

Biography of Van Stiefel



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Van Stiefel was born in 1965 in Atlanta, GA, and has since left an undeniable mark on the guitar world. With an amalgamation of various musical languages and techniques, improvisation, electric guitar, and interactive technologies, he, an Avondale, PA-based composer, guitarist, producer, and author, has composed over fifty works and has established a unique voice in contemporary music.

Early Life and Education

Watching the Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour at age three, he was so enthusiastic his parents gave him a ukulele to play along with the TV, and at six, his father began teaching him guitar. He was introduced to classical music by singing with Atlanta Boy Choir, with which he toured England, Italy, and the United States. He studied classical guitar at Maple Street Guitars in Atlanta and attended Yale College, where he was awarded the Cox Prize for Music Composition. Subsequently, he received a Masters in Guitar Performance from the Yale School of Music. He earned a Certificate in Advanced Musical Studies from the Banff Centre (Banff, Alberta) as its Andre Segovia Memorial Fellow.

Career and Contributions

After earning a Ph.D. in music composition from Princeton University, Dr. Stiefel began creating chamber music that involves the electric guitar with various instruments and computer-generated sound. He formed and performed with an experimental electric guitar quartet called the Sap Dream Quartet, with appearances at the New York Guitar Festival and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. Carving his path in new music for guitar, he has produced two albums released on New Focus Recordings and has additional recordings on the Mode and Innova labels. His scores have been performed by many of the world's leading guitarists and are published by Da Vinci Publishing.

Much of his work is noted for seamlessly blending music with technology. A self-taught computer programmer, he composed interactive works for laptop ensembles, both with and without electric guitar. He has collaborated closely with the Princeton Laptop Orchestra (PLOrk) and presented at the LSU Inaugural Symposium of Laptop Orchestras and Ensembles, as well as TedX Phoenixville. While guitar remains his principal instrument, experimentation with turntables, sound design, digital production, and spoken word shows his desire to push boundaries and craft experiences “beyond space and time, deceiving in its simplicity,” as critic Bob Duggan of BigThink puts it.

Awards and Recognition

Van’s contributions to music have been awarded support from the Augustine Foundation, the Georgia Council for the Arts, the Mid-Atlantic Arts Council, Met-Life Composer Connections, and the American Composers’ Forum.

Hobbies and Personal Interests

Apart from his professional interests, he draws and paints and has produced animations for his compositions. His mother, a painter, played a significant role in inspiring him to explore this art form. He believes that drawings and animations record or document time in an alternative dimension to music, allowing audiences a different perspective on musical scores and recordings.

Upcoming Ventures

Dr. Van Stiefel is constantly evolving and breaking new ground. He recently started a Substack focused on guitar theory, music, music technology, and composition. It’s a promising initiative poised to generate a wealth of new content and insights both for his readers and his creative work.