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The Jazz Guitar Corner

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Talmage Farlow: A Film By Lorenzo DeStefano



"I'm not looking to be a star, you know? I'd just like to be a participant in making some good music."

Tal Farlow from the film "Talmage Farlow," 1981

For my money [Tal Farlow](#) is unquestionably one of the most influential jazz guitarists of the 20th century. [Charlie Christian](#) was the first jazz guitarist to change the course of the instrument's development in the genre and Tal followed close behind, taking what Charlie started and pushing it even further into flights of wild harmonic fancy and unbelievable technique.

Much has been made of the supposed fact that the lanky North Carolinian, who as a young man out of high school learned the trade of sign painter, disappeared from the jazz scene circa 1961 to lead a life of contemplation and sign painting down by the shore in Sea Bright, New Jersey. This 1981 film by [Lorenzo DeStefano](#) uncovers the so-called mystery.

We are instead introduced to a humble gentleman, a man of immense talent in TWO professions who rather than disappear just decided one day that there was another way to live life as a musician and artist that didn't involve constantly being in the spotlight and traveling.

The film gives a keen insight into this "mystery man" through interviews with him, his wife Tina, and musicians such as [Red Norvo](#), [George Benson](#) and [Jimmy Lyon](#) (the jazz pianist, not the rock guitarist). We see Tal relaxing at home, painting the sign for someones yacht and later rehearsing for an "out of retirement" concert at [Joseph Papp's Public Theater](#) with his trio consisting of [Tommy Flanagan](#) on piano and [Red Mitchell](#) on bass. Guitarists will love the fact that you get to see Tal's technique up close on [comping](#) as well as picking. My favorite part, however, is the legendary [Lenny Breau](#) showing up at his idol's home to visit and jam with him. Its really great to watch Lenny, who was a guitar virtuoso in his own right, tell Tal how much he's been influenced by him.

This becomes even more poignant when you realize that Tal doesn't have a trace of arrogance about it. In fact, he seems baffled by the idea that people love him so much. Later on Lenny and Tal do a gig together and its truly a joy to watch segments from it.

"Talmage Farlow" has been out since 1981 but the DVD version was first released a year ago, on April 4, 2006. The video and audio are of excellent quality. While the feature itself is only an hour long, the DVD features over an hour of great extras that of course were not available on the VHS version:

PHOTO GALLERY: Contains pics from the film, pics of Tal and some paintings, which I'm assuming perhaps Tal did himself.

TAL FARLOW TRIO: This ten minute segment features Tal rehearsing with Tommy Flanagan and Red Mitchell in a New York City Penthouse.

TAL FARLOW / LENNY BREAU OUTTAKES: This is just a little over an hour and is really great. It contains segments from before the film was actually cut, so we see the cameraman and director sometimes, and the sound and film quality aren't as good as the feature, but are perfectly acceptable. You feel like you're hanging out with Tal and Lenny in Tal's living room. What I love the most is when they talk about aspects of guitar playing that give them trouble. Just goes to show that jazz guitar can be hard for anyone!

When this film was released it brought Tal back into the public eye and he commenced to recording and touring extensively until his death from cancer at the age of 77 on July 25, 1998.

He is sorely missed by fans of guitar everywhere but this film helps to keep his memory alive and I strongly suggest you purchase it and enjoy.

Thanks again for stopping by.

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A FILM BY LORENZO DESTEFANO"**

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