

Guitar icon Tommy Emmanuel C.G.P. is no stranger to iconic stages from Nashville's Ryman Auditorium to London's Royal Festival Hall and Paris' L'Olympia. The legendary entertainer has dazzled audiences across the world. But there is something truly magical about the Sydney Opera House, and the magic of Tommy's performances there has finally been captured on his new album *Live at the Sydney Opera House*.

"The moment and power in these hours spent playing music, is perfectly preserved here on this record," Tommy says. "I hope you can feel the intensity of our musical and spiritual relationship... a bond built on a life freely given to all".

The Grammy-winner played two spellbinding shows on the Concert Hall stage in May 2023, with the best of both performances represented here. The setlist showcases the most beloved songs of Tommy's career – classic compositions like "Tall Fiddler," "Mombasa" and "Country Wide," recent fan favourites like "Fuel" and "Sail On" and his now iconic arrangement of "Classical Gas" and his thrilling "Beatles Medley."

"As a 15-year-old boy living in Circular Quay, I spent many a time walking past the Opera House" he says. "I would daydream about what it must be like in there, what it would be like to perform there. After fifty years in the business, we finally got there!".

At 15, Tommy was already a decade into his professional career. With a love for and deep understanding of music seemingly from the moment he was born, Tommy picked up a guitar as an adolescent and could soon outplay people three times his age. With his brother Phil also developing well beyond his years, a family band was formed and while most kids were learning their times tables, Tommy was on tour.

After the untimely death of their father forced them off the road, Tommy headed to the big smoke, sleeping on floors in the red-light district of Sydney by day while by night he turned heads by sitting in with bar bands. Before long, he was the most in demand session guitar player in town, barely in his 20s, playing on #1 pop and rock singles and touring with Australia's biggest stars.

Despite his jaw-dropping abilities on the six strings, Tommy was as shy as he was talented. A trip to Nashville led to an audience with his all-time hero: the virtuosic fingerstyle guitarist and record producer Chet Atkins. Chet handed him a guitar to prove his mettle and was suitably blown away. He sat with the young Australian for hours, giving him advice and beginning a loving mentorship that would last the remainder of Chet's life. A duets album and a shared Grammy nomination would follow, but nothing means more to Tommy than the three letters Chet designated at the end of Tommy's name: C.G.P.

The title of Certified Guitar Player was the highest honor Atkins could bestow on another player – a signifier that the recipient had not only mastered the instrument but taken it to new vistas and become a guiding light for the next generation of pickers. Like Tommy, Chet had never gone to a university, and the C.G.P. was his version of a PHD or a Doctorate of the guitar. He gave the honor to Tommy and only five other handpicked players.

After the validation of meeting his hero, Tommy struck out on his own as a solo artist and became that rarest of things: a legitimate music star as an instrumentalist. His records charted on the pop charts, he won awards typically only given to singers and he opened arena tours for legendary artists like Eric Clapton. But as anyone who has seen Tommy play will tell you, the vocalist is there, as is the drummer, the bass player and the rhythm and lead guitarists. In a way that must often be seen to be believed, Tommy plays all the parts of a full band simultaneously, his fingers dancing around the fretboard with a dexterity and speed that would seem impossible if you weren't witnessing it.

As a songwriter and a performer, Tommy is a melting pot of influences across genres, from pop to bluegrass, jazz to rock n' roll. To him, music is rhythm and emotion, all other distinctions are meaningless.

After conquering the pop charts in Australia, Tommy moved to London to raise his daughters, commuting to Nashville to visit Chet Atkins and slowly building a devoted audience in Europe. But it was after moving to Nashville twenty years ago that things began to move into another level. Word of mouth built rapidly of the acoustic guitar god who was the ultimate showman as much as he was the ultimate picker. Celebrity fans like ELO's Jeff Lynne, Monty Python's Eric Idle, Steve Vai and Joe Satriani attended shows and raved about his prowess. But the biggest gamechanger came with a new website that came online in 2005.

"I was selling out all these shows in Sweden, and I'd never played there before. I don't even know if my records were available," Tommy recalls. "I asked the crowd on the first night 'How do you know me here?' and they all said back 'YouTube!'"

The experience of seeing Tommy as well as hearing him, to capture the dynamism and electricity of his live shows – and to have proof that it really was one man making all that music – made Tommy's popularity skyrocket. Generations of fans from Tommy's contemporaries through to school-age youngsters began attending his shows all around the globe. Tommy plays more shows in more countries per year than most artists a third of his age and could easily play 365 days a year to satisfy the demand.

Tommy's determination to entertain, to move audiences, to connect with strangers through the power of music, remains undimmed as he closes in on his seventh decade as a performer. He can turn a jazz café into a cathedral or a radio station performance into the Ryman. But there is still something that a truly iconic venue like the Sydney Opera House – a mecca for music that has fired in Tommy's imagination since he picked up a guitar as a child – that brings out the best in him. To have witnessed the pin drop silent audience hanging on every note of "Sail On," the propulsive rhythm of "Classical Gas," the impossible bluegrass speed-picking on "Tall Fiddler" and the delicate wringing of melody out of Paul Simon's immortal "American Tune," is to experience the communion of music at its most pure. That is Tommy Emmanuel, *Live at the Sydney Opera House*.