

# *Mason Williams*

## *Biography*

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*Featuring:*

## *The Guitars of Mason Williams*



*The back-stories, photos & favorites*

Updated January 2005

Mason Williams, Grammy Award-winning composer of the instrumental *“Classical Gas”* and Emmy Award-winning writer for *“The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour,”* has been a dynamic force in music and television circles since the 1960s.

1938  
to  
1956  
Oklahoma  
City  
to L.A.

Born in Abilene, Texas in 1938, Williams spent his youth divided between living with his father in Oklahoma and his mother in Oregon. His interest in music began when, as a teenager, he became a fan of pop songs on the radio and sang along with them for his own enjoyment. In high school, he sang in the choir and formed his first group, an a capella quartet that sang the 1950’s style pop and rock & roll music of that era.

After graduating from High School in Oklahoma City in 1956, he and best friend, artist **Edward Ruscha**, drove to Los Angeles. There, Williams attended Los Angeles City College as a math major, working toward a career as an insurance actuary. But he spent almost as much time attending musical events, especially jazz clubs and concerts, as he did studying. This cultural experience led him to drop math and seek a career in music.

Williams moved back to Oklahoma City in 1957 to pursue his interest in music by taking a crash course in piano for the summer. After a few weeks, his piano teacher, **Jewell Major Roach**, told him flatly that he would never become a great musician, but would probably be able to play very well someday. So, with the burden of “greatness” lifted, Williams decided to approach music from the standpoint of just having a lot of fun with it. In the fall he enrolled as a music major at Oklahoma City University, where he studied piano, flute and double bass. To put himself through school, he worked at a record shop in the evenings.

1958  
to  
1960  
The  
Wayfarers  
Trio

Williams’ music career took a key turn in 1958, when he purchased his first guitar, an old Stella, for which he paid \$13. He bought it from an artist friend of Ed Ruscha’s named Bill Elder.

FIRST GUITAR - **STELLA**

*“I paid \$13 for it, and wrote my first guitar instrumental on it, which I called \$13 Stella. I still play this one. It’s my cabin-in-the-woods guitar. I’ve written several pieces on this guitar.”*

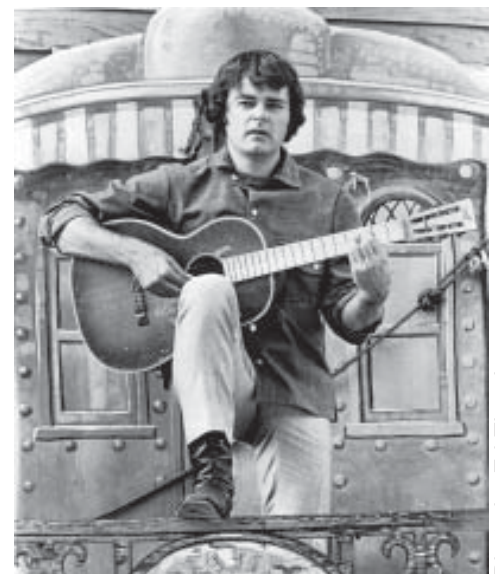


Photo by Ed Thrasher

*“I was mostly interested in folk music and spanish flamenco guitar in the beginning. I took the metal tailpiece off the Stella and threw it in the trash. I had the bridge converted to a classical guitar and used nylon strings. I don’t recall who did the conversion, but they did a great job.”*

He played guitar and formed a duo with a fellow OCU student, singer, **Scott Fulton**. At about the same time, he met **Bill Cheatwood**, a folk and ethnic music aficionado who introduced Williams to the world’s of traditional folk, flamenco, blues and other ethnic guitar styles.



Photo by Jerry MacMillan

*“Bill had a beautiful Spanish classical guitar, so I decided to get a decent classical for myself. I bought a Goya. It was a great guitar for the money and beyond that, it was a really great guitar. It played easily and the fretting was nicely in tune.”*

In 1959 the two teamed up with a schoolmate of Bill’s from Dallas, Texas, **Baxter Taylor**, to form a college folk group called **The Nightlighters**. They eventually became **The Wayfarers Trio**. They played for **(list to come)**. In addition to performing with that group, Williams became a regular at **The Gourd**, an Oklahoma City coffeehouse. There he worked with folksingers **Steve Brainard**, **Johnny Horton**, and bassist, **Joe Lawrence**. The Gourd later became, at a different location, **The Buddhi**, Oklahoma City’s most famous folk music club.

SECOND GUITAR -  
**GOYA CLASSICAL GUITAR**

*“Gave it to a friend when I got the Cordova from Tommy Smothers.”*

*“I remember borrowing one of Johnny’s guitars, a steel-string Guild. I played it fingerstyle and felt the extra effort to play on steel strings made my left hand strong.”*

In 1960, he recorded his first album, **Folk Music As Heard at The Gourd** recorded live at the club with all of the Gourd guys. A couple months later, he recorded his second album, this one with **The Wayfarers Trio** called **Songs of the Blue and the Grey** (Mercury). He wrote his first song in 1960. It was an ersatz American history ballad about the California Gold Rush.

In the fall of 1960, in order to be closer to a booking agent in Dallas, Williams, Cheatwood and Taylor (**The Wayfarers Trio**) enrolled at North Texas State Teachers College in Denton, Texas. The move paid off. They went on a concert tour around the south and southwestern states as the opening act for the **Kai Winding Jazz Septet**. The Trio broke up after that, and everyone went their separate ways. Williams dropped out of school (after one semester) and moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma where he worked as a folksinger at a coffee house called, “The Gallery” He worked solo, or with friends when they came through town. He also discovered that the cook at The Gallery, **Lorane Parker**, had a great voice and sang gospels. Williams began to work with her. In fact, it was as part of a “hootenanny” performance at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma that Mason first met long-time friend, fiddler **Byron Berline**.

The next year, 1961, Williams bought a 5-string banjo. It was a Pete Seeger long neck model. He learned to play the banjo and reformed **The Wayfarers Trio** with two old friends from The Gourd coffee house, **Johnny Horton** and **Joe Lawrence**. This group went on to play folk clubs in the midwest and on the west coast such as **The Troubadour**.

In the fall of 1961 when this group dispersed, Mason formed a duo with OCU classmate, singer and songwriter **Mike Settle**.

*“Mike had a great tenor voice and was a great songwriter right from the start. He has written a lot of fine songs. His most famous hit being the country classic, But You Know I Love You. He was also a founding member of The First Edition.”*

Mason continued to write more songs of his own. That November, “Williams” as he became known, since the military operates on a last name basis, was called up from the Naval Reserves to be on active duty with the U.S. Navy in San Diego, California. He served as a Third-Class Yeoman on the USS Paul Revere.

During this period, he was a sailor by day and a folksinger by night, working the area clubs and coffee houses after hours and on weekends. He formed another folk group (playing the 5-string banjo, guitar, 12-string guitar & recorder) called **The Hootenaires** which included **Marilyn Powell** (vocals & dulcimer), **John Powell** (guitar) and **Ed Douglas** (bass). They sang traditional songs and made one record, *“More Hootenanny,”* for the Crown label. They began performing at folk clubs in San Diego (**The Upper Cellar, Circe’s Cup, The End, The Pour House, The Mantiki** and **The Blue Guitar**). Other musicians in the San Diego area Mason worked or hung out with during this time were **Eric Horde, Barney Bartelle, and Russ Giguere**.

Photo by —



**THIRD GUITAR** - I had a custom 12-string made by LA guitar maker Candelas. The body was a Harmony, with a classical guitar neck added. I played it with finger picks. This was a tough guitar. I didn't even have a case for it at first. I just sort of threw it in the back seat of my car going to gigs.

In 1962 The Hootenaires expanded their gig base to include folk clubs in L.A. (**The Ice House** and **The Troubadour**.) It was at this time that Williams made his first instrumental recordings of guitar and banjo pieces (*“The 12-String Story” Volumes I and II* and *“The Banjo Story”*) for the Horizon label.

Williams was discharged from the Navy in the fall of 1963. He returned to Oklahoma City with the idea of picking up his college musical education. During this time he produced his first album for folksinger **Paul Sykes**. In the process, he also hooked up with OCU bass player **Dave Phillips**. Halfway through his first semester back at school, he got an offer to perform at **The Exodus**, a folk club in Denver. He and Dave took off for a week-long engagement, but ended up having so much fun in Denver that they hung around the exciting folk scene there a little too long and he was forced to drop out of school once more.

1963  
to  
1964  
LA folk clubs  
Davon  
Music

1964 opened with Williams moving to Los Angeles to room with his friend, artist, **Ed Ruscha**. He played the L.A., Southern California folk club circuit and pursued his writing and songwriting interests. He signed a publishing agreement with **Dave Hubert** of Davon Music that provided \$200 a month retainer, if he would deliver two songs a month. Several of his songs were recorded by **The Kingston Trio**, **Glenn Yarbrough** and others. His comedic *“Them Poems”* were such a big hit for **The Kingston Trio** that it led to his opportunity to record them for the Vee-Jay label. That year he also played 5-string banjo on an anthology recording titled, *“5-String Banjo Greats”* (Liberty). Musicians Mason worked with during this time included, **Dick Rosmini**, **Tandyn Almer**, and **Jimmy Helms**.

In December of 1964, Williams published his first book, *“Bicyclists Dismount,”* a collection of poems, lyrics, snippets and photos. He also made a fortuitous connection. **Tom and Dick Smothers** heard about Williams’ comedy songs from their sister, Sherry, who worked at The Troubadour. They recorded some of his comedy material on their *“Tour de Farce”* album (Mercury). Williams backed them up on the recorded live at The Ice House performances, playing guitar, 12-string guitar, 5-string banjo and recorder.

**The Smothers Brothers** introduced Williams to their managers, **Ken Kragen** and **Ken Fritz**, who also became his managers, thus setting the stage for his lifelong association with the popular Smothers Brothers act. In 1965, he did a concert tour with them that featured **Ester and Abi O’Farim** as an opening act. Mason played backup for them as well as for Tom and Dick.

He received his Cordova classical guitar as a gift from Tom Smothers that year. He also published and printed his second book, *“Next to the Windows.”*

**FOURTH GUITAR** – *Cordova Classical Guitar (Actually made by German guitar maker Oskar Teller) Tommy Smothers gave it to me in 1965. The company gave it to Tom for a promotional endorsement.*



Photo by Ken Kragen

The Ed Sullivan Show 3/23/69

In the fall of 1966, he was hired as a comedy writer for the television variety series, *“The Roger Miller Show”* (NBC) and published his third book, *“Tosadnessday.”* Williams’ Hollywood career spanned the next five years, during which time he wrote songs, comedy material, published books and articles; produced and recorded albums, for himself as well as for other artists; wrote music and comedy for television series and specials; performed in clubs, in concert and on TV; created and produced several art projects. He also wrote several songs with **Nancy Ames**, and worked with her music director, **Artie Azenzer**. (*The Smothers Brothers Theme & Cinderella-Rockefella.*)

The year 1967 consisted of more television writing, primarily for *“The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour”* (CBS), for which he received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Writing Achievement in Comedy, Variety and Music. On the show he worked on musical arrangements with **Denny Vaughn** and on comedy with his writing partner, **Allen Blye**. The show’s conductor and arranger was **Nelson Riddle**. **Jimmy Joyce** of *The Jimmy Joyce Singers* was the choral director. The other writers on the show were **Mike Marmer, Stan Burns, Al Gordon, and Hal Goodman**. He also published three more books that year, *“The Night I Lost My Baby,” “Royal Road Test”* (with **Ed Ruscha**) and *“Boneless Roast.”* He created and produced two art projects: *“Bus,”* a life-sized photograph of a Greyhound Bus (11 x 37 feet) which was featured in the Museum of Modern Art exhibition “Word and Image.” It is now part of the museum’s permanent collection. *“Sunflower,”* a skywriter drawing of a sunflower with the sun as the blossom. At the end of the year, he began to record his first album for **Warner Bros.**, *“The Mason Williams Phonograph Record,”* working with producer, **Mike Post** and arranger, **Al Capps**.

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1967  
Emmy  
Nomination  
Books, Art  
and  
Warner Bros.  
Records

Television writing in 1968 included musical variety specials for **Petula Clark** and **Andy Williams**. He also continued writing with *“The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour,”* where he, among other things, engineered the *“Pat Paulsen for President”* campaign. *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* went directly into *“The Summer Brothers Smothers Show.”* A summer replacement show starring **Glen Campbell**. Mason and **Allen Blye** were the lead writers for (11) shows. Other writers on this show were: **Steve Martin, Rob Reiner, Carl Gottlieb, Bob Einstein, John Hartford, Leigh French, Murray Roman** and **Cecil Tuck**. *“Classical Gas”* from the *“Mason Williams Phonograph Record”* was issued as a single and became a number one hit that summer. His work in both television and recording led him to produce one of the earliest “music videos,” when he combined *“Classical Gas”* with a film by **Dan MacLaughlin** titled *“3000 Years of Art in 3 Minutes.”* In the fall, he released his second album for **Warner Bros.**, *“The Mason Williams Ear Show,”* and performed his first live concert with orchestra, a benefit with Nancy Ames in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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1968  
TV writing  
“Gas”  
becomes  
a hit

In 1969, Williams began primarily to pursue his own pop career. *“Classical Gas”* won three 1968 Grammy Awards-Best Instrumental Composition, Best Instrumental Performance for Mason and Best Instrumental/Orchestra Arrangement for arranger, **Mike Post**. Williams also won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing Achievement in Comedy, Variety and Music for *“The*

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1969  
Pop Career-  
Grammy  
and  
Emmy  
Awards  
Books

*Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour.*” In March, he published his first commercial book *“The Mason Williams Reading Matter”* (Doubleday) and released *“Music,”* his third album for Warner Bros. A single, *“Greensleeves,”* became number one on the easy listening charts. He formed a band to help promote his albums that included **Rick Cunha** (guitar), **“Putter” Smith** (bass), **Mike Cannon** (drums), **Larry Kneetal** (piano), **Jimmy Gordon** (piano/clarinet), **Ben Lanzaroni** (piano) and **Bill Cunningham** (fiddle, dobro, harmonica) and began to play clubs, concerts and make appearances on such major television variety and talk shows as *“The Ed Sullivan Show,” “The Tonight Show,” “The Today Show,” “The Johnny Cash Show,” “The Dating Game”* and *“What’s My Line?”* plus shows hosted by **Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas, Steve Allen, David Frost, Donald O’Connor** and others.

1970  
Recording  
and Touring  
More Books

The year 1970 consisted of a fourth Warner Bros. album release, *“Handmade”* a second book for Doubleday, *“Flavors”* and a book about his television/censorship experiences for Liverite, *“The Mason Williams F.C.C. Report.”* Williams also made television appearances in London, and performed spring and fall college concert tour. **Jennifer Warnes** was the opening for Mason.

By this time, Billy Cheatwood had gone on to become a first rate guitar maker and repairman. He made Williams a 6-string original.

*“From my experience as a television writer in presenting musicians on camera, I began to realize that playing guitar, or almost any instrument on television, for that matter, wasn’t very interesting visually. I began to realize that as a guitarist, you are basically head shots, a guitar and one hand moving up and down the guitar neck. Whereas this might be of interest to other guitar players to see fingering and hand positions, it was static for the average viewer and there was only so much a director could do to keep it interesting visually. Since one is rather locked in, especially for classical guitar, by the way it’s played, I decided that by changing the look of the guitar itself, I could make shots more interesting. I came up with all kinds of ideas. One I remember*

**SIXTH GUITAR-** Glass guitar  
Built by Billy Cheatwood and the ABC prop  
designer for television performances.



Photo by Ed Thrasher



Photo by Ken Kragen



was a hammerhead shark design (there were others) but a guitar you could see though seemed to be the best idea because the hot studio lighting would give it a stubben glass aura.

Billy Cheatwood was staying with me in LA at the time, so I asked him if he'd help me build a plexiglass guitar as a visual element to use on television. I told him what I wanted was in essence, a real, playable guitar. I hooked Billy up with the head prop designer for ABC, who was a true craftsman, and using a real classical guitar pattern, they made the glass guitar. The fretting science on the neck (real frets) was accurate. You could actually play pieces on it. However,

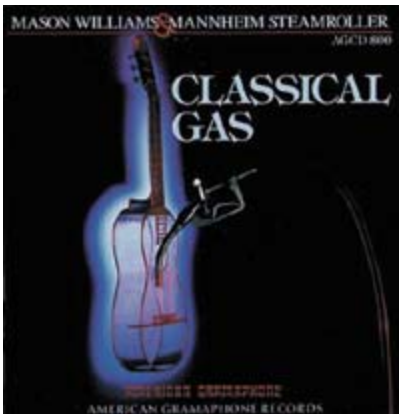
since the plexiglass was 1/4" thick, it didn't have any volume to speak of -- it was somewhat like the sound you get on an electric guitar that's not plugged in. It was quite a bit heavier than a wooden guitar. I used it on a TV special called, **Just Friends** that involved my friends from the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*; Tom & Dick, Pat Paulsen, John Hartford, Jennifer Warren and Bob Einstein. I used it to finger-sync my hit version of *Classical Gas*. When I left Hollywood a couple of years later, I gave most of my stuff away to family and friends. John Hartford loved the idea of that guitar, so I gave it to him. He later told me that he had it hanging on the wall of his house in Nashville and once in a while it would get explored by some of the Nashville pickers.



Photo by Terry Paul

I got it back from John to use for a *Smothers Brothers* show in 1974. Rick Cunha and I played *Baroque-A-Nova* as a duet. I first suggested that we fill the guitar with honeybees, letting them make a honeycombed hive you could see into, but NBC didn't like the idea of bees flying around

the studio... what if they didn't like the song and stung people in the audience? So, I filled the guitar with water and put a couple of gold fish in it. The camera had fun exploring the goldfish in a guitar bowl and a lot of people must have seen this spot, because to this day, people bring it up in conversation. In 1987 I got it back from John again to use for the cover of my *Classical Gas* album with *Mannheim Steamroller*. John Hartford died in 2001 and I don't know who has it now.



American Gramophone (AG 800)

1971  
to  
1973  
Hollywood  
to  
Bluegrass  
Split to  
Oregon

In 1971, he released his fifth and final album for Warner Bros., *“Sharepickers,”* and published *“The Mason Williams Guitar Pieces Book.”*

With his career in high gear, Mason continued to give numerous concerts throughout North America. But the pace began to take its toll and, feeling the negative effects of burning the candle at both ends, in 1972 Williams gave up his “place in line” in Hollywood and drove back to his folks’ home in Oregon. There he restored an old camper and for six months traveled around the West, fishing trout streams, swimming rivers, hiking trails, climbing mountains, and in general got the chance to be a kid again. Rejuvenated, in the fall he moved to Sante Fe, New Mexico.

Williams decided to “bite the bullet” and try to learn to play guitar with a flat pick. He bought a Martin D-28 and tried to master playing rhythm guitar. He formed **The Sante Fe Recital**: A band consisting of **Steve Keith** (5-string banjo), **Hugh Hazelrigg** (cello), **Doug Cottler** (bass), **George Bouhey** (drums). A regional country, folk and bluegrass band, they played clubs, bars and concerts throughout Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. The band recorded an album called *“Fresh Fish”* (Flying Fish Records)-an early prototype of the bluegrass-with-symphony project that would occupy Williams in the years to follow.



#### **SEVENTH GUITAR - Martin D-28**

*Bought it in Santa Fe in 1972 to learn to play rhythm guitar with a pick. I still play this one.*

1973  
to  
1975  
Bluegrass  
Festivals and  
Concerts

In 1973, Mason wrote television for the *“Tommy Banks Show”* in Edmonton, Alberta Canada. There he met Tommy’s bass player, **John Sereda**. John played bass with him the next for several years.

Williams premiered his *“Concert for Bluegrass Band and Orchestra”* at **Red Rocks Amphitheater** in Denver, Colorado in the summer of 1974. The next year, he returned to Hollywood to write for *“The Smothers Brothers Show”* (NBC), for which he received a Writers Guild of America nomination in the Outstanding Script, Television Variety category.

By 1976, Williams was back perfecting his “**Symphonic Bluegrass**” concert, which he performed that year with the Oklahoma City, Sacramento, Eugene and Denver symphonies. His band now included **Byron Berline** (fiddle), **John Hickman** (5-string banjo), and **Dan Crary** (guitar). In December, in Toronto, he appeared as the host of a CBC Super Special titled “**Guitar,**” which featured guitarists **Merle Travis, Randy Bachman, Liona Boyd, Ed Bickert, Bob Mann** and **Bobby Edwards & Fat City**.

In the summer of 1977, Williams put together a band to play concerts in Colorado. That year he also wrote television scripts for “**The Rolling Stone Magazine 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Special**” (CBS). The next three years consisted mostly of playing bluegrass festivals and symphony concerts.

In April 1980, Williams was invited to perform at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Earth Day ceremonies in Denver, which featured a celebration of the clean-up of the South Platte River that runs through the downtown Denver area. This event was a harbinger of his future concert about water and rivers, “**Of Time & Rivers Flowing.**”

The following year, Williams helped create a unique concert event in Eugene, Oregon, one that featured the **Eugene Symphony**, members of the **National Academy of Artistic Gymnastics**, and guest gymnasts from around the country. **Tom Smothers** was the host. Williams’ musical collaborator was **Art Maddox**, with whom he has since worked on numerous projects. Williams finished the year again writing for television. He received a Writers Guild award in the Outstanding Script, Television Variety, category for a **Steve Martin** special, “**All Commercials**” (NBC). He then went to New York City to become head writer for NBC’s “**Saturday Night Live,**” a job he described as like “working for the head shop at Sears.” In 1981, after a ten-year hiatus, he began to actively write songs and music for the guitar.

During the summer of 1982, the Vail (Colorado) Symposium invited Williams to perform at its “Water: Options for Tomorrow” conference. Coincidentally, he found out that an Oregon utility was intending to put several hydroelectric dams on his favorite trout stream, the North Fork of the Willamette River, near his home in Oakridge. At a public meeting, where the pros and cons of the issue were debated, he realized that the river itself was not able to speak in its own behalf. He decided to try to give the river a “voice” by presenting an entire concert of music inspired by “the river”. His motives were to draw attention to the local issues and, in a larger

1976  
to  
1979  
Symphonic  
Bluegrass  
and  
TV Comedy  
Writing  
Awards

1980  
to  
1981  
Music &  
Comedy -  
Saturday  
Night Live

1982  
to  
1987  
Of Time  
& Rivers  
Flowing  
& More  
Classical  
Gas

sense, to show that the river flows “not only through the land but through our hearts and minds as well.” He named the concert after a song by **Pete Seeger** titled, “*Of Time and Rivers Flowing*” and performed the show with *Mason Williams & Friends* band members, **Art Maddox** (piano), **Amy Windus** (cello), **Jerry Mills** (mandolin), **George Relles** (banjo), **John Averil** (mandolin), **Dennis Caffey** (drums), **Thom Bergeron** (woodwinds), and **Hollis Taylor** (violin).

After the premier of the concert at Vail, he continued to work on the concept. In 1983, Williams, with fellow river enthusiast, **Jim Williams**, in conjunction with the McKenzie Flyfishers, presented three sold out benefit concerts in Eugene. The money earned was used to successfully lobby the state legislature to make the North Fork of the Willamette River (one of Mason’s favorite trout streams) a protected waterway. In 1984, he released an album on his own label **Skookum Records**, “*Of Time and Rivers Flowing*” which featured studio recordings of the music from the concert program.

The next three years saw Williams performing bluegrass festivals, symphony concerts and “river” shows. In 1987, author/storyteller **Ken Kesey** joined the river show band. That fall, Williams released his “*Classical Gas*” album recorded with **Mannheim Steamroller** on the American Gramophone label. He ended the year performing with Kesey at the Grateful Dead’s New Years Eve Celebration at the Oakland Coliseum.

In 1988, “*The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*,” after having been kicked off the air in 1969 for being “too controversial,” returned to CBS. Williams resumed his old roles as a writer (for which he received an Emmy nomination in the *Outstanding Writing in a Variety of Music Program* category) and performer (“Classical Gas”). The Smothers Brothers went on to do (14) more shows that year, which Williams also wrote. He also managed to perform several concerts and taped a PBS special with the Smothers Brothers and **The Boston Pops**. In addition, Williams’ composition “Country Idyll,” a single from the Mannheim Steamroller collaboration album, was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Country Music category for *Best Instrumental Performance by a Soloist, Group or Orchestra*.

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**1988  
to  
1989  
Smothers  
Brothers  
20 Year  
Renion  
Manheim  
Steamroller**

Over the next few years Williams played more of his *“Of Time and Rivers Flowing”* and *“Bluegrassical Gas”* concerts. In 1990, he received the Governor’s Award from the State of Oregon for his contribution to the arts.

In the spring of 1991, Williams began to write the first edition of *“Classical Gas: The Music of Mason Williams”* guitar book. In October, the **Mannheim Steamroller** album went gold. In July 1992, Vanguard Records put out an anthology of his earlier work (22 cuts out of 52 from his five Warner Bros. Albums) titled *“Music: 1968-71”* produced by **Bill McEuen**. He also signed a recording contract with the Real Music label to produce an acoustic instrumental Christmas album titled *“A Gift of Song,”* which was released in the fall.

In 1992 Williams began to produce and perform a Christmas Holiday Pops Concert for guest performers, choirs and orchestra. He played with **The Eugene Symphony** for the ‘92, ‘93, ‘97, ‘98, ‘99 & 2000 seasons. He also played a total of twelve concerts with **The Oregon Symphony** for the 1994 & 1998 seasons. Mason’s guitar book was published by CPP Belwin in 1993.

*“Ken Keseay had an Epiphone 12-string guitar that I used for these concerts. Since I usually had a lead guitarist with me, either **Rick Cunha** or **Don Latarski** the 12-string made for a full, rich rhythm guitar sound.”*



**EIGHTH GUITAR** - Epiphone 12-string belonging to Ken Keseay. I traded him the guitar Bill Cheatwood made for me for his 12-string to use in my shows. I still play this one.



1989  
to  
1992  
Rivers,  
Bluegrass  
“Best of” CD  
&  
Guitar Book

The 1990’s  
A Gift  
of Song -  
Holiday  
Concerts  
Honors &  
Awards

Williams continues to receive awards for his work and community efforts. In 1996 he received an Honorary Doctor of Music from Oklahoma City University. In 1998 BMI presented Mason with a special Citation of Achievement in recognition of the great national and international popularity of *Classical Gas*. It has logged over three million broadcast performances to become BMI's number one all time instrumental composition for air play, replacing the previous #1 tune, *The Theme From Moulin Rouge*, by Michele LeGrande, released in 1953.

In 1999, "*Bus*" (the art piece from 1967) was included in an exhibition about artists of the 50's and 60's called "*Radical Past*" at The Norton-Simon Museum of Modern Art in Pasadena. The University of Oregon presented him with the Distinguished Service Award in 1999.

In 2000, The University of Wisconsin's Parallel Press published his "*Them Poems*" in chapbook form as part of a poetry series. At his 2000 Holiday Pops Concert with the Eugene Symphony, by proclamation from the Governor, Mason was designated "Oregon Musician Laureate" for the state.

Most recently, Williams career has taken a new turn. He has begun to focus on having his music used in film projects and on television. "*Classical Gas*" was used in Rob Reiner's film, "*The Story of Us*," as well as "*The Dish*." "*Classical Gas*" was also featured on episodes of "*The Simpsons*" and "*Frasier*." "*Tradewinds*," another of his compositions, was included in the David Mirkin film, "*Heartbreakers*."

In July of 2003 Williams made a special appearance at the annual **Chet Atkins Appreciation Society** event in Nashville and was presented with a special award.

By the end of 2003, a new expanded second edition of Williams' popular guitar book (with companion CD) was released by Warner Bros. Publications. Much more than music book, it's an engaging story of Mason's songwriting and performance history. To wrap up the year, Williams released a new CD of six new instrumental recordings, "*Mason Williams EP 2003*" *Music for the Epicurean Harkener* on his Skookum Records label.

Mason's broad palette of writing, composing and performing in a variety of venues continues to this day. He has also begun working with several up and coming artists on new recording projects.

