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AUSTRALIAN GUITAR DIGITAL #137

EACH ISSUE, WE BRING YOU INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS, SAMPLE TRACKS, VIDEO TUTORIALS, AND STYLE STUDIES COMPLETE WITH TABLATURE AND BACKING TRACKS – FOR MORE INFO, HEAD TO **GUITARHEROES.COM.AU**

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

AN INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN VERDERY

Described by *The New York Times* as “an iconoclastic player”, Benjamin Verdery has been hailed for his innovative and eclectic musical career. He’s been the Professor of Guitar at the Yale School of Music since 1985, and Artistic Director of 92Y Art of the Guitar series (NYC) since 2006.

As a recording artist, Verdery has released more than 15 albums. His most recent, *On Vineyard Sound* (released as The Ben Verdery Guitar Project), features him performing music composed by his colleagues at Yale, as well as one his own compositions. It was released on the ECR label, an online music platform Verdery co-curates with guitarist-songwriter Solomon Silber.

In 2020, Verdery will release a new album of his own material, as well as the debut release by Bryce Dessner’s Quintet for High Strings with the St. Lawrence Quartet.

Verdery has created and released several exquisitely filmed videos, including his *Shangri La* series – filmed at Doris Duke’s Shangri La Centre for Islamic Arts & Cultures in Honolulu, Hawaii – which features Barrios Mangore, Manuel de Falla and Isaac Albeniz. His two most recent videos are for Seymour Bernstein’s “Searching For A Chorale” and Bryce Dessner’s “Portbou”.

A prolific composer in his own right, Verdery has been commissioned to compose works for a wide range of releases, events and groups, including the Pensacola Guitar Orchestra, John Williams and John Etheridge, Wake Forest University, and the score for the documentary film *Corida Goyesque*.

Verdery’s Scenes from Ellis Island, for guitar orchestra, has been extensively broadcast and performed at festivals and universities in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Europe. The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet also included a shortened version on their release *Air And Ground*.



TUTORIAL VIDEOS

MASTERS OF ROCK

Steve Flack presents a tutorial based on the style of a “Master of Rock Guitar” – in this issue, part one of a Lou Reed-style study. Includes backing tracks, tablature and Guitar Pro 6 files.

SLIDE GUITAR

Steve presents an ongoing series covering slide guitar techniques. This issue presents part three of a Dwayne Allman-style study. Includes backing track, tablature and Guitar Pro 6 files.

IMPROVISING

Steve explores the ‘secrets’ to improv. This issue presents the first part of a study on John Coltrane’s classic “Green Dolphin Street”. Includes tablature, solo and backing tracks, and Guitar Pro 6 files.

UNPLUGGED BY ARRANGEMENT

Steve presents one of his unaccompanied arrangements of popular music for the guitar. In this issue, an arrangement of The 4 Tops’ “Reach Out, I’ll Be There”. Includes tablature.

“KILLER BACH” WITH STEVE FLACK

Steve Flack performs a J.S. Bach piece for solo guitar. Not for the faint of heart!

Also available are our regular columns, supporting tracks and tablature, plus artist tracks, What’s New, gear galleries and more!



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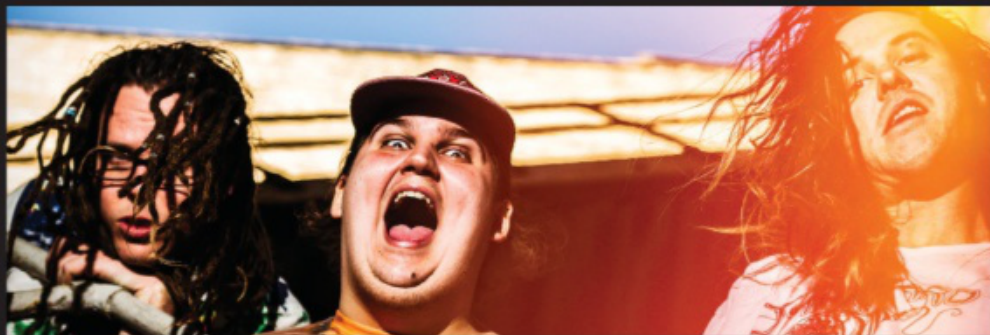
LITTLE QUIRKS

THEY ARE Three inhumanly talented folk-pop firestarters from the NSW Central Coast, dealing in soul-warming indie-pop song structures made all the more beautiful with mandolin riffs, off-kilter percussion and three-part harmonies that constantly threaten to steal the show. All three members share the mic equally, with sisters Abbey and Mia Toole behind the axe and kit, respectively, and cousin Jaymi on mandolin duties.

THEY SOUND LIKE The perfect soundtrack for summer mornings spent road-tripping through the mountains en route to this ‘hidden gem’ beach your sister’s girlfriend swears by – it’s no shock at all Little Quirks are a coastal crew.

YOU’LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Boy & Bear, All My Exes Live In Texas, and the first few Mumford & Sons records. There was a little chunk of time towards the end of the ‘00s where Top 40 pop types went through a big neo-folk phase – if you found yourself letting your inner yee-haw shine back then, Little Quirks will pull you right back into the thick of it.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Their recently released third EP, *Cover My Eyes*, which across five neat slithers of sharp, twangy guitars, and vocal harmonies that shoot for the heart like bloodthirsty ticks, unfurls everything there is to love about Little Quirks. It’s tight, bright and emphatically emotive, and the production (led by alt-folk luminary Wayne Connolly) is downright flawless.



WALKEN

THEY ARE Three fun-loving best mates from Brisbane hellbent on brewing up a gut-punching frenzy of pop, rock, punk and grunge. Driven by some beautifully banging beats from drumlord Beej Vaughan, the earsplitting double-axe attack is wrangled by Patrick Shipp and Matt Cochran, the latter of whom also belts his heart and soul out into the mic.

THEY SOUND LIKE The next biggest name in Australia’s burgeoning pop-punk revival scene. They’re derivative of no one, they’re unafraid to take stylistic risks, and although they don’t take themselves too seriously, their jams are all ridiculously tight. And with just a handful of tracks to their name, they’ve explored a stunning expanse of sonic terrain.

YOU’LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Jimmy Eat World, *Folie*-era Fall Out Boy and WAAX. They’re very much in the same class as other modern Aussie rock bands – if you’re into anything on Poison City or I OH YOU, there’s a good chance you’ll dig Walken – but they revel in a flavour and authenticity entirely of their own.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT The equally fun and feisty new single, “Regular Human Person” – their first release in over two years, and a monolithic comeback to say the least. The lyrics are a tad cheesy (and intentionally so), but somehow, the trio avoid falling into the pit of “wanky ‘90s dork-rock facsimile” that so many bands that try their hand at such a concept do.



TEEN JESUS AND THE JEAN TEASERS

THEY ARE One of the few reasons worth defending the ACT, and a wickedly fiery throwback to the golden age of ‘90s alt-rock. They formed at a sleepover after watching *School Of Rock*, and wielding a huge wall of sound with their SG and Tele combo, shredders Scarlett McKahey and Anna Ryan have proved themselves more than worthy to follow in the footsteps of rock’s greatest.

THEY SOUND LIKE Something you’d put on when you’re not necessarily feeling angsty, but need to scratch the musical itch that only something that sounds angsty will. They deal in coming-of-age anthems for those who like their distortion heavy and neighbours angry.

YOU’LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Siouxsie And The Banshees, Cherry Glazerr and Sunny Day Real Estate. The core of their sound is undoubtedly nostalgia, but strewn through a filter of youthfulness that adds a whole new dynamic to gristly, grungy might of those above.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT One of their downright eruptive live shows, where Ryan, McKahey, drummer Neve van Boxsel and bassist Jaida Stephenson gel with a creative calamity that few of their peers could match. It’s also only there that you can cop their best song, “Swimming Pool”. One day they’ll drop a studio version of it, and when they do, the Australian rock scene will be forever changed.



OUTRIGHT

THEY ARE Quite possibly the single most underrated hardcore band in Australia; they’ve been kicking down doors and spurring circle pits en masse since 2010, yet they’re an elusive bunch – the undisputed kings and queen of Melbourne’s underground mosh scene. Driven by frontwoman Jelena Goluza’s brutally badass bellows, the dual shred action from Joel Cairns and Lincoln le Fevre is something you really need to hear to believe.

THEY SOUND LIKE Pure, unwavering catharsis. Any shit day can be made immensely better by popping on some headphones, clearing out all your expensive/fragile furniture, and blasting an Outright cut at full volume.

YOU’LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Knocked Loose, Code Orange, Converge and whatever bloody-nosed up-and-coming hellions are belting their hearts out at the local PCYC this Friday night (don’t forget your tenner for the door charge). They go hard as all sweet hell, they’re unforgivingly loud, and their progressive message is one that everyone should get around.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT The breakneck-paced bangers “No Fear” and “Holler” – two fierce and fiery feminist anthems loaded with crunchy riffs and belting bass. We’ve got our fingers crossed that these two recent singles lead to a full-length album, but for now, they’re absolutely worth jamming on repeat ad nauseam.



MAX QUINN

HE IS A living meme, the unofficial Prime Minister of the online Australian music community, and a singer-songwriter from Ballina with a penchant for viscerally poignant lyrical themes and ballads that'll still make you want to pump your fists.

HE SOUNDS LIKE The sonic equivalent of slipping into a nice, warm bath with a mug of hot choccy after a tough winter's day on the clock. No matter your ailments, Quinn's music is as therapeutic as it is fun (see: very).

YOU'LL DIG HIM IF YOU LIKE Kisschasy, Something For Kate and Courtney Barnett. There's a hint of folk lingering in the shadows of his punchy pop-rock numbers, but the primary flavours are ripping guitars, walloping drums, and a heavily accented holler that instantly ropes you in and demands your attention – that is, until you've learned all the lyrics and you find yourself belting along with Quinn. '00s alt-rock fanatics will fall head over heels before the first chorus ends.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Last year's slow-burning soul-thumper "Live Again" and its raw and enigmatic predecessor "Serotonin". Both are witty and warbly pop jams about Quinn's struggles with mental health, made all the more powerful with their riveting choruses and warm, lightly distorted guitar parts. Delicious.



BEN LEECE

HE IS One of the brightest new voices in Australian country, his sharp, Tennessee-inspired drawl and twangy acoustic juts pummelling through the mix with a distinct balance of passion and power. He tugs at the heartstrings with his bluntly emotive passages and biting honesty, and sonically, finds avenues to intensity by way of dry, lowkey strumming over dense, yet beautifully natural soundscapes.

HE SOUNDS LIKE A double shot of your finest aged whisky, neat.

YOU'LL DIG HIM IF YOU LIKE Nick Cave, Tim Rogers and Wilco. There's a striking Southern punch to Leece's music, but it never feels like he's playing musical dress-up. The authenticity at play is nothing short of breathtaking, and it's without a doubt he'd fit right at home on the Bluesfest and Tamworth Country Music Festival mainstages.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT His riveting debut album, *No Wonder The World Is Exhausted*. It's a play-by-play through everything that makes country music great, delivered in a bold, acoustic-heavy mix unfettered by any unnecessary bells or whistles. This is Leece as raw as he comes, pouring his heart and soul out onto tape.

WOLFJAY

THEY ARE An idiosyncratic indie-pop powerhouse who's very quickly gearing up to cannonball into the mainstream. Their lovably lush soundscapes are layered with crunchy percussion, dreamy synths and heady, honeyed guitars. It's the solo project of Adelaide's brilliant Jack Alexander, and we honestly have a hard time believing one person alone can create such rich and rousing material.

THEY SOUND LIKE The walk home after a first date where the dinner was scrumptious, conversation bloomed and the two of you got along like a house on fire. Wolfjay has good vibes on tap.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE M83, The Midnight and The Cure. You're reading about them in a guitar mag, of course, but it's honestly the twinkly, pseudo-melancholic electronica vibes that stand out most in Wolfjay's discography. If you have a soft spot for synthpop or like to mellow out with a bit of progressive house, you'll likely find that the drawcard for this mind-melting multi-instrumentalist.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT The kaleidoscopic new single "In Memory Of", which runs for just shy of three minutes but feels impossibly short. The moody cut canters along with a chill, droning melody that's far too easy to lose yourself in, bright and buzzy guitar lines keeping the beat afloat until they culminate in a big, beautiful solo.



SHADY NASTY

THEY ARE A trio of terror from Sydney whose eccentric and experimental fusion of punk, hip-hop, industrial metal, jazz, math-rock, emo and shoegaze makes them impossible to define succinctly. They left us with our jaws properly unhinged at BIGSOUND last year, and with good reason – Shady Nasty are completely one-of-a-kind, and pretty goddamn great at what they do with their combined talents.

THEY SOUND LIKE A total clusterf***, in all the best possible ways. If you've ever had to pull an overnight study sesh for a uni exam on a topic you had no bloody clue about, you'll know that truly unique feeling of existential dread. Shady Nasty take that dread and spin it into musical masochism. Addictive as hell.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Superego, Death Grips and Ministry. If you're the type to start your day with a can of V or always fantasise about ripping doughnuts at that roundabout down the street, Shady Nasty are the band for you.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT The mind-melting new EP *Bad Posture*, which dropped like an atom bomb on us at the end of February. It's four tracks long and barely scrapes the 15-minute mark, and yet it's a powerful platter of everything Shady Nasty have to offer – from the raw, to the melancholic, to the downright intense. Give it a spin, and then catch the band in the flesh. It's onstage that they truly shine, and there's a good chance you'll leave their set a changed person.



SIMPLE CREATURES

THE VERONICAS

GOOD THINGS FESTIVAL

WHEN: **FRIDAY DECEMBER 6TH, 2019**WHERE: **FLEMINGTON RACECOURSE, MELBOURNE VIC**REVIEW: **MATT DORIA** • PHOTOS: **PETER ZALUZYNY**

After its unequivocally spectacular debut last year, the Good Things festival is back for another crash-hot round of rock, punk, pop and mosh. Punters arrive in droves for the first acts, with all nine-plus hours of the schedule packed tightly with international icons and local legends alike. For us, the festivities kick off with a poignant – if decidedly polarising – set from web-famous weirdcore princess **Poppy**.

Across 45 minutes as upbeat as they are unsettling, the 25-year-old fuses bright bubblegum pop hooks with thumping hip-hop beats and guttural black metal riffs – if you're wondering how that works, don't, because we certainly can't explain it. Somehow, though, she and her band (who, by the way, are wearing deeply disturbing latex masks of Poppy herself) pull it off without a hitch. It's something you truly need to witness in the flesh to properly understand.

Helping us reconnect with reality are the ska-punk superstars in **Reel Big Fish**. Complete with the prerequisite Hawaiian shirts and horn section, the Californian quintet deal a tireless hand of skank-worthy scorches from all corners of their 28-year catalogue. It's stunning how tight frontman Aaron Barrett is – especially given the blistering heat and his defiantly inappropriate attire for such – as he couples his quick and quirky vocal quips with frenzied shredding on his fretboard.

Our parents taught us that if we have nothing nice to say, it's better to say nothing at all. So, with all due respect to **Ice Nine Kills**, we're gonna skip discussing their performance (which greatly favours gimmicks over musical prowess) and jump straight to **Dance Gavin Dance**, who actually put some effort into their career-spanning showcase of pummelling

mosh-pop and mind-shattering math-rock. Will Swan holds virtually the entire weight of the band on his shoulders, his inflammable lead riffage a potent focal point of their 45-minute eruption of energy.

However curious their inclusion on the lineup seemed at first, **The Veronicas** become an instant highlight of the day when they blast into a string of their early-'00s pop-rock anthems. Between their resoundingly dynamic stage presence, the tongue-in-cheek Blink-182 cover and the wall of death that capped their set, the Brissy-native pop duo prove without a hitch why their comeback is one to keep an eye on. Seconds after they saunter offstage, **Trivium** storm out to remind us that, yes, this is a rock festival, and yes, shit is about to hit the fan. Hell hath no fury like Corey Beaulieu with his axe in hand, every toothy bend and turbulent breakdown he conjures equally beautiful and brutal.

With a new album on the horizon, **Enter Shikari** are as sharp and springy as ever, more than making up for their extended hiatus from Oz touring. The electroniccore warriors focus on the short, fast and loud, taking full advantage of every second they're doled with a wall-to-wall onslaught of synths and shredding. He's visibly hungover, but frontman Rou Reynolds still pours every ounce of his soul into the mic – he sings sweetly on recent single "Stop The Clocks", slams into the chants on "Anaesthetist" with an intimidating British bite, and lets all hell break loose for the crushingly chaotic "Paddington Frisk".

Starving for a sneaky bit of pop-punk, we ditch our dinner plans to cop a chunk of **Simple Plan**'s domination of the mainstage. Though certainly not at their peak, Pierre Bouvier and co. deliver an impressively cool and kinetic performance, with throwback jam "Addicted" an especially tasty

moment in their set.

As we settle into the evening, it's the local favourites amongst the bill that (rightfully) steal the spotlight. **Thy Art Is Murder** throw us for six, as they tend to, with their noxious flurry of blastbeats and breakdowns, proving that deathcore is alive, well, and certainly not to be f***ed with. After over a year in hibernation, **Violent Soho** make their headliner-worthy comeback with a stacked set of their grungy alt-rock gems, frontman Luke Boerdam and lead axeman James Tidswell trading fiery juts and gravelly jams aplenty. And rounding out the triple-hit in a powerfully intoxicating wall of sound, **Karnivool** throw us deep into the ether with their riff-heavy unfurling of polychromatic prog-rock.

Leaning on their heavier cuts, **A Day To Remember** have their sights set on brewing the festival's most chaotic pits. And with a breathless string of barbarous bangers like "I'm Made Of Wax" and "2nd Sucks", it shouldn't come as any shock that they succeed. On the other side of the site, **Simple Creatures** prove effortlessly that doughy, adolescent pop-rock has a bright future ahead of itself, their simple, yet authentically energetic bops earning many a well-deserved shake of the fist.

Reigning as the undisputed kings of modern Australian metal, the night comes to its peak with a stadium-level showcase from the one and only **Parkway Drive**. Their set is a celebration of grandiose and guttural excess – the riffs are enormous, punishingly heavy and spine-rattlingly loud, equal in abundance to the billowing reams of fire that erupt with every one of Jeff Ling's inhumanly savage breakdowns. This is the kind of set that goes down in history; that Good Things is a part of the narrative makes it all the more special. 

TASH SULTANA

VAMPIRE WEEKEND

FALLS FESTIVAL

WHEN: **TUESDAY DECEMBER 31ST 2019 - THURSDAY JANUARY 2ND, 2020**

WHERE: **NORTH BYRON PARKLANDS, BYRON BAY NSW**

REVIEW: **MATT DORIA** • PHOTOS: **BRITT ANDREWS**

By the time we make it to the festival entry on day one, we're already caked in sweat and dust - a prerequisite, though, for any camper making their way into Falls after setting up their "home" for the next three nights. After perusing the grounds in search of the cheapest spot slinging watermelon juice and playing a quick game of volleyball at the makeshift beach propped up between stages, we settle in on the amphitheatre hills and prepare to have our minds blown by a true blue Australian icon: **John Farnham**. An odd choice for a festival like Falls? Absolutely. One we still wouldn't miss for the world? *Absolutely*.

Farnsey is in remarkable shape as he takes to the Valley stage at sunset, cantering through a choice slither of his catalogue - marvellous nuggets of banter scattered throughout - before closing, naturally, with his seminal pub karaoke classic "You're The Voice" (and yes, virtually everyone in attendance screamed along). Spirits are strikingly high when **Tash Sultana** follows him with their 45-minute set of sprawling, snaky guitar rhythms and serendipitous synthage. They've come a long way from busking on the sidewalks of Melbourne, wrangling a one-person powerhouse setup of prickly psych-rock and rippling reggae with a level of might that most established virtuosos would fail to replicate.

We call it a night early to celebrate our New Year in the pavilion (which is, like every year, buzzing with liveliness and its own unique culture), and rise early on day two for a rip-roaring set from Wollongong skate-punks **Totty**. It's instantly clear why they've captured the heart of the underground scene: their songs are short, snappy and super fun, and their easygoing stage presence

is top-notch. It's just three best mates having a jam, shooting the shit and showing off their skills - which they have a crazy amount of. They're a perfect warm-up, too, for Canberran grunge-pop trailblazers **Teen Jesus And The Jean Teasers**. From the light and lively "Swimming Pool" to the crunchy and convulsive "Hallway To Norway", the foursome hit every mark with a bullseye.

Hot off the heels of their debut album *Big Grief*, **WAAX** launch themselves upon the Forest stage with pure, incandescent fury, bursting into a biting blitzkrieg of highlights from the disc, as well as some delightfully deep cuts that send their crowd into a raging tizzy. The only other act on this bill who could muster such intensity is **Yungblud**, so props to the organisers for popping his set on right after the Brissy quintet's. Dominic Harrison is an irrepressible force of manic moxie as he tears through hit after hit, stopping only to sling on and off his guitar between the setlist's meatier tracks (which there are thankfully plenty of).

Bounding around the stage with youthful ardour and hopping at whim between keyboards, guitars and percussion, Sydney pop-rockers **Holy Holy** prove themselves to be the perfect comedown act as we roll into the evening. Smiles wide and energy buoyant, we're ready to get our melancholy on with new-wave crooner luminary **Lewis Capaldi**. The laidback Scot breaks up his cruisy, heartstring-tugging soft-rock jams with side-splitting banter - it's not often you see punters vacillate between belly laughs and tears a dozen times across an hour, but if anyone can make it work, it's Capaldi.

The amphitheatre is teeming with elation for **Of Monsters And Men**, with the Icelandic pop-folkers coasting through a sharp and spirited

set of their sprightly summer anthems. We end the night with an hour of pure, mind-melting magic from the German indie-rockers in **Milky Chance**. Cuts from their recent *Mind The Moon* LP are highlights in their calculated restraint and more cerebral noodling, but it's older gems like the puckish "Ego" and hallucinogenic "Stolen Dance" that truly make the pits erupt.

Adrian Eagle sets the mood for our surprisingly lowkey third and final day, as the up-and-coming Adelaidean spotlights his polychromatic fusion of rootsy hip-hop and mellow pop hooks. We get a decent hit of early-arvo energy from pub-rockers **Bad//Dreems**, whose walloping Tele riffs, gnarling solos and bright, booming choruses make them a standout act of the festival. Their fiery stamina stands out, too, sandwiched between Eagle and the ultra chill **#1 Dads**. The side-project of Big Scary frontman Tom Iansek, the guitar-pop outfit revel in breezy and understated bops that burn slowly, but with a fire that hits the soul fiercely.

The rest of our day is admittedly quiet, until a loveably cool night settles in and the festival comes to a rousing close at the hands of pop kings **Vampire Weekend**. Between the jammy, classic rock-channelling cuts from this year's *Father Of The Bride*, the sparkly synthpop gems from 2013's *Modern Vampires* and the perky pseudo-reggae scorchers of the New Yorkers' earlier works, the hourlong set is wonderfully unpredictable and consistently exciting. Performing as a septet, their mix is layered dense with punchy and peculiar instrumentation - the guitars are the stars, though, from the intoxicating grooves of frontman Ezra Koenig's hollowbody noodling on "Sunflower" to Brian Jones' flamenco fretting on "Sympathy".

POLARIS

NORTHLANE

UNIFY GATHERING

WHEN: **FRIDAY JANUARY 10TH – SUNDAY 13TH, 2020**WHERE: **TARWIN LOWER, SOUTH GIPPSLAND VIC**REVIEW: **MATT DORIA AND MILO DUREAU** • PHOTOS: **BRITT ANDREWS**

It seems Thor was upset he'd missed out on tickets to the hottest heavy music gathering of 2020 – virulent thunderstorms wreak havoc on the Friday morning, wind and rain terrorising the campsite and causing major delays to the stage operations. Schedules fast become irrelevant as the crew endeavour to stage any entertainment at all, to varying success; such means we miss out on highly anticipated acts like **Tired Lion** and **Antagonist AD** – though all reports indicate that punters braving the elements for them are treated generously for their dedication.

The first act we catch is a notably soggy **Dear Seattle**, unfazed by the gloom as they belt through a frenzied flaunting of bangers from their hit-heavy debut album, *Don't Let Go*. Our troubles melt away like butter on toast when frontman Brae Fisher hits the first wailing pring of his guitar on “Daytime TV”, the band's rowdy crowd chanting every lyric back like it's gospel. **Architects** follow them to rapturous acclaim on the mainstage, doling out a delicious hit of caustic catharsis with their PA-pulverising metalcore gold. It's the UK titans' only show on Oz soil this year, and they make full use of every second they have – Josh Middleton and Adam Christianson riff with impassioned fury, down-tuned crunches aplenty as Sam Carter spits pure vocal fire.

So day one was a bust, we'll admit, but after some much-needed Z's (in the back of our car, since our tent had become a glorified kiddie pool), we're back in high spirits and starving for a circle pit. Cue the fire-eyed Adelaidians in **Sleep Talk**, who, armed with cuts from their manic and motley debut LP *Everything In Colour*, deliver a breathtaking 30 minutes of pummelling post-hardcore, soul-twisting emo and bleak-as-hell grunge. Straight after, **The Brave** take us down a winding rabbit-hole of cerebral metalcore stylings, axemen Kurt Thomson and Denham Lee building a vicious and vexing soundscape that keeps our jaws planted firmly on the ground for the whole span of their set.

With more bands left to play than time to schedule them, UNIFY did what they said they never would and propped a second stage up in the circus tent (which existed formerly as a shady hangout spot and bar hub). This becomes a hotspot for pop-punk lovers, kicking off with a rabid and raw throwback to the '90s courtesy of Melbourne up-and-comers **Something Something Explosion**. Summarised pretty aptly by their name alone, the trio soar with breakneck-paced beats and sour, scuzzy riffs that come like a sonic shot of pure caffeine straight to the brain. The nostalgic effervescence rolls on with **Columbus**, whose dorky and doughy, Weezer-esque pop jams evoke a sea of smiles and pumping fists.

We head down a more traditional, mid-'00s influenced pop-punk path with the back-to-back blow of Melbourne maestros **Between You And Me** and Sydney scorchers **Eat Your Heart Out**. Both revelled in bright, booming guitars and summery hooks that spurred circle pits en masse, an overall sense of elation bounding around the tent as they ripped through cut after cut of youthful energy à la Telecaster. **The Beautiful Monument** kick the crunchiness up a touch with their metallic bends and down-tuned jutting, but their inescapably catchy rhythms and towering choruses make them a favourite of the pop inclined.

Over on the mainstage, heaviness reigns supreme. **Kublai Khan** bring the Texas touch with their gritty and gory hardcore shredding, before **Knocked Loose** roll out and prove why their name is outright unavoidable at the moment. They have the energy of a hardcore band, metalcore-esque song structures and the tonal bleakness of black metal. Breakdowns don't just feel like an invitation to mosh – they barrel down in the mix like atom bombs of drop D-tuned decimation, the unremitting ire and angst of their songs rendered into visceral bursts of savage shredding.

The scathing pseudo-nu-metal flavour of **Stray From The Path** makes the New York foursome

stand out like a steak in a vegan restaurant – their beats are sick and their riffs are slick, and the way mic-lord Drew York whips around the stage incites pure f***ing chaos in the pits. **Tonight Alive's** set almost feels like respite after, their cruisy pop-rock stylings a welcome break from all the guttural dread and flying ankles. It's a noteworthy set for the Sydney crew, back in action after a year of hiatus and hitting every last beat like they never left.

Marking the official last show of the *Mortal Coil* era, **Polaris** jam a headline set and a half's worth of venomous fervour into their 50-minute incursion. Ryan Siew's merciless fretboard abuse is simply captivating, every ultra technical twist as searing as frontman Jamie Hails' monstrous battlecries. Up next is a crash-hot showcase of sonic intensity from their fellow Sydney-native metalcore maniacs in **Northlane**, with gems from this year's game-changing *Alien* LP sending shockwaves right through to the campsite.

We'll be honest: for a solid few years there, it seemed like we'd never see **The Ghost Inside** kick ass again. As their second show back in action since a life-threatening bus accident in 2015, it's an incredibly special performance, both for us and the Cali quintet themselves. Highlights are abundant, but with Zach Johnson's lead riffage especially frenzied, “Dear Youth” and closer “Engine 45” are certainly cuts we won't soon forget. There's a palpable sense that The Ghost Inside are genuinely thankful to be onstage again, reflected in performances that prove their talents haven't wavered one bit in four years off.

As our next-day bangovers are soothed by the acoustic stylings of **Marcus Bridge** (who shines just as much with his soft-pop crooners as he does going ham in Northlane), our minds are officially made up: even if dreary weather made it the roughest one yet, UNIFY 2020 was a *damn* fun time. We can't wait to see what they have up their sleeves for the next one. 🎸

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FROM THE HEART

ON THE COMEDOWN FROM HER SUGAR RUSH, POP QUEEN **JACK RIVER** TAPS INTO A DEEPER, DARKER AND MORE PERSONAL CORNER OF HER ARTISTRY WITH THE *STRANGER HEART* EP. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

In case its Valentine's Day release didn't make it obvious enough, the title of Jack River's new record should let you know enough about its subject matter. The seven-track *Stranger Heart* EP is another release jam-packed with ooey, gooey love songs that'll make you feel like you're 15 and falling head over heels for that one girl in your English class all over again. Except this time, you won't be savagely rejected and embarrassed in front of all your mates, and Holly Rankin is upping the stakes by adding a piquant dose of peculiarity to the mix.

Following on from the bright and buoyant debut LP *Sugar Mountain* – a proper sequel to which is already on the cards – Rankin has ditched the bubblegum sweetness, instead toying with seven uniquely potent and provoking reappropriations of the concept of love.

After the twinkly synth-based opener “Lonely Hunter” hints at a trippy, kaleidoscopic journey ahead, Rankin jumps straight into the sonic black hole with the gauzy and droning “Later Flight”, its crunchy ‘90s pop riffs digging like daggers into the slits that her honeyed quips open up. With an immediate dip in tone, the acoustic “Night Song” hits especially hard in its drunken melancholy. Rankin takes full advantage of the emotional ebb and flow that her loud-soft contrasts imbue – “Dark Star” is another dancefloor-ready pop anthem, followed instantly by another lowkey lighter-swayer in “Closer”. Production shines on the double dose of downbeat dreariness in “Infinity Roses” and “80sHD”, leaving us sated and feeling sappy in love, but certainly hungry for more.

With the EP now making hearts flutter all over the world, we got down to business with Rankin to find out what makes this *Stranger Heart* beat.

So my first impression of this EP was that it feels a bit darker and a bit more personal than *Sugar Mountain*. Was the intention to sort of take the listener a little deeper down the rabbit hole and get a little weirder after establishing a connection on LP1?

Yeah, definitely. I guess I felt I needed to after *Sugar Mountain*, which was kind of big and bold, and lyrically quite aspirational. That

record was about always pushing forward and striving for something better, but this record's very here-and-now and personal, and I wanted to explore a few specific feelings that I've been experiencing. And just make sure that that layer of realness is at the foundation of Jack River, and what I write next time as well.

I know that on top of this EP, you're hard at work on a second full-length for 2021... How far along into that adventure are you?

I've got the bones down and I know what it'll sound like – a lot of that is still in my head, but I've got the name and the sound, and the kind of reasoning I have for all of that, and that's kind of how I start something. It makes it really easy to colour in the lines with songs, or identify the right songs to kind of fit into that mold.

So do you see this EP as a bridge between *Sugar Mountain* and LP2, or did you go into this with the intention of it being a distinct standalone chapter in your discography?

I guess they're all kind of standalone works. I actually kind of had the ideas for all three of these records before *Sugar Mountain* came out, and kind of foresaw the path that I wanted my music and writing to take. It's not a trilogy in the way that they relate – they're not all linked together like the *Lord Of The Rings* series or something. It's more just that these are three phases of things that I know I need to explore to feel accomplished as a writer.

What guitars did you have with you for the recording of *Stranger Heart*?

A broad range, really. I have a little baby Taylor that I take everywhere – it fits on the plane and you can take it wherever you want, so for that reason I end up writing a lot on it. I bought that one when I was in New York, and it was like the one trip where I was like, “I don't need to take a guitar! It's all good. I'll survive without writing.” And I just felt so thirsty without a guitar, like, I needed to just have something beside me. So yeah, that Taylor is a

special one that I don't go anywhere without. And then in the studio, I mainly use a Fender Strat and I write a lot of things down on that. I'm not sure actually what bass we used because my co-producer Xavier [Dunn] pulled out his own bass for that. But really, within the tracks, we layer so many guitars down that there likely isn't any sound that comes from one single guitar.

That off-pink Strat has become pretty synonymous with your live show. What's your connection with it?

I actually stole it off my old guitarist, Alex Bennison – he was playing it in the band for about two years, and I just couldn't stop staring at it. He plays it far better than me, but when you find a guitar that feels like home – the colour and the design, and the feel of it, and then the sound and the tone... I don't know, it's just my favourite little guitar, and onstage it's totally my safety blanket.

Speaking of the live show, what do you have planned for this EP's touring cycle?

It's actually quite a sneaky little release without too much touring attached. We're planning to do a few interesting little things, but we're not really going to properly tour this EP. I'm heading over to the US to play South by Southwest, and then new music is going to follow not too long after. So there will be some shows, just a little latter in the year, maybe.

I saw you put the call out on Facebook that you're keen to play a bunch of weddings...

That is correct! Because this EP is all about love and the heart, it felt like a cool idea to put a call out and say, “I will come to your wedding or party and sing for you.” And we got a really f***ing overwhelming response to that – we received, like, close to 1,000 entries! The entries are absolutely wild: there was someone's parents' 60th, there's a boatwarming party in there, a bunch dog parties, and of course weddings – so many weddings! So it's going to be a very fun little adventure for us. 🎵



CALL OF THE WILD

AHEAD OF THEIR FIRST LOCAL TOUR IN ALMOST HALF A DECADE, **SHEER MAG** SHREDDER **KYLE SEELY** TOUCHES ON THE KEYS TO A PERFECT SHOW AND HIS PERFECT '70S ROCK-CHANNELLING TONE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

With their cool and crunchy sound drawing from equal measures of '70s cigarette-rock and '90s anarcho-punk, it's no surprise that Sheer Mag have rapidly established themselves as one of the best bands on the circuit. If you managed to catch them on their 2016 tour of Australian dives, you'll remember the spine-tickling waves of belting basslines, punishing percussion and gloriously gory guitar riffs, all tied together with some of the world's most raucous and riveting howls courtesy of frontwoman Tina Halladay.

But if you didn't wind up getting sweaty as all hell with us back then (firstly, shame on you, and secondly) never fear, for you're about to have a second chance at copping the inexplicable intensity that is Sheer Mag live in concert. The Philly-native powerhouse are back on Oz shores for the 2020 Brunswick Music Festival, and they're also playing a short stack of headlining sideshows up and down the east coast (and Tassie).

Ahead of what's sure to be one of the year's most unforgettable tours, *Australian Guitar* caught up with lead axeman Kyle Seely - who, it turns out, loves us so much that he recently moved to Melbourne!

What is it that you'd say makes a Sheer Mag set so special and unique?

That's something that I've maybe changed my tune to a bit over the years. When we first started, my idea of the perfect punk or rock 'n' roll set would be no talking, no showiness... Just cut to the chase, play the songs - hit it and quit it, basically. But now I think as we've gotten to be a little bit bigger of a band, we've put more emphasis on wanting to connect a bit more with our fans. At least I have - I think playing to a bigger room, you sort of have to do that a little bit. So the set has gotten a bit longer and we do a little bit more between songs to keep the atmosphere alive.

Especially given how intense and personal some of your songs are, do you find it important to include the audience in the set?

I think the audience gets as much out of your set as you're willing to give them. There's work on either side to make the show really memorable, but I don't always think that that stuff makes for an awesome show. Sometimes it just happens organically, and sometimes you can work too hard at it and things get awkward. It depends on the night, really, but we've always been

fans of playing shows where no matter what size venue it is, we keep the energy up, and people dance and have a lot of fun. But y'know, we don't really do a lot to try and get that to happen, or anything. We just let it be, and what it will be is what it will be, I guess.

So the new LP, *A Distant Call*, came out a little over half a year ago. How's it been touring that so far?

We've played about half the songs on the album live. When you put out a record, you think you know what songs are going to be the ones that everyone likes the most, like, "Oh, this is definitely the single because... I think it's the single." But it really takes a few months for your fans to let you know what the bangers really are. I suppose it's a lot easier to measure when you have shit like streaming because you can just look at which songs are getting all the plays. But yeah, some of the songs that we've played so far have gotten to be the more memorable ones. We like to build a set around what we've done and what we haven't done, and what we think people want to see.

What axes are you jamming on right now?

For the last couple of years, I've been using Telecasters - I've played the National Deluxe Tele with three pickups on all of our records but *A Distant Call*. Around 2016 I started using a Gibson SG, because I felt like it was easier for me to dial in humbuckers to get the live sound I wanted. I switched over to the SG for our last record because we wanted to go for a bit more of a new-wave British heavy metal sound, and Gibsons and humbuckers are the perfect sort of vibe for that. But recently, I've actually been thinking about how much I miss the Tele. I didn't bring any with me here, so I might have buy one. I'm thinking about going back to something with single coils. I've been going to this really awesome shop in Melbourne, the Music Swop Shop, which has a bunch of sweet old Japanese Fernandes and Grecos, some of the knockoff Teles from the '80s and stuff like that.

Are you a big believer in having a ridiculous pedalboard by your side at all times?

I was firmly against it from the get-go of the band. I basically just used a BOSS Seven-Band EQ with the mids boosted a little bit for solos, and then I would just play my guitar right through a Marshall. But as we

got a little bit more complicated, I started feeling like I needed some more control, so I started using pedals for distortion, and some chorus and stuff like that. But I really don't use all that much stuff. I definitely don't have one of those crazy pedalboards with a million bits and pieces - I have one of those small single-bar pedal trains with chorus, compression and a Rat, and that's kind of it. One thing that I've been using a lot lately, and I'm going to really try to dial in for the Australian tour, is the TC Electronics Munich pedal.

What are you digging about the Munich?

It's pretty sweet. You run your signal into it, and then it runs through two stereo outs. The wet signal has a slight varying delay on it that you can control the speed of, and it also has a slight varying pitch-shift built in. So it has one knob that's basically just tightness, and it's similar to a chorus but with some randomness built in. It sounds the closest to basically doubling a guitar that I've been able to hear out of a pedal, and it's perfect because a big part of the Sheer Mag sound is two guitars playing the exact same thing, sort of panned left and right.

I love that you've got your rig down to a point where it's simple, but dialled in enough to be perfect for your style.

I mean, Sheer Mag is so much less about the way the guitar sounds - we spend the majority of our time just trying to write good parts. We have specific ideas about production that we want to achieve with the guitar, but I'm really not the kind of guy who would try out ten different distortion pedals to pick the one I like. As long as it sounds relatively distorted, I'm not really complaining. The needs are pretty limited. 🎸

Sheer Mag are touring Australia in March:

Thu 19th	Estonian House, Brunswick VIC
Sat 21st	Altar Bar, Hobart TAS
Wed 25th	Red Rattler, Sydney NSW
Thu 26th	La La La's, Wollongong NSW
Fri 27th	The Zoo, Brisbane QLD
Sat 28th	Meadow Festival, Melbourne VIC

Tickets are on sale now via sheer-mag.com



IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

WITH THEIR CRASH-HOT DEBUT ALBUM IN TOW, **THE VANNS** ARE DIVING HEADFIRST INTO THE NEW DECADE WITH THEIR HEARTS ON FIRE AND THEIR SIGHTS SET FOR THE STARS. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Smack bang in the centre of a venn diagram between ‘grandiose rock anthems that not even stadiums could hold’, ‘fervently passionate authenticity’ and ‘infectious larrikin spirit that makes them impossible to hate’, The Vanns deserved every second of their monolithic breakthrough at the turn of the decade. Last year’s debut album *Through The Wall* was an instant hit upon release, bolstered by colossally captivating jams like the lively and luminous “Mother”, energy-brewing “Deranged” and furiously fiery “How Was I Supposed To Know”.

But much like the bands they draw influence from (see: Gang Of Youths, Kings Of Leon, Queen), something truly magical happens when The Vanns take to the stage. Their live show is a masterpiece in calculated mayhem – loose enough that you know it’s not choreographed, but so staunch and slick that at times you can forget you’re watching an actual live band, and not Hollywood’s approximation of one à la *Bohemian Rhapsody*. At the core of their wall-to-wall calamity is the double axe attack from Jimmy Vann and Cameron Little, both shredders punishing their fretboards with licks that belt from the PA like snakes at their prey.

As they gear up to continue their conquest of Australian stages, we got a hold of Vann himself to chat about just what it is that makes a Vanns gig so great, and the secret weapons he wields to conjure those spellbindingly searing tones.

Having seen you blokes rip it up onstage a few times, I feel confident in saying it’s in concert that The Vanns truly shine. Do you consider yourselves primarily a live band?

That’s probably our strongest point, and that’s what we strive to really nail. Because if you’re not good live, what’s the point? Y’know when you listen to a band and you’re like, “Ah, this is sick,” and you see them live and you’re just a bit disappointed? I can’t stand that. But I don’t know, man – something just *happens* when we get up there. We just kind of turn into animals, especially with Cammy on the guitars up there just shredding non-stop for the whole thing. To try and capture that in a studio atmosphere is kind of difficult.

So what goes into crafting a performance that you feel best reflects what The Vanns are and represent?

We want to create a lot of light and shade in the

set. I guess we’re known as a bit of a rock band, but at the same time we have songs – especially on the record – that are quite a bit different. There’s a bit of lowkey piano-y and acoustic stuff. We just want to be able to show that we’re more than just a rock band. We’re just going to keep challenging the expectations of what a band should be – especially with the next album, we want to keep changing and evolving as a band. We just don’t want to stay on the straight and narrow of bands like AC/DC, where they just churn the same album out every few years with different lyrics.

I know the *Walls* cycle has only just begun, but have you already started to think about where a second album could take the band?

Yeah. We just want to keep pushing the boundaries of who we are as musicians, and maybe take a bit of a risk, stylistically, because that’s also exciting. I think we’re definitely going to be working towards a new album soon, but I mean, if we roll out a couple of one-off singles before that, we’re not going to be too upset at all.

What guitars do you find yourself jamming out on these days?

My main one for The Vanns is a Gibson ES-325. It’s from 1972 so it’s pretty old, but I just instantly fell in love with it as soon as I played it. And then I’m using a Fender Stratocaster Deluxe as well, which is awesome. I pretty much just use those two for the electric stuff, and then I have a Maton acoustic as well for the quieter songs. I don’t have that many fancy pedals – Cam’s our dude for all of that stuff. I’m just running a Fender DeVille and a Marshall JCM, which I stereo. I might whack on a tube screamer or a Fulltone Full-Drive pedal, just for a bit of a boost, then a bit of reverb and maybe some delay here and there.

What is it about that ’72 Gibson ES-325 that you dig so much?

I used to always play a Strat, but I wanted to get a hollowbody because they sing better. They’ve got a bit more of a voice to them. I was playing a Les Paul Goldtop with the mini humbuckers in it, which is what the ES-325 has, and I was like, “Woah, these pickups sound amazing!” And then I saw those same pickups in the hollowbody that I

have now, and it was just a match made in heaven. Straight up. I *had* to buy it.

Are you running the same setup live that you did on *Through The Walls*?

Yeah, on the record I literally just used the same setup I have running now. I think I might’ve even just used the Fender – but now I have the option of running stereo, which I like because it’s so much fatter. I didn’t change it around too much. But I worked a lot with Oscar Dawson from Holy Holy, who’s a total guitar freak. That was great, especially with Cam’s tones because he does a lot of the big lead riffs, and that’s where we’d all nerd out and try all the different pedals.

Do you have a favourite song to play from it?

There’s one called “Chelsea”, which is completely different to anything we’d done before. It’s a slow, spill-your-heart-out kind of love song, but the crowd reacts really strongly to it. On the last tour, people were singing it word-for-word, and I was like, “This is so weird!” Because it was so new as well. And there’s another song called “Fake Friends”, the last track on the album, which just goes *nuts*. As soon as we start playing it, there’s just this weird, positive energy in the room. It’s really cool. It’s exciting for us that we can do such diverse things throughout the set and have people not lose interest. They’re always show interest in different ways, whether it be with a mosh pit or singing every lyric, or staring at Cam do this beautiful guitar solo or whatever. 🎸

The Vanns are touring Australia in March and April:

Thu Mar 19th	Altar Bar, Hobart TAS
Fri Mar 20th	Howler, Melbourne VIC
Sat Mar 21st	Uni Bar, Adelaide SA
Fri Mar 27th	Sol Bar, Sunshine Coast QLD
Sat Mar 28th	Crowbar, Brisbane QLD
Fri Apr 3rd	Uni Bar, Wollongong NSW
Sat Apr 4th	Cambridge Hotel, Newcastle NSW
Thu Apr 9th	Howler, Melbourne VIC
Fri Apr 17th	Indian Ocean Hotel, Perth WA

Tickets are on sale now via thevannsband.com



BIG RISKS BIGGER REWARDS

LOVE 'EM OR HATE 'EM, **THE CHATS** HAVE CORNERED THE AUSSIE PUNK SCENE LIKE MOST BANDS WISH THEY COULD. BUT WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS SUNNY COAST TRIO THAT MAKES IT ALL *CLICK*? WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Few things in this world are more powerful than the collective unity of the internet when a funny video starts to spread. When they dropped the low-budget video for “Smoko” – a belting bastion of blue-collar Aussie humour – in July 2017, The Chats didn’t think they would end up selling out theatres around the country, touring the world with their heroes or dropping their debut album at #1 on the ARIA Charts (with critical praise to boot). But alas, social media buckled under the hilarity of Eamon Sandwith and co’s loose and lively tradie-punk anthem, and two years later – the spark kept alight by follow-up gems like “Pub Feed” and “Identity Theft” – The Chats are all but engraved into the annals of Australian music history. According to guitarist Josh ‘Pricey’ Price, the crash-hot debut album *High Risk Behaviour* is just the beginning for these Sunny Coast scamps.

Let’s go way back to the start: how did you first discover the guitar?

My dad introduced me to the guitar when I was, like, four years old. My dad’s a complete guitar freak, so I grew up in a house where there’s always been good guitars everywhere – we’re pretty much just stepping over guitars. I used to play at the pub every Sunday with him with I was ten years old, just playing acoustic guitars together and learning the ropes. And then I went to school, and it wasn’t until grade 12 that I had to do a music assignment with a band. I’d always either played by myself or with another guitarist, but I actually had a really good time with the band. So then Matt and Eamon were like, “Oi, do you want to join us?” And yeah, the rest is history.

Did you kick things off with any ambitions to be where you are now as a band?

Absolutely not. No one even spoke about it, really. We just sort of hung out and shot the shit. We had another mate with us as well – he couldn’t really play that much, but he had this big shed at his parents’ place and he put us up. He was just like, “Yeah, I guess we can jam here,” so we used to jam there just about every night during school. And then when school finished, we just kept jamming. It wasn’t until we

released “Smoko” that we were like, “Oh shit, we’re a real band!” That video blew up, and suddenly it was like, “We could actually do something with this”. We didn’t realise that we could actually be anything.

So after you went viral, did you have to learn how to be a “proper” band, or did you slip into the touring and stuff pretty easily?

We had to do a bit of learning. It was definitely a big transition, going from our mate’s shed to travelling everywhere and actually being up on stages in front of people. It was an easy decision to make, though. As soon as the opportunity came, we went, “Okay, we’re actually doing this. Let’s give it a go!”

What was it like catching the attention of people like Dave Grohl and Josh Homme? Are you a part of the rock ‘n’ roll Illuminati now?

I will say, it was pretty special when Dave Grohl came up to me and called me Pricey, gave me a hug and said, “Y’know, I’m a big fan.” He watched our whole set from the side of the stage, and we had a beer with him after. That was surreal. And then Josh Homme as well, taking us under his wing on that Australian tour, showing us the ropes and how to drink tequila properly... Yeah, it’s been nuts.

How does a Chats song usually come to life?

Eamon’s a really good lyricist, so he’ll write a lot of things. Either he’ll bring in a song in or I’ll bring a song in, and we basically just smash it out. I’ll write a little riff or something, and we’ll just jam it out until it works, really. And when we record, we tend to just do it quickly – we’ve been doing this thing where we’ll do three takes of a song, pick the best one and call it there.

Are you tracking live?

Always. That way you don’t really get stuck on a lot of songs, and you don’t end up wasting a whole day on one part – you just slap it down and move on, and if you *really* want to do it again later down the track, you can do it at the end. We try to just keep the ball rolling and make sure we’re not stuck in a rut.

There’s a beauty in the simplicity of a Chats song. They’re not half-assed, but you’re also not f*ing around with any over-the-top rock ‘n’ roll wankery.**

Not overthinking things is definitely a big thing with us. Even if I’m laying down a guitar solo or a more complicated part, it’s the same sort of thing: I’ll give myself three takes and pick the best one. With the solo on “Identity Theft”, that was my first take. I recorded that and went, “Oh nah, that’s rubbish, let me do it again,” and I ended up doing it like six more times. I went, “F***, I’m never going to get it!” And then the guy who was recording with us went, “I think you got it on the first one,” so I listened back, and it was totally the first one. I actually had to re-learn my own solo because I couldn’t figure out how to do it again [*laughs*].

How long would you say it took to piece the album together from start to finish?

It probably took us about ten months, because we were in and out and doing tours and stuff in-between. We’d go [into the studio] for a day or two at a time here and there, and then we’d go on tour for a month. And you can hear that throughout the album, how our sound sort of changed a little bit.

What gear were you rocking?

I mostly used a Jazzmaster, and I had a Takamine GX-100 for some extra little bits. And we’d just go through the Fender Twin with a Soul Food pedal and a Hotcake. I don’t really use that many pedals; you can actually hear that the guitar tone gets a little bit better throughout the album, and that’s just because I bought the Soul Food halfway through recording.

Why is the Jazzmaster your go-to guitar?

I don’t know – it’s weird, because I’ve got two of them, right, and one of them doesn’t sound as good as the other one. Maybe it’s because of the way it’s wired or something, but it just sounds really fat... But not fat at all, if you know what I mean? It sounds like a good rhythm guitar, and then it just unleashes on the Hotcake. 🎸

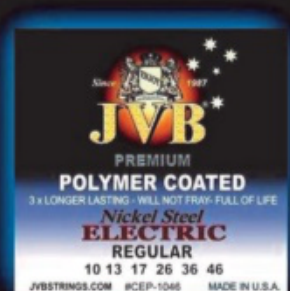


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COLOURING OUTSIDE THE LINES

ON HER POWERFULLY PERSONAL SECOND ALBUM, **SOCCER MOMMY** UPS THE ANTE WITH A BROAD SONIC AND THEMATIC PALATE THAT SHOWS HER TRUE STRENGTHS AS A SONGWRITER.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

At age 22, Tennessee trailblazer Sophie Allison – better known by her indie-rock alter ego Soccer Mommy – has lived through more than her fair share of ups and downs. Her music, often cool and charismatic as Allison herself, is defined by its heart-on-sleeve honesty, quips that cut straight down to the soul, and fretwork so fanciful it demands repeat listens. She’s been compared to artists like Mitski and Avril Lavigne (both of whom she also cites as major influences), but really, pairing Soccer Mommy with anyone else is doing Allison an injustice – she’s a Strat-wielding superstar all of her own accord; a luminary of the lowkey, and one to watch with a keen eye as she continues catapulting through the ranks.

On her second album *Color Theory*, Allison separates her thematic abstractions into three distinct categories marked by – shock and awe – colours. Blue represents sadness and depression; yellow represents physical and emotional illness; and gray represents darkness, emptiness and loss. Driven by a notably prickly and raw mix – an intentional byproduct of Allison recording the album live with members of her touring band (in her own words, she wanted the experience of listening to it to feel like “finding a dusty old cassette tape that’s become messed up over time”) – it’s a viscerally poignant and powerful listen. Naturally, we had to learn more.

How did you come up with the concept of using colours to represent the different emotions and themes you explore on LP2?

I think I’ve always associated certain colours with themes, even just from reading stuff in high school and college. Specific types of imagery are often used to make a theme really prominent, and [allow the writer to] continue bringing it up without having to use any exact dialogue around it. I’ve always been really intrigued by the idea of an album having these little themes that reoccur a lot and carry that same weight and same idea, and using them to paint a more vivid picture for the listener. And colour has been a huge one for me. People often associate a lot of different feelings with random colours that have random meanings to them, and I think that’s really cool.

Did you find that having a colour-coordinated palate for those themes helped you shape this record structurally?

I think I’ve always been one, when I’m making

a record, to need it to feel kind of perfect and feel intentional, and feel like it has this sense of a beginning, and then rising and falling action, and then closure – just like a book or a movie would have. And closure for me doesn’t always have to be literal closure, it can just be the final thing you have to say on a certain topic. But it’s always been really important to me to have those arcs, and make sure that it feels like if you were to sit down and listen to this record the whole way through, it had a coherent story and a journey – even if it’s not in the same way that a book would have a story.

Do you find that writing on the road is a good way to ground yourself and take your mind away from the chaos of touring?

For me, writing on the road feels no different than writing at home. I think when the inspiration for a song starts coming to me, I just want to finish it, and I don’t really feel any barrier to that based on where I am. As long as I can get some time alone or at least a little bit of privacy, I can work on that and get in that headspace. I don’t know that it really detracted from any of crazy stuff that happens on tour. I’m a Gemini – my life is chaotic at home too. It’s constant chaos. Writing is even a little bit chaotic for me. Most things in life are chaos in my book.

Do you feel like the experiences you had on tour rubbed off on the songs themselves?

I can listen to like one or two of the songs and remember exactly where I was. Like “Yellow Is The Color Of Her Eyes” – that imagery is hugely inspired by the city I was in the day I wrote those verses. We were spending a day in Holyhead in the UK, which was just the most beautiful little seaside town where we could walk to the ocean right from where we were staying. It was so beautiful and the imagery was really inspiring to me, and I got the verses for “Yellow” down that day. I didn’t even write them down. I didn’t even have a guitar – they just kind of came into my head. The imagery in that song is obviously about the water, looking out at the water and having this kind of moment, and that’s literally what I was doing in Holyhead.

How did you find the experience of recording with a full band?

I had always wanted to bring the band into

the studio with me. Julian [Powell, guitar] has been a part of the experience since *Clean* – he played guitar on that and had all these ideas for production and stuff, so he was a big part of that record. I always wanted to have the band that I play with in the studio with me and be able to capture that live feeling, but I just didn’t really have that at the time beyond Julian. We had a lot of people interchanging. Graeme [Goetz, bass] might’ve been in the band when *Clean* was recorded, but it was a recent thing, and the rest of the band was still kind of phasing in and out. Plus, we didn’t have any money to send everybody up to New York.

Did you find that jamming and recording live was crucial in capturing the feeling you were after on *Color Theory*?

Oh, absolutely! When I think of a song like “Crawling In My Skin”, I can’t help but think about how it was originally an 18-minute recording. There was literally, like, 12 minutes of us just playing this insanely long outro and trying out all these ideas between me and Julian and Graeme. There were a couple of tracks where we kind of went on forever, just trying to capture the magic that happens when we go and we practise at Rodrigo’s [Avendano, guitar] house and spend hours jamming together.

What axes were you slinging in the *Color Theory* sessions?

I have this ’94 custom shop Strat with a holographic purple sparkle, and that’s basically my baby. And then we had a couple of Teles from the studio, and I brought my Jaguar in with me.

What makes that ’94 Strat so special to you?

I wish you could see it, then you’d know! The finish has these sparkling red, blue and purple flakes in it so that when the light hits the guitar, it shines really bright and creates all these crazy colours. But it also just sounds amazing. It has these pickups that I really love on it – I don’t remember the name of them, but they sound incredible. It’s just a really nice guitar that also happens to be the perfect visual experience. I bought it for myself for my birthday one year – I found it while I was scrolling aimlessly on Reverb and I was like, “Oh my God, that is literally the coolest guitar I have ever seen in my life.” And I got it! It’s mine! 🎸



A LEADING FORCE IN THE RISE OF ALT-METAL, **HELMET** HAVE BEEN SHREDDING UP A STORM SINCE 1989. THIS YEAR, THEY'RE TAKING THEIR JAW-DROPPING ANNIVERSARY SET DOWN UNDER. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Whether it be for their unique collision of jazz guitar stylings and blistering metal, their pioneering use of Drop D tuning or the simple fact that most of their tracks go as hard today as they did three decades ago, there's a good chance you're either a Helmet fan (you are reading an article about them, after all), or you would be if you gave one of their records a spin.

Since 1989, frontman (and noted ESP Horizon fanboy) Page Hamilton has been steering the ship in one of the world's most revered alt-metal acts, delivering consistently crushing onslaughts of floor-shaking riffs and fist-pumping beats – and though their lineup has never been all too sturdy, Helmet have always rebuilt themselves to be stronger and more savage with each incarnation.

Now, they're in celebration mode, travelling the world with a 30-track setlist diving deep into every corner of the Helmet story, from 1990's rough and rabid *Strap It On* to 2016's sharp and sizzling *Dead To The World*. To say we can't wait for the tour to reach our shores would be the understatement of a lifetime – but if there's one Helmet fan who's *seriously* over the moon with their 30th anniversary tour, it's Hamilton himself.

Have you found it especially gratifying to be able to show equal love to all chapters of the Helmet story, and not have to focus on any one particular record?

Yeah, definitely. It's fun to do stuff like this – we're doing a lot of songs that had either never been performed live before, or hadn't been performed since 1990, '91, '92. We've pulled out a lot of the cover songs that we've done for tribute albums, like *Music For Our Mother Ocean* and the *Jerky Boys* movie, and those have been great to dust off. Those had never been played live before, which is crazy because they're really fun to do. And then we've been doing a couple of really old Helmet songs from back in the first years of the band. We hadn't done "Your Head" since, like, '91 or '92. I think the last time we did it was at the Big Day Out in '93. I actually just mixed that show, by the way – we're going to release it this year.

Bombshell alert!

Yeah man, we've got CBGBs from 1990 and the Big Day Out from the *Meantime* tour, which were

both pretty funny because we were just so raw and so spastic. And my first time in Australia was just complete mayhem. We loved it so much – I think we had a bottle of Coopers in our hand the entire time we were there. We just had such a fun time, and we ended up getting super close with the Mudhoney guys because we were on the Big Day Out tour together; there was six or seven of us that were just inseparable.

What would you say has kept Helmet relevant in an industry that can often be so callous in cycling through bands and trends?

I've always thought it was the 'no bullshit' aspect of the music and the band. We're not really much to look at, and there's no show, but we put our all into the music. Once I kind of got on this path and decided to form my own band – after my great experience with Band Of Susans and playing with Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham and all these amazing people in New York – I kind of had an idea what was lacking in heavy music for me. And John and Henry and Peter, we were all on the same page. I think I've always taken that approach to it – I just write the songs that I want to hear, and don't worry about what the current flavour of the month is.

I've had conversations with bands where they were like, "Yeah, we got on a major label and we tried to do X, Y, and Z, and it didn't work for us". And Victor from Prong said to me recently, "Man, I really admire the way you never got knocked off your course. You just stuck to your guns." I guess maybe we could have been bigger if we tried to do whatever was trendy at whatever point in time, but I'm not really worried about that. I'm happy with the music that we play!

Almost synonymous with Helmet itself is your classic red ESP Horizon. Is that still your go-to axe today?

It is! Unfortunately the original model doesn't travel out of the country with me, because it got lost by my tech. About ten years ago, we were in Mexico City, and he had to fly it over to Minneapolis because we were starting a tour somewhere in the Midwest after we got back from Mexico. And he never told me – his wife told him not to tell me that the guitar got lost by Air Mexicana for ten days. He didn't tell me for a year or two after that, and I just decided that it wasn't worth it to me to risk losing it.

I know it's pathetic, but as a single pathetic loser who lives for the guitar, that specific guitar is very special to me. But the good news is that ESP did their Relic. They copied it perfectly, and I have about six of those and they all sound incredible. They have the exact same pickups, the exact same bangs and scuffs – everything.

What is it about the Horizon that roped you in and made a lifelong lover out of you?

Henry Bogdan, our bass player, was friends with a guy named Baker Rorick, who was at ESP, and he was very hip to all the new underground bands in New York. And he was like, "Man, your band is so cool, you should consider coming over and working with us". I didn't know anything about them. They were just a little shop on 48th Street and York, and they had maybe 50 guitars on sale. They let me go in and play as many as I wanted, and they were all really nice, but I just loved the feel of this one.

You can pick up an electric guitar and tell how it's going to sound, kind of, by playing it acoustically – just by the resonance and the feel of the fretboard – and so I tried it out like that I was just like, "This is a really great guitar." They sold it to me for, like, \$600. That was the artist's deal at the time. I didn't even know my band was going to do as well as we did, but I've never paid ESP for another guitar since then – and I probably have 30 guitars from them. I use the shit out of them. I just did a guitar track on one of the movies I'm scoring with an LTD that they set up for me. They're great tools. And Matt [Masciandaro, CEO] is sort of like my big brother, I just love him. 🍷

Helmet are touring Australia in May:

Fri 1st	The Zoo, Brisbane QLD
Sat 2nd	Croxton Bandroom, Melbourne VIC
Sun 3rd	The Rosemount, Perth WA
Wed 6th	Cambridge Hotel, Newcastle NSW
Wed 13th	Uni Bar, Hobart TAS
Thu 14th	The Gov, Adelaide SA
Fri 15th	Metro Theatre, Sydney NSW
Sat 16th	Croxton Bandroom, Melbourne VIC
Sun 17th	The Zoo, Brisbane QLD

Tickets are on sale now via helmetmusic.com



ANOTHER CHAPTER OF BAD DECISIONS

STILL THE UNDEFEATED CHAMPIONS OF ROUGH AND RUGGED ROCK 'N' ROLL, **CLUTCH** ARE GEARING UP TO BRING THEIR IDIOSYNCRATIC INTENSITY BACK DOWN UNDER FOR ANOTHER ROUND.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

With the exception of keyboardist Mick Schauer (who sadly passed away last year), Maryland metal titans Clutch have remained a tight-knit band of the same four brothers since their inception in 1991. Their strength behind the scenes is reflected in their output: a whopping twelve studio albums of thick 'n' fierce guitar lovin' without so much as an inch of fat around the edges. Ditto for their live shows, which have reaped lashings of (well-deserved) acclaim for their tight, catalogue-spanning setlists, top-notch banter, and performances so powerful it's downright impossible to sit through them – moshing is a must for all able-bodied punters, no excuses.

Four years since their stunning *Psychic Warfare* theatre tour (which some of us at AG still haven't recovered from), Clutch are set to make the journey back Down Under this year for the third local instalment of the iconic Download festival. According to lead guitarist Tim Sult, fans can expect a career-defining avalanche of hits from all chapters of the Clutch anthology – including their most recent opus, 2018's *Book Of Bad Decisions* – and a balls-to-the-wall performance that serves as a giant metaphorical middle finger to anyone that thinks Clutch have gotten “old”.

How do you feel about making your way over to shred up a storm at Download?

For us, it's always fun to play big festivals with huge bands. We get a big kick out of playing in front of huge crowds, and playing in front of people who've never heard of us before. Making new fans is always the best. That's really what it's all about – just getting out there and playing the best set you can.

How do you squeeze 30 years of Clutch down into one hour of rocking? Do you have to be selective about what eras you represent?

Over the past few years we've been playing a lot of more recent stuff, but with the last couple of tours in particular, we've started to add some more older stuff into the mix. We even played one of our albums in its entirety, *Blast Tyrant*, on New Year's Eve. That was really fun. So for us, the most important thing

now is going back and relearning our old songs.

Do you find yourself going, “I forgot how cool this song was” when you come across a cut that you haven't played in a while?

Oh yeah, absolutely. I mean, we had to relearn all of the songs from *Blast Tyrant* when we played that New Year's Eve show, and that was a real fun experience, getting to hear those songs with a fresh ear and play them all for the first time in years and years. I think some of them we've never even played live when we put that record out.

What's your guitarsenal looking like?

On the past couple of tours I've been playing a Les Paul custom, and this guitar from a small company called Seger. Those have been my two main guitars in the US, at least – we'll see what happens in Australia. I was thinking about bringing a couple of SGs down, actually. I'm open to anything. I actually ordered a couple of Bankers recently, too – I haven't gotten them yet, but those will probably be making their debuts sometime in the spring.

What makes that custom Les Paul the definitive model for you?

Well, the neck profile is just super comfortable and fun to play. I usually love Les Paul customs, but they're really not the most fun guitar to play. This one is *actually* fun to play. I enjoy playing shows with it, so that's really the most important thing to me. And with the pickups, I actually threw in a DiMarzio Super Distortion, which is what I used to do all the time back in the '90s. I just figured I would try something that felt a little more retro, and it brought the guitar to life a little bit more. I also put in some new wiring. When I bought it, it sounded terrible and it wouldn't stay in tune. But I fixed everything, and now it sounds okay and stays in tune.

So, pedalboards – does size really matter?

Honestly, the more simple, the better. On the last US tour we did, I think my pedalboard started to grow a little too much. I ended up with a little bit of an extra pedal board as well – just like a little buddy

board next to the normal one. But I'm going to try to reign that in a little bit and bring a smaller board with me to Australia.

What are the essentials for you?

I have been known to over-wah [*laughs*]. One of my favourite effects of all time is the reverse effect in the Line 6 DL4. I absolutely love the reverse effect in there, and that always sounds good when we jam on “Big News I” or something a little more slow and funky – that DL4 is my go-to pedal for stuff like that. And then basically, ever since the '90s, I've been looking for a good Leslie effect. I only recently started using the Strymon Lex, and I just love that thing. It sounds phenomenal. That's the closest to a real Leslie I've ever heard in a pedal.

Have you started thinking about a potential 13th Clutch album?

Yes. Absolutely. We're going to write as much as possible, starting tomorrow. We've gotten together a few times since [*Book Of Bad Decisions*] came out and we've laid down a couple of new ideas. But now that we have a few months off, we're going to start to get a little more serious about it.

After almost 30 years and 12 albums in the bag, how do you keep things feeling fresh and exciting for yourselves?

Well, we just try to continue writing new songs, really. We don't really rest on the old songs. Our biggest song is probably “Electric Worry”, which came out a *long* time ago. We probably could've just stopped there, but we didn't. We kept going. And we're going to keep going. 

Clutch are touring Australia in March:

Fri 20th Download Festival, **Melbourne** VIC
Sat 21st Download Festival, **Sydney** NSW

Tickets are on sale now via
downloadfestival.com.au



THE COAST WITH THE MOST

THE JOURNEY TO IT WAS ALL KINDS OF CHAOTIC, BUT POP-ROCK POWERHOUSE **BEST COAST** HAVE ARRIVED AT LP4 WITH SOME OF THEIR SHARPEST AND MOST STUNNING MATERIAL YET. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Rounding out a trilogy of pop-rock scrapbooks that gripped the 2010s with fiery flurries of jangly guitars and pumping beats, Best Coast made inhumanly massive waves with their 2015 effort, *California Nights*. From triple j to Tumblr, anyone worth their bangs and bucket hat was head over heels for Best Coast. They were ready to rule the world.

Alas, fate had other plans for the duo. In a press release, Cosentino described falling into a deep artistic slump after the *California Nights* cycle wrapped: “I felt creatively paralysed. I couldn’t write music. There was so much bubbling inside of me, so many things happening and so much to process, but I couldn’t get any of it out. I was miserable and felt like nothing was ever going to change.”

Of course, Cosentino was eventually able to crawl out from her creative pothole, and now Best Coast are ready to resume world domination with the punchy and polychromatic *Always Tomorrow*. In the five years between drinks (sans the decidedly non-alcoholic *Best Kids* record), Cosentino and shredder Bobb Bruno have grown a trillionfold as musicians: LP4 is more diverse, dynamic and danceable, and the shredding at play is simply jaw-dropping.

As she explains to *Australian Guitar*, making the new album work meant Cosentino had to take some broad leaps in a bold new direction.

How did you start to disseminate those feelings of artistic paralysis?

Well it’s funny, because it sort of happened in weird phases. The first song I wrote for this record was “Everything Has Changed”, and that was the first song I had written in a really long time that I was able to even look at and go, “Wow, okay, I’m proud of this.” Because everything up until that point, I would write and then I would immediately hate. For a while there, it was just like, “Oh God, I’m never going to be able to write music again.” So when I wrote that song, it was sort of like the beginning of a period where I was able to say, “Okay, I think I have something here, and I think it’s coming back to me.”

And then slowly, over time, ideas would trickle out and I would sit and write. I took like a different

approach on this record where I asked Bobb to be involved in writing some of the music, which I’ve never done before. I’ve always written every single song on the records, but I went to him and was like, “I think it might be beneficial for me to have some music to try and write lyrics to, could you try to send me some stuff?” So it all took shape in a lot of different phases and in different ways. And then all of a sudden, it was like, “Okay, there’s a record here. I guess it’s time to go in and record stuff.”

When you started building the foundations of *Always Tomorrow*, did you have an idea of what you wanted the record to be?

I didn’t have an idea of what I wanted it to sound like, but I knew that I was at this phase in my development as an artist – and also as a woman – where I was like, “I just want to make a record that like feels different, and feels empowering, and feels inspiring.” And I didn’t know *sonically* what that was going to be – I knew I wanted to take risks and liberties, but I also didn’t really know what that *meant*.

I didn’t know if it meant I was going to go in and make a synth album, or some weird kind of record that was going to make people scratch their heads. I just knew that I was ready to do something different. And I think what happened is that lyrically, this is the Best Coast record that most stands out on its own. It’s very different than the other records, and I think thematically is really where that comes from. It’s a very hopeful record. It has a lot of resolution. It’s really like the grown-up version of Bethany is appearing on this record, whereas in the past, it was sort of like I was grappling with existence. Now I’m kind of like, “Okay, I think I have it somewhat figured out now.”

What was the creative dynamic like between yourself and Bobb on LP4?

I think there’s four songs on the record that Bobb wrote the music to. I went to him in the beginning and I was like, “Listen, I’m not feeling super inspired. I’m feeling really stressed out and feeling like I put way too much pressure on myself as an artist.” I felt like I was really struggling with my expectations of self, so I went to him and was just like, “I think it might be

really helpful to me if you wrote some songs – write whatever comes into your head and send it to me, and I’ll see if that works for me.”

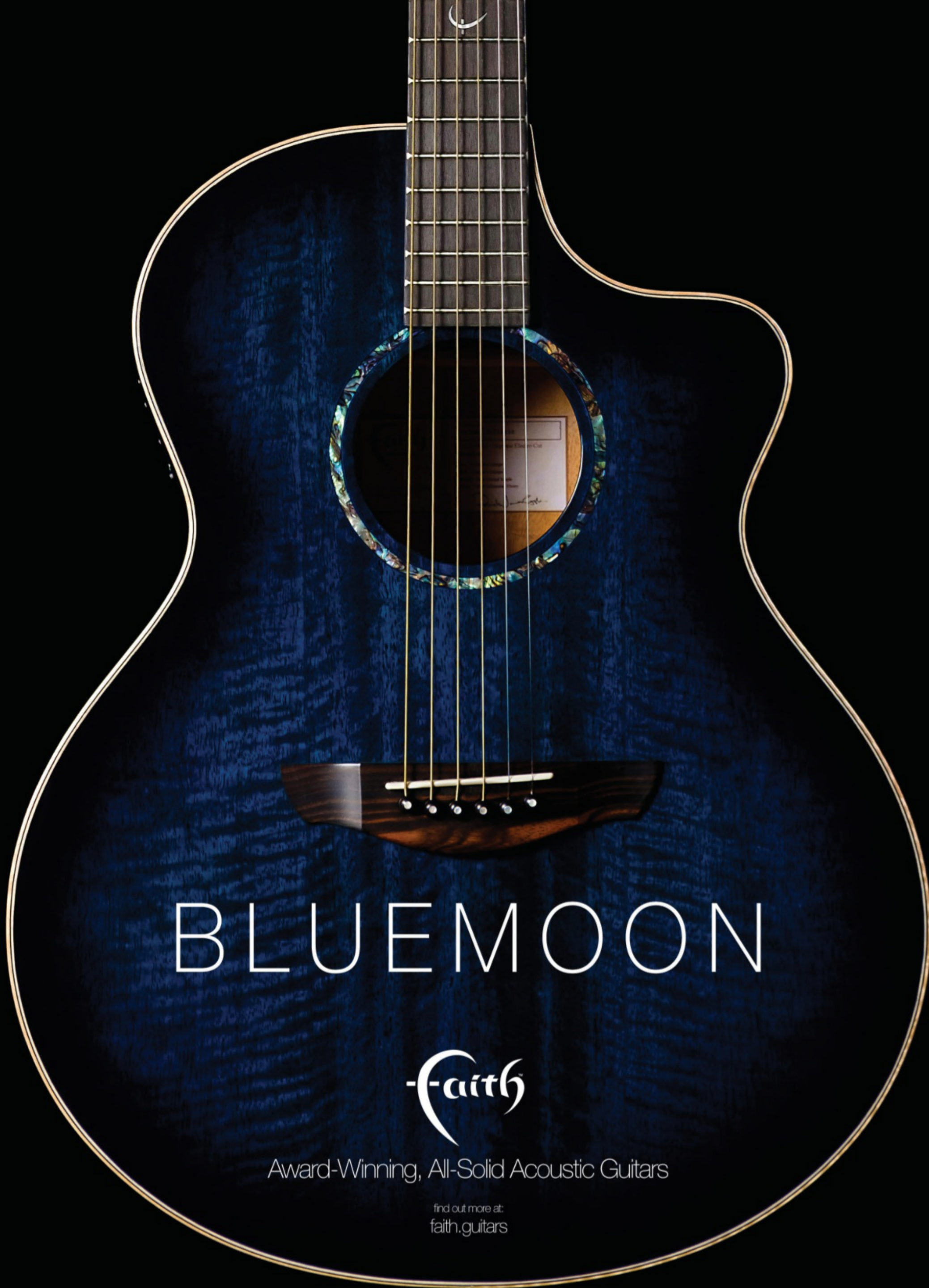
And so he sent me these four songs, and when I heard the music, I was excited because it was very different to the music that I would’ve written. It was different in terms of the chords he used and the changes he came up with – it allowed me to just focus for a second on like what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it. And then the rest of it was done exactly the same way that every other Best Coast record has been done – it was me writing the bones of a song and sending it to Bobb and saying, “Okay, here’s my idea for this one,” and then him sort of fleshing it out from a distance.

Bobb and I are very weird collaborators. We don’t sit in a room and write stuff together. We tried it once and it just didn’t work. But it was exciting to give him the space to create differently on this record. And it’s not that I never allowed that in the past – it was just that I had my own specific way of doing things, and I was always like, “Okay, here’s the song.”

Was this a particularly gratifying record for you to make as a guitarist?

I’m going to tell you the truth here: I love the guitar, and I’ve been playing the guitar since I was 13. The guitar was my first instrument. It’s a part of me. But with this record, I really wanted to step into the role of a singer. I played my rhythm guitar on a lot of the songs, but I really wanted to focus a lot more seriously on my vocals, so I kind of stepped out of the way and let Bobb take the lead – which made sense, because he’s obviously the lead guitarist in this band.

I would say that this record was the first where I really just allowed myself to be the singer of this band, and not let myself worry so much – because I’m very insecure about my guitar playing. I’m insecure about a billion things, but guitar playing is one where I really struggle. I’m not a virtuoso. I’m not a shredder. I can play really good rhythm guitar and I can play power chords really well, so for me to get that stuff out of the way, do my rhythm parts and then say, “Okay, I’m going to leave the rest to you guys,” that was really cool. 🎸



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All's fair in love and **METALCORE**

AFTER DIPPING THEIR TOES IN THE POP WORLD FOR ALBUM #6, **THE AMITY AFFLICTION** ARE BACK TO RIPPING FACES OFF WITH THEIR POWERFULLY PUNCHY MOSH-POP ANTHEMS. EXCEPT NOW, THEY'RE DOING SO WITH A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF EXPERIENCE UNDER THEIR BELTS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**

Mastering the paradoxical see-saw between buoyant, fists-in-the-air pop anthems and merciless, skull-rattling metalcore, The Amity Affliction have fast become one of Australia's most beloved alternative acts. 2018 saw them take their biggest stylistic swing to date, the somewhat controversial *Misery* album leaning into a glitchier, more experimental side of Amity better suited for dancefloors than mosh pits. Though critics were largely onboard with Amity 2: Electric Boogaloo, longtime fans of the band – namely, those who cut their teeth whipping limbs to “Anchors” and had a fierce thirst for breakdowns – were less enamoured. And the Gympie crew were expecting as much from the start.

“I think we took a left turn with *Misery* on purpose,” says guitarist Dan Brown, “Because we thought, ‘We can’t just keep doing the same thing.’ And so we went in with a new producer and brought some new kids of sounds with us, always knowing that we’d do [*Misery*], and then straight after follow it up with what we learned from that. So we put *Misery* out, and there were mixed reviews – it did really well in the States because the majority of our fans there already liked that pop sound, but when we toured it in Europe, we went, ‘Okay, they’re not really into this.’ Which makes sense, because European metal is really popular.”

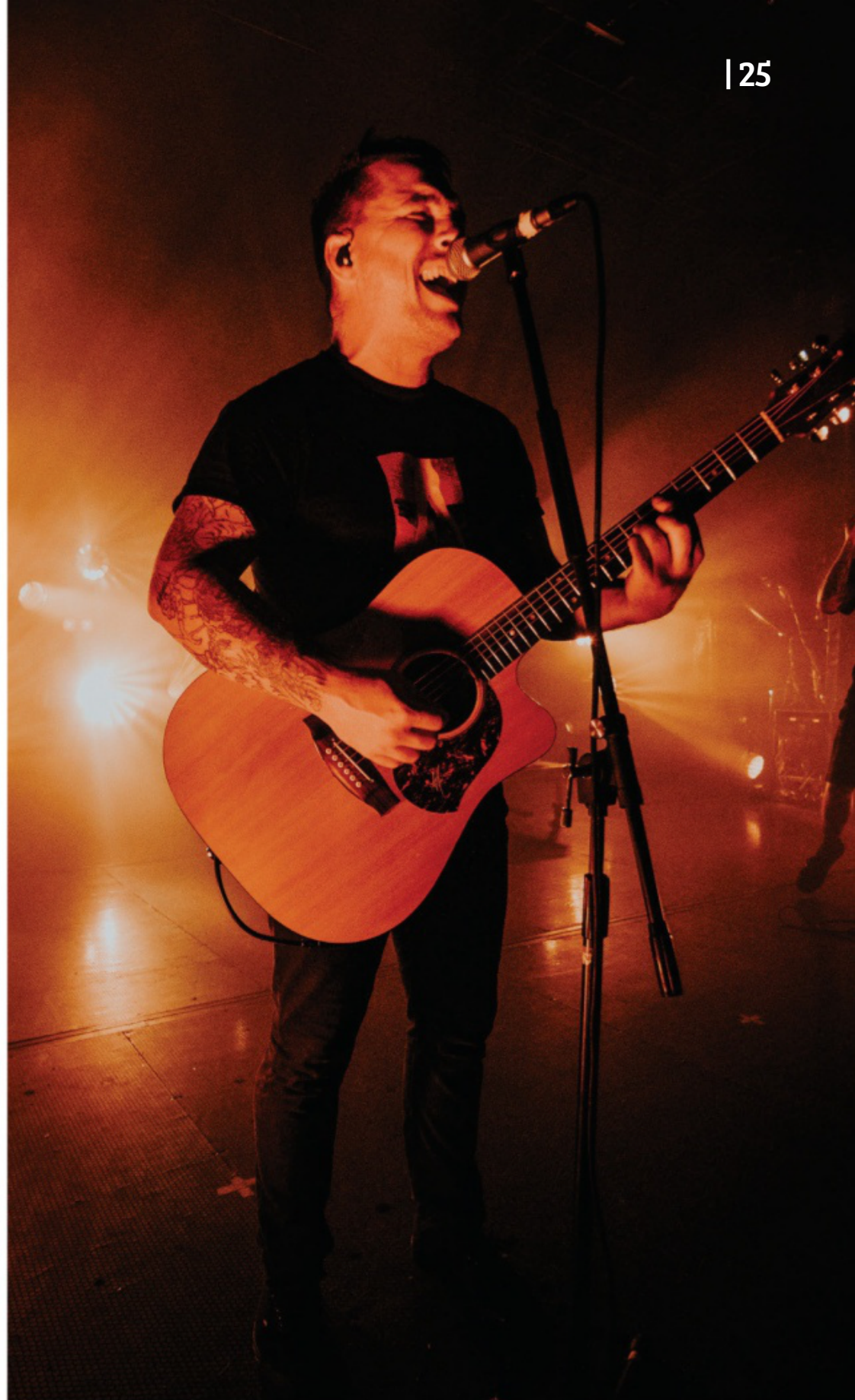
But whether or not *Misery* hit the mark didn’t matter music to The Amity Affliction – they were always looking at the bigger picture. “We always had the plan to put [*Misery*] out, learn some new tricks from making it, and then take what we learned and quickly do another record,” Brown says. “And I think it paid off! We got to take our original formula, for lack of a better word, apply to it what we learned by taking such a big left turn, and go into the next record with a more open mind and more knowledge about music in general.”

The end result of the band’s experiment is a record that screams “The Amity Affliction” right from the title: *Everyone Loves You... Once You Leave Them*. In many ways, LP7 acts as the definitive Amity album: there’s the big, barbarous breakdowns and ultra gory metal moments that echo 2008’s *Severed Ties*; there’s the overly catchy choruses and mammoth mosh-pop melodies they peaked with on 2014’s *Let The Ocean Take Me*; and just enough of the glitchy, rave-ready grooves of *Misery* that prove the quartet stepped off the rollercoaster with a decent set of new skills to play with.

A sizeable chunk of education came from the band holing up with producer Matt Squire, whose workmanship spreads to all corners of the genre spectrum, from Ariana Grande to Underoath. “We learned a lot of different ways to think about writing songs,” Brown says of his takeaways from working with Squire. “I won’t go too far into them, but he’s got all these theories about why certain things work and why they don’t – why that word in that lyric shouldn’t be that word, and why that exact note needs to be there. He’s got such a vast knowledge of pop music, and we picked up as much as we could from him about how to make the most of that.”

Of course, at the core of The Amity Affliction lies their knack for making angsty kids around the globe want to punch holes in brick walls. As best reflected on bookending cuts “All My Friends Are Dead” and “Catatonia”, the heavy stuff is undoubtedly what shines most on *Everyone Loves You*. It’s in part a callback to the gristly hardcore that Amity first made a name for themselves with. But toying with blastbeats and new guitar techniques, it also represents a searing slither of uncharted territory for the band.

“I think during those two years we spent doing *Misery*, heavy music changed hugely,” Brown says. “It always is changing, but stepping away from it for a while and coming back, we were a bit like, ‘Oh, okay... This is a whole new



ballgame!’ Listening to all of these new bands... There’s some of the heaviest stuff I’ve ever heard out there – it’s so much heavier than anything was before we even did *Misery*. And I think we were able to come back into that [heavy scene] with a fresh outlook, instead of being lost in the change of style.”

As for his playing style on *Everyone Loves You*, Brown endeavoured to up the ante with techniques that were “a bit faster and a bit more intense, but also more classy at the same time.” His setup involved the decidedly un-metal (yet undeniably classic) Fender Stratocaster, decked out with an EMG 81 humbucker for a meatier, more mosh-ready tone. The signal chain couldn’t be more straightforward: “I just grabbed a 5150 and put a tube screamer in front of it in a Mesa cab,” Brown says. “Yeah, right back to your standard metalcore setup. I think what gave it a bit more character was just that I was using a Fender guitar, because [the Strat] definitely has the heart of those heavier-style guitars, but it still has a bit of that rock-y tone as well.”

If there’s one thing Brown reckons will stick around from the *Misery* experiment in perpetuity, it’s his love for the humble Fender Stratocaster. “It’s just a classic,” he gushes. “It’s has such a great warm tone, and the mid-low EQ in the actual wood itself resonates so nicely. And then I’ve paired that up with a heavy amp, so it works really well for our sound. Fender are nice enough that they give me really top-of-the-line stuff, so I’m just privileged to even play them. I play a maple neck most of the time live, but I used a Strat with a rosewood neck in the studio, just to take that twang out of the top end and give it a bit more of a rounded-off sound.” 🎸



the ballad of the Juveniles.

AFTER SLOGGING IT OUT FOR A DECADE TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST AND BEST ROCK BANDS, KINGSWOOD HAVE CUT THEMSELVES FREE FROM THE TIES OF EXPECTATION WEIGHING THEM DOWN. THE END RESULT IS THEIR LOOSEST, LOUDEST AND MOST LOVEABLE ALBUM YET.

WORDS BY MATT DORIA

After kicking down the walls of the Australian pub scene with the raw, punchy rock 'n' roll spirit of 2014's *Microscopic Wars*, Kingswood set their sights to the world and, armed with a groovier, more electronically intoned pop-rock slant, made a monolith of themselves in 2017's acclaimed *After Hours, Close To Dawn*. And though it showed a major stylistic shift for the Melbourne-native foursome, the album proved an instant hit with fans and critics alike. Before long, Kingswood were a household name, any venue they'd plaster on a tour poster sold out before the presales could end...

And then they found themselves in a creative ditch. Throughout the bulk of 2018, the band wrote two albums worth of material, both of which they saw enough value in to draft up release plans. But each time they got close to the finish line, they'd step back, look at the material and decide, "This isn't right." There was an elongated stretch of existential crises for the band, where it seemed



like a worthy follow-up to *After Hours* would never materialise. That was until they were booked for a few one-off shows in Europe circa mid-2019, and in the process of digging through their catalogue to write a setlist, rekindled a love for the heavier, more guitar-driven bangers of their early releases.

“We felt that juvenile energy that you get when you first pick up a guitar and buy your first drive pedal or amp,” lead shredder Alex Laska gushes, “And you just dive in and you’re like, ‘Yes!’ It’s loud and it’s rebellious and it pisses off your parents, and it’s *beautiful*. And we just fell back in love with that. We were like, ‘That’s it, that’s the soul of this band – what are we doing trying to be clever?’ I guess because we’d been going to the right for so long, we wanted to pull really hard to the left. You spend pretty much your whole life cultivating your first album, and it gets released and you get recognised for it, but people don’t realise that you spent the entirety of your musical education and development getting to that point. The last

thing you want to do is go and do all of that again, y’know? I wanted to get away from that so much that I forgot why I loved it in the first place.”

For his first few shots at writing for Kingswood’s third album, Laska searched for inspiration in a suitcase; he’d completed writing sessions everywhere from Berlin to New York to London, desperate to squeeze influence out of scenery. But the wide-eyed excitement of touring the world hardly translated to good music. It was when he teamed up with frequent collaborator and producer Eddie Spear that he found his creativity start to blossom again. The album that would become *Juveniles* (named so for the aforementioned energy Kingswood felt when it clicked what they were searching for) was ultimately written between Melbourne and their second home of Nashville (where Spear is based), the homeliness of their surroundings helping to light their spark.

“It was that combined with the shows in Germany where we found ourselves again,” Laska admits. “Songwriting became very much like a diary and a self-help guide for ourselves. Being grounded there helped us realise who we were and what we were doing, and really challenged the songs and challenged why we were writing them, and whether we actually loved them. And then when we finally pieced it together, we realised, ‘This feels good because it’s come from one place.’ It wasn’t frenetically designed through circumstance, like, ‘Oh, we’re in Berlin today, let’s book a studio for the afternoon,’ or, ‘We’ve got a few days in Brisbane next month, let’s try to write a song there.’”

When you first pop your copy of *Juveniles* down on the turntable (this is assuming you’re all aboard the Vinyl Revival Express), you’ll notice just how much Kingswood have fallen back in love with the guitar. Though bright and bouncy as their poppiest cuts, album no. three is a six-string serenade through and through. If you’d ever questioned Kingswood’s validity as a rock band before now, *Juveniles* serves to whip a metaphorical glove against your cheek. And as Laska gushes to *Australian Guitar* (who else better to?), he’s always wanted to indulge his inner rifflord as such.

“I love the guitar,” he says with a distinct bluntness. “I’ve loved it since the first time I saw *Back To The Future* as a kid, when Marty grabs the 335 at the end. I didn’t know what it was, but I just loved it and I loved the sound it made – especially when he starts to ramp it up. I remember being four or five years old and hearing the blues, and not knowing what the hell it was but that it just moved me so much. Discovering the sound of pentatonics and how they can be manipulated... I was always drawn to it in such an intense, spiritual way.”

If he hadn’t warmed up to us before, diving into the arsenal of gear Laska used to record *Juveniles* has him buzzing like a tween after one too many red cordials. In addition to a pile of pedals that would make any self-respecting gear nerd’s eyelids twinkle, the band found themselves pulling from an impossibly impressive collection of axes.

“I fell massively in love with Gibson again,” Laska declares, spinning off into a lengthy anecdote of his adoration towards (and momentary lapse from) the iconic brand. “It’s where I started off. My first guitar was an SG, and then my most prized possession was a VOS Custom Shop Les Paul – a ’58 Plaintop in Iced Tea that ended up being stolen. Our studio got robbed, and I had five amazing guitars stolen – an old Kalamazoo from the ’60s, a Custom Shop Roy Orbison 335, two Les Pauls and a Goldtop. It was a massive blow for me, because my guitars are so

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personal and they all have their own history, their own name and all of that. They’re like friends to me – they’re extensions of who I am.

“I’d always hated Strats, but when all of those Gibsons got stolen, I was like, ‘Alright, there’s gotta be something about Strats that I’m just not seeing. Everyone loves them, blah, blah, blah’ – and then I went *deep* into Strat world. I’ve got, like, eight or nine Strats now. But then when we played those shows in Germany and Austria, I was given this satin-like wine red Gibson 335 hollowbody, and I was just like, ‘Man, this feels great!’ It just had this mojo to it. So I went home and I started to pull out all my other Gibsons; at the time I had a ’59 reissue Les Paul, a Goldtop and a ’56, two 330s – an old one and a new one – a 335, an R6, an R8 and an R9.

“I fell in love with humbuckers again, and then serendipitously, Gibson started back up in Australia. I was like, ‘Man, this has to be a sign!’ So I called up Chris Taylor, who’s their new director, and we just got on like a house on fire. I don’t think he even knew who the band was, but he’s a total guitar guy in the same way that I am, and we just spoke for hours. We became instant friends, and he invited me to the Custom Shop in Nashville when we were recording there – he was there for an event or something, and I got to go in and pick my own tops out for some replacement guitars. I got to walk through the factory and choose everything, and I ended up with the most amazing pieces.

“I got this custom white Firebird with aged gold humbuckers, and a ’62 ES-335 Block – lightly aged, one of four ever made. I was able to buy it all with the insurance money from all my robbed gear, which was amazing. And that’s what you hear on the album. You’re hearing the R9, which is a reissue VOS from the Custom Shop; you’re hearing my Roy Orbison 335, which is in the video clip for ‘Say You Remember’; you’re hearing an ES-275, which is just one of the most beautiful guitars I’ve ever seen, and that’s in the video clip for ‘Bittersweet’; you’re hearing the R6, the R8 and the ’66 330, and then just a little bit of Jazzmaster – this *beautiful* Jazzmaster that I picked up in Nashville.” 🎸

A NEW CHAPTER IN BLOOM

EQUALLY MORE GROUNDED, INTIMATE AND BOLD, PINEGROVE REINVENT THEMSELVES FOR THEIR CAREER-DEFINING FOURTH ALBUM.

WORDS BY MATT DORIA.

Listening to *Marigold* – the fourth album from New Jersey alt-country titans Pinegrove – elicits a certain feeling of warmth; comfort; an affirmation that you’re not alone in whatever personal storms you’re currently weathering. The band achieve this by minimising the distance between us and frontman Evan Hall. On previous records, the outfit would revel in the breadth and looseness of a lo-fi mix – Hall says that 2018’s *Skylight*, for example, “was supposed to sound like you’re just in the room with us rehearsing” – which made them fun to listen to, but difficult to connect with. But on *Marigold*, Hall’s vocals are emphatically more distinct; it’s as if he’s singing directly to us, the instrumental backings merely a bed for us to lie on together as he does.

“We were aiming for something more emotionally direct than *Skylight*,” Hall says of Pinegrove’s more contained approach to recording *Marigold*. “Introspection is certainly a theme throughout all of my songwriting, but with *Skylight*, it was a pretty conceptual project. There’s a lot about exploring the fourth wall, and performance, and that sort of thing. We had this whole making-of documentary series, *Command + S*, which basically allowed everyone to look in through the window and see our process. But with this record, we imagined something a bit more buttoned-up that we could just hand to the Pinenuts out there and say, ‘I hope you like this.’ And with that, too, I think you’ll hear a more sonically direct approach.”

Hall explains that each new Pinegrove record is, in a multitude of ways, a response to its predecessors. There’s an overarching visual metaphor



that he unravels – in the case of 2016’s *Cardinal*, he envisioned “a bright bird landing in the branches of a tree, or the spirit of creativity visiting your brain.” *Skylight* expands on that concept of welcoming and visitation – it’s a midnight jam session in which the listener is a fly on the wall – but *Marigold* grounds it. It’s a wake-up call to the morning after the jam, when all the other strangers have left and all that remains is yourself, Pinegrove, and your collective hangovers. Thematically, Hall links it to the album’s titular flower.

“The marigold is something that you go to,” he says. “You visit the flower, which is stationary – it has roots. And there are different phases to it: sometimes it’s beautiful and bright, and sometimes it’s nothing; it’s in hibernation. That was what initially drew me to the marigold – exploring the liminal space between hibernation and being brightly in bloom. I thought that was a nice way to explore the dualities that every person has – whether you’re feeling social or feeling private, whether you’re feeling up or down, or whether you’re horizontal because you’re sleeping or dead, or you’re energetic and running around, vertical.”

On a technical wavelength, the hi-fi sound of

Marigold is testament to how much Pinegrove have matured in all aspects of their operation. The LP was self-recorded at Amperland – a rural farmhouse in upstate New York that Hall and drummer Zack Levine rent out – where the band would spend weeks on end tinkering with their sound, living and breathing with the record as it took shape on its own accord. And as Pinegrove continue to rack up years of experience in DIY production, their approach to certain techniques has evolved and been reshaped.

“I think we’ve absolutely gotten better at capturing the sounds in our heads,” Hall attests, “And at the same time, our vision is sort of shifting too. When I recorded *Mixtape One* in 2010, I was like, ‘Y’know what? This is it. This really scratches the itch for me.’ And I can listen back on that and think, ‘Yeah, this *is* what I wanted to hear ten years ago, but it’s not what I want to hear anymore.’ I think we’ve grown a little bit with each effort – not just in terms of our skill, either, but also the precision of our vision... No rhyme intended.”

The band initially rented what they would dub Amperland – in tribute to the humble ampersand, a key element of Pinegrove’s imagery – solely

to record *Skylight* and be able to document the process more fluidly. But after finding immediate success in ditching the traditional studio recording process, the house became a central part of Pinegrove’s ongoing operations. They live there while they work, meaning the songs don’t just exist as extensions of their creativity, but become exact reflections of who they are in the moments they choose to embrace those songs. Hall doesn’t see Pinegrove ditching Amperland anytime soon... It just doesn’t make sense to.

“When you’re given an album advance,” he says, “You can go to a studio and use their mics and consoles and equipment, and you leave with an album in your hands. But you’ve got maybe a week or two to make it work, and then that’s it. Or, we figured, we could just buy a bunch of microphones, pay rent for a year and do it ourselves. And then you’re not limited by the hours of operation of the studio, or the lack of space, or anything else. We moved to a place where we don’t have any neighbours to bother, so if we want to do some drum takes at 1:00am, that’s not a problem. We can work more patiently and more spontaneously when we’re doing it on our own schedules – and so far that’s worked for us.”

Having the freedom to work on their own terms has rubbed off creatively on Pinegrove, too. “I think that we’ve built our own sort of insular language,” Hall says, “As far as our recording techniques and arrangements go. If you’ve heard Pinegrove before, you’ll notice that we like to switch tempos, and we’re very sensitive to dynamic trajectories and stuff like that – and perhaps rejecting more traditional song structures when it doesn’t suit us. None of that feels abnormal to us because we’ve been playing together for so long; that’s just how we do it.”

One pivotal idiosyncrasy that sets Pinegrove apart from their peers is the fact their lineup is constantly in flux. Hall and Levine are the only two “permanent” members in the band, with a revolving cast of friends and colleagues dipping in and out at will. There are five guitarists that pop up on *Marigold* – Hall, Levine’s brothers Nick and Michael, Josh Marré and Sam Skimmer – all of whom have their own wholly unique setups and skillsets. His main duties remaining behind the mic, Hall keeps things relatively simple. “The other players in the band all do have a bit of a taste for pedals,” he admits, “But honestly for me, on my pedalboard you’ll find a tuner, a boost pedal, a volume pedal, and an EQ pedal for when I put acoustic guitar through.”

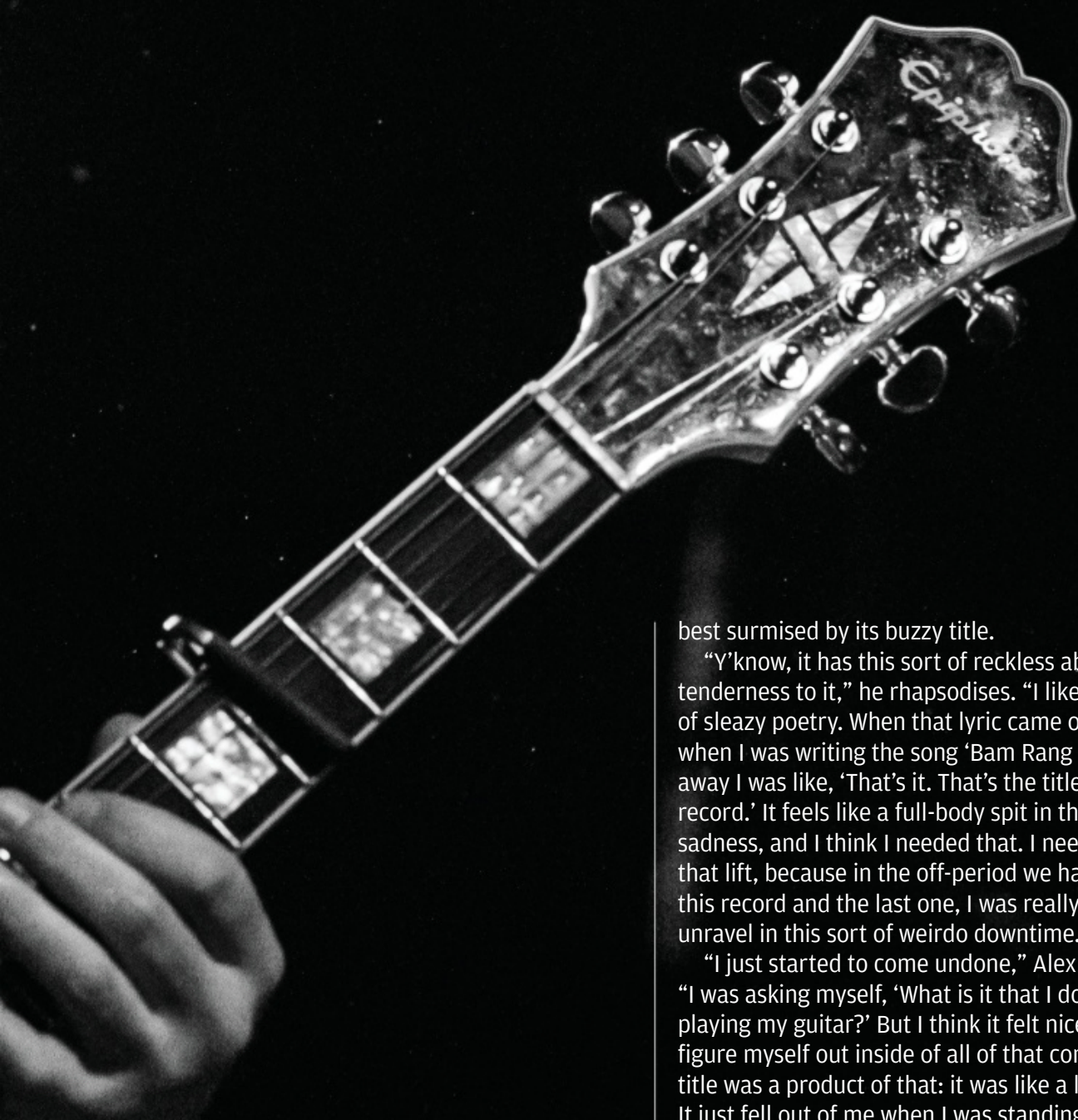
His guitarsenal on *Marigold* included some nondescript Stratocasters and the occasional Gibson hollowbody. He admits that he’s not too precious about what winds up in his hands when it comes time to lay down a lick, but there is one guitar that he holds near and dear: a one-of-its-kind Larrivé acoustic that Hall has quite literally lived with his entire life.

“My dad bought this particular guitar the week I was born,” he says wistfully. “This is the guitar I remember him playing when I was a child – there were all these times where if he wasn’t paying enough attention to me or something, I would just go over and detune his pegs while he was playing. And not that he was planning on doing this when he bought it, either, but he gave it to me as a gift for my 18th birthday. So that’s the one I had in college and started writing Pinegrove songs on, and there’s a lot of personal attachment there. I think we got some great sounds out of it [on *Marigold*], too!” 🎸

THE ROAD TO HEARTBREAK CITY

THE CRACKING NEW ALBUM FROM
BEACH SLANG ALMOST DIDN'T EXIST. BUT IT
DOES, AND IT'S BRILLIANT, AND IF NOTHING
ELSE, IT'LL MAKE YOU *DESPERATE* TO
TEST-DRIVE AN EPIPHONE DOT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**



The product of a mind so sharp and distinctive – that of frontman (and sole remaining founder) James Alex – Beach Slang are one of a select bands who don’t even need to sell listeners on the music their records contain, merely because the titles alone do it perfectly. Case in point: *The Deadbeat Bang Of Heartbreak City*. You read those six words on a record jacket and you’re immediately roped in. It’s poetic; political; powerful. You ask yourself, “What could such a gut-punching string of buzzwords possibly sound like? I need to buy this record and find out.”

Okay, so maybe that exact scenario doesn’t happen in this current age of Spotify and instant gratification – but you just know that if Beach Slang were kicking 30 years ago, they’d have a solid slew of fans earned via curious crate-digging alone. And as Alex attests, their curiosity would be rewarded, because *The Deadbeat Bang Of Heartbreak City* is

best surmised by its buzzy title.

“Y’know, it has this sort of reckless abandon and tenderness to it,” he rhapsodises. “I like that sort of sleazy poetry. When that lyric came out of me when I was writing the song ‘Bam Rang Rang’, right away I was like, ‘That’s it. That’s the title of this record.’ It feels like a full-body spit in the face of sadness, and I think I needed that. I needed to feel that lift, because in the off-period we had between this record and the last one, I was really starting to unravel in this sort of weirdo downtime.”

“I just started to come undone,” Alex admits. “I was asking myself, ‘What is it that I do if I’m not playing my guitar?’ But I think it felt nice to sort of figure myself out inside of all of that confusion. The title was a product of that: it was like a lonely snarl. It just fell out of me when I was standing up in my little room at home, trying to write this record and bash out all these chords. I just spit it out in this stream of consciousness, and when I looked back on it, I was like, ‘Woah, where did that come from!’”

Alex is one of those songwriters who – like many of us can relate – cracks under the weight of boredom. Beach Slang’s debut album, the agile and angular *Things We Do To Find People Who Feel Like Us*, crash-landed on the punk scene at the tail of 2015; less than a year of back-to-back touring and aggressive self-promo later, they followed it up with *A Loud Bash Of Teenage Feelings*. That it took almost four years for *Heartbreak City* to materialise seems downright unbelievable. But especially after LP2 gathered such an impassioned response from its fans, Alex had a cardinal epiphany: *Beach Slang 3* would make or break the band, and rushing it would almost guarantee the latter.

“There was this fear that we were burning people out,” he admits. “We were offering so much stuff

so quickly, it was like, ‘How much more of this two-chord schlock do people need?’ I wanted to take a little time and learn a third – maybe even a fourth – chord. This thing matters so much to me and to the people that have connected with it that I just didn’t want it to be burned out. I didn’t want it to be one of those things where it burns bright and then it’s suddenly over. And then the second part of it was that schlocky thing – I didn’t want to be pumping out xerox copies of my own shit.”

It’s a struggle many artists find themselves entangled in at a certain point: “Where am I going with this?” It’s imperative for creative growth to build on your sound and take it in new directions, but for a lot of us, that’s a lot easier said than done. Readers can (and should) look to 2018’s *Everything Matters But No One Is Listening* – a lowkey reinvention of Beach Slang’s catalogue released under the moniker Quiet Slang – for an example of how Alex reckoned with that struggle. In a bid to nudge himself out of the comfort zone he’d established with the first two Beach Slang records, he completely reworked the formula of their contents. Because if he couldn’t write an album that stood apart from them – at least at first – disseminating their markup would be a fruitful exercise.

“I felt that records one and two were sort of a related narrative,” Alex explains, “And I think that if I had done anything else along those lines again, it would have been cheating, y’know? So I took a step back, as a songwriter. And then I probably wrote, like, five different versions of [*The Deadbeat Bang Of Heartbreak City*] – just figuring out, ‘What the hell do I really want this to be?’ All those songs I threw away, it was like I was burning it down just to build it back up.”

To finally beat his four-year bout of songwriter’s anxiety, Alex looked way back, before Beach Slang even existed. “I went back and listened to everything that turned me on when I was coming up,” he says. “It was punk rock, classic rock, new wave, folk, pop – I just absorbed all of that, and that’s when it sort of clicked. It should’ve been obvious from the beginning – I was like, ‘I’m just going to write some big mushy love letter to rock ‘n’ roll.’ And that’s what [*The Deadbeat Bang Of Heartbreak City*] is.”

If there’s one thing that will never change with Beach Slang, it’s the presence of Alex’s iconic white-and-gold Epiphone Dot – a guitar so imperatively synonymous with his playing that to see him without it feels like something has to be wrong. Its brash and biting lead tones can be heard on virtually every one of the band’s tracks (it’s even the focal point of the *Heartbreak City* cover art), and if Alex has any say in the matter, that won’t change anytime soon.

“I’ll go down with that thing for sure,” he chuckles. “They actually just rebuilt me another one – I beat the hell out of the other ones so much that they built me another one to make sure I wouldn’t have to play a show without it. It’s just my thing, man! I’d feel like Superman without a cape if I played something else!”

“It has this robustness that I just don’t get when I play on a solidbody electric,” Alex continues. “I’ve used a full hollowbody before, and that was almost too big – I felt like I needed to grease my hair back and play Brian Setzer songs or something, y’know? But then with the Dot, it just felt *perfect*. I could hit it and it had this really big, fat tone to it, but it still had the bite of something like an SG. It melded those two worlds that I dig so much, and the action on it just feels so... We were just meant to fall in love, y’know? Cupid shot the arrow and it nailed the two of us together. It was meant to be.”

THE RANCH OF LOVE & TORTURE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CROSS ONE OF POP'S MOST WHOLESOME AND LOVEABLE BANDS WITH ONE OF ROCK'S MOST STONY AND MERCILESS PRODUCERS? IN THE CASE OF GROUPLOVE'S NEW ALBUM, THE ANSWER IS HONESTLY QUITE SURPRISING

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**

At one point, in some whimsical alternate universe, the new album from LA pop-rockers Grouplove could've been a gruff 'n' grungy love-letter to the '90s. The quintet holed themselves up in the small coastal town of Inverness, Northern California, where they poured their collective heart and soul into their fretboards in pursuit of a lo-fi masterpiece worthy of Double J's feature album circa '96. As lead guitarist Andrew Wessen rhapsodises, "It was this incredible breakthrough where we all stayed up 'til five in the morning every day, eyes rolled back, making this crazy guitar record."

And then David Sitek happened. Not to say that Sitek marred what would eventually grow to become *Healer* – an ultra sprightly smoothie of towering choruses, caramel-sticky hooks and big, belting guitar melodies – or that he himself is anyone worthy of complaint; his work with bands like TV On The Radio, Weezer and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs is nothing short of extraordinary. Though it would've been great to hear Grouplove all fuzzed up and furious, Sitek allowed the band to channel their inner virtuosos and reach a new level of musical nirvana; to unleash a reservoir of creativity that not even they knew was there until he came along.

"We were thick as thieves right away," Wessen says of the band's immediate meshing with Sitek. "It was this beautiful explosion of inspiration and chaos and creative expression, where, starting with our second or third night at Sonic Ranch, we just started to write the best songs of our lives every night. Most of the stuff we did with Dave on this record, which I think is seven of the 11 songs, is literally what was done in those very first days – everything you hear is the first thing someone played or the first idea someone had. He gave us no time to overthink things, so everything ended up being this raw gut-punch of an interpretation."

"Because usually when you make a record, you have so much time to overthink and overplay it, and sit there stressing about playing the line perfectly or doing 25 takes, or whatever you do to walk away feeling like you justified your musicianship. And honestly, when you do it like that, all the spirit is gone by the time you have a record. But with Dave, you literally had one take – maybe two – and that was it. There was no going, 'Hey man, I think I'd actually prefer...' You either show up and throw down, or you do what you do and you just have to live with it. And that just made us all step up as musicians and artists, which was really exciting."

"Honestly, I think we needed that. It was something we all embraced and enjoyed, especially after being in a band together for nine years. That feeling of being pushed was really amazing."

As is typical of stories where Sitek is a central character, Wessen's weekend of musical masochism brought him to some interesting peaks – including one where he was almost pushed over the edge in a bout of chaotic anxiety.

"On the first day, I thought he was dead," Wessen says, not a hint of exaggeration in his tone. "I honestly thought David had died. Because he was like, 'Yeah, meet me and [engineer] Richie at 1pm.' 1:00pm rolls around – two, three, four, five, six, seven... Six hours. No Dave. So I'm like, 'Is he dead? Is this motherf***er dead?' But no, he was just sleeping because he'd been up 'til 10am the night before. And that's how the dude lives – he works all day, every day, and that's his whole life; his dedication to art and music."

"You know this as a journalist: everyone always says, 'Oh, we were living and breathing the record,' but half the time it's f***ing bullshit. But we were actually living and breathing the record, on a level that was... Honestly, at some points it wasn't chill. There was one point where I didn't sleep for days

because I had a mild nervous breakdown – and not just because of the shit I was going through in my life and relationships, but because of this crazy, transformative experience that I was having."

In addition to a stint at Larrabee Studios in LA, where they worked with pop legend Malay, Grouplove brought much of *Healer* to life with Sitek at the Sonic Ranch. The world's largest residential recording property (housing five full-scale studios), it's situated on a breathtakingly massive – not to mention, downright idyllic – pecan orchard bordering Mexico and the US' Rio Grande. This is relevant, of course, because in a post-Trump world where anyone with skin darker than beige is a walking target for bigotry, cities around the US-Mexico border aren't as serene as they once were – which led to Grouplove finding inspiration along some more jagged paths.

"While we were there," Wessen explains, "There were a lot of protests and a lot of unrest regarding the border in the US – we could literally hear the megaphones of people protesting, and all the migrant camps and everything. One of the songs on this record is called 'Promises', and that speaks directly to our feelings about that, sort of reflecting on the world that we're in now and our frustration with certain things. And so there are elements on this record, too, where I feel like there's some more deliberate lyrical messages and musical themes."

One of the more positive things to note about Sonic Ranch is that by proxy of its five studios housing some of the world's most prestigious rock bands on a daily basis since 1989, it's racked up an incredible collection of gear – the last proper count had it scratched up to over 55 vintage and modern guitars, 50 vintage and mod amps, and 54 guitar pedals. And in the midst of his whirlwind time in the booth, Wessen did what any of us would and strived to get his hands on as much of the arsenal as possible.

"I don't even know what guitar was in my hand half the time I was there," he laughs. "It's a gear junkie's paradise; there were all these rare '50s, '60s, '70s Stats, Teles, Les Pauls... I played some crazy 12-string Gibson, I know that. Dave made me buy this '73 Yamaha off him – he was trying to guilt me into it, like, 'I guess you guys don't want to write the best f***ing song on your record, 'cause he doesn't want to buy this guitar off me.' Because he wanted to buy an MPC, but he was like, 'I need Wessy to buy this guitar so I can use the money to buy the MPC.' So I ended up buying this guitar off Dave, but it's epic because all these insane players like Dave Navarro, Rivers Cuomo... Everyone who's recorded there in the past ten years has played this guitar."

As exciting as it was being surrounded by walls of incredible equipment, Wessen learned quickly not to make his drooling too obvious. After all, Sonic Ranch isn't a museum, and Grouplove weren't there as tourists.

"There wasn't a lot of ooh-ing and ahh-ing over the vintage gear because that's just what Dave and Tony are about," Wessen says. "It's not some revered thing where they're like, 'Oh my God, we all must sit here and talk about the greatness of this guitar!' It was like, 'Yeah, there's a \$20,000 guitar laying up against the couch, next to a bong and a PS4 controller. It was kind of insane – the first night I was like, 'Uh, is this okay!? People are partying around this however-many-thousand-dollar guitar!' But Tony was just so cool about everything being used. And I get it."

"My brother and I are surfers, and our motto is that no board is meant to be just put on a wall and stared at. You're supposed to f***ing ride them. Tony and Dave are the same with their guitars, where they go, 'Just play it. Stop fawning over it and enjoy what it was made to do, which is f***ing kick ass.'" ■



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VIOLENT SOHO

JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE OFFICE

WITH 2016'S CHART-DOMINATING *WACO*, GRUNGE-PUNK REVIVAL OVERLORDS VIOLENT SOHO WERE AT THE TIPPY TOP OF THEIR GAME - AND BEFORE LONG, EVERY BUDDING ROCK BAND IN THE COUNTRY WANTED TO BE LIKE THEM. NOW, AFTER A FEW YEARS IN HIBERNATION, MANSFIELD'S FINEST ARE BACK AND READY TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN WITH ALBUM #5: THE SHARP AND SPRIGHTLY *EVERYTHING IS A-OK*. AND EVEN THOUGH THEY'VE SETTLED INTO THEIR SHOES AS ONE OF THE BIGGEST ROCK BANDS IN AUSTRALIA, THEY'RE KEEPING THINGS DECIDEDLY LOWKEY THIS TIME AROUND.

WORDS BY MATT DORIA
STUDIO PHOTOS BY IAN LAIDLAW

Our story begins at the 2017 edition of Australia's biggest regional touring festival, Groovin The Moo. Headlining the mainstage is post-grunge powerhouse Violent Soho, still riding high on the waves made by their monolithic fourth album, *WACO*. For a post-internet music scene that seems to churn through a new set of obsessions every other week, that *WACO* was still on everybody's lips a year after release was no small accomplishment for the Mansfield foursome. But as far as they were concerned, *WACO* had run its course - Groovin would be the last distortion-slayered nail in its coffin, and the band were eager to give it one hell of a send-off.

"It was more like a party than anything we felt obliged to be at," describes vocalist and rhythm guitarist Luke Boerdam. "I remember thinking, 'Wow, we've never taken shows less seriously than this.' And we were headlining!"

The grand crescendo was their hourlong onslaught in Western Australia's idyllic port city of Bunbury, where after the last rasping guitar wails of "Scrape It" rang out, the band channelled their inner '90s rock dogs and beat the everliving shit out of their equipment. Tuning pegs bounced off amp heads when Boerdam tested the strength of his axe against the foot of the stage (spoiler: even the firmest of fretboards burst when you put enough muscle in

it), and then bassist Luke Henery took the amp and smashed that too, because *f*** it, why not?*

"People have sent us photos of the bits of drum kit and they have in their lounge rooms - one person even has a quad box framed up," chuckles lead guitarist James Tidswell. "Life itself was pretty hectic for everyone, so we were just blowing off a bit of steam."

It was a well-earned capstone for Soho. When the *WACO* era kicked off, they were comfortably selling out thousand-cap theatres and ringing in the sunset at boutique festivals like Mountain Sounds. By no means were they a 'small' band, but there was no reason for them to be overwhelmed by their popularity, either. But not even Soho - who'd already seen their hype boom once when "Covered In Chrome" became an overnight hit - could predict just how fervently crowds would leap the hype train for *WACO*. It spawned six lucrative singles - more than half the album itself, all of which made the cut in Triple J's Hottest 100 of 2016 - and by the end of its run, the band were packing out venues like Brisbane's 9,500-capacity Riverstage.

"The goal was always, like, 'Let's get to a point where we could play Ric's Bar'," Boerdam says, "Or maybe The Zoo. The Zoo is 450-cap, so to then hit the Riverstage... It was like, 'Oh f***, this is out of our control now.' The cool thing about [smaller] shows is that everyone's right there and you can see everyone's



face. But over the years, it becomes more and more just like a sea of bodies. It really does take your breath away – you look out into the crowd and you’re like, ‘Wait, that’s *people!*?’”

So began two years of relative quiet for Violent Soho – the ‘Silent Slowho’ era, if you will. The band are adamant that we not call it a hiatus, because they never agreed between themselves to acknowledge their cogs bogging to a halt – “I don’t think our band could ever be ‘done’,” Tidswell stresses – but after such an intense and tireless grind on the back of *WACO*, they were, admittedly, feeling pretty burnt out.

They’d also noticed first-hand the rising trend in bands influenced by themselves coping mainstream success. Acts like WAAX, Dear Seattle, Tired Lion and Hockey Dad – all cut from the same grungy, punky, retro-tinged alt-rock cloth – were making waves on the Js and packing out theatres of their own; it’s not that Soho felt they’d been usurped in the rock scene, but they didn’t feel like they necessarily needed to carry its torch anymore.

“It was almost like a feeling of, ‘Wow, there’s all these kids doing it, and they’re doing it really well, so there’s no point in us doing it too if they’re just going to take the baton and run with it,’” Boerdam says. “Literally, in those early 2000s, we had to pick indie-pop bands to support – full-on DJ bands – because if you wanted to get on a national tour, they were the bands that had the funding. Whereas now, it’s like, ‘Pick as many heavy bands as you can take on the road with you!’”

Then there was the all-important issue of public image. Rock ‘n’ roll had been doled the mainstream resurgence it so utterly deserved, and though they were obviously stoked with that, Soho were cautious not to be sucked into the allure.

“This thing happened where all of a sudden, everyone was a rock band,” Tidswell recalls, “And it was sort of a ‘thing’. We just wanted to make sure that we were being *us*, I guess, and never buying into whatever that ‘thing’ is. Because it’s all fleeting moments in music – different things come into trend and others phase out, and we’ve always been the same band regardless of that. So the fact that we got to experience that trend first-hand and be the first cab off the ranks, so to speak... It would’ve been dangerous to buy into that mentality, and it would have only ruined our band. So we decided to just sit back and see what happened.”

Lo and behold, Australian rock music is still enjoying a ripping spell of triumph – hell, when this article went to print, the last three bands to drop albums at #1 on the ARIA Charts were Tame Impala, Green Day and Dune Rats (the lattermost of whom actually opened for Soho on the *WACO* tour). In fact, shortly after Soho called it on the *WACO* days,

Tidswell dove headfirst into the deep end of Aussie rock’s new golden age, founding a new home for up-and-coming punks in Domestic La La Records. Having always been close to Soho’s own release plans, it was a long time coming for him.

“I got involved with Violent Soho because I wanted to put out their music,” he says. “I didn’t even play the guitar back then. I called it Victim Records at the time and I sold my car to pay for the first EP. So as soon as the opportunity came up to do a record label on [Domestic La La’s] scale, it just made sense.”

By signing bands with the same passionate morals and DIY ethos as Soho, and knowing how to crack the code to a great pop-influenced rock jam, Tidswell’s first year pioneering Domestic La La was nothing short of enormous, with its second looking even bigger. He takes a hands-on approach sourcing talent for the label – we’ve bumped into him in the pits at every BIGSOUND since 2016, for example – and works closely with the artists he takes under his wing. In many ways, it’s a continuation of a cycle that Tidswell is enamoured to be involved in.

“I feel super lucky,” he says, his smile as genuine as it is wide. “I love it! And I think I love it because Dean Turner from Magic Dirt was [Violent Soho’s] first manager – our first director in a way, I guess. We have this black-and-white photo from ’07, ’08 or something like that, and we’re all sitting around intently, looking in on him; it reminds me of how much we listened to him back then, and how our band really were a sponge to the advice he was giving us – how to behave and how to act, and the correct way of going about things.

“It was so important that we were getting that advice from someone *from* the ‘90s, when integrity was vital to the way you did things. For example, we had some friends getting sponsorships for all these different brands, and Dean went, ‘Well, would you want to be sponsored by?’ And we were like, ‘PlayStation, man! We want PS3s!’ So he goes, ‘Then sell more records so you can buy a PS3. Don’t sell your band for a \$500 video game console!’ I love that I was lucky enough to get to soak up all that information. And to this day, we still live by everything that he taught us. I sort of feel like Obi Wan Kenobi – I got the message from the source, and I’ve got to pass it on to my Padawans if the Jedi is going to exist.”

Incidentally, that exact strain of integrity is the reason Violent Soho’s new album doesn’t feature the Domestic La La tag. *WACO* was the second of their two records under contract to I OH YOU – the Mushroom imprint to whom they’d initially signed in 2012 – and at one point, Tidswell did intend to lead the Soho ship under his own direction; that’s part of why Domestic La La was established when it was.

“I had it set up so that we could transition straight from I OH YOU over to the new label,” he says, “but in all honesty, it was like we stepped back and went, ‘Y’know what? *Nah.*’ I OH YOU is an incredible label, Johann [Ponniiah] is an unreal dude, and we love the whole team over there. We were introduced to Mushroom through Dean, and his wife Linda still works there! That was our family. So it was about doing the right thing, and paying respect to those that gave us a chance back when we needed one. Because in this day and age – especially with the generation of kids coming up now – we’re so quick to be like, ‘Get yours! I’m getting the next best thing for me!’ But I OH YOU are a great label, and they’ve been so good to us



over the years, so why end that now?”

The independence they have under I OH YOU’s roof is a crucial part of the narrative. Freedom is something the band holds close to its collective heart – mostly because they can’t stand the inner workings of music’s business side. “We went to the first AIR Awards,” Boerdam snickers, “And we ended up leaving early because we were just like, ‘This is too industry!’ We had everyone around us going, ‘Dude, you don’t realise, this is the *small* part of the industry,’ and we were just like, ‘Yeah, f*** that.’”

Tidswell continues, “They all went, ‘What does it feel like to win the Independent Artist Award?’ And we were like, ‘*This is not independent!!!*’ Carlton Dry were sponsoring the whole thing – *that* gave it a weird flavour. But it *is* independent – and I don’t say that to be rude, I’m saying it as in, like, we’re an anti-industry band through and through, and this is how *proudly* we talk about being involved with Johann and I OH YOU.”

By this point in the story, we’re at the tail end of 2018. Tidswell is kicking goals on the daily with Domestic La La, Henery and drummer Michael Richards have settled nicely back into their day-to-day lives, and Boerdam... Well, Boerdam is going through some shit. He found himself moving back into his parents’ house, which came as an especially harsh blow given that he’s not only a boomerang baby, but a twice-thrown one, having wound up in the same plight when Soho were dropped by their first label (a major, aiding in the band’s staunch views on independence) in 2010.

Without the constant chaos of touring to keep distracted, Boerdam settled for the next best thing: writing. It’s in his childhood bedroom that the fifth Violent Soho album would start to materialise; the tongue-in-cheek title of *Everything Is A-OK* was a ways off, but the first song for it – the sarcastic and angsty and snappily acerbic “Vacation Forever” – came about surprisingly fast. It set the tone for what *A-OK* would grow to be: sharp, loud, and distinctly personal – that last one an admittedly unusual trait for a Soho record.

“The first one was pretty personal – y’know, songs like ‘Jesus Stole My Girlfriend’ were straight out of my diary,” Boerdam says, “But then over the next two, everything changed. I was like, ‘I want to write about all this other stuff that’s got nothing to do with me!’ It’s all still about being frustrated with the world, but it’s not directly personal – whereas this time it did swing back around, and I was putting way more of my own feelings into the lyrics and writing more naturally, straight from the heart.”

This is the part where we’re supposed to tell you how the rest of *Everything Is A-OK* came together in a bright, summery ‘80s movie montage with lots of belly laughs, clinking pint glasses and romantic walks along the beach (with the obligatory spotting of a pug in the distance). But alas, that’s just not how it works. Boerdam certainly wasn’t going to catch a break – viable song ideas were few and far between as he braved the storms of his personal life, and the rest of the band weren’t exactly champing at the bit





**I SORT OF FEEL LIKE
OBI WAN KENOBI – I GOT
THE MESSAGE FROM THE
SOURCE, AND I’VE GOT
TO PASS IT ON TO MY
PADAWANS IF THE JEDI
IS GOING TO EXIST.**

to kick the ol' machine back up again.

"We were just dragging ourselves to band practice," Boerdam admits. "Even with the new songs, we were like, 'Ugh, let's get this over with.' But then we started joking around about making this new record, and I don't know, that kind of kicked it off. We were like, 'Oh, we should call it Johann's mobile phone number' – the working title was literally +61 4, etcetera – and we recorded it in a house with Greg Wales for four weeks, and we just had all these cool little ideas, and everybody got excited about it again. We were excited about taking ownership again, and breaking the cycles we'd gotten ourselves into."

Once they found themselves in a decent rhythm (pun intended), the focus quickly shifted to a late 2019 comeback. The band met often to piece ideas together, and though they ultimately chose not to record the album live, its inception very much revolved around the four of them being in a room and playing through the songs as one taut, well-oiled unit. "We spent heaps of nights and weekends jamming for this record – more than we ever have for any other record," Boerdam says. "And I think you can hear that."

The past two Soho records came to life at the The Shed in Brisbane, with longtime collaborator Bryce Moorhead behind the console. But since The Shed was axed in 2017, the band decided to step outside their comfort zone, enlisting iconic producer Greg Wales – whose work you might've heard on a Bloc Party, You Am I or Wolfmother record – to produce *A-OK* at The Grove Studios in Sydney.

The new setup came with changes to the way Soho worked at their core. In a press release, Boerdam declared, "We spent an entire day getting the guitar sounds right, so it's probably the first time I've ever been completely happy with the guitar sounds." For a band who've always lived and died by their guitar tones, we have to wonder: why did it take so long to get them articulated?

"Because for some reason," Boerdam sighs, "Greg went, 'I'm not going to let you use any guitar pedals.' I was like, 'Ah, go f*** yourself dude' – because I love guitar pedals! They're my favourite thing in the world! But then I was like, 'Nah, alright, you're producing, I'll follow your lead.' He wanted to use all amps – and that makes sense, because y'know, tubes give you the best top saturation, period. And it took eight hours because Greg has this crazy mic technique; I personally tried to replicate it when I was doing some stuff with Tired Lion and it's just impossible.

"So we had two amps: one was an old metal amp, a Framus Cobra – it's like 100 watts and it has heaps of headroom – and we blended that with an

Orange OR that they had lying around in the studio. I'm usually more of a Marshall guy, so that was a bit like, 'Oh God, this is all different for me!'

"[Greg] had to line up eight capsules and eight mics to the phasers – that's really, really, really hard to do, I found out. And then Greg was really happy but I wasn't – I was like, 'It's still not tough enough' – so the other guys had to drive over an hour and a half away to get a Soul Food pedal from this music store in Sydney city. James was like like, '*Boerdam better f***ing need this pedal!!!*' So we put that in on 20 percent and suddenly it was like, 'Oh my God, this is the best sound I've ever heard in my life!'"

As far as the guitars themselves go, Tidswell brandished a strikingly simple rig: "It was just a Jazzmaster plugged straight into the amp with a smidge of Soul Food."

Being the gear nerd he is at heart, Boerdam's kit was a little more fleshed-out. "I used a 2017 [American Professional] Tele Deluxe," he says, "But I put in these pickups from a guy in Adelaide named Brierley – he hand-winds these P-90s and all these cool vintage pickups, so I ripped out the humbuckers and put in this one P-90, and took out all the tone knobs so there's just a volume knob.

"I actually want to buy an old '70s one. I've been playing these old custom '70s Teles – like, proper ones – that Greg has in the studio. I picked mine up and I was like, 'That's good,' but then I picked up a '70s Custom and I was like, '*Phwoah!*' It's like triple the weight, but it's such a great guitar. But I am very happy with what I've got now – I only take two guitars with me on the road and they're the exact same... James, we need to get you a red '70s Tele."

"Hmmm... I'll compromise: a red Strat. And then put the Jazzmaster pickup on the neck, at least. You cannot replicate a Jazzmaster's neck pickup sound – it's so clean! And once your ear listens to that and not even the distortion, if you lose that pickup, it's just like, 'Well, where's the guitar? Where's the tone?' So a Strat with a Jazzmaster pickup in the neck... And maybe a Seymour Duncan humbucker in the back. I don't know, though, that might be a little *too* much. But I want some crunch."

So now we're nearing the end of 2019. The first shows back have been announced (coincidentally for another festival, Good Things), and Violent Soho officially have their fifth studio album, *Everything Is A-OK*, wrapped up and ready to stamp onto wax. It's a homely record for the band – they did everything on their own terms, worked at their own pace, and didn't even consider the prospect of hiring A&R.

Such is reflected in the LP's deliberately vanilla artwork: it's a photo, taken by Henery, of a house each member has walked past at least 1,000 times each. It's in walking distance from where Tidswell grew up and where he lives currently. It belongs to Ken, aged 83, who feeds his birds every day at 3pm on the dot and was ecstatic when the band asked if they could immortalise his abode in a jewel case.

But nothing is a greater testament to the record's informality than the actual material on it. The band had no grand plans to make any particular record when they started writing it. There was never any discussion of a Violent Soho metal record, or debate over whether they should roll in a keyboard or two.

All of the stylistic growth that Boerdam displays in his songwriting – and the band en masse in their performances – came not through calculated reinvention, but natural artistic maturity. As Boerdam explains, "Those kind of things happen naturally through writing a bunch of shit songs and going, 'That doesn't feel right', 'That's derivative



of *WACO*', 'We already did that on *Hungry Ghost*'... And then finding the songs where you can go, 'Okay, this one we could work with!'

Boerdam looks at *A-OK* as his most sophisticated effort. "I think the thing I like most about this record is that it's more mature," he reflects. "All the other records felt like we were just trying to punch holes in the wall, whereas this one's more like, 'Nah, let's have a discussion.' I don't think Soho will ever get rid of the heavier riffs because... Well, we love them. But in the themes and the way we get the message across, there's something more laidback – I think we were just more calm and confident."

Tidswell is quick to agree. "All the other records that we've done, I can *hear* the anxiety," he says. "And on this one, there's none. We're not anxious. We're not aggressive. We're just, like, sitting back and *being*. It's almost like what you try to do when you're meditating y'know? You have to be in the right headspace and let it happen – and when I listen back on these songs, I'm like, 'F***, we did it!' I'm so proud of that."

There's no shyness when it comes to branding *Everything Is A-OK* the band's magnum opus. For reference, we're sitting in the beer garden at the Lansdowne Hotel in Sydney, where in three hours, Soho will play a set for 200 fans that lined up outside a record store at 4:15am to buy tickets for; when we dive deep into the record, the axe-wielding duo rave about their favourite tracks as if they're the punters that have started lining up downstairs.

"Slow Down Sonic" is one we all mutually agree rules – it's a mid-tempo jam that canters along with a battered sizzle. "Pity Jar" is classic, grungy mosh food with some of the best percussion in Soho's catalogue. "Canada" will undoubtedly reign as a festival favourite. Tidswell and Boerdam have a near infinite amount of reasons to be proud of *A-OK*. Whether it really is their best album is up for time to decide, but it's objectively the one they put the most effort into, and that deserves praise.

"We cared so much about each song," Tidswell says, "And we just did the absolute best that we could with it. And there's so many little things that are completely new for us – the time signature changes on 'Easy' at one point, for example, and that's nothing we've even remotely attempted before. But we thought it sounded good, so we did it. Y'know, we've always focussed on making the songs sound as poppy as possible – we want them to be catchy as f*** – but with this record, we just wanted to just sound our best. We'd like to think that it's going to take four or five listens before you realise how good it actually is. With the other ones, we served it up like, 'If you don't get it on the first listen, you don't get it at all.' But there's a bit more going on here."

At the end of the day – for you reading along at home, at least – there's only one question that really matters: is *A-OK* a good album? Well, that's completely subjective, and we recommend you give it a spin for yourself to decide. How would we answer it, though? Simple: "*Hell f*** yeah!*" 🍌



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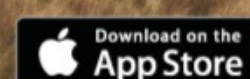
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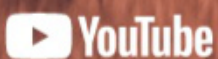
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THE GREAT

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2020

Another year deep, another NAMM down! The world's biggest annual celebration of all things music - which has been kicking strong since 1901, believe it or not - the 2020 edition of the trade show went down a treat back in January, with tens of thousands of gear nerds hustling and bustling around the Anaheim Convention Centre's shiny floors, all in search of the latest and greatest musical innovations. Here are just some of the biggest reveals we caught as fretboard fiends on the cusp of an exciting new decade...

FENDER



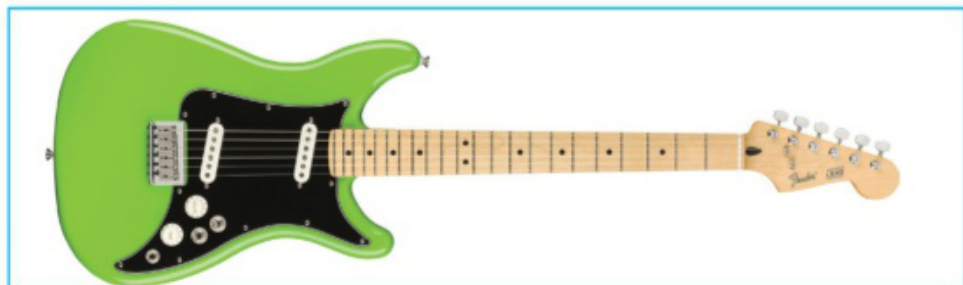
THE ICONIC HM STRAT IS BACK!

Famously wielded by virtuoso guitarist Greg Howe on his 1992 REH Hot Rock Licks instructional video, the short-lived '88-'92 run of heavy metal-friendly Strats were very much tailored to an era of super shredders.

Famous for their extreme playability and bold color schemes, the line has finally been revived. The new models offer a basswood body, Gotoh tuners, a HSS pickup configuration with a coil split switch for the bridge pickup, a Floyd Rose locking tremolo and 24 jumbo frets.

Of course, these latest versions wouldn't be the same without a black headcap and that infamous '80s stylised Fender logo on the headstock.

WORDS: AMIT SHARMA



THE LEAD II AND III HAVE BEEN REVIVED

St. Vincent, Bono, Eric Clapton and Steve Morse are just a handful of the guitarists associated with the Fender Lead series, its history stretching all the way back to 1979. The unique double-cutaways will be making their return this year in the form of Player Lead II and Player Lead III reissues.

The Lead II offers dual-slanted Player series single-coil pickups, a modern C-shape neck, medium jumbo frets, and dual-toggle switches for pickup selection and phase-reverse. The Lead III features two Player humbucking pickups, and dual-toggle switches for pickup selection and coil-splits.

WORDS: AMIT SHARMA



THE ACOUSTASONIC GETS A STRAT VERSION

Following the success of last year's bombshell Acoustasonic Telecaster, Fender have doubled down, revealing a Stratocaster variant featuring all-new tonewoods, voicing options and electric capabilities.

With a fully hollow body and Fender's patented Stringed Instrument Resonance System (SIRS), the Acoustasonic Stratocaster features everything that made the Tele so successful, but with a Strat-shaped body that will inevitably result in a different tonal projection and feel.

The guitar also features the Fender and Fishman-designed Acoustic Engine, delivering a newly curated collection of acoustic and electric voices. The Fender Acoustasonic Noiseless Magnetic pickup can be played solo for hum-free Fender electric tone, or blended with an acoustic voice to create new tones.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE

THE MILLION-DOLLAR CORONATION STRAT LEADS A JAW-DROPPING CUSTOM SHOP LINEUP

Fender have announced a plethora of new Custom Shop electric guitars, including additions to the Custom Artist Collection for Jimmy Page and Eric Johnson. Also ringing in the new decade is the introduction of the Annual and Prestige collections.

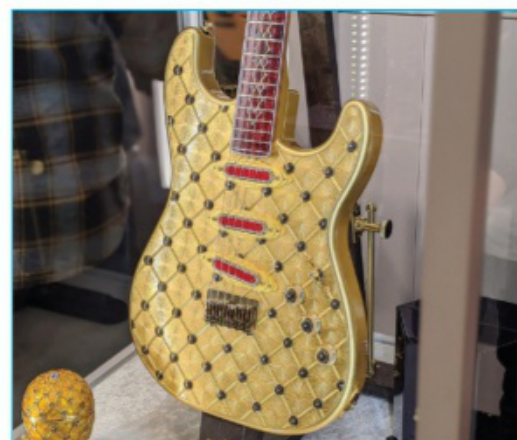
While the Annual Collection has been conceived to showcase the latest innovations and developments at the Custom Shop, each guitar in the Prestige Collection is by a single Fender Master Builder with no limit whatsoever on budget.

Headlining the pack is the Coronation Stratocaster, inspired by the Coronation Egg made in 1897 to commemorate the inauguration of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra on the Russian Imperial throne.

The guitar looks as royal as the name would suggest, donning a gold leafed surface with an on-wood Guilloche and gilded silver artwork. It's adorned with custom fabricated diamond eagle medallions, along with hundreds of diamonds throughout the instrument.

For anyone lucky enough to afford this beauty (it'll run you over \$1,000,000 in Australian currency), the souped-up Strat even comes with a vintage recreation of the Coronation Egg itself.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE



GEORGE HARRISON'S 'ROCKY' STRAT GETS A TRIPPED-OUT REPLICA

Fender has announced a faithful recreation of George Harrison's 'Rocky' Stratocaster, as made famous by its appearance in The Beatles' 1967 *Magical Mystery Tour* film.

Harrison's guitar was originally a Sonic Blue Strat, purchased in 1965 and still bearing the decal from the music store it came from: 'Grimwoods; The music people; Maidstone and Whitstable'.

In 1967, Harrison gave the guitar its dayglo paint job, and by December '69, he had painted 'Bebopalula' on the body, 'Go Cat Go' on the pickguard' and 'Rocky' on the headstock.

In creating this new model, Fender Custom Shop Master Builder Paul Waller examined and measured the original guitar - which boasted a rare asymmetrical C-profile neck - and its pickups to create a meticulous replica, right down to the 'Grimwoods' decal.

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

THE '70S LIVE WITH THE NEW TREADLITE WAH AND EXPRESSION PEDALS

Fender has added to its ever-growing family of pedals with perhaps its two most fascinating effects units in recent years: the Treadlite Wah and Treadlite Volume/Expression.

The Wah is certainly eye-catching, to say the least. The wooden pad on its lightweight, durable anodised aluminium body screams "70s" in a way that few wahs ever have. It's by no means an old design though, with adjustable treble and a three-way top mounted, mid-frequency toggle to really dial in the frequencies you're going for.

The original-Fender analog circuit also boasts a switchable external buffer and a red status LED to indicate when the pedal is active and ready for use.

Ideal for those who use volume pedals to sweep in chords à la Allan Holdsworth and those who want more control over their levels, the Treadlite Volume/Expression carries a similar vintage flavour, with a stage-ready chassis and rubberised pad built to last.

WORDS: AMIT SHARMA AND JACKSON MAXWELL



GIBSON



TOMMY IOMMI'S "MONKEY" GETS A CUSTOM SHOP CLONE

Those who take their Sabbath like their coffee will be tolling the bell of doom in celebration with the news that Gibson has launched an Artist Series replica of Tony Iommi's iconic 1964 SG Special. Nicknamed "Monkey", and featuring a sticker depicting the eponymous primate just below the bridge, the new SG Special is the Holy Grail of electric guitars in Black Sabbath history.

Besides its mahogany body and set neck, the Monkey features a pair of handmade pickups, which were wound by an apprentice of the late guru John Birch. It has been aged with a zero fret as per Iommi's original, and sports the same stop tailpiece bushings and routing holes where the original tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece would have been removed.

The Gibson Custom Shop has created 50 of these guitars, with 25 right-handed and 25 left (like the original). Each comes signed and numbered by Iommi, and inside the custom 1960s coffin case, you'll find an exclusive replica of Iommi's silver cross necklace and leather touring guitar strap.

WORDS: JONATHAN HORSLEY



THE FLYING V, EXPLORER AND LP SPECIAL TRIBUTE COP A REDUX

Gibson is expanding its Original Collection with new '70s-style Flying V and Explorer electric guitars. The Flying V will feature a bound rosewood fingerboard on a slim taper neck, with a pair of hand-wired '70s tribute burstbucker pickups. The guitar will be available in a classic white finish with a matching headstock, with silver reflector knobs and chrome hardware.

The Explorer will also feature a pair of handwired '70s tribute burstbuckers, a classic white finish, a bound rosewood fingerboard and chrome hardware – but with black speed knobs.

Gibson also looks to further expand its Modern Collection with a new Les Paul Special Tribute model. Players will be able to choose between two pickup configurations (humbucker or P-90), with the guitar representing the more affordable side of Gibson's lineup.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE



EPIPHONE'S "INSPIRED BY GIBSON" COLLECTION DROPS JAWS

Epiphone has announced that its 2020 electric guitar lineup will be split into two ranges: 'Epiphone Originals' and 'Epiphone Inspired by Gibson'.

The latter range's guitars will feature the more Gibson-like Kalamazoo headstock, as well as upgraded electronics and finishes.

These models include the Les Paul Junior, Les Paul Special, SG Special, Les Paul Standard '50s, Les Paul Standard '60s, SG Standard, '61 SG Standard w/Maestro, Designer Collection Explorer, Firebird and Flying V – as well as a Les Paul Studio and Les Paul Modern.

The Epiphone Original Collection, meanwhile, sees the relaunch of Made in USA models, beginning with the Texan acoustic – which features solid woods, X-bracing and a 25.5-inch scale length.

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

VOX

THE CAMBRIDGE50 MODELLING AMP IS A NUTUBE-EQUIPPED LIFESAVER

Equipped with Vox’s Nutube and Virtual Element Technology, the Cambridge50 promises to capture tube-amp response for stage-ready sounds. 11 amp models and eight built-in effects are rearing to go, as is a tuner, while a Celestion 12-inch speaker delivers the tones. Other functions include an aux input, USB audio interface and headphone/line output with cab sim, plus a line mode for acoustic-electric guitars and keyboards, and a preset mode to recall existing tones.



WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN



THE VALVENERGY PEDAL SERIES STARS FOUR NUTUBE-EQUIPPED GEMS

After years of cramming its Nutube tech into tiny amp heads and even an Ibanez Tube Screamer, Vox has finally brought the miniature valves into its own line of overdrive pedals. The lineup is composed of four models: the Mystic Edge (based on the AC30), Copperhead Drive (a classic rock stack sound), Silk Drive (the tone of a legendary boutique amp) and Cutting Edge (voiced for modern metal). All four offer amp-style drive with a Nutube twist, promising tube tone and response via a nine-volt power supply internally boosted to 15 volts. Each stompbox offers buffered bypass, and the ability to switch multiple pedals on and off at once via a clever eighth-inch cable connection mode.

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

TWO NEW BOBCAT MODELS REVISIT THE BRITISH INVASION ERA

Vox has announced the launch of two British Invasion-style semi-hollow electric guitars: the Bobcat V90 and the Bobcat S66.

The V90 is equipped with two soapbar pickups, while the S66 sports three single coils. The guitars feature a set neck design, which Vox promise will improve playability at the higher frets. Featuring a maple plywood construction, the body has a weight-relieved spruce center block for added sustain and feedback resistance. Hardware is designed for simplicity, with a fixed tune-o-matic bridge and lightweight open-gear Grover tuners.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE



IBANEZ

NITA STRAUSS’ SIGNATURE JIVA10 GETS A YOUNGER SIBLING

2020 marks the release of Strauss’ second signature model, the JIVAJR: a more affordable alternative to the JIVA10. The new model will come with a quilted maple top with three-ply binding on a meranti body, bolted to a Wizard III maple neck with a 24-fret ebony fingerboard that features her own ‘Beaten Path’ EKG-style inlays and luminescent side dot markers. Elsewhere on the guitar, there’s an Edge Zero II double locking tremolo bridge, Ibanez tuning machines and Ibanez Quantum pickups (HSH).

WORDS: AMIT SHARMA



AND STEVE VAI HAS A STUNNING NEW (NON-JEM) SIGNATURE MODEL

An ornate, avant-garde S-style guitar that looks very much like a more evolved JEM, the Paradise In Art (PIA) has a solid alder body and a five-piece maple and walnut neck, with a rosewood fretboard emblazoned with a multi-coloured blossom inlay. The PIA also features an all-new DiMarzio HSH pickup set that’s yet to be named, 24 jumbo stainless steel frets with Prestige edge treatment, gold hardware, and a Floyd Rose Edge tremolo. But the big news is the Petal Grip, which replaces the time-honoured Monkey Grip and looks kind of like a TMNT domino mask – but of course reprises the foliage theme. “The petals signify the bond that two people have when they resonate together,” Vai says.

WORDS: JONATHAN HORSLEY



ERNIE BALL



GET YOUR FINGERS AROUND EIGHT NEW STRING TYPES

Coming later this year will be Ernie Ball's new Turbo, Mondo, Skinny Top Beefy Bottom and Mighty Slinky sets, offering users custom string gauges that have never been available through the brand before.

All of the new sets will feature a nickel-plated steel wrap wire around a tin-plated hex core for that iconic Slinky feel and tone. The Turbo Slinkys fit neatly between Regular Slinkys and Hybrid Slinkys – great for those transitioning from 9s to 10s or back down. The Mondo Slinkys will be welcome news for those who tune lower, or want to get as much out of their instrument without going as heavy as 11s.

Those looking to explore the more extreme, thicker gauges will be interested in the new Magnum Slinkys – well suited to players who want optimal tension at lower tunings and with a wound 22-gauge G-string. Then there's the Skinny Top Beefy Bottom Slinkys for a happy medium between riffing and bending.

Finally, aimed at those who prefer the lighter gauges, the new Mighty Slinkys sit between the popular Super Slinky and Extra Slinky strings, providing a fast, light tension across all six strings. The Hyper Slinkys offer a lighter gauge variant on the Skinny Top Beefy Bottom format.

WORDS: AMIT SHARMA

JOHN PETRUCCI'S SIGNATURE SERIES GETS AN UPDATE

The John Petrucci signature series also sees a bit of an overhaul, with three new models for 2020: the revamped Majesty, JP15 and JP Maple Top. The latest incarnation of the Majesty features a flamed maple shield seated in a lightweight okoume body, Trooch's signature Dreamcatcher and Rainmaker pickups, and an onboard piezo bridge system.

There will also be a limited run of six- and seven-string Purple Nebula Majesty guitars, with a three-piece neck constructed from two strips of Honduran mahogany and a center strip of flamed maple on a body with alder sides, a neck-through mahogany and maple center and a carved, highly figured quilt maple top.

The 2020 JP15 is powered by twin custom DiMarzio Illuminator pickups, with a lightweight okoume body and figured maple top, a figured roasted maple neck and fingerboard, a piezo bridge system and onboard 20-decibel gain boost.

The JP Maple Top boasts an alder body with a mahogany tone block and figured maple top, and a Honduran mahogany neck with an East Indian rosewood fingerboard. The pickups included with this model are the DiMarzio Liquifire and Crunch Lab, with more options courtesy of the piezo bridge system and a coil-splitting tone pot. There will also be a Koa Top option which includes a mahogany body and neck with an ebony fretboard.

WORDS: AMIT SHARMA



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

ORANGE'S TERROR STAMP MIGHT BE THE WORLD'S MOST PORTABLE 20-WATT

Orange has launched the Terror Stamp: an ultra portable 20-watt electric guitar amp with the size (and functionality) of a pedal.

Featuring an ultra compact form factor, this little powerhouse will fit easily onto any pedalboard, delivering what Orange calls "masses of Terror tone at the stamp of your foot." Features include an 8/16-Ohm speaker output, a fully-buffered FX Loop, a cab sim/headphone output, shape control and a foot-switchable master volume.

The amp also features a hybrid ECC83 tube / Class AB solid state design, offering users the best of both worlds. Orange even says the amp can be used to power a four-by-12 cab. And with stunningly robust casing, we expect these will be very popular with gigging guitarists.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE



FISHMAN GO TO INFINITY AND BEYOND WITH NEW POWERTAP PICKUPS

With its new PowerTap Earth and PowerTap Infinity pickup systems, Fishman is aiming to help acoustic guitarists take their sound to infinity and beyond. The pickups

feature a Tap body sensor that, when combined with a Matrix Infinity or Rare Earth pickup, adds layers of texture and depth to an acoustic guitarist's sound.

Both systems feature an adjustable Blend control that can mix the sound of the Rare Earth or Infinity and Tap signals in mono. Players can choose to run the individual pickup and Tap signals into separate channels with the use of a stereo cable, allowing users to add separate effects, level control and EQ to each pickup independently.

The PowerTap Infinity features an enclosed, soundhole-mounted Volume and Tone control module, plus a voicing switch. The PowerTap Earth, meanwhile, features active electronics, miniature batteries and a neodymium magnet structure for increased string clarity.

WORDS: JACKSON MAXWELL



IK MULTIMEDIA'S AXE/I/O SOLO AUDIO INTERFACE IS A GODSEND FOR GUITARISTS

The AXE I/O SOLO is a more compact version of IK's premium guitar interface. The unit was developed with guitarists looking to record on a budget or on-the-go in mind, featuring two inputs and three outputs in a portable and convenient form factor.

Features include IK's high-end PURE microphone preamp, an instrument input with proprietary tone-shaping options; an exclusive Amp Out to incorporate real gear into a recording setup; and 24-bit, 192-kilohertz converters with a wide dynamic range for pristine recordings in all musical genres.

The unit also has the ability to act as a controller for IK's AmpliTube 4 software – the guitar and bass tone studio for Mac, PC, iPhone and iPad that comes included if purchased. Also included is a suite of T-RackS mixing and mastering plugins, and Ableton Live 10 Lite recording software.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE





MOOER UNVEILS TWO FEATURE-PACKED MINI PEDALS

Mooger Audio announced two new additions to its recently revamped Micro Series. Both the the A7 Ambiance reverb pedal and the D7 Delay come packed with tone-shaping features housed in a compact form factor.

The A7 Ambiance features seven reverb effects with the ability to shape the reverb tails with the Infinite Trail function or the more traditional Trail On function. The pedal also features an array of controls allowing endless customisation, and the ability to save settings as presets.

The D7 Delay houses six customisable digital delay effects, with LED lights on the side of the unit indicating the current setting. The pedal will also include a Trail On function, allowing the current delay to fade out naturally; and Tap Tempo functionality, which allows the user to easily set the desired delay timing.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE

VICTORY COMBINES PORTABILITY AND POWER WITH V4 THE DUCHESS

Victory has unveiled V4 The Duchess: a portable and compact amp in a pedal format. The company hopes to enable guitar players to achieve the classic Duchess tone at a more affordable price and in a more compact and lightweight design.

V4 The Duchess features an all-valve preamp and a 180-watt Class D power section. The amp weighs just 1.7 kilograms, so will appeal to guitarists seeking portability while maintaining the tone of a much larger head.

The amp also features an effect loop, an onboard digital reverb and a tremolo for ambience. Victory has intentionally opted to exclude speaker emulation and IRs from the unit, however.

WORDS: SAM ROCHE

FAITH HAVE UNVEILED THEIR FIRST EVER BARITONE ACOUSTIC

Faith Guitars has been on a roll as of late, and now the company has announced another new model: the HiGloss Neptune Baritone. The new acoustic guitar – Faith's first baritone design – sports the company's baby-jumbo body Neptune shape and a 26.77-inch scale length.

Features include a solid Engelmann spruce top and solid figured rosewood back and sides with an all-over high-gloss finish. There's also an ebony fingerboard, bridge, headplate and heelcap and flamed maple binding. Electronics include a Fishman INK3 preamp system with a chromatic tuner, three-band EQ and volume control, and an under-saddle Sonicore piezo pickup.

WORDS: RICHARD BIENSTOCK



THE SUNN O))) DIRT BOX COMES BACK TO LIFE IN EARTHQUAKER'S LIFE PEDAL V2

It was the must-have distortion pedal of 2019, and we see no reason why this new version of the Life pedal won't be this year either. Is it a distortion, octave fuzz, or boost? It's all three, and maybe a little more!

Developed in collaboration with Sunn O))) guitarists Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson, the Life Pedal is designed to hit a tube amplifier hard and send your tone spinning through a wormhole of cascading drive and harmonics.

While the pedal has an all-new enclosure, the gameplan is unchanged. The Life Pedal features an octave fuzz that was inspired by the classic Shin-Ei FY2 and FY6 units.

That circuit leads into an LM308-chipped RAT-style distortion, and features a three-way clipping switch (op Amp, Asymmetric and Symmetric) to sculpt that gain. The second stage operates as a clean MOSFET boost to get your tube amp all hot and bothered.

WORDS: JONATHAN HORSLEY

KORG'S SUPER EASY-TO-BUILD PEDAL KIT REQUIRES NO SOLDERING

In addition to Vox's Valvenergy pedals, parent brand Korg has also utilised Nutube technology for the Nu:Tekt OD-S Overdrive kit, which requires no soldering to build. Such should make for an easy build with no risk of anything going wrong – provided you follow the instructions to a T, of course.

Once assembled, the pedal features two gain knobs, one of which adjusts the input volume and the other the gain of the Nutube, offering amp-style flexibility. There's also a switch to choose between two overdrive types (low/high) and true bypass switching. Most intriguingly, Korg notes that the circuitboard features a mod-friendly layout, allowing you to create your own design.

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN





THE ALLMAN BETTS BAND



JIMMY VAUGHAN



GEORGE BENSON

Photo: Austin Hargrave



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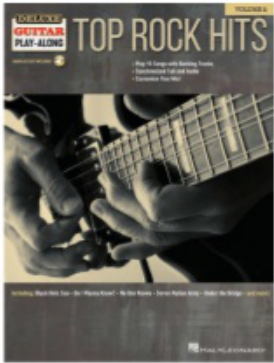
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INCLUDED IN:
Top Rock Hits
Deluxe Guitar Play-Along
Hal Leonard 248381
*Customise your experience
with the interactive, online
audio and TAB.*

Kryptonite

Words and Music by Matt Roberts, Brad Arnold and Todd Harrell



Intro
Moderately slow Rock ♩ = 99

Chords: Bm, G, Asus2

Notes: *mf* w/ clean tone let ring throughout

TAB:

1. Bm G Asus2 2. G A7sus2

Verse
Bm G Asus2

1. Well, I took a walk a - round the world to ease my trou - bled mind.

I left my bod - y ly - ing some - where in the sands of time.

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The image displays a musical score for the song "The Dark Side of the Moon" by Pink Floyd. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal melody in G major (one sharp) and 7/8 time. The lyrics are: "But I watched the world _ float to the dark _ side of the moon. _". Above the staff, the chords Bm, G, and Asus2 are indicated. The bottom staff is a guitar solo, also in G major and 7/8 time, featuring a melodic line with a tremolo effect. The fret numbers for the guitar solo are: 2, 4, 4, 3, 4, 4, 0 for the first measure, and 3, 2, 0, 0, 0, 2, 2, 0 for the second measure.

Bm

G

A7sus2

I feel there's noth - ing I can do. Yeah.

2 4 4 3 4 4 0

3 2 0 0 0 0

The image shows a musical score for an "Interlude" section. It consists of two staves: a guitar staff (top) and a bass staff (bottom). The guitar staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The bass staff is in bass clef. The music is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. Above the guitar staff, the chords Bm, G, and A are indicated. The guitar staff contains a series of notes and rests, while the bass staff contains a series of notes and rests. The notes are written in a simplified, stylized manner, with some notes grouped together. The bass staff has a 4/4 time signature. The overall style is that of a simple musical notation for a guitar and bass duo.

The first system of the musical score for "The Sound of Silence" is shown. It features a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the accompaniment is written on four staves below. The first measure of the melody is a quarter note G4, followed by a half note A4. The first measure of the accompaniment is a quarter note G2, followed by a half note A2. The system is labeled with the chord Bm (B minor) above the first measure and the chord G (G major) above the second measure. The system ends with a double bar line.

Verse
Bm

G Asus2

2. I watched the world _ float to the dark _ side of the moon. _
3. See additional lyrics

2 4 4 3 4 4 0

3 2 0 0 0 2 2 0

Bm

*G **A7sus2

Af - ter all, _ I knew _ it had to _ be some - thing to do with you. _

2 4 4 3 4 4 0

3 2 0 0 0 0 0

*2nd time, bass plays E. **2nd time, bass plays F#.

Bm

G Asus2

I real - ly don't _ mind _ what hap - pens now _ and then, _ as

2 4 4 3 4 4 0

3 2 0 0 0 2 2 0

Bm

*** G ***A7sus2

long as you'll be _ my friend _ at the end. _

2 4 4 3 4 4 0

3 2 0 0 0 0 0

***2nd time, as before.

Chorus

B5 G5 A5

Well, if I go cra - zy, then will you still call me Su - per - man? _

f w/ dist. P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - -

9 9 9 9 5 5 7 7

7 7 7 7 3 3 5 5

B5 E5 N.C.(F#5)

If I'm a - live _ and, well, will you _ be there hold - ing my hand?

P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - -

9 9 9 9 2 2 5 4 0

7 7 7 7 0 0 2 0

B5 G5 A5

I'll keep you by my side with my su - per - hu - man might. _

P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - -

9 9 9 9 5 5 7 7

7 7 7 7 3 3 5 5

B5 E5 F#5

_ Kryp - to - nite. _

P.M. - - P.M. - - P.M. - -

9 9 9 9 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4

7 7 7 7 0 0 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

1.

Bm G A

mf
w/ clean tone

Fingering: 2 3 4 4 2 2 3 4 4 2 3 3 3 3 2 2 2 2

Bm G A

Fingering: 2 3 4 4 2 2 3 4 4 2 3 3 3 3 2 2 2 2

2.

Interlude

B5 G5 A5

Fingering: 7 4 5 4 5 4 7 5 4 5 4 5

B5 E5 F#5

4th time, To Coda

P.M.

Fingering: 7 7 5 5 7 5 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 0

B5 A G Bm A G

mf
w/ clean tone

Fingering: 4 4 2 2 2 0 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Chorus

Bm A G Bm

If I go cra - zy, then will you still call me Su - per - man? — If I'm a - live — and well will

A G Bm A G

you be there hold - ing my hand? — I'll keep you by my side with my su - per - hu - man might. —

Bm A G

Kryp - to - nite. Yeah! —

D.S. al Coda
(take 2nd ending)

f
w/ dist.

19

⊕ Coda B5

Additional Lyrics

3. You called me strong, you called me weak,
But still your secrets I will keep.
You took for granted all the times I never let you down.
You stumbled in and bumped your head.
If not for me, then you'd be dead.
I picked you up and put you back on solid ground.

HOT GEAR



FENDER VINTERA '60S JAZZMASTER

RRP: \$1,999 • fender.com

For players who want the style and sound of Fender's golden era. Equipped with the coveted features that defined the decade, including period-accurate neck profile and playing feel, along with re-voiced pickups, this guitar has all of the warm, smooth sound that made the Jazzmaster a legend.



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RRP: \$1,899 • fender.com

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SHURE SE215 SOUND ISOLATING EARPHONES

RRP: \$149 • jands.com.au

The place you'd rather be is right here. Get immersive sound that turns your commute into a concert, and your workout into the discovery of new musical dimensions. Available in four colours in both wired and wireless options, the SE215 delivers off-the-shelf audio for a better listening experience in every situation.



ERNIE BALL VPJR TUNER

RRP: \$650 • cmcmusic.com.au

The Ernie Ball VPJR Tuner is the perfect combination of two pedals that every musician depends on, offering precise volume control with an enhanced definition digital tuner, while saving valuable space on your pedalboard. The pedal features a fast and accurate chromatic tuner with a graphic volume display that is visually attractive and easy to operate. The large, sunlight-readable display automatically switches between tuner and volume modes depending on the signal level, allowing the player to tune at minimal volume.

KEMPER KABINET

RRP: \$TBC • innovativemusic.com.au

The Kemper Kabinet is a combination of the Kemper Kone loudspeaker and an extensive speaker tone mining technology developed by Kemper, making it possible to digitally "imprint" various speaker characteristics onto one single cabinet. Among the imprints, you'll find the finest choice of well-known guitar speakers from Celestion, JBL, Jensen and many more, as well as rare and particular speakers from other manufacturers like Oxford and Goodmans Audio.





BEHRINGER WASP DELUXE SYNTHESISER

RRP: \$699 • australismusic.com.au

This monophonic analog synth delivers a faithful reproduction of the classic 1978 EDP Wasp, sporting the same bone-rattling lows and searing highs that made the original model infamous amongst synth circles. As the name insinuates, the Wasp Deluxe excels at droney, buzzy and waspy synth sounds, all made possible by its two digital oscillators, distinctive analog VCF, noise generator, and a hive of modulation capabilities.



CORT MANSON META MBM-1

RRP: \$TBC • dynamicmusic.com.au

Cort has teamed up with Manson Guitar Works and Muse frontman Matthew Bellamy to develop an all-new signature model that is built to Matthew's exact and demanding specifications. The result is a superb rock guitar with a full tone and rock-solid feel, without the boutique price. This exciting model features a specially designed set of pickups from Manson and a discrete kill button to create unique sonic textures.



PIGTRONIX PHILOSOPHER'S TONE MICRO PEDAL

RRP: \$199 • dynamicmusic.com.au

Turn lead to gold with the Pigtronix Philosopher's Tone Micro. Famous for its noiseless clean sustain, the Philosopher's Tone stands out as a uniquely powerful guitar effect in the crowded world of compressor pedals. The Philosopher's Tone Micro packs all of the optical compression and unrivalled sustain of the original into a micro-sized chassis that runs on a meagre nine volts of external power.



TWO NOTES TORPEDO CAPTOR X

RRP: \$949
innovativemusic.com.au

Playing your tube amp in a great sounding room, with an exceptional choice of perfectly matched speaker cabinets and microphones, is a truly joyous and unparalleled experience. The Torpedo Captor X is for tube amp lovers who crave this every time they play, no matter the environment.



LINE 6 POWERCAB 112 + 112 PLUS

RRP: \$1,299+ • au.yamaha.com

The Powercab 112 and Powercab 112 Plus are one-by-12-inch active speaker systems that deliver an authentic 'amp in the room' playing experience when paired with any modeller, profiler, or even an amp-simulation pedal.

Select one of six classic Speaker Models as alternatives to your current cab models, or simply plug in your modeler and play using Flat Mode. Powercabs are loud enough to fill any small club or medium-sized venue, and performing guitarists will also appreciate their lightweight yet roadworthy construction, compact size, flip-out kickstands and XLR direct outputs.

The Powercab 112 Plus also includes powerful advanced features such as a two-inch LCD screen, 128 user preset locations, MIDI In/Out, AES/EBU and L6 LINK digital I/O, a multipurpose second input, and a USB audio interface.

ERNIE BALL FLAT RIBBON PATCH CABLES

RRP: \$18.95+ • cmcmusic.com.au

Ernie Ball's new flat ribbon patch cables feature a high-quality design made with superior components that are built to last, while providing you a clear tone with crisp highs, tight mids and rich harmonics. Key design elements include 99.95 percent oxygen-free copper for corrosion resistance, and dual shielding for low noise and durability. The flat cable design and low-profile connectors allow for optimised pedalboard layout and cable routing. Multiple shielding materials preserve the signal and minimise handling noise, and the durable PVC jacket exterior ensures long-lasting performance.





TWO PEDALS ENDLESS SOUNDS

Zoom A1 Four.

The Zoom G1 FOUR and G1X FOUR feature over 70 effects and amp models, looper and drum machine. Plus, access to ZOOM Guitar Lab's additional library of downloadable effects.



X is for Xpression

Zoom A1X Four.

The G1X FOUR comes with ZOOM's expression pedal, which provides control over effects such as volume, wah, delay and pitch. Plug in and be amazed!

AUSTRALIAN recording TECHNIQUE

CAPTURE THE SOUND

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WE ROUND OFF THE
MOST ESSENTIAL TIPS
AND TRICKS WE'VE
LEARNED SO FAR



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RECORDING TIPS

EAT, SLEEP, JAM, REPEAT – HOW TO CAPTURE
WORLD-CLASS ACOUSTICS FROM YOUR BEDROOM

ROAD TESTED

ELECTRO-VOICE EVOLVE 30M PORTABLE
POWERED COLUMN SYSTEM



OUR STRONGEST LESSONS LEARNED IN-STUDIO

TOP TIPS FROM SOME OF AUSTRALIA'S BEST RECORDING ENGINEERS AND PRODUCERS. WORDS BY **PETER ZALUZYNY**.



Over the last few years, a lot of extremely talented people that work behind desks in recording studios across Australia have revealed their tips, tricks and sound capturing secrets for our little column. Many of these have almost been lost to the pages of time, sitting in boxes, back issues or buried in hard drives. So, we decided to dig through the archives to bring you some of the best bits of professional advice that we collected from over 30 interviews.

HOW TO BALANCE COMPRESSION AND GUITAR DISTORTION

"Compression is extremely important for any song where you want a powerful sound, especially for the vocal tracks and drums. But the reason guitars are distorted to start with is basically due to the limitation of the signal, so it's important not to make them seem lifeless by compressing the distorted signal, which will result in zero dynamics. Just about the only time I'd run distorted guitars through compressors now is to impart the sound of the compressor without actually compressing it. When guitars are layered up, this especially helps the whole mix to move and breathe, because they still have dynamics." – **Joseph Cheek**

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH LOUD GUITARS IN A LIVE RECORDING

"Gain structure and cutting frequencies are the two biggest things that make live sound sound good. Push all your faders flat and push all your levels up by gain when you start. There's no point giving yourself 20 decibels of gain on a fader that you're going to pull down by 20 decibels – it's pointless and it gives you gain structure issues. But if you have everything flat, you have more control and you're not pushing your master all the time. You have headroom, and things aren't going to feed back." – **Daniel Brown**

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE MIXING A BROAD RANGE OF FREQUENCIES AND DYNAMICS

"These days, I use a combination of EQ, compression, panning and effects to place instruments and parts accordingly, because it's important for each instrument to have its own space in the frequency spectrum. It varies from track to track, but some key frequencies that I tend to focus on initially are around the 50-hertz, 80-hertz, 100-hertz and 330-hertz area. In terms of dynamics, contrasting dips and peaks are very effective. Also, one way to catch the listener's





attention and draw them to another instrument or part is by creating little inconsistencies in a mix. For example, a ping pong delay coming through a vocal reverb panned further out to the sides.” - **Jessica Bennett**

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF PRODUCING YOUR OWN (OR YOUR BAND’S) MUSIC.

“The hardest thing is managing perfectionism when I mix. There’s always a nagging feeling about how my work stacks up, and I can sink hours into tweaks or different approaches to try and bring the best out in material. Obviously this is amplified when it’s my band. I’ve been training myself to sever that emotional connection to some extent, simply for the preservation of my sanity! But understanding the personal dynamics of the band, the things each musician needs to excel, and feeling satisfied with the result, are some of the really tricky things about producing. So the deep personal connection I have with my bandmates means that they can be pretty straight-up with me about what they want and what needs to be better.” - **Alex Wilson (sleepmakeswaves)**

FINDING THE RIGHT INSTRUMENT TO SUPPORT YOUR VOCAL TAKE

“The bottom end of an arrangement

is pretty important. With a male vocal, the resonance of the person’s voice usually sits between 150 hertz to about 300 hertz, and a female vocal will be around 300 hertz. The bottom end of a mix will almost always be below that, so I’ll make sure that the bass, double bass, cellos, synthesiser – whatever’s in the bottom end – is really controlled and sitting comfortably under the vocalist. But as I move up the frequency spectrum towards the vocal, I try to pan the instrumentation to the left or right so there’s a definite gap in the centre that’s not intruding on the vocal space.” - **James Englund**

HOW TO SLOWLY BUILD A SONG UP TO AN EXPLOSIVE FINISH

“[It’s] detailed automation in the mix. If the volume increases too much by the end, then compression comes into play, especially when it comes to mastering. If the intro is too quite relatively, the whole track may need to be compressed too much to stand up, taking the impact away from the end. The key is to increase intensity in performances, rather than pure volume. A guitar player that gradually digs in harder, letting the amp break up more and more as the song goes on, is far more effective than just turning it up, for example.” - **Fraser Montgomery**





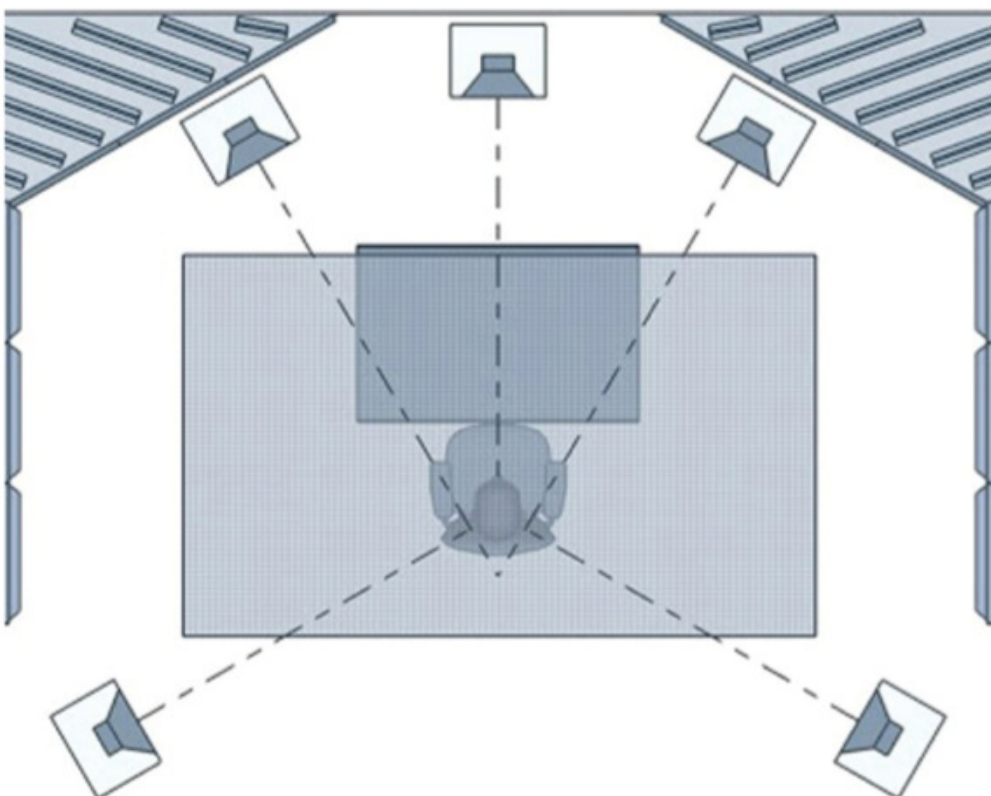
BEDROOM ACOUSTICS, PART TWO: ACOUSTIC TREATMENT

SO YOU'VE GOT YOUR SPACE SORTED OUT. NOW LET'S MAKE IT SOUND LIKE A WORLD-CLASS STUDIO! WORDS BY **ROB LONG**.



ABOVE:
LOW CEILINGS,
HIGH POTENTIAL

BELOW:
BOUNCING IN ALL
DIRECTIONS



Last issue, we looked at the highly challenging issue of soundproofing a room for general recording and music production. It's tricky enough if you own the property and have carte blanche on what you can do with it, but it's far more difficult if you're renting and need to keep alterations (and damage!) to a minimum.

This time, we'll take a brief look at the (only slightly) less daunting subject of acoustic treatment. This deals with the behaviour of soundwaves within the room – not with sound isolation from the outside world.

The average domestic dwelling is not designed to 'sound good' in any considerable way, so usually you're faced with some fairly daunting and often immovable obstacles – low ceilings, square rooms, windows and doors placed in challenging positions, rooms next to bathrooms and laundries...

Most studios are designed and built from the ground up, obviously. However, most people delving into the world of recording begin with a basic setup, which slowly grows and improves over time as things get serious and budgets expand. The gear is often capable of producing great results, however the room is often overlooked, until such time as issues and limitations begin to arise. Thus, acoustic treatment often becomes a perpetual 'work in progress'.

Basically, the better your ears, mics, preamps and converters are, the more the issues will be apparent. It's a wake-up call capturing sound sources with pristine equipment in a less-than-pristine environment – not unlike zooming in on a low-quality image on a large screen.

TIME TO REFLECT

A portion of the soundwaves within the room are termed 'direct sound', which travels in a straight line between the source and the microphone. This is obviously the 'meat' of the tone you're attempting to capture in its purest form.

However, thrown into the bargain are soundwaves reflected off all surfaces (including the floor and ceiling) and can bounce around in a myriad of directions – often back into the mic. This can enhance your

recording, but it can also totally mutate what you capture – there are infinite possibilities. The biggest issue here is the difference in time it takes all of these different reflections to reach the single mic.

The louder the sound's source is, the more it will interact with the room. While high frequencies are very directional and highly reflective, lower frequencies become unidirectional and actually penetrate structures beyond the walls, doors and windows.

The harder and 'shinier' your surfaces are, the more they will reflect soundwaves. Achieving the delicate balance between reflection and absorption is a tricky business – and not everyone seeks the same result. Obviously, there are 'live' rooms and 'quiet booths' – but we're focusing here on those folks who essentially have one general-purpose room for tracking and mixing. Your setup has to be useful in a multitude of situations.

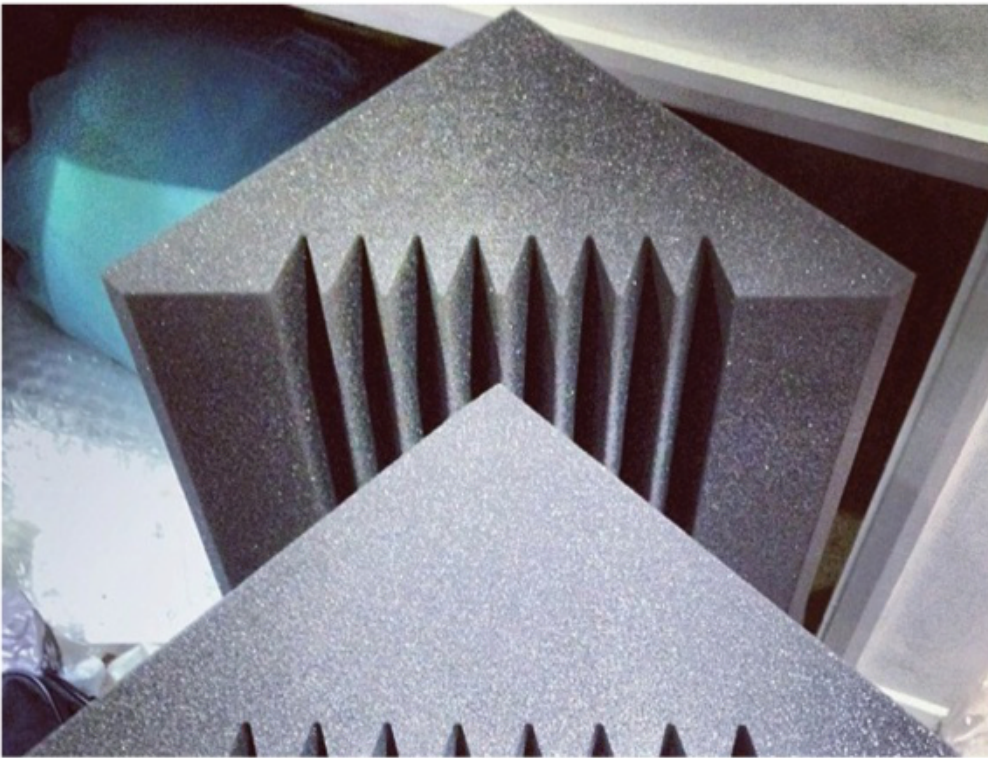
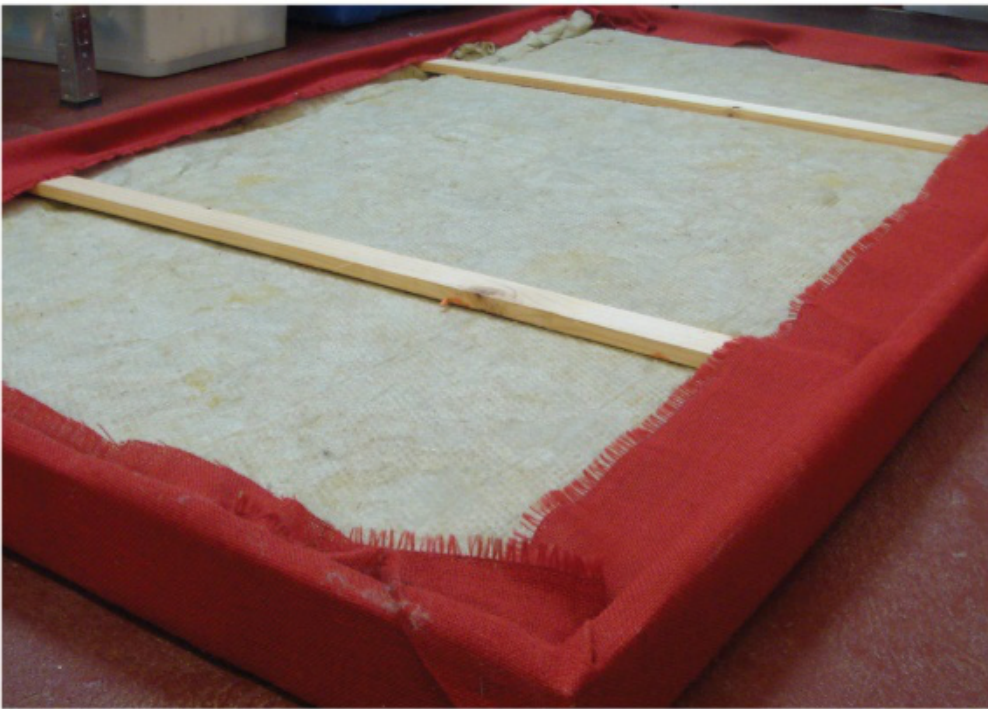
Reflections are not your arch enemy. It's natural to hear reflected sound – we do it all day long. However, reflections can seriously complicate and dilute things in a recording environment if the factors causing them are left completely unchecked.

Generally, for the home studio projects, it's most sensible to record things as tightly and cleanly as possible, with predominantly close micing techniques – then use digital means later to create space around the sounds during the mixing phase. This makes every element more malleable and controllable, and of course less random.

LAYOUT

If you have the luxury to choose which room you want to make your studio, obviously you want to pick the largest one you can get a hold of. Not because you can fit more gear into it, but because the further your walls and ceilings are from your sound sources, the less impact their reflections will have on things.

As much as possible, you want to make your setup symmetrical. Soundwaves from your stereo speakers need to travel identical routes to your ears, if possible –



TOP:
WALL-TO-WALL
ABSORPTION

MIDDLE:
A HOMEMADE
SOLUTION TO
SOAKING UP SOUND

BOTTOM:
TRAP THAT BASS!

otherwise you'll have an impaired impression of the stereo field (kind of like one dirty lens on your glasses).

Try to give as much space as possible between the speakers and the back wall of the room. If you're mixing and getting heavy reflections back into your listening position, you

can easily find yourself pushing and pulling things all over the place and tearing your hair out. Often you'll see a fair bit of work put into the rear wall of a studio (bass trapping, absorption, diffusion), as the length of the room will often coincide with the 'peak' of a low frequency wave.

An interesting way to approach the placement of acoustic treatment is to have someone move a mirror around the walls and ceiling. Any place you see a reflection of your speakers in the mirror is an ideal candidate for absorption or diffusion.

THE THREE AMIGOS

There are three main types of commercially available acoustic treatment devices, which are found in virtually any professional recording space. They all have their uses, and work together to achieve the final result.

SET SOME BASS TRAPS

Corners are generally not your friend. Soundwaves - particularly in low frequencies - tend to build up in corners, as the two surfaces reflect waves back and forth. Of course, a typical room has twelve corners - four around the walls, four from floor to wall, and four from ceiling to wall.

Think about those dark, smelly rehearsal rooms which sound like oversized boomboxes. Look around, and you'll find a whole lot of high-to-mid frequency absorption (often stuff you'd find on a council clean up) - and absolutely no work put into absorbing low frequencies. The result is a room that sounds like a subwoofer, where there's absolutely no clarity in anything above 800 hertz.

The bass trap is really a great starting point for acoustic treatment. Tame those low frequencies early on, and the rest of the room will (usually) be much easier to deal with.

REACH FOR THE CEILING

Most studios have a mix of hard and soft surfaces. The general approach is to have a soft ceiling, a hard floor, and a mix for the walls. If you think about it, there's a wide variation in ceiling height from room to room and building to building, so the distance from the ceiling to your ears is always changing. On the other hand, the distance from your ears to the floor is always the same - that's just dependent on your height. So this becomes an important source of orientation.

Low ceilings really mess with overhead mics on drums, and can create all kinds of phasing issues. The average adult's head is well above the halfway point between the ceiling and floor in the standard dwelling. Thus, if they are singing, or holding an instrument above the shoulders (violins, violas, most brass and woodwind instruments, etcetera), the reflections will hit the ceiling before

they hit the floor.

You can minimise ceiling reflections in various ways, and don't necessarily need to treat the entire ceiling. I've seen people hang an old parachute upside down from the ceiling - looks great! More conventional methods might involve using a mixture of absorbers and diffusers. These can be fixed directly to the ceiling, or sometimes more strategically 'hung' on panels which are floated from the ceiling like a 'soundcloud'.

Absorbers reduce a portion of the incidental acoustic energy in order to minimise the amount being reflected back into the room. They actually convert the sound energy into heat; they deal with a specific frequency range - usually upper mids to highs. They are often the first thing people grab for, and thus when used alone, or excessively, can completely suck out the very frequencies that make many instruments and the human voice coherent.

Diffusers, on the other hand, scatter the sound energy over a wide range of angles, rather than allowing a coherent reflection to bounce back as it would on a flat, solid surface. It's important to ensure that the soundwaves remain in the room. For this reason, diffusers tend to work better in larger rooms. These devices look amazing, but can be quite expensive as they are usually labour-intensive to build. Think of them more as 'icing on the cake' rather than fundamental essentials.

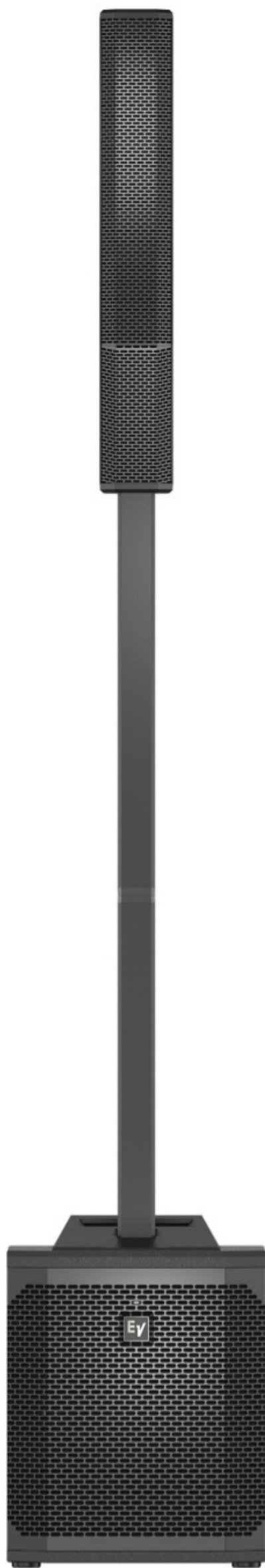
SOFTWARE

It's common to use software to aid in 'tuning' your room from the inside out. This often involves generating frequencies from your studio speakers into a mic which captures information and analyses it, giving important feedback on your setup.

Acoustic treatment is a deep and complex subject, which involves years of dedicated study to fully understand. Hopefully this article will help kickstart some thoughts about how you can work to improve your current setup.

You may wish to take things further by doing some more serious research, visiting professional studios, asking questions or talking to a professional acoustic engineer. Or you may decide that you'd rather just record in the box with samples and loops and mix with a good set of headphones, and bypass the whole issue! Whichever route you choose to head down, remember - the most important piece of equipment in the studio is your ears... Oh, and the coffee machine! ☕

Rob Long is a multi-instrumentalist and producer working @FunkyLizardStudios in Newcastle.



RRP: \$2,195

ELECTRO-VOICE EVOLVE 30M PORTABLE POWERED COLUMN SYSTEM

ALEX WILSON EXPLORES A COMPACT SPEAKER AND MIXER PACKAGE THAT MAKES LIVE SOUND STUPID EASY.

In the past decade or so, the big (literally) audio tech of live sound has been challenged by smaller digital upstarts. While the tired “analog vs. digital debate rages eternally online, any time working in the live industry will show you the writing on the wall. Digital smokes analog in the venues of the world. Big tube or transistor warmth is not nearly as compelling in the rush and roar of live sound as in the studio.

Electro-Voice (EV) obeys the law. They keep shrinking the technology required for live shows down into smaller packages. The 30M is an even slimmer version of their already compact 50M. These are two slightly different versions of a one-stop-shop product that attaches a digital mixer to a highly portable PA system, placing everything you need for a small show or event under your fingertips.

If you’re the kind of person to ask, “what’s a column system?” then this product has been made to be easy for you. The column is the stand and small rectangle of speakers that sit atop it. Column arrays have less perceived loudness than larger box speakers, but EV have unflinchingly committed to the portability and user-friendliness offered by the smaller drivers. The end result, is impressive. The 6-by-2.8-inch drivers in the column, powered by 500w (solid-state) and with another 500 going to the subwoofer, pump out a fairly impressive 123 decibels of SPL. In real terms this is enough juice for a medium size, medium volume band or a cranking dancefloor where uncle Terry can cut rug to Hall ‘n Oates after a few pinots.

I didn’t have any similar speakers on hand to compare with the 30M, but on its own the one I had offered ample, transparent headroom. Some of this can be attributed to the little slant on the column array that offer 120 degrees of coverage. Or in other words, shoots a bit of treble and mids towards the floor so it can bounce around and hit the ears of people that might be sitting down. The 30M also has a low-key but powerful sense of quality despite its bantam weight. EV is now owned by home appliance artisans Bosch, so its quite possible that fastidious and efficient German engineering accounts for some of the 30M’s oomph.

And with the sub weighing a (relatively) paltry 16 kilos, any relatively healthy human can carry one. Included with the 30M is a custom-designed zipless backpack to carry the stand and the column array. With the pack on your back and the speaker in your hands, it’s a single trip from the stage to the car. EV sell a matching padded bag for the 30M’s sub separately, and also have a generic sub transport bag that includes wheels and a telescopic handle if you want an extra hand free for another item.

This is going to sound super-cheesy, but the 30M really does put control in the hands of the average person far more than most units that come across my

desk, claiming the same thing on their ad boilerplate. The key takeaway is that a non-professional could familiarize themselves with the basics of how the 30M works in fifteen minutes and then be ready to get on with running their event, or busking, or whatever.

Talking shop, the 30M includes an eight-channel digital mixer. Different signals hit the mixer via six combi-jack inputs on the back. One of these jacks can be switched to a quarter-inch Hi-Z input, better for quiet signals like guitar or bass pickups. Another is a stereo pair that can be switched to unbalanced RCA or eighth-inch inputs, say for plugging in a phone, TV or computer.

Another simple, inspired feature is inclusion of dedicated and flexible Bluetooth connection. In the first instance, the digital audio that can be played via Bluetooth makes up the final stereo pair of the eight-channel input stage. I love the democratic, unsnooty vibe here. It’s a kind concession to average, non-techy folks who wouldn’t think to bring an aux cable or RCAs if they want playback from another device. The Bluetooth feature can be taken further, either as a means of connecting your control device to the speaker, or even as a means to commonly connect and control multiple 30Ms if you want to expand the setup. Classy.

All these various signals are controlled by EV’s QuickSmart app, run from iOS and Android devices. In addition to QuickSmart, more features are built into the sub and tweakable via buttons and an LCD. But you could do near everything in the app. Boot it up on your phone and you’ll have access to basic digital channel strips for each input, as well as master controls to control the overall response of the unit and the balance between the different speaker sections.

QuickSmart is not as complex as other digital mixer platforms, which is mainly a strength but also a qualified weakness. What I love is how simple and bullshit-free the app is, making it quick to learn and hard to screw up if this is your first live sound rodeo. In terms of sheer capability, it pales in comparison to competing mix software from Soundcraft, for instance, or Mackie. But this critique, while valid, must also be kept in context. One doesn’t need bells and whistles to use the 30M as intended, in small settings where portability and ease-of-use overshadows the need for finicky detail.

THE BOTTOM LINE

By definition, no product can be perfect, because it can never be everything to everyone. But judged as an accessible, comprehensive and fairly-priced audio solution for small events, the 30M excels. Provided you don’t ask it to scream volumes louder than its small size can handle, it won’t let you down. 🎧

► TOP FEATURES

- Transport backpack
- Practical Bluetooth compatibility
- 123 decibels of SPL performance
- 120-degree speaker coverage
- QuickSmart app for iOS and Android

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Extremely portable for a PA
- A simple and accessible mixing platform
- Sturdy and sleek design

CONS

- Physical limits to the headroom and perceived loudness

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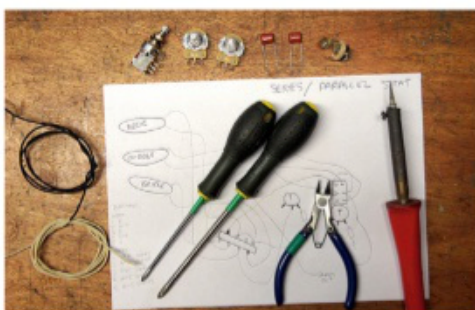


SHURE



MEET YOUR EXPERT

Jack Ellis runs Jack's Instrument Services from his workshop in Manchester, England. In his career, he's worked on thousands of instruments, from simple fixes and upgrades to complete rebuilds.



WHAT YOU NEED:

- 40-watt soldering iron
- Solder
- Wire cutters
- Shrink tubing
- Cloth pushback wire
- A500K or A250K push/push pot
- 2x A500K or A250K pots
- 2x 0.022-microfarad tone capacitors
- PH2 screwdriver
- Small flathead screwdriver
- Wiring diagram

If your Strat has RWRP pickups (reverse wound, reverse polarity) this means that the combined pickup setting will cancel humming just like a real humbucker – which of course is where the pickup gets its name!



SKILL LEVEL:
Intermediate

SPICE UP YOUR STRAT WITH SERIES SWITCHING

MAKE YOUR STRAT A SERIAL KILLER WITH THESE NEW SERIES HUMBucker SOUNDS USING THE ORIGINAL SINGLE COILS. WORDS BY **JACK ELLIS**.

This issue, we're modding a Strat to give it a new series mode. You thought your Strat was versatile already? Now you can begin stepping into humbucker territory.

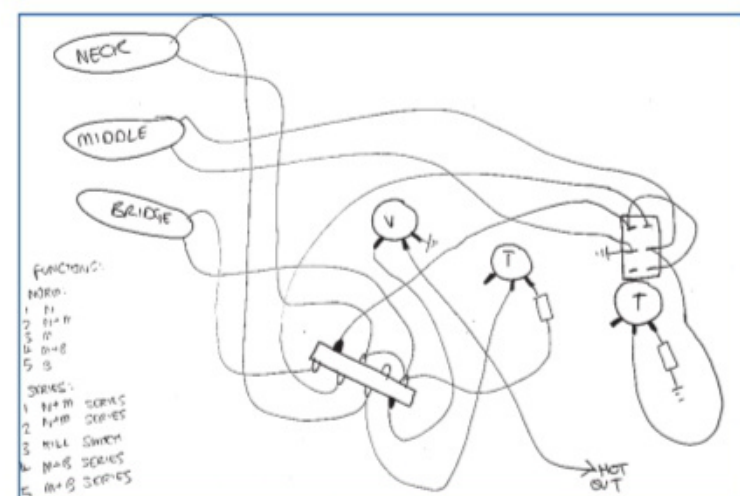
As standard, the Strat has this switch function: Neck / Neck and Middle / Middle / Middle and Bridge / Bridge. The N&M and M&B settings are parallel connections of the two single coils giving a classic 'quack' tone; if these coils were connected in series instead, they'd have a rounder and louder sound. This is actually how the two coils in a humbucker are connected. So wouldn't it be great to have that switchable? Enter the push/push pot, a neat way of making a pot dual-function.

The new series modes are: Neck and Middle (series) / Neck and Middle (series) / Kill switch / Middle and Bridge (series) / Middle and Bridge (series). As you can see there's now two new sounds there, plus a centre setting kill switch as a bonus; you can toggle between the sounds with the push/push switch!

1 To get started on the wiring, we need to gain access first. On a Strat, that means out with about 1,000 screws! Be careful not to yank the plate when you lift it up, as there's still a couple of wires attached. Snip off the

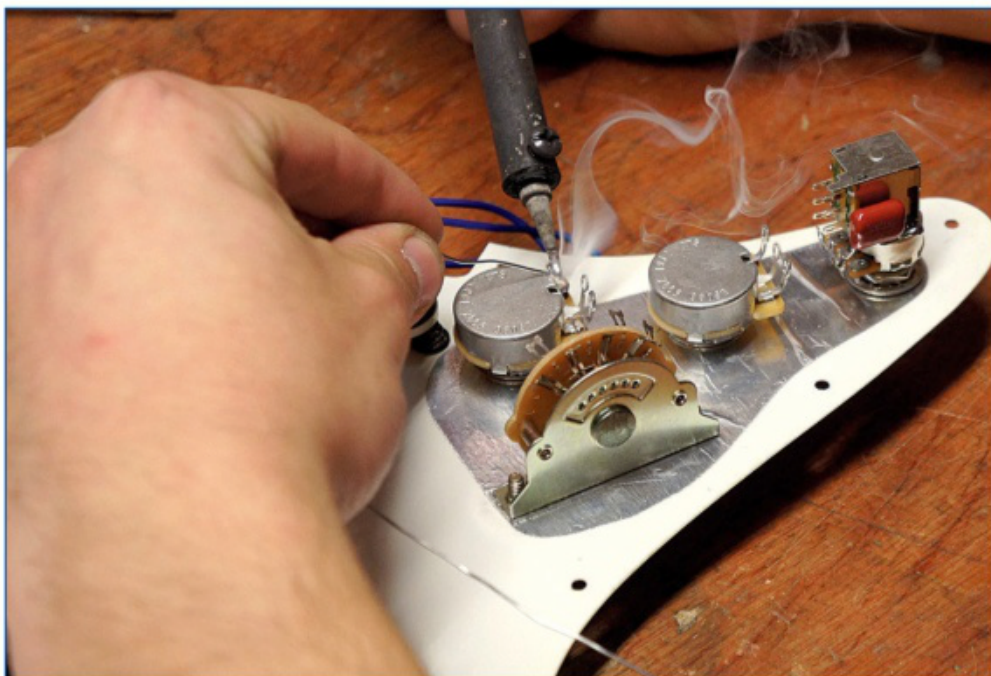
wires that are left – these go to the jack socket and the tremolo claw ground wire.

2 Here's the diagram we'll be using; a series mode for Strats which uses a switch to put it into overdrive but keep the classic Strat sounds too. The drawing calls for two pots, a five-way selector switch and a push/pull pot – we'll be using a push/push pot as the Strat knobs aren't that easy to grab!





- 3** We're using the old pickups again - even though they were from a Squier, there's something about them we like. Carefully trim the pickup wires without cutting them too short; we'll need to use those again. Load in the new components and spin the pots so they won't touch the walls of the cavity.



- 4** Here we're tinning the connections on everything we're going to use. The volume pot has its rightmost leg bent to touch the back of the pot and is soldered in place. The tinning process is a great way to prepare the parts and makes it easier when it comes to the rest of the soldering.



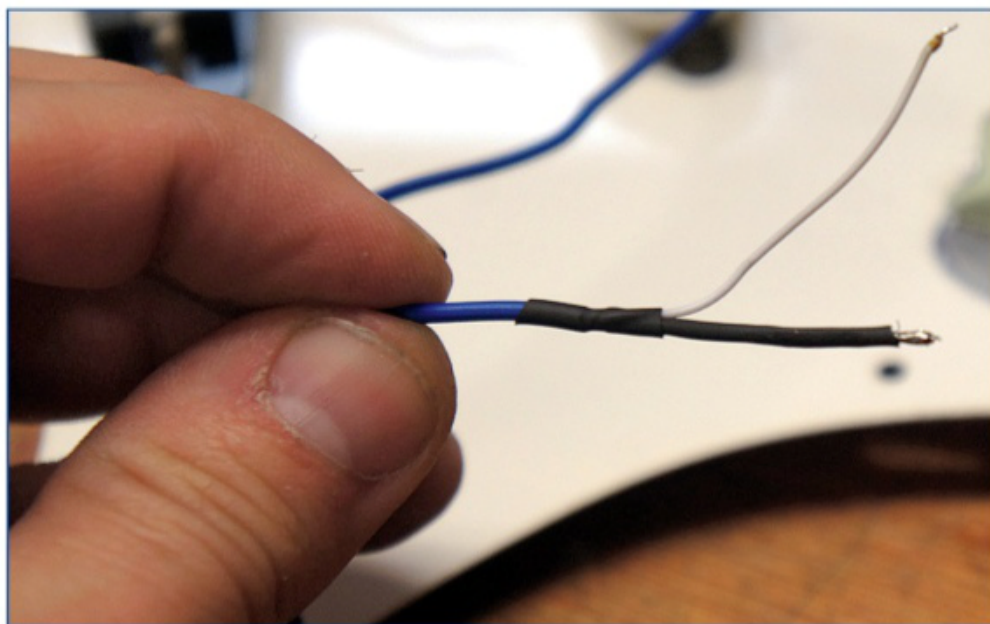
- 5** Now it's time to add the tone caps. Our diagram calls for two capacitors to be added. Use some shrink tubing to insulate the capacitor's legs and stop them shorting out. Without the shrink tube, the capacitor could accidentally turn that tone pot into a volume pot!



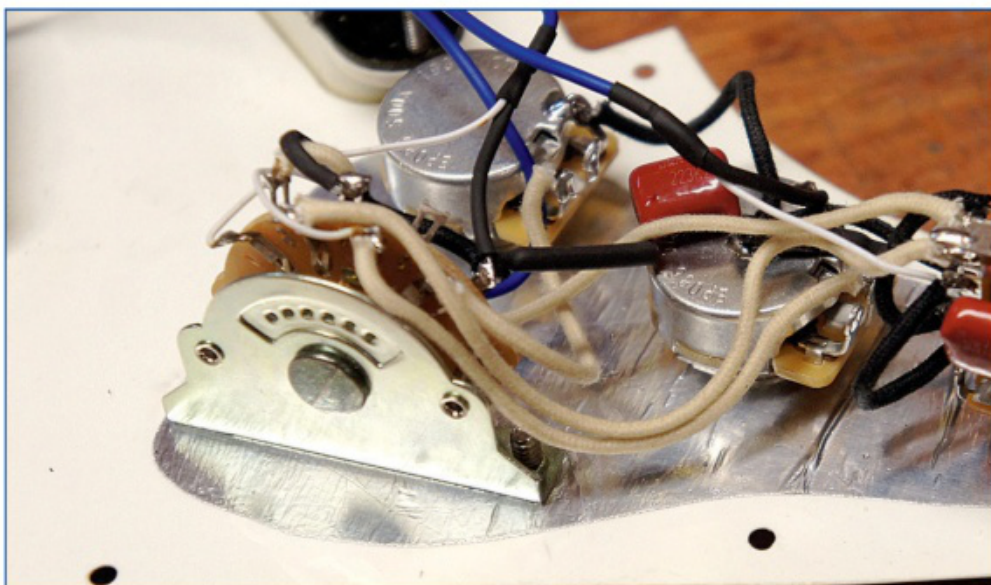
- 6** The next job is to add the jumper wires to the five-way switch and the switch pot, which involves making some fiddly connections. Preparing the jumper wires by tinning them as you go will help considerably. It's good to get these fiddly wires on now, as later on they will get buried by the rest of the wiring work.



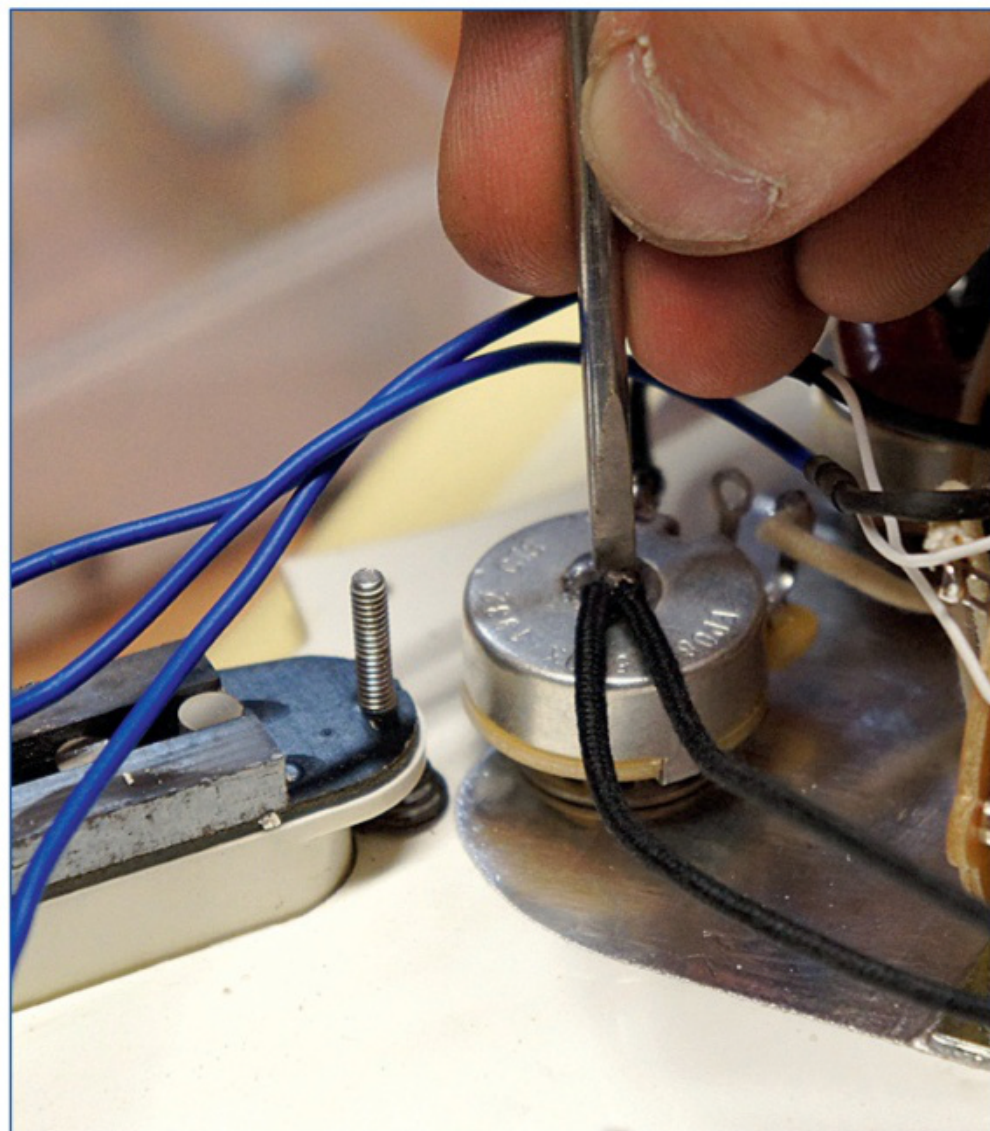
- 7** When adding a wire, strip one end, solder it on (always tinning), and then look up where the wire is going. This will let you determine the how long to cut the wire so it can be tucked out of the way. Excessively long wires don't just use up space - they increase capacitance and dull your sound. Cut them to a healthy, short length.



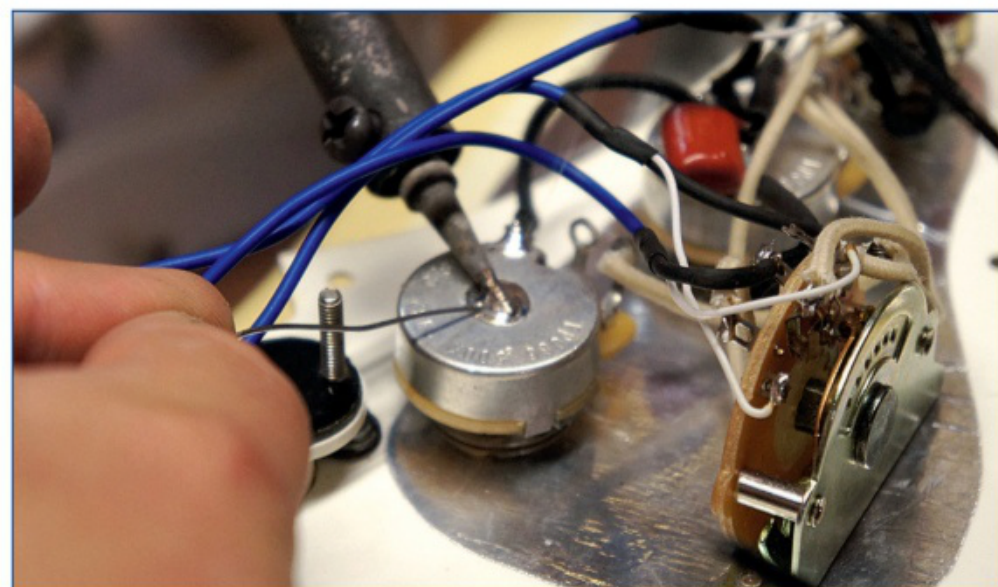
- 8** Our tip for screened wires: prepare them like this! A screened wire is effectively two wires - one carries the hot signal, while the other is connected to ground and screens the hot signal from hum. With the careful use of two pieces of shrink tube, you can safely isolate and insulate each wire ready for the circuit.



9 Our wiring nest is getting close now. Imagine how glad we are that we added the fiddly jumper wires on first! There's a few cables left to attach: the output jack hot and ground, and the tremolo claw ground. After that is a good time to arrange the wires and tuck them out of the way so they'll fit nicely when we re-fit the plate.



11 Your ground wires will likely want to spring up out of the solder pool, especially if there's a few, so pin them in place with a flat-tipped screw driver. This will also cool the solder faster. Assuming you're using pre-tinned wires, they'll melt easily into the solder like Arnie at the end of 72. Hasta la vista, baby!



10 Here's a great trick for getting the last few ground wires attached to the back of the pot: make a decent pool of solder on the back ready for the wires. A 40-watt iron really comes into its own here to supply enough heat. Some pots are sensitive to the heat, so don't go nuts with it.

12 Once everything's soldered, check each joint against the diagram and make sure there's no stray wires. To test the new functions, plug into an amp and tap the pole pieces with a screwdriver. You should hear a new, louder sound when the push/push switch is activated! When you're happy, reassemble your tricked-out Strat!





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SIX-STRING SWEEPS

When it comes to sweep picking, the most commonly used arpeggio shapes involve either three or five strings. However, it's also possible to use sweep picking to play arpeggios across all six strings. These are probably the most difficult sweep picking arpeggios to master. For this column, I'm going to look at the basic six string shapes for a minor triad (1-b3-5) and a major triad (1-3-5).

EXERCISE #1

This is the standard six string minor arpeggio shape in the key of E minor (Bar #1). I've also included the recommended left-hand fingering. To play the notes on the same frets on adjacent strings, you will need to roll your finger on and off the strings in order to separate each note. Practice the shape slowly until it feels comfortable under your left hand.

The second part of this exercise (Bars #2 and #3) involves sweep picking the arpeggio shape, ascending and descending across six strings (and then repeated). Note how it begins with a hammer-on on the sixth string, and a pull-off is used on the first string when descending. The key here is to use the one continuous pick stroke down and then up (like strumming a chord) while the left hand simultaneously frets then slightly releases each note.

The rhythm here is somewhat unusual since it involves septuplets (seven notes per beat). Start off slowly with a metronome, ensuring that the initial ascending downstroke and descending upstroke is on the beat.

EXERCISE #2

This is the standard six string shape in the key of E major. The only thing different from the minor shape is that the b3 degree is raised by a half step (becoming a major third). Practice the shape in the same way as advised in Exercise #1.

EXERCISE #3

I've incorporated the minor and major six-string sweep-picked arpeggios into a short exercise using an Im-VII-VI-VII-Im chord progression. As such, the arpeggios used are Em-D-C-D-Em. The opening Em and D arpeggios are looped twice

1 Em

2 E

3 Em D

4 C D Em

here - however, the subsequent C and D major arpeggios only ascend/descend once. Aim to get it up to around 120 beats per minute. The passage finishes with a short pull-off lick into a whole-step bend to the root note. My use of this final bend was deliberate - to make the point that if your bending, vibrato, and overall feel is lacking, any fast or technical shredding essentially becomes meaningless.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

This is my final column for *Australian Guitar*. I started writing this *Shredded Metal* series way back in September 2008 (AG #69). I've loved sharing my knowledge of shred and metal guitar with our readers over the years, and I truly hope that guitarists have found my columns helpful and interesting. I'd like to thank everyone at *Australian Guitar* for allowing me the privilege of writing for such a fine

publication for such a long time. I'd also like to thank everyone who's ever reached out to me over the years to let me know how much they've enjoyed and benefited from my columns.

If you'd like to keep up to date with my future musical endeavours, please check out my website (jimmylardnerbrown.com) or follow me on social media - the links are all on the site. Thanks for reading, and as always, keep shredding!

CHORDS

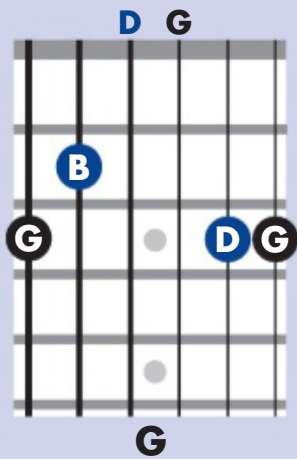


GETTING STARTED WITH SLASH CHORDS

GET CREATIVE WITH SOME EASY NEW SHAPES AS WE EXPLAIN HOW SLASH CHORDS WORK.

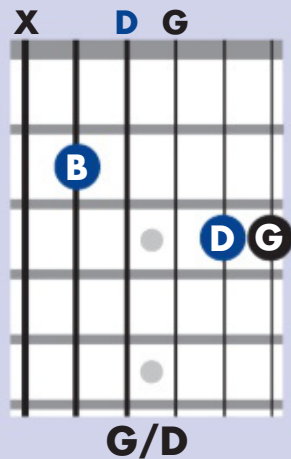
SLASHER PICS!

FOUR CHORD SHAPES TO GET YOU ROCKING



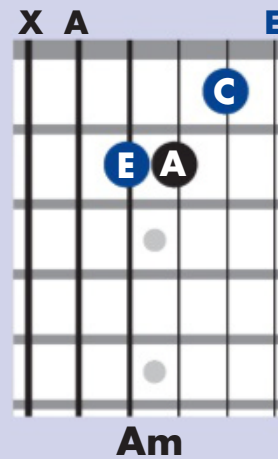
1 OPEN CHORD: G

You probably already know this open G chord.



2 SLASH CHORD: G/B

Ditch the low G and the chord becomes G/B - because B is the lowest note.



3 OPEN CHORD: AM

Another easy open chord. Surely you know this one!



1 SLASH CHORD: AM/G

Here we're adding a G note in the bass. Hence you get Am/G.

"I'VE HEARD OF SLASH CHORDS, BUT WHAT ARE THEY?"

It's a simple idea - they're chords whose lowest note isn't the root. The root note in, say, an A chord would be A; in a G chord it would be G. Basically, the root is the note the chord gets its name from. Easy! It's the same for any kind of chord - Am, Amaj7, A13 or any other kind of 'A chord' all have A root notes. Now, to come back to slash chords - if you played an A chord, but with a different note in the bass, then that would be a slash chord. Get it?

"I THINK SO, BUT I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT."

Well, it's important in that it's a whole other category of chords you can use in creative ways.

"GOT IT. CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME WELL-KNOWN EXAMPLES OF SLASH CHORDS?"

Sure! Jimi Hendrix's "Little Wing" is a masterclass in slash chords - in fact, much of Jimi's rhythm style uses them. Van Halen's "Running With The Devil" is crammed full of slash chords. For a '90s take on proceedings, have a listen to Reef's "Place Your Hands".

"HOW DO I GET STARTED WITH SLASH CHORDS?"

Take a look at the box out on

1 STEP-BY-STEP CHANGES

G/B and D/F# are the slash chords here. The idea is that these chords offer a step by step move from C to Am and from G to Em.

2 HIGHER UP THE NECK

We're using two power chord shapes here, with fifth- and fourth-string root notes. Switching between the full shape and just the root note adds shape to the riff.

the right where we're looking at a handful of shapes and covering some essential basics.

"THAT'S REALLY EASY! SURELY THERE'S MORE TO IT?"

Well, we've shown you the easiest way to understand slash chords - just use any note other than the root in the bass. As you say: simple! There are potentially limitless possibilities, though. Just think how many 'slash

notes' you could apply to the chords you already know. And every time you learn a new chord, you could be making up even more slash chords - just add or take away a bass note.

"HOW DO I GO ABOUT USING THESE SHAPES IN SOME MUSIC?"

Take a look at our tab examples below where you'll find a mix of typical shapes played in a more musical context. The first example is based in

the open position so the chords are easy beginner-friendly shapes.

"HOW SHALL I TACKLE THE SECOND EXAMPLE?"

Hopefully it's not too tough to play. For now, though, play through the tab slowly and see if you can identify the bass notes. None of the bass notes are root notes of their respective chords - which means they're slash chords.

Example 1: Step-by-step changes (♩=60)

Chords: C, G/B, Am, G, D/F#, Em

Tab: 0 3 0 3 3 0 (T), 1 0 1 0 2 0 (A), 2 3 2 2 0 2 (B)

Example 2: Higher up the neck (♩=75)

Chords: D/F#, G/B, D/A, C/E, N.C.

Tab: 7 8 5 7 7 (T), 7 7 5 5 7 (A), 9 7 5 5 7 (B)

Notes: let ring - - -

SIGNATURES



MINOR KEY SIGNATURES

GET THE MINOR KEY BASICS DOWN WITH THIS SIMPLE THEORY LESSON.

Just like major keys, a minor key signature tells you which notes are likely to appear in the songs you play. What's the difference between the two kinds of key? Well, just like major and minor chords, the major kind tend to sound bright and happy whereas minor keys sound darker and moodier. Vital info then!

Knowing which notes to use and the general mood of the key signature will help you whether you're writing your next song or playing along with a jam track. There are three vital notes and intervals that give minor keys their signature sound: the B third, the B sixth and the B seventh.

Grab your guitar, stretch your fingers and read on - we'll explain a bit more.

EXAMPLE #1: E MINOR SCALE NOTES

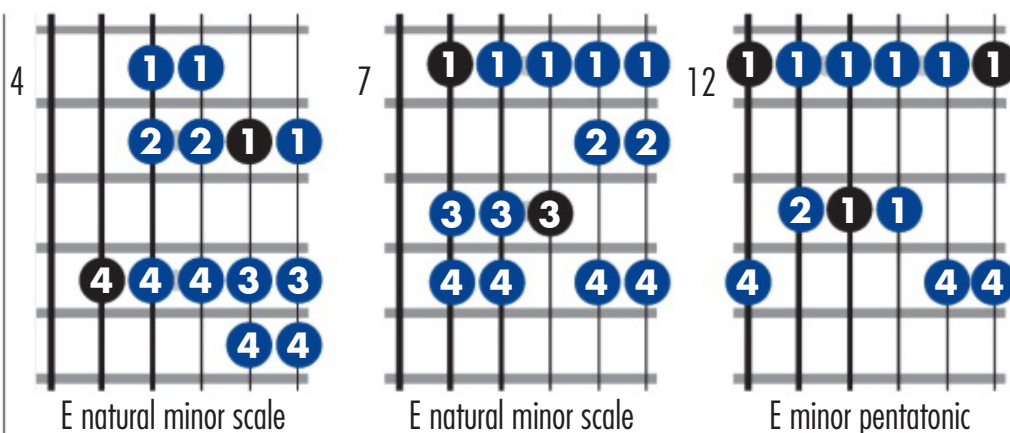
With only one sharp note (F#), E minor is a nice easy key signature to start with. G is the all important B third interval (or, a minor third) found three semitones higher than the root note. Compare that with the key of E major (E F# G# A B C# D#) where there's no G note - but a G# 'major third' four-semitone interval instead. See if you can work out the B sixth and the B seventh intervals.

EXAMPLE #2: CHORDS IN E MINOR

If you want to jam in E minor, you'll need to know some suitable chords, and all of the shapes shown here use only notes from the key signature. We usually show finger numbers on our chord boxes but we've written the notes here so you can see how the chords relate to the key signature.

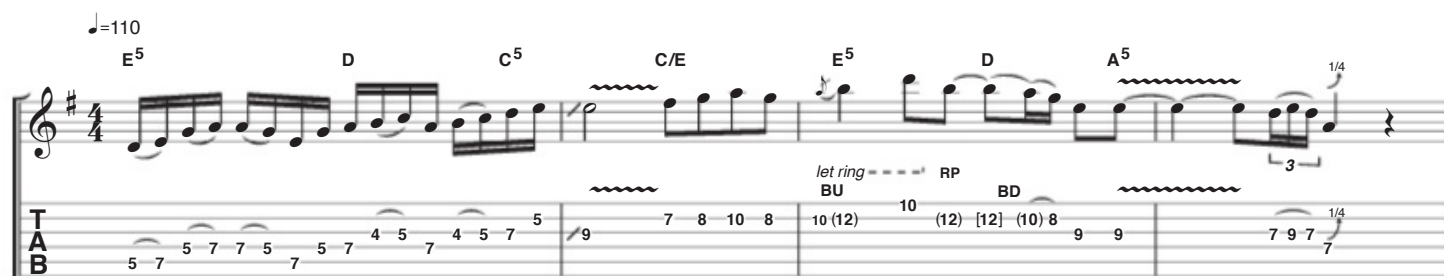
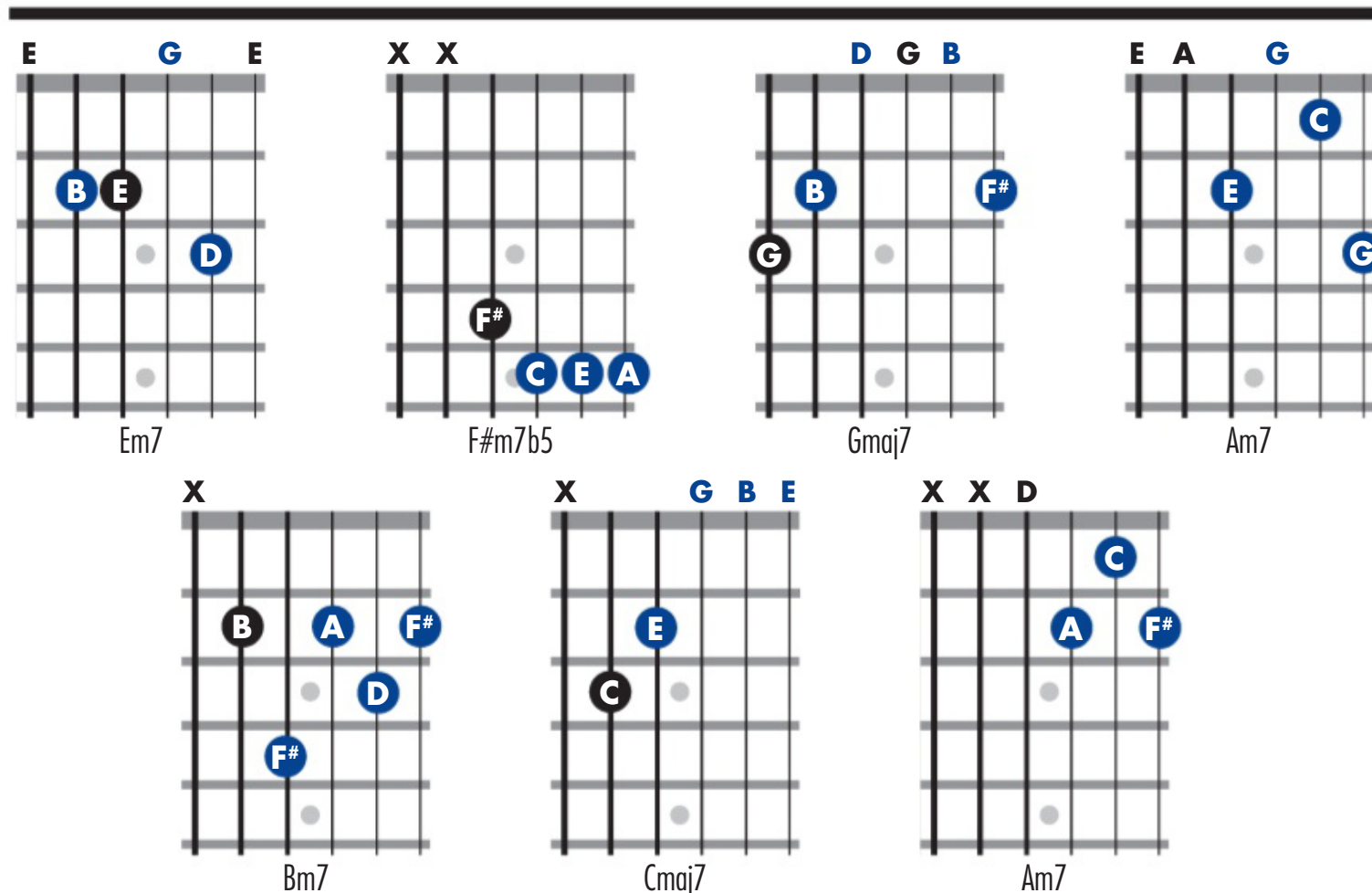
EXAMPLE #3: E MINOR LICK

We'll round off with a melodic rock lick in the key of E minor. All the notes come from the key and appear in the scale shapes we looked at. Remember, the best reason for learning to play 'in key' is so that you can also learn how to play out of key - on purpose, of course - adding light, shade and colour to give you the sounds you're after!



To play in a minor key, you need to know the natural minor scale. These shapes will help you get started. You can also use the minor pentatonic scale if you like - it's just a simpler version of the natural minor scale.

1	2	$\flat 3$	4	5	$\flat 6$	$\flat 7$	8
E	F#	G	A	B	C	D	E
TONE	SEMITONE	TONE	TONE	SEMITONE	TONE	TONE	





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VAN HALEN'S VOCAL COACH GIVES US GUITARISTS THE ESSENTIALS FOR BETTER SINGING TECHNIQUE. WORDS BY **ALISON RICHTER** AND **ROB LAING**.

As a musician, you should treat your voice with the same care as your guitar, whether you're a leader singer or just contributing the odd backup harmony. And it's especially easy to overlook good technique when you've got two jobs to do at once.

Voice coach (and guitarist, bassist, luthier, producer, etcetera) Peter Strobl has worked with musicians including Eddie and Wolfgang Van Halen, and Clutch's Neil Fallon, on improving their technique as playing singers. Now he's here to offer us a no-nonsense set of essential tips you can start using now.

1 THE WHOLE PROCESS STARTS WITH YOUR BREATH

"Learn how to breathe properly. There appears to be massive confusion about this basic process. 'Should my stomach go out? In? Should my lower back expand? Should my kidneys explode?'"

"Breathing is what happens when you just relax and do nothing at all. Otherwise we would die when we fall asleep. Inhaling is actually a passive activity that happens when your abdominal muscles relax. Exhaling happens when your abs tighten. Once you understand that process,

you can use that knowledge to breathe more effectively as a singer. If your chest rises and falls, you are doing it all wrong.

"Try this simple exercise: stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Bend slightly over at the waist and place your hands on your knees, as if you dropped a tortoiseshell guitar pick on a brown shag rug.

"Blow out any residual air while pulling your stomach muscles (yes, they're in there somewhere) in toward your spine. Now, let your stomach relax and fall toward the floor.

"Unless someone has duct-taped your face, you will notice that air enters your body through the holes in your face. Now push your stomach in again toward your spine to expel the air. Notice that you have to work harder to exhale than to inhale. Inhaling is passive.

"Many singers start a phrase with residual breath in the lungs, sing until they run out, and then take a quick breath that is more to catch up than it is to prepare for the next phrase. The voice is a reed instrument. Watch any woodwind player - they breathe before the phrase, not after. Think of the breath as a pickup to the phrase. Breathe, play the phrase, breathe, play the next

phrase. The breath is a setup for the phrase you're going to sing, not a catch-up for the phrase you just completed."

2 YOUR GUITAR CAN BE A PART OF YOUR TRAINING

"If you play guitar or bass, the sooner you integrate your singing with your instrument, the better. I started working with Wolfgang Van Halen at 17 years old - him, not me. From the very beginning, I had him strap on a bass, play descending five-note exercises, 5-4-3-2-1, and sing the notes as he played them. Musicians tend to shortchange vocal development in favour of their instrument.

"But when you find yourself standing in front of a vocal mic, the average listener relates to you as a singer first. As the sessions progressed, I used various vowels and consonants in order to address specific areas of development. The scales became more difficult as his strength, stamina, and range developed. Learning to sing what you play and play what you sing will improve your musicianship as both a singer and a player.

"No matter how accomplished a player you are, there is always someone out there better. But

there is no one who can possibly sing exactly like you. Your voice is unique. Work hard and use your instrument as a tool to support and develop your skills as a vocalist.”

3 LEAN WITH YOUR FOREHEAD, NOT YOUR CHIN

“If you look into a mirror and rock your head up and down, back and forth, you will see the muscles of your neck and throat flexing with each movement. Each movement represents tension that could have an effect on your vocal performance and could cause problems over time. The most relaxed head position is when you’re looking forward toward an imaginary horizon.

“If you think about letting your forehead be the first part of your body to enter a room, you will have the idea. Microphone placement for guitar and bass players is hugely important. Many guitar players have a yard sale of pedals at their feet and put the mic stand on the other side. They have to reach out with their neck and shoulders in order to get to the mic. Distorting the architecture of your vocal instrument compromises everything to do with singing.

“When I started working with Eddie and Wolf Van Halen, their vocal mics were high and pointed down so they had to sing up into them from below – sort of a Lemmy posture. We moved the mics so that they could look down the barrel of the mic and see the floor about six to eight feet away. In many live situations, this is where the audience is in relation to the vocal mic. If they can see your nose hairs, your mic is too high.

“We also moved Ed’s mic stand to the side of his effects pedals and used a long boom to place the microphone exactly where his face would be when he was singing. This eliminated the need to reach out with his neck to get to the mic.”

4 PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO YOUR POSTURE

“Nate Bergman fronts Lionize and plays a Gibson Les Paul. A solidbody guitar like that can weigh seven-to-ten pounds. This is why it’s so important to play vocal exercises at the same time as you sing them. Watch your posture, and make sure that what you felt from learning to breathe while bending at the waist is still happening when you’re in playing position. A gallon of water weighs about eight pounds, so if you hang a gallon of water on a clothes line around your neck and jump around on stage for an hour, that’s what’s happening with a guitar. It’s hard work on your back and legs.

“The first thing you must do is nail down what it feels like to breathe correctly. Then figure out how to maintain that sensation in the posture you assume when you’ve got this anchor hanging around your neck. It helps to be strong and physically fit. The moment the big muscles of your back, shoulders, and abdomen fail, the small muscles of your neck and throat will try to take over. The result is vocal tension, vocal strain, and a shorter career. The more you lean forward toward your microphone, the heavier the instrument feels, because it’s now suspended in mid-air. So posture and mic position are hugely important.

“Remember that gravity goes straight down into the centre of the Earth, so if you’re cantilevered, if you’re leaning over, the instrument is going to feel heavier than if you’re standing straight. This will bind up and overwork your back and stomach. And you must maintain elasticity in your abdomen in order to continue breathing efficiently.”





5 THERE IS NO CORRECT WAY TO SCREAM

"If you're singing aggressive rock or metal, you must come to the honest realisation that you're damaging a very fragile instrument, and take steps to do strict maintenance daily, and before and after gigs. Imagine a football player who beats the hell out of himself on game day. After suffering what amounts to a few dozen car crashes, he takes the rest of the week to rehab and fix things. You can't practise being a lineman by just smashing your head into the garage wall for three sets of ten every day and then expect to be in top form for the game.

"There are those who claim to teach 'rock screaming', 'metal screaming', and other silliness as if there is some sort of legitimate pedagogy involved. Rock 'n' roll is an art form of rebellion, so let's just get real and face the facts: there is no 'correct' way to be aggressive. The very act of playing a guitar amp at distorted levels spits in the face of the original designs. Worn-out tubes and capacitors can be replaced. But once your voice is gone, it's lunchtime.

"Accept the fact that you're damaging your voice. Before every gig, and between gigs, you

should do exercises that counteract what you've roasted during your gig. This is where singers get completely bullshitted by people in my business who say, 'This is the proper way to scream your guts out,' or hand you a straw to sing through, pat you on the ass, and cash your cheque. Don't waste your time. There's no safe way to sing metal. You've got to scream, you've got to be aggressive, you've got to be honestly rebellious. Anything less is bullshit.

"Watch concert footage of Clutch to see what comes out of Neil Fallon in an hour-and-a-half show. Touring the new album, he is working harder, but singing with more freedom than ever. It is because he's bought into the concept of taking care of himself before and between concerts if he expects to do this for another 25 years. He is putting in the reps doing very basic breathing and falsetto exercises that have nothing to do with his songs but everything to do with building and maintaining his most important instrument.

"Incidentally, Neil leans toward a feather-light Gibson ES-335 and actually gets a little rest when he straps on the guitar and stands at the mic for a few songs.

"If you want to deliver your message forcefully and command every emotional nuance in an aggressive genre, learn to take care of your voice before, after, and between gigs so you can start every gig at ground zero and not in the hole."

6 DON'T FORGET TO LEARN YOUR LYRICS

"Don't expect to be taken seriously if you are reading lyrics from an iPad. The worst bloody item ever invented is the iPad/mic stand attachment. Reading on the gig screws with your posture and concentration and destroys any sense of connection with an audience. People don't go to concerts to be read to. If that were the case, the biggest ticket in town would be Story Time at the Library.

"Have some respect for not only your audience, but for the art and craft of singing. Reading lyrics might be fine in a bar or a wedding band, when you're taking requests and you can't possibly know all the songs ever written. But you can't consider yourself a serious concert musician if you're doing that - unless, of course, you're getting a monthly cheque for product placement. Otherwise, leave the tablet in the gigbag." 



SO YOU WANNA SOUND LIKE EDDIE VAN HALEN

You know the man, the myth and the legend - now it's time to crack that classic, timeless tone that made Eddie Van Halen one of the most revered guitarists in the world. Taking into account the fact that many of us don't have the kinds of budgets Eddie would (or anywhere close to them), we've put together a surprisingly cheap, yet law-defyingly accurate recreation of EVH's setup that any shredder with a paper route could take pride in.



MXR 5150 OVERDRIVE PEDAL

Eddie is a rarity, as he's been more heavily involved in designing the gear he uses than nearly any other guitar hero since Hendrix. He knew what he wanted and it gave birth to one of the greatest high gain amps of all time: the Peavey 5150. Its blue channel this is based on became a huge hit with metal players, but Eddie used less gain than some think.

The contemporary EVH 5150 III take on his amp head design costs over a grand itself, so the launch of this pedal four years ago was potential brown sound manna from heaven. Does it cut it? It does very well. While Wampler's Pinnacle is impressive, we think this is as close as a pedal gets, and its in-built noise gate is a rare feature indeed for a gain pedal.

At a median street price of \$350, it's not cheap, but it offers boutique-level string definition for those EVH rhythms that are even more important to nail than his leads. It's versatile enough for great classic rock and metal tones too and even sounds great at low volumes - handy for the home!



EVH STRIPED SERIES GUITAR

A maple neck gets you a little more brightness you'll want and a Super-Strat-style body is a given. While we love the Charvel So-Cal Series guitars, for less money we can get right on the Frankenstrat money here with the entry-level Striped model. There's even four finish designs to cover every classic EVH era! But this is a guitar that's far more than looks, as you'd expect from the EVH name.

A genuine Floyd Rose will get you divebombing in no time, and a D-Tuna takes you down to drop D faster than you can say "Unchained". A single bridge EVH Wolfgang humbucker and master volume keeps things streamlined, and the graphite reinforcement in the neck is our kind of strong and stable.



LANDLORD FROTHY HEAD ECHO PEDAL

Eddie used an EP-3 Echoplex tape echo in-between his Marshall Super Lead and power amp without distorting the repeats. The Echoplex preamp also instilled its own character, but the recent pedal version will set you back a couple hundred bucks on a good day. Let's keep it simpler, then, with this bargain mini pedal that will cover the short delay time and repeats required.



DONNER MOD SQUARE MODULATION PEDAL

Our last ingredient is a crucial one: a phaser. Or is it a flanger? Well it's both. Unchained is the latter, Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love uses a flanger in the intro and phaser in the solo - indeed an MXR Phase 90 throughout the leads on the first album. That alone will set us back over \$100, and we're on a budget here, so we're back to the bargain world of Chinese-made mini pedals. This seven-mode special from Donner offers killer bang for buck, including both a phaser and flanger.

Your rig is officially complete - and if you play your cards right, and you'll still have some coin left over to buy some snazzy dungarees like Eddie used to rock!

ag TOP PICK



TAME IMPALA

The Slow Rush

ISLAND / MODULAR



In the five years since releasing *Currents* – their major breakthrough into the universal mainstream – Tame Impala (or more specifically, its main brain Kevin Parker) has gone through a monolithic shift in

public personality. Parker has become pop's go-to guy for a dose of acidic idiosyncrasy, the peculiar-minded Perthian buddying up with everyone from Mark Ronson and The Flaming Lips to Kanye West and Rihanna.

Such worldly adventures have rubbed off suitably on his main project's unbearably long-awaited fourth LP, *The Slow Rush*, with a glittery, pop-consonant shimmer slicked over a solid bulk of the hourlong affair. "Is It True" could easily be a collaboration with the aforementioned Ronson, with its funky bass throbs, pulsing wah and handclaps in excess. Parker hasn't collaborated with Daft Punk (yet, at least), but the ultra suave "Breathe Deeper", with its creeping progression and angular, '80s-channelling keyboard riff, instantly throws our mind over to the French EDM duo.

At its core, *The Slow Rush* is unquestionably a Tame Impala record. The gauzy, droning guitars are in full focus on early cuts like "Instant Forgiveness" and "Posthumous Forgiveness", with the record at large quickly building on them with eccentric synths, thumping basslines and labyrinthine lashings of digital percussion. It's a natural progression from the experimental *Currents*, and pitches Parker at his most confident and charged to date. He's unafraid to dive into his inhumanly wide scope of influences, and the end result is a kaleidoscopic collision of shoegaze, soul, hip-hop and disco. Do we wish there were more guitars? Definitely – but Parker's experimentation with electronics feels almost paradoxically natural. And, where they are the focal point, the guitar parts are always nothing short of magical.

Though we start slow, the LP gathers steam as it chugs along – by the time you reach the bright and boppy "Lost In Yesterday" (where it's all about that prickly, punchy bass guitar), you should be dancing at your desk (or steering wheel, stereo, etc.) like you're nine pints deep in a German nightclub where no one knows your name and 'embarrassment' isn't in your vocabulary. We end on a high note with seven minutes of Tame Impala's classic technicolour prog-pop in "One More Hour", the good vibes as bountiful as Parker's collection of reverb pedals.

MATT DORIA

CABLE TIES

Far Enough

POISON CITY



An eight-track exercise in blunt and unforgiving catharsis, the venomous second album from Cable Ties is inescapably gripping from the first gravelly strum on "Hope" to the last whip of feedback on

"Pillow". It's brash and scrappy and loud as hell, and intentionally so – the Melbourne proto-punks are pissed off and fired up, and they translate their grievances effortlessly into fierce political poetry and punishing pummels on a fretboard. It's a cracking listen on wax, no doubt, but with each biting howl and crunchy riff that passes, we can't help but wish we were watching Cable Ties smash them out onstage; they're an ace live band, and these cuts will make ace additions to their setlist.

MATT DORIA

INTROVERT

Mending Breaking

UNFD



True to form for the Novocastrian quartet, Introvert swing wide with booming bellows, crashing snares and ripping riffs in abundance on their quasi-comeback EP. Audie Franks aims straight for the soul

with his signature battered yells, his emotive poetry crashing like a tonne of bricks while he wrings his heart out into his Jazzmaster. There's an enthralling loud-soft dynamic at play with the guitars, verses favouring cleaner and more introspective strumming while choruses see Franks go ham with lashings of overdrive and distortion. At a tight 20 minutes of gritty emo-pop as poignant as it is punchy, the only real downside to *Mending Breaking* is that it isn't twice as long.

MATT DORIA

MURA MASA

RYC

UNIVERSAL



After cutting his teeth in the EDM scene with 2017's self-titled debut, Mura Masa heads in a decidedly more grounded direction on the breezy and buoyant *RYC* (or *Raw Youth Collage*,

for the acronymphobic). True to its name, LP2 is captivatingly cheerful and carefree, cuts built primarily on bright, warbly guitar lines and crazy crisp drum machine beats, with vocals – if not Alex Crossan's own, then from scene-stealing luminaries like Slowthai and Wolf Alice – often stacked and slathered in distortion. Jams like "No Hope Generation" and "Vicarious Living Anthem" recall the simpler days of early '00s pop-rock, sticky as all sweet hell and impossibly easy to bop along to. Fun, apolitical and nostalgic, *RYC* is a pure joy to spin from cover to cover.

MATT DORIA

POLARIS

The Death Of Me

RESIST



Polaris stand as definitive proof that heavy music can have pop-level success in the current musical landscape, and *The Death Of Me* paints a clear picture of why: every chorus is as catchy as it is callous,

every riff as riveting as it is ravaging, and every breakdown as meticulous as it is merciless – and the way that all gels together is downright stunning. Following 2017's barrier-shattering *Mortal Coil*, LP2 is legions darker, denser, more mature and more technical – and yet, it also sees Polaris embrace more of the big and bouncy, emo-adjacent hooks that demand you bop along. Decades from now, a new generation of moshlords will look back and sigh, "I miss when they made albums like *The Death Of Me*."

MATT DORIA

SLØTFACE

Sorry For The Late Reply

PROPELLER / CAROLINE



For an album as fun and frenzied as it is, *Sorry* is almost surprisingly earnest. On it, Sløtface couple spry pop anthems with tales of personal grief and political angst. It shows the Norwegian trio have

grown exponentially since their '17 debut, the tracks equal measures more mature and manic. Too, the breadth of stylistic ground they cover here is beyond superlative, from the growly juts on "S.U.C.C.E.S.S." to the soaring melodies on "Sink Or Swim"; the slick and suave licks on "Stuff" and the playful grooves of "Tap The Pack"; the clean, sober strumming on "New Year, New Me" and the punkish fretting on "Crying In Amsterdam". Even at its weakest points, *Sorry* is diverse, dynamic, and danceable as hell.

MATT DORIA

STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

Perdida

WARNER



Toto, I don't think we're in the '90s anymore. LP #8 sees Stone Temple Pilots shed their signature hard-rock veneer, trading bassy wallops and overdrive for cool acoustic strumming and... Flute sections?

Though a first spin might prove polarising, the band settle well into their newfound neo-country swing; where they pop up, electric guitars sear with a Southern twang that feels perfectly angular to Jeff Gutt's rich, harmonic vocals (to that end, Gutt sounds much more at home here than he did on the 2018 self-titled LP). Slow-burners build the bulk of *Perdida*, but what the disc lacks in energy, it makes up tenfold in emotional weight. Whether or not they hit all the marks (spoiler: they do not), it's commendable that STP took such a major stylistic risk – especially when it'd be so easy to rest on their laurels at this point.

MATT DORIA

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FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA TELECASTER

FENDER UPDATES THEIR TOP-OF-THE-RANGE TELECASTER DELUXE WITH A NEW SERIES NAME AND A COMPLETE REEVALUATION AND REDESIGN OF VIRTUALLY EVERY FEATURE. WORDS BY **PETER HODGSON**.

You would think there would be no way to improve upon a Telecaster. Heck, you can still walk into a store today and buy a Tele with the same specs as one made in 1952. It's a design that works, and that continues to work even as new genres spring up around it.

But Fender doesn't rest on its laurels. The Fender of 2020 pays attention to what today's players want to hang onto from the old days and what they want to have incorporated from more recent guitar development. Want a faithful '50s Tele replica? You can get that. Want a modern Tele that's easier to play and more suited to the variety of tones a player in 2020 might require? That's where the Fender American Ultra Telecaster comes in. It still feels like a Telecaster, but it's not your grandad's Tele.

The essential stuff is still present. The body is alder or ash depending on the finish you choose (alder is standard, but ash is spec'd for the Plasma Red Burst and Butterscotch Blonde). The alder-body finishes are Texas Tea, Ultraburst (the perfect three-colour sunburst), Mocha Burst (an almost brown-gold sunburst), Cobra Blue, Arctic Pearl, and one that has to be seen in person to be truly appreciated: Texas Tea, which looks black in low light conditions, but soon reveals itself to have subtle but effective colour-shift elements that take on highlights of brown, gold and bottle-green depending on the lighting conditions. You can't adequately photograph it, but your live audience is gonna love it.

Note that a few models have higher RRP's, including the Plasma Red Burst Telecaster reviewed here, and the Butterscotch Blonde. But Fender has

actually kept the pricing the same as the American Deluxe range that preceded the American Ultra.

Different models also get different fretboard woods on their maple necks. Arctic Pearl, Ultraburst and Texas Tea get rosewood, while Butterscotch Blonde, Cobra Blue, Mocha Burst and Plasma Red Burst have maple. And those necks feature a new 'Modern D' profile with ultra rolled fretboard edges. The shoulders of the neck are a little higher than you might expect and yet they strangely make the neck feel thinner than it is, and extremely comfortable for long playing sessions or small hands.

The neck joins the body at a newly reshaped block joint which is more ergonomic than ever before. It's not quite like an Ibanez All Access Neck Joint but as far as what players want and expect from a Strat, this is easily the most accessible neck joint ever. The rest of the bevels have been slightly redesigned for further comfort too. The fretboard has a compound radius starting at a roundish ten-inches at the nut end and flattening out to 14-inches at the widdly end of the neck. The 22 medium jumbo frets are finished perfectly on our review guitar; and while some players may bemoan the absence of so-hot-right-now stainless steel frets, it's important to remember that stainless steel does have its own impact on the tone – especially in terms of note attack, and in all likelihood Fender would have tried it during the R&D phase and found that it just took things a little too far from the brief.

The electronics are another big deal. Fender has gone all-out in designing the fifth generation of their Noiseless pickups, which are paired with a

traditional three-way pickup selector blade switch and an S1 switch stealthed into the top of the volume pot. When the blade switch is in the middle position and the S1 is engaged, the two single coil pickups are connected in series, effectively turning into one giant humbucker.

I tested this guitar on a live covers gig with my trusty Marshall DSL50 on both its clean and dirty channels, and a bunch of effects including an Eventide H9 Max for delays, reverb and weird pitch shifting. The single coils are absolutely noise-free even under ridiculous amounts of gain, and the faux-humbucker setting is great for thickening the tone up even more. But my absolute favourite setting was the middle selector position with the S1 turned off, just running both single coils in parallel into my Marshall's Crunch channel set for just enough dirt to go from a crisp clean jangle to a brash, chunky, Malcolm Young-esque snap depending on picking strength. This was absolutely one of the best live guitar sounds I've ever heard – something my co-guitarist also yelled out mid-song.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This guitar still very much sounds and plays like a Telecaster instead of just coming off like a Telecaster-shaped modern shred machine (although the HSS Strat from this series that we reviewed last issue definitely edges further towards that kind of designation), so it's not a million miles removed from what we might expect of Fender, but it's definitely seven decades removed from the first Fender Broadcasters that hit the market in 1950. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- Alder or ash body
- Rosewood or maple fretboard
- Fifth-generation noiseless pickups
- New neck shape
- New body and neck joint

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Super playable
- ▲ Great range of new finishes
- ▲ Deluxe case included

CONS

- ▼ No stainless steel frets
- ▼ Fretboard woods are locked to particular models

► CONTACT

FENDER

Ph: (02) 8198 1300

Web: fender.com



RRP: \$1,850

MARKBASS LITTLE MARK VINTAGE

OLD SCHOOL TONES FOR THE MODERN PLAYER. WORDS BY **STEVE HENDERSON**.

Not satisfied with being the new millennium's most popular bass amp range, the folks at Markbass continue to release products that are both innovative and entirely practical. Such is the Little Mark Vintage – a compact bass head with loads of character and plenty of power. The Little Mark Vintage offers preamp and master gain controls, an interactive four-band EQ section, a very musical limiter, and a three-way “preset” EQ switch. But the real business in this amp is the 12AX7 that adds all manner of harmonic content not available in solid state circuits.

There are still some bassists who disregard the benefits of the vacuum tube, preferring the more pristine edge of a transistor-based circuit. But a great many are returning to the more vintage tones that were so integral to early and classic rock. The tube affects every aspect of what you hear: the harmonic content of the tone, the attack of the note, and the way the sound compresses and decays. The compression factor, alone, is worth the effort of maintaining the tube section (you might have to replace it every couple of years) because tube compression is a most musical effect, whereas solid-state amps tend to be overly snappy, even harsh, in the attack of each note. The 12AX7 squashes the attack just enough, and then allows the note to bloom. The limiter adds to this by capping the peaks as the note sustains and then decays. It's a very controllable effect, and it adds an organic feel to the playing experience.

The Little Mark Vintage delivers 500 watts into four ohms and 300 watts into eight ohms – plenty of power for most gigs. I switched between a custom PJ

(with EMGs) and a fretless Stingray, and fed the Little Mark Vintage into (variously) a Hartke 410, a Hartke 115, and an old EV TL15. No matter the combination, the Little Mark had plenty of punch and projection. The lows were full and rich, and loaded with the kind of subsonics you'd expect to hear from an SVT-style amp. The mids punched through with authority and the Stingray had that lovely, infectious whine that is so much a part of what we love about the fretless sound. Using the two Hartkes together harnessed the Little Mark's full output for even more output and serious bass boom, thanks to the acoustic coupling of having that much cone area in such close proximity. But, for smaller gigs, I'd be happy to pair the amp with the TL (the frequency response is 60-to-6.5k, so it has a very rounded top end) or, for a more contemporary sound, a Markbass 210 (like the 102HF).

That previously mentioned three-way EQ switch is surprisingly effective. It provides three “platforms” from which to start your quest for the perfect sound: flat, scooped mids, and an old school muted treble. The scooped mid position creates a very woody tone that's great for emulating jazzy upright tones. The sound seems to swell around the stage, rather than be noticeably directional. For that classic rock thud, the “Old” setting is perfect for those Who or Zeppelin covers. Other features are, again, entirely practical: like the variable DI – a real, transformer-based DI and not just an attenuated tap off one of the outputs. The back-panel effects loop works well. I plugged in a number of pedals and an old SPX-90 (it has a fabulous chorus using the pitch transposer) and the Little Mark didn't skip a beat. The built-in limiter, mentioned earlier, is a very “bass friendly”

device. You can wind in as much as you like so that it just snips off the peaks or you can squash the whole sound. For straight up rock, you may not need it; but, if you're a funk player, you're going to *love* it. But dial it in gradually, because the natural compression of the tube will do some of the work, too.

Since the Little Mark's frequency range is 68-10k, I paired it with a full range cab and plugged in my Maton MSH-210D. The Little Mark produced a beautifully clean, controlled acoustic guitar tone, with some serious weight behind every chord. Increasing the Gain and lowering the Master adds a warmth to the tone without losing the clarity, and a touch of limiter keeps everything under control when switching from single notes or fingerstyle to first position cowboy chords. This is a wicked acoustic amp, with more power than you'll ever need.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Little Mark Vintage is a punchy, tuneful amp with a simple layout and no unnecessary bells and whistles. The tone circuit offers so many options that it's easy for a player to find their personal sound. And, at just over two kilos, it's an easy lug. The big knobs give it a '60s vibe, but without the oversized enclosure: think of it as two rack spaces high and about half a rack wide. In fact, it doesn't even need a handle – slip it into your shoulder bag and you're ready to rock. For the professional or the serious amateur, the Little Mark Vintage represents truly excellent value for money, with a professional build quality and a variety of tonal flavours that allows the player to “grow” their sound into the future. As you develop, the Little Mark Vintage will be right there with you. 

► TOP FEATURES

- 500 watts (four ohms) or 300 watts (eight ohms)
- Tube preamp
- Four-band EQ/preset EQ switch
- Built-in variable DI
- Effects loop, tuner out

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Great tones
- Excellent quality
- Pro facilities
- Light and portable

CONS

- Only available in black and orange

► CONTACT

CMC MUSIC

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RRP: \$1,850

FOCUSRITE SCARLETT 2I2 USB AUDIO INTERFACE

THE THIRD-GENERATION SCARLETT 2I2 PROVIDES IMPRESSIVE, PRO-QUALITY SOUND AND EASE OF USE. WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

Considering that more than 50 companies offer USB audio interfaces, it can be very confusing to decide which one to buy. While the sound quality of today's digital home recording products is significantly better than that of their analog counterparts from a few decades ago, all digital products are not created equal.

The quality of the unit's components – like A/D and D/A converters, preamps and filters – can make all the difference between a lifelike, dynamic recording and a flat, lacklustre one. Usually it's wise to select a product from a company with a long history of making pro audio products as a lot of their high-end expertise goes into every product they make.

Focusrite have done just that for more than three decades, which is part of the reason why their Scarlett 2i2 is one of the most popular two-in/two-out USB audio interfaces available today. Focusrite recently introduced the third generation version of the Scarlett 2i2, which provides an upgraded preamp design, a new Air mode that enhances high-end detail, inputs and outputs with improved

headroom, a USB-C port that minimises latency to undetectable levels and much more.

Scarlett 2i2 is a two-in/two-out interface with a combo XLR/quarter-inch input jack, preamp gain knob, line/instrument level switch and Air switch for each input, plus a 48-volt phantom power switch, monitor level knob, direct monitor mode switch (off/mono/stereo), quarter-inch TRS headphone jack with level control knob, USB-C port and quarter-inch TRS left and right line outputs.

The interface also comes bundled with an impressive selection of supporting software, including Avid Pro Tools, First, Ableton Live Lite, Focusrite Red plug-in suite and more.

Setting up the Scarlett 2i2 with your computer recording system is incredibly easy thanks to Focusrite's quick start tool, which automatically provides popup prompts and takes users to a webpage for customised installation.

While Scarlett's specs are quite impressive, even they don't convey just how good this interface sounds. Recording pro-quality vocals can be particularly challenging in most home

studios, but the Scarlett 2i2's Air feature does an incredible job of capturing detail, ambience and a sense of space that I previously was only able to achieve by renting preamps and outboard gear worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Scarlett even made my inexpensive Rode condenser mic sound like it received a significant upgrade. Thanks to the Air feature, Scarlett's overall detail and clarity and the unit's incredibly low latency, it offers true high-end performance for an entry-level price.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With its new upgrades and features, the Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 is a serious digital audio interface that provides impressive pro-quality sound and ease of use that make it a great choice for new and experienced recording enthusiasts alike. Upgraded mic preamps provide expanded headroom, lower noise and improved clarity and detail. The new Air feature enhances high-end detail that is particularly effective for recording lifelike, dynamic vocals. 

► TOP FEATURES

- Air mode
- USB-C port
- Quarter-inch TRS line outputs
- Direct monitor mode switch
- 48-volt phantom power switch

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Enhanced high-end detail
- ▲ Upgraded mic preamps
- ▲ Incredibly low latency
- ▲ Pro quality at an entry-level price point

CONS

- ♥ None

► CONTACT

INNOVATIVE MUSIC

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RRP: \$5,999

FRAMUS DEVIN TOWNSEND STORMBENDER

FITTING FOR A VISIONARY, GENRE-DEFYING ARTIST LIKE **DEVIN TOWNSEND**, THE STORMBENDER SEEMS LIKE AN UNCONVENTIONAL INSTRUMENT, BUT MAKES PERFECT SENSE ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW IT. WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

The Framus Teambuilt Pro Series, which comes between the company's flagship Masterbuilt Custom Shop models and import Standard D-Series line, offers several different Artist Series electric guitars for an interesting group of players that includes Phil X (who recently switched to Gibson), Stevie Salas and Alice In Chains frontman William DuVall.

But by far their most interesting artist is progressive metal musician Devin Townsend (best known for the Devin Townsend Project, Strapping Young Lad and his work on Steve Vai's *Sex And Religion*), who collaborated with Framus on an appropriately out-of-the-ordinary model called the Stormbender Devin Townsend Artist Series.

Fitting for a visionary, genre-defying artist like Townsend, the Stormbender seems like an unconventional instrument, but it makes perfect sense once you get to know it.

Although it's built from conventional tonewoods, including a mahogany body and set maple neck, the Stormbender features a generously thick two-inch body with a carved and contoured top and back with a AA flame maple top inset in an oval section running down the middle of the body.

The neck has a 25.5-inch scale, and 22 extra-high jumbo frets installed with Framus's Invisible Fretwork Technology (IFT) and Plek set up. The model is available in transparent Nirvana Black, and the tigerstripe ebony fretboard is minimally adorned with a Devin Townsend circle at the 11th through 13th frets.

Pickups are a pair of Townsend's signature Fishman Fluence Transcendence ceramic magnet humbuckers with a hybrid

magnetic circuit that provides two distinct humbucking and single-coil tones accessed via a push/pull switch on the master tone knob. The Evertune bridge and Graph Tech Ratio locking tuners keep the guitar perfectly in tune.

The Devin Townsend Stormbender Artist Series boasts very aggressive and distinctive midrange, thanks to the 635-hertz/3.4-kilohertz (bridge) and 780-hertz/-kilohertz (neck) peak frequencies of its pickups' humbucking and single-coil settings.

As a result, the guitar delivers a throaty, full-bodied sound that works equally well with high-gain and clean amp settings and also seems to pull more tonal variation and range out of standard amp tone controls. Even with a graphic EQ set to a scooped mid setting, the guitar's tone remains robust and chunky.

Our example weighed a little more than nine pounds, but the weight is well distributed and the guitar feels much lighter when strapped on and played in a standing position. The fretwork is stunning, with a smooth, fast feel, and access up and down the neck is unrestricted, thanks to the neck heel that is contoured seamlessly to the body like a neck-thru design.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With the Stormbender Artist Series, Framus's Teambuilt staff and Devin Townsend have joined forces to offer a solidbody guitar with style and sounds that are as innovative, appealing and distinctive as Townsend's music. A pair of Devin Townsend's signature Fishman Fluence Transcendence pickups provide a selection of two distinctive full humbucking and single-coil tones. The guitar always stays perfectly in tune thanks to the Evertune bridge, locking Graph Tech Ratio tuners and Graph Tech Tusq low-friction nut. 

► TOP FEATURES

- Evertune bridge
- Locking Graph Tech Ratio tuners
- Low-friction Graph Tech Tusq nut
- Fishman Fluence Transcendence humbuckers
- Mahogany body and set maple neck

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Townsend's signature pickups offer distinctive, can't-find-elsewhere tones
- ▲ Fretwork is stunning with a smooth and fast feel.

CONS

- ▼ May cause a backache with how heavy it is

► CONTACT

AMBER TECH

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RRP: \$2,399+

GIBSON G-45 STANDARD AND G-45 STUDIO

WITH GIBSON'S RENAISSANCE IN FULL SWING, THE COMPANY IS SHOWING ITS HAND IN THE ACOUSTIC MARKET WITH TWO BRAND NEW, MID-PRICED MODELS. WORDS BY **DAVID MEAD**.

Everyone out there in guitar land knows about Gibson's efforts to rediscover its mojo under a new CEO. We've looked at its revised electric-guitar range and, so far, have found pretty solid evidence that things are on the up again after a painful dry spell. This new Generation series acoustic range – only two models strong for the moment – is a bold venture for Gibson. The G-45 Studio in particular is something the company is branding as “a new point of entry into a Gibson acoustic”.

Opening this pair's very impressive-looking cases reveals a handsome duo with a dialled-back level of ornateness, giving the impression that build quality is paramount. After all, the finest wines come with the plainest labels. The G series is built at Gibson's renowned Montana plant and we've seen some stunning instruments coming from that direction, so needless to say, we're a little bit excited.

Running our eyes down the spec lists for each guitar and we can see that the actual build materials are very similar on both models, with a few twists, tweaks and refinements in the Standard model to justify the price hike of some \$300. But it's the Studio model that captures our attention – we're still having problems digesting the relatively low price point for an all-solid-wood acoustic.

Both instruments have Sitka spruce tops and walnut backs and sides. Sitka needs no introduction to an acoustic player, but the sonic qualities of walnut might be a little unfamiliar to many. Nicely figured, it's a less dense tonewood than either rosewood or mahogany and the sound it produces falls somewhere in between. It has the robust woodiness of mahogany but also the depth of rosewood. Combined with the spruce top, this could be a good pairing.

The timber used for the neck is more unfamiliar: utile. The grain appears very similar to mahogany and other mahogany alternatives such as sapele. Its presence on a guitar is unusual, but with the recent lock-down on rosewoods and other endangered woods, we suppose we're the result of painstaking research into alternatives. In any case, both necks are one-piece and the lamination on the front of the headstocks is walnut.

The fingerboard material differs between the Studio and Standard in that the former is walnut – again, not so common, but it looks great and has a reputation for strength and durability and so should be fine – but the Standard is Richlite. This

is a composite of paper and resin and certainly not a ‘solid wood’ or even wood at all. However, it looks like ebony and is resilient and hard-wearing and so why shouldn't it make a perfect fretboard material?

Half of us want to nod sagely here, while the other half battles with the ‘not a solid wood’ argument. Richlite is not only sustainable, its ‘green’ credentials are fairly high as the paper part of the composite is generally from recycled sources. Its use is not unknown – Martin's lower-end models tend to use it, as well as MDF for their necks and Godin champions it, too. This might just be a sign of the future and so open-mindedness must prevail, however uncomfortable this shock of the new might make some of us feel.

Another characteristic shared by both models is the pickup system. Fishman's Sonitone is Gibson's choice here, with the controls hidden away inside the soundhole. Returning to an earlier theme, just what is it that accounts for the difference in price point between the two models? All we can say is that the Studio model looks a bit less well dressed. Think of a Studio Les Paul versus a Standard, for instance. But the differences aren't too pronounced.

Standing them side by side, you can see the Standard has slightly more ornate fingerboard markers, but both bodies are bound nicely, albeit with different materials. The Studio has a matte finish whereas the Standard has a gloss top with matt everywhere else – and both are nitrocellulose.

Sound-wise, the Studio is bright and crisp with all the ranges – treble, middle and bass – present with no unwanted peaks or troughs in the frequency spectrum. This formula is repeated on the Standard model, with perhaps a little more presence in the mix: it has a tad more sparkle. Both have almost identical necks – fattish but not unwieldy – and the actual playing experience is generally excellent.

The Fishman Sonitone system proves its worth as an excellent companion when both guitars are plugged in, with a flexible control over the sound, its presence here adding another string to the G series' already formidable bow.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Gibson have read the market and provided guitars that fill a gap in the mid-price range, to become workhorses for the next generation of acoustic players. Solid woods, nitro finishes and the stamp of Gibson's Montana facility's high quality can only be a good thing.

The naysayers will doubtless snipe, but we genuinely urge you to seek these guitars out and try them yourself. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- Fishman Sonitone pickup system
- Sitka spruce tops with walnut backs and sides
- Traditional scalloped X-bracing
- 16-inch fretboard radius
- Compound dovetail neck-to-body joint

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Both guitars are solidly built dreads with almost irresistible price tags.

CONS

- The presence of Richlite might upset purists.

► CONTACT

AUSTRALIS MUSIC

Ph: (02) 9698 4444

Web: australismusic.com.au



RRP: \$519

FISHMAN TRIPLEPLAY CONNECT SYNTH SYSTEM

THIS SYSTEM MAY FINALLY CONVINCE EVEN THE MOST SKEPTICAL OF GUITARISTS TO EXPLORE THE VAST WORLD OF SOUNDS THAT EXIST BEYOND THEIR BELOVED SIX STRINGS. WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

Ever since the first commercial guitar synthesisers were introduced back in the mid '70s, I've been fascinated by the possibilities of controlling non-guitar sounds with an electric guitar. However, over the years, numerous idiosyncrasies of guitar synth design made that prospect not entirely ideal for me.

From specialised guitar controllers and invasive pickup installations to bulky proprietary cables and rack- or floor-mounted sound modules, a guitar synth seemed more like a separate instrument unto itself rather than something I could easily and painlessly integrate into my existing gear rig.

Recently, Fishman introduced a few products that may finally convince even the most skeptical guitarists to explore the vast world of sounds that exist beyond our beloved six strings. The Fishman TriplePlay Wireless MIDI Guitar Controller came first, which offers a hexaphonic pickup and controller that communicates with software on a desktop or laptop computer.

Fishman's new TriplePlay Connect system goes even further for players who prefer the most compact and portable system imaginable, thanks to its app-based design. It's also the least-expensive guitar synth solution I've ever encountered, costing about the same as a high-falutin' boutique stomp box.

The Fishman TriplePlay Connect system consists of two items: a hexaphonic pickup and mounting brackets purchased from a retailer and the TriplePlay Connect app, which is a free download. The hexaphonic pickup is slimmer than a pencil,

and it is tethered to a controller that is wonderfully simple, featuring only a pair of large pushbuttons for scrolling through various settings on the app.

Unlike the previous TriplePlay package, the TriplePlay Connect pickup is not wireless, but it connects directly to a wide variety of mobile devices via the included Lightning or USB cables. Several different brackets provide a variety of non-invasive mounting options for both the pickup and controller. The mounting hardware is also magnetic, allowing you to quickly and easily remove and attach the pickup and controller.

The app is laid out in a very easy-to-use and understand fashion. Once the pickup is properly installed and calibrated (the app walks you through this process), it's truly a plug-and-play scenario, with a wide variety of available instrument sounds or "combis" (combinations of any instrument sounds that can be split; the split points between strings can be adjusted to be any of the strings, including limiting the range on the frets) arranged as icons on the left.

For each individual sound there are multiple programmable options that include transpose, dynamic response, EQ, MIDI FX arpeggiator, chord creator and auto key functions. In addition, eight different effects can be placed in any order to four audio effects slots, which can be put on each individual sound.

The app can be used for controlling sounds via the guitar, playing and arranging loops for practice and even for making multitrack recordings. Additional loops from Native Instruments and Big Fish in hip hop, EDM/electronic and rock styles are available as

in-app purchases, and users with TriplePlay Wireless MIDI systems can access the app via a separate in-app purchase.

I've installed many hexaphonic pickups on guitars over the last three decades, but the TriplePlay Connect was by far the easiest and fastest. Once the pickup is in place and charged, the app automatically walks you through tuning, pickup sensitivity and picking strength adjustments. After this setup is completed, it's smooth sailing for even the most tech-averse guitarists: most functions involve simply pointing at the desired function or instrument.

The selection of instruments is impressive and comprehensive, including keyboard instruments like pianos, organs and synths, a wide variety of acoustic brass, string, percussion and ethnic instruments, electric and acoustic basses, and drums. Available effects include amp simulators, chorus, phaser, tremolo, analog and modulated delay and reverb.

Because of its vast selection of sounds and loops, the TriplePlay Connect app requires almost four gigabytes of storage space on an iPad. Making new recordings and adding additional loops will require even more storage space, so the system is best for use on iPads with higher memory capacity than those on the lower end of the spectrum.

THE BOTTOM LINE

For guitarists who have always wanted to explore the capabilities of controlling new sounds with their guitars but were confused by guitar synth systems, Fishman's TriplePlay Connect offers the most affordable and easy-to-use solution available.

► TOP FEATURES

- Hexaphonic pickup and controller
- TriplePlay Connect app
- Multiple programmable options
- Magnetic mounting hardware
- Large pushbuttons for scrolling through settings

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- You can play along with drum, bass and instrument loops, and make multi-track recordings via the software

CONS

- The app is laid out in a very easy-to-use and understand fashion
- Additional loops are available as in-app purchases

► CONTACT

DYNAMIC MUSIC

Ph: (02) 9939 1299

Web: dynamicmusic.com.au



RRP: \$189.99

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES PLUMES OVERDRIVE

THE EARTHQUAKER PLUMES PROVIDES OUTSTANDING DYNAMIC, ORGANIC AND NATURAL-SOUNDING OVERDRIVE TONES, AND HAS A PRICE THAT WILL MAKE OTHER STOMPBOX COMPANIES SCREAM. WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

The Tube Screamer is easily one of the most popular and heavily copied circuits in the overdrive pedal industry, so chances are pretty good that most players either already have an original, a modded version or a clone of some sort in their rig whether they know it or not.

The Plumes Small Signal Shredder from EarthQuaker Devices is the latest stomp box inspired by Screamer-style overdrives, but they've radically reimagined it with a new circuit that replaces the 4558 IC and BJT transistor buffers with JFET operational amplifiers to provide improved tone and performance, with more natural tone and organic dynamics, enhanced treble clarity and depth, lower noise and boosted midrange that hits the sweet spot.

In addition to overall tonal improvements, Plumes offers a much more useful tone control and three different clipping modes that will make even the industry's best Screamer clones green with envy.

The Plumes pedal provides the standard three-knob overdrive control configuration - Level, Gain and Tone - plus a mini toggle switch for

selecting the three available clipping modes. Mode 1 is symmetrical clipping that provides the pedal's most aggressive crunch; Mode 2 is a clean boost and Mode 3 is asymmetrical silicon diode clipping similar to the original Screamer, but with more output and clarity.

The click-free footswitch provides flexi-switching that engages or bypasses the effect when it is tapped or can automatically engage the effect when the footswitch is continuously held down and bypass the effect when the footswitch is released. A bright white LED illuminates when the effect is engaged. A 9-volt DC power supply with a standard 2.1mm center negative barrel is required to power the pedal (there's no battery power).

A common complaint about Screamer-style overdrives is that they sometimes sound a bit over-processed. That's not a problem with Plumes, as its overdrive is very organic and natural-sounding, and provides the dynamic give and take of plugging directly into an overdriven tube amp. While there is a notable (and intentional) midrange boost, it hits an ideal sweet spot that

makes the guitar's tone full, rich and sweet with a vocal-like singing quality instead of a nasal honk.

Mode 1 has the character of a modded Plexi amp, while Mode 2 delivers true clean boost with enhanced mids and Mode 3 provides classic 'green' overdrive with less compression and more dynamic string zing. The tone control is useful across its entire range. Turn it counter-clockwise for bigger bass or clockwise to boost treble without making the tone flabby or wimpy.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The EarthQuaker Plumes provides outstanding dynamic, organic and natural-sounding overdrive tones that will make your guitar scream, while its sub-\$200 price will make other stompbox companies scream.

Three clipping modes provide Marshall-like overdrive, clean boost and classic Screamer overdrive at the flick of a switch. The Tone control provides a wider variety of EQ than that of similar overdrive pedals while remaining musical and useful across its entire range. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- JFET operational amplifiers
- Level, Gain and Tone controls
- Mini toggle switch for selecting clipping modes
- Nine-volt DC power supply
- Click-free footswitch

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- 🎸 Marshall-like overdrive, clean boost and classic Screamer overdrive at the flick of a switch
- 🎸 Wider variety of EQ options than similar overdrive pedals

CONS

- 🎸 No battery power

► CONTACT

YAMAHA AUSTRALIA

Ph: (03) 9693 5111

Web: au.yamaha.com



RRP: \$949 (G5220)
\$1,199 (G2622T)

GRETSCH G5220 ELECTROMATIC JET BT SINGLE-CUT + G2622T STREAMLINER CENTER BLOCK

THESE ELECTROMATIC AND STREAMLINER MODELS ARE PERFECT FOR ANYONE WHO HAS EVER WANTED A GRETSCH, AS WELL AS PLAYERS WHO MAY NOT HAVE CONSIDERED ONE BEFORE. WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

To me, a Gretsch ranks as one of the top five essential electric guitars every guitarist should own, particularly since their models deliver a unique sonic voice that's unlike most other brands. One setback for many players is that the best-known and most highly coveted Gretsch models like the 6120, Duo Jet and White Falcon start at prices above \$2,000 and only go up from there. Fortunately, Gretsch also offers much more affordable Electromatic and Streamliner models that deliver impressive, genuine Gretsch style and vibe for about a quarter of the cost of the 'professional' models.

The Gretsch G5220 Electromatic Jet BT Single-Cut is a descendent of the company's timeless Duo Jet solidbody model, which has inspired players like Cliff Gallup, George Harrison, Malcolm Young, Billy Zoom, Jeff Beck, Chris Cornell and more. Like the Duo Jet, it features a chambered mahogany body with an arched laminated maple top and a mahogany set neck with a 24.6-inch scale length, 12-inch radius and 22 medium jumbo frets. It even includes classic G-Arrow control knobs.

However, this G5220 Electromatic model has a few distinctive differences, including a slightly shallower body depth (1.85 inches instead of two), Thin U neck profile, black walnut fingerboard with pearloid big block inlays, V-shaped stop tailpiece, two Black Top Broad'Tron humbucking pickups and a selection of cool finish options.

The G2622T Streamliner Center Block takes a design

cue from '60s-era Gretsch double cutaway hollowbody models like the 6120, Country Gentleman, Rally and Viking, but it has a shallower 1.75-inch body depth and spruce center block that runs the entire length of the body, distinguishing it as a semihollow model.

Construction features include a laminated maple body with aged white binding, black-and-antique white purfling and enlarged f-holes and a nato set neck with a Thin U profile, laurel fingerboard, aged white binding, 24.75-inch scale length, 12-inch radius, 22 medium jumbo frets and Big Block fingerboard inlays.

The pickups are a pair of high-output Broad'Tron BT-2S humbuckers; the hardware includes a Bigsby B70 vibrato tailpiece and black vintage-style control knobs, while finish options are Gunmetal, Riviera Blue and Torino Green. Both models share identical control configurations consisting of a three-way pickup selector toggle switch, master volume, master tone and individual volume controls for each pickup.

Absolutely every detail about these Electromatic and Streamliner models is dazzling, from the eye-catching finishes and impeccable construction to the comfortable playability and snarling, aggressive tone. Both models deliver distinctive Gretsch character that will please the most discriminating vintage Gretsch enthusiasts and neophytes alike.

In a blindfold test, most guitarists would not be able to tell the difference between these guitars and many of Gretsch's more expensive boutique models – they're simply that good.

The G5220 Electromatic Jet's pickups are impressively hot, delivering blistering, ballsy overdrive that's perfect for most styles of rock, including metal and punk. The frequency range is a little wider than that of a classic Gretsch Filter'tron, with big, tight bass, full, rounded mids and surprisingly rich treble.

The G2622T Streamliner's tone leans more towards classic Gretsch hollowbody territory, with a distinctive midrange honk and reverb-like body resonance that's ideal for anything from hot-rodged rockabilly to smoking blues. The solid center block allows players to crank the amp's volume and gain way up without experiencing unwanted feedback.

While both models are undeniably ideal for players looking for their first Gretsch as well as dedicated Gretsch junkies looking for another addition to their collections, they're also highly recommended for guitarists who previously may have never considered a Gretsch. These are versatile, exceptionally playable instruments that sell for outrageously competitive street prices that are so affordable you may want to seriously consider getting both.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Offering incredible tone, playability and style for street prices that are jaw-droppingly low, these Electromatic and Streamliner models are perfect for anyone who has ever wanted a Gretsch, as well as players who may not have considered the company's offerings before now. 

► TOP FEATURES

- Chambered mahogany body (G5220)
- 24.6-inch (G5220) or 24.75-inch (G2622T) scale length
- Classic G-Arrow control knobs (G5220)
- Black Top Broad'Tron (G5220) or Broad'Tron BT-2S (G2622T) humbuckers
- Big Block fingerboard inlays (G2622T)

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Range of classic and modern finish options for both models
- Hot pickups on the G5220 Electromatic Jet
- G2622T Streamliner's classic tone

CONS

- None

► CONTACT

GRETSCH

Ph: (02) 9666 5077

Web: gretsch.com.au



RRP: \$265

ELECTRO-HARMONIX RAM'S HEAD BIG MUFF PI

HEADS UP! ARGUABLY THE MOST ANTICIPATED OF THE BIG MUFF REISSUES HAS LANDED. WORDS BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

So, which is the most desired Big Muff of them all? There have been many variations over the years, but a lot of Muff aficionados have a soft spot for the V2 Muff produced for a few years from 1973 and known as the 'Ram's Head' because of that bizarre little face on the front. The popularity may also have something to do with the fact that it's the model most associated with David Gilmour.

Now in its nano range of Big Muff reissues (that also includes the V1 Triangle Muff, Op-Amp Big Muff and Green Russian), Electro-Harmonix has launched the Ram's Head Big Muff Pi, said to be a reproduction of the 'violet' version, the most common revision of Ram's Head-period circuitry as first seen in '73 models with violet silk-screened

graphics, although it is also found in pedals with other colours.

EHX has refined the new model's circuitry with close reference to some vintage models, and A/B'ing it against our own '73 vintage Ram's Head confirms they've nailed it. The usual Big Muff range is all here: the Sustain knob starts out at medium-gain overdrive, but soon transitions into saturated fuzzy sustain that just goes on and on, blooming into harmonic feedback as you hold a note.

Tonally, there's less bottom-end than in a lot of other Big Muffs; here it's tighter and more controlled. The midrange scoop is there, but the pedal's overall balance of frequencies seems just right, yielding a lovely degree of string articulation.

All can be tailored with the wide-ranging tone knob – rolled back for smooth liquid sustain or rolled forward for crispier, more cutting top-end.

Ultimately, a Big Muff is a Big Muff and any particular version is going to be in the ballpark, but to aficionados it's all about the subtle differences and this one has pedigree. If Comfortably Numb floats your boat, you're a Dinosaur Jr fan or you want to cop Ernie Isley's That Lady tone, then a Ram's Head is likely to be your preferred variation.

THE BOTTOM LINE

It's excellent news that this particular flavour of Big Muff is freely available once more – and it sounds every bit as good as it did back in 1973. 

► TOP FEATURES

- True bypass
- Volume, Sustain, Tone and Bypass footswitch
- Standard input and output
- Nine-volt battery or DC adaptor (not included)
- Tighter and more controlled bottom-end

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Nails the classic Ram's Head tone
- Compact size
- Very reasonably priced

CONS

- Why no violet-coloured graphics?

► CONTACT

VIBE MUSIC

Web: vibemusic.com.au

Pictured: Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram (via Fender)



OWN YOUR TONE: THE GUITAR TERMS YOU NEED TO KNOW

TO HELP YOU PERFECT THE FEEL AND SOUND OF YOUR GUITAR RIG, HERE'S A REFRESHER ON SOME KEY CONCEPTS. WORDS BY **DAVE BURRLUCK**.

Your tone is about more than just sound; it's the things that affect playing feel and touch-sensitivity as well. Some players like a clear, glassy note that can punch through any mix. Others need a swampy, down-and-dirty drive tone to feel really at home. Others still need both, at the touch of a footswitch, to get their point across.

Our goal is to get to those sounds deliberately and methodically, whenever we want them – not rely solely on random experimentation, as fun and useful as that can be. But you don't need a degree in audio engineering to get to the point where you can make effective decisions about tone-tweaking. As with cooking, there are some simple building blocks that can be combined in different ways to create thousands of distinct flavours.

We're going to look at some of those building blocks below, so we completely understand our key ingredients before going on to show how they can be put to use in crafting your perfect tone.

HEADROOM

This is arguably the most important root concept we need to understand before we can make any effective decisions about tone-tweaking. Headroom is the capacity of an amp or pedal to reproduce a signal faithfully without distorting. With an amp that has lots of headroom, such as a Fender Twin, you can turn it up loud at the master volume and the sound will still remain glassy and clean, with the whole of the waveform of your signal amplified clearly and faithfully.

This is really important for players who rely on delivering huge clean tone at gig volume – think of Duane Eddy, for example, or the late surf-guitar master Dick Dale. Headroom isn't just relevant to amps, either – some drive pedals, such as Fulltone's OCD, can be run at 18 volts to give them more headroom than if they were operated on a standard nine-volt supply.

So why is headroom also important in an overdrive, where you're not aiming for pristine clean tones? To understand that, we need to move on to our next key term...

DYNAMIC RANGE

The most important thing that an amp (or pedal) with lots of headroom offers you is dynamic range. This means that if you dig in and play hard, then you hear that jump in loudness reproduced clearly and crisply. If you play softly again, the amp backs off to a whisper immediately.

Good dynamic range means all the detail of your playing, in terms of loud and soft dynamics, is captured faithfully in your audible tone. This is great for players who rely on nuanced loud/quiet dynamics to convey emotion, such as blues players. So if dynamic range is so brilliant for capturing the subtleties of your playing, why wouldn't you want as much of it as possible?

The answer is that it can be pretty revealing – volume will rise and fall very abruptly according to how hard you're picking, so your tone can sound a bit spiky and plunky if you're not careful.

Also, you don't have a comfortable cushion of sustain to help you milk those bends and get notes soaring. Obviously you're going to want a bit of that, too – which leads us nicely to...

COMPRESSION

This process makes quiet sounds louder but also quashes spikes in volume. In practical terms that means it smooths out changes in volume and adds some flattering sustain.

By definition, compression means you lose some dynamic range – but, in exchange, you gain a more rounded, mellow attack to each note and a pleasant bloom as the note fades.

Dedicated compressor pedals can give you full control over how much and how little of this effect you want. These are favoured by country players for chicken picking, where you're aiming for a silky-smooth flow of rapid but clean notes with no uneven spikes in volume. Likewise, Roger McGuinn of The Byrds fame uses one with a 12-string electric to smooth out what might otherwise be quite a brash sound and help notes ring and shimmer for longer.

Already you can start to see that a given player's sweet spot will lie somewhere on the spectrum

between maximum possible dynamic range and maximum possible compression. You need some dynamic range to get light and shade, in terms of picking dynamics, into your sound. But you also need compression to smooth and flatter and extend notes in a pleasant way.

How much or how little of each you want is absolutely central to achieving your perfect tone. However, it's not quite as simple as picking a spot on that spectrum and setting up camp there. Why? Because your amp and drive pedals will also introduce a degree of natural compression themselves when you play. How much? Well, here's where things get tricky, because that amount varies depending on a variety of other factors – which brings us to our next key term...

CLIPPING

Earlier on we looked at the concept of headroom. But there's a crucial question to answer: what happens when you run out of it?

Circuits that amplify signal – from the mighty power valves in your amp to the transistors in your overdrive pedal – all have a limit to how much signal they can handle while still reproducing all of the waveform fully and faithfully. When they can't amplify the full waveform any more, clipping occurs.

As the name suggests, this means the peaks of the waveform are lopped off when they hit the ceiling of how much the circuit can handle. This has profound effects on your sound and produces those great crunchy drive sounds we all love. And because the loudest parts of the waveform get clipped off, it's also a form of compression.

So, what causes clipping? One way clipping occurs is to turn up the gain – the degree to which the signal is being amplified by a given circuit. When the circuit runs out of power to amplify the full waveform, clipping occurs at the peaks of the signal. But if the incoming signal is already pretty hot – for example, if it has already been boosted by a drive pedal earlier in the chain – then the threshold at which the circuit starts clipping is reached much quicker. 🎸



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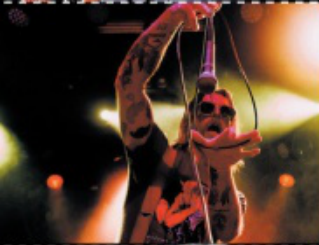


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