

Billy McLaughlin

Innovative Emmy Award Winning Guitarist/Composer, Inspirational Keynote and Historic Comeback Story

Billy McLaughlin is recognized internationally as a world-class guitarist, composer and inspirational performer who has appeared on Billboard's Top Ten Chart. Previously signed to Virgin Records' *Narada* label, McLaughlin has 14 CD releases, three National Campus Entertainer of the Year Awards, five Minnesota Music Awards, and his decades of national concert touring earned him the Hall of Fame Achievement Award. But in 1999 McLaughlin vanished from sight as his career crumbled due to a little-known neuro-muscular disorder called Focal Dystonia. After suffering several years without a cure, he embarked on an unlikely attempt to regain his career by re-learning his instrument left-handed. His story is the subject of an award-winning documentary *Changing Keys – Billy McLaughlin and the Mysteries of Dystonia*, and he received an Emmy Award for his documentary *Billy McLaughlin: Starry Night with Orchestra Nova*.

The Past. A serious professional in his teens, McLaughlin left his home and rock band in Minneapolis for the University of Southern California guitar department. Employing what would become his signature style of placing both hands on the fretboard, McLaughlin began composing for his first release. His unusual approach led to extensive national touring earning multiple NACA Campus Entertainer Awards. In 1995 McLaughlin signed a multi-album international contract with Virgin Records label *Narada*, whose first release, *Fingerdance*, peaked at #7 on the Billboard charts. For two years he struggled with a mysterious and unrelenting condition of unexplainable muscle spasms and contractions. In 2001, Billy was diagnosed with a neuromuscular disorder called focal dystonia. Going against doctors' recommendations to quit music and look for other work, McLaughlin focused on his songwriting and returned to his rock band which was less demanding for his hands. Despite releasing his ensemble's best recording, *Finally – Live!* (2002) it was clear that focal dystonia had ended McLaughlin's career as a virtuoso guitarist.

The Challenge. Not willing to give up, McLaughlin began the unlikely journey of teaching himself to play in his signature style – left-handed! Late in 2004, a documentary film crew began following McLaughlin's desperate attempt to regain his career. Warned by doctors of a higher likelihood for developing focal dystonia in his remaining good hand, McLaughlin chose to press on towards an ambitious goal he had yet to achieve – to perform and record a new project with a string orchestra. In January 2007, McLaughlin published a limited release of *Into the Light*, a concert recording of compositions for acoustic guitar with string orchestra. This collaboration with Grammy nominated arranger, Eugenio Toussaint, is McLaughlin's first recording as a left-handed guitarist. In 2008, *Coming Back Alive*, a companion DVD shot by volunteers from the WWE broadcast crew capturing the historic performance was completed and released via direct marketing.

The Future. Billy's story is an inspiration! The Dystonia Medical Research Foundation named him their first Ambassador for Public Awareness, and he was awarded the international 2010 Leadership in Public Neurology Award at the American Academy of Neurology conference. McLaughlin is a featured speaker at the TED conference in Atlanta (May 2010) and is touring internationally. "Many people fail because they quit too soon" reads the fortune cookie saying that McLaughlin taped to his dashboard in 2001 – it remains there to this day.