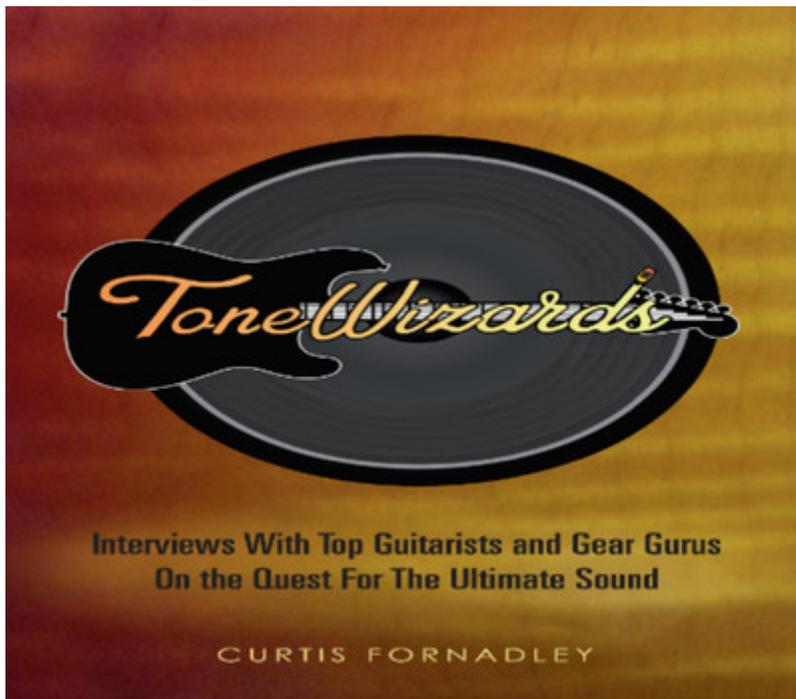


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Curtis Fornadley's 'Tone Wizards' is a must-read for guitarists and music fans

October 29, 2015

7:16 AM MST



Tone Wizards

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A collection of guitarist interviews about “the quest for the ultimate tone” — one would think that it’s been done, perhaps several times, but the more Curtis Fornadley searched for that book, the more he realized that it didn’t exist. There are books about the guitar, for the guitarist, and by the guitarist, and there are endless collections of Q&As, but none brought together gear-makers and players the way Fornadley thought it should be done. With that in mind, he decided to do it himself.

The result is his self-published debut book, *Tone Wizards*, a solid 400 pages of gear-centric explorations. If you play guitar, love the guitar, are fascinated by those who play it, or simply love music, it’s a must-read. Fornadley interviewed Joe Bonamassa, Bob Bradshaw, John Carruthers, Cliff Chase, Peter Frampton, David Friedman, Jay Graydon, Scott Henderson, Eric Johnson, Jim Kelley, Jeff Kollman, Ronan Chris Murphy, Joe Satriani, John Suhr, Pete Thorn, Steve Vai, and Carl Verheyen. Each

was asked a similar set of questions, but each responded in his own way. *Tone Wizards* is informative, educational, and fascinating, as every interview is filled with the technical minutiae that gearheads thrive on, but also digs deep into the creative process and passion that go into the art, explained in ways that fans who don't play an instrument can appreciate and connect with.

Fornadley began playing classical guitar at age 11, eventually mastering both electric and acoustic. Like the artists he spotlights in his book, he is well versed in several genres of music, from rock to jazz, blues, and country. He performs with his trio, which includes drummer Rob Chismar and bassist Joe Villa, and has recorded a number of singles and albums, including the 1998 release *Curtis*, from which 50 percent of sales are donated to cancer-related charities.

Alison Richter: You state in the introduction that you thought, *This is the type of book I would love to read, but it does not exist. In some ways, the premise seems so obvious. Why do you think it had not been written?*

Curtis Fornadley: There are probably a variety of possible reasons. It required a huge amount of effort that only serves a relatively small audience/potential market. Maybe other qualified players that have this knowledge did not want to take the time away from their music to write it.

There is also a tendency in our current culture to be drawn to quick sound bites, which fosters short attention spans, so a long, detailed book does not fit that mold. Self-publishing book models are also relatively new. But the timing just seemed right to gather the last 50 to 60 years of electric guitar "tone-dom" into some sort of summary or reference guide.

Because it seemed obvious, I was motivated to finish the project. I didn't want to get scooped by someone else taking the idea and running with it. Although the angle of talking to both gear-makers and players I felt was pretty unique and maybe not as obvious.

AR: During the planning stages, did you waver between, "This needs to be done and I'm the one to do it!" and "Who am I to do this?" If so, how did you balance between the two and convince yourself that you were, in fact, the one to do it?

CF: Not really. I made a relatively quick decision; when I set my mind to do something, I see it through to the end.

I never questioned if I was the one to do it. I just assumed the challenge. I mean, I know how much of my life I have dedicated to my music and guitar playing. I was really motivated to hear about some of these topics that I have explored on my own directly from very successful and respected people. I became obsessed with the idea, like a song I had to finish.

AR: You describe yourself as a musician first and an author second. When writing a book like this one, particularly in the Q&A format, which is more important? Isn't your readership more concerned about the technical information in the interviews, rather than whether or not there's a

comma splice somewhere within those 400 pages?

CF: I am hoping it is the former, although I have received a few emails from readers annoyed by typos and some misused words (which I am gathering for a corrected edition at some point).

My main service was to be an informed listener that understands the topic very well and can edit a conversation into something that is fun and interesting to read. Reading a raw transcript of a conversation is painful, and at times confusing, because conversations jump around and go off on tangents. So I had to transform each interview into a readable form that still retained the voice of the interviewee.

AR: The questions you asked go far beyond the usual “What type of [pedal, amp, strings, etc.] do you use?” and instead dial in on the heart and soul of each artist’s technique — which is, of course, in the hands and unique to each guitarist. Do gearheads obsess too much about “which amp and which strings,” instead of focusing on their own hearts and hands?

CF: I think many do. For some it is a phase of growth they go through until they learn how to manipulate almost anything to do what they hear in their head. For some players it is part of the fun. There is always a rush when you get a new piece of gear. Sometimes it inspires a great new song! Which is worth the price of admission right there.

AR: Were you guilty of doing the same thing in your formative years?

CF: Yes and no. I was always limited by money. But the players and bands I liked heavily influenced me gear-wise. As a young musician you assume that the players you look up to have “divine insight,” which you cannot see, but the gear they use is an outward, visual symbol of how they are achieving their greatness. At 15, I had to have a Marshall amp; nothing was good enough until I had that amp. When a teen sees their favorite guitarist playing a certain brand of guitar or amp, it is a huge selling point. Which obviously is known in the industry and why endorsements are such a big deal.

AR: It’s no secret that many publicists are the bane of every interviewer’s existence. Did you encounter resistance from them in your efforts to schedule interviews?

CF: Yes. It was one of the biggest challenges and forced me to move out of my comfort zone. But in this instance I was not pleading for someone to listen to my song or guitar playing. It was about selling the idea, to believe in this project, to share this information with the larger guitar community.

AR: Were some requests ignored or denied?

CF: Absolutely. Although in the end I ended up with a final list that exceeded my initial expectations.

AR: How did you narrow down your choices of artists and builders? Was it based on personal preferences, artist availability, cooperation from their “people,” your own deadline, or a combination of?

CF: After deciding to do the project, the first thing I did was to create my initial wish list, which included some people I knew, and others that I would have to establish contact with. This list was my guide. I knew I wanted to keep a balance of players and gear gurus and address both live and studio situations. In the end there were some people that were suggested to me that I did not follow up with because I felt that a certain area had been covered enough. In some cases the pieces just fell together as one person I interviewed referred me to someone else on my master list.

AR: The book was a year and a half in the making. It was quite an undertaking in a short time, considering that you had to schedule, prepare, interview, transcribe, edit, and proofread everything. Were the transcript approvals effortless, or were there instances of drafts going back and forth half a dozen times until the individuals were happy with their own words?

CF: With some people I went back and forth three or four times, with others it was approved the first time. It was very important to me that each interviewee had the final say on what was printed. Sometimes edits removed content; other times they were to include a follow-up question and answer that clarified a certain topic. I should note that in some cases I went through as many as nine internal revisions before I even sent a draft to the interviewee for review.

AR: Were all of the interviews conducted in person?

CF: I talked to most people in person or on the phone. Only two were through an email exchange.

AR: All things considered, what was the biggest challenge in turning this dream project into reality?

CF: Some things that come to mind are: running the gauntlet through the layers of people to reach and schedule some of the interviewees. Dealing with “no” or open-ended maybe’s. Now that the book is out, my biggest challenge is spreading the word so that guitar players know about the book. That presents a whole other set of challenges.

AR: Someone has to say it, so it might as well be me: 400 pages of guitarist interviews and not a female in sight. Because?

CF: I never really thought about it in that way. I formed my interview wish list by focusing on players and gear gurus that I felt have made an impact tonal and stylistically. Of course this is a personal choice informed by my own worldview and experiences. It is not a sexist thing, but there were not any women on that list. If I were interviewing other musicians or songwriters that have influenced me, then yes, there would have been women on that list.

AR: So many guitarists, so little time. Do you foresee a second edition of the book or perhaps another volume? Do you have other books in the works?

CF: Not at this time. I am back to focusing on writing and playing music. I suppose if the demand or interest were to arise, I might consider it. I would be more likely to pick a broader musical topic that is

not so electric-guitar-centric. In that case I would certainly talk with some women as well!

Learn more about Curtis Fornadley, connect with him on social media, and listen to his music at <http://www.curtisguitar.com/>.

Order Tone Wizards in paperback or ebook format, and visit the website, at <http://www.guitartone wizards.com/>.



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