

Kottke defines classification—it doesn't matter

By Casey McCabe

Leo Kottke has been a unique force in the music world in the decade or so since he subtly glided onto the scene.

He defies a concrete classification, and we journalists tend to get into the habit of lumping musicians into a specific category for easy labeling.

His style is generally in the folk tradition, but folks and music are different throughout the eight states, from Virginia to Minnesota, that Kottke moved through during his youth. In his vast repertoire one might find a little Bach, Beethoven, or Burl Ives, maybe some of his own distinctive sound forged in his home base of Minneapolis, a Dutch folk tune, or hints of Spanish flamenco through a particular riff.

But nevertheless some feel he deserves his own category. A few suggestions have been "American classical guitarist", "Pop virtuoso", "fingerstylist", and the rather ambiguous title; "commercially tangent, self-taught guitarist". Maybe it would be best to call Kottke's style "eclectic acoustic" and leave it at that.

Kottke brought this all to Lincoln April 1 for his first performance in the city since 1969 when he played opening act to Paul Revere and the Raiders, in what must have been one of Pershing's more mismatched shows.

But this time it was for a full, appreciative crowd at O'Donnell Auditorium, who had come with the express purpose of seeing Kottke and possibly with the desire to observe one of the few traveling guitar virtuosos around.

He has in fact, developed a definitive sound of his own, the result of a combination of four-finger picking and the use of a guitar slide on his little finger. He demonstrated this in his opening song, a Kottkish version of "America the Beautiful."

Then in a bit of parody on his varied influence, he performed "Stealin'", consisting of various licks he borrowed from other artists. Surrounding himself with two twelve-string guitars and a six-string Kono spanish guitar, Kottke warmed up to the task of conversing with the audience. His on-stage personality is unassuming to the points of appearing shy. But a glib sense of humor shows through, and though he needs nothing to carry his guitar work, the casual humor helps create the character we like to expect from an "eclectic acoustic" performer.

For all his 31 years, which have included acid trips in the mid-sixties to extensive touring in recent years, Kottke could still pass as a clean-cut representative of college campuses. He has in the past, remained uninvolved in his own career, choosing to avoid the music business battlefield.

But more and more people have become interested in Leo Kottke. He fills concert halls and college auditoriums nearly 100 nights a year. Readers of *Guitar Player* magazine have voted him Best Folk Guitarist for the past three years, and he was even featured in *People* magazine, which as a rule covers things nothing short of being trendy.

A brief history of Kottke's life may reveal the reason for his diversity and the elusiveness of a more tangible image. Born in Athens, Georgia, his early life was spent moving through several states. He played violin in grade school, but gave it up "because they make you play crud." As a tuba player he won state competitions, but was soon to discover banjo and

guitar as a teenager. After three years at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, he finally sent off some of his demo tapes to another folk guitar virtuoso, John Fahey, who he has since often collaborated with. Besides nine albums to his credit since then, his music has been found in such unlikely places as TV Sermonettes, weather and traffic reports, the *Newlywed Game*, and as the suspenseful music filler used on the *Dating Game* when the girl chose her date.

The praise of fellow guitarists has had much to do with Kottke's respect in the music world. Anyone who plays the guitar or even attempted to, has to be struck by the ease and quickness with which he manipulates the strings. He never attacks the guitar as some do, rather he commands it, with a total understanding of the instrument's dynamic capabilities.

The audience for his Lincoln show seemed aware of this too. Thoroughly attentive through the songs, an occasional gasp of disbelief could be heard now and then from someone impressed by the agility of his fingers. One wonders what the main attraction is, what he plays, or how he plays it.

What he played was a variety of both moods and music. Even the staunchest Kottke fans will admit that he tends to play much on the variation of a theme, and the result can be similar sounding tunes. But in the course of the evening, he changes enough to keep the audiences attention from wavering.

By describing what some songs reminded him of before performing it, he had the advantage of being able to share the intended imagery with the crowd. One was written with the feeling of being out in the middle of nowhere, another reminded him of a little Dutch boy running around the Holland countryside. And indeed the analysis seemed to hit home with the audience.

One element of Kottke's performance that has often been maligned has been his voice, termed as bland, or unfitting. It is an invalid claim, unless you feel his guitar should be given one-hundred percent attention. The deep resonant voice of Kottke is, if nothing else, a show case for some of his thoughtful lyrics. The ironic words of "Pamela Brown", and his remake of the Byrds "Eight Miles High" were two of the highlights in the Lincoln show.

But Kottke doesn't seem like a person bothered by criticism. He has no need to be, while the crowds are still responsive, the fans dedicated, and he has the respect of his peers. It may be hard to classify Leo Kottke, but it's easy to admire him. A man who does the work of two guitarists with his two hands has got to be admired.



Photo by Ted Kirk

Leo Kottke not only plays a great guitar but does terrific faces too.

daytime

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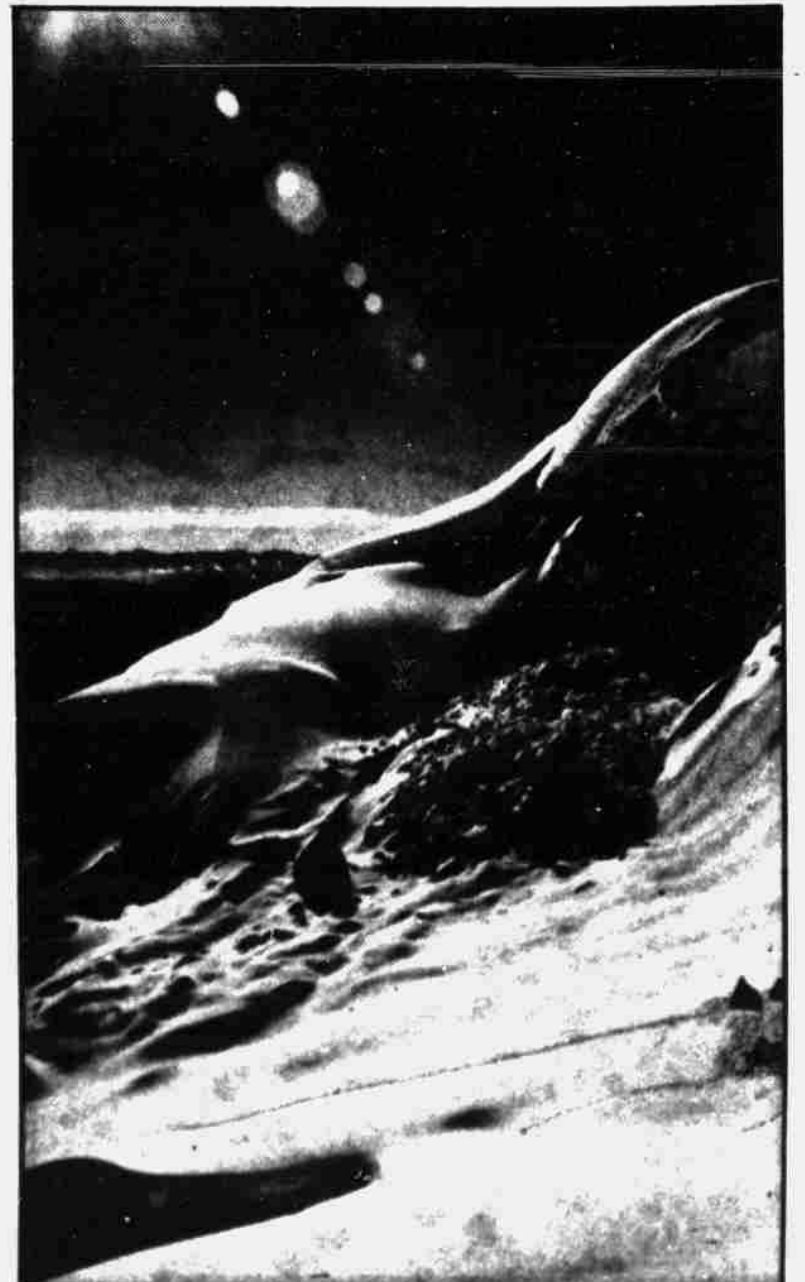
MORNING

- 6:00 BOZO
- NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY
- PTL PROGRAM
- VARIOUS PROGRAMMING
- FARM REPORT (FRI.) Answer's Love (WED.)
- CBS NEWS
- 6:05 FARM AND RANCH REPORT
- 6:10 NEWS
- 6:15 UNO SCENE (WED.)
- 6:30 ROMPER ROOM
- COUNTRY DAY
- SUNRISE SEMESTER
- VARIOUS PROGRAMMING
- BLINKY'S FUN CLUB
- 7:00 ARCHIES
- TODAY
- CBS NEWS
- GOOD MORNING AMERICA

- 7:30 I DREAM OF JEANNIE
- MORNING SHOW
- SESAME STREET
- FLINSTONES
- MCHALE'S NAVY
- 8:00 POPEYE
- GOOD MORNING AMERICA
- CAPTAIN KANGAROO
- FLINSTONES
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- 8:30 LITTLE RASCALS
- CARTOONS
- 700 CLUB
- 9:00 SANFORD AND SON
- ALL MY CHILDREN
- APRIL MAGAZINE (THUR.)
- Pass The Buck (EXC. THUR.)
- PHIL DONAHUE SHOW
- NEW ZOO REVUE
- APRIL MAGAZINE (THUR.)
- 9:30 HOLLYWOOD SQUARES
- PRICE IS RIGHT (EX-

- C. THUR.)
- BEWITCHED
- 10:00 WHEEL OF FORTUNE
- HAPPY DAYS
- PRICE IS RIGHT (THUR.)
- HAPPY DAYS (EXC. FRI.)
- Martha's Kitchen (FRI.)
- NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- 10:30 RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING
- KNOCKOUT
- FAMILY FEUD
- LOVE OF LIFE
- FATHER KNOWS BEST
- 11:00 NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY
- TO SAY THE LEAST
- \$20,000 PYRAMID
- YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS
- MAYBERRY R.F.D.
- 11:30 GONG SHOW
- CONVERSATIONS
- RYAN'S HOPE
- SEARCH FOR TOMORROW
- HIGH HOPES
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- AFTERNOON
- 12:00 FOR RICHER, FOR POORER

- 12:15 NEWS
- NOON SHOW
- ALL MY CHILDREN
- JIM NABORS SHOW
- SESAME STREET
- 12:30 FARM ACTION
- DICK VAN DYKE SHOW
- DAYS OF OUR LIVES
- CROSS WITS
- AS THE WORLD TURNS
- 1:00 LUCY SHOW
- ONE LIFE TO LIVE
- MOVIE "Swing Shift Maisie" (THUR.), "Treasure Of Ruby Hills" (FRI.), "Dramatic School" (MON.), "Sword Of Venus" (TUE.), "Judge Hardy And Son" (WED.)
- IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING (UNTIL 3:30)
- 1:30 BEVERLY HILLBILLIES
- DOCTORS
- GUIDING LIGHT
- 2:00 PLEASE DON'T EAT THE DAISIES
- ANOTHER WORLD
- GENERAL HOSPITAL
- 2:30 GOMER PYLE
- ALL IN THE FAMILY
- DENVER NOW
- 3:00 MICKEY MOUSE CLUB
- FOR RICHER, FOR POORER
- EDGE OF NIGHT
- MATCH GAME
- FLINSTONES
- 3:30 TOM AND JERRY
- GILLIGAN'S ISLAND
- PASS THE BUCK
- PHIL DONAHUE SHOW
- I LOVE LUCY
- MERV GRIFFIN
- KALAMITY KATE'S CARTOONS
- 4:00 ELECTRIC COMPANY
- GILLIGAN'S ISLAND
- MY THREE SONS
- I DREAM OF JEANNIE
- DRAH
- SUPERMAN
- MIKE DOUGLAS
- MISTER ROGERS
- 4:30 LEAVE IT TO BEAVER
- BEWITCHED
- BRADY BUNCH
- BIG VALLEY
- FAMILY AFFAIR
- SESAME STREET
- 5:00 ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW
- ODD COUPLE
- ABC NEWS
- I LOVE LUCY
- 5:30 ROOKIES
- NBC NEWS
- BEWITCHED
- CBS NEWS
- NEWS
- ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW
- OVER EASY



High in South America's Andes mountains, eerie light plays on a camp pitched by students of the Outward Bound school in the 'National Geographic' special 'JOURNEY TO THE OUTER LIMITS,' airing Tuesday, April 11, on PBS.

Ad Lib

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