

Know Your GH07 Finalists!

September, 2007

After listening to hundreds of submissions from guitarists across the planet, the Guitar Player staff deemed the following ten players worthy of battling it out for the *Guitar Player's* Guitar Hero 2007 title.

The following biographies were published on Sonicbids—the Web community that hosted the entry process for GH07. We will be updating this site with more contestant info as we count down to the October 12 concert at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall.

Juan Coronado

Juan's journey began in his native country, Colombia, and, at 16 years old, he was already breaking from the mainstream. Instead of following a route towards salsa, vallenato, and merengue, Juan found himself drawn to the electric guitar, and the emerging underground rock scene. His obsession resulted in several albums, a number one radio hit, countless live shows, and an abundance of powerful songs.

In a country where public interest in rock is secondary to more traditional music forms, Juan brought his fiery guitar riffs to the public, and the public loved it. While a university student, Juan formed the alternative rock band, Emma Hoo, as the lead singer and guitarist. Three months later, the band was offered a record deal, and resulted in the release of its first album. Emma Hoo quickly gained a cult following, playing many major festivals and sold-out concerts.

Juan's next project, La Universal, was an original, genre-busting band with a unique fusion of rock, electronica, rap, and funk. As the lead guitarist, songwriter, and producer, Juan led the group to success. Their hit single "Ola de Calor," hit number one on the local charts, and stayed there for three consecutive weeks. La Universal made frequent radio and television appearances—including a special nationally televised unplugged concert.

It wasn't until Juan moved to Toronto, Canada, when he finally started working on a project he had dreamt about for many years—making instrumental guitar music. Inspired by the guitar legends he grew up listening to, he began recording his first solo album, *Renewal*, in 2004. This record reflects the experience of finding his true voice—one that connects his Latin roots with his love for the electric guitar and rock and roll.

Curtis Fornadley

Curtis Fornadley's power trio plays music that is a captivating mix of instrumental rock, acid jazz, and surf. A "guitar slinger with a worldwide view and the technical ability to explore it" [*Music Connection*] Fornadley is a native of Southern California. His self-titled debut CD (1998), and his second CD, *Room 137* (2001), "demonstrate the guitarist's impressive skills both as a guitar stylist and composer" [*20th Century Guitar*]. Curtis was nominated for

"Guitarist of the Year" for the 11th Annual Los Angeles Music Awards, and his group has been included in *Music Connection* magazine's "100 Top Unsigned Bands."

In 2005, Curtis released his third CD, *Blue Electric Cool*—an album that takes the instrumental guitar genre a step further. Each track is different from the next, yet there is a common thread that ties them all together—a balance between composition, soulful playing, and virtuosity. The guitar is front and center, but the variety of tones and styles allow it to be enjoyed by people other than guitar players.

In July 2006, *Blue Electric Cool* was re-released on o.i.e Records with national distribution through RedEye. In October 2006, the release was nominated for "Instrumental Rock Album of the Year" by Jpfolks.com.

Casey Harshbarger

I play and teach guitar for a living. My philosophy on living is simple: Music creates communication among people from all walks of life, and it is central to creating a more peaceful and balanced society. I try to live with this in mind, and I strive to play music with all kinds of musicians. The guitar is my main focus, and I love the sounds and expression this instrument can produce. I have been playing for more than 20 years, and I have studied as many styles as possible. I would say I lean more towards blues, rock, and jazz than other styles, but I respect and appreciate all music!

Danny B. Harvey

Rockabilly guitar legend Danny B. Harvey played in the rockabilly band 13 Cats before meeting Lynda Kay and forming the Lonesome Spurs. "Virtuoso" is the word most often used to describe him and his unique style of fingerpicking—which, like his idol Merle Travis, he developed while growing up in rural Kentucky. A well-respected guitarist, record producer, and composer, Danny B. has worked with many notable artists, including Johnny Ramone, Nancy Sinatra, Lemmy, and Wanda Jackson.

Coincidentally, it was while he was producing Wanda Jackson's *I Remember Elvis* that he received a demo from Kay, who reminded him so much of a young Wanda that he immediately asked her to sing background vocals on the CD. While working in the studio together, they quickly discovered a strong musical and artistic connection. Sharing a passion for honky-tonk, rockabilly, and garage music, they soon became inseparable, and record, write, and rehearse together almost daily. Before long, they had developed their own signature, honky-tonk garage sound and the Lonesome Spurs were born.

Taka Minamino

I am a 23-year-old guitar player from Japan, now living in the Los Angeles area. I started playing violin between the ages of four and 14 years old, and then grabbed a guitar. After graduating from GIT Hollywood, I sent my demo to Shrapnel Records, and label owner (and GH07 judge) Mike Varney put me in his September 2005 Spotlight column in *Guitar Player*

magazine. Since 2005, I have been working on my own record with singer Kevin Jones (Rattleface), my master Kelly Simonz (Blind Faith), drummer Jeff Bowders (Paul Gilbert), and keyboardist Michael T. Ross (Hardline).

Chris Peters

Chris Peters specializes in music composition, production, session work, live performance, and guitar instruction. He has 20 years combined music training—three years on clarinet, ten years on piano (with renowned pianist Michael Kramer), and seven years on guitar (with Dave Hopwood). His guitar work includes a wide range of styles, including jazz, rock, funk, fusion, and R&B. Influences include Joe Satriani, Eric Johnson, Tom Scholz, and Ryan Newell. He is a session guitarist with Emmy-nominated Colin O'Malley, and has recorded numerous advertising, film, and multimedia tracks for clients such as Universal Studios Orlando, Wright Entertainment Group, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and the Billy Graham Library.

Jamie Robinson

Winner of the 2007 North American Rock Guitar Competition at the age of 17, Robinson was the youngest winner in the history of the competition, representing Canada against countries including England, Russia, Brazil, Italy, Ireland, and the United States. Robinson has been playing guitar for more than nine years, and teaching at Durham School Of Music since the age of 15. Playing in bands around the Greater Toronto Area since the age of 12, Robinson has been on the same stages as Tommy Lee, Justin Timberlake, Nickelback, Beyonce, and Shania Twain. He received a full-tuition scholarship to Hollywood, California's G.I.T for 2008.

Les Robot

Les Robot is an indie artist based out of Edmonton, Alberta. His career began at age 16, in an abandoned house on his parent's farm—just him, the birds, a guitar with scalloped frets, and a Marshall cranked to 11. A self-taught player who absorbs information from every available tool and genre he can get his hands on, it was evident early on that Les had found his muse with the guitar.

In 1989, he entered and placed in Guitar Warz, Edmonton Alberta. ("...he picked up a guitar for the first time only three years ago, but brashly promises a 'new style of guitar playing.' He wins over his audience almost immediately. His playing is stunningly assured and there is an intangible: a natural charisma." —Neal Watson of the *Edmonton Sun*, February 6, 1989.)

From 1989-1993, Les toured Canada with a number of bands, including a three-year stint as lead guitarist for Specula Black. The years 1993-2004, saw him performing in and around Edmonton with five different bands, acting as manager, booking agent, promoter, lead guitarist, and frontman. It was also during this time that he began exploring the art of writing and recording, and it was no surprise to anyone when he set out alone to record and produce his self-titled debut CD. The result was collection of songs that highlights his talent for composition and production. Each track offers something different, but all are rooted in rock, with influences from various genres such as blues, metal, jazz, and rockabilly. In June 2006,

Les Robot made his performance debut outside Canada by winning the prestigious North American Rock Guitar Competition in Buffalo, New York.

Ladd Smith

Ladd Smith was born in Stillwater, Oklahoma, on September 21/22 at midnight in 1982. But To hear Ladd Smith sing and play, your ears will tell you you're hearing a veteran singer/songwriter, a master guitar player, and an experienced performer. Born into a musical family—both of Ladd's parents were professional singers and musicians—that eventually settled in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and opened Argills Music Store, Ladd had racked up hundreds of impromptu music lessons by the tender age of five.

Ladd began to write songs at the age of nine, and had written over 350 by the time he reached 19. Along the way, he managed to record three original albums, play on nearly 400 sessions, and perform at over 1,000 live shows. It has been said that if Billy Joel and Dolly Parton were to have had a love child, his name would be Ladd Smith. You'll hear a distinct voice and style that is both grounded in his country roots, and yet breaks down the barriers of genre segregation. You will hear Ladd forge a new path through familiar territory.

Tony Smotherman

Tony Smotherman was born November 1, 1979, in Athens, Greece. At the age of 15, he was introduced to the music of Bach, and his passion for the composer inspired him to take classical guitar lessons. Within a few months, Tony was practicing at least six hours a day. It was during Tony's senior year that one of his teachers submitted some of his musical work to Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen not only received his music, but also sent notes of encouragement, describing his classical guitar skills as "highly sophisticated."

Tony wanted to explore a different side of guitar, and bought his first electric. His early influences were Jimi Hendrix and Yngwie Malmsteen. In mid 2000, he began to experiment with the sitar and the sarod, motivating him to create his own musical style, bringing the vocal-like nuances of Indian music to the electric guitar.

In 2002, Tony released his first CD, *Embracing the Spirit*. In 2003, he was asked to contribute one song to the Finnish label Lion Music for the tribute album *Shawn Lane Remembered*. Tony has opened for—and played with—a vast array of national and international touring acts including Buddy Miles, Rick Derringer, Leon Russell, and Adrian Legg. He has also released two instructional videos, *Virtuoso Techniques* (2002) and *Licks of the Absurd* (2006).

In 2007, Vision Sound Records released Tony's second CD, *The Light Within*. The new album is an exploration of melodic rock, funky grooves, neo-classical explorations, world music, and acoustic compositions. Joining Tony on this release are keyboardist Derek Sherinian (Planet X, ex-Dream Theater), Grammy Award winning Indian slide virtuoso Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, bassist Jon Reshard, and drummer Bruce Royal.

If you can't join us in SF, the competition will be streamed live, on www.GuitarPlayer.com, using the Microsoft Silverlight simulcast media format.