

Tommy Emmanuel

“Music is the medicine of the soul,” wrote Plato. “It gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, joy to sadness, and life to everything.” Remarkably, Plato recognized this truth somehow more than 2000 years before Tommy Emmanuel was even born, but it could have been written about him. The real-time exuberance Tommy brings to every note of every song he plays is palpable and infectious. His fans are in love with his unbound talent as a guitarist of multitudes, his ability to play three parts at once, always with pure heart and real soul. He is a true virtuoso. But he seems as delighted always with the magic of the music as the audience, if not more, and his joy illuminates everything.

It’s one thing to play these multi-dimensional arrangements flawlessly on an acoustic guitar. But to do it with that smile of the ages, that evidence of authentic, unbridled delight, is an irresistibly infectious invitation to feel his music as deeply as he does. “The joy, ” he says, “is there always because I’m chasing it through music. Seeing the surprise in peoples’ eyes is worth living and working for... I can’t help but play to the people with all my heart, which is overflowing with joy of being in that moment that I’ve worked all my life for. And here it is!”

That authentic exuberance Tommy brings to every show and every record is especially powerful, given the profound deficit of real joy in so many lives. Tommy’s happiness, like his music, is pure and expressed in real-time. Nothing is phony. It’s a quality that does reach far beyond any one language, and it’s instantly understood by all his fellow humans. It’s the reason he smiles so much while playing, and why his audience does as well. As many have said, it’s hard not to be happy at his shows. Because his joy, and the timeless river of inspiration, which is the source, is universally recognized. And it feels good.

In 2018, Tommy made the great album, *Accomplice One*, a series of duets with musicians great and varied, and all at his level. An inspired idea, it seemed to answer the question: What could Tommy possibly record that would match the energy and greatness he’s already achieved? How about bringing in other virtuoso musicians and artists to duet with him? It’s a concept that worked, as the range of artists reflected Tommy’s expansive love of all kinds of music, including Rodney Crowell, Mark Knopfler, Amanda Shires, Jason Isbell, Jerry Douglas, Jake Shimabukuro and more. Each of his accomplices seemed as inspired by his energy and passion as much as Tommy was by theirs, and he played with effortless grace.

Now comes the long-awaited sequel, *Accomplice Two*, out in spring of 2023. It shares the same exuberance, diversity, and sense of adventure as the first album, with a great range of artists. This album features rock legends Michael McDonald, Jorma Kaukonen, and Little Feat; bluegrass superstars such as Billy Strings, The Del McCoury Band, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Sierra Hull, and David Grisman; country icons such as Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Jamey Johnson, and Raul Malo; and guitar heavyweights like Yasmin Williams, Larry Campbell, and Richard Smith. The first single “White Freight Liner Blues” is out now and features the Grammy-nominated claw hammer guitarist, Molly Tuttle.

Tommy also has a new television special called *Accomplice LIVE!* which begins airing on PBS in March of 2023. This special will feature some of Tommy's best-known songs and duets with his accomplices such as Emmylou Harris, Rodney Crowell, Sierra Hull, Yasmin Williams, and many others.

Tommy was born in 1955 in Muswellbrook, New South Wales Australia. His father, an engineer who loved music and musicians, brought home an electric guitar one day with the intention of finding out how it worked. Piece by piece, he took it apart to discover its secrets. But Tommy and his older brother Phil, were much more interested in music than mechanics, so when their dad was away at work, they'd surreptitiously sneak away with the guitar.

They both took to it like they already played. Their mother, who played steel guitar, had shown them chords which got them started. Driven somewhat by a sibling rivalry, they developed contests that were both fun and educational and they became exceptional guitarists rapidly, and without formal training. Though they assumed their father would be angry if he found out, which he did, they were wrong. He was surprised and thrilled his sons could play music.

Soon their big brother Chris was enlisted to play drums, and with their sister Virginia playing lap-steel, a family band was born. They joyously rocked hip guitar instrumentals such as "Apache " by The Shadows, featuring Hank Marvin on guitar, who both Phil and Tommy adored and emulated. They called themselves The Emmanuel Quartet. But when people kept mistaking them for a classical string quartet, they changed the name to The Midget Surfaries.

They entered a band competition, and easily surpassed all contenders to take first prize, a national TV appearance. On that show they burned through "Apache" with such aplomb that the producer told their dad he should take the band on the road. He agreed.

Back home he told everyone the plan. To sell the house and hit the road, and around age six Tommy went on tour. It seemed to be a dream, yet it was true. What they didn't know was that their dad had learned recently that he had an incurable heart disease and was not expected to live for much longer. His doctor said if there was ever anything he really wanted to do; he should do it. When his father's heart finally gave out, Tommy remembered, his mother grieved for a few hours alone, and then emerged to give them the choice of a "normal life" or staying on the road. They chose the road, of course, and signed up with a successful traveling show, which kept them gainfully employed for a good stretch. But that came to an end when the child welfare department forced them off the road for perceived child labor violations.

From these origins, Tommy's music expanded in every direction. In his twenties, he was the most sought-after performer and session musician in Sydney. By age 30, he was burning on electric guitar with several rock bands in stadiums across Europe. He could have gone on to live the rock star life. Yet, he yearned for something purer and closer to his heart. Casting

off the reliable rock band engine of monstrous sonics blasting with chains of effects through monstrous stacks of amps, Tommy went acoustic.

Stripping away everything but the essentials: one acoustic guitar in standard tuning played by one ambitiously unchained guitarist and a lover of song. Always it's about melody, of expressing the tune not with a barrage of notes, but with those which touch the heart. And it's about his singular greatness at translating the dimensional dynamics and dimensions of arrangements onto the six strings of his guitar. Although many scoffed that it was possible, Tommy made a series of hit albums as a solo guitarist, and became a major star first in Australia, and soon everywhere.

The inspiration for Tommy's transformation was his hero, Chet Atkins, who represented the purity of one man, one guitar, and unlimited passionate for serving the song. Soon as he was able, he went to meet the man himself, in Nashville. Their bond was immediate, and like their music, existed beyond words. Chet picked up his guitar, and the two men jammed joyously for hours.

It started a lifelong friendship which shaped Tommy's music forever. Chet welcomed Tommy into guitarist knighthood by bestowing upon him the coveted title of CGP (Certified Guitar Player), an honor awarded only to four other humans ever, and they recorded an album together, *The Day Finger Pickers Took Over the World*. Though already devoted to the life of a solo player, receiving the love and esteem of Chet lifted Tommy into a different realm. Because, as Chet recognized instantly and told the world, musicians like this don't come along that often; pay attention to this man. And people have paid attention from sold out shows all over the world to multiple Grammy nominations, ARIA Awards, IBMA Awards, and countless "Best Acoustic Guitarist" wins in numerous music magazine readers polls.... the world is taking notice.

Of course, Chet knew of what he spoke. Tommy's triumph on his singular solo path has been extraordinary. From the Midget Surfaries, he's become beloved and revered around the planet. Tommy said, "When I was a kid, I wanted to be in show business. Now, I just want to be in the happiness business. I play music, and you get happy. That's a good job."