

On Stage

Roger McGuinn

by Glenn R. Swift



As frontman and co-founder of The Byrds, Roger McGuinn developed a unique folk/rock style that resulted in such timeless hits as “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Turn, Turn, Turn.” These days, the solo acoustic performer has returned to his first love, folk music.

Prior to forming The Byrds, McGuinn studied at Chicago’s Old Town School of Folk Music and was active on the city’s folk scene. He toured and performed with the Limelites, Chad Mitchell Trio and Bobby Darin as a guitarist and banjo player, but it was the emergence of the Fab Four that inspired McGuinn to experiment with playing folk songs to a rock beat.

“I was looking for something that was a cross between Bob Dylan and the Beatles,” recalled McGuinn.

Guided by that inspiration, McGuinn formed The Byrds in 1964 with Gene Clark and David Crosby. The group went on to become one of the most influential bands of the ‘60s. It was with the Byrds that McGuinn developed a distinctive “jingle-jangle” tone on his 12-string guitar, which ultimately became the signature sound of the group.

As for what was behind McGuinn’s jingle jangle, let’s just say that there was a bit more involved than just his 12-string Martin.

“I practiced eight hours a day on my Rickenbacker in those days. Back then 12-strings had wide necks and thick strings that were spaced pretty far apart. They were difficult to play. The good thing was that the Rick’s slim neck and low action let me explore jazz and blues scales up

and down the fretboard. I then used those techniques when playing my 12-string. I also used my banjo picking techniques with the 12-string." There was still more.

"By combining a flat pick and metal finger picks on my middle and ring fingers, I discovered I could instantly switch from fast single-note runs to banjo rolls and get the best of both worlds on the 12-string."

There were some electronic innovations as well.

"The recording engineer for Columbia Records back then was Ray Gerhardt. Because Columbia was still a little bit afraid of rock 'n' roll, they didn't want us to play too loud. So, Ray would run compressors on everything to limit the volume. That's what he did with my 12-string, and it sounded great. I could hold a note for three or four seconds like a wind instrument."

McGuinn disbanded The Byrds in 1973 to embark upon a solo career. Since then, he has kept an active tour schedule and released over a dozen albums, including *Treasures from the Folk Den*, which was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2002 for Best Traditional Folk Album.

"I've really always been a solo artist who just happens to find himself in a band," laughed McGuinn.

As for what motivates him to keep practicing for hours a day after all these years, McGuinn offered some simple, yet profound, wisdom.

"I want to improve as a musician." **PBG**

Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Roger McGuinn will perform at the historic Lyric Theatre in downtown Stuart on Wednesday, December 17 at 7 p.m. For tickets or more information, call (772) 286-7827 or visit www.lyrictheatre.com.



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