

NEW YORKER Dominic Frasca recently walked away with the title of 'Next Guitar Hero, the first competition of its kind sponsored by *Guitar Player Magazine*. Out of 3,000 entries submitted, ten finalists were chosen to compete for the title at the Rock n Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland in front of a panel of judges that included rock guitar legends Joe Satriano and Steve Lukather. What makes this a standout feat is that Frasca, who is classically trained, was their only acoustic guitar-playing finalist.

Seated on an overturned milk crate with a stew of cables at his feet, Frasca performed last, offering a five-minute excerpt from his massive piece *Deviations*, a 23-minute musically and technically relentless post-minimalist epic built on stacked metres, shifting harmonies and a slew of original and unorthodox extended techniques. The piece was performed on a modified Thomas Humphrey nylon 6-string with pickups under each string, allowing for each string to be processed and mixed through a Mac G4 laptop. Frasca also incorporates odd elements, such as C-clamps and flat scraps of steel to create an improvised capo at the neck, and various pieces of wood and cardboard mounted below the soundhole of the guitar to create a wide array of percussion timbres.

Frasca, who studied with Steve Aron, Thomas Patterson and Ben Verdery, cites the music of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Anthony Davis and Prince, to name a few who have inspired his guitar technique and compositions.

'I started studying with Steve [Aron] after hearing him perform at the University of Akron in Ohio and immersed myself in the classical guitar repertoire for a few years. I loved the technical and the musical possibilities of the classical guitar but I found that the repertoire was not quite who I was as an artist. By the time I reached college I had decided I wanted to go in a slightly different direction. It was about this time that I got into the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich.

'Their music really spoke to me on many levels — it had all the structure and interest of classical music while at the same time possessing the visceral feel of rock music. Since these composers had not written any pieces for guitar at that point, in 1985 I started doing arrangements of their music. It was also the period when I started composing as well.'

Frasca has no qualms about physically deconstructing and reinventing his guitars to suit his pieces. His collection includes a number of 10-string guitars with mixed nylon and steel strings that are altered in various ways to achieve a number of musical effects, and he also performs a good part of his show on a modified nylon 6 string. He also keeps a huge collection of guitars which never see the concert stage and these can only be described as instrumental guinea pigs, some of which contain necks that have frets under only a couple of the strings.



Dominic Frasca.

'I had this idea that I wanted a guitar with fretless basses because I have always been a huge Jaco Pastorios fan and just loved his sound. So I took a 6-string Takamine guitar that I had lying around and bolted on an old electric guitar neck that I had removed the frets from and cut it in half down the middle and made a six-string guitar with two fretless bass strings. And it worked. It created a really nice effect. I had a bunch of prototype guitars like it made shortly after that and I wrote pieces for them. I hope to get around to playing them again some day, but for now I am playing all fretted guitars, except for my 6-string which has a small fretless area on the 6-string above the 12th fret which I use in the piece *Deviations*.'

While writing and learning *Deviations*, Frasca experienced focal dystonia in his right hand from over-practising one of the extended techniques and it put him out of commission for two years. He admits it was a struggle but he did manage to overcome the injury. 'I worked a lot on relaxation and slow movements, basically retraining my hand how to play again.' After taking a year to restore his ability to play at full strength, Frasca developed focal dystonia again, only this time it was in his left hand.

'I had been practising a slur technique that I use in the piece *Shattered Glass* and not much else. The new technique had become very easy to do but when I went back to playing other things I noticed my left hand felt a bit off. So I started to make small adjustments in my technique to try to compensate for the problems I was having. Before I knew it, my technique was shot and I was unable to do very basic movements like 1-2-4 slurs without my hand completely locking up. The strange thing was I could do 1-3-4 slurs fine.

'What is even more strange is that one day, while holding this, I discovered that *without* strings I could do 1-2-4 slurs just fine. I made this discovery on Odair's guitar neck from his first Millennium guitar, which Humphrey had replaced. I had turned the thing into my bathroom key fob because everyone kept leaving with my key. With strings on a neck, my hand freaked out.