

FENDER PLAYERS CLUB TOMMY TEDESCO

Not a household name, Tommy Tedesco was nonetheless the most celebrated Hollywood studio musician of the 1960s, '70s and '80s, renowned for his music reading abilities, his knack for playing exactly what a producer or composer wanted, and his versatility to play not only a dazzling variety of musical styles but also virtually any fretted instrument that a session called for. A jazz man at heart, he was a self-professed "hustler," a phobic (with "sixty hangups" including fear of heights, flying, elevators and the dark), and a guitar educator and solo recording artist in his own right.

Born in 1930, Tommy Tedesco grew up in a poor Italian neighborhood in Niagara Falls, New York. He began playing guitar and banjo as a child, and played in an orchestra from about age eight, touring during WWII when the adult musicians were off at war, but didn't practice very hard and his teacher later recalled him as the worst of all his students.

He played in local bands until getting hired by a touring big band in 1953, and played his first gig in Hollywood. The stint lasted only two months until he was laid off and quit the band. When he returned to Niagara Falls he decided to move his family to California to pursue a career as a professional guitarist.

In California he had a hard time finding music jobs, so he took a job at an aircraft factory, which he hated. "There was a magic moment when I decided that was a drag," he recalled in his autobiography. "I wanted to become a guitar player. So every day after work, I would play for ten hours. All of my waking moments I had a guitar in my hand. Learning, learning, learning."

Eventually he began getting nightclub jobs, playing in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and making connections with musicians such as Rod McKuen, Maya Angelou, and Barney Kessel, as well as working with Latin bands, which gave him experience that served him well later in his career. In 1957 he first started getting freelance TV gigs on shows including "Ozzy and Harriet" and "The Red Skelton Show." His big break came when he was asked to join a group called "Guitars Inc." with Howard Roberts, Bobby Gibbons, Bill Pittman and Al Hendrickson, which led to recording with three different record labels: Dot, Tops, and Warner Bros.

Tedesco's career took off from there and he began working with stars like Peggy Lee and Bobby Darin for live shows, and playing on movie soundtracks. He recorded his first jazz album in 1958 with Jerry Vaughan, an LP which he treasured all his life. His nightclub days drew to a close as he started getting more and more studio work, and the Guitars Inc. group gained notoriety for their five-guitar sound on a TV show, "The Deputy."

In the early Sixties, Tedesco became part of a group of musicians who backed up an array of rock and pop artists and who were later nicknamed the Wrecking Crew by drummer Hal Blaine. Among them were bassist Carol Kaye, guitarist Glen Campbell, and pianist Leon Russell. Tedesco called it "the birth of the California rock scene," and the flavors of pop music they covered included surf (Jan and Dean, the Beach Boys, the Ventures, the Marketts), folk (the Sandpipers, Barry McGuire, Mamas and the Papas), Phil Spector (the Ronettes, the Crystals) and many others.

Throughout the Sixties and into the Seventies, Tedesco played on a staggering list of hits, TV themes and movie soundtracks that earned him the moniker of "Most Recorded Guitarist in History," a title that would be hard for anyone to dispute. Those are his licks opening up the Beach Boys' "Fun Fun Fun" and "I Get Around;" later he played on songs like "Good Vibrations." That's him playing acoustic guitar on the M*A*S*H theme, "Suicide is Painless," and on ukelele for Burt Bacharach's soundtrack to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. He played on Elvis' movies like *Viva Las Vegas* and *Girl Crazy*, as well as his 1968 TV special, and said of the King, "Being a fellow guitar player, he acted like he felt inadequate around me." He was on countless smash hits of the Sixties, like "Up Up and Away" and "Aquarius" by the Fifth Dimension, "California Dreamin'" and "Monday Monday" by the Mamas and the Papas, "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" by the Righteous Brothers, "Along Comes Mary" by the Association, "These Boots Were Made for Walking" by Nancy Sinatra, "Strangers in the Night" by Frank Sinatra, "This Diamond Ring" by Gary Lewis and the Playboys, and other hits by Cher, Johnny Rivers, Sam Cooke, the Supremes, Wayne Newton, and a list that goes on and on. You can hear him

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on the Monkees, the Partridge Family, and even Alvin and the Chipmunks. He played on Frank Zappa's album *Lumpy Gravy*. Other artists and composers he played for and with include Henry Mancini, Lilo Schiffrin, Quincy Jones, Michael Jackson, Dean Martin, Barbra Streisand, Fats Domino, Muddy Waters, Tina Turner, Gladys Knight, Stevie Wonder, Neil Diamond, and of course, many others.

Tedesco's movie and TV credits are mind-boggling. *Cool Hand Luke, The Godfather, Cocoon, Honky Tonk, Cat Ballou, Dirty Dancing, The Buddy Holly Story, Bonnie and Clyde, The Odd Couple, Looking for Mr. Goodbar, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Young Frankenstein, Grease, Jaws, Bonanza, Three's Company, Love Boat, Get Smart, The Twilight Zone, Gunsmoke, The Brady Bunch, Dallas, The Waltons, Gilligan's Island.*

Having always been into what he called "hip jazz stuff," Tedesco began recording solo albums beginning with 1978's *When Do We Start* and continuing through 1992's *Tommy Tedesco Plays Roumanis Jazz Rhapsody*.

Later in his career, Tedesco began teaching at GIT (Guitar Institute of Technology) and writing instructional books for guitar. After suffering a stroke that limited his use of his right arm in 1992, he wrote his autobiography, *Tommy Tedesco: Confessions of a Guitar Player*. He passed away in 1997 at the age of 67.

-- Barry Houlehen, with information taken from:



Tommy Tedesco: Confessions of a Guitar Player
(Centerstream Publishing)

Tommy Tedesco is the most recorded guitarist in the history of the music business. His four-decade career has earned him a reputation among his peers as one of the world's best musicians. His contributions have been instrumental in shaping the sound of popular music. This book covers Tommy's life story and includes lots of studio photos and quotes from some of the world's most famous musicians.

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