



## Benjamin Verdery

Guitarist / Composer

*an iconoclastic player....*  
New York Times

*an American original, an American master*  
Sound Board Magazine

### BIOGRAPHY

Ben Verdery has performed throughout Europe, North and South America and Asia, including at the Metropolitan Opera, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), 92Y Kaufmann Auditorium and guitar festivals around the world.

He has performed and/or recorded with guitarists William Coulter, Frederic Hand, Leo Kottke, Paco Peña, Nano Stern, Andy Summers and John Williams, and vocalist Jessye Norman, among others. In 1996, Verdery accompanied the German baritone Hermann Prey in a performance of Schubert's "Frühlingsglaube" described in the New York Times as bringing "an affecting sweetness and intimacy to [the] gently lyrical music." In 2005, Verdery and Andy Summers debuted Ingram Marshall's *Dark Florescence Variations for Two Guitars and Orchestra* at Carnegie Hall with the American Composers Orchestra; Classical Guitar Magazine wrote that the performance's modern sensibility "exult[ed] in a dazzling interplay" between classical and electric guitars and orchestra.

Throughout his career, Verdery's recitals have been noted for lyricism, invention, complexity, dynamism and eclecticism. The New York Times review of his 1980 New York debut described his interpretations of Bach as "rhythmically secure and musically precise" with a riveting concentration augmented by "flamboyant gestures." In 1991, Guitar Extra characterized his approach as a "dichotomous marriage of absolute virtuosic bravura and a commanding—and sometimes comedic—stage presence." His later performances have been described as open, democratic and original, freely mixing styles and elements such as altered guitars and digital delay to create new sonic environments.

As a recording artist, Ben's [discography](#) is extensive with over 17 recordings. He has released albums of original and arranged material, solo and in collaborative duos with guitarists and other instrumentalists, and as a member of Latitude, the ensemble Ufonia and the Schmidt/Verdery Duo. His most recent, *Scenes from Ellis Island* (with premieres of his newest compositions) was released by New Focus Recordings in February 2020, together with a [video](#) of the recording's title piece. Other recordings include *On Vineyard Sound* (2016 featuring Ben performing music by his composer colleagues at Yale University's School of Music); *First You Build a Cloud* (2007 with Andy Summers); *Happy Here* (2011 with William Coulter); *Branches* (2006 works of Bach, Strauss, Jimi Hendrix, Mozart and the traditional *Amazing Grace*); *Start Now* (2005 Classical Recording Foundation Award) and *Some Towns & Cities* (winner of Guitar Player Magazine's Best Classical Guitar Recording 1992).

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*Some Towns & Cities* features fifteen original Verdery compositions inspired by American cities, seen in terms of the guitar, with duets with Fred Hand, Leo Kottke, Paco Peña, John Williams and Rie Schmidt, as well as chamber music selections. Reviews described the album as "strikingly American" and groundbreaking, touching on blues, jazz, Spanish/Mexican and fingerpicking styles, with evocative onomatopoeic references.

Ben has created and released several exquisitely filmed [videos](#), most recently his collection [Peace, Love & Guitars](#), a series of 16 videos presented in February and April 2021 through the New York City Classical Guitar Society. The videos feature solo works as well as collaborations with long time colleagues. Other videos include: [From Aristotle](#) with Mark Martin and [Michiyaya Dance](#), Bryce Dessner's [Portbou](#), Jimi Hendrix's [Purple Haze](#), Seymour Bernstein's [Searching for a Chorale](#) his Shangri La Series, filmed at Doris Duke's Shangri La Center for Islamic Arts & Cultures Honolulu, HI and four videos with hip-hop artist Billy Dean Thomas including the ground breaking *Black Bach*.

Verdery has composed works for classical and non-classical guitar, for solo and duo, guitar quartets, chamber groups and orchestras, for himself and others, including Sérgio and Odair Assad, David Russell, David Tanenbaum, Scott Tennant, and John Williams and John Etheridge.

After beginning with classical arrangements in the 1980s, his signature arrangements of "Three American Songs" [Don't Be Cruel by Elvis Presley, Kiss by Prince, and Purple Haze by Jimi Hendrix] "left the audience with a happy, patriotic glow" [San Francisco Classical Voice].

Verdery went on to compose works for himself, such as the three-movement solo "In Memory," the largely solo and duo pieces comprising his album *Some Towns and Cities*, and "Eleven Etudes" and the Dalai Lama-dedicated "Be Kind All the Time" from his recording *Start Now*.

Ben's compositions for larger guitar ensembles includes *Scenes from Ellis Island* (1999), which was written for and recorded by the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet (*Air and Ground* album), and *Pick and Roll* (for multiple guitars, saxophone, violin and basketball player), which premiered at Santa Cruz Contemporary Festival in 2000. Ben's arrangement of *Scenes from Ellis Island* for guitar orchestra has since been extensively broadcast and performed at festivals and universities in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Europe.

He has also written chamber music for his group Ufonia and for a work commissioned by the New Jersey Chamber Music Society for its annual Martin Luther King Day concert, *Soul Force* (1996, for guitar, cello, flute and percussion). Other commissions include The Changsha International Guitar Festival, The Chilean Guitar Ensemble, the Pensacola Guitar Orchestra (FL), Kyo-Shin-An Arts (NY), Wake Forest University, Thomas Offermann and the guitar ensemble of the Hochschule for Music and Theatre (Rostock, Germany) and the score for the documentary film *Corida Goyesque*.

Doberman-Yppan (Canada) currently publishes his solo and duo works for guitar and Alfred Music distributes the solo pieces from *Some Towns & Cities* as well as instructional books and video. Other compositions are available at Ben's web site.

Many of the leading composers of our time have created music for Ben, including Ezra Laderman, Daniel Asia, Martin Bresnick, Javier Farias, Aaron Kernis, John Anthony Lennon, David Leisner, Hannah Lash, Ingram Marshall, Anthony Newman, Roberto Sierra, Van Stiefel, Christopher Theofanitis, and Jack Veas.

In 2018 the 92Y, with Ben, commissioned Bryce Dessner's *Quintet for High Strings*. The work was premiered at the 92Y Kauffman Auditorium with the St Lawrence String Quartet. They went on to perform the work at the Ottawa Chamber Festival. Of the performance Artfile wrote "Verdery plays with the kind of infectious, childlike joy that lights up the whole stage, the sheer pleasure the five virtuosos took in playing the Dessner couldn't help but enhance the audience's enjoyment."

Ben is currently recording Dessner's *Quintet for High Strings* with the Ulysses Quartet, along with works by Farias, Bernstein (arr. Verdery) and Verdery for a release in June 2023.

Of particular note is the commission by the Yale University Music Library of Ingram Marshall's *Dark Florescence* (2005) for classical and electric guitars. Ben Verdery and Andy Summers premiered the work at Carnegie Hall with the American Composers Orchestra. "Mr. Marshall's *Dark Florescence* composition was imbued with a winning, what-the-hell spirit that left one hoping for a repeat performance. The guitarists' thorny rhythmic interaction with the orchestra, and the somber closing section, carried a potent emotional charge." Stated by the New York Observer.

Ben Verdery has been a guitar professor at the Yale School of Music since 1985. He has also taught at New York University, Manhattan School of Music, Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, Centro Flamenco Paco Peña (Spain) and his own annual summer master class on Maui, HI.

His teaching philosophy balances technique, interpretation and performance, while also emphasizing curiosity, intuition, and the physical relationship to the instrument, including posture and breathing. Verdery's instructional work includes the videotape, *The Essentials of Classical Guitar Vol. 1: Sound and Sensation* (1989), and the book, *Easy Classical Guitar Recital* (1999).

Ben Verdery was the Artistic Director of 92nd Street Y's Art of the Guitar series from 2007-2020, served as artistic director of the D'Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts, and is Producer of his Maui Summer Master Class since 1999. Ben is also Honorary Board Member of the Suzuki Association of the Americas.

Ben Verdery uses [D'Addario](#) strings and guitars by [Garrett Lee](#) and [Otto Vowinkel](#) and is represented by [GAMI/Simonds, LLC](#).

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