

# NEWS FROM THE HOOT

Making music in Jackson Hole  
since 1993



Welcome to the latest issue of the Jackson Hole Hootennany Newsletter. Our goal is to provide regular updates on the Hoot, including upcoming events, musician profiles and venue information. Your input is always welcome. Please email us at [jhhootnews@gmail.com](mailto:jhhootnews@gmail.com)

## **In this issue**

- Hoot returns to Wort for the new year.
- Performer profile: Byron Tomingas
- Other music in the mountains
- Musicians, let us know about your gigs

## **New Year's day at the Wort**

After a Christmas Day hiatus the Hoot will resume its regular Monday night schedule at the Wort on Jan. 1. Signups begin at 5 p.m., with music starting at 6 p.m. Remember to tip your servers generously.

## **Player Profile: Byron Tomingas**

*Classical guitarist Byron Tomingas is a Wyoming native and long-time Hoot performer. His dazzling instrumentals range from Chopin to Stevie Wonder.*

**How did you go from a high-school rocker in a small, rural town to a classical musician at a prestigious music school?**

I had an affinity for music from the very beginning. And I found that if I tried to do anything else as my main thing, I failed at it. So ultimately I didn't have a lot of choice. It was overwhelmingly what I did best.



In my local band, “Teton Rocks”, I selected the songs, learned all the parts, taught them to the band, scheduled the venues, arranged for chaperones or hired policemen and people to take tickets and sell refreshments.

I did advertising artwork and repaired the amps that seemed to break right before the dance. The dances drew really well and made very good money for those days, mostly because the kids were as desperate to hear their music as I was to play it. So we filled nearly every hall in Wyoming.

In 1968 I went out to the California Institute for the Arts in downtown Los Angeles until its new campus in Valencia was finished in 1971. I majored in classical guitar.

CalArts had just been established and needed a lot of bodies. I did an instrumental version of "Yesterday" as my audition piece. It was just dumb luck to have such a prestigious school as my alma mater. I got to study with the big boys of the era — Ravi Shankar, Morton Subotnik, and Cesare Pascarella, and I attended numerous masterclasses, including one with Andres Segovia in Spain.

It was the first time I had found a peer group of motivated creative people. At CalArts, everybody was exceptional and self-motivated! It was really exciting!

**What's your career arc? Have you supported yourself as a musician since Cal Arts?**

To pay my way through college I taught at a music store and I worked as a pickup musician, mostly playing bass, guitar and drums. Then in summer I would, of course, work

construction or other jobs to earn a bunch of money before heading back to college. When I graduated I was working in a band that had a recording contract with RCA, but those bands usually just play in bars and live out of a van on the road a lot.

So I did what many classical musicians did, teach at a college. I also taught at a music store in Monterey, California. I did as many concerts as I could, TV shows, etc. from 1972-1982.

I avoided getting married and having children because I didn't want to drag a family through the likely lifestyle of a poorly paid musician.

At some point in the '80s I had been with the same sensational girl for several years and I had been dabbling with computers. I was frustrated with music as a business, you had to pay an agent or promotional company with no guarantee of even a single concert booking. So I traded my teaching jobs for a computer job and worked at that for about 10 years in Monterey CA. Officially, I was a senior embedded systems networking engineer and was fortunate to work with Silicon Valley legend Gary Kildall. During that time we had our daughter and actually bought a house, I was almost a normal person. But music, of course, was where my heart always was. I've never taken a break from playing because, to me, that was a pleasure not a chore.

**You take pride in your Estonian/Finnish roots. Has it influenced your music?**

Having Estonian/Finnish heritage has certainly influenced me personality-wise. It's part of what makes me so reclusive. Estonians are noted as being particularly musical, but extremely private. I have a triple dose of the private part. I also seriously believe that there is some gypsy somewhere in my lineage; because musically I gravitate toward highly emotional music.

**You do wonderful arrangements of both popular tunes and classical music. Which do you prefer?**

I love finding how to bring out the best of a song so it sounds like it was written for the guitar. Getting it up and running and breathing life into it is like riding a thoroughbred horse at full gallop on a moonlit beach.

Mostly, I listen to classical music. But what I play depends on the song. It's like forming friendships, each song is something I want to spend time with and get to know well. So genre has nothing to do with it. Kind of like making friends, you don't care if there's a color involved, race, religion or any such thing, it's just an individual.

**What's with the piece of fabric that you drape over your guitar?**

Because guitars are so oddly shaped and slippery, they can be hard to hold in the correct position, so I use a chamois or leather so that the guitar doesn't slip around on me so much. The other reason I use it is because I use a concert Orbe guitar, (a new car costs less....) This guitar, to me, is like having a Stradivarius violin.

**Tell us some things about yourself that many people don't know.**

Here are three things:

I worked for a few years helping my brother with his fleet of oceanographic research ships in Alaska. These were hundred-foot-long, noisy, dangerous ships going to remote places in Alaska so scientists could do their research. Yes, I was a ships' captain.

I don't really practice guitar, I just like to play. For a while it was 10 hours a day, then five hours a day. And now it's about two hours a day, which is about where I like it.

In addition to music, my other passions are walking in the hills and figure skating.



**Other Music in the Mountains**

Keep your eyes (and ears) open for other musical opportunities in the area, including:

The [Wort](#), where Tasha and the Goodfellows perform several times a month.

The [Virginian](#), which features open mic night every Tuesday from 7-11:30 p.m.

The [Knotty Pine Supper Club](#) in Victor, which schedules local and big-name touring bands, including Leftover Salmon on Jan. 18.

The [Mangy Moose](#) in Teton Village, with a variety of shows through the winter and spring.



**Musicians, Let Us Know About your Gigs**

A number of Hoot regulars perform music in the area. If you have any gigs coming up, let us know and we'll include them in the Hoot newsletter. Email your info to

[Jhootnews@gmail.com](mailto:Jhootnews@gmail.com)

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