

Playing For Joy:  
Guitarist's Gift to Audience is Sharing the Thrill of Jazz

By Zan Stewart, LOS ANGELES TIMES (Thurs. Nov. 6, 1997)

For Barry Zweig, who will be appearing tonight at Chadney's in Burbank, music has always been about enjoyment. It was that way when he got a ukulele at age 5 and when he took up the violin at age 8. But he really got hooked on playing when, as a teenage guitarist, he heard the great Barney Kessel on records and in person.

"Barney got so much music out of his instrument, it made my jaw drop," said Zweig, who has appeared with such acts as Buddy Rich, Natalie Cole, Bill Holman and George Van Eps, as well as being a leader. "He played incredibly beautiful melodies and harmonies with intense passion, lots of feeling. Hearing him clinched it for me: I decided I wanted to be a musician. What better way to spend a lifetime than to try and figure out how to play the guitar? And that's what I've done for 40 years."

Early on, Zweig was befriended by Kessel, who played with giants from pianist Oscar Peterson to alto saxophonist Charlie Parker and was part of the famed recording trio the Poll Winners, with bassist Leroy Vinnegar and drummer Shelly Manne. "When I was 17, I'd go hear Barney play at clubs like the Sanbah, which was located where Sunset and Santa Monica boulevards meet" near Silver Lake, said Zweig, 55, who's from Detroit but grew up in North Hollywood, where he lives now. "He's spend intermissions with me, talking about how nice (jazz guitar innovator) Charlie Christian was to him. He was passing on that kindness, and I've always kept that in mind when dealing as a teacher with younger players. Jazz should be a friendly undertaking. It's not such a mysterious thing. It should be fun."

At tonight's Chadney's gig, Zweig leads a trio composed of bassist Dave Carpenter and drummer Jake Hanna, two of his favorite colleagues. The aspect of enjoyment won't be far from his mind. "Jake brings such a joy to the bandstand," Zweig began. "He has such a swinging feel. And Dave is so courteous musically. With all his technical talents, he never tries to be bossy. He understands that jazz is a team sport."

Playing in the trio format will add to Zweig's pleasure. "Trio is the basic platform of expression for the guitar," he said. "You can accompany yourself and still play jazz choruses. You can make the group sound like a big band; you can make it quiet. You get a good feeling, and you get to have fun."

At Chadney's, Zweig will dig into his book of rearranged standards and jazz tunes and offer a bouquet of succulent numbers. There might be Charlie Parker's rapid-paced number "Moose the Mooche." "That's such a challenge to play on guitar," he said. Bronoslav Kaper's "Invitation" is another strong possibility. "I redid that in fourths voicings," Zweig said, referring to a modern sound typical of the renowned pianist McCoy Tyner. "I also might do my version of 'Take Five,' which is in 4/4 time."

Whatever he plays, Zweig will try to tell a story without words, and let listeners know the joy he feels telling it. "I just want to make this music beautiful, and have it be accessible," said the guitarist, who can be heard on such recordings as bassist John Leitham's "Lefty Leaps In" and the late drummer Gene Estes' "On the Edge." "I don't think you should have to go to college to understand jazz. It's physical music that you can feel. I want it to be fun for the listener."