

Music runs in the family

Larry Carlton, who picked up the guitar after watching his mother play it, will perform with his son here

Sujin Thomas

HE'S an American jazz legend who, apart from an outstanding solo career, has contributed guitar work for respected artistes such as Billy Joel, Steely Dan and Joni Mitchell over three decades or more in the music industry.

But guitar great Larry Carlton, 59, who is playing in Singapore tomorrow, recently added a rare and prestigious Asian connection to the list of famous names drawn to his talent.

Late last year, he produced and performed on an album to commemorate the 80th birthday of King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand and the 60th anniversary of his ascension to the throne.

The album, called *The Jazz King*, features an all-star line-up of musicians such as drummer Harvey Mason and bassist Abraham Laboriel Sr.

The 10 tracks were actually composed by the Thai monarch, who is himself an accomplished jazz musician.

Grammy-winning Carlton received the offer to participate in the project after performing at a concert in Bangkok.

"A gentlemen from Sony BMG Thailand approached me and said that the Thai King's birthday was coming up," says Carlton on the line from his home outside of Nashville, Tennessee, recently.

"And he asked if I would be interested in producing an album of his music, but performed by American all-stars. I was flattered that I was invited to do that," he adds.

However, Carlton adds with a hint of disappointment: "I never met the King though. He had just had back surgery when we performed there again in January so he was unable to attend the concert."

Carlton goes on to tell *Life!* that he has been resting at home for the last couple of weeks after completing a seven-week tour of the United States and Europe.

He will perform at the Esplanade Theatre tomorrow night with his eight-piece backing band, The Sapphire Blues Band. Organised by the Esplanade, the show is already 70 per cent sold out.

Carlton picked up music when he was six years old, after being inspired by watching his mother play a few guitar chords at his grandmother's house.

"That's all I ever did for a living," he says. "I'm very thankful I started at such a young age because by the time I was in my mid-teens, I had already been playing guitar for 10 years, so I had a lot of early practising."

His music, which bears the influence of guitarists such as Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery and BB King, has garnered him three Grammy Awards – Best Pop Instrumental Performance (1981), Best Pop Instrumental Performance (1987) and Best Pop Instrumental Album (2002). He has also composed TV theme songs including the one for the 1980s hit sitcom *Who's The Boss?* and collaborated with Fourplay guitarist Lee Ritenour.

But his life has had its ups and downs. In 1988 while working in Hollywood on the album *On Solid Ground*, he was shot at the door of the studio by a young boy. Police later described the shooting as part of a gangland initiation.

The resulting injuries left him temporarily without the use of his left arm. And his left vocal chord suffered permanent damage.

"I did many months of physical therapy for my left arm and I worked with a voice builder five days a week," he says, explaining that *On Solid Ground* had to be postponed by eight months due to three unfinished guitar solos.

Carlton, who is married to singer Michele Pillar, has since made a full recovery.

For his show here, he has a surprise in store for fans: "My son Travis has been playing bass with me for the last three years and he will be with me in Singapore."

He adds: "He's a world-class player."

Like father, like son.

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> Larry Carlton & The Sapphire Blues Band will perform at the Esplanade Theatre tomorrow at 8pm. Tickets at \$30, \$90 and \$120 (includes booking fee) are available from Sistic, tel: 6348-5555. The \$60 tickets are sold out.

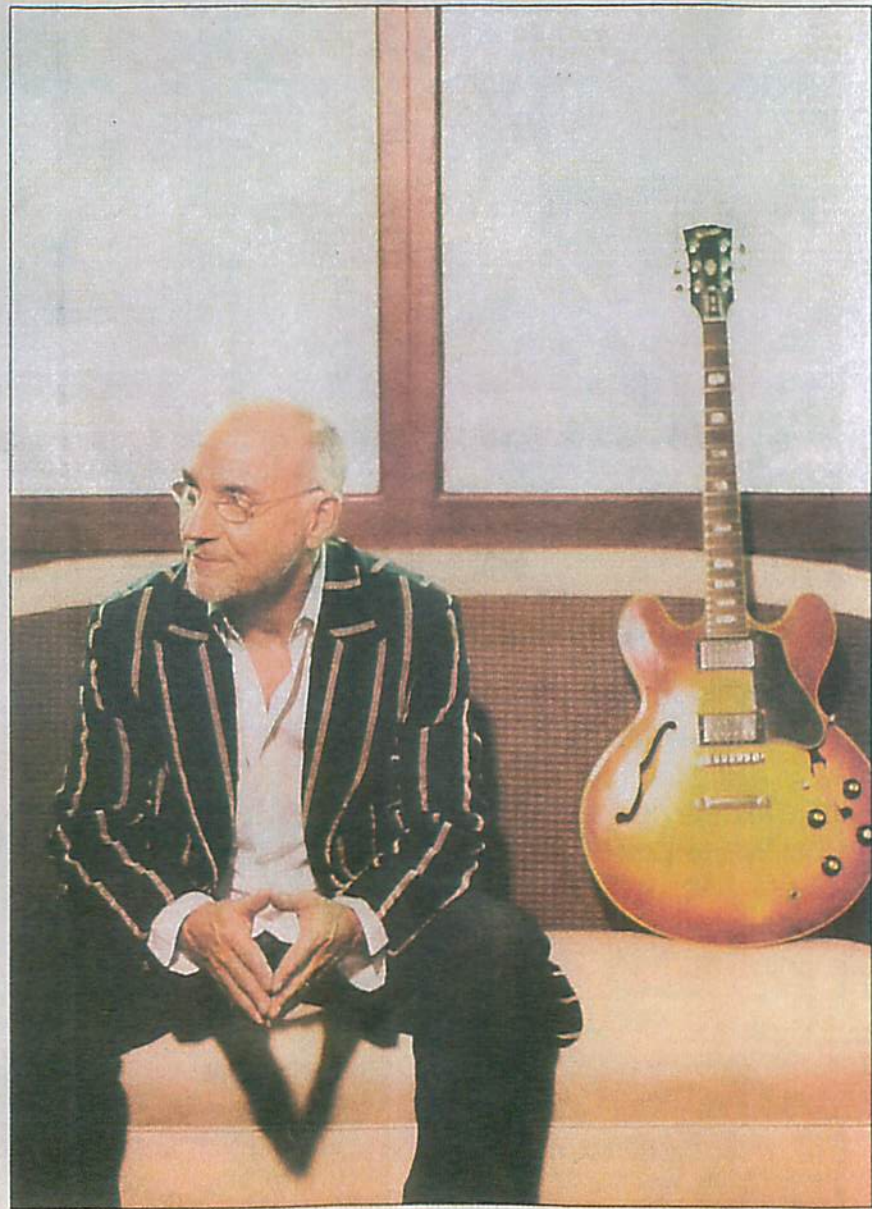


PHOTO: THE ESPLANADE
THE ASIAN CONNECTION: Larry Carlton has produced an album in which the tracks were composed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand.