

A Conversation with Jorma Kaukonen • Frank Goodman (Puremusic 2/2002)

Throughout history, there has been a long lineage of electric guitar heroes. In their parallel universe, there have been as many acoustic guitar heroes. But the only musicians I can think of who have legitimately been both are Richard Thompson and Jorma Kaukonen.

Jorma rose to superstardom in his early twenties in The Jefferson Airplane. (In fact, he named the band. It was part of a name a friend made up for him, Blind Thomas Jefferson Airplane.) Paul Kantner and Marty Balin needed a lead player, and he took the spot reluctantly. He was more into the Blues. His propensity for acoustic fingerstyle spawned an instrumental on their 1967 breakthrough record *Surrealistic Pillow* called “Embryonic Journey” that is still in demand, featured in the soundtrack of *A Walk On The Moon* (the great movie produced by Dustin Hoffman), and the NBC series *The Sixties*.

The legend of Jefferson Airplane is a matter of Psychedelic record, and in the late 60s Jorma and bassist Jack Casady put together Hot Tuna. Hot Tuna was and is a Blues based act (from a duo to a quintet over the years) that featured the work of Reverend Gary Davis and other acoustic Blues masters, as well as Jorma’s originals in this style.

I certainly recall the mind boggling impact that the first Hot Tuna album (recorded live at Berkeley’s New Orleans House in September of ’69) had on my musical family and all my fingerpicking friends in the suburbs of Philly. We all started to learn as many of the difficult pieces note for note as we could. “Hesitation Blues,” “Death Don’t Have No Mercy,” “Mann’s Fate,” and all the rest, it was even more exciting than learning the Mississippi John Hurt or Blind Blake numbers. This was a young white cat, a Rock guy. He jammed in the middle of the pieces with a great bassist, it was a totally different and very cool trip. It made fingerstyle Blues even cooler than we thought it was, it made it cool to Everybody. (Hell, it’s 30 years later and I still like to play a version of “How Long Blues,” the Leroy Carr song I learned from that record as a teenager.)

In fact, we think that first Hot Tuna record is so important that we will include some clips from it on the Listen page, since it’s still available, reissued in 1996 with five previously unreleased tracks.

There have been many incarnations of Hot Tuna over the years, and they are still actively touring and recording. They have been featured in several Further Festival tours. The current lineup includes Jorma and Jack with keyboardist Pete Sears, drummer Harvey Sorgen, and Michael Falzarano on guitar and mandolin.

In 1998, Jorma and his wife Vanessa Lillian opened the Fur Peace Guitar Ranch. On a farm in Pomeroy, OH, they built two dozen outbuildings, mostly to house visiting students. The site now includes a 32 track recording facility, a music library, a gourmet kitchen and a dining hall. They’re currently building a 200 seat concert venue. From April to October, students of various levels take weekend workshops from world class guitarists. (One of them, Aussie Geoff Achison, is reviewed in this issue.) Some of the

luminaries among the instructors, besides Jorma himself, are John Hammond, Roy Book Binder, Rory Block, Alvin “Youngblood” Hart, and Duke Robillard. You can even learn bass from Jack Casady or guitar repair from Dan Erlewine. We plan to make a Puremusic call on the Fur Peace Guitar Ranch in the Spring, and we’ll write a feature all about the experience, which promises to be very special. You can find out even more about this unique and wonderful place at the website, www.furpeaceranch.com.

It had been some years since I’d seen Jorma or Vanessa, and I was very happy to do so again. They were both looking radiant, very healthy. We met at the Elliston Soda Shop in Nashville one Saturday at 8:15 in the morning. Jorma was in town recording with the Bluegrass “A” team (Sam Bush on mandolin, Byron House on bass, Jerry Douglas on dobro, and Bela Fleck on banjo) for a new record on Columbia. It’s not everybody that gets a new deal with Columbia Records at 61, but he’s a person who has broken a few rules in his time. We discussed his current project and anything else we could think of before it was time to head down the studio. It was a real pleasure, he’s a helluva guy.

Puremusic: Good to see you, Jorma. I was looking at your picture in the press kit, thinking “Geez, this character is looking awfully good for the Rock & Roll life he’s led.”

Jorma Kaukonen: So far so good. I don’t stay up as late as I used to, you know. Creak a little bit more when you get up in the morning, but hey, that’s okay.

PM: It’s a beautiful life you got going on.

JK: Yeah, we do, couldn’t be better. This project we’re doing in town with the boys, it’s been a slice of heaven.

PM: It’s so interesting that, at the age of 61, you get a new contract with Columbia Records, to record songs of white Country guys from the 20s and 30s, Jimmie Rodgers and Gene Autry, among others. How did that come about?

JK: It really had to do with Yves Beauvais [a rather famous A&R person in NYC, formerly with Atlantic Records]. Yves knew our Public Relations person, Diane Connal. When I was playing a solo show at B.B. King’s a couple of years ago, he came down, and heard something he liked. You never know who’s going to like your stuff or why, you know how that is. I like what I do, but I’m not an A&R guy. He was with Atlantic at the time. We hit it off, talked about a few things. Some time went by, next I hear, he’s with Columbia Records. Now we really start talking. And he’s really been behind this project, it’s remarkable to me. He’s a really rare guy.

PM: Is he producing?

JK: No, Roger Moutenot is the producer of the album, but Yves has been involved in the recording. He’s a real A&R guy, old school. I’m not gonna name names, but when I was

with CBS in the late 80s, we did that record and the A&R guy coulda cared less. But here we've got people like Yves Beauvais and Roger Moutenot. And the players are fantastic: Jerry Douglas, Byron House, Sam Bush, Bela Fleck, come on. We cut everything live, 15 songs in four days.

PM: When something's not cut live, I'm less interested.

JK: Especially with this kind of music. It's not about bricklaying, who cares? But this has been great, Byron and Sam sang backups, we just had a great time.

PM: Your earliest records were Psychedelic Rock with the Jefferson Airplane, and you've been a huge proponent of Country Blues through your life. Is the interest in early Country something relatively new?

JK: Actually, I started out playing Old Timey and Bluegrass. I was never really any good at it. But the influence was always there. All the musical influences have been important in my life, I like so many styles. The Psychedelic thing doesn't really mean much to me now, but I don't regret any of it. When people ask me what I listen to now, I surprise them if I say "Well, I really like the new Lee Ann Womack record." That's a great record, and Jerry has some really good stuff on it. I like to listen to the player oriented stuff. Alison and Jerry, I have all those records.

PM: Are you a Gillian Welch fan? Buddy and Julie?

JK: I am, though not a real aficionado. I like David Rawlings' playing a lot. Buddy Miller, yeah, he's terrific. When I saw Buddy play with Steve Earle's band in Columbus, I told him he was playing notes that aren't even on the guitar.

PM: In my interview with Buddy, we talked about you. He surprised me when he said that he was a huge fan of the San Francisco Rock scene. Garcia, Jorma, Jerry Miller...

JK: And [bassist] Byron House too, you know he has many musical personalities. One of them is his Dead cover band.

PM: Dead Set, sure. I go out to see them once in a while. One time I was out, Donna Godchaux [former singer with the Grateful Dead, while she was married to the late keyboardist Keith Godchaux] and her bassist husband David McKay were the featured guests.

JK: It's funny when I look back on my history in the music business. It's been many years since I've been with a major label that gave a shit about what I did. But back in the days of the Airplane recordings, it was very fashionable to constantly complain about your label. "The record company is screwing me, they won't give us artistic freedom," and all that. Maybe that was valid, it's hard to remember. But the guys I've been working with down here, everybody's on the one together, and happy just to be playing. Hell, you

oughta be thanking Jesus you got a gig. Anyhow, so Yves and I talked about doing this, we were interested in doing some period stuff, but not Delta Blues.

PM: There's plenty of that going around.

JK: All the guys we're doing are white Old Timey Country guys, with the exception of Washington Phillips. He's the guy that plays the dulcicola, an odd instrument. He had an album out on Yazoo that I think was reissued on Shanachie called *I Was Born to Preach the Gospel*, you gotta check it out. It's beautiful stuff. The dulcicola, I don't know how to describe it, it's like a gigantic zither. He's probably one of the only guys in the world that ever learned to play it. We do his song "What Are They Doing in Heaven Today?"

PM: Is it fretted, or...?

JK: No, it's more like a big autoharp. So, anyhow, we're up to stuff like that on this record. And over the last year and a half, Yves has been searching out and selecting material. He's been very active. It's so much fun to work with someone who likes the same stuff as you do. He sent me hundreds of cool CDs that he compiled to listen to things. As recently as three months ago, we'd boiled it down to 60 songs, and I just couldn't pick between them. So I asked him to pick and I'd tell him if there was something I was less than comfortable with including. But I liked everything he picked, and off we went.

PM: I listened to *Too Many Years* [Jorma's last album] yesterday. As cool a guitar player as you are, I'd forgotten what a distinctive singing voice you have.

JK: You know, I get roasted for my voice a lot. But David Crosby told me years ago, "Listen, you have character." I don't sing well loud, but if I can hear myself [on stage] okay, I sing in tune. Although I truly wanted to be, I got over the fact a long time ago that I wasn't Ray Charles, and wasn't gonna be.

PM: For the first time yesterday it occurred to me that there are similarities between your voice and Leon Russell's, especially in this time of your life. You're both character singers, a compliment of the highest order, I think.

JK: Well, you can't be much of a backup singer when you're a character singer, but I agree. Michael Falzarano and I were doing a gig with Arlo Guthrie at Carnegie Hall in Pittsburgh, and Arlo had his son, Gabe, in his band. One of the guys hit a chord backstage and they struck this four part harmony version of "Nowhere Man" that was amazing. I said, "I must have been cutting school the day they taught that..." It's like that in Nashville, everybody knows how to sing good harmony down here.

PM: Oh yeah. I love living in this town.

JK: It's the greatest. I love living where I do, but I like that it's only eight hours away at a reasonable pace. It's nothin.

PM: Really? Nothin to me, for sure. I'll have to pay a call up there once Spring comes.

JK: Absolutely. Spring and Fall are so nice up there.

PM: Because I want to do a separate story on the Fur Peace Guitar Ranch.

JK: Oh, you'd love it up there, we have a ball.

PM: How did the Ranch come about?

JK: Well, I taught years ago. Then Happy Traum got me into doing some of those instructional videos [Homespun Tapes, in Woodstock, NY]. I did four of those for him. But now that I've been immersed in teaching for four years since that time, I'm much better at it. I think we've convinced him to let me to start over and do everything on a DVD. I can actually explain what I'm doing pretty well now.

Anyway, right after the Airplane reunion in '89, a friend I hadn't heard from in 20 years called me up and said he was selling a farm. We went out to Ohio for a look, and Vanessa and I liked it. When we bought it, land was \$600 an acre. It's more than that now.

We have about 200 acres. So we joked about how much fun it would be to have a Guitar Farm. It's a lot easier raising guitar players than taking care of milk cows. The first thing you do when you start a business is letterheads and T-shirts, and we went that far, but didn't really do any more about it. In her previous life, Vanessa was a civil engineer, and she assembled all the people to do the necessary drawings, etc., and put the plan into motion.

PM: She was a civil engineer?

JK: Yeah, she had a real life before we met each other. She did all the things that I not only couldn't have done, but wouldn't ever have done, like permits and EPA, all that stuff. And we made it happen.

PM: So you started building.

JK: Yeah, we built 23 or 24 buildings. We're building a 200 seat theater that will be open next month, it's almost done now. It's like my mini-Branson on the Shady River. [laughter] And the interesting thing is that the bank believed in us, and financed it. So they think we're going to be making our payments for the next 30 years. When we started, it was all poison ivy, we cleared everything. Our restaurant building is a 150 year old log cabin that we moved down from another county. I wanted to do all the buildings like that, but it's really a pain. It's cool to have one.

PM: Did it travel well, being such an old cabin?

JK: There's a little story there. We thought that we'd like to do logs, so we visited this bed and breakfast up in Hocking County. This couple had a business restoring these cabins, and used them for their cottages and restaurant. He said he had three cabins that he wanted to sell. Great, we'll come take a look. If we like them, we'll take them apart and bring them on down. When we got there, it was just a pile of these filthy looking logs. It looked like firewood. I thought, "We're gonna pay good money for this?" But when we put it all back together again, it looked great. I used two of them to make the restaurant and the kitchen. And the other I sold to John's brother [John Hurlbut, the Ranch manager], who's building a house with it. All the other buildings are more contemporary, but rustic. We have a two story library, and a workshop with a little stage. We have a restaurant and now the theater, 17 cabins, a bathhouse. When I got my own urinal, that was a big deal.

PM: A 200 seat theater, that's a real graduation, even for Fur Peace. Will it become a part of the Folk Blues circuit?

JK: Yes, definitely. We're doing gourmet dinners and concerts already, and we've had a lot of good performers through. I wish I had a brochure with me. John Hartford played one of his last shows there, Guy Clark was up, Rory Block, Kelly Joe Phelps, Roy Book Binder. We've been doing all those good shows at our workshop, but we were beginning to draw so many people that we had to move up. We also have an NPR show on our local NPR affiliate, "Jorma Kaukonen's Live from the Fur Peace Ranch." Tune it in on the web sometime, that's www.woub.org/furpeace.

PM: Thanks for the url, Earl. Yeah, this webzine we're doing is getting big, we had over 300k hits last month.

JK: That's amazing. Well, that's why we're having this conversation. We're into the Net. We have a Fur Peace website, and a Hot Tuna website. I have a personal one, at www.jormakaukonen.com, where I do a lot of blabbing about things. You can't talk back (though you can contact me through the Ranch site), I do all the talking. Ain't no chat room. It's like that Toby Keith song, "I Wanna Talk About Me." Frank, I can't tell you, I've had a great couple of years, and I'm just tickled pink to be here.

PM: It's beautiful, what you're doing. There are many of us that think that, after a lifetime of playing music of various sorts, it's important, it's kind of sacred, to teach, to give it away. It's good to get people playing an instrument.

JK: Do you know Steve James?

PM: No, I've seen him play at Kerrville, though.

JK: Steve is great, and a real interesting guy. If you ever interview him, you'll find him very intense and very lucid. He's really got it going on. He was saying one time how, with the old masters, teaching would arrive at a certain point in their life, and become a very important chapter in it. With me, it's not only important to pass it on, it's the thing

in my life that keeps me practicing. And the older you get, the more you really need to practice to stay sharp. I'm frequently teaching seven hours a day, four days a week, and I love it. I'm doing it really slow, and practicing things I wouldn't normally, because I got too many other things going on.

PM: And it honors the fact that, early in your life, you were helped by guys that were really good, like Ian Buchanan.

JK: Right, and I'm still getting helped by guys that are really good. I was telling Jerry [Douglas] at the session, there's a lot of great players out there right now, it's a glorious time for string music. And there's a lot of great dobro players, Rob Ickes is great and Mike Auldridge, and many others. But I told him that his sound really touches my heart, there's just something about it that I really love. I screwed up some takes because I'd get so enthralled by what he was doing. He's a really funny guy, too. All those guys are. Really reminded me of my buddy time, growing up, joking around, playing.

PM: We're covering a record of one of your Fur Peace instructors this issue, Geoff Achison.

JK: I love Geoff, he's the greatest, speaking of sweet guys. You've heard him play acoustic, right? [I'd not yet heard the record, which had a couple of acoustic numbers.]

PM: No, I saw him live in town, he was playing a Les Paul.

DK: Blowing on the electric is really his thing, and he's great at it. But being a smart guy, and from another country, he realized he'd also better get good at the acoustic. Australia's not around the corner. So he took five years, and really learned it. He uses all five fingers, really has his own approach and style.

PM: Like Tommy Emmanuel or something?

JK: Well, Tommy is pretty astounding. Geoff is foremost a Blues guy, and he's a real specialist. We have Tommy coming in this year, too.

PM: How's Roy Book Binder doing?

JK: Book's a regular, he's great. [Look for a review of Roy's latest, *Singer Songwriter Bluesman*, in our next issue.]

PM: I always loved his playing. He does pretty well on the circuit, right?

JK: Roy world is an amazing world. Well, part of Roy's thing is always his rap, you know? Another thing is that he books his own gigs. I know people that love to work with him because they just dig making the deal with him. I wouldn't want to do any of that stuff, myself. He loves it. [A phone goes off, we both reach for our pocket.] Isn't that funny? Even though it isn't your ring, we still have the reflex.

PM: How did this team of guys get assembled for this record, had you known any of them previously?

JK: It was thanks in part to Roy, actually. He got me into Merlefest a couple of years ago. Sam had been a fan of my music when he was young. Sam and I met, and we hit it off. That day he said, "I'd really like to play 'Mann's Fate,' would you come on stage during our set and play it with me and Jerry?" ["Mann's Fate" is a Jorma classic from the very first Hot Tuna record.] So we did. We met up the next year too, and did some shows, and got to like each other. I've always been a fan of all those guys myself, so it was a thrill for me. It was like meeting Willie or something.

PM: Do you run into Jim Lauderdale at Merlefest?

JK: Oh yeah, that's another great guy. We'd love to get him up the Ranch to do a songwriting class.

PM: You and Jack Casady have played together for an awfully long time. What's the secret of your longevity?

JK: Well, Jack and I have disagreed about a lot of stuff over the years. But even in our darker years, we've never had a fight. He and I were talking about this. We'd get to places where we wouldn't play for a couple of years, but we've never said anything to each other that required an apology. We've done things that required apology, but never burned bridges that couldn't be mended. It's very odd, and it's good stuff.

PM: He's a remarkable fellow, very smart cat.

JK: Yes he is. In the workshops, my approach to teaching is more anecdotal. I've learned to write some things out. But Jack is the professor, he does a syllabus for his classes.

PM: And he has a website that's about gear, right?

JK: Well, Jack does a Signature model Epiphone Bass. And he started a website that sells them, and we sell that at our site, too. I have a Jorma model Epiphone guitar, and I'm on my way to the NAMM show right after this Nashville trip, to help sell guitars. On my website, I ramble and philosophize. On Jack's, he likes to talk about his stuff, his gear. That's his thing. Both of us heard the complaint that our website looks too professional. We liked that. It's nice to do things right.

PM: Is Jack a regular instructor at the Ranch?

JK: Yeah, he's a regular, too.

PM: What's the profile of the people that come out to the Ranch to study?

JK: Most of the people that come, come for specific teachers. Some are interested in the thing that I do, for instance. Most of them are not as old as me, but then, who is? [laughter] But they tend to be adults who have liked the music, and want to come out and have some fun, learn something new. It's interesting, sometimes we'll get a person that just wants to learn some guitar or bass, and found us on the web, and knows nothing about our background. To me, that's really fun. They take some lessons, and buy a couple of CDs to take home.

The cross section tends to be adults who can afford to buy Collings guitars and stuff like that. But we do have a scholarship program for kids, and we do get some kids who don't have the dough but have a lot of talent. Many are brighter than I was at their age, or twice their age, in some cases. There tend to be more males than females, but that's true of guitar world in general, and it's changing. We have a lot of women coming who are very good players, some are or aspire to be professionals, others just love to play. Rory [Block] usually pulls some good female guitarists who want to study with her, she's such a fine player.

PM: Have you read or heard anything lately that really turned you on?

JK: I just read something by a guy from Columbus who's a Chicago sports writer, can't think of his name, of course. He wrote a thing called *Duty*, a story about his father dying. But he met Paul Tibbets, the guy that flew the Enola Gay. Basically, it turns into an interview with him. It's a killer. I like stuff like that, I read a lot of historical stuff.

PM: How was Tibbets doing? [He was the pilot that dropped the A Bomb on Hiroshima.]

JK: Good, really good. He's in his eighties, still drives himself around, a crusty old soldier. There's this great part where they go to Branson [a music resort in MO where lots of older folks go, many Country stars have big entertainment halls there]. You know that Japanese gentlemen, great fiddler showman who has the big place there? [Shoji Tabuchi] All the Enola Gay survivors were there, and [Shoji] honored them. He said, "If that bomb hadn't been dropped, I would never be here today."

PM: Whoa.

JK: It was a cool book, you'll like it.

When we started this project, I started listening to a bunch of scratchy old records I hadn't listened to in years.

PM: Yeah, a lot of my teenage years were wrapped up in scratchy records.

JK: We were talking about that the other day. People these days have a real hard time listening to that unless they're investigating the music, because they're so accustomed to the "perfection" of CDs.

PM: Zeros and ones.

JK: Speaking of that, this is a 5.1 SA-CD recording, that new SONY thing.

PM: I'm ignorant of it, can you wax on?

JK: No, we'd need Jerry, he's got all the figures and info on it. It's got some ungodly sampling rate. Apparently, you need to buy a new gadget to get the most out of it. But the sampling rate is so high that it puts back in the "air" that used to be in vinyl that disappeared with the digital revolution.

PM: How'd they do that?

JK: I haven't heard it yet, so I can't swear to it, but I am gonna try and induce them to give me one. [laughter] The Robert Johnson recordings will come out again on yet another format.

PM: It's almost weird, the interest that erupted over those recordings, when Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Arthur Blake are still so relatively unknown.

JK: Well, you know, so much has to do with Columbia picking it up and re-releasing it, it was a John Hammond Sr. thing. And they made it readily accessible, a record you could pick up anywhere. I remember when I got to Antioch College, John Hammond went there, too, and I was learning the Reverend Gary Davis stuff. John had these reel to reel tapes of what became that Robert Johnson album. We all listened to it, and thought "That's way too weird." [laughter]

PM: So, were you and John friends at Antioch?

JK: Oh yeah. We threw up on each other, it was great.

PM: I gotta get that CD of Tom Waits tunes that Hammond did.

JK: Now that's great, a stroke of genius. Tom did a great job of producing that album, because he let John be John. The band is terrific, and John does his own thing with the tunes. The band really swings. John's another very lucid fellow.

PM: Well, Jorma, it's so nice to see you in Nashville. I hope you'll come again soon.

JK: I'll be back in two weeks to mix, email me. How's your brother Billy doing? [My brother and Jorma have been on the road together a bunch. Billy's a great songwriter and slide player in Europe, we've played together a lot of our lives. Jorma and I talked about each of our brothers, his brother Peter is also a fine musician.]

PM: So, what goals still lie ahead?

JK: Well, I'm lucky, I got a bunch of things going on. The Ranch is already in the black, after only four years. As you know, that's unbelievable for a small business of that sort. At 61, I don't enjoy the road as much as I used to. And I quit doing the electric band, just couldn't make any money at it. But Jack and I still like to play gigs. It's just four guys on the bus, really low stress, it doesn't get any better than that. I basically just sit down and pick my guitar a couple of hours a night, it's great. With a little luck, I'll be able to do some touring with these guys I just cut this record with, we're working on that possibility. It's predicated on their availability, and my ability to afford them.

The Nashville thing is so funny, I'm a stranger here. In the studio, as soon as a take is done, everybody's back on their cell phone. [laughter] I get it, you got to keep it rolling. But we've all become very friendly, so it may come together. But by golly, I'd sure like to do that. I hate change, so once I've actually done something different, then I want it to stay that way, you know. Last year I did 170 or 180 dates, and I'll probably do that this year, too. But I love to spend time with Vanessa on the Ranch, so it's about striking the balance.

PM: Will this record be a one-off deal with Columbia, or is something else planned?

JK: Well, naturally, it depends on how this is received, how well it sells. But they have options, and if it does well, there will be other records. Not just for me, but I suspect for Jack and I to do some Hot Tuna records with them.

PM: What guitar are you playing these days?

JK: I'm a Gibson nut. They gave me a factory second Advanced Jumbo a couple of years ago that I really like, and that's all I used for this session. It's a 1936 Advanced Jumbo model, a long scale guitar, which I don't normally play, but this particular guitar I love. This really is unplugged, just microphones, no pickups. Byron had a direct on his upright besides the mics, but that's it. The Gibson guys up in Montana have been talking about the possibility of doing a Jorma model acoustic, which I'm very excited about. I play the Gibson J-190 acoustic electric fusion guitars on the road. It's a J-185 soft cutaway, arch back, no bracing in the back, a Super 400 neck, but a short scale one. A transducer pickup under the bridge, and a single coil humbucker at the bottom of the neck, with a three way switch. Volume and tone for each pickup, you don't need to read the instructions to play this guitar. It's great for gigging, but we needed an acoustic for this record, of course. I've been using a Retrospec Tube Direct, unfortunately they went out of business. They still own the patents, and may come back. I go right into the PA, and I've also been using the Crate Acoustic Amp, the CA112, which I like a lot. G.E. Smith got me hooked on using a little Reverb.

PM: I hate playing without Reverb.

JK: Yes, it's very forgiving. On the electric side, the Jorma Epiphone is a 335 with a whammy bar on it, Cherry Red, of course. People ask, "Does that throw your guitar out of tune?" I tell them, "Well, of course it throws your guitar out of tune if you whammy

the hell out of it, you're bending the strings!" I use those and these Carvin 50 watt Bel Air amps, a retro tube amp with two 12" speakers that you or I could still lift with one hand and not be taken to the hospital.

PM: What will be the earmarks of the proposed Jorma acoustic?

JK: We're still in the talking stage. On the electric, it was mostly cosmetic things. I wanted the vintage '57 pickups, the gold hardware, Grover tuners, the whammy bar, and I wanted them to black out the inside of the F holes, 'cause it looks cooler. The acoustic guys Robbie and Ren in Montana say "Dream. Don't just put your name on something." What I'm thinking about is the Advanced Jumbo body, but a short scale neck like the J-190, and no cutaway. And there's a new Swiss pickup we're talking about, uses a lithium battery that lasts for years. I'll gladly go out to Montana and hang out with those guys, do some fishing, and not tax the R&D budget needlessly. So we'll see.

PM: Maybe it's time for a one name model, the Jorma Gibson.

JK: Hey, that's a good idea. But for my personal guitar, I'm old enough now where I want my entire name on the fingerboard: Jorma Ludwik Kaukonen Jr. [Vanessa and Ranch manager John Hurlbut return. Time to get to the studio.]

PM: Well, that was a fun interview.

JK: Yeah, Frank, thanks. Good to see you. Come on up to the Ranch in the Spring. We'll see you then.

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