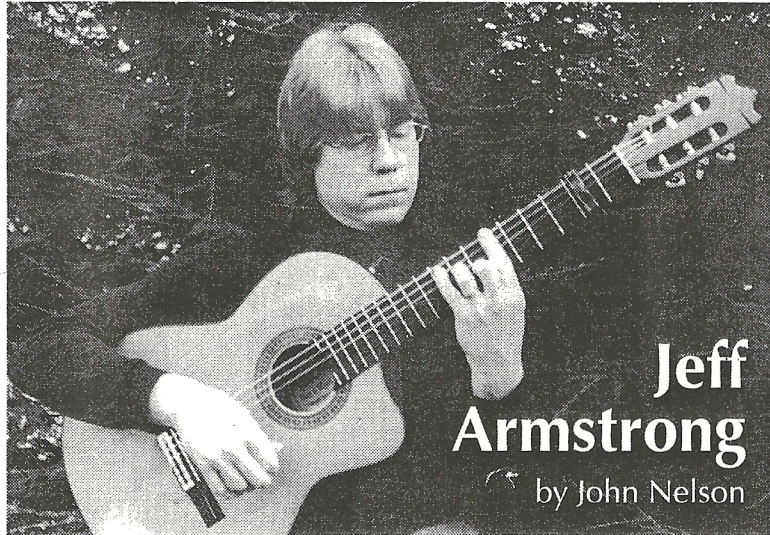


## Artist



**Jeff  
Armstrong**  
by John Nelson

Guitarist and composer Jeff Armstrong is one of many Hudson Valley musicians who will be taking area stages this Saturday night to help ring in the New Year. Armstrong will perform at two different venues – Millbrook First Night in downtown Millbrook at 5 and 6 p.m., and the Rio Mexican Eatery and Bar on Raymond Avenue in Poughkeepsie from 7 to 9 p.m.

In an earlier incarnation, Armstrong played heavy metal guitar with his band D.I.E. (Death Inevitable). Today, however, the Hyde Park resident has re-established himself as a classical guitarist, focusing on flamenco music.

**John Nelson (JN): Describe your lifestyle and how it contributes to your process as an artist.**

**Jeff Armstrong (JA):** My current lifestyle revolves around my wife, Karin, and my two daughters, Leandra and Madison. They are very inspirational and supportive. I am assistant professor of guitar at Marist College. I teach part-time at Dutchess Community College and Bard College. I also play two to four nights a week on average, but generally get home in time to be with the family.

**JN: So how does someone go from years of playing heavy metal guitar to just concentrating on classical guitar?**

**JA:** Going from heavy metal to classical guitar was a very natural progression. I incorporated classical guitar in the heavy metal music, with intros and interludes. Metal has intense and

dramatic themes, as does classical music. Cutting my hair eventually was the hardest part.

**JN: Who have been your musical influences and why?**

**JA:** I have many influences, because I play many various styles.

Classical – Paganini, Vivaldi, Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Bartók.

Blues – Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, ZZ Top, George Thorogood, Dave Edmunds, SRV (Stevie Ray Vaughan).

Flamenco – Paco Peña, Sabicas, Paco de Lucía, Manitas de Plata.

Metal – Alex Lifeson (Rush), Iron Maiden, Kirk Hammet (old Metallica), Slayer, Sepultura.

Generally, I feel that all these artists have originality, brilliant technique, emotion and integrity.

**JN: You are also a music teacher. How does instructing someone about music help your own artistic pursuits?**

**JA:** Teaching students has had a profound impact on me, and my music. I need to be on my toes about a wide variety of music subjects as well as keep my enthusiasm for music, because they (my students) are eager to learn.

**JN: When you're not playing or teaching music, what else do you like to do? Do you have other passions?**

**JA:** I like "trains, cars and guitars ..."

I am vice president of the Hudson Valley Railroad Society at the Hyde Park Train Station Museum ([www.hydeparkstation.com](http://www.hydeparkstation.com)), belong to the Hyde Park Historical Society and am active in other town organizations. I have a 1931 Model A Ford Roadster we drive and show as well as a 1972 Plymouth I am currently

restoring. I also follow New York Giants football and NASCAR (Richard and Kyle Petty).

**JN: How would you describe yourself as a performer? What kind of relationship do you have with the audience when you're on stage?**

**JA:** I feel I am intense about the music and the performance, but I am casual and connect with the audience. Somewhat informal ...

**JN: From where do you draw inspiration for your compositions?**

**JA:** Life, love and family.

**JN: Do you have anything special planned for your New Year's Eve performance at Millbrook's First Night?**

**JA:** I'll play a "mixed set" in Millbrook (5 and 6 p.m. shows). Then I'll be at the Rio on Raymond Avenue in Poughkeepsie from 7 to 9 p.m., playing classical, flamenco, pop and holiday standards. I play Spanky's Restaurant (Main Street, Poughkeepsie) on Thursday Nights and the Rio on most Fridays and Saturdays.

**JN: Describe yourself in one word. Why that word?**

**JA:** One word? Balance.

This is difficult, but I think it best describes my way of balancing my family life and professional life. Professionally, balancing the performance and compositional styles, being very active and having time to be with my family.

**JN: What is your personal definition of art?**

**JA:** Art is the artificial representation of something real that the artist feels. The art of music requires the knowledge of understanding, ability to execute and the desire to express your ideas. Art is integrity. ◊