

Brad Richter Biography

Brad Richter took an unusual path to his career as a composer, touring artist and co-founder of Lead Guitar, a not-for-profit that provides free arts education to thousands of young people in disenfranchised communities throughout the United States.

Born in Enid, Oklahoma in 1969, Richter showed an early interest in music, but absent opportunities to pursue it, he burned through a series of obsessions that included an effort to break the pogo stick world record, riding a bicycle across Oklahoma and running a marathon – the latter two at age twelve. That same year he saved enough money mowing lawns to buy his first guitar, a \$40 Kalamazoo electric found at a local pawnshop. From that moment he poured his energy into teaching himself to play and compose.

On his eighteenth birthday Richter left Enid for Los Angeles where he spent his days working as a landscaper, dishwasher and house painter, all the while using every spare moment to practice and compose. His first professional engagement was at Whiskey-a-Go-Go, playing his own guitar compositions as an opening act for local heavy metal bands.

At nineteen and looking for a next adventure Richter headed to Chicago where, with no formal music training, he won a full scholarship to the American Conservatory of Music. He later earned a Master's Degree in guitar and composition from the Royal College of Music in London and became the first guitarist in that college's history to win the coveted Thomas Morherr Prize for voice accompaniment. On returning to the US he notched several competition wins, including the International Fingerstyle Guitar Championship and the International Composer's Guild Competition.

Richter's legacy as a performer includes nearly one-thousand concerts in North America and Europe and innumerable appearances on NPR's *Performance Today*. An avid collaborator, his long-term touring partners were cellist Viktor Uzur, with whom Brad recorded three critically acclaimed albums as the Richter Uzur Duo, and guitarist Carlos Bonell, his teacher at the Royal College of Music. A run as solo accompanist for the Grammy-winning Phoenix Chorale and composing *Navigating Lake Bonneville*, a concert-length work for choir, guitar, percussion, cello, soprano and narrator commissioned by Weber State University stand out in terms of project-based collaborations. Broadway legend Ben Vereen and Grammy-winners the Pacifica Quartet and David Finckel are among those who have premiered his compositions and

arrangements. Other commissions of note include: *Duo Concerto for Cello and Guitar*, written with Viktor Uzur for the Jackson Symphony Orchestra; *Devil in the Details*, commissioned by the National Music Teachers Association, and music for an episode of the PBS series *The Desert Speaks*.

In 2019 Richter's performing career was cut short by issues resulting from Lyme disease - a development which, far from sapping his energy, has strengthened Brad's resolve to create arts education opportunities for young people nationwide.

Since its inception in 1999 when Brad penned the program's curriculum, Lead Guitar has expanded from its base in Tucson to reach thousands of young people in Chicago, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Oklahoma and Colorado and earned the support of the National Endowment for the Arts. Through the University of Arizona and in collaboration with faculty from its College of Fine Arts, Richter has applied the Lead Guitar model to a variety of artistic disciplines, including dance, percussion, theater and the visual arts in order to provide a wide swath of free arts learning opportunities to schools in low socio-economic status communities. Brad is the founding Director of a newly formed University of Arizona unit that houses those programs: Arizona Arts in Schools.