



# Tony Koch

(Kōsh, rhymes with "posh")

**Guitarist, composer, bandleader, music educator and jazz visionary Tony Koch creates freewheeling music with simmering rhythms, inventive harmonies and memorable melodies. Influenced by legendary artists and pioneers like Wes Montgomery, Miles Davis, Pat Metheny, Allan Holdsworth, Mike Stern, Cannonball Adderly, Chick Corea and Michael Brecker, Koch pours his fine-tuned technique and knack for improvisation into his lively, detailed recordings and work with his group, The AltNews Band. His creative recipe mingles sweet and savory flavors from nu jazz, neo bop, fusion, funk, pop, hip-hop and Latin music and showcases his impeccable ear, lyrical improvisations and deep understanding of the rich nuances of instrumental voices. Koch's work shows a commitment to his vision: to bring together diversely talented musicians in order to create fresh sounds.**

**K**och's musical journey has been marked by a quest to become fluent in the complex language of music and to continuously evolve as an artist. His mother, a piano teacher, taught 40-plus students per week in his childhood home in Toronto, and he began his own classical training on the instrument at just three-years old, excelling in conservatory exams and eager to learn as much as he could about technique and musicianship. Determined to nurture his talents, his parents enrolled him at Saint Michael's Choir School in Toronto, where he explored piano, organ, voice and ensemble work and built a solid foundation in music theory, history and ear training.

His world expanded when he first heard The Beatles and became fascinated with the guitar and the art of pop songwriting. With a guitar and a small amplifier, he taught himself to play chords from books and by listening to pop and rock tunes. At 13, his family relocated to Vancouver, and Koch found himself at a school without a proper music program. Determined to further his education, he dove into the intricate finger picking styles of Leo Kottke, emulating his recordings.

After high school, Koch immersed himself into different genres, including blues and rock and started teaching guitar lessons in order to

supplement his earnings from doing small gigs with Vancouver bands. At 21, he made a commitment to a career as a professional musician and sought out opportunities in the local music scene.

Upon hearing local guitarist Pat Coleman tear it up at a Vancouver jazz club, Koch asked him if he would take him on as a student. Coleman, an alumnus of the Dick Grove School of Music in L.A., introduced Koch to jazz theory and improvisational harmony along with the vast library of jazz standards. Over the next several years, while continuing to teach and expand his student roster out of his own home, Koch further integrated what Coleman had taught him about technique and theory and was able to find additional work playing jazz, R&B, funk and blues gigs on top of accompanying several jazz singers.

Though briefly sidelined by tendonitis, Koch eventually ditched his old-fashioned fat body electric jazz guitar and bought a lighter model in order to modernize his sound and explore other schools of playing. It was during this period that he also developed a series of night school group guitar lessons, which he called "Jazz, Rock, Blues Guitar," that were then offered by the Continuing Education Program at Vancouver Community College (VCC). After one semester, his course became so popular that he was able to expand it from one class to four. Koch continued to polish his skills, playing jazz gigs and fronting duo, trio and quartet ensembles, playing mostly standards. When the jazz guitar instructor position opened up in the diploma program at the VCC School of Music, Koch was hired. At the start of his second year with the music program he was asked to also take on the Jazz Improvisation classes, an opportunity he jumped at, as this gave him an excellent platform from which to flesh out and expand on what he had been taught by Coleman years earlier. VCC gave him free rein in what developed into a four-semester jazz improv course.

During this time, he began diligent study of fusion guitarist Allan Holdsworth's approach and started a fusion jazz band, which gigged regularly around town and twice made it to the western semi finals of the "Alcan Jazz Competition." After the band dissolved, Koch continued teaching at the college level and kept playing and recording with a variety of local jazz ensembles, including Hugh Fraser and the Vancouver Ensemble of Jazz Improvisation (VEJI). Koch toured the Canadian jazz festival circuit with VEJI, performing at the Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Victoria, and Halifax Jazz Festivals, as well as many others.

Later in his teaching career Koch earned a master's degree in educational leadership at Simon Fraser University, which further enriched his teaching approach and abilities as a musical collaborator.

Parallel to Koch's musical endeavours, he and his wife, Katrina spent several years building a log house up the coast from Vancouver in Pender Harbour and subsequently welcomed two daughters. The couple also built a small home studio to give them space to create. After twenty-four years of teaching for VCC, Koch retired and moved his family full-time to the coast. He found the studio and his new home to be an inspiring hotbed of ideas, and after he had compiled several tunes, he planted the seed for his new project, The AltNews Band. He contacted long-time friend, producer, engineer and bass player Miles Hill, who introduced him to drummer Bobby Ruggiero from Las Vegas. He also enlisted the amazing talents of saxophonist Campbell Ryga and renowned Vancouver multi-instrumentalist, Miles Black. Koch started The AltNews Band as a way to challenge concepts of traditional jazz by bringing together elements of neo bop, chill and nu jazz with unexpected instrumental solos, synth sounds, hip rhythms and bluesy, funky, guitar hooks. The many layers of his stylish vision can be heard in the group's debut, UberChill, a collection of Koch's original alternative jazz tunes that dives deep into his knowledge of melody, harmony and rhythm and celebrates each band members' diverse perspectives on improvisation and technique, all framed by the group's sizzling chemistry.

Tony Koch continues to seek answers to the eternal question “What is jazz?” both in the studio and on stage. His second collection with The AltNews Band, *Funk Jazz from Planet Earth* builds on the acclaimed success of its debut recording, *Uber Chill*, which was released in October 2017. *Funk Jazz from Planet Earth* sees The AltNews Band taking a hard turn towards the exploration of retro funk/bop/fusion grooves with elements of Afro/Latin/Pop vibes thrown in for good measure.

Koch explains, “*Funk Jazz from Planet Earth* ups the bar with respect to tempos, complexity of the melodies and faster-moving solo section harmonies. Our first CD, *Uber Chill* had soloists contributing harmonic content that moved from chord to chord in a very relaxed and patient manner. The idea was to cover some deep jazz harmony while providing ample time for the listener to adjust and follow along, even through dense harmonies. With *Funk Jazz from Planet Earth* the solo sections draw from more complex jazz changes, which require the soloist to manage fairly rapid harmonic movement throughout their motivic development. It was certainly a more challenging body of material for all of us, and a real pleasure for me to present to and collaborate on with the guys.”

Tony is also already working on his third album with The AltNews Band, which will be recorded in Spring/Summer 2019. *Funk Jazz from Planet Earth* will be available in October 2018.