Steve Grismore: Guitarist and Educator

Steve Grismore has been playing the guitar for over 50 years and is one of the most in demand players in eastern Iowa and beyond. He is a versatile guitarist and plays traditional jazz, as well as improvised music with a more avant-garde sensibility. He is equally at home performing classic rock music and the blues. Steve grew up in Iowa and cut his teeth on pop music styles of the 60’s but soon gravitated to jazz sounds of the 70’s through his experiences in the high school jazz and rock bands. He studied jazz performance at the University of Miami his freshman year of college and from there transferred to Arizona State in the mid 70’s. In 1978 Steve moved to Los Angeles enrolled in the newly formed school, the Guitar Institute of Technology. Upon graduation, Steve returned to the Midwest where he joined the R & B band the Rhythm Rockers and started teaching at Coe College in Cedar Rapids. A couple of years later, he returned to school and received his B. M. in Composition and a M.A. In Music Theory from the University of Iowa and soon after, became Director of Jazz Studies at The University of Iowa from 1990-93. Steve returned to the University of Iowa in 2000 and is currently a full-time jazz instructor at the University of Iowa.

Steve has performed with nationally-recognized jazz artists as well as local ensembles over the years including David Sanborn , Paul Smoker, Carla Bley, Steve Swallow, Tatsu Aoki, Charlie Haden, Jack Walrath, Bobby Shew, Matt Wilson, John Carlson, Tim Hagans, Vinny Golia, Robert Dick, Kim Richmond, Clay Jenkins, Victor Mendoza, Ryan Shultz, Damon Short, Paul Scea, Sex Mob, Cory Christansen, John Rapson, Reggie Thomas, Anthony Cox, Mike Lee, Tim O'Dell, Johhny Raab, Carmen Bradford, Kevin Mahogany, the Often Ensemble, and the Damon Short Band. He is currently with the Steve Grismore Trio, Big Fun, 3 Dawgs and a Bone, the Beaker Brothers, and the University of Iowa Jazz Faculty Ensemble.

Steve recorded with the group Happy House (with Paul Scea) in 1988, and has ten recordings with “Orquesta Alto Maiz”, better known as "The Salsa Band." He also recorded for Accurate Records (Boston based label by Russ Gershon) with the Grismore/Scea Group. Their first release was “Just Play” in 1994 and their second release for Accurate, “Of What”, received high praise in many of the national jazz periodicals. It was voted one of the "10 Best of '97" by the Boston Phoenix Magazine. The first two cd’s featured Tim Hagans on trumpet, Matt Wilson on drums, John Turner on bass, and Paul Scea on flute and saxes. Grismore and Scea recorded a new project in 2005 called “Well Behaved Fish”, their third release on Accurate records. This cd featured Anthony Cox on bass, Marc Gratama on drums, and Brent Sandy on trumpet.

Another project called “OddBar” includes Jim Dreier on drums and Brent Sandy on trumpet. “Lost Art Café” with The Odd Barr Trio + Trombone (also John Rapson) was released late 1998 on the Ninewinds label and was named one of "10 Best of '99" in the LA Jazz Scene. The Odd Bar Trio released a live CD in 2002 titled “Odds and Ends” and again in 2003 "Fungus Amongus" (with bassist Mark Urness and a rap by Alex Grismore). Steve was also featured on a project by John Rapson that was based on a series of Billy Higgins improvisations called “Water and Blood” and another Rapson project called "Mafficked Simulacrum" in 2002 with the University of Iowa Jazz Faculty. Steve has also recorded other projects with Tim O’Dell, John Daniels, Bob Levy, Brent Sandy, Dan Moore, and a recent project with B-3 organist Sam Salamone called “Besame Mucho” was released on Realtown records in 2012.

Two more recent projects found on his own label (Corridor records) include a 2018 release of an avant-garde project of all improvised, but highly effected guitar music called "Me and My Machine". Another project of originals, some classic American folk music, and pop standards is  dedicated to his family and is called "The Grismore Family Album-In Iowa". (released in 2019) Both are available online and in hard copy.

Steve has performed at various clubs and festivals all over the U.S. including the West Virginia Wine and Jazz Festival, Madison Jazz Festival, Peoria Jazz Festival, Jazz on the Green (Omaha), College Hill Arts Festival, Rutabaga Jazz Festival, the Mississippi Valley Blues Festival, Summer Live@5, Rolling on the River Blues Festival, the Tall Corn Jazz Festival, Springfield Jazz Festival, Elkhart Jazz Festival, and the Iowa City Jazz Festival. Steve is currently a member ISIM and performed with the Ra Ensemble at the 2008 conference in Denver, again in 2010 in Ann Arbor, and at William Patterson College in 2012. He has performed in Europe on three occasions including Holland in 1982, Montruex Jazz festival 1998 and in the 20th Anniversary IASJ Conference held in Den Haag, Holland in 2010.

Steve has a long history of jazz education throughout the state of Iowa. He has given workshops at high schools and colleges and has adjudicated high school jazz festivals including those for the Southeastern Iowa Bandmasters Association, the Northern Iowa Area Community College, Central College, Indian Hills Community College, Hoover Jazz Festival, Truman State University, the Tall Corn Jazz Festival, the Jack Oatts Jazz Festival, and many others. He has taught at several private colleges in Iowa including Coe, Cornell, Central, Grinnell, and Iowa Wesleyan College. He has also taught at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, IA, Blackhawk Community College in Moline, IL, Augustana College, Rock Island, Ill, and at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, IA.

Grismore co-founded the Iowa City Jazz Festival in 1991 with local businessman and entrepreneur Marc Ginsberg and was named Executive Director of the festival in 1999. He stepped down as Director in 2005 and became Musical Director of the festival through 2010. The Iowa City Jazz Festival has received national acclaim and has been recorded four times by NPR for rebroadcast on "Jazz Set." The Iowa City Jazz Festival was named one of the "10 best" free festivals in the Midwest in a 1996 issue of Downbeat Magazine.