

GREG CHAKO

A personal, composition-driven hard bop statement from a veteran guitarist returning with renewed purpose, original music, and a piano-less two-horn quintet sound.

Greg Chako is an internationally experienced jazz guitarist, composer, arranger, bandleader, and educator whose career spans five decades across the United States and Asia. Known for his warm tone, lyrical phrasing, and deeply swinging approach, Chako has built a wide-ranging body of work that reflects his grounding in mainstream jazz, hard bop, Latin jazz, and world-influenced modern jazz language.

A Cincinnati-born musician with years of professional activity in Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, and Japan, Chako has recorded extensively as a leader and performed with musicians across several generations of the jazz tradition. His writing and playing are shaped by the melodic clarity of bebop, the blues-rooted drive of hard bop, and the rhythmic vocabulary of Latin and groove-based jazz.

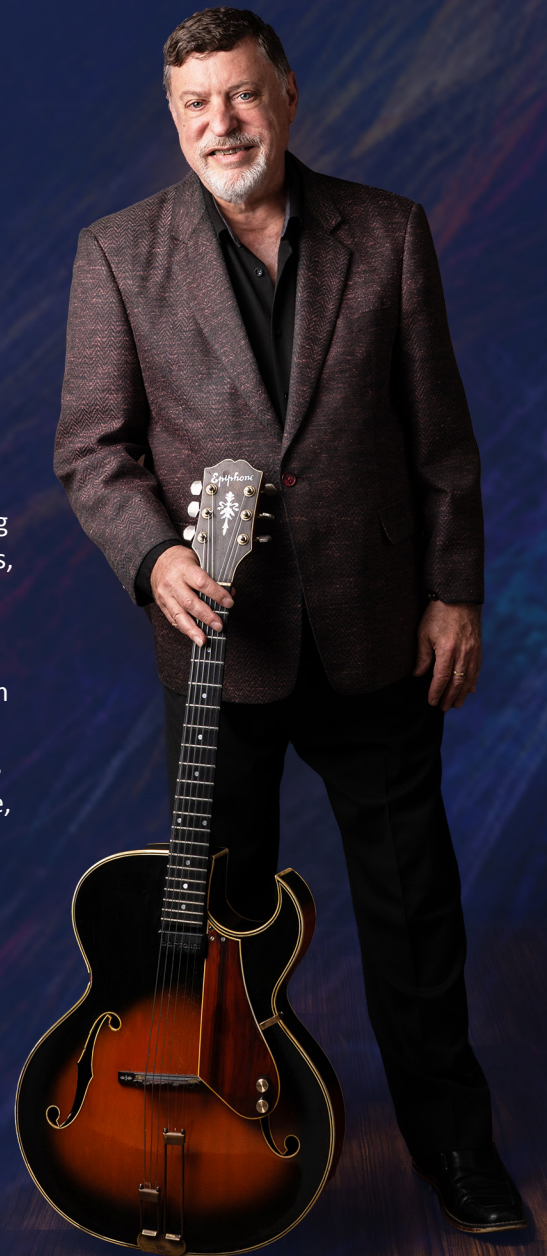
After surviving a life-threatening battle with sepsis that threatened both his health and musical future, Chako returned to composition with a renewed sense of purpose. That experience led directly into *Hard Bop: For The Record*, a piano-less two-horn quintet recording that places his guitar at the harmonic center of the ensemble while reaffirming his commitment to original music, hard bop language, and personal expression within the jazz tradition.

On *Hard Bop: For The Record*, Chako turns renewed purpose into ten original compositions shaped by the soulful drive, memorable melodies, blues feeling, and swinging fire of the hard bop tradition. Inspired by the classic quintets of Horace Silver and Art Blakey, the album features saxophone, trombone, guitar, bass, and drums, with the intentional absence of piano allowing the guitar to serve as the harmonic core of the ensemble.

Written after a life-threatening battle with sepsis, *Hard Bop: For The Record* turns recovery into renewed artistic purpose. The first piece Chako began composing after returning home from the hospital was “Second Chance,” a swinging tune born out of gratitude and the realization that he still had more music to write. That sense of purpose runs through the album, but the recording is not framed as a survival story alone. Its center is the writing: the compositions, arrangements, ensemble interaction, rhythmic character, and melodic storytelling.

The album also marks Chako’s return to the hard bop spirit that first inspired him as a young musician: the soulful drive, memorable melodies, blues feeling, and swinging fire associated with groups led by Horace Silver and Art Blakey. For this project, he assembled a piano-less two-horn quintet featuring guitar, saxophone, trombone, bass, and drums, allowing the guitar to serve as the harmonic core while the horns give the music its bold melodic profile.

The program opens with “Mozambique,” built on a driving bass ostinato and inspired by the Afro-Cuban Mozambique rhythm. “Second Chance” follows as the album’s emotional doorway, connecting Chako’s recovery to a renewed sense of swing and purpose. “Ballad to the Bone” brings the trombone forward in a warm, lyrical ballad setting. “Soar With the Wind” draws inspiration from “Marney,” a Donald Byrd composition recorded on Jackie McLean’s *Vertigo*, and uses an open drum solo to propel the music back into its final melodic statement.



"Bop for Bud" offers a relaxed nod to Bud Powell and the bebop language surrounding "Dance of the Infidels," and "Mr. Higgins" pays tribute to drummer Billy Higgins, whose "Marilyn's Dilemma" has long been one of Chako's favorite vehicles for improvisation. "Time to Play" grows from a cool opening vamp into a more intense solo framework, leading to drums over the vamp, while "Mellow-Dee," the album's second ballad, moves in 3/4 time with trombone carrying the melody in a restrained, lyrical voice. "April Wind," a contrafact based on "I'll Remember April," revisits a concept Chako first recorded on his Singapore album *Where We Find Ourselves*. The closing title track, "For the Record," is a minor blues boogaloo shaped by the Latin-influenced groove tradition of 1960s New York.

The title *For The Record* carries a double meaning. The music was created for this recording, but it also serves as a statement of identity: where Chako comes from musically, what still drives his writing, and how the hard bop tradition continues to offer room for personal expression, ensemble dialogue, and forward motion.

1. Mozambique — 5:43
2. Second Chance — 4:21
3. Ballad to the Bone — 5:58
4. Soar With the Wind — 5:46
5. Bop for Bud — 7:10
6. Mr. Higgins — 5:43
7. Time to Play — 6:36
8. Mellow-Dee — 7:33
9. April Wind — 5:57
10. For the Record — 5:22

All songs composed and arranged by Greg Chako.

Greg Chako — guitar
Brooks Giles — tenor & soprano saxophones
Spencer Merk — trombone
David Lloyd — bass
Alex Merk — drums

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