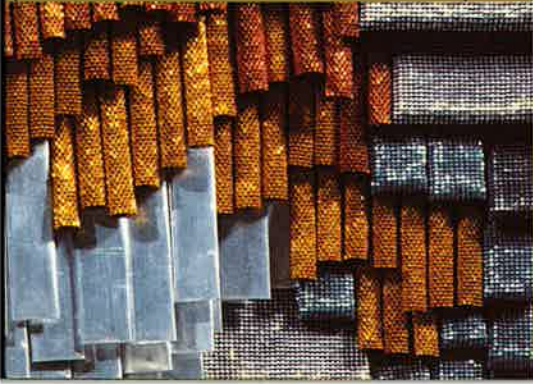


ALABAMA **ARTISTS**

FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS 2000-2002

ALABAMA STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS





Thomas **WOLFE**

2000 FELLOWSHIP IN MUSIC

TUSCALOOSA

Understanding parents played a big part in Thomas (Tom) Wolfe's finding his life's calling. In Tom's case, he was able to start playing guitar at six years of age because his parents bought him one at Bargain Barn for \$10. Tom had seen a girl on television strumming an instrument; his parents had to tell him it was a guitar, and he thinks the girl must have been Joan Baez; all he knows is that the experience resonated with him.

After beginning his formal education believing that his future lay in banking, Tom auditioned and was accepted to Eastman School of Music. His concentration, in the Department of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, was in writing skills. He now teaches those skills to his own students as the director of Jazz Studies at the University of Alabama (UA) in Tuscaloosa. Among the many facets of jazz that he teaches, such as composing, arranging, and improvisation, he includes the writing of commercial music, including jingles and film scores.

Tom designed and premiered the Jazz Studies program in 1997; it offers a Bachelor of Music degree. He is very proud of the strong curriculum, the fact that he has 15 students majoring in the program, of the stringent requirements for those who major in jazz, and that when one of his students started his career in Los

Angeles, he was ahead of the curve because of his education at UA.

"If I hear music that I like I try to analyze it and understand it, or internalize it, in order to apply it in my own music. My mind is constantly playing music, whether it's a new composition, or an existing tune," says Tom. He carries a sketch pad to capture ideas; a harmonic progression, a rhythm, or a bass line so that they remain intact months or years later.

As one of the top jazz guitarists in the Southeast, Tom is in constant demand as a performer. He has a duo with saxophonist Rick Condit, and also a jazz trio with other musicians. He is a regular at the W.C. Handy Jazz Festival in Florence, at City Stages in Birmingham, and at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. He has a standing Wednesday night date at a club in Tuscaloosa.

"To really be an artist, you have to be completely focused on your art," says Tom. He adds that he and his family also have a very firm spiritual core that keeps them centered, despite the complications implicit in a life that includes two musicians (his wife is a flautist) and a ten-year-old son, who's already showing an aptitude for his parents' calling.