The Quinten Hope Interview

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One of the more rewarding and exciting things about what I get to do on Boomerocity is the discovery of talent that is new ... or, at least, new to me. I'm flattered when people tell me that I'm an "expert" due to what I supposedly know. The fact of the matter is, I'm always "discovering" artists who have actually been around quite awhile and have developed a very respectable following.

Case in point: Quinten Hope

I learned of Quinten while interviewing guitarist, <u>Andy Timmons</u>. In addition to bragging about Hope's incredible talent on the guitar, he also mentioned that he was a principal in a new, high end guitar store, The Guitar Sanctuary. I made note of to conduct research on Hope to see if he would be someone I would want to interview.

My research (and acquisition of two of Quinten's three CD's, Start of A New Day and Reunion) opened my eyes to one of the best kept secrets of the Dallas/Ft. Worth music scene. To say that Quinten Hope is a talented guitarist would be like saying Tiger Woods is an okay golfer. Hope is a highly disciplined artist who knows his craft inside and out and it shows in his recordings and in his performances.

The music I heard from those two discs treated my ears to some of the most intricate, work I've ever had the pleasure of listening to. The music is incredibly well written and performed with precision, transcending a wide range of styles. I became instantly hooked and am now a fan for life.

After a couple of preliminary visits at The Guitar Sanctuary and the exchange of e-mails, Quinten and I met for lunch at a local la Madeline's to enjoy a tasty salad (we are both watching our girlish figures). Tucked away in a relatively quiet corner of the restaurant, we chatted about mutual friends and acquaintances and various business news. Hope is a great conversationalist and we could have talked all day about a wide range of subjects. It's clear, though, that, besides his lovely wife, Caron, music is his passion and second love.

Every guitar player I've had the privilege to meet (friend or celebrity) eventually winds up telling me how they wound up playing the guitar and, if they're a professional, what led them to pursue the life of a musician. I asked Quinten to tell me what led him down his path.

"Well, I've always been around musicians – from the time I was growing up – my dad, he played. He had a band back in the fifties. It was him on guitar and bass – they would switch off. It was a four piece band that they had. They played the old Jimmy Reed stuff and Elmore James – just

old rhythm and blues stuff.

"We got into the sixties and a couple of guys went into the army. They all lost touch for awhile and then got back together. But he would always have guys coming over to the house and do some jamming in the back. He was really getting me turned on to country like Waylon Jennings and all of those guys.

"One night I saw KISS. They had this really cheesy movie on. It was in 1977 and it was called KISS Meets The Phantom of the Park — 'Movie of the Week', you know? I just remember watching and going, 'Wow! That's out there? That exists?' So, for years after that, I jumped around in my room with a tennis racket. I put a flashlight in the window to shine on me like a spotlight and jump around with this tennis racket. And I did this for years!", he says with an embarrassed chuckle.

Uh, you and millions of others, Quinten. Or, so I've heard. I'm just sayin'...

"I remember specifically, one day, I was in there, jumping around and I actually stopped and turned the record off and go, 'You know? If this is what I want to do – if I really want to do this – I might want to really learn how to play. If I'm going to stick with this tennis racket, I better start watching John McEnroe, you know?

"So, I got a real guitar. Actually, what was supposed to be a real guitar – it was better than the tennis racket. I think I was around 12 years old. I got this white flying 'V' – because that's what KISS played at the time - had to have it. Dad actually wanted to buy me a Les Paul and I go, 'No! I hafta have the white flying 'V'!' It was by a company called 'Hondo'. It was a \$250 guitar. Dad goes, 'You sure you don't want this Les Paul?' It was, like, a thousand bucks back then. 'No, man!' Looking back, I wish that I had taken the Les Paul.

"So, they got me the guitar and I would sit around and pick everything out by ear. I was taking the needle off the record and putting it back, just figuring everything out." When Hope shares this, I had to smile because great guitarist like Keith Richards came to mind for doing the exact same thing.

There comes a moment of truth in a musicians life – one of many, actually – when they make that first decision to play in a band. I asked Quinten at what point did he feel that he was good enough to play in public?

"Well, I was practicing a lot. I would go to school, come home and the first thing I would do was drop my books and play guitar all night long. I guess I was in eighth grade and just about to go into high school. I went to South Garland High School. There was a pop band called The Show Boaters — eleven vocalists, guitar, bass, drums and two keyboard players. It was school band and it was an actual class. You had to audition to be in it. What they did was they took pop tunes and country songs and work up a set and perform now and then — like at business luncheons and

events like that.

"I tried out and I made it. At this point, I was the only freshman that played in the band. I remember standing there for the audition. It was my first realization, 'Holy crap! I've got to play in front of somebody!' I worked up this whole Randy Rhodes solo. I'm going to go in there and do some finger tappin' and some Crazy Train!

"I go in there and start playing and I drop my pick! I'm fumbling around – what do I do? I dropped my pick! I couldn't pick up the pick because my Jordache jeans were too tight to get the other one in my pocket! So, I just started making stuff up on the fly and, somehow, I made it into the band. I was in the there my whole high school 'career'.

"I learned a lot. Every day, it was an actual class. You would go and set up in this room and rehearse a song. And, if you were in there, you automatically had to be in the choir. So, two hours of the day in school, I was doing music. And, then, I would go home and do music the rest of the night. That really helped a lot."

This rigorous regimen obviously groomed Hope to be accustomed to the discipline necessary to practice and rehearse in order to become a world class musician. He pretty much says so as he continues.

"It was really good because they would say, 'Here are the songs we're going to do this semester.' There would be 30 songs and I had to go and learn these 30 songs. They didn't always have the music for them but, luckily, I had already been playing things by ear and training my ear. I had to learn all of those 30 in about a week because I didn't know what we were going to rehearse. The instructor was tough and if I didn't know the songs, I didn't want to hear it from this guy at all!

"So, from the standpoint of making sure I had my stuff together and meet deadlines, it was really good training. It still transfers over today. If I have a gig somewhere – somebody calls me to do something for them, I've got to make sure that I've really done my homework and not just show up to the gig and go, 'Let's jam!' That gave me a really good foundation."

While researching Quinten's background and work, I learned that he was a music graduate from University of North Texas. I asked him if he went straight to UNT after graduating from high school.

"No, I was going to go be a rock star" he says with a laugh. "The good thing about the time where I was developing a lot of skills and how to play, there was a lot of diverse music. Dad was into old blues, and new blues like Stevie Ray Vaughan and country – blue grass, even. In the school band, we covered everything from pop tunes to classic rock to country to whatever. So I got my feet wet with a lot of different styles but, still, the whole rock thing was what was calling.

"So, I got out of high school and actually worked in a local music store. The reason why I wanted to get a job there was to meet other musicians. I figured, 'Man, this is the place where everybody's going to be.' A friend of mine worked there – we became friends and he had a friend who was rolling through town and he used to be in a band as a bass player. He came in and I met him. We got together and started writing songs. So we did this little rock band thing. We gathered three other guys and formed a five piece band. We did really well. We dealt with Warner Bros. and Geffen Records. We never signed anything and thank God we didn't. We were right at the turn when everything went *Alternative* – the whole Seattle/Grunge scene. So, I'm really thankful that it didn't happen. Of course, at the time, you don't understand why it happened but, looking back it's like, 'Ah! Perfect!'

"The whole thing happened: The band breaks up as usual – after three years into it. It's another one of those realizations where I'm sitting there thinking, 'Alright, I've spent three years of my life working on this and it went away just like that. What am I going to do to make sure that it doesn't happen if I want to keep doing music?' So, that's when I went to UNT and got involved there and got into reading music – the whole music theory thing.

"When I went up there I did Jazz Studies and Music Theory. I did a double major and, man, that opened up a lot of doors as far as developing my musicianship and musicality. And that was a big part of it, too. When I tell these stories and look back, it's pretty funny. Even now, I'm sitting here thinking, 'Wow, that was kind of cool!'

"At UNT, you either had to be classical music or you do jazz, which is funny because, if you try to go out and do jazz to make a living, it doesn't happen. So, again, you have to be fluent in multiple styles. Plus, trying to break into studio work, it's the same thing. You want to get calls where you can handle any situation – country gigs, pop gigs, whatever. But, probably at North Texas, it was probably the worst playing I have ever done in my life."

I asked Hope why that was.

"I think they really wanted me to try and sound like somebody who wasn't me. 'Oh, this is good but it's too blues based or too rock based. You need to sound more like this . . .'. So, I had this whole struggle going, trying to create my own identity but, at the same time, sounding like someone they wanted me to sound like. It just didn't work but I got through the whole thing. I think one of the best pieces of advice I ever got was from Fred Hamilton. He runs the whole guitar department up there. I worked my way up to study with Fred. You study usually with grad students and TA's (teacher's assistants). So, I worked my way up. The first semester I'm with Fred, I'm all excited and am, like, 'Yeah!'. I'm sitting in his office – the very first lesson – he looked like Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings*. He's got the slicked back, long white hair with a beard. I kept on thinking, 'Cast a spell or something."

"But he sat back and he was stroking his beard and he just goes, 'I can't make you play any better.' What he was talking about was, 'Taking a lesson with me is not going to make you any

better. You've got the facilities, you've got the skills and the knowledge. You've got to go back to the music that you like – that you dig and you've got to get your head between the headphones and figure out what you like. We can talk about concepts and techniques and other approaches. You've just got to go back and dig into what it is you like.'"

After following his heart to pursue his musical passion in school, Quinten graduated from University of North Texas in 2001. In addition to working on his own music, he also enjoys a reputation as a much sought after session musician. I asked him to tell me about that aspect of his career.

"Well, I try not to get it on the hundredth take." He says with a laugh. "I try to get it done quick. The key is to try not to suck. It's real funny because I was always in the studio with a rock band — we did a couple of CD's. I've been in the studio doing my own thing. But it's real funny, when you get a call from somebody to come do something because, most of the time, you DON'T know what to expect. I just did one — I guess it was last month — for about a week. I recorded four days for this guy's record. But it was really cool and laid back. The band was great. So, we did eleven tunes for this guy's record. But it's pretty cool and it's one of those things that keeps you on your toes because it's not like you've got a lot of time. You've got to get it done quick to make sure that you don't run up their studio bill.

"It's like the whole recording scene changed a lot in the last few years. Everyone has a home bedroom recording studio. I do a lot of stuff where people will send me a rough mix of a tune and I'll drop it in my Pro Tools rig, record the guitars and send them a WAV file back and they just drop it in and it's done. I've done a lot of stuff for guys in San Diego and New York. It's pretty consistent work."

When Quinten isn't hard at work in the business called rock and roll, he spends quite a bit of time applying his craft in the non-profit sector, most at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas. I asked him how that all came about.

"Prestonwood had their Saturday night service and their Sunday morning service going on. So, I got a call one day from somebody at Prestonwood and they said, 'Hey, would you come over and play on Saturday night for us?' And, at this point, they still didn't have a lot of guitar music at all. It was mostly the orchestra and piano kind of thing. But, they had a song that had a guitar solo in it and they needed a guitar player. So, I went over and played that Saturday night. A couple of weeks later, they called and asked, 'Hey, would you come back and do it again?' So, I went over on Saturday night. After a few times of that, they really started to like the vibe of what was going on. And, then, they added me to Saturday nights (as a regular) but nothing on Sunday.

"Then, one night, Todd Bell, the music director over there, said, 'Man, we really like what you do and we want to add this in on Sunday morning, too.' So, I have been there ever since. Now, there is *lots* of guitar music. We changed that pretty quick! We rock and roll over there now."

Later in the conversation Quinten shares the story about a very interesting development that sprouted from his work at Prestonwood: "One thing that we got started there was the music school. I'd been on them for a long time that they needed to get a music school going. We talked about it and mentioned it here and there. We had lunch one day and they said, 'Hey, we're going to start a music school and we want you to be part of it.' I grew the guitar department really big. I was teaching something like 40 people a week myself. Then, I had to bring on two other guitar teachers to help me with the load. It was pretty crazy and it's still going pretty strong."

Since Hope has an extensive – and impressive – resume of musical work that can be proudly pointed to, I asked him who all he has worked with that has commanded his respect.

"You know, you've heard of his drummer, Dan Wojciechowski. Well, he's played drums on my CD's, too. He's been on the road with Frampton – on the Frampton gig – for a couple of years now. The first time I got to play with Dan was actually at Prestonwood. The drummer that we were going to have was going to be out. So, Dan came in and played. From the first measure of music, this guy's groove was so deep, I said, 'This is a cat that I'm going to play with!'

"I had already done my first CD and I was writing and getting ready for my second CD, Start of a New Day, and I said, 'Alright, this guy is going to be on my CD.' We had already gotten to be friends before that. I was sitting on the couch one day and I started putting everything together. I go, 'Alright, who is the perfect rhythm partner I would want to play with Dan?' The first guy that popped into my head was Will Lee, off of (The Late Show With David) Letterman. I go, 'There's no way that's going to happen. He's already so busy playing on everyone else's records, there's no way!' I was in the mood that day that I felt that I could get anything done so I go, 'Why wouldn't he do it? Let's make this happen!'

"So, I made a few phone calls and talked to a few friends and sent a couple of e-mails here and there and by that same night we were on the phone with each other. We spent over an hour on the phone just talking about everything. He said, 'Yeah, man, I'd love to do it!' I'm sitting there thinking, 'I got hold of the wrong guy. He's an imposter.' To me he's the most grooving bass player ever.

"He came down to Dallas and we did the record. That was pretty freakin' amazing! The way that he and Dan would communicate musically on a groove – they wouldn't have to say anything. They had never worked before – never met. Will was real impressed with Dan and Dan was just beside himself to play with Will – we all were. That was six years ago and, to this day, that is THE best band I get to play with.

"We did that record and we all stayed in touch – e-mails, phone calls. We talk all the time. I still do some shows with Dan around town. And, then, when I got ready to do Reunion – the last CD – of course, those were going to be the same guys that I wanted on it. So, we worked it out, schedule-wise. It's kind of hard to do because Dan had just started playing with Frampton so trying to work that out, schedule-wise, was kind of hectic. Also, trying to find time when Will

could take off from Letterman. Dan was off from Frampton so we could work a week out where we could get together. It all worked out.

"We did that record and, to release that, Dan and I went to New York and played some shows with Will – at The Bitter End. That was a fun gig. We had Rob Arthur on keyboard. Rob Arthur is also Peter Frampton's keyboard player. Rob is such a great dude. He's got a CD out (Anywhere But Home) and it sounds awesome. It's one of my favorite CD's. That gig was, I think, on September 22nd, 2008, and then we came back to Dallas. The following week, Will flew down and my buddy, Bradley (Knight), who played with me at Prestonwood and is a great arranger and keyboard player, we all did the show at the Granada. That was really, really cool."

After exchanging our thoughts and feelings about the current state of the music business, Quinten uses the opportunity to brag on the music scene being fostered in McKinney, Texas.

"I really like the scene in McKinney as far as the square goes because they're really doing a lot to support live music. And the people that go there are going there to hear live music. It's not like in Dallas where you go somewhere and you've got people there going, 'Gosh, I wish that band would shut up!' At least in McKinney we've got that vibe going now to where it can be happening."

"One of the things that blew me away – any time I go to New York, I'm blown away just because of the culture and the things that happen musically – the art, the vibe, the energy of everything. When we got done with our Bitter End gig, which was cool because I looked out and I saw Felicia Collins – the chick on Letterman – and some other people that I know there and I'm thinking, 'Wow, these people are watching me play!'

"After the gig, Will (Lee), goes, 'Hey, man, Mike Stern's playing over at the 55 Bar.' Mike Stern is one of my favorites. So we snuck in there. We walk in and it's so crowded and we scoot in to the back against the wall. Mike Stern was playing. Cindy Black was playing drums – she plays with Beyonce and Lenny Kravitz. Will Kennedy was playing bass and there was a trumpet player with them. Man! They were playing at an intensity that was just incredible. But it was a volume that was just above talking volume. That was amazing! I got to talk and hang out with Mike a little after the gig. He's such a cool dude. How cool was that?

"I come back to Dallas thinking, 'That needs to happen here all the time. Somewhere in the metroplex that needs to happen."

Hope comes back to the list of artists who he highly respects.

"If I count my favorites on my hands, there's Mike Stern, Eric Johnson, Andy Timmons. I've always got to throw in some old Clapton with Cream, Hendrix, of course. I missed all that stuff because, when I was learning to play, it was Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Richard Thompson, and those guys. I was learning about finger tapping and shred and do all of that. I got into the whole

KISS thing and the whole 80's rock thing. "And, then, when I really started to get into playing, it was Steve Vai, Satriani and whoever else was shredding - John Sykes from Whitesnake, Paul Gilbert, all those guys. That taught me a lot about technique and really getting in there and studying my picking, my left hand and learning all the scales and modes and getting as technical as I could be. And, then, someone turned me on to Stevie Ray (Vaughan) and it's like, 'Wow, man! That's a whole other world!' It floored me."

"Yeah, so those are my favorites: Andy, Eric Johnson, Mike Stern and Oz Noy is another favorite of mine, too. He's a cat up in New York. He's actually from Israel. He's kind of like fusion/jazz kind of stuff. The stuff that he's doing is really, really cool. Check him out. He's starting to get some good exposure on the scene. Then, there are guys like Tommy Emmanuel. He's one of the hardest working dudes in the business. He stays booked. He loves to travel and tour. I saw him live, twice, over at Bass Hall (a world class venue in downtown Fort Worth). Oh, man! I walked away thinking, 'Oh, wow! One guy, one guitar and entertaining? Wow. I never met him but he comes across so genuine – the real deal."

Apparently, top shelf amp manufacturer, <u>Mesa/Boogie</u> feels that Hope is the real deal, as well. So much so that they proudly include him as part of their impressive line-up world renown roster of artists. Artists such as Keith Richards, Ron Wood, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Weir, Carlos Santana and Lindsay Buckingham, to name just a very, very few.

Quinten's talent, along with his solid relationship with Mesa/Boogie, have presented more than just performance opportunities. Business opportunities also presented themselves to Hope. One very intriguing venture is The Guitar Sanctuary – a high end guitar and gear boutique in McKinney, Texas. Quinten shared how he got involved with the store.

"George (Fuller – a very successful luxury home builder in the Dallas area) had been wanting to do that (open the store) for a long time. We talked about it for the last couple of years. I had been playing, recording and teaching and all of that. He got it all up and almost ready. I was playing at Rick's Chop House one night up in McKinney and they were up there – George and Maylee (George's wife and lead singer of the Maylee Thomas Band) – because they were playing outside for a festival that was going on. And then Andy popped in and played with us, too. So George and I were sitting there talking and he says, "Yeah, man, I'm getting really close to getting this thing done." And I go, "Well, let me know if I can help you. I'll be there to help you out." I was thinking, 'If you need me to carry in some guitars or something.' We just left it at that.

"Maybe two or three weeks after that, I get a call from Steve Mueller at Mesa Boogie. Mesa Boogie is partnered in as far as making us one of their flagship stores. We're one of two stores that they've partnered with. One is Rudy's music in Manhattan. They call that 'Mesa Manhattan'. This store is now called 'Mesa North Dallas'. So, they've made this their specialty shop.

"So, I get a call from Steve Mueller and goes, 'Hey, man, George has got this shop and it's really

close to being finished but we're trying to think of someone who can partner with us on this and help run it.' I go, 'Well, I know this guy, this guy and this guy. They might be good guys.' He says, 'We thought about those guys but what about you?' I go, 'Uh, I don't know.'

"Steve and I talked about it for awhile and it started like something I might want to do. Later that day or the next morning, George called me and said, 'Hey, let's get together. We've got some things to talk about.' So, we got together and talked and it sounded like a perfect deal – a perfect match. So, I go, 'Yeah, man, I'm in! I've got a couple of extra hours in the day where I'm not sleeping. Let's do something!" He says with a laugh.

"We just jumped into it and it has been going really, really well. We just had our full color ad come out in *Vintage Guitar Magazine*. That looks sharp. It's starting to grow and getting national attention with orders for product. It's getting out there. We're about quality and a good selection of quality. There are other stores around town that are good stores and they have their market. But George has his flair for design, style and resources – his taste for tone and equipment. It's more towards what the Dallas Metroplex really needs - a place that you can feel real comfortable and just hang and check stuff out."

Surely, working in neck deep in such a great store would present lots of curvaceous, six string temptations. Well, maybe not. Not if he already owns a lot of guitars. How many guitars does Ouinten own and what is the most that he's owned at one time?

"I think, right now – let me count real quick. Hang on." He then starts using his fingers to go through his mental inventory. "Right now, I think I only have 16."

Only 16. Is that all?

"But, at one time, I had over thirty. My goal was to have 52 so I could play one every week of the year so that it would be a year before I saw the same guitar again. But then I thought that would be a little obsessive about guitars. So, I went to my closet and I got rid of everything that I wasn't playing. Some of them I should have held on to because they're going to increase in value one day. But, they need to be played. They need to be loved. They can't be lonely – locked up in a closet."

So, what's the "holy grail" Hope would like to own, guitar-wise?

"Man, I think I've already got it. I think I do. I'm more of a Fender Strat guy. I've got a 1959 Strat that is just amazing. I bought it ten years ago. Then, about five years ago, John English was one of Fender's Master Builders. They had a handful of Master Builders and he was one of them. The guitar that I have is one of the last ones that he made. It's special. Besides the fact that he made it and that he was their best builder and passed away. They made one for me about 14 years ago that I really loved, too, a Fender Strat. But I picked up this '59 Strat ten years ago and, like I said, it's amazing. It's a player's guitar. It's not just an investment to hang on a wall, even

though it does. But this John English – it was everything I wanted in a Strat: the wood, the neck shape. I was really happy that John made it. When I took it out of the case and hit one note, that was it. I knew that he nailed it. It has been a really great, special guitar. Yeah, definitely, my '59 and my John English are definitely my holy grails."

Later in our conversation, Quinten mentions a couple of acoustic holy grails.

"I love Collings. Collings are awesome! Those guys are great. The first Collings I bought was an OM2H model. Great guitar – sounds awesome. But I think the holy grail of the acoustics that I own is my dad's Martin – a 1977 D-28. This thing does have a tone to it. I've played a lot of old Martins that have a lot of years to age and mature. But, this one sounds pretty special."

Since Quinten is more than adequately equipped to hit just about any stage to perform on, I asked about what his dream gig would be.

"Oh, man! Probably play on stage with Paul McCartney. That would be THE biggest thing to do. The second biggest gig would be with Will (Lee) and his Beatles band, the Fab Faux. They do the whole record. Anything that's on the record, they do it live. No recording or tracks. There are fourteen or seventeen people on stage making it happen. A string section and a horn section, rhythm section, vocals. It's all going on. So, I think to play in something like that would be really cool."

Who's commanding your attention, guitarist-wise, these days?

"I don't know. I think it still goes back to the same guys because there's something about guys like Tommy Emmanuel, Eric Johnson and all my favorite players – there's always something about those guys that I can listen to the same record for five years and when I go back and listen to it, it's like, 'I never heard that!' I think that I'm still trying to absorb everything that I started trying to absorb when I just started playing. I keep going back to that – just trying to absorb more of that. It's like going back and listening to Beatles records. There's always something. It's like, 'Wait a minute! I never heard that before! Where did that come from?' So, I think I still have my favorites but I still listen to it in a different way. I just approach it from a different perspective with my ears.

"I still listen to Clapton, Hendrix, Beatles, Mike Stern, Oz Noy, all those guys."

With two of Hope's three CD's, I'm anxious to see this great artist come out with more work. I wanted to know what he has coming out next and when.

"I'm working on the new record – the writing part of it. Hopefully, we'll be in the studio maybe next spring, depending on schedules. And, then, planning another show – a big release like the Granada or the Kessler, something like that and some more shows in New York. It's going to be fun, man. It's going to be fun."

What going on five years from now?

"Five years from now? Man, I don't know. Hopefully, more of the same but on steroids. Maybe I'll learn how to tune my guitar." He says with a laugh.

I don't mind saying that I'm a new, HUGE fan of Quinten Hope. I love his work. I love his attitude. I love the calm and confident vibe that seems to be ever-present with this incredibly talented man. Kind. Approachable. Honest. Humble. You get the whole package with this guy.

You can get the latest news on Quinten, including where he'll be performing and when his latest CD will come out by visiting his website, www.quintenhope.com. While you're there, I would encourage you to order all three of his CD's. I promise you that you will love what you hear.