

Arts & Entertainment

Virtuoso builds bridge to art by playing 'truth'

By David Thompson

Guitar virtuoso Gene Bertoncini doesn't believe in confining himself to any particular style of music.

"It's all good music," he said in a Daily Nebraskan interview. "I really love a lot of the stuff out there. So much of what I love about music is good harmony, good melody, and I think more people can bridge that."

His belief that one can find bridges between musical styles lent the name to his album *Bridges*. Those bridges will reach all the way to Lincoln Saturday when Bertoncini performs at the Kimball Recital Hall. Several pieces from that album will be performed along with a few others, all demonstrating the wide musical background Bertoncini draws from his skillful playing.

Bertoncini has had many years to develop his style and a variety of experiences on which to hone his craft.

"I used to do *The Tonight Show*, he said. "I always felt like I wanted to be out there as a guest." Bertoncini has also played with such noted performers as Buddy Rich, Benny Goodman, Tony Bennett, Lena Horne and Burt Backarach.

"I was always happy to play with those kind of people," Bertoncini says of his years with the NBC Band and as a studio musician. "But in regard to the guitar, it's not as creative as it can be. I quit NBC so I could cut the umbilical cord."

Bertoncini saw that umbilical cord as limiting to his growth as an artist. Once free of it there were still obstacles, however.

"I spent several hours in the studio one day just hitting the guitar. I said that's not what I want to do."

Now Bertoncini is doing what he wants to do. Several years ago he met bassist Michael Moore, known as one of the world's best bassists. Bertoncini said he prefers playing with just a bass player.

Together with Moore he produced the innovative music of *Bridges*. The album features everything from Bach to Chopin to Rodgers and Hart to the Beatles. Those composers will be joined by George Gershwin and Chick Corea to provide Bertoncini with a musical array that he will bring to life in concert.

Bertoncini will not be joined by Moore here in Lincoln. The other half of that musical dialogue will be UNL Jazz professor Rusty White. Bertoncini likes a bass accompaniment because "It allows you to use the interplay between the instruments. A guitar can be a complete orchestra itself," he said.

In addition to the concert Bertoncini

will conduct a jazz improvisation clinic at 3:30 p.m. today and a jazz guitar clinic at 1:30 p.m. Saturday in the Westbrook Music Building.

As a teacher at the Eastman School of Music in New York, he said he believes education is an important part of the musical world. "The more it's taught the more

it will be appreciated," he said. "You can't really stop the education process because there's too many people that really love it."

Love of music does not necessarily mean admiration of quality, however.

"When you hear what's on the radio," he said, "it's really lacking in terms of educating people musically. I don't have to mention disco or punk rock — the distortion, the noise that's out there."

Bertoncini hopes that people will look for quality in the midst of all the noise, but realizes that people often take the easiest route.

"People who want to know about medicine go to a doctor," he said. "People who want to know about putting up a house go to an architect. Unfortunately people don't do that. They go to builders who put up anything for a buck."

This cheapness has infiltrated the music world according to Bertoncini.

"I really think it's harmful," he said. "I think there's very little excuse for it. It may make a political statement, but it sure isn't music. It's hurtful to see all the people react to something that doesn't have any depth."

Bertoncini claims lack of effort is the cause of the popularity of what he considers harmful music.

"They want to be bathed in sound," he said. "without making any spiritual or intellectual effort in terms of art. They're missing a lot."

For those who don't want to miss anything, there is Bertoncini, calling for what he believes is musical truth. "We sort of know as musicians what is good and what is contrived or commercial," he said. "For each artist there's a degree of truth that he's really aware of. I think the artist has to say what he feels is truth. That's his function in life, to go out and play what he thinks is good, to show that to the world."

This part of the world will hear Bertoncini's truth Saturday.

"If you direct your life in a creative way," he said, "eventually your energies have to find an expression. Everything is going to bust out eventually." Bertoncini's energy busts out as a result of his faith and belief in art, and his truth will be here for those who listen.



Gene Bertoncini

Film catches sweat, spit of LA punk subculture

By Danny O'Kane

The band Fear has just taken the stage, at Los Angeles club, The Arena. Lead singer Lee Ving is priming the crowd.

"How many fags we got out there?" The crowd reacts ... he continues.

"You thought you were getting a weekend in Las Vegas."

Twenty or so have gathered in front of the stage, and are spitting on Ving. He spits back.

The band is tuning up. Wait a minute, do these guys tune their instruments? They break into "I Don't Care About You," and a girl with orange hair flies on stage in

Perhaps more disturbing than the concert footage are the interviews with the young punkers. All seem to have adopted a lifestyle which depends upon the punk scene for the release of pent-up aggression. When asked where the aggression comes from, Eugene, a young and intelligent skinhead says, "It comes from living in this city, from the buses, the ugly people, and the dirt."

Does this sound familiar? Aren't these the same things that gave rise to the rock subcultures of the '50s and '60s?

The bands featured in *The Decline* vary a great deal in talent and appeal. Bands like X, and The Alice Bag Band deliver tight, and deliberate songs, with biting social statements. Exene, lead singer for X, sums it up when she screams, "We're desperate, get used to it." Their music is

easily traced to '50s style rock'n'roll, with Doors-style poetics and harmonies.

Other bands, like the Circle Jerks and The Germs rely wholly on destruction of normal rock conventions. Their songs move at breakneck speed, sometimes lasting less than a minute, and are filled with images of anarchy.

The Decline is an intense documentary which captures the feeling of the LA punkers. Still there is more than a touch of satire in Spheeris's title.

Punk is not the beginning of the end. If anything it is a regression toward simpler roots, just as most new trends in rock seem to be. This film will probably be remembered most for its portrayal of the now internationally known band X, in its infancy.



Movie Review

a rage. There's a scuffle, and with one swift kick to the chest Ving propels her off the stage. Not having missed a beat, this band is off.

The LA punk scene is not new, but *The Decline of Western Civilization*, a film produced and directed by Penelope Spheeris catches this subculture in its prime. The film provides powerful concert footage of LA's best punk bands, tastefully intercut with interviews of band members, club owners, and other assorted punk rock retinue. Miss Spheeris expertly keeps her distance from the material — making this documentary a powerful, and objective statement, which far surpasses earlier rock films like *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* in its depiction of a new rock culture.

Spheeris has filmed the club scenes from remarkably short camera angles, giving them a frenzied beehive-like appearance. The pogo-ers literally seem to be dancing on top of the cameras. The atmosphere is always volatile, seemingly on the brink of becoming a riot, but never really boiling over. The bloody scenes so often depicted in the press are not evident in this film.



Darby Crash, lead singer of seminal L.A. punk band the Germs.