

Mark Whitfield

Whitfield's jazz education began early: His parents, raising their family on Long Island, would take their son to Westbury Music Fair concerts featuring Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Joe Pass, and others. He recalls being spellbound. At the age of seven, his brother bought him a guitar and an anthology of Lightning Hopkins songs. From there, he took off.

The only impediment to a career in music was his parents. Whitfield's brothers and sisters were all becoming doctors, lawyers, and stockbrokers, and they wanted young Mark to have a so-called real profession. He graduated high school at 16 and received a scholarship to study medicine at Georgetown University. His parents were less than thrilled when Whitfield opted for the Berklee College of Music instead.

"Once I landed in Boston, that was it for me," he says. "I didn't care if I ever made a dime. I was in love with the guitar and I was in love with jazz and I wanted to be a part of it." His career has been boosted by support from Jack McDuff, Wynton Marsalis, and George Benson, to name just a few. Benson remains an inspiration, even though he no longer records straight-ahead jazz.

Whitfield is cutting across musical boundaries and attracting all sorts of fans with his incredibly fast pick and a delicious knack for melody. "The guitar has an unusual appeal, even to people who don't know much about jazz," says Whitfield.

After three records for Warner Mark Whitfield just released his second Verve record *7th Avenue Stroll*. With seven of the eleven compositions written by Whitfield, the New York theme of the recording is immediately evident. "I wanted this record to be a tribute to my entire New York experience," says Whitfield, who now lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "Aside from being the birthplace of bebop and many other significant jazz innovations, New York City has also served as the definitive proving ground for young musicians. Therefore, after I graduated from Berklee College of Music, I gathered up my courage and moved to the city to pursue a career as a jazz guitarist."

Now 28, Whitfield says, "what I look forward to is being a seasoned veteran. There is such a difference between how you play at 25 and 35, 40, 50, or 60. I'm looking forward to being able to make really worthwhile contributions to jazz literature as a composer and to the jazz vocabulary as an artist."