

# Jeff Barone

## Traditional Jazz Guitarist Hits His Stride

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**Artist Interview by:** [Susan Frances](#)



Jazz guitarist/composer Jeff Barone hits his stride on his second release *Open Up*, the follow up to his critically acclaimed debut album *Crazy Talk*. Barone found his voice early on, not as a turquoise gem in a strand of white pearls, but as a link that unifies the strand and aids and abets in making the piece into a harmonious collective. Barone views his role as a guitarist from the standpoint of being every musician's colleague. Even when it came to recording his solo albums, he never lost touch with being one of the cadets in the band.

The musicians who worked with Barone on the recording of *Open Up* are long-time chums of his. Going as far back as his days at high school in Syracuse, New York and his time at the Manhattan School of Music where he earned his Masters. "We have all worked with each other at one time or another," he provides.

He talks about the musicians who played on the record including trumpeter Joe Magnarelli, organist Ron Oswanski, saxophonist Mike Dubaniewicz, drummer Rudy Petschauer, and guitarist Jack Wilkins. "I have worked with Joe's group in the past.

Ron and I met at the Manhattan School of Music. Mike Dubaniewicz, I've know since high school. Rudy I met through Ron Oswanski and since we have worked together as sidemen on other people's gigs. I studied with Jack Wilkins when I first moved to New York and he has since become a very good friend. In addition, I just produced his new recording called *Until It's Time*, which is being released on the Max Jazz label in September 2008. We also have a trio project we're working on that revolves around more obscure songs from the American Songbook. In general, all of us have worked together individually at one time or another."

He reveals, "We had never played together as a unit before this recording. We did a rehearsal just before the recording date, then went in and recorded nine of the twelve tracks in one session. The two duets with Jack, 'Jenna's Song' and 'Quiet Now' were recorded in a short separate session while the solo track 'My Funny Valentine' was recorded in another."

"Jenna's Song" is a sweet wafting jazz lullaby which Barone wrote for his daughter, and "My Funny Valentine" is the popular jazz standard which most people will find the familiar soothing sounds to be comforting. The song selection for *Open Up* has more traditional jazz vibes than eclectic sounds, which suits Barone's style. He expresses about the song selection for the record, "I just picked some tunes I've always liked along with some newly written originals. In terms of originals, I have one tune written for my daughter called 'Jenna's Song' which is based on a Chopin Nocturne. A 24 minor blues called 'Duban's Groove' named after Mike Dubaniewicz. A samba called 'New Samba' and the title track tune 'Open Up' which is more of a funky tune. I also recorded standards such as 'Falling in Love with Love,' 'My Funny Valentine,' 'I Hear Music' and 'Here's That Rainy Day.' In addition, I recorded some lesser known tunes such as Jacque Brels 'If You Go Away,' Herbie Hancock's 'Toys' and Denny Zeitlin's 'Quiet Now.'"

Barone recorded two takes for the standard "Falling in Love with Love" which he explains, "The first take, which is the alternate take on the CD, I counted off at a more relaxed tempo. The second take, master take, we did a little faster while changing some chords and the solo order. Originally, I was going with just the up-tempo version, but Ron Oswanski really liked the laid back version so I decided they were different enough to include both."

He glows about the results, "I'm very proud of the new recording *Open Up* and I'm looking forward to the release in June (10, 2008). It will be available at [JazzedMedia.com](http://JazzedMedia.com) as well as other fine retailers."

Barone also recorded a mix of original tunes and standards for his first album *Crazy Talk*, which sat well with music critics. He details about the recording, "Three of the songs were originals: 'Resa's Blues' written for my wife, 'To Care For' written for my parents, and 'Crazy Talk' a funky type of blues."

He explains that the title track "Crazy Talk" was inspired by the cartoon character of Homer Simpson from the FOX-TV show *The Simpsons*, as he tells, "The title coming from part of a Homer Simpson phrase," when Homer says, "That's crazy talk Marge."

Barone mentions, "I also played an original by Jack Wilkins/Marc Puricelli called 'She's The One' and an original tune by Monty Alexander called 'Renewal.' We did three standards: 'In a Sentimental Mood' a salsa type version with an afro-Cuban

bridge, 'Close Your Eyes,' and 'Who Can I Turn To' a duet with Jack Wilkins. I also did a bossa type version of Stevie Wonder's 'Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing' and Michel Legrand's 'You Must Believe in Spring.'"

The team which Barone recruited for the recording of his debut record *Crazy Talk* had a few familiar faces that you may recall from the *Open Up* sessions like Ron Oswanski and Jack Wilkins. Barone outlines, "The recording featured: Ron Oswanski, piano; Chris Berger, bass; Joe Strasser, drums; Mike Clark, drums; and Jack Wilkins, guitar and co-producer." He also adds that Wilkins played "rhythm guitar on 'In a Sentimental Mood' and duet on 'Who Can I turn To.'"

He points out that "Jack Wilkins was very instrumental in encouraging and helping me to do the recording. The *Crazy Talk* recording was organized very quickly, and in a matter of weeks I had a studio date booked and was working on arrangements. My aspiration for this recording was simply to make a demo. We ended up recording a full CD's worth of material, ten tunes in one day!"

He admits, "I didn't really tour with *Crazy Talk*. I did some clubs and a couple of festivals but other than that, not much. I pretty much finished that record in early 2001 and it was picked up by a record label in New York City. They had pretty much finished the artwork design when 9/11 happened. About a month after that I was notified I was being dropped from the label because of the current climate. They went out of business about a year later. From there, work was very slow in New York and I spent about a year on the road as a sideman."

He cites that "*Crazy Talk* was picked up from a small label in England called String Jazz and was released in February 2003. In March 2003, my daughter was born and I had very little time at that stage to really promote anything. It's a thrill to play your own music, but for me it's almost a different mindset when the focus is primarily on you. I think it is much more relaxing to be a sideman. It's probably why there are so many great players that never record on their own."

Barone noticed a different set of burdens placed on him when he was recording material for his own solo albums rather than for someone else's records. "There's definitely a difference in recording music for your own record versus someone else's. For me, it was pretty stressful and enlightening at the same time. There are so many details that need to be addressed to make a recording session work well."

He tells that recording *Crazy Talk* gave him the impetus to continue on a solo path and coming up with his own projects. "After *Crazy Talk* was released, I was in a very creative mode and felt it was the right time to go back to the studio. Also, when I first moved to New York City, I was working with a bunch of B-3 organ players and always wanted to do a record with the B-3."

The *Crazy Talk* album garnered the type of attention that caught the eyes and ears of the Jazzed Media Label, who signed Jeff Barone to a record deal and put out *Open Up*. "Jazzed Media is a quality label with quality artists. The label is owned by Graham Carter and he is very particular and hands on with his artists. I am happy to be associated with his label."

Currently, Barone is setting up a tour to support *Open Up*. "Yes, I will be working on some dates on the east coast and would like to branch out to the mid-west and west

coast. Eventually, I would like to bring a small group to Europe. Right now, I have a concert booked at Middle Collegiate Church as part of their jazz concert series with my trio. It's on Sunday June 22nd at 6:00pm at 50 East 7th Street in New York City's Greenwich Village with Ron Oswanski on organ and Vince Ector on drums. The following week on Sunday June 8th, I'm at a jazz club in Elmira, N.Y. called Green Pastures. I'll once again be with Ron Oswanski on organ along with a good friend and drummer George Reed. I look forward to more dates with the trio as well as a quintet to really present the music that's on the CD."

Though his path is set for now, there was a time in Jeff Barone's life when playing guitar was a pastime activity while he was a student, and a means to earn a living when he was a session guitarist living in New York City. He remembers, "I started playing guitar around the age 7 or 8. My parents bought me the guitar for Christmas and within a short time I started lessons with a cousin who owned a music store. It wasn't something I asked for, it was my parent's idea to buy me a guitar, or maybe it was Santa," he chuckles.

Musicians apparently flourished in Barone's gene pool. "My parents both played a little piano. We also had an organ in the house as well. My mom would read from sheet music and would only play if she had the music in front of her. My father played a little bit as well, but could only play pretty much two songs he learned early on by rote (repetition and memory). In addition, my cousin Greg Barone is a very good jazz pianist while his father played bass. In general, I think I was pretty much self motivated to pursue guitar. My parents have and still remain very supportive to this day."

He emphasizes that guitar lessons were his choice. "I never found it a chore. Nobody forced me to practice. I just wanted to do it."

He recalls that his early musical influences shaped his sense of what good music should be like. "I was very much into Joe Pass with Oscar Peterson. In regard to what was on the radio, I would say at that time I was listening to groups such as The Police, Led Zeppelin and The Who. I grew up in Syracuse, New York and there was no shortage of good players."

He professes, "I just always wanted to be where music is played and studied on a high level, whether in a school or out of school. I'm still studying!"

After high school, he entered Ithaca College to pursue music. "Ithaca College was not far from Syracuse and had an excellent reputation as a music education school. In addition, two friends of my mine attended before me, Jim Robinson and Rob Wlodarczyk. I studied music literally from the bottom up and even had to study just about every instrument for a short time. In addition, I think Ithaca has one of the finest music theory departments around. They had an excellent classical guitar teacher named Ed Flower, with whom I studied at the time. Also, I even studied classical percussion including the marimba for a short time. My college experience was very hectic. If I had to do it now, I don't think I'd have the energy to go through it. I had some excellent teachers at Ithaca, but I wouldn't say any of them were mentors to me."

After graduating from Ithaca College, he attended the Manhattan School of Music. He shares, "While at Ithaca College I continued to play with area jazz groups, R&B

bands, funk bands, and even some shows that would come through the area. Around this time, I had already worked for a touring production the Will Roger's Follies, vocalist Al Martino (who played Johnny Fontane from the *Godfather* movies) and the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra. I was just trying to play and practice. I wasn't thinking about options too much back then. I just enjoyed doing it. Shortly after finishing Ithaca College I decided to audition for the Manhattan School of Music to obtain my Master's Degree. Everything just seemed like a natural transition."

He notes, "I moved to New York City in fall of 1993. My decision was decided on a couple of things, I always wanted to be in New York City and at the time I needed to fulfill my requirements for my teaching certification."

He says about this experience at the Manhattan School of Music, "I met players that I still play with today from time to time. It also afforded me the time to absorb the scene without worrying about surviving right away."

Moving to New York City opened him up to more opportunities as a session guitarist and sideman for live bands. Some artists whom he has recorded for or toured with include Tom Harrell, Bob Mintzer, Jimmy Lovelace, and Warren Chaisson. The experiences awakened his senses to a desire to create his own projects and his own albums. He reflects, "On some level I must be competitive or else I wouldn't have thrown myself into this competitive environment. In general, I'm my own worst critic, but I am very inspired by all the talent New York City has to offer. I don't think I'll ever be finished achieving what I want to do on the guitar. It's an ongoing process."

It is no surprise that after so many years of playing the field, Jeff Barone has found his stride and is making leeway as a solo artist. His sophomore album *Open Up* is due out on June 10, 2008, and with a few shows in the pocket, Barone is beaming with pride. It is the type of self-gratification that comes with making a decision that your heart was telling you to take. Going solo is something which Barone always knew he had it in him to do.

**For more information:** [www.jeffbarone.com](http://www.jeffbarone.com)