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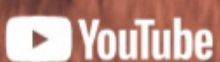
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EDITORIAL

EDITOR Matt Doria

ART DIRECTOR Kristian Hagen

CONTRIBUTORS

Adam Kovac, Alex Wilson, Chris Barnes, Chris Gill, Dan Orkin, Jack Ellis, Jimmy Leslie, Jonathan Horsley, Joshua Rothkopf, Matt Blackett, Matt Doria, Michael Astley-Brown, Nick Guppy, Richard Bienstock, Rob Laing, Ron Zabrocki, Trevor Curwen

ADVERTISING

NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER Lewis Preece
EMAIL lewis.preece@futurenet.com

ADVERTISING CO-ORDINATOR Di Preece
EMAIL diane.preece@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

techmags.com.au or call +61 2 8277 6486

PO Box 1077 Mount St, North Sydney NSW 2059



MANAGING DIRECTOR Neville Daniels

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KEMPER LAUNCHES “ULTIMATE CABINET SOLUTION” FOR PROFILER PLAYERS WITH NEW KABINET AND KONE

WORDS: RICHARD BIENSTOCK

Kemper has unveiled two new cab options for its Profiler guitar amp – the Kemper Kabinet and Kemper Kone replacement speaker. The Kabinet and Kone offer guitarists the choice of 19 different speaker imprints, for use with Kemper Profiler PowerRack and PowerHead amps.

The Kabinet combines the Kone loudspeaker and Kemper-developed speaker tone mining technology, making it possible to digitally “imprint” various speaker characteristics onto one single cabinet. The Kone, meanwhile, is a 12-inch speaker designed in conjunction with Celestion, and features a full-range sound that “carries a distinct guitar speaker character.” There are also Sweetening and Directivity parameters for detailed adjustment.

The 19 imprints offer classic speaker sounds from Celestion and other brands, with the potential for more imprints included in future software updates. The Kabinet can be driven by a Profiler PowerHead or PowerRack, as well

as via an external power amp. In the latter configuration, two Kabinets can be driven in stereo. Additionally, the Kone is available as a replacement speaker for existing guitar cabinets, as a single unit and two- and four-speaker sets for two-by-12 and four-by-12 cabs.



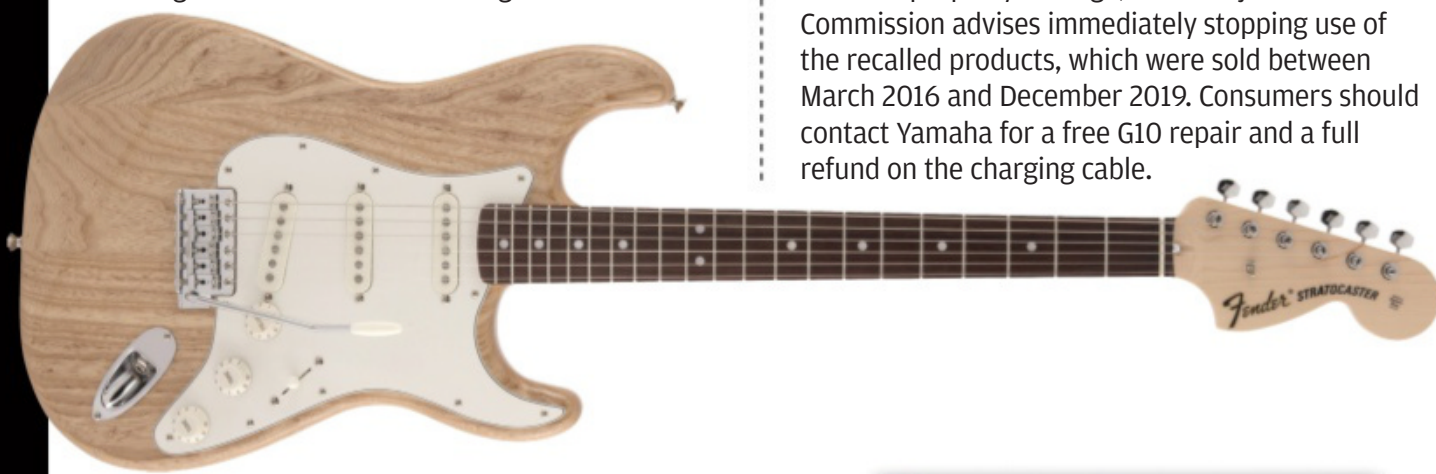
FENDER LAUNCHES MADE IN JAPAN HERITAGE SERIES

WORDS: RICHARD BIENSTOCK

Fender Music KK has launched the Made in Japan Heritage series, a new electric guitar and bass line developed under the guidance of Mark Kendrick, one of the Fender Custom Shop’s founding master builders and the company’s current Director of Global Build Standards.

The new instruments – which are available in Japan only, though can be imported through select local dealers – encompass Heritage ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s Stratocasters; the Heritage ‘50s Telecaster; the Heritage ‘60s Telecaster Custom; the Heritage ‘60s Telecaster Thinline and the Heritage ‘60s Jazzmaster; as well as Heritage ‘50s and ‘60s Precision Bass and Heritage ‘60s and ‘70s Jazz Bass models.

All instruments feature historically accurate specs, tones and colours, combined with “quality Japanese craftsmanship.” According to Fender, the series “delivers the true essence of Fender instruments with refined body and neck shapes, ideal pickup settings and colours – all referenced from the original US drawing archives and various vintage instruments.”



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LINE 6 RECALLS RELAY G10 SYSTEMS FOR POTENTIAL “FIRE AND INJURY HAZARDS”

WORDS: RICHARD BIENSTOCK

AG’s partner mag *Guitar World* recently ranked the Line 6 Relay G10S as one of 2020’s best wireless systems. The unit is no doubt a great buy, but for those of you currently running the Relay, take



heed: the Consumer Product Safety Commission has announced a recall on the G10, G10S and G10T wireless systems, as well as the G10 USB charging cable, stating that “the lithium-ion battery

can overheat and the battery cover can separate with force, posing fire and injury hazards.”

So far, Yamaha is aware of four incidents worldwide of the battery cover “separating forcefully from the transmitter,” with one report of minor property damage, but no injuries. The Commission advises immediately stopping use of the recalled products, which were sold between March 2016 and December 2019. Consumers should contact Yamaha for a free G10 repair and a full refund on the charging cable.



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ISEKAI

Photo: Ellie Cooper

THEY ARE a pair of Adelaidian post-punks on the cusp of a monolithic breakthrough with their anthemic eccentricity. They pair defiantly raw and brutally authentic quips with crisp, modern production. The end result is something straight out of a *BLUNT Magazine* mixtape circa 2003, buffed up with the sharpness of everything we've learned about music production since.

THEY SOUND LIKE the battered, barely functioning portable CD player you carried around with you *everywhere* in your early teens, zombified and sprinting into the 2020s with all of its nostalgic dorkiness in tow. The overly straightened bangs, the velcro wallets with keychain clips, the half-drunk cans of Monster Energy you thought you looked like such a badass walking around with at the skate park... *Oh God, it's all coming back!* And yet, you secretly can't resist it.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Brand New, Placebo, Garbage, and dusting off your PS1 every few years to revisit *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*. Yes, in case you're wondering, it does still hold up.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT their punchy and powerful debut single, "More Than Two". Thematically, the track sees J (vocals/guitar) and Lucy (drums) explore the fluidity of gender, doing so by way of a soundscape that is, in its own way, impossible to classify. It's heavy, yet soothing; bright, yet bold. The duo also have an EP on the way, which we've had a sneak peek of and can say with the utmost of confidence that it bloody rips.



TOGETHER AS ONE

Photo: Abbey Stevens

THEY ARE the band that would give your grandparents a heart attack if they knew you were heading off to their gig - two of Sydney's most talented death-metal debonairs, churning out gristly and guttural slithers of pure sonic warfare. It's hard to believe they only have one guitarist; Mitch Davis reckons with a wall of sound so mercilessly massive it should come with its own warning label.

THEY SOUND LIKE the artistic personification of despair; they're named after a Trivium song, but they make Matt Heafy and co. look like the Teletubbies with their blistering breakdowns and soul-ravaging riffs.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Machine Head, Sepultura and Code Orange. If you were the type of teen to have a morbid curiosity for things like the *Faces Of Death* series, there's a good chance you have a soft spot for bands like Together As One, whose heaviness abides only by the bounds of their mixing software. Which, given how sharp their debut EP sounds in spite of its monstrous avalanche of gutturals and guitar, seems to be a pretty wide margin.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT that aforementioned debut EP, *Crawl*. It's a decently weighty release, too, stuffing almost 40 minutes of mind-melting metal into a neat six-track bundle. Closing track "Grand Deception" is a particular highlight, slow-burning and kaleidoscopic, and certainly worthy of closing out such a transcendent package of power.



ROGUE HALF

Photo: Rogue Half

THEY ARE soon to be the champions of Australia's ever-burgeoning melodicore scene - we're calling it now. Staples of Adelaide's underground, the foursome deal in powerful, polychromatic soundscapes that grab the listener by the ears and bodyslams them through a table lined thick with tenacious riffs.

THEY SOUND LIKE what would happen if you plugged a pair of headphones into a bucket full of fireworks.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Polaris, Underoath and The Beautiful Monument. They swerve like F1 drivers between mammoth singalong melodies and cataclysmic breakdowns, their tracks suited equally for the mosh pit and the car stereo. With metalcore progressively edging its way back into the spotlight, we can easily see Rogue Half dropping a major bombshell on the mainstream with their next record.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT their latest single "Bite My Tongue", the chorus of which will undoubtedly find itself stuck in your head for weeks after your first dozen listens (which will definitely happen in quick succession, as it's a dangerously moreish track). The band are hard at work on the follow-up to their 2018 *Refraction* album, and though that release is well worth a spin, their more recent material is leagues ahead.



GREAT GABLE

Photo: Liam Fawell

THEY ARE a four-piece of loose and loveable indie-rockers from Perth, gearing up to make 2020 their bitch with one of the year's biggest and most unforgettable debut albums.

THEY SOUND LIKE a coursing rush of serotonin right to the cerebral cortex. They're not trying to be anything over-the-top of deliver some meticulous jewel of grandeur - they deal in fun, playful jams that tick all the right boxes for a summer arvo playlist; their playing is incredibly tight, but you're not going to give yourself a migraine thinking too hard about it.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Lime Cordiale, The Strokes and Arctic Monkeys, and wishing you could go back in time to cut loose at the original Woodstock. Great Gable are all about the good vibes, and they've got plenty to share - pop them on en route to the beach or after a long day on the grind when you're in need of a serious chillout sesh.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the new single "All My Friends" - unless you're a Triple J regular, in which case you've probably already heard it a couple hundred times. There's a good reason it's being hammered on the airwaves, though: the interplay between those prickly rhythm lines and the fuzzed-out lead, those soul-warming vocals and the understated percussion - it's a simple tune on the surface, but there's so much going on that makes it great.

Photo: Madeline Randall



HALLIE

SHE IS a trailblazing Brisbanite whose voice booms with the force of a Spartan army, and whose fretting hands conjure up hooks so sharp they could slice through tungsten like butter. Hallie is also occasionally a three-piece band, of which Hallie is the frontwoman – makes sense, right?

SHE SOUNDS LIKE the perfect balance of sweetness and maturity, like dark chocolate in MP3 form.

YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Missy Higgins, Middle Kids and Julia Jacklin, but you've always wished their respective discographies were just a tad *spicier*.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT her latest jam "Sympathy", which, in a resoundingly tight three-and-a-half minutes, puts Hallie's full spate of dazzling and dynamic musicality on display. We start off slow and folky, the singer musing calmly over the buzzy, understated strums of a guitar sans effect. And then it kicks in, and we're treated to a pummelling onslaught of biting electric guitars and thumping drums. One absolutely *ripping* guitar solo later, Hallie is belting out a vocal melody so strong we're convinced she's got lungs of steel. If the cut is any indication of what her debut album will sound like, our end-of-year list topper is pretty much sorted. *There's even a goddamn key change!*

TEENAGE JOANS

THEY ARE a two-piece pop-rock powerhouse who call Adelaide home, but are sure to find themselves in high demand around the whole world soon enough. Simply put, Cahli Blakers (vocals/guitar) and Tahlia Borg (drums) are a match made in musical heaven.

THEY SOUND LIKE the kind of band that Fueled By Ramen would've killed a man to sign in the early-to-mid 2000s. Their tunes are bright and boomy and wickedly accessible, but sharper than a shard of the glass you'll knock over from dancing too hard when one of their songs starts playing.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Tiny Moving Parts, Ruby Fields and Tigers Jaw. They fit in well with their classmates in the new wave of Australian pop-rockers, too, so if you've found yourself vibing hard with WAAX or The Hard Aches as of late, Teenage Joans will make for a no-brainer addition to your daytime playlist. That being said, they have plenty of charm that's entirely their own.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT their inhumanly catchy debut single "By The Way", which clocks in just shy of three minutes but packs more than its fair share of crunchy riffs and cruisy melodies. They may only have other track to their name at the moment, but rest assured Teenage Joans are sitting on a torrent of gold just waiting to erupt. Once it's legal to go outside again, make sure to catch one of the duo's rambunctious live shows, where they bash out the bangers in abundance.



Photo: Evie Wonder

GRENADE JUMPER

THEY ARE Sydney's latest searing and summery answer to the pop-punk revival that's rippling through the world like the blue hair dye through our curls. They'd be a shoo-in on a label like Hopeless for sure, but they also revel in a strain of originality the genre has been starving for.

THEY SOUND LIKE the secret USB of early b-sides that Pete Wentz left lying around after a trip to Frankie's. It's hard to sit still when you pop on one of the quartet's three-minute bursts of kinetic calamity; they're unforgivingly upbeat and brutally bouncy, Max Jacobson and Bianca Davino (the latter also belting those stunningly spry vocals) trading riffs with more body-jerking energy than a year's supply of Red Bull could dole you.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE All Time Low, State Champs and the first couple of Fall Out Boy records – or, if you're abiding by some weird personal rule where you can only listen to Australian pop-punk bands, then Between You & Me, Eat Your Heart Out and Stand Atlantic. Honestly, the three of them and Grenade Jumper would make for one *heck* of a tour lineup. Can someone at Destroy All Lines jump on that, please?

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the new single "Heat Wave", which is fittingly titled since it's an absolute scorcher of a tune. It's only the third track in their slowly blooming discography, yet it flaunts the kind of radiant spirit that most bands spend years trying to capture. Davino says the track is about "empowering yourself to understand the beauty in all aspects of life" and that the band "aimed to channel that drive and brightness in the instrumental." We'll consider both points as missions accomplished!

Photo: Georgia Moloney



Photo: Sophie Hill



GEORGIA MARLEY

SHE IS a singer-songwriter from Sydney with a penchant for pensive indie-pop jams that feel distinctly intimate, lowkey production and sparsely built soundscapes making each play feel like another personal performance from Marley herself. The simple, mostly electronic beats make for a rich bed of soil from which Marley's warm, honeyed drawl and silvery fretting blossoms like a forest of exotic flora.

SHE SOUNDS LIKE that feeling when you flip your pillow over in the middle of the night and it's just that little bit cool and extra comfy.

YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Angie McMahon, John-Allison Weiss and Tegan & Sara, and staying up all night flipping through old schoolbooks and reminiscing about your first crushes. Fiends of fat riffs need not apply, but if chill, pseudo-folky crooners hit your vibe, Marley will hand-deliver you the goods.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT her emphatically fluorescent debut album *Yearning*, which showcases ten dizzying and delightful slivers of Marley's heart à la prickly acoustic guitars and minimalistic pop beats. Equal parts moving and melancholic, the LP demands your undivided attention as its charismatically alluring (and often crushingly relatable) stories unfurl.



PUTTING THE 'ART' IN 'HEART'

HEARTWORK IS A RECORD SO DEFIANTLY LEFT-FIELD THAT NOT EVEN THE MOST INTENSE OF **THE USED'S** FANS COULD HAVE SEEN IT COMING. IT'S LOUD, ABRASIVE, AND TOTALLY F***ING WEIRD – AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT FRONTMAN **BERT MCCRACKEN** WAS GOING FOR.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **BRIAN COX**.

Anyone who's met him will attest that Bert McCracken is one hell of a character: the Utah-native emo legend exudes eccentricity, his communal personality an amalgam of friendliness, hilarity and angst, with just a tinge of mania for good measure. Such rubs off emphatically on his songwriting in The Used, where he pairs acidic, brutally honest quips with an idiosyncratic whimsicality. It's why The Used are such an extraordinary force – there are no other bands like them, because there are no other bands with Bert McCracken in them.

Though he's always kept The Used fairly close to his chest – 'collaborative' isn't often a word used to describe him – McCracken is growing wiser and more open-minded as he nears his 40s. He's less precious about other voices chiming in when it comes to the conceptual process for an album, and the band's 2020 record, *Heartwork*, is definitive proof of that. Across its bold and bombastic 16 tracks, the band explore influences from each of its four members. In the end, we're presented 45 taut, tenacious and twisting minutes of everything from gristly underground punk to glittery bubblegum pop, with chunks of every fruit in the musical forest scattered in-between.

Heartwork is, at its core, a youthful and exciting record to delve into. McCracken is well aware of its childlike joviality, too – he's described it as a spiritual successor to The Used's 2002 self-titled album and 2004's *In Love And Death*, all the unequivocal urgency and impenetrable passion of those records revived and modernised in only such a way that McCracken and The Used can.

What is it about the early style and ethos of The Used that you wanted to recapture and embrace again?

I think it was the deep honesty of the first couple records. I feel like social media has changed the dynamics of the music world, but The Used has never really had a hard time keeping the bigger picture in mind – for us, it's just about the love of music. We grew up as music fans, and music has saved our lives since we were kids – so to to give

that back has been more than a dream come true.

Our feelings for the first couple of records was that honesty combined with this catchiness that I always look for in a good song – if it gets stuck in my head, then I'm in. That's what I mean when I talk about the kind of feelings we had on the first and second records – just kind of letting it be what it is, laying all our cards out on the table, never thinking about what kind of record we were going to make or what kind of song we were going to write; just letting it all flow from the subconscious

There's a lot of variation in the sounds on this record – from heavy, shredding guitars to really cerebral, left-field pop moments. Playing with all these different flavours across 16 tracks, would you say this is the definitive Used album?

Yeah, totally. This is a very *colourful* record for The Used, I think – there's something on the record for everyone, and I think that comes down to basic influences inside the band; we all dig such different stuff, and when we get together, we end up having songs that show all of our different personalities. There's one song on this record that's maybe the poppiest song The Used has ever written.

We just have a lot of fun in the studio. A lot of the times, when you're making a song or when you're creating something, a really fun time and a lot of laughs will turn into a serious moment, and suddenly you're like, "Well, now we have a slap bass bridge on our record." We wanted to say 'yes' to everything that came up in the studio for this record – that was a big part of it.

You've always been the kind of songwriter to really push the boundaries of what a track can be. How did you want *Heartwork* to challenge you as a songwriter?

Well, like I just mentioned, saying 'yes' to everything was a big one. Saying 'yes' to *anything* has been a challenge for me throughout my career; my creative process has always been really specific and strict – when I came up in music as teenager,

I was very narrow-minded person. If it wasn't a pretty heavy, straight-edge hardcore band, then I just hated it. I despised it. But I don't think kids are like that anymore, and I certainly don't want to be like that as an adult.

Do you think that heightened dynamic of collaboration comes out in the music itself?

100 percent! I can hear the difference right away; I think it still sounds like me – the lyrics sound like my lyrics – but with kind of a different feel. I think there's a new kind of honesty and a new kind of urgency behind the realness that makes this record really stand out in my mind.

I mean, I've been listening to it so much – I should be sick of it already, but I just love it! It's such a cool little journey to go on. And we still love making records that you're supposed to listen to from front to back, so it made a lot of sense for us to have, for people who still love listening to records in the old-school sort of way, something special they could experience.

Of course, this is the first Used album with Joey Bradford on the guitars. How did he gel into the flow of the chaos?

He *is* like jelly, in a way. You don't have it in Australia, but in the US, they have this really crazy jar with both peanut butter *and* jelly in it at the same time. [Laughs] that's actually a really bad metaphor, because that shit is disgusting... He's like a nice scone with jam and cream, right out of the oven – he gets along with everyone, he's super positive and friendly, and he's the youngest guy in the bunch so he's got that youthful energy.

And this is still all brand new for him – when he was in high school, it was bands like The Used that were blowing up. He was a huge fan of us and a lot of bands like us in the same genre, so it's been really amazing to have his enthusiasm on hand. And with [producer John] Feldmann, it's kind of hit or miss – he's a pretty tough guy to work with in the studio, but Feldmann took to Mr. Jelly right away. That was a good sign. 🍪



TWO STEPS FORWARD ONE STEP SIDeways

IN CELEBRATING FAMILIARITY ON THEIR RIPPING SECOND ALBUM, *SIDEWAYS TO NEW ITALY*, MELBOURNE POST-PUNKS **ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER** HAVE BREWED UP THEIR BIGGEST, BRIGHTEST AND MOST EXPERIMENTAL EFFORT YET.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **PETER RYLE**.

New Italy is a town straight out of some rural Australian kid's archive of Twilight Zone fan-fiction. You'll be driving up the New South Wales coast for a much-needed getaway and suddenly, out of nowhere – some 700 kilometres North of Sydney, amidst a sprawling nirvana of absolutely f*** all – appears a small, yet ever-so-bustling village of shops and Italian restaurants, entirely unfazed by its remoteness or peculiarity. And though it's largely unknown to those who haven't passed through (or visited) it, New Italy has been thriving since 1882, when it was established by homesick immigrants determined to recapture the unique spirit of their motherland.

Such makes New Italy the perfect locale to base the conceptual framework for Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever's new album, *Sideways To New Italy*. The Melbourne-native indie-rockers have personal ties to the area – it's close to where drummer Marcel Tussie grew up, and remains a must-visit pitstop on the band's Australian tours – but it's the story behind New Italy, that of homesickness and perseverance, that they most closely relate to.

Following up their debut album *Hope Downs*, which introduced them to the mainstream, took them around the world and sent them on a journey that packed a decade's worth of experiences into a tight two years, *Sideways To New Italy* sees Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever beg for normalcy. They have a nostalgia for the days where they wouldn't wake up to a phone screen blaring with an endless stream of notifications. They're grateful for their fame – otherwise they wouldn't be releasing a second album, or pushing it as fervently as they currently are – but they appreciate the more passive, mundane moments of life a bit more right now; they long for the next time they can shoot the shit and kill some time worry-free in New Italy.

Before embarking on another life-changing journey in support of *Sideways To New Italy*, we caught up with guitarist Tom Russo to dive a little deeper into it.

Downs was a pretty monumental release for the band. Did the experiences you all had making and touring that record feed into the creative process for this one?

I think so. We had a very specific window of time to work on [*Sideways To New Italy*], whereas I think that a lot of first albums are an accumulation of a lot of sprawling time – everything you do kind of leads up to that record. But then for the follow-up, all of a sudden you've got three months to write a record.

And so we went into this album's writing process really excitedly – I think it was about August last year, and we'd already written a bunch of songs, but we went into the studio and came up with a whole new batch that we immediately felt were more exciting. It was just more of a focussed approach, I guess, that led us to where we are now with this record.

How did you want this album to kick Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever to the next level, or build upon what you'd established creatively with *Hope Downs*?

Initially, we went in with a very ambitious and conceptual idea. With the first record, we wrote a lot of fairly airtight pop structures – y'know, that's what we set out to do. But with this record, we want to try stretching out a little bit more and getting a little bit more adventurous with our songwriting – which we did! We really blew these songs apart and gave them every chance they could to be some big, adventurous epic.

And then in the process of doing that, we came back around to the idea of doing a few classic pop structures – because in the end, that's what feels good and that's what works. So as a result, we've ended up with this strange mix of very ambitious, grandiose and weird songs, and then a bunch of straightforward pop tunes. And they all come together in this very heartfelt, weird album that I think we're all quite proud of.

I know that yourself, Joe and Fran are all very staunchly involved in the songwriting process. What's the creative dynamic like between the three of you as guitarists? Are

you trading ideas around all the time?

That's exactly what it is. It's a really collaborative process. Another thing we tried to do [with *Sideways To New Italy*] was make a real effort to have these be more like 'band' songs. We've always collaborated and bounced ideas back and forth, but on some of those older songs, it might have been that one of us would just bring a fully formed idea to the group, and we'd play with it and work it out as a band, but the song was already there.

What we really wanted to do with this album was come in with no set ideas, and let the songs, in the practise room, just go wherever they wanted to. And that worked for a lot of them – we got some really weird and unexpected, jammy parts out of that.

This record was a lot more collaborative as a whole, to be honest – all five of us were working hard together, and we took turns to share our ideas for each song. We just tried to put ideas on top of ideas. It took longer, and it was probably a more labour-intensive process, but I think it made the songs really strong in the end.

Do you find that you all work on the same wavelength as guitarists, or are you constantly challenging yourselves creatively and trying to introduce new directions for the band to head in?

I think we've got a pretty set language that we speak with each other, in terms of guitar playing. We've been playing with each other for so long that we understand what we're all trying to say with our fretboards. We can almost hear who's going to do what and who's going to take which sort of role, and I think that we really solidified that over this album – this language that we speak together is really quite solid in our minds.

We've learned and developed that language over quite a long period of time. It's hard to describe, because y'know, the only way you can really understand it is by hearing it, I guess. But as guitarists that work together, there's not a lot of talking that needs to be done with words, y'know? There's a fair bit of just jamming it out, and then at the end, saying, "That's good, let's keep that," or, "Let's work on that bit a little more." 🗨️

I think it goes without saying that *Hope*

BACK TO BASICS BUT ANYTHING BUT

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER A DECADE, **THE NAKED AND FAMOUS** ARE A TWO-PIECE. AND JUST LIKE IN THEIR EARLY DAYS, THE KIWIS ARE IN HIGH SPIRITS WITH SOME OF THEIR MOST ENERGETIC HITS TO DATE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **LARSEN SOTELO**.

Everybody loves a good comeback story – it’s in our human nature to embrace a narrative of resilience and rehabilitation. It gives us the motivation to persevere when shit hits the fan in our own lives; to keep our chins up and kick life’s little inconveniences where the sun don’t shine.

For Kiwi synthpop scorchers The Naked And Famous circa 2018, a good ol’ fashioned comeback was just what they needed. Longtime members Jesse Wood (drums) and Aaron Short (keys) both abandoned ship that March, and both its remaining members – keyboardist Alisa Xayalith and guitarist Thom Powers, both of whom founded the band and serve as its interchanging frontpeople – were in the midst of their own personal tumults. For a short while, it seemed as though The Naked And Famous had run its course.

And then came a spark – a few errant chords on a keyboard that led to a defiant rush of inspiration for Xayalith and Powers. Fueled by ruthless determination not to let their flame fizzle out, they decided not to enlist replacements for their expired collaborators, instead pushing forward as a two-piece and smashing out some of their sharpest, wittiest and most explosive material to date.

Cue album number four, *Recover*, which Powers is overwhelmingly happy to agree is a resounding return to form for the band.

In the press release for this album, you say it’s about “recovering ourselves and our artistic vessel,” and that it’s “a statement of creative

healing.” How exactly did making *Recover* act as that form of therapy for the band, and was it more about liberation or catharsis?

I don’t really believe in catharsis. I read some really interesting stuff about it recently – the idea of ‘catharsis’ can effectively create an emotional feedback loop, and doesn’t actually help people let go of emotion. It creates a kind of encouragement mechanism for the emotion that you’re going through; the idea that if you’re angry, you can just punch a punching bag to release that anger, is apparently a psychological myth. So I’m not as big of a believer in catharsis, but I *do* find that it gives me deep purpose and meaning to create something out of tragedy.

If I have a terrible experience and I can put it into a song or turn it into some kind of lesson, I find that extremely useful. And to be honest, because I don’t have this connection to the word ‘catharsis’ that I think a lot of other artists do, I almost find it like more valuable to turn my negative situations into a story, or sort of solidify them, if that makes sense. I feel like this album has the most of that for me, personally – it has the most diary-entry-like songs.

So behind the music itself, this is a pretty huge album for The Naked And Famous because it’s your first release as a duo since the first few EPs. What was it like to navigate that setup again after so long?

It felt like going back to basics, because Alisa and I began this group in 2008 as just the two of us; it

wasn’t uncharted territory, as far as it went with us making music as a duo. And we’ve always been the songwriters in the group, so it’s not like anything really changed at our core.

It was like returning to form, though with ten years of experience and life behind us. And, to be honest, everything that we’d done up until about 2016 was basically just in the wake of *Passive Me, Aggressive You*. We were still trying to live that dream, if that makes sense. And then after Alisa and I separated and we wrapped up our second album... I mean, *Simple Forms* was kind of like a reset button in some ways, but not entirely – this feels like a *full* reset, y’know?

We’re not just on the tail end of a separate decade. Alisa and I live in LA now and we have friends here; we feel settled. Those old records are far enough behind us that we’re not just tacking onto that buzz – it really feels like we’re starting all over again, in some ways.

What’s your guitarsenal like right now?

I used to have a couple of Les Paul Studios and I would play those live a lot, but they have extremely hot pickups, and I much prefer the wide range humbuckers on my ’72 Deluxe Tele. I’ve been playing that guitar with [The Naked And Famous] since *Passive Me, Aggressive You* – it’s the oldest guitar I own, and I just love it so much.

It’s a really important guitar for me because I have big, chunky bass-player fingers. You know *Minecraft*? The little block hands? Those are my hands. And so the ’72 Deluxe has this amazingly wide neck so that you can really get a sense of how far apart the strings are, and it’s excellent for big, fat, chunky hands like mine.

So I’ve been playing that guitar for as long as I can remember – although I did recently switch over and start playing this really unique guitar that I adore, and I can’t find anything like it; there’s this series that Fender did called the Pawn Shop Series, where they’re all Frankensteins of all these different guitar parts put together, and I have a Pawn Shop Mustang.

It is just the most beautiful, elegant guitar I’ve ever seen. It’s got a miniature Jazzmaster or Jaguar body, but it’s the size of a Mustang, everything on it is just a little short-scale and the pickups are wide-range pickups, but they’re elegantly smaller. I’m a small guy, and I find that the Deluxe sits really heavy on me – it’s a big guitar – but the Pawn Shop Mustang is the only guitar that actually feels *right* on me. 🌹





SOUTHERN COMFORT

JASON ISBELL IS A MAN OF POWERFUL CHARACTER, AND ON HIS FOURTH ALBUM IN TANDEM WITH COLLABORATORS **THE 400 UNIT**, HE'S DIVING DEEPER INTO THAT CHARACTER THAN EVER BEFORE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ALYSSE GAFKJEN**.

Few men turn heads as fast or as fervently as Jason Isbell. Whether it's because he's a devout progressive in the Southern US country scene (see: xenophobe heaven) or for his enrapturing fretwork, the Alabama-native strumlord (who now calls Nashville home – because of course he went from one country hotspot to another) knows how to get people talking.

His fourth album in collaboration with five-piece backing band The 400 Unit, *Reunions* is Isbell's most introspective set of twangy tunes. It has him ruminate on the past and calculate his future by way of some truly stirring soundscapes, Isbell himself unquestionably in the best shape, musically at least, that he's ever been.

Australian Guitar got a hold of Isbell to chat about how the record came together, and how it introduced the storied singer-songwriter to a new world of recording techniques.

What is it that you wanted to say with this record, and why would you say it's the best reflection of who you are in 2020?

Well, it was before all this shit happened! Now it's not a good reflection of anything – if I want people to know who I am today, I'll just sit on my own and cry into my voice recorder about how sad the world is. But at the time, I thought I did a pretty good job of documenting my life. It felt like I was finally able to express to my tastes in a way that I haven't been in the past – I wrote a record that sounded like I wanted it to sound.

I think that had as much to do with the production as it did with anything, so cheers to Dave Cobb for that! This is the fourth record we've made with him, and I went in before we started recording and talked to him about how I wanted something that sounded more interesting and more high-fidelity than anything we'd done in the past. So he put a lot of work into it – he bought a brand new console and a

bunch of new gadgets and gear, and we got to work on trying to make something sound interesting, clean and powerful at the same time.

Were you recording live in the room?

Sometimes. We did a little bit of everything on this one. We didn't do as much live recording as we have in the past, but there were a couple of songs – “Overseas” and “Letting You Go” were both cut live. Everything on “Overseas” was done live because we'd been playing that one on the road some before we went in to record. And then “Letting You Go” was recorded very simply – there's not a lot of instrumentation on that song.

But for everything else, we got a drum track and built from there, just with the intention of making the record more sonically interesting than, y'know, just a bunch of guys sitting in a circle and playing music.

Did you find yourself heading very far outside your comfort zone this time around?

I try not to have a comfort zone, because I don't think anybody's really looking for me to express my comfort to 'em. Y'know, it gets harder for me to write songs as I go, because I try to challenge myself more as I move along – I try to work harder on each individual song and each individual word, and try to get things exactly right. So there's things that I would've tolerated on previous albums that I won't tolerate on the new work, just because I'm consciously trying to move forward as a songwriter.

But as a guitar player, I've never really had to make any conscious effort to move myself forward, because any time I get the opportunity to play, that's what I'm doing. I have a lot of really cool guitars now – I can sit down play a 1959 Les Paul for a couple of hours if I feel like it. And I feel like if you have that opportunity, then you shouldn't have to force yourself to practise. So as a player, I just play, y'know? All the time. And it still feels like

playing – it's still working machines and having fun to me. But songwriting is not that – songwriting is definitely *work*.

What guitars were you playing on this record?

Well, let's see... I have a '53 Goldtop Les Paul that Larry Craig put a Bigsby on; Larry did Neil Young's Old Black '53, too. And then I had an April '65 Telecaster that is really special. In the first few months of '65, before they started shifting from the L Series serial numbers over to the CBS era, there's a little bit more wood on the headstock where it joins the neck of the guitar, and it balances those guitars in a way that even blackguards didn't have. I had a blackguard '53, and I sold it because the '65 just blows it out of the water. And then I have a 1960 Strat which is all stock, except I changed the pickup selector to the five position because I really like to sound like Mark Knopfler at any chance I get.

Do you like to switch up the arsenal with every record, or do you have your go-tos for recording?

Usually, I just buy so much new shit between each record that I'm excited to use all of it when I get into the studio. I do have some standards that I always go back to, but one thing I used on this album that I never had was a '46 Gibson J-45 that I bought right before we went into the studio. Normally, I play Martin dreadnoughts; I have a signature model Martin D-18 that came out a couple of years ago – that's what I play live, and they're great guitars, but the old Gibson had just a little bit of a different texture to it.

Another thing I did on this album, which I'm pretty proud of, is I wrote and recorded the entire thing without using a capo. I had to challenge myself as a singer, but I was determined not to use a capo. And I didn't tell anybody about that until it was all finished – I said, “I don't know if anybody noticed, but I just made a whole record without using a f***ing capo!” 



POST-MORTEM METAL

FUSING TOGETHER ALL THE BEST ELEMENTS EXPLORED ACROSS THEIR 20-PLUS YEAR LEGACY, **MATT HEAFY** AND CO. HAVE CONJURED UP THE DEFINITIVE **TRIVIUM** ALBUM WITH *WHAT THE DEAD MEN SAY*. THE IDIOSYNCRATIC FRONTMAN RIFFS ON WHAT MAKES LP9 SUCH A SPECIAL RELEASE FOR THE BAND, AND HOW STREAMING HAS CHANGED HIS LIFE OUTSIDE OF IT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA.**

Matt Heafy is one insanely busy bloke. When he's not taking care of his two young children or hanging out with his wife, he's either tearing shit up as the face-melting frontman in Trivium, working on his signature guitars with the fine folk at Epiphone, studying the relentless techniques of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, or streaming his heart out on Twitch. In fact, Heafy's streaming habits have made him an internet legend of sorts – whether he's gaming, performing music, running clinics or just shooting the shit and answering fan questions, Heafy's twice-a-day, five-day-a-week broadcasts gather tens of thousands of viewers apiece.

Despite streaming on a regular basis since 2017, Heafy somehow managed to conjure up an entire Trivium album without spilling the beans to a legion of *Fortnite* fanboys. *What The Dead Men Say* is album number nine for the Floridian heavy metallers, and it's a cataclysmic culmination of everything they've been leading the metalcore scene at large with since 1999.

That's thanks in no small part to Heafy's streaming side-hustle, too – because he's constantly revisiting his entire catalogue for acoustic jams and fan requests, he's never too far deep into one singular era of Trivium; he lives and breathes their entire two-decade legacy, and by proxy, when it comes time to put pen to paper, he's able to reflect on every record he's worked on thus far to calculate the perfect next step.

When we get Heafy on the phone to chat about

What The Dead Men Say, he's in particularly high spirits – something we can't say for many of the interviews in this issue, given how hard the music industry has been hit by the Coronavirus pandemic. See, not too much has changed for old mate Matt: Trivium can't tour right now, and we're both in agreement that such is a major bummer, but there's a definitively bright upside in that he can still perform for his hordes of fans on Twitch.

Heafy still has this enormous platform – an established one, at that – where he can share his talents and connect one-on-one with those who love his content. And especially now, he's taking full advantage of that.

So, how's your slice of the world dealing with *The Plague 2: Electric Booga-flu*?

It's sort of business as usual for me. I mean, it really stinks that this is happening and I'm definitely encouraging all of my followers to embrace social distancing – let's make this thing pass as quickly as possible by being smart and vigilant – but I started streaming on Twitch about three years ago, so I've basically had the infrastructure set up since 2017.

I've been streaming twice a day, five days a week off tour, and then seven days a week on tour. So now a lot of newcomers are visiting the channel and realising, "Oh, Matt's had this thing going on for a while." So the entertainment isn't stopping, the Trivium music isn't stopping, and people seem very happy.

How have you found it having such a unique outlet to express yourself away from the confines of a band, and also connect with your fans in such a personal way?

It's been fantastic! And because I'm playing Trivium songs for Trivium fans, I'm getting better at what I do – I have become a better singer, screamer and guitar player thanks to streaming. Because it's three-to-six hours a day, at least five days a week, of just rehearsing stuff.

Typically – and I'm sure it's the same with many musicians – the case is that it's only right before a tour or before you head into the studio that you decide to start getting into shape. But now, if I had to go on tour tomorrow or suddenly start making a record, I'm always in shape vocally and with my guitar playing. I've got, like, 95 percent of our entire discography memorised, and that's just a side-effect of playing it all the time on stream.

Does streaming stimulate you creatively?

I'm sure it's like anything, y'know? There are good days and there are bad days. I've always been regimented by practise, but let's say there was ever a day where I didn't *feel* like doing it – that's a tricky pothole to navigate around. But because I have this community and because I have a schedule – I know that there are people out there depending on me – I make sure that I'm always there and being active.

And it absolutely makes practising more fun than just being in a room by myself and rehearsing stuff. There are thousands of people there daily, there to just hang out with likeminded people and have a good time, request songs and enjoy the content.

Twitch is mainly a gaming platform, but about 75-to-95 percent of the time when I'm streaming, it's music. I recorded this one song where I basically wrote the entire thing – guitars, vocals, drums, and recorded absolutely every second of it – while streaming. I can't say what that song's for yet, but that was an incredible experience. I really enjoy what I do. And y'know, being a frontman, I feel like you *should* enjoy entertaining people.

In the press release for *What The Dead Men Say*, you describe it as having "all the ingredients of past, present and future Trivium." What makes this the definitive Trivium album in your eyes?

It feels like the definitive Trivium album when I listen to it and I see evidence of that statement. I see ingredients of records one through eight on this record, and you can't say that for records one through seven; with every single one of those records, we did something very different, never really knowing what we were heading towards. But with record eight [*The Sin And The Sentence*], I felt like that was a great summary of everything we had done before. And with record nine, it's a summary of everything we'd done on one through eight.

It wasn't a conscious decision – nobody came to us and said, "Hey, let's do this..." It was a matter of making music from a place of not thinking, "Are people going to like this?" We were just making the kind of music that we felt like we wanted to make; the kind of music that made us excited to play.

And what's great was that we never told anybody the entire time that we were recording, and we were able to present both of these last two records in really unique ways and build anticipation in a way that I feel *is* challenging nowadays. It's hard to find new ways to be exciting and mysterious when you're broadcasting yourself to the world five days a week, six hours a day. But I was able to find that time and place where we could build up as something exciting for our fans. 



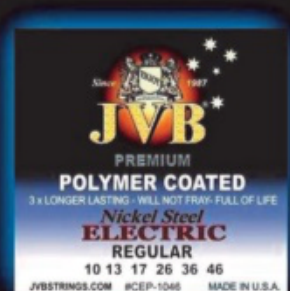
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A SHARP DOSE OF HUMAN NATURE

AS THEY CONTINUE TO BLAZE TRAILS AS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST (AND, LET'S BE HONEST, BEST) ALT-ROCK OUTFITS, **BIRDS OF TOKYO** ARE TAKING A TURN TOWARDS NEW HORIZONS ON LP6. *HUMAN DESIGN* IS AT ONCE THEIR MOST INTIMATE, ENIGMATIC AND ADVENTUROUS EFFORT YET, AND IT MARKS THE START OF A VALIANT NEW ERA FOR THE PERTHIAN POWERHOUSE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **CYBELE MALINOWSKI**.

Though it's virtually impossible to deduce when the first proper 'album' came out – historians get pretty subjective when it comes to the grinding minutia of timelines, classification and so forth – 1948 was a huge year for longform music releases, when Columbia Records debuted the iconic 33RPM 12-inch LP. Capable of holding a then-revolutionary 52 minutes of audio, the LP format quickly became the norm for burgeoning rock and pop acts.

Seven decades later, and – no shit – a great deal has changed in the music industry. We moved from vinyl to cassette, to CD, to MP3, somehow back to vinyl (thanks, hipsters) and finally to streaming as our favourite way to chew through some tunes. And as streaming services continue to steal the spotlight, so to do the structures they're most keen to promote – playlists and singles. The humble 'album' as we know it is becoming less and less viable as a way for bands to make the biggest impact with their music, and so an increasing majority of them are embracing looser, more on-the-fly releases.

Case in point: Perth alt-rockers Birds Of Tokyo, who blew up at the tail end of the 2000s with their smashing '07 debut, *Day One*, and have continued to soar up the ranks with each subsequent disc to bear their name. But for their sixth time in the ring, the quintet decided to reappropriate the traditional album cycle by releasing the full thing at the end of the promotional campaign, rather than lead with it. *Human Design* itself comes two years after they started plugging it with singles and tours, tying everything together from a notably hectic chunk of their continued world domination.

Human Design is a significant release for Birds Of Tokyo in a lot of other ways, too, as lead guitarist and co-producer Adam Spark let us know. It's their most personal release, chronicling a nightmarishly turbulent chunk of frontman Ian Kenny's life. It's their most ambitious release on a creative wavelength, ironically, because of how pared-back and raw it is. And it's the first release of what could shape up to the most important decade for Birds Of Tokyo yet.

How did you find yourselves wanting to push the boundaries of what Birds Of Tokyo is and can be with this record?

I guess for us, it's not necessarily about pushing boundaries musically or production-wise or anything like that – it's become about pushing our boundaries as to how much we let our personalities or real life stuff be part of the public architecture. Normally we write pop songs, and they're always about uplifting things or whatever, so it's sort of new territory for us to really get personal.

I always think that my great art, and the band's great art, is not really the songs or the guitar stuff or the melodies or anything like that – it's when you zoom out and look at it all as one body of work over a long period of time. You start off with a few pretty similar albums that all exist in this same sort of bubble, but then you go over to *Brace* and take a really hard left-hand turn – it confused a bunch of people and angered some others, and some people really liked it – and then you swing back around in a completely different direction again.

So as a songwriter and guitarist, were you really pushing yourself out of your comfort zone here, or trying to do things with your musicality that you'd never done before?

It was actually the flipside of that – it was taking years and years of experience, writing and producing songs and all this, and using the very, very, very bare minimum of what we needed to do to get a message across – which is incredibly hard, actually.

Y'know, it's so easy to throw all the bells and whistles on there and use all the tools you've got – "Let's be clever with this chord thing! Let's change keys here!" In the past, we've tried to be clever by hiding some fairly complex songwriting ideas and concepts in a way that is really hard to pick up on, so that, y'know, your mum or your nanna can still get it. But hidden behind the simple pop song structure, there's a really complex sort of technique.

But this time around, we were pushing all of that away and going, "Okay, what's the core of this song?" We have all of these skills and all of these tools at our disposal, but we wanted to only use one or two of them to great effect. It was about showing restraint. And y'know, it takes a while to be able to trust yourself and understand what things to leave in and what things to leave out. Honestly, that's been the biggest learning experience for us.

Quality over quantity, right?

That's right, yeah. How can you achieve maximum story and maximum emotion with the minimal amount of detail? There's a song on the record called "Designed", which is just an acoustic guitar, a piano, Kenny's vocal and some strings – Glenn [Sarangapany, keys] did our parts as demos at one of the other guys' studios, and we did rerecord them properly at a big studio with nice stuff, but we ended up just using the original stems. And I fought the band on it a little bit, saying, "Y'know, let's use these really out-of-tune, rough kind of guide takes," and I think we all believe now that [the track] feels so much better for that.

So when COVID-19 finally decides to f* off, you'll be launching this record with some enormous and ambitious shows in collaboration with full-scale orchestras. Where did such a wild idea come from?**

First of all, normally there's always a way to do a record – you make the record, you put it out, you put the singles out and then you go on tour a bunch of times. But we're not doing this record in that way – we've flipped it completely the other way around, as we believe that records are less important than the eras themselves these days.

So as the story of the record was building and we were recording all the songs, we thought, "Well, let's lead up to the album being at the end of the cycle as it were." And by the same token, we had to go, "Well, how do we wrap this cycle in an interesting way, and provide a really exciting experience for everyone?"

To be honest with you, I've been kicking the tyres on this concept with the band and our managers for about ten years. We did one tour with a quartet in 2009, and it went very well, so we've always wanted to do it again since, but we've never been able to find the right time or the right partners to do it with.

I sat down with the Sydney Symphony folks last January and had a chat with them about another project that I'd been working on, and they all started saying, "Oh hey, what's [Birds Of Tokyo] doing?" And I was just like, "Well, funny you should ask that!" It all just sort of fell into place. The record has a bunch of strings on it anyway, so it feels like the perfect opportunity to this thing that we've wanted to do for so long, and wrap everything for this album up in a big, all-encompassing project which is absolutely over-the-top in scale. 





ALMOST A DECADE IN THE MAKING, *RISE RADIANT* IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER KALEIDOSCOPIC ONSLAUGHT OF CONCEPTUAL MAYHEM FROM THE BRISBANE BELTERS IN **CALIGULA'S HORSE**. LEAD GUITARIST **SAM VALLEN** RIFFS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE BEHIND THIS MONOLITHIC LISTEN.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **RACHEL GRAHAM**.

Much like the fabled Roman emperor referenced in their name, Caligula's Horse are titans of a gloriously stately force. Since their earnest origins in Brisbane's underground club scene circa 2011, the prog-metallers have carved out an impressively zealous niche for themselves - they're the go-to crew for grandiose, sprawling narrative epics that grab the listener by their ears and yeets them at a thousand kilometres a second into the eye of a kaleidoscope belonging to God himself.

Rise Radiant is the fifth album to bear the Caligula's Horse stamp of approval - yet, in many ways, it's the album they began working on all the way back when shredder Sam Vallen first envisioned the project. It's not a reboot for the band, however, but something of an awakening; they made four albums in an effort to build a set of tools they could use to chisel out a true, career-defining masterpiece, and now that they're adroit with those tools, the five of them were able to start grinding away. And what wound up with? *Rise* motherf***ing *Radiant*.

Spanning eight of their tightest and most tenacious cuts of steel-shattering metal to date, *Rise Radiant* is to Caligula's Horse what Caligula's horse was to Caligula - their most prized possession, and something that will come to define them long after their reign's end. At times introspective and others intense, though always bold and bright and slicked at every sharply produced turn with polychromatic poignancy, it's clear to see why the record means so much to the band. And according to Vallen, it's the kind of record they could only have created now, almost a decade into their legacy.

In announcing this record, you declared that “*Rise Radiant* is the album we’ve been working towards for almost a decade.” How did that journey finally lead you to this record?

In one sense, it's the culmination of a lot of practise - a lot of records where we'd increasingly worked on different characteristics that we loved and wanted to lean further into as we got better

and better at executing them. But in another sense, it's an album that has this thematic thrust behind it - this idea of getting back up again when you're knocked down. It's about accepting when something is difficult, resisting the urge to fight and overcoming the struggle.

And because we've had things like lineup changes recently, we had this moment where we really had to think, “Is this band something we're going to push into fully, or is it something we're going just keep doing the same thing we've always done for?” *Rise Radiant* would be the opportunity for us to explore what the absolute limits of our band can be. How hard can we push it technically? How intricately could we weave lots of different ideas into songs?

What guitars were you drooling over in the booth this time around?

This is the first record that I recorded with my seven-string JP15, which is a guitar that I got only recently before we went in to record, and which my wife has banned me from taking on tour because, y'know, it's a very expensive and very beautiful looking instrument. I had a Telecaster that I did a lot of the cleans, too. Unfortunately, I'd bought a Music Man Cutlass a little too late in the game, and it came about a week after mixing finished, so that didn't quite make it onto the album. So I would say 80 percent of the guitars on the album were done with that seven-string JP15 - it's just a monster.

What is it about it that you just can't get enough of?

I've been playing Music Man guitars for quite a while now, and when I first made the jump to seven-strings, I was playing an Ibanez Universe. I love that guitar and I'm still a huge fan of it - it still appears on records and stuff every now and again - but the difference with the JP15 is that the JP is just this classy and understated looking, non-metal guitar - it could just be any classic instrument, and it just happens to have

that beautifully thin neck profile and all of that accessibility in terms of things like upper fret access. It doesn't scream ‘shred’ or ‘metal’ or any of those characteristics that might seem a little bit garish sometimes. It ticks all the boxes for me.

I've taken a JP7 on the road for pretty much every tour we've ever done. It's been on all these long-haul flights, it's been on tour busses, it's been dropped and thrown and it's had everything bad that you can imagine done to it, and I've never had to replace a part - it still works as new, y'know? It's just a beautiful make of guitar.

I think it goes without saying that as batshit mental as your studio material is, the live show is really where Caligula's Horse shines the brightest. Did you have the stage in mind when you were writing this record?

Jim [Grey, vocals] and I muse on this a lot when it comes to conceptualising a record - we always have a big discussion about what it is that we want to do and what kind of energy we want to capture. We just had this experience of coming off our first European headline tour and some pretty big tours in Australia and elsewhere, and we realised that we needed material that would universally feel good to play live.

In Contact was an album that I adored, but it was an album that demanded a lot from the audience - y'know, it had a lot of prolonged, more thoughtful and quiet sections - so what we wanted to do this time is create a much more immediate kind of sound. We wanted something that hits you and allows you to understand it instantaneously. Whether we actually captured that or not, I'm not sure, but that was our goal.

I'm hesitant to use the word ‘accessible’, but you could almost throw that in there as well - it's the idea that it should grab you immediately. And of course, that doesn't mean that it's all heavy - if you've heard the record, you'll know it certainly isn't - but the heavy stuff is heavier and the lighter stuff is lighter, and those things tend to translate really nicely live, I think. 🎸



FERCE. FIERY. FERAL.

THREE YEARS SINCE THEIR BOMBSHELL DEBUT TOOK THEM FROM THE AUSSIE UNDERGROUND TO THE INTERNATIONAL MAINSTAGE, **RVG** RETURN TO OUR STEREOS WITH A NEWLY ENERGISED SPARK THAT'S EQUALLY CHARISMATIC AND CRAZY. FITTINGLY TITLED *FERAL*, LP2 IS SET TO KICK THE BAND OFF ON AN EVEN MORE EXPLOSIVE JOURNEY.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ANNA CUNNINGHAM**.

A little rough around the edges, emotionally volatile and defined by their prickly rhythms, soaring hooks and lashings of reverb and overdrive, RVG are one of those bands that are simply impossible to ignore. Starting out as wide-eyed staples of Melbourne's DIY circuit, the foursome – led by the enigmatic Romy Vager, whose forcible quips and scuzzy riffs recall the walloping bluntness of '70s post-rock – have fast become one of Australia's outright favourite rock outfits.

Before they make their arena debut supporting iconic rockers Faith No More next February, RVG are cementing their status as songwriters not to f*** around with in their scorching second album, *Feral*. Though it's leagues above its predecessor – 2017's sleeper hit *A Quality Of Mercy* – it's a familiar journey through the jungle of emotion that is Vager's mind. It's coarse, colourful and compelling; an experiment in high fidelity with the energy and abashment of a band whose defining characteristic is their rawness. It's just over 30 minutes in length, yet its hooks bound around in your head for hours after the final note rings out.

We caught up with Vager to vibe on how *Feral* came together, why it sounds *so goddamn good*, and why you don't always need a billion-dollar guitar to get the most riveting riffs (so long as you have a mate whose state-of-the-art Danelectro can save the day when needed).

The name *Feral* really sticks out because there's so many ways it can be interpreted, virtually none in a positive way. What's the significance behind that title for you?

For me, at least, the last couple of years have been intense and quite weird. A lot of it being the kind of person I am, and the kind of way I perform, I feel like I'm very much outside of the world – I feel feral. I just feel like a wild animal, y'know? I think

that's kind of what these songs reflect; I was being really dramatic when I came up with it as the title for the album, but then I just went, "Oh, this actually makes a lot of sense!"

***A Quality Of Mercy* was recorded on a \$100 budget in the bandroom of a local pub. What was it like going from that sort of atmosphere to a professional setup at Head Gap with someone as renowned as Victor Van Vugt?**

It was good! I mean, I liked the way the first album sounds – I think it came out really nice for \$100. But at the same time, it did take us a very long time to record that. We were quite lazy at that point in time; I'd ring people up and be like, "Do you want to finish off the small amount of work we have to complete the album?" And they'd be like, "Ah, I'm not really feeling it right now – maybe in a month." And then a month would pass, and y'know... So it took a long time to record like that, because we had no prospects or anything. But this one was just two weeks of pure concentration and hard work, and I really liked that.

Feral* sounds a bit sharper and more dynamic than *Mercy*, but as far as the atmosphere of it all goes, it's still very raw and un-fed-with, and it sounds a bit like a live record in some places. Was it important for you to maintain that kind of musical aesthetic for this one?**

Before we recorded it, I had the idea of it being this kind of overproduced, compressed, like, monster. But in the end, we just did what was good for the songs – and what was good for the songs was just to play them in a variation of how we play them live, and kind of keep that energy and honesty to it.

Were you recording live?

Yes! The only thing was that I did vocals separately

and we did a few overdubs on some parts.

What is it about that live, in-the-moment vibe that you think really makes these songs shine?

You can hear the energy to it. You can really hear when something is played to a click track – it sort of sucks a bit of the energy out a bit. And our drummer Marc [Nolte] *refuses* to play to a click track – he's like, "I'll quit the band if I have to play to a click track!" Which is fair enough, y'know? So I think it's just horses for courses, really. We just kind of suit that vibe.

What are you getting your shred on with at the moment?

I have a Danelectro – some sort of '56 reissue. Reuben [Bloxham] has a guitar he got for \$5 at an op shop... *Yeah*. It's the only the guitar he uses, which is mental [*laughs*]. It stresses me out! It's been known to cut out before a gig, and we've had to quickly solder the parts back together so it doesn't just fall apart.

What is it about old mate Dan that's just stolen your heart?

This one I got as a surprise birthday gift a few years ago from all my friends, so I feel like it's a good omen to use it on everything I do. But I had a job at Safeway when I was 15, and as soon as I earned enough money, I went out to a guitar shop and bought my first proper guitar – and I bought this shiny Danelectro, just because it was the most ridiculous looking guitar I'd ever seen. So I've been using Danelectros for years – they're the only kind of guitar that I really *like* to use. I like the way they sound, and I like how light they are. I don't know, it just feels really good. I've never really felt comfortable with a lot of other guitars. I haven't even *tried* a lot of other guitars, I've just kind of stuck with this. 🎸

SWEET AS HONEY

FOR HIS THIRD SOLO ALBUM, EX-GASLIGHT ANTHEM LUMINARY **BRIAN FALLON** EXPLORES A WEALTH OF NEWFOUND ARTISTIC INTROSPECTION. THE END RESULT IS SOME OF HIS BOLDEST AND MOST STRIKING MATERIAL TO DATE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA.**

PHOTO BY **KELSEY HUNTER AYRES.**

As the old adage goes, you either die a punk or live long enough to see yourself release a folk album. Though the roots of folk and country have always planted themselves throughout Brian Fallon's discography – most notably when he was the frontman of heartland heroes The Gaslight Anthem – the 40-year-old New Jersian has officially made the crossover into fingerpicking singer-songwriter territory with *Local Honey*, his third solo album and a blindingly beautiful compilation of introspective reveries.

A mostly lowkey affair, *Local Honey* showcases Fallon at his rawest and most vulnerable; he has nowhere to hide with his emotional fervour, he can't bury a feeling in an onslaught of riffs or shake off his worries in a breakdown. The music is resoundingly mature and understated, yet it's undoubtedly some of his most complex and mosaic. It's a fitting album for right now, too, offering some much-needed calm in an era of calamity.

With nothing else to do but twiddle around on his collection of dreadnoughts, Fallon took a break from social distancing to chat with us about his serpentine new set of slow-burning jams.

I read that you started taking guitar lessons again recently. What made you realise you wanted to get back to school with the instrument, and what's that been like?

Thing is, I could do it, y'know? Like, I've been playing the guitar for a *long* time. But I reached a point that I think everybody gets to, where you sort of reach your limits – you know everything that you're able to do with your own motivation. And I wanted to be able to do more things!

I wanted to be able to play the acoustic guitar and not just have it be, like, campfire strumming. I didn't know how to fingerpick, so I had to learn how to do all of that stuff and break it down really slow. And then that led into other things, and I sort of went, "Well, if I can do *this*, then what about *that*?" I started looking at all these different things, and I'm still doing it! I'm still learning. .

When people think of Brian Fallon, the guitarist, most people think of that big, driving Les Paul sound, those huge punky

riffs and big hooks. What's it been like going from that sort of playing style to this really clean, fingerpicked acoustic vibe?

Well, it's been a slow journey. Over the last probably five years, I've been inching slowly – with each record, I suppose – towards sounding cleaner and cleaner, and more acoustic and fingerpicked. It's almost like I've had a little bit of a lead-up, and now it's pretty normal for me – it feels comfortable, y'know? But it's definitely made me concentrate on things a lot more, because if you don't have the amp turned all the way up, you have to be really precise with what you're doing. Every off note sounds a million times worse when it's acoustic.

So going into this new chapter of your story, how did you want this album to be the best reflection of who you are and what it is you have to say in 2020? And do you think you achieved that in the end?

I did! But I didn't really know that I would when I set out to write it; I thought I was just going to continue down the path I'd already been going down, and then somewhere in the middle of the writing process, I said, "Wait a second..." I've been wanting to do a more acoustic record my whole career. I was like, "Why are you waiting to do this? Why don't you just do it!?"

And then it came from being uncertain and having a certain lack of skill in the beginning. But I felt like I achieved what I wanted to – I was like, "I can play! I can do this stuff! I might as well dive in!" And it really was a good thing to do, because I didn't know I was doing it. I was a little unsure

about it and nervous, but once I finished, I felt such a strong sense of satisfaction.

I don't know if this is, like, my best record or whatever – I wasn't judging it like that. I just said, "I'm so satisfied with this – this is exactly what I needed to do right now for myself."

It's such a cliché thing in music journalism to bang on about the maturity of a record that comes as far into a musician's career as this one has for you – but I feel like this is one of those records where I can get away with it, because it genuinely is a really personally dense and matured album, especially compared to your past in bands like The Gaslight Anthem. When you look at these songs yourself, do you feel like this is the kind of record you could only have written now that you're an adult and you've lived as much life as you have?

Absolutely. I don't think I could have written



this record when I was in my 20s – not a chance. I think it took a lot of sort of experimenting and writing other songs first to find my footing with this record. I had to write all of those other songs to *get* to these songs. There’s no way that I could have done this – at least not in this way – back in the 2000s.

Musically speaking as well, compared to your last two solo albums, this record feels a bit more stripped back and a bit closer to the chest. Is that a byproduct of how personal these songs are for you?

I think the lyrics led it to be that way. In the beginning, I was trying to play electric instruments all over it – some of the songs were a lot faster as well – and they started to lose something when I did that. It was really the lyrical themes that dictated how it went, because every time I would go back to a song with just the acoustic guitar or a piano, I went, “Okay, this is supporting the song

much, much better than the electric guitar was.” I played a resonator a lot on this record, too, and that gave it a whole new vibe.

What is it about the resonator that just pickled your onions?

It has a real percussive element to it. I don’t know if it’s just from being American and hearing that old appellation sound that reminds us of the Mississippi Delta, the blues and folk music... I don’t live in the South so I don’t have that connection with the blues that some of those people do, but I have a very close connection to things like Woody Guthrie and that whole upstate New York scene. And that just resonates with something at our core, where we hear the resonator and our hearts start to vibrate.

Have you always had a soft spot for music of the more twangy equation?

Yeah! I mean, I think you can hear that even on

Gaslight’s first album, *Sink Or Swim*. I had the song “Red At Night”, and you can hear how it’s totally that dusty, wide, Americana-esque thing. And on every record we did, there was always that one song like that. I always felt like that was my one chance to really *speak* on every record. I can remember recording each one of those songs and being like, “*Yeah!*” I felt so strongly about those.

What other guitars were you jamming on for this record?

As far as the electric guitars go, I went back to the Telecaster; I got a Custom Shop Broadcaster recently, and I used that on every single song. And I have a little Deluxe Reverb from 1966 that I used – every guitar that you hear on the record was played through that amp. We tried other amps – we had a whole bunch of newer and more advanced ones in the studio, but that one just sounded the best. 🎸



THE GLORY DAZE

BEFORE HE BROUGHT NU-METAL TO THE MAINSTREAM IN **LINKIN PARK**, THE EVER-ENIGMATIC **CHESTER BENNINGTON** WAS CUTTING SICK IN AN UNDERGROUND OUTFIT CALLED **GREY DAZE**. NOW, HIS FORMER BANDMATES ARE CELEBRATING HIS LEGACY WITH A RE-TINKERED AND FRESHLY MASTERED SET OF THEIR EARLY CLASSICS, PROVING JUST HOW FAR AHEAD OF ITS TIME THE PROJECT TRULY WAS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ANJELLA/SAKIPHOTOGRAPHY**.

When the year was 1994, and though every man and his dog was embracing the golden age of grunge, the eruptive rise of nu-metal was right around the corner. One of its most notable mainstream pioneers, Linkin Park's late frontman Chester Bennington, was hard at work building a bridge between the two genres in Grey Daze, churning out some loveably loose and rivetingly raw bangers that sounded years ahead of their time.

25 years later, and Grey Daze is largely a thing of legend – their demos lost to the obsolescence of the formats on which they were distributed, and the stories of their life-altering live shows restricted to the underground scene in Arizona they called home before disbanding in '98.

Or, that was until a few months ago. Three years on since Chester's passing, his former bandmates (alongside a wickedly talented crew of old friends like Korn's Head and Munky, Chris Traynor of Bush and Paige Hamilton of Helmet) are completing one of the last missions he set out to do – bring Grey Daze back into the spotlight, and reinvigorate their unique brand of rough and rugged alt-rock. *Amends* is a reimagining of 11 gems from the quartet's small, yet searing catalogue – and as guitarist Cristin Davis tells *Australian Guitar*, it's a project for which no expenses were spared, no corners cut and no riff left unshredded.

When the idea for this release was first brought up, did it seem like a no-brainer right off the bat, or was there some trepidation over whether it was right to do it without Chester on deck?

There's two parts to that – one is that we started when Chester was alive, so it all seemed like it made perfect sense. But then after what happened happened, there was some trepidation where we were like, "Should we do this? Should we not do this?" And it took us about nine months to decide whether or not we would move forward with it, because obviously everything needs to be handled very delicately with the situation that we found ourselves in.

We think and rethink every single thing we do, so we thought about it for months, and in the end we decided that it did make sense to move forward because Chester was pushing us in that direction while he was alive. We're continuing his work and the work we did together as a band.

But we had to make sure it was right; we had to make sure that Talinda [Bentley, Bennington's widow] was onboard – we even had to make sure Chester's ex-wife [Samantha Olit] was onboard because she was around during the time of Grey Daze, and we made sure all of his previous band members were okay with it. So it was a long process, but in the end, we decided that it did make the most sense to move forward.

We know that Chester wanted to reunite Grey Daze before he passed – had there been any work done to make that happen, or did this all properly come together in recent times?

So in 2017, Sean [Dowdell, drums] called me and asked if I wanted to do a show with Grey Daze – Bobby Benish, the original guitar player,

had passed away in 2003, so Sean asked me if I would be interested in taking his place to do a show, and I said, "Absolutely!"

I'd been a fan of Sean's forever – he and I had jammed together a bit in the past, and I'd known Chester since we were in high school, so I was an easy fit. We were working with [producer] Sylvia Massy originally, revamping one of the old records, and we were just going to redo some of the tones and put it out – Chester was even going to go in and make a few little updates to the vocals.

What started out to be one show turned into more shows being added, recording being discussed – I think Chester wanted something to do when he wasn't doing a Linkin Park album every couple of years. He wanted something of his own that he could do in that downtime, and I think this was his way of putting something together. He had a deep affection for Grey Daze because it was almost like his origin story.

"EVERYTHING WE DO HAS TO BE VIEWED THROUGH THAT LENS OF, 'WHAT WOULD CHESTER THINK OF THIS?' I DON'T EVER ENVISION US HIRING A SINGER OR BEING A BAND WITHOUT CHESTER AT THE FOREFRONT."

So we'd been rehearsing for a couple of weeks before Chester made it into the studio – he was supposed to come in once he was done with the leg of the tour he was on with Linkin Park. We were days away from him joining us for rehearsals; the band had already started and we were ready to go, we had songs all polished and everything was sounding good – we were just waiting for the day Chester was going to show up, and unfortunately that day never came.

Y'know, Chester's passing was a dark time for a billion and one reasons, and one of them is that we didn't get to finish what we had all started together.

So what was that process like, going back and unearthing these recordings for the first time after so many years?

We thought we only had one record's worth of tapes that we could use when we started doing this, but Jason Barnes, the band's first guitarist – he was searching for a lightbulb in his garage and found the first demo that they made in 1994. So now we had 22 tracks to work with, and it was crazy to have that much material in our hands. The really cool thing was when they went to record these early demos, they had the foresight to say, "Let's spend a little extra money and get some really nice vocal mics." So what they had

was really rough and raw, but they had amazing quality vocal tracks for all of the stuff Chester did.

I was playing in bands around the same time that Grey Daze was happening, so we played shows together and I had their record and all that stuff, but I hadn't listened to them in 15, 20 years. So when I went to go back to learn the songs before we started rehearsing, I was just blown away by how incredible Chester was, even back then.

I mean, obviously we know through Linkin Park how incredible he is as a singer, but even going back to 1994, he just had that voice and that scream... I actually had a friend send me a videotape of Chester when he was 15 years old, he's sitting in a garage and playing the guitar with a bunch of our mutual friends, and he's got that scream even then. 15 years old! And even when I think back on my guitar playing, I was probably in my prime around 19 or 20 – that's when I spent the most time doing it.

How much work did you have to put into these songs to bring them up to scratch? Did the record go through much of a shapeshifting process between the early tapes and what we hear now?

Oh yeah. We completely revamped all the songs, except for "Sometimes" and "What's In The Eye" – we still rerecorded them and we put new tones on them, but they're the ones that are most recognisable in terms of what the old songs were. But all the other songs on the record got complete makeovers – they don't sound at all like the originals.

It was kind of an interesting process, too; typically when we write songs, we would write the music and then put vocals over it. But for obvious reasons, we had to take the complete opposite approach – we had just the vocals, and we changed the songs completely in every other way. Some of them are in different keys now, and none of the parts are the same – it was a pretty crazy process.

Do you think it's possible you might eventually take these songs on the road and play live, or would that kind of ruin the sanctity of this project?

We get asked this question a lot, and there's really no answer to it. The truth is that we just don't know. It's sort of a bridge that we need to cross when we get there – if there's a demand for it, we might try to figure out a way to make it work. But everything we do has to be viewed through that lens of, "What would Chester think of this?" I don't ever envision us hiring a singer or being a band without Chester at the forefront.

I think what might make sense and what could work would be if we played the songs at something like a festival, where there's multiple singers that could take one or two songs each as a tribute. Because obviously we want to play – we love these songs and we've spent a lot of time working on them – but without Chester... How do you do that with integrity? I think that's what it comes down to – *would* we, or *should* we do this without Chester? The circumstances would have to be right and we'd have to be in the right place to do it. 🎧

UP AND AT 'EM



IN SHEER DEFIANCE OF THEIR VERY NAME, **ALL TIME LOW** HAVE DELIVERED A RIVETING CAREER HIGHLIGHT WITH THEIR ENORMOUS EIGHTH ALBUM, *WAKE UP, SUNSHINE*.

IT'S A MIND-BENDING LABYRINTH OF EVERYTHING THE FOURSOME EXCEL AT, FROM BOOMING POP-PUNK BANGERS TO SHIMMERY SYNTHPOP EARBWORMS. LEAD GUITARIST **JACK BARAKAT** LETS US IN ON ITS SUMMERY SECRETS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **JIMMY FONTAINE**.

It's hard to believe All Time Low were ever the underdogs of the pop-punk scene. We remember them fondly when they were dorky kids with overly straightened hair, wailing to us about how they had our picture and they were coming with us (though my name's Matt, dude, not Maria - I'll still count you in though). But even then, they seemed larger than life - who'd'a thought a decade of growing up would lead them to where they are now, packing arenas full of devotees from all walks of life, topping charts the world over and inspiring a whole new generation of bands themselves?

Now bonafide legends of the radio-pop circuit, All Time Low are heading beyond the four-chord pit food they cut their teeth on, expanding their horizons and experimenting with a swathe of new and exciting sounds. Such is unquestionably true on their momentous eighth LP, the bright and bombastic *Wake Up, Sunshine* - an album that guitarist Jack Barakat says surprised even *them*.

What makes *Wake Up, Sunshine* the definitive All Time Low album?

One thing that really stands out to me is that there's songs on this record that could belong on each one of our past records - but somehow it still sounds like an updated version of our band. It's the most well-rounded record we've ever done - y'know, it has a little bit of *Dirty Work* on there, a little bit of *Don't Panic*, a little bit of *Last Young Renegade*... It's got a little bit of all that, so if you've been a fan of our band at any point, I really think that this record has something for you. Which is kind of a unique feat to accomplish. I don't even think we set out to accomplish that, but since all of us worked on the record together, that's just what happened.

This record is a great follow-up to *Last Young Renegade* because it maintains the experimentalism and the exploration of new sounds that you took advantage of with that record, but it's also just a solid pop-punk record as well. How do you reckon with that balance, taking stylistic leaps in new directions while maintaining the core personality of what All Time Low has always been to fans?

I think it's the fact that we wrote the record together, y'know? We lived in the same house and we were all throwing around ideas. It was great to have all of us be together in the same place while we were writing the songs - and working with a producer like Zakk Cervini,

who's got all these fresh sounds, and also came from a place where he grew up as an All Time Low fan. I think it was a mix of those two things that made for this explosion of raw energy, which led to us being the best version of All Time Low that we've ever been.

Do you find that because of how closely involved you all were and how collaborative the process ended up being, that you're able to connect with *Wake Up, Sunshine* a little more than you can with your earlier records?

I really do. And y'know, the true test will come once we start playing the songs live. Even when we were in rehearsals, learning the songs together and going over "Some Kind Of Disaster" and "Sleeping In", you could already feel this sense of camaraderie and connection between all of us as bandmates. These parts are all really special to us because we all contributed to and wrote them ourselves. And I'm not saying it was any better than it has been in the past, or shooting down the people we worked with on earlier records - this time it felt just a little more special than usual.

I get the sense that this record represents All Time Low coming full circle, in a way - going back to the basics of how the band worked when you started out, but with the experience and the knowledge you have as adults.

You're completely right. I'd be hesitant to call it a "throwback record" or anything like that, but there were certain things that came into play that kind of put us in the mindset of where we came from. Those things obviously include us writing a record together for the first time since *Nothing Personal*, and also rerecording that album last year and getting back into that youthful mindset. And so we almost had this newfound energy as a band, where we felt like we were starting over in a way.

So you wrote and recorded this album between Rian's [Dawson, drums] studio in Nashville and a rental house in Palm Springs. What made you guys want to take that approach as opposed to a more traditional studio process?

The interesting thing about that Nashville writing session was that it was just Alex [Gaskarth, vocals] and Rian. Alex just happened to be in Nashville and Rian owns a studio there, so Alex was in there writing songs, and he ended up coming up with some of those ideas that created the bones for this record.

And I don't think he even had the intent of

starting an All Time Low record - he was just like, "Oh, I'm gonna write some songs!" We weren't planning on doing a record this soon, because Alex was doing Simple Creatures and I was doing WhoHurtYou; we were taking our first quote-unquote "hiatus" as a band, and it was almost like an accident with the way Alex started coming up with these songs.

Once he came out of those sessions and sent us those ideas, we were like, "Well, holy shit. Let's go make a record now!" And that's when we decided to rent a house in Palm Springs and go off to write a whole record - we had a plan and a very, "Let's go get this thing done" type of mentality. But there was no pressure, y'know? We didn't want there to be this stress of, "We have to go make an All Time Low record," walking into the studio at 9AM and leaving at 5PM. We wanted it to be more like, "Let's go live and breathe this thing and create something special."

So were you surprised at how quickly it all came together?

Dude, literally every day, we'd step back and go, "Holy shit, is this really happening right now?" It was just kind of like this happy accident where Zakk Cervini had a random opening of free time and Alex was like coming up with shit right, left and centre. I was in the songwriting mindset too because I'd just written an EP for WhoHurtYou, so the ideas were just *flowing*.

A month in the desert later, and we really had the whole thing finished - I'm talking, like, almost mixed. It was genuinely surprising how fast it all came together. All Time Low didn't have a plan to come back this soon - it's just that the songs were there and the record was done, so we were like, "Alright, well I guess we're getting back together now."

What axes were you swinging around that living room for this record?

We were using Benji Madden's old guitar. Benji gave Zakk the red one that he used on all the *Young And The Hopeless* stuff, and it's f***ing beautiful. We used that on every song. And as a fanboy of his, it was f***ing insane using Benji Madden's guitar on our record.

And the one he used on *The Young And The Hopeless*, too, what a f*ing iconic record!**

It was so full-circle for us, because y'know, that's the record that we grew up on as well. We grew up on Good Charlotte and Zakk grew up on All Time Low, and now we're all working together on an All Time Low album with the Good Charlotte guitar. It was unbelievable. 



THE MOTHER OF ALL EVILS

SHAKING UP THEIR SIGNATURE GOTH-METAL GRANDEUR WITH SOME BOLD CREATIVE RISKS, **IN THIS MOMENT** HAVE REINVENTED THEMSELVES AS A NEW FORCE OF FURY WITH ALBUM #7.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **JEREMY SAFFER**.

Celebrating their 15th year of delightfully demented, horror-influenced metal mania, 2020 pretty much belongs to LA quintet In This Moment. Even the current global crisis feels suited to their bold and polarising aesthetic: the universal economy and major mainstream society being progressively buried alive at the hands of a viral infection caused by a bat? When you think about it, that's *pretty f***ing metal*.

Anyway, the band are currently riding high on the release of their equally intense and intriguing seventh album, *Mother* - a career-defining onslaught of harrowing hollers and spine-rattling shred. For founding members Maria Brink (vocals/piano) and Chris Howorth (lead guitar), it's an especially gratifying release - as Howorth tells us (over the phone, because y'know, social distancing, etcetera), its writing process saw them break free from the shackles of expectation that 2012's *Blood* burdened them with; it saw them rethink

and rejuvenate their creative affluence, and open themselves up to more collaboration.

The end result is an album well deserving of its critical acclaim, with some of the most explosive and ebullient material In This Moment have ever written.

How does it feel to be unleashing this beast into the wild?

I mean, it always feels awesome to finally get your record out. But this time, y'know, in the current world climate, it's a little bit weird because we're supposed to be on tour, pushing it as it comes out and all of that stuff - but now it's just coming out into this... Uncertainty.

But there is kind of an upside to it in the fact that maybe because people are just sitting around at home, they will be open to having something like this to listen to - something new to check out, y'know? So it could work both ways! It's just weird not being on tour and promoting it in the

traditional sense.

It kind of forces people to really dive into the album and digest it as a body of work, which is pretty cool.

Hopefully people do that! We don't think about it as individual songs when we do the album - when we present it, we're presenting it in an order that we've thought about and went back and forth over, and the songs all tie together in a very certain way. It's nice to think that some people might listen to it like that now that they have nothing better to do [*laughs*].

So heading into another monumental chapter for In This Moment, how did you want this album to sort of take the band to the next level, or build upon what you'd established over the first six records?

The next level has always been what we're

“WHEN WE PRESENT AN ALBUM, WE’RE PRESENTING IT IN AN ORDER THAT WE’VE THOUGHT ABOUT AND WENT BACK AND FORTH OVER, AND THE SONGS ALL TIE TOGETHER IN A VERY CERTAIN WAY.”



always trying to go for, y’know? And we’ve definitely been climbing the ladder with every album over our career arc, heading in an upward momentum – and we want to keep that going, but we’re also looking for our place now. Like, where are we going to sit, in the grand scheme of things?

We want to be an arena band – we’ve always felt like our show could be in arenas – but we’re also happy to bring this really cool show to theatres and stuff too. We’re just kind of feeling it out right now. But it feels really cool to just be building with each consecutive album, y’know? *Mother* is kind of an extension of *Ritual*. We’re always just trying to write better songs and just do something better than the last thing we did.

In addition to a stack of brand new bangers on this record, you’ve got these three covers scattered throughout the pack – a Steve Miller Band song, a Queen song and a Mazzy Star song. What made you want to throw your own little spin on those classics?

Maria’s been notoriously brave with her cover picks. We did “In The Air Tonight” on our last album, and we all loved that song, but there was hesitation from me and Kevin [Churko], our producer – y’know, we were both like, “Are we sure we want to try to do these types of songs?” They’re already so epic that you can’t really make them better – you just have to kind of go with the angle of making it your own as much as you can.

But with “We Will Rock You”, I was telling Maria,

“No, there’s no way we can do that song right now, it’s just too well-known.” At the time we were talking about doing it, that Queen movie [*Bohemian Rhapsody*] was blowing up, and I just thought, “There’s no way we can do this song. Even if we do it our own way, it’s too risky. Why bother with it?” And she said, “What if I got Lzzy [Hale] and Taylor [Momsen] to do it and all three of us sang a verse? That would be so cool!” And I was like, “...Damn, that *would* be so cool. But how the heck are you gonna get those guys to do it?” And y’know, she just went and worked her magic with them, and they agreed to do it. It just kind of came together.

Some of the the fretwork on this record is absolutely mind-blowing. Was this a particularly gratifying album for you to make as a guitarist?

Honestly, with the band in general, *Blood* was the last record where we were thinking a lot about the guitar work. After that record, we kind of stepped away from the need to have big riffs and shredding throughout the album – it was more like, “What can we do to make the songs stand out?” Less worrying about the solos or fretwork.

But I think we’ve kind of evolved to where now, with *Mother*, we wanted to kind of try and go back to more of a quote-unquote “real band” type of sound; we have a lot of synth and a lot of samples and stuff that we play with when we play live, and that’s a big part of our sound, but sometimes we feel chained to that, so we wanted to try and give

Mother a little more of an organic feel.

Yeah, it definitely felt more satisfying to record, from a guitar playing standpoint, than our last couple of albums. And I think Randy [Weitzel], our other guitarist, he stepped up to the plate on several things, and we were able to work really closely together on some of the solos. I think it came out sounding really cool.

What’s the creative dynamic like between yourself and Randy in the writing process?

Well, it’s been a weird situation for In This Moment – before our *Blood* album, we had a full band of vehicle members that all had a say in what we were doing. And then a bunch of them quit and it was just down to Maria and I. We went into the studio with Kevin Churko and literally did the whole *Blood* album with just the three of us. And that ended up being our most successful album – it shifted our career to a new phase.

So on the subsequent albums, we didn’t want to bring some new guys into the band and start writing with them as equals – we just weren’t thinking like that, because all of a sudden we had success. We were like, “We’ve gotta keep the *Blood* formula going!” But now we’re on our third album since then, and Randy has been in the band for seven years now, so we definitely wanted to get him more involved.

Randy and I have a really, really easy dynamic – he’s a super talented guitarist, and when we do our live stuff, we’re always working out really cool parts that we can play together. 🎸



LUCID DREAMING

NEVER ONES TO REST ON THEIR LAURELS, INSTRUMENTAL POST-ROCKERS **SLEEPMAKESWAVES** ARE REINVENTING THEMSELVES THRICE OVER WITH A TRILOGY OF EXPERIMENTAL EPS, EACH TAKING THEM TO SPECTACULAR NEW HEIGHTS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA.**

If the name Alex Wilson sounds particularly familiar, it may be due to the fact he's been a valued contributor to *Australian Guitar* since long before I even started interning here (and now I run the show!) – or, perhaps, because you're into cerebral, sizzling instrumental post-rock, and you've found yourself deep in the rabbit hole of sizzling riffs and sprawling soundscapes that only Sleepmakeswaves can offer. Wilson is the dude noodling on the bass in this Sydney-native trio of transcendence, and as of late, he's also stepped into the role of taking their inspired ideas from the mind to the masses as a producer and engineer.

The band's first full-scale project with Wilson at the helm is perhaps their most ambitious yet: three EPs, each with its own thematic framework and series of unique concepts, trickled out across 2020 and forming one intensely momentous era for Sleepmakeswaves. Collectively dubbed *These Are Not Your Dreams*, the trilogy – comprising *No Safe Place*, *Out Of Hours* and *Not An Exit* – has slowly come together with the band writing, recording and releasing its material in chunks alongside their fans' interactions, rather than cobble the whole project together at once and merely throwing them out on a schedule.

Unfortunately, due to that little “worldwide viral pandemic” thing you may or may not have heard about, the project hasn't exactly gone according to plan – the band have been struck by tedious delays and creative setbacks aplenty, including the cancellation of their biggest national headline tour to date. Still, they're remaining optimistic, with Wilson declaring that no matter the setbacks, Sleepmakeswaves will continue to chase the dream and get *Dreams* back on track sooner than later.

For the minute, Wilson is excited to dive into the story behind *These Are Not Your Dreams* – from writing our content, to becoming it!

Where did the concept come from to split *These Are Not Your Dreams* into three separate records?

I think there are three main reasons why we're doing what we're doing at the moment. The first one was that we found ourselves with some leftover material that hadn't fit on other records, that we wanted to get out into the world in some way, shape or form. There wasn't enough to make a release of its own, so we sort of cobbled that stuff up together – it was probably about 20 minutes worth of material that we had laying around from other recording sessions, songs that we wanted to revisit and things like that.

And then around the same time that we found ourselves in that position, we went through a bit of a change in how we approached the band – everyone at that point had clocked over into their 30s and we all decided that we no longer wanted to be road-dogging

it as hard, and that led us to a different way of looking at the band. We wanted to try and focus on doing things differently from a creative standpoint, and experiment with a few different approaches that we'd always wanted to try out. We thought that the EP format might be a better way to explore some of those things, as opposed to the traditional album formula.

I suppose the last note also ties in with the fact that I've been personally working on the production and mixing side of things for a while – I'm really passionate about that, so we saw an opportunity where we could both explore a different kind of creative process and run a tighter ship, business-wise, if we brought all of our production in-house. Because recording and engineering in Sleepmakeswaves is a pretty massive job... The analogy I've used elsewhere is that rather than taking one big bite of a peach, we're taking three small bites of a cherry – we would ease ourselves into this mode of self-production.

And so ultimately – having given you the reasons for *why* we've decided to take this particular approach – we wanted to try to present it all in a unified way, and in a way that a fan would still be excited about. The idea of creating three EPs that exist together felt like a more respectful and exciting way to deliver this material to the fans, rather than just going with a sort of lackadaisical DIY approach and releasing these songs in drips and drabs.

When you announced this project, you said that each song was “an experiment in how far we can push ourselves creatively and sonically.” How exactly did you push yourselves with this project, and what were you keen to do, as songwriters, to really challenge what it is you've established as the “Sleepmakeswaves formula”?

On the second EP, to give you an example, there's a song on there where Otto [Wicks-Green, guitars] is laying some vocals straight on top, and it ends up sounding a little bit like that mixture of post-rock and indie-rock that you might find in The Appleseed Cast or something like that. And that's an example of something we probably wouldn't have had the ability or courage to do in the past, but has been lurking in the back of our minds, creatively, for some time.

And y'know, every band – unless they're fortunate enough to be, say, Radiohead – is working within a fairly defined set of expectations. I'm not trying to say that we're particularly hard done by or anything like that – just alluding to the fact that we're using this project as an opportunity to try and continue what we like to do, which is innovate around the perimeters of post-rock, and try to find our own little ways to bust out of those perimeters. Because that's when things are the most exciting.

On the second EP, at least for me personally, I took

that as a real opportunity to explore two passions of mine, which are the kind of guitar sounds of '90s rock production, for lack of a better term – more mid-range-y, fuzzed-out, crunchy kind of tones – and also more of an influence from '70s progressive rock as well; you'll find that there are more acoustic guitars coexisting with the electrics, and a harmonic or melodic feel that reminds me of bands like Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tull.

And then for the third EP, we wanted to focus more on the electronic and ambient side of things – we've put a rule in place that there are no big riffs and no bombastic climaxes. Because we haven't really – for a while, at least – allowed ourselves the opportunity to explore making stuff that has an emotional intensity without relying on volume or pummelling instruments.

So if you look at *These Are Not Your Dreams* as one self-contained chapter in the Sleepmakeswaves story, how do these three EPs gel together and exist in the same bubble, as opposed to just being three standalone releases of their own volition?

I guess what unifies them will be the moment in time that they were created, and the mentality that brought them together. If I could use an analogy from one of my favourite artists of all time, you know The Smashing Pumpkins, right? If you look at albums like *Siamese Dream* or *Adore*, you'll see that they're very clearly exploring a single idea across one album – 40 to 60 minutes, or however long they are. But then you have *Mellon Collie And The Infinite Sadness*, which is this big, sprawling double-album that has everything but the kitchen sink on it – you have songs like “We Only Come Out At Night” alongside “F*** You”.

So I guess I would like to suggest to the fans that they listen to the three EPs in a similar sort of way to that. We're presenting a bunch of material that we're interested in and that we enjoy, in a semi-thematic kind of way, and just seeing where the chips fall for the listeners. I've always been a big believer that people bring their own meaning to the music, and particularly as an instrumental band that's never really relied on lyrics to convey meaning, we're trusting a great deal that the audience will go on their own journey with what we put out there.

And so in that way, we've made the effort to pull these things together, give them some unified artwork and a unified presentation, because for us, they come from a certain moment in time and a certain feeling we had around the band. It'll be really interesting to see what the listeners think about that. I suspect that people will just enjoy the diversity of what's there, and the music for what it is. Hopefully, the people that have been listening to us for a long time will appreciate the opportunity to hear a bunch of different sides of Sleepmakeswaves in one go. 



DOWN THE RABBITHOLE

CODE ORANGE ARE ONE OF THOSE BANDS THAT SEEM TO HIT THEIR PEAK WITH EACH NEW RELEASE, ONLY TO ONE-UP THEMSELVES YET AGAIN WITH THE NEXT ONE. HOW THEY'LL FOLLOW UP THE SPINE-SHATTERINGLY MENTAL *UNDERNEATH* IS FAR BEYOND US, BUT ACCORDING TO GUITARIST **REBA MEYERS**, THEY'VE ALREADY GOT THEIR SIGHTS SET ON THE NEXT GAME-CHANGING MASTERPIECE. FOR THE MINUTE, THOUGH, LET'S JUST FAWN OVER THIS NEW BEAST OF AN LP.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

When we last caught up with Code Orange, they were already one of the biggest hardcore bands in modern history. It was right before they took to Australian stages for the 2019 Download Festival (remember live music?), and the murmurs of their fourth studio album were heating up faster than a match thrown into a barrel of diesel. 2017's *Forever* had showcased such passion, ferocity and talent that it seemed as though if Code Orange were to usurp it, they'd need to reinvent the wheel. Instead, they swallowed the rabbit whole.

Especially notable in a climate where originality is as scarce as it is, *Underneath* landed at the turn of 2020 with a pummelling plentitude of new ideas. It's vicious, grimy, rugged and industrial, yet it's also their brightest and most dynamic body of work yet. It's packed with glitches and jumpscars and production techniques that even the most creatively intoned of us never saw coming. It defies what their biggest supporters thought Code Orange were capable of, and makes one thing abundantly clear: this is not a band whose success is driven by hype, heresy or some cultural phase; they're the kings and queen of metal's next generation, and they're here to stay. Don't like it? Die mad about it.

As guitarist Reba Meyers fills us in, *Underneath* was a long time coming for the Pennsylvania fivesome. Any moment they weren't either eating, sleeping or sweating their brains out through their eye sockets onstage, Code Orange were thinking about this album. If it was to take them 20 years to make, then they'd have spent 20 years making it. The effort they put into the album is truly insane, and Meyers is over the moon that she now gets to spill her guts about it.

I feel like *Underneath* is easily your most intense and over-the-top album yet – was the goal to just kick things over the edge and dial it all up to 11?

That's always our goal, man. We're not the type of band who just wants to churn material out – we have a

very clear goal of improvement and evolution, we talk about things as a group at length, and we push each other super hard. We're so critical of the music and the ideas we all come up with, and that's part of why we're so intense – it definitely reflects in the music.

We went into writing this album – which was a really long process, too – with a very serious attitude. We didn't want anything to be compromised, and we had so many things that we were imagining, but we wanted everything to come out sounding how we had it in our heads. And we didn't want to compromise that vision for any reason, no matter how much work it took. I hope people are able to connect with that.

At some points on the record, like “Sulfur Surrounding”, you tap into this type of groove and melody in a really powerful and dynamic way, and how that angles up against the heavier stuff makes it stand out really nicely. Were you excited to experiment with a lot of new sounds and flavours on this record?

Definitely. At this point in our lives, I think we've all kind of soaked in our influences and gotten our crafts to how they're going to be – it's like we're trying to add more paint to the picture that we've been working on for as long of a time as our band has been a thing, y'know?

We wanted each character and each emotion to come through in a very individual way for each song, but then it also had to flow as one big piece. And that is a very hard goal to accomplish – especially with how detail-oriented and specific we get as a group, and how many standards we all hold. We each have our own different set of standards, so it took a lot of communication with each other, a lot of explaining how we wanted things to be, and just sitting in a room and working on the music for hours at a time. We weren't going to settle.

But I think we eventually got to a point where, yeah, we all felt like it was ready, and we did the best job with it that we could, and that's why this album



feels so intense – the amount of intensity and all the blood, sweat and tears that each one of us put into it was so immense.

With how much time you spent working on this album as a band – I was reading that Jami [Morgan, vocals/drums] said you guys spent almost a whole year just locking down all the digital information – did you find that there was more of a collaborative dynamic between you all?

We always have collaborated – that’s always been the Code Orange way of writing – and I think we’ve now just fallen into each other’s specialties and honed in on our skills a lot better as a unit. Each person has their way of writing and their own way of thinking about the music, but since we’ve been doing this together for so long, we’ve learned how to fill each other’s gaps. We’ve kind of accepted what we’re best at and what we’re not so good at, and we’re able to be very honest about that with each other.

Sometimes you get pissed off by [criticism], but we’re always able to work through it and push each other up to the next level, and I think that’s something that separates our band from a lot of other bands and artists. We have so many people filling a specific role in the writing of the music, but it doesn’t just sound like one big mess – we’re able to collaborate in a way that makes us work as a unit, and all those different ideas can mesh with each other. And that is the band’s identity.

That’s what makes the album so diverse – we’re able to have these super digital riffs mixed with these really in-the-room, heavy, old-school Code Orange

riffs, mixed with ethereal and melodic chords, mixed with modern, almost videogame-esque digital sounds. It’s a whole melting pot of different influences and characteristics, but since we’ve all grown up together, we’ve been able to develop this thread that links everything together, and helps it all still make sense in the bigger picture.

So the last time we spoke, you mentioned that something you were thinking about a lot was the potential of designing your own signature guitar – which, of course, finally happened last year with the ESP RM-600. How’s that been holding up for you lately?

It’s been great! I just used it at our livestreamed record release show, and it held up awesomely. It sounds amazing, and I’m just extremely proud of it. Y’know, I’d been wanting to do something like this since I was a kid, so the fact that I got to do it and I got to make something that I don’t look back on with any regret at all is great.

And ESP were super cool about it the whole time that we were working together – they let me think of the whole idea and were able to make it happen. And y’know, it’s tough in this industry – especially nowadays, lot of times you’ll think of these crazy ideas and specific aesthetic concepts that people will just immediately give you a ‘no’ to. But they didn’t say no to me at all, and they went out of their way to make it happen exactly as I had imagined it.

Were you very hands-on with ESP in the actual making of the guitar?

Yeah. I had been playing the Viper for so long that I knew I just wanted it to be similar to a specific

model of that guitar, and they were willing to do that. I mocked up a picture of the reverse headstock on the Viper with the finish, the colouring and the logo I wanted, and I had no idea how they were going to be able to make it happen, but I sent it to them and they figured it out in a very whole new way that hadn’t been done before. I’m crazy proud of it!

One of the big drawcards for it – on top of that insane black marble satin finish, of course – is the EMG 81 pickup and TKO killswitch. What is it that made you want to have them on this guitar, and how have you been making the most of them?

We kind of went back and forth on the pickups and how we wanted to do that, and they pushed me to just stick with the one. That’s all I ever use, anyways, and I think we wanted to go with more of a modern design. EMG were willing to make that pickup to match with the logo, which was super cool of them – it’s a custom one-off colour just for this guitar, too.

And I love the killswitch for the live show, especially with all these glitchy moments that we have – it makes it really easy to bring those parts to life onstage without any software. And y’know, we just went back and forth until it was right, basically. We both had great ideas to share with each other, and that’s why I think it turned out the way it did. That’s how I feel about everything, really – music and art and anything creative – if you’re able to go back and forth with a company or a person, and really *collaborate* with them, then whatever you’re working on can end up being a greater thing. 🎸

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A FLASH FLOOD OF COLOUR

WHOOSH! THAT'S THE SOUND OF HARD-ROCK PIONEERS **DEEP PURPLE** BLASTING BACK TO THEIR RIGHTFUL SPOT AT THE TOP OF THE PODIUM – AND, FITTINGLY, THE TITLE OF THEIR GAME-CHANGING 21ST ALBUM. LONGSTANDING AXEMAN **STEVE MORSE** RUNS US THROUGH WHAT MAKES THIS NEW SET OF SHRED THEIR MOST DEFIANT IN DECADES.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**

If you've ever listened to literally any rock 'n' roll song, there's a good chance that, somewhere along the chain, Deep Purple's influence rubbed off on it. A key element to the genesis of modern heavy music – so much so that the *Guinness Book of World Records* branded them “the globe's loudest band” – the British shredders have been doling out their colourful solos and crunchy riffs since 1968.

Over the last five decades, they've managed to smash out a truly cataclysmic 20 studio albums – not to mention to near-uncountable deluge of demos, bootlegs and extra releases to bear their kaleidoscopic stamp of approval. And they've hardly settled down; in 2017 they embarked on the *Long Goodbye* tour, which would supposedly see them fizzle out their

touring efforts. But when the stint ended at the tail end of 2019, it only took a few months for Deep Purple to announce yet another sprawling world tour.

Unlike most bands of their caliber, too, Deep Purple aren't simply kicking on as a legacy act churning through the hits of their “glory days” – they're still living theirs, after all, and celebrating them with a brand new collection of bold and bombastic hard-rock anthems. *Whoosh!* marks a striking return to the classic sound of Deep Purple, capitalising on thick, byzantine chords and polychromatic rhythms that stick to the eardrums long after the songs themselves have ended.

As frontman Ian Gillan so elegantly puts it, “Whoosh is an onomatopoeic word that,

when viewed through one end of a radio telescope, describes the transient nature of humanity on Earth; and, through the other end from a closer perspective, illustrates the career of Deep Purple.”

Before the album drops on us like a bombshell of brilliance in August, Australian Guitar had the incredible privilege of shooting the breeze with longstanding guitarist Steve Morse – who, in addition to diving deep into the inner mechanics of *Whoosh!* with us, declared that one of Deep Purple’s biggest priorities moving forward (as soon as they can move forward with their touring plans and so forth) is making their return to Australian stages for the first time since 2013.

After 21 Deep Purple albums – seven with yourself in the mix – how do you keep things feeling fresh and exciting, not just for the fans, but as musicians and music lovers yourselves?

We try to put a lot of effort into the crafting of the music, and try to leave in some of the more outlandish ideas we might come up with. I fight hard for those kind of interesting instrumental bits – the bits that keep me personally more interested. And when we add vocals, we have Ian Gillan’s lyrics and delivery, which I think is superb; he has such a magnificent command over the English language, speaking on the obvious level, and then even moreso once he explains it to me on the cryptic, crossword-y sort of level. And I just love the craftwork of it. So it’s no problem for me to keep things fresh and interesting.

In the press release for this record, we learned that your motto in the studio – the motivational tagline, if it were – was, “Deep Purple is putting the Deep back into Purple”. What did that mean for you, as far as what you wanted to achieve with this album on a creative wavelength?

A few albums ago, we said, “Well, nobody’s gonna play it anyway. Nobody buys albums anymore, so let’s just make the music that we think is best for the band.” We weren’t going to worry about sales or charts or anything like that – the only thing we’d focus on is having it be good quality. And I think that’s really where the ‘Deep’ part comes from.

And as far as the ‘Purple’ part goes, we’ve always had that sort of arrangement where... Y’know, someone like me coming in – even a quarter of a century ago – being the new guy, what I would do is just constantly bombard the other guys with all the ideas I was having. And y’know, those ideas would be taken seriously on maybe a ten-to-one ratio... 20-to-one, even. But the idea was always that the guys who were there for the longest would listen to those ideas and judge whether or not they liked it for a Deep Purple song.

Did this record give you much of an opportunity to step outside the square and explore some techniques outside of your comfort zone?

I’m usually a little bit out of my comfort zone working with Bob [Ezrin, producer]. I love what he does, and I was the only person in the band that had worked for him before he came onboard, so it was very easy for me to recommend him when his name came up. But having said that, I love him in the way that you love your coach or your drill sergeant, y’know? It’s not an easy love – especially when the red light is on and you’re in the hot-seat.

He pushed me a lot – mostly with the challenge of, “Morse, play something different than you would normally play!” I’d be like, “Just don’t play like myself,

you mean?” And he’d go, “...Yeah!” That’s virtually impossible, when you think about it, but the idea was to push me beyond the boundaries of what was comfortable. And we we came up with a product that I couldn’t have done on my own.

Left to my own devices, I would’ve reverted to more of my own approaches to the solos and stuff; he picked some solo parts that I would have just thrown in the trash, but he heard a different thing and he was listening from a different point of view. He’s probably someone that doesn’t listen to guitar players, y’know? Not unless he’s getting paid to [laughs].

You’ve had a couple of really incredible signature guitars hit the market throughout the years, starting of course with the very boldly named Ernie Ball Steve Morse – which has a staple of their lineup for over 30 years now. How did you first get to collaborating with that team?

Well, Ernie Ball had bought the Music Man label from Leo Fender, and Ernie himself was a big fan of Leo’s designs. But what they decided was that the guitars needed work, however they loved the basses. They were just going to start producing the Stingray basses right out of the bag, and not even change the formula. But for the guitars, they wanted to switch things up a bit.

They approached me about doing a signature model when I was talking to them at a NAMM show – Sterling was the spokesman at the time, and he’s since become one of my oldest and best friends. We’d already played a lot of music together, but the thing that impressed me about the Ernie Ball brand was that when I came onboard, they said, “Well, we’ll just make [a guitar] like you want. We won’t put it out if you’re not happy with it.”

I’d been through the process [of designing a signature guitar] before with a couple other companies, and it hadn’t worked out. But they said, “You tell us when it’s finished,” and I said, “Okay! I like that idea!” I asked them, “What parts can I use?” And they said, “Whatever you want.” So they took some of my suggestions, and I took some of theirs: for instance, the Music Man headstock – I was a little skeptical about it at first, but when I really looked at it, I said, “That actually makes more sense.”

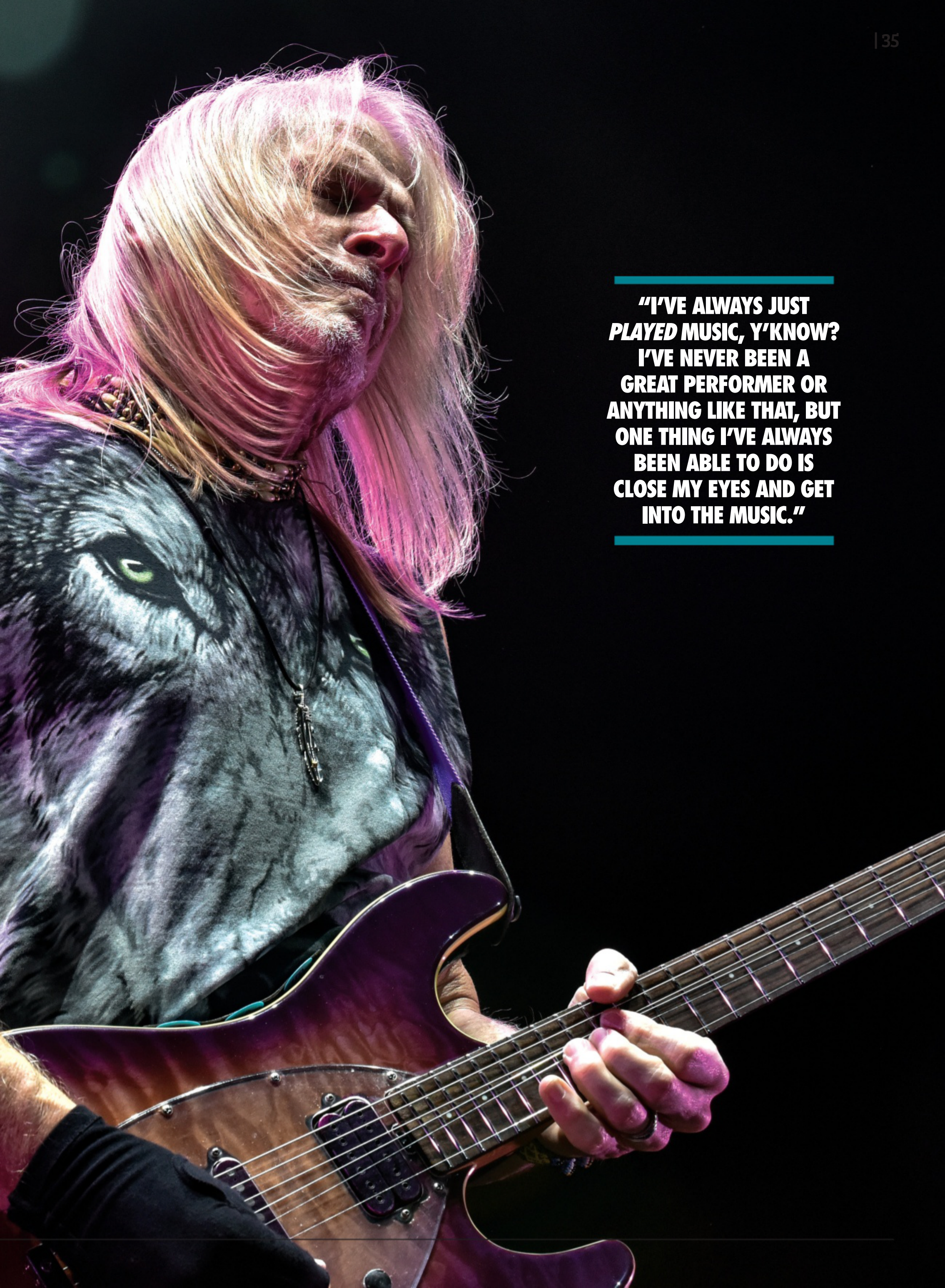
Y’know, there’s four and two [pegs on each respective side], instead of six in a row – having six in a row puts the two thinnest strings the farthest away from the nut, requiring a nut tree to hold enough down pressure. And that’s wrong for two reasons: firstly because a nut tree adds extra friction, which causes the string tension to change or re-equalise after you’ve tuned it, possibly while you’re playing, and secondly because having four and two makes it a more balanced guitar.

It also fits in a three-quarter-sized case, which is my secret weapon when I go on flights. As your Aussie musicians know, the international Australian flights are the only place in the world you’ll never see a guitar inside the cabin. But everywhere else in the world – literally *everywhere* else in the world – I can tuck my guitar under my arm in a little three-quarter-sized gig bag and pass them my ticket with the other hand, and nobody says a word.

So the first guitar was based on your infamous Frankentele, which was a beautiful clusterf* of different bits and pieces from all over the place. How did you figure out what parts of what guitars were right for you, and what was your process like in using them to create something that suited your very specific needs?**

For instance, I owned a Les Paul and a 335, and I knew there was something *different* about that sound.





**"I'VE ALWAYS JUST
PLAYED MUSIC, Y'KNOW?
I'VE NEVER BEEN A
GREAT PERFORMER OR
ANYTHING LIKE THAT, BUT
ONE THING I'VE ALWAYS
BEEN ABLE TO DO IS
CLOSE MY EYES AND GET
INTO THE MUSIC."**

I said around and asked myself, “What was it?” The 335 was light and airy and the Les Paul was heavy, but they both had a similar fat sound that I liked. So I thought, “Okay, well it’s gotta be that pickup.” I liked the sort of sound that Hendrix got with a heavily effected single-coil pickup, so it seemed that if I was going to play lots of different styles, I was going to need lots of different pickups. And I noticed that with the 335, I could get feedback real easy – too easily, in fact – so I wanted a solidbody base.

When I was a teenager, I got paid for a session with an old Telecaster, and I thought, “Wow, this is perfect – it’s just a slab of wood!” And so I stripped the paint off it and drew some lines where the pickups would go, took my dad’s chisel set and went to town on it! Fender had just come out with the humbucking pickup, and I said, “I’m going to try this first.” And a Thinline humbucker was a giant pickup, y’know, so I pretty much chiseled out the Grand Canyon on this 1960-something Telecaster. It had a maple neck, too, so I said, “Huh, it looks like my Strat neck would fit right on there.” So I busted out the screwdriver, and what’d’ya know, it fit! And it played fine!

Next was the bridge – the bridge was three double trees on the Telecaster, and I couldn’t get the G and D in tune because the G was plain and the D was wound. The day the Telecaster was invented, they used flat-wound Gs and flat-wound Ds, so they were more similar. So I needed a Tune-O-Matic bridge – that was the only thing we knew of at the time, so I bought one at my local music store, and then came some careful measurement for a change. I graduated from the chisel set to a drill, and pretty soon I had a Tune-O-Matic bridge!

Then I needed something to hold it on, so I went to a pawn shop and found a part from a 12-string floating tree – this crazy trapeze type of tree – and I just screwed it into the wood. Then came the process of taking out the capacitor from one of the tone selections that was wired into the factory Tele – I needed another switch so I could get more combinations. Then I took the lipstick pickup from the Tele and moved it closer to the humbucker, which I knew was something I was missing. Boy, was I glad I did that! I’ve used that pickup combination for my whole life since.

You really were the mad scientist of DIY luthiers, weren’t you?

I was just a kid! And y’know how kids are. My parents were saving for their kids’ college, and I had two other brothers. My dad started as a minister with a very modest income, and he and my mom worked their way up to where they had finally gotten their PhDs in psychology and had regular, middle-class jobs. But even then, money was not something I had in my pocket on the regular. But luckily my dad let me borrow his tools, and y’know, as kids we weren’t afraid of trying stuff.

I had a little 50cc motorcycle, and every time it wouldn’t run, I would just take it completely apart and scrape the carbon off the piston, drill it all back together and drift off into the sunset. I liked taking things apart and figuring out how they worked. My dad had a soldering gun – a big, powerful industrial one – and I was using that for soldering the wires on that guitar and everything.

Never underestimate the resourcefulness of a broke teenager! Back to the present day: did you record *Whoosh!* with your signature axes?

Pretty much. I would start with my number one – the blue Steve Morse model with four pickups. I take that to every gig and use it for everything that I can. But when we recorded a lot of the main parts on this

“MONEY WAS NOT SOMETHING I HAD IN MY POCKET ON THE REGULAR. BUT LUCKILY MY DAD LET ME BORROW HIS TOOLS, AND Y’KNOW, AS KIDS WE WEREN’T AFRAID OF TRYING STUFF.”

record, I used the Y2D guitar it’s a little bit more of a rock-sounding guitar, slightly less flexible in terms of playing cleaner country stuff or anything classical, but it works great with Purple.

And then there was Bob’s bits and pieces – he bought some expensive vintage guitars at some point in the recording process, and y’know, he has to use those finds on every album he makes. So I would have to double some parts on his Les Paul or Telecaster – and the Telecaster played like a Mack truck, y’know? A nice looking Mack truck! And sure enough, it does have a real Tele sound. With my Telecaster, y’know, I took away some of that Tele sound by changing the bridge and the lead pickup – which was prone to feedback, by the way, as a lot of people know.

I would say we used the Y2D most of the time, and then 40 percent of the time we used number one – and a fraction of a percent on Bob’s guitars, by request. I think I used his baritone, too, because I forgot to bring mine when we did a baritone guitar solo on one of the tunes.

You’ve been known to improvise a lot during the live show, and take your guitar parts in some really crazy new directions. What’s going through your mind when you’re up onstage with axe in hand? Are you thinking much about where you want to take a song, or are you just getting into your zen place and letting the music guide you?

I’ve always just *played* music, y’know? I’ve never been a great performer or anything like that, but one thing I’ve always been able to do is close my eyes and get into the music. And when I improvise, I just say, “Well, I hope the audience will forgive me.” Because I don’t know how it is for you [*writer’s note: my version of improv involves mashing the fretboard like a toddler having a seizure – we all have our ineptitudes*], but when I improvise, I get about 75-to-85 percent of what I would do if I had worked on a song.

The great moments are where people are like, “Oh, I dig what you were trying to do there, Steve,” And the low points are when they go, “You didn’t quite finish what you started there, Steve.” But my theory is that if I keep it interesting for myself, and challenging and fun, then it will be that way for the people who took the money out of their pockets to buy the tickets, got the babysitter and the ridiculous parking spots that cost so much, and paid half a million dollars for a t-shirt. 

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METALLICA WHEREVER I MAY ROAM

MASTER THE RIFFING BASICS OF **JAMES HETFIELD'S** EPIC SIX-MINUTE TRACK FROM **METALLICA'S** LEGENDARY *BLACK ALBUM*.

The mammoth fourth single from Metallica's über-hit *Black Album*, "Wherever I May Roam", clocks in at over six minutes long. For the sake of brevity, though, Rockscool's arrangement cuts the track down, focusing on the main riffs to make it more digestible for Grade 3 players.

The opening riff is based around the exotic sounding E Phrygian scale (E F G A B C D) and the most colourful note is the F (a b9th interval). This crucial note comes up time and time again, lending a slight Eastern vibe to the song as the riff makes the semitone shift between the E and F notes. Lots of Metallica songs use E Phrygian and the E to F move, in fact, you could call it Metallica's trademark!

For an authentic tone use a guitar equipped with a bridge-position humbucker, dial in a high-gain distortion sound and keep the midrange on your amp low, with bass and treble fairly high.

METALLICA WHEREVER I MAY ROAM

♩=128
N.C.

1

2

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4

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100

METALLICA WHEREVER I MAY ROAM (cont'd)

11

E⁵ N.C. A⁵ B^{b5} B⁵ C⁵ N.C.

PM PM PM PM-----|

TAB

2 0 0 7 7 8 7 7 0 0 5 5 7 8 7 0 0 7 7 8 7 7 5 6 7 10 8 5 6 7 8 7 8 7

16

A⁵ B^{b5} B⁵ C⁵ E⁵

PM PM PM-----|

TAB

7 0 0 5 5 7 8 7 0 0 7 7 8 7 7 5 6 7 10 8 5 6 7 8 2 0

22

F⁵ Em F⁵

PM-----| PM-----| PM-----|

TAB

1 3 3 0 2 2 0 1 3 3

28

Em B^{b5} A⁵

TAB

2 0 2 0 2 0 8 6 8 6 8 6 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5

34

B^{b5} E⁵ B^b

Improvise chord accompaniment

TAB

8 6 8 6 8 6 8 6 0 2 0 2

METALLICA WHEREVER I MAY ROAM (cont'd)

40

Gm B^b N.C.

TAB

1 1 2 3

45

A⁵ B^{b5} B⁵ C⁵ F⁵

PM - - - - - I PM PM PM - - - I

TAB

5 6 7 8 7 8 7 0 0 5 5/7 8 0 0 7 7 8 7 5 6 7 8 10 8 3 3 1 1 3

50

E⁵ B^{b5}

PM - - - I PM - - - I PM - - - I PM - - - I PM - - - I

TAB

1 1 3 2 3 (2 3) 2 2 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 2 2 3 (2 3) 2 8 8 6 6 8 6 6 8 2 3 (2 3) 2

55

A⁵ G⁵ E⁵

PM

TAB

2 0 5 3 2 0 7 7 8 7

60

N.C. A⁵ B^{b5} B⁵ C⁵ N.C. E⁵

PM PM PM - - - - - I

TAB

7 0 0 5 5 7 8 7 0 0 7 7 8 7 5 6 7 8 10 8 5 6 7 8 2 0

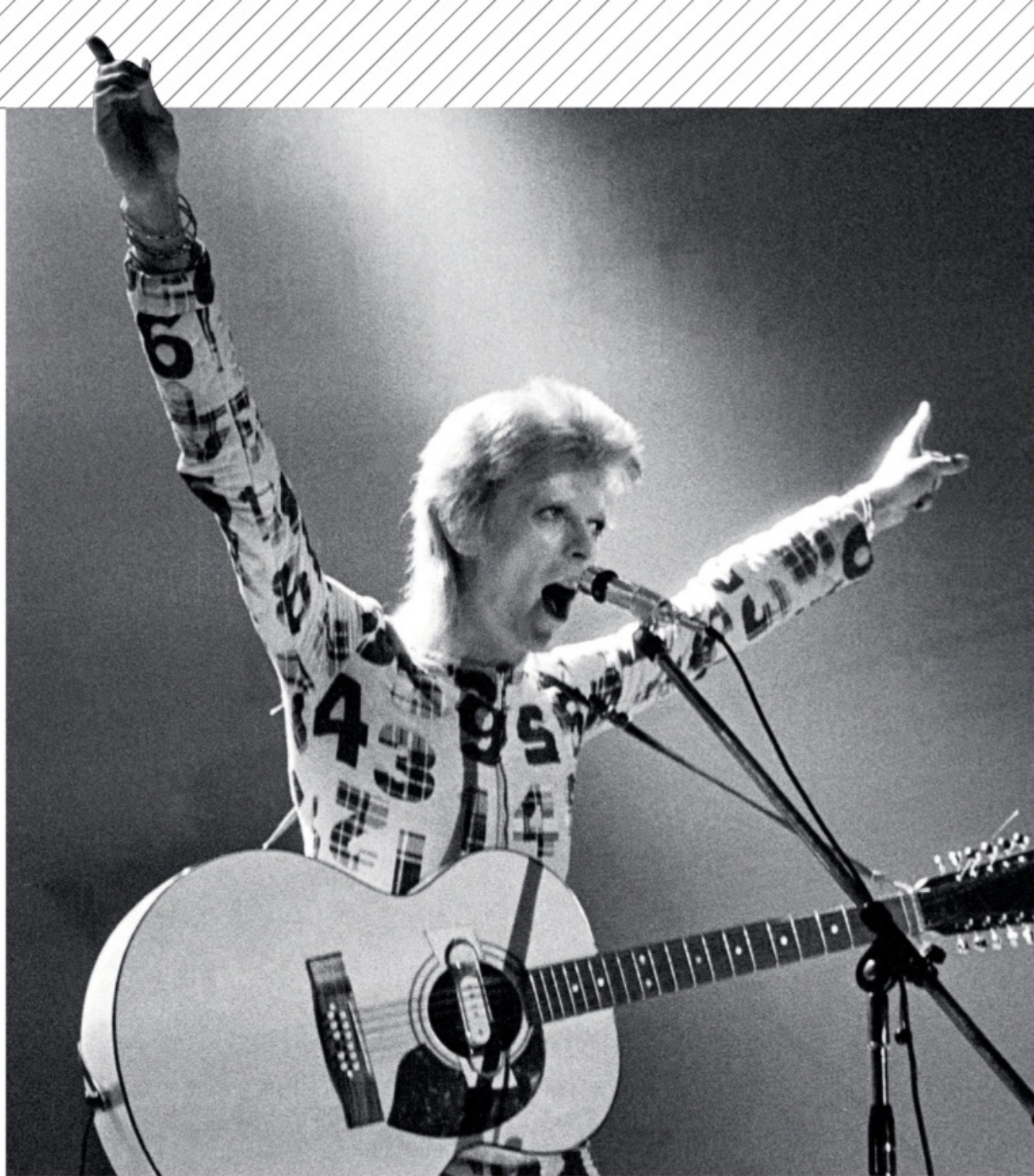
Watch out for the 2/4 time in bar 9 – just count to two (instead of four) over the held note and you'll be okay. In bar 15 use your first, second, third, and fourth fingers to play the first four notes and keep the same position as you hammer on at the 7th and 8th frets. The slash marks starting in bar 38 tell you to improvise a rhythm part based on what's gone before. This doesn't need to be too busy – trust yourself and find something that is pleasing to your ear.

DAVID BOWIE STARMAN

EXPAND YOUR REPERTOIRE AND REBOOT YOUR CHORD VOCAB AS YOU LEARN THIS ALIEN-THEMED CLASSIC FROM **BOWIE'S ZIGGY STARDUST** PERIOD.

Rleased in 1972, "Starman" marked the end of a fallow period for Bowie – well, in terms of hits, at least. Although continuing to release material in the meantime, David's previous hit had been as far back as 1969's *Space Oddity*. As it would turn out, "Starman" was perhaps the most important release of Bowie's career, paving the way for a wave of chart-topping singles and albums that would catapult the singer-songwriter into new realms of superstardom.

You're going to need 17 chord shapes to play the song – and yes, five of them are barre chords. But before you groan, spare a thought for David himself, who played them all on a 12-string acoustic – quite the finger workout for any guitarist! We've printed the chord shapes here for you, but don't feel like you'll need a 12-string guitar to make them work. It's a great song to strum along to, so play it on any guitar you like.



CHORDS

The toughest shapes here are obviously the barre chords – especially the F. The trick is to take your time, practise a little and often, and you'll gradually develop the strength you need to play them. Alternatively, try ditching the bass note altogether. Admittedly your guitar sound may be a little thinner, but it may just help you get to the end of the song.

STARMAN

Words and Music by David Bowie
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B,add#11/E



Fmaj7/E



Gm



C



C7



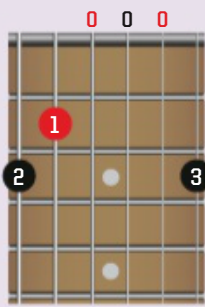
A,



B,



A



G



F



Dm



Am



C/G



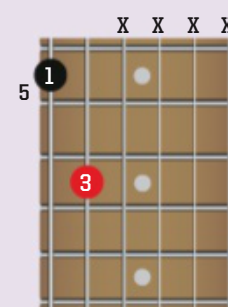
B,m



D7/F#



G5



A5

SONG SHEET

Starman

Intro

B₇add#11/E Fmaj7/E x2

Verse 1

Gm
Didn't know what time it was

The lights were low - oh - oh

F I leaned back on my radio - oh - oh

C Some cat was layin' down some rock 'n' roll **C7**
F A B

'Lotta soul', he said

Gm
Then the loud sound did seem to fa-a-ade

F Came back like a slow voice

On a wave of pha - a - ase

C That weren't no DJ

That was hazy cosmic jive

Chorus

F Dm
There's a starman waiting in the sky

Am C/G
He'd like to come and meet us

C **C7**
But he thinks he'd blow our minds

There's a starman waiting in the sky

Am C/G
He's told us not to blow it

C C7
Cause he knows it's all worthwhile, he told me:

B **Bm**
Let the children lose it

F D7/F#
Let the children use it

Gm C
Let all the children boogie

Interlude

B_b / / / F / / / C / / / F / G5 A5
B_b / / / F / / / C / / /

Verse 2

Gm
I had to phone someone

So I picked on you - ou - ou

F Hey, that's far out so you heard him too-oo-oo

C Switch on the TV

C7 F A B
We may pick him up on channel two

Gm
Look out your window I can see his li - i - ight

F If we can sparkle he may land toni - i - ight

C Don't tell your poppa

C7 A G
Or he'll get us locked up in fright

Repeat chorus x2

Outro (to fade)

B₆ / / / F / / / C / / / F / G5 A5

INTRODUCTION

[illegible]

Bowie allowed the open first and sixth strings to sound against both chords, creating an eerie 'otherworldly' vibe. If it's not working for you, try muting out the open sixth string and focus your attention on the fretted notes instead. Notice that you play the same finger shape for both chords, so it's just a simple position shift.

INTERLUDE

♩=100

B $\flat$

F

1. **C**

F

G 5 A 5

2. **C**

Gm

1:23

TAB

BU BU

5(7) 5(7) 5 3

2 2 3 5

BU BU

7(9) 7(9) 7 5

7 7 3 5

BU BU BD

7(9) 7(9) [9](7) 5 7 5

Mick Ronson's melodic riff was played mostly on the third string. At the start of Bar #4, you'll probably have your third finger on the seventh fret, so be ready to quickly shift back to third position as you reach the Bb note that accompanies the G5 chord. That'll put you in position ready to go back to Bar #1.

HOT GEAR



FENDER LIMITED EDITION HM STRATOCASTER

RRP: \$2,499 • fender.com

The limited-edition HM Strat sports the same unique look and specs that helped the '88-92 models compete with the hot-rodded Strat impersonators of the day. Built in the same factory as the original, the HM (for Heavy Metal) Strat features a narrow 'C' neck with unique 25.1-inch scale, 17-inch radius maple or rosewood fingerboard with 24 Jumbo frets for nearly effortless bends and technical fretwork. A Floyd Rose Special recessed bridge keeps everything perfectly in-tune even after the deepest dive-bombs, and the high-gain HSS pickup configuration delivers hot humbucker tones in the bridge - which can be split for more traditional Strat sounds when combined with the single coil neck and middle pickups. Other features include Gotoh tuners, molded 'F' logo knobs and black headcap with a highly stylised, '80s-era "STRAT" silk logo.



LINE 6 POD GO

RRP: \$999.99 • au.yamaha.com

The Line 6 POD Go pairs traditional controls with a large color LCD to let players interact with virtual amps, stompers, and cabs in new and meaningful ways. Whether you're running live FX into a stage amp, recording and re-amping through modelled amps and cabs, or outputting rich Helix-derived tones directly from the stage to the PA, the POD Go has you covered. The price and simplicity of the POD Go tailor this floor processor to players who have been on the fence about diving into the Line 6 ecosystem; despite boasting a premium HX Family sound library - the Blackface, Plexi Lead, Treadplate, and all your favorites are here - there's only a short learning curve standing behind the POD Go and total integration with your rig. Who knows? Once you experience the freedom of gigging out with nothing but the guitar on your back and the Line 6 POD Go at your feet, you may never drag an amp out of your practice space again.

ORANGE TERROR STAMP 20-WATT VALVE HYBRID AMP PEDAL

RRP: \$399 • australismusic.com.au

For years, the Orange Terror series amps have proven that biggest sounds can come in the tiniest packages. Taking our pocket-sized powerhouse concept one step further, we've brought you the Terror Stamp. Packing all of the punch of the minuscule Micro Terror and Micro Dark amps into an even smaller pedal format, this Valve/Solid State hybrid amp brings 20 watts of killer Orange tone right onto your pedalboard.



YAMAHA NXT5

RRP: \$3,499 • au.yamaha.com

The NX Series features contemporary body styles and proprietary preamp and pickup systems developed with the needs of live performers in mind. NX Series guitars will appeal to both accomplished nylon-string players in search of superior amplified sound, and electric and steel-string players seeking to explore the beauty of nylon-string sounds. The top-of-the-line NTX5 acoustic-electric nylon-string guitar's modern looks and unparalleled amplified sound enable electric guitarists and steel-string players to easily explore the world of nylon-string playing, while strap buttons and the exceptional Atmosfeel pickup system make it especially appealing to performing guitarists.

GIBSON ES-335 DOT

RRP: \$6,199 • australismusic.com.au

The Gibson ES-335 DOT is the cornerstone of the Gibson ES line-up. From its inaugural appearance in 1958, the Gibson ES-335 immediately set an unmatched standard. The pearloid dot inlay rosewood fingerboard on a hand-rolled Rounded C mahogany neck remind players where it all started. The all-new Memphis Historic Spec II (MHS II) humbucking pickups paired with Memphis Tone Control Plus (MTC Plus) circuitry showcases the versatile Gibson ES tone that players have craved for over 60 years. Tuning stability and precise intonation are provided by the Grover 'Milk Bottle' tuners, an ABR-1 bridge with brass saddles, and a stopbar tailpiece.





ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN STINGRAY SPECIAL 2020 COLLECTION

RRP: \$TBC • cmcmusic.com.au

The contouring of the StingRay Special is all about comfort and playability. The arm contour is less like a one-directional ramp and more spherical to allow for a comfortable place to rest your forearm at any angle. The five-bolt neck joint, combined with the neck joint contour, improves fret access with an ergonomic carve that matches the shape of the player's palm when in the upper registers. Now made with roasted maple, the sculpted neck joint provides uninhibited access to all 22 stainless steel frets. The resins in the wood are hardened, giving you a beautiful color while also providing additional stability. The StingRay Special bass pickups feature powerful neodymium magnets with a higher output that creates a dynamic range while preserving the StingRay sound. This bass also offers a redesigned 18-volt preamp for maximised headroom without clipping - ultimately giving you more power.



D'ADDARIO HUMIDITRAK

RRP: \$129.99 • daddario.com

Musical instruments can be easily damaged by large and rapid changes in humidity and temperature. Now you can protect your investment by simply placing D'Addario's Humiditrak with Blustream Technology inside your instrument or case. Humiditrak uses a patent-pending Bluetooth sensor to provide a constant stream of temperature, humidity, and impact data to the free smart phone app to alert you of hazardous conditions that can lead to diminished playability, costly repairs, and lost value to your instrument.

FENDER MTG TUBE TREMOLO

RRP: \$479 • fender.com

The name Fender is synonymous with real tube tone. The MTG Tube Tremolo brings the hypnotic sound typically found in vintage amps, and conveniently places it into a stompbox based on a genuine, US-made NOS 6205 preamp tube. The pedal features Level, Intensity and Speed controls; three oscillator wave shapes; and a dedicated tap tempo footswitch, which allows access to various note subdivisions. Designed by their in-house team of experts, the MTG Tube Tremolo is an all-original Fender circuit. The chassis is crafted from lightweight, durable anodised aluminium, and the amp jewel LED gives your pedalboard an unmistakably Fender-esque look. The switchable, back-lit LED knobs ensure you can adjust your control settings on even the darkest stage.



FISHMAN LOUDBOX MINI CHARGE

RRP: \$1,099 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The Loudbox Mini Charge is a portable, battery-powered amplifier designed to faithfully reproduce the sound of acoustic instruments and a diverse assortment of vocal or recorded accompaniments. A powerful, rechargeable battery, combined with unique power management circuitry, is specifically designed to maximise output levels and playing time. With the addition of Bluetooth wireless connectivity, you can now easily and neatly add backing tracks or other accompaniment to your performances, jams, or wherever your Loudbox Mini Charge takes you and your music.



MARKBASS BASS STRINGS

RRP: \$62.95+ • cmcmusic.com.au

The Markbass brand is well known for innovation and quality when it comes to the design and production of bass amplification. Now, Marco De Virgili is extending his Italian family's operation into string manufacturing. For centuries the Italian region of Abruzzo has been the motherland of almost

all instrument string makers. The craft of string making was born there. In fact, many of today's great brands can trace their origins to Abruzzo. History has been made with skilled hands, hard work, sacrifice and genius of the artisans of this region. Last year, Marco de Virgili decided to continue this tradition by acquiring D'Orazio Strings, who have been making strings since 1859, and bringing them into the Markbass Family. Through a combination of artisanship, the selection of innovative materials and leading edge quality control, Markbass is now producing bass strings that offer superior playability and responsiveness across the full range of the fretboard.



THE RIGHT PICK

WANT TO RIFF IT UP LIKE YOU'RE A BONAFIDE VIRTUOSO, ABOUT TO MELT A STADIUM FULL OF FACES WITH THE MOST SCORCHING SOLO OF ALL TIME? WELL, FIRST YOU'RE GONNA NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET THOSE STRINGS WOBBLING. LUCKILY, OUR NEW MATE DAVA'S GOT THAT UNDER CONTROL.

No matter how calloused your fingers get, any guitarist worth their headstock will admit that sometimes, to get the perfect notes ringing from your amp - that most sumptuously sizzling riff or that beautifully bluesy twang - a pick is the right way to go. And since they've been around since the dawn of the guitar itself, there are virtually *millions* of pick options on the market.

But what if guitar picks were more than just a little chunk of plastic you bought by the bucketload and flicked out into the crowd after every other lick? What if there was a truly premium pick out there - one which revolutionised the entire art of guitar playing, and didn't just make it easier to get your strings vibrating, but more fun, intuitive and engaging?

These are the questions that Dava set out to answer. And now, thanks to the legends at JVB

Strings, Australian guitarists are now able to enjoy their wide range of phenomenal picks. Here's a quick rundown on what you're able to get your hands on:

DAVA CONTROL PICKS

Dava first introduced its multi-gauge design pick in 1996. Since then, the original Dava Control has brought the idea of pick control to millions of musicians around the globe. All Dava Control picks feature the brand's unique multi-gauge grip, allowing players to change pick gauge on the fly simply by the way you grip it.

Choke up on the tip for a hard gauge, or release the flexible centre section for a softer gauge. It only takes a minute to get the hang of it, while at the same time you'll find all the nuances in-between. After you've played Dava picks, you'll agree that they're much more than simply picks - they're tiny

instruments in themselves.

The original Dava Control pick is made from nylon - a very hard-wearing, long-lasting material with excellent sound qualities. Nylon makes a good 'all-round' pick popular with many players and manufacturers.

DAVA ROCK CONTROL (DELTRIN) PICKS

Dava's new Rock Control picks, with their larger 'control area' and insert-molded tips, are all about sound. The red-tipped model is made from delrin - a very smooth material that glides over the strings for fast-action strumming. Delrin picks are most often used by rock, jazz and fusion players.

DAVA ROCK CONTROL (CELLULOID) PICKS

The yellow-tipped Rock Control model has a celluloid tip - the most premium pick material. First used back in the 1920s to copy the sound of tortoise shell, celluloid picks are a favourite of blues and rock players.

Dava's celluloid material is made with a one-millimetre thick tip, so it lasts a shockingly long time. And thanks to Dava's multi-gauge grip, you can have light-gauge flexibility with heavy-gauge durability.

DAVA GRIP TIPS

Nothing parallels the grip and comfort of Dava's new Grip Tips. These are the first completely over-molded rubber-grip picks. In the past, frustrated musicians have tried everything from gluing sand to even pieces of rubber to the sides of their picks. Grip Tips have officially changed everything. Dava's latest design gives musicians a comfortable, thin-profiled pick with incredible feel, sound and multi-gauge control.

DAVA MASTER CONTROL PICKS

The ultimate *cool* pick! The Master Control pick is the first ever to combine a metal edge with plastic flexibility. The nickel silver tip is the same material as guitar fret wire; if you bend notes, you'll know how smooth the strings glide over frets - this is the same for the pick.

Incredibly smooth and fast, but never 'too bright', nickel silver has a great chime, and can be totally full-on when you want it to be. And like all Dava picks, the Master Control picks are specially designed to make playing the guitar easier, more expressive, and an absolute blast to use.

Dava products are distributed in Australia by JVB Strings. For more info, head to jvbstrings.com or call (03) 9773 8583

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SLASH'S NEW STASH

SLASH AND GIBSON'S **CESAR GUEIKIAN** TALK US THROUGH THE COMPANY'S UNPRECEDENTED NEW *SLASH COLLECTION* OF SIGNATURE GUITARS, FEATURING LES PAULS IN APPETITE BURST, NOVEMBER BURST, VERMILLION BURST AND ANACONDA BURST – PLUS (FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER) TWO SLASH J-45 ACOUSTICS.

WORDS BY **RICHARD BIENSTOCK.**

It's a sunny afternoon in California, and Slash is holed up in a hotel room near the Anaheim Convention Center, where the NAMM Show – the massive music industry trade event that gathers upwards of 100,000 professionals and fans under one roof – is currently underway.

Note that the operative word in this sentence is “near”. Because, as Slash points out, the last time he actually stepped foot inside the Convention Center during NAMM, the experience was, to put it mildly, “overwhelming”.

And how could it not be, given that Slash is – and this is hardly hyperbole – maybe the most iconic and instantly recognisable guitarist of the past 30 or more years? For him to walk that convention floor amongst tens of thousands of devoted players and fans would be to create an outright frenzy of near-riot proportions, which he seems to be humbly acknowledging.

But even while Slash himself does not make an appearance at this year's NAMM (although he does still headline a killer Gibson party later in the evening; see page 36), the guitarist – and, more to the point, his guitars – are still the talk of the show. The

reason? The unveiling of Gibson's new Slash Collection.

It's worth recognising here that, while a new Slash signature guitar from Gibson is always welcomed – and, given that they're generally offered in limited runs, also quickly snatched up – the Slash Collection is something entirely different for both artist and company. Because unlike other one-off collaborations with the man who, with Guns N' Roses, went a long way toward single-handedly putting the Les Paul back on the map for rock guitarists in the late Eighties, Gibson's Slash Collection encompasses a full line of instruments. What's more, it represents the first time Gibson has undertaken an endeavour of this sort with one of its signature artists.

Moreover, the Slash Collection consists of more than just the requisite Les Pauls. At launch, the range offers four new electrics – the Slash Les Paul Standard in November Burst and Appetite Burst, as well as limited-edition Anaconda Burst and Vermillion Burst – alongside two Slash J-45 Standard signature models (in November Burst and Vermillion Burst), which represent the guitarist's

debut acoustic guitar collaboration with the company.

As for how the idea for the Slash Collection came about? “It started with a discussion between us and Slash about, ‘Where do we go from here?’,” says Gibson Chief Merchant Officer Cesar Gueikian. “Slash has such a wide variety of instruments that he's played and that have become famous at different points in his career – across different albums and different tours, with Guns N' Roses or on his own or with the Conspirators. With that in mind, the concept became, How do we now create something that is representative of all those moments in music history that Slash has been at the forefront of developing? And the answer was, ‘Let's not just work on one more guitar – let's work on a collection.’”

For Slash, one of the key selling points of collaborating with Gibson on a project of this scope was that the Slash Collection guitars would be part of the Gibson USA production line, and therefore more readily available and affordably priced than limited-edition Custom Shop models.

“It was really a revelation,” Slash says. “For the last year-and-a-half or

so I've been using a couple of Custom Shop Les Pauls that I sort of designed, but that I basically did just for myself. And they're great guitars. So when Cesar said he wanted to do a core Slash line, which was basically those guitars plus other things that I wanted to do, like bringing the Appetite guitar [the limited-edition Gibson Custom Slash “Appetite for Destruction” Les Paul] back as a USA guitar, I said, ‘F*** yeah, that'd be great.’”

The new Slash Collection Les Paul Standards use classic '59 Les Paul design and specs as their foundation, with AAA maple tops, solid mahogany bodies, mahogany necks and rosewood fingerboards with trapezoid inlays. From there, Slash and Gibson added a few personal artist touches: a C-shape neck profile, new “SlashBucker” pickups, color-coordinated hardware appointments and hand-wired electronics with orange drop capacitors (the electrics and acoustics also feature personalised accents like a Slash “Scully” signature drawing on the back of the headstock and his signature on the truss rod cover).

Some of the Slash-specific specs, the guitarist points out, “are Custom

**SLASH J-45 STANDARD**

- Vermilion Burst (left) and November Burst (right) finishes
- Rounded C-shape neck profile
- 16-inch fingerboard radius
- LR Baggs VTC pickup
- Slash's "Skully" signature drawing on the back of the headstock + signature on the truss rod cover
- Additional blank truss rod cover
- Four Slash Jim Dunlop Tortex picks

**SLASH LES PAUL LTD EDITION**

- Anaconda Burst (right) and Vermilion Burst (below) finishes
- AAA flamed maple top
- Solid mahogany body
- C-shape neck profile
- Gibson Custom Burstbucker Alnico II pickups
- Hand-wired electronics with orange drop capacitors
- Slash's new Ernie Ball strings



- Slash's "Skully" signature drawing on the back of the headstock + signature on the truss rod cover
- Vintage style brown hardshell case
- Additional blank truss rod cover
- Four Slash Jim Dunlop Tortex picks

Shop specs that I have on all my guitars. So that's what I think is so cool - in a way this is a USA guitar with pretty much every Custom Shop spec on it."

One component that Slash has not had on his previous Les Pauls - and that's because they didn't exist until now - are the brand-new "SlashBucker" pickups. Of the new design, Slash explains, "It's sort of a medium-output pickup. We wanted to focus on doing something similar to the Alnico II [humbuckers] that I've done in the past with Seymour Duncan, and since Gibson makes great pickups it seemed like the right thing for us to do it together."

“

IT WAS REALLY A REVELATION. WHEN CESAR SAID HE WANTED TO DO A CORE SLASH LINE, I SAID, "F* YEAH, THAT'D BE GREAT!"**

Explains Gueikian, "We started with a [Gibson] Burstbucker and then we modified it to carry an Alnico II magnet, which is what Slash loves playing. And the winding of the coils is offset - it's not the exact same number of rounds per bobbin. So you get that vintage PAF feel, but with the addition of the Alnico IIs. Which is the Slash sound."

The pickups in all four Les Paul models are uncovered ("I just like the way they look," Slash explains), but the Appetite Burst adds another nice visual touch - a "Zebra" color scheme reminiscent of the coils on his famous Eighties-era guitar.

As for the finishes themselves, Slash has been using custom Vermillion Burst Les Pauls onstage with the Conspiracy over the past few years, and took such a liking to the color that he wanted to incorporate it into the Collection. "It took a long time to develop that Vermillion color," Slash says. "It was something that Gibson did that I then said, 'Okay, let's take this, and then do this and this and that to it.' I went through five or six different prototypes during the last Conspiracy tour before we got to what you see."

As for the other models, the Anaconda Burst finish was briefly

available on a Slash Custom Shop model, whereas the Appetite Burst, as Gueikian informs us, "needs no introduction." The November Burst, meanwhile, is a lighter take on a traditional Tobacco Burst finish and references the '59 Les Paul that that once belonged to Aerosmith's Joe Perry (and which, thanks to Slash, does once again) and that the guitarist famously wields in Guns N' Roses' "November Rain" video.

"The original Les Paul that Slash played in the video, which was Joe Perry's guitar, had faded, but it's still a Tobacco Burst," Gueikian explains. "So I threw the idea out one day when Slash was with us at Gibson - why don't we do this and call it the November Burst? He said, 'Let me think about it.' And a couple of weeks later he came back and said, 'I like it.'"

In general, Slash says, the process of working with Gibson to craft the Collection was easy from beginning to end. "Since Cesar and everybody came onboard at Gibson it's a completely different vision," he proudly says. "There's far more of a conscientious attitude about the history and the heritage of Gibson, and also what it is that Gibson represents and where it should go in the future."

This balance between past, present and future can be seen in the second component of the Slash Collection - his new signature J-45 acoustics. The J-45 has been in production at Gibson since the 1940s, and is regarded as the brand's best-selling and most iconic acoustic design. "It's my favourite acoustic model," Slash says. "It's very straightforward, very simple. I take J-45s out on the road all the time, but I never actually thought to do an actual line of acoustics..." he laughs, "...because Gibson would just give them to me. But when they said to me, 'Why don't we do an acoustic collection, because you have your acoustic set up to your own specs as well?,' it made perfect sense."

"If anybody were to draw Slash they'd probably draw him with a Les Paul," Gueikian acknowledges. "But he's also an amazing acoustic guitar player and he plays quite a bit of acoustic guitar. So he had this J-45 that he loves at home, and we said, 'If that's the guitar you love, that's what we should be working on and we should make it just the way you like it.'"

In Slash's case, making his signature J-45 just the way he likes it meant retaining the cornerstone design elements - dreadnought-style body, Sitka spruce top, mahogany



back and sides, mahogany neck and rosewood fingerboard – that have made the model a classic, while adding a few key modifications, such as a reimagined fingerboard radius.

“Slash’s vintage J-45 has a 12-inch radius, but in our discussions we said, ‘Why don’t we also consider a flatter 16-inch radius?’” Gueikian says. “I told him it was worth trying

“**HE GETS REALLY INVOLVED IN WHAT WE DO TOGETHER – THE LOOK, THE FINISH, THE TOP, THE FEEL OF THE NECK, THE PICKUPS – HE’S INTO EVERYTHING!**

because with his style of playing and how much he bends, it might actually be something that he would end up liking. He was a little doubtful at the beginning, but we ended up making two guitars, one with a 12-inch radius and one with a 16. And he ended up loving the 16-inch radius.”

Another slight but important design adjustment came with the electronics. “The whole time I was out with Guns we were working on it and developing it,” Slash says of the improved system. “We spent a lot of time listening to different piezos and discussing the shortcomings.”

“We started with an LR Baggs VTC,” Gueikian says. “And then we began tweaking the output to try to find the right balance of preserving that vintage J-45 sound but with a higher output, which is what Slash is looking for when he’s playing live.”

The result is an instrument that offers classic acoustic tone while also meeting the needs of the modern rock player. “It’s really a guitar that was

designed to be played loud onstage, and then when you take it home and play it unplugged it’s the sound that everybody loves about a J-45,” Gueikian says.

Slash, for his part, has been using a signature J-45 on the current Guns N’ Roses tour – “I play it on ‘Patience’ and [the band’s cover of] ‘Wichita Lineman,’” he says. At home, meanwhile, he’s been putting a Slash Collection Les Paul to work on new music he’s composing for future projects.

Beyond his own use, however, one of his favourite things about the new Slash Collection guitars is that they’re not just for him. Rather, these are premium instruments that are also aimed at the typical working player.

“There used to be a time when the only way you could get a really good signature Les Paul was through the Custom Shop,” Slash says. “Which meant sending people to a place where 90 percent of them couldn’t really afford to buy the thing. So it’s really exciting to me to do this through

[Gibson] USA.”

And, promises Gueikian, there are more exciting things to come. “With Slash, the vast majority of his sound is always going to be made with a Les Paul. But the great thing about him is he has an intellectual and musical curiosity to try new things. He’s always in pursuit of... I don’t know if I’d call it pursuit of the perfect sound, but pursuit of the sound that perfectly represents him. So he gets really involved in what we do together – the look, the finish, the top, the feel of the neck, the pickups – he’s into everything. It’s an amazing experience to work with someone like that.

“So while the concept of the Slash Collection was to start with the six guitars, we also know that we can go into new and different places with him. The idea is to amplify the Slash Collection over time, and to continue to create something that is relevant and inspiring both to his longtime fans and to newer generations of players.”



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AUSTRALIAN GAY-TAR

53

TO CELEBRATE PRIDE MONTH IN JUNE, WE'RE ROUNDING OFF ON SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE BANDS AND ARTISTS WITH A STRONG QUEER PRESENCE. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.



For more than half a century, rock 'n' roll has been defined by its idiosyncrasy – the loud and livid sonics and the audacious aesthetics, a merciless middle-finger at the blandness of the mainstream's saccharine gruel. And through it all, the genre (and by extension, its culture and society) has maintained a strong undercurrent of queer identities.

As mainstream societies continue to loosen up and ditch the heteronormative rigidities of old, those identities are thriving and shining brighter than ever before – something all of us at *Australian Guitar* are excited to embrace. So, as June rolls around and the queer community huddles under the spotlight for Pride Month, we're going beyond the restraints of L, G, B, T and Q to celebrate the entire alphabet of queerness that's defined music for generations.

There are hundreds upon hundreds of incredible queer artists that've made their mark on music history over the decades – but alas, we're bound by page space, so we're focussing here on 26 of our favourites. Consider this a launching-off point, though: make a playlist of bangers from the badass bands and artists below, then dive deeper into the rabbit hole of undeniably delicious queer music that exists right now!

AGAINST ME!
TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES



A is for **Against Me!**, the outspoken, no-punches-pulled punks that defined the '00s with their crazily catchy hooks and politically charged anthems, then revolutionised punk itself in the 2010s with their instantly classic 2014 opus *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* – an autobiographical rollercoaster ride through the struggles and storms weathered by frontwoman Laura Jane Grace, pummelling down a track built on punchy guitars and concrete-shattering yells.

B is for **The B-52s**, the new-wave rock legends you'd likely know most for their unforgettable (if a tad schlocky) pop hit "Rock Lobster". Though their lineup has gone through its fair share of shake-ups over the years, the B-52s have been riding the wave of their bright pop-rock buoyancy since the mid '70s, with no plans to hop off the board any time soon.

C is for **Courtney Barnett**, whose powerfully relatable, heart-on-sleeve slacker-pop has made her a household name for Australian rock aficionados. She writes anthems for the average queer millennial barrelling through their 20s with no clear vision of where they'll end up, but a keenness to enjoy the ride there either way. Few

artists have mastered such a poignant balance of simplicity and depth.

D is for **Doll Skin**, a fearless force of blistering punk energy that's sure to test the limits of your hi-fi setup. The way they fuse radiant pop vibes with coarse and crunchy shredding is something to marvel at – they pose the perfect soundtrack for your post-Mardi Gras afterparty where the glitter on your cheeks is smeared with sweat and you're ready to mosh out all the vodka shots you've done.

E is for **Elton John**, one of the most iconic gay men in rock and pop, with a legacy (and discography) far too broad for two sentences in a listicle. Though his touring days may (soon) be

H IS FOR HALESTORM

whose grungy, metallic alt-rock have made them a staple for lineups at festivals like Download and a mainstay on playlists of empowering anthems. Welding her guitar like a machine gun in the boss level of a *DOOM* game, Lzzy Hale is undeniably one of the fiercest frontwomen in the game.



over, the blazing iridescence and valiant eccentricity that he brings to music at large is timeless.

Fis for **Florist**, a quadrant of New York indie-rockers quickly soaring up the ranks with their loveably lowkey soundscapes and songwriting that comes straight from the soul. Their 2019 album, *Emily Alone*, is one of the cutest and most charismatic releases in recent memory – definitely one for long drives and late nights where a mood-setter is needed.

Gis for **G.L.O.S.S.** (short for Girls Living Outside Society's Shit), a painfully short-lived hardcore unit whose two years of gruff and gritty musical chaos immediately cemented them in the annals of heavy music history. Devoutly trans-feminist and DIY to their core, the influence that G.L.O.S.S. continues to have on new punks en masse is proof of their unwavering legacy – one listen to their mind-melting EP *Trans Day Of Revenge* will show you why.

Is for **Indigo Girls**, the legendary Georgian folk-rockers set to release their landmark 15th album in 2020. The duo – best friends since primary school – have been outspoken queer-rights activists since their breakthrough in the mid '80s, which is particularly notable given the folk and country scene's rigid gatekeeping at the time. They've collaborated with everyone from Brandi Carlile to Pink, but it's their work as a pair that's most resplendent.

Jis for **Julien Baker**, an emo-folk heartthrob from Tennessee whose two solo albums have garnered her an avalanche of (well-deserved) praise. Though a follow-up to her 2017 album *Turn Out The Lights* is hotly anticipated, in 2018 she formed the supergroup Boygenius with fellow queer icons of the modern indie-rock landscape, Lucy Dacus and Phoebe Bridgers. Their eponymous debut EP is simply jaw-dropping.

Kis for **Kitchens Of Distinction**, a trio of English alt-rock hellions (and early pioneers of shoegaze and post-punk) whose unapologetically sharp themes – like, in addition to their then-controversial overt queerness, reveries of killing ex-PM Margaret Thatcher – made them outcasts to the mid-'80s mainstream, but heroes of the underground to this very day.

R IS FOR ROB HALFORD

the magnetising frontman of Judas Priest and arguably the most notable gay man in metal, partly due to the fact he came out in a time when the genre's culture wasn't particularly known for its inclusivity. Nevertheless, Halford's tenacious persona and tough-as-nails vocal sleight have made him a fine frontrunner for queer representation in heavy music.



L is for **Laura Pergolizzi**, one of pop's most prodigious virtuosos, having lent her impenetrable songwriting talents to such high-ranking names as Cher, Rihanna, the Backstreet Boys and Céline Dion (to name just a few). She's also a breathtaking vocalist and guitarist in her own right, dropping five albums of destructively catchy pop-rock jams since the early '00s.

M is for **Moaning Lisa**, the Canberran alt-rock heartthrobs who blew up at the tail end of the 2010s with their loud 'n' luminescent "Carrie (I Want A Girl)" – a powerful anthem for sapphics everywhere, and a damn good rock tune on its own merit. Keep an eye out for this fiery foursome's debut LP in the not-too-distant future!

N is for **Nona Hendryx**, a genre-bending goddess who, since the turn of the '60s, has lent her voice to everything from hard-rock heavyweights to funk classics, with the occasional new-wave banger in-between. Her solo work is littered with hits, though it's in doo-wop trio Labelle that she made her biggest waves – if you haven't found yourself jamming to "Lady Marmalade" at least once in your life, you probably grew up either deaf of deathly sheltered.

O is for **Openside**, the Kiwi emo-pop troupe that unfortunately called it a day at the start of 2020. They were on the cusp of greatness, too, with their debut EP *Push Back* positing a powerful new force of sharply produced pop ebullience.

P is for **Placebo**, who introduced most of us to the sheer power of androgyny in the '90s, with Brian Molko a shapeshifting superstar bending gender just as dextrously as his band did with genre. Records like *Sleeping With Ghosts* and *Loud Like Love* are certain to be found on the Spotify accounts of queer teens finding their footing – the band's coming-of-age pop-rock anthems are designed for high-schooler relatability, and we can certainly vouch that they excel at that.

Q is for **Queen**, whose larger-than-life hooks and grandiose poignancy virtually invented stadium-rock. Freddie Mercury himself is a timeless queer icon for countless reasons, but it's his rapturous passion, deft refusal to water down his bravado for mainstream audiences, and inescapable wit that we most admire him for. And, strewn all throughout Queen's discography, you'll find some of the most face-meltingly brilliant riffs ever written.

S is for **Sleater-Kinney**, our go-to girls for a Sunday night sesh of prickly and punkish '90s nostalgia. A couple when the band made their breakthrough, frontwomen Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker shred – to this day, no less – with a fiery and frenetic adroitness that's made them staples of both the punk scene at large and the liner pages of lesbian teens' schoolbooks around the world.

T is for **Tegan And Sara**, the identical twins whose dreamy, downbeat bops have made them a favourite of playlist curators for coffee shops around the globe. They're perhaps best known for 2007's *The Con*, which stands today not only as their best album, but one of the best indie-rock albums of all time.



Z IS FOR ZIGGY STARDUST

the David Bowie alter-ego that outright erupted with flamboyance at the turn of the '70s. Bowie himself has never shied away from his androgynous caprice or sexual ambiguity, but it's old mate Ziggy who really embraced the glitz, glam and unforgivingly undisguised queerness. At the time, he was quite a controversial fellow, inflaming the souls of conservatives everywhere with his sharp high-heels and searing diva-esque attitude. But did that stop him from leading a full-on assault on the mainstream? Hell no. A truly timeless icon of queer liberation.

U is for **Uh Huh Her**, a soul-tickling synthpop outfit with three of the genre's most riveting albums to their name. Currently on hiatus, the LA troupe have a wealth of gems downright perfect for the dancefloor, and an archive of live footage so fantastic that we're counting down the very seconds until they make their return to the stage (with some Australian shows, maybe? Please?)

V is for **Villagers**, the Irish indie-folk project of singer-songwriter Conor O'Brien, who, alongside his four inimitably talented bandmates, churns out albums so intensely enthralling that it's impossible to listen to just one track without letting the rest of them unfurl after.

W is for **Worriers**, who are bonafide punks at their core, but deal in what they fittingly describe as 'survival pop'. Breakout hit "They/Them/Theirs" became a defacto non-binary anthem upon its 2015

release, but the entirety of three-LP discography is jammed to the brim with massively relatable hooks designed to get fists pumping in the pit.

X is for **The XX**, who churn out some of the most infectious indie-pop this side of the River Thames. There's a dreamy, highschool-crush-esque intimacy that drenches their discography at large, axewoman and singer Romy Croft driving the force with melodies that leap for the heart and sink deep into the soul. Definitely one for the dancefloor.

Y is for **Yungblud**, the edgy, no-f***s-given Brit whose bratty incandescence sparked a punkish new wave of rebellion in the pop sphere. He's a self-confessed 21st century liability, bounding around the shop with a garish, mismatched aesthetic and merciless Yorkshire snarl – but he's also got a big ol' heart to him, much of his work, at its core, touching on deep societal issues and personal humility. 📺



DISTORTION FOR DAYS!

CRUNCH, FILTH, MAYHEM! READ OUR EXPERT ROUND-UP OF THE BEST HIGH-GAIN DISTORTION PEDALS AROUND. WORDS BY **JONATHAN HORSLEY**.

Distortion? We all want it, and many players just can't live without it. In this golden age of stompboxes – with all kinds of small-scale boutique FX manufacturers trading blows with industry titans such as MXR, TC Electronic and Boss – there's never been a better time to find the best distortion pedal to turn your pristine cleans into dirt. Here we have some hardy perennials and some ubiquitous picks from the big players, but then we've also got an oddball gain machine from EarthQuaker Devices with one knob and that's that.

Any one of these pedals will turn a clean guitar amp into a fire-breathing monster, so if that tweed combo isn't cutting it for your doom-metal band, boy, have you come to the right place. Each of these distortion pedals is designed to weaponise your guitar tone, so whether you're looking for the best distortion pedal for metal, rock or beyond, we've hunted down the best options for you.

WHAT IS DISTORTION?

So, let's talk about what we mean by distortion, and how this might affect your hunt for the best distortion pedal. As with anything with an aesthetic purpose, gear – and how it sounds – is subjective. There are no rules so long as the tone speaks to you – and ultimately, that's the most important thing.

This list focuses on distortion pedals, but naturally there's some overlap between distortion,

overdrive and fuzz. All dirty up your tone. But where overdrive doesn't change the fundamental character of your guitar's signal, distortion is more aggressive. It clips your signal harder. Fuzz clips it harder still, so you really lose definition.

Distortion pedals are best applied to clean tones. Just stomp on the switch, and your metal/punk/hard rock dreams await.

WHICH DISTORTION PEDAL IS RIGHT FOR ME?

In the world of heavy metal, distortion is the most-prized raw material, and the evolution of metal and its subgenres through the ages has seen the black t-shirt dollar buttressing the economy for high-gain pedals. For some metal players, a pedal that can deliver thick, saturated distortion, often with a tight compression to it, and definitely some rich harmonics, is essential.

If you are playing towards metal's extremes, you'll want a whole heap of distortion. Some scenes, such as early '90s Stockholm death-metal, coalesced around a single distortion pedal, the Boss HM-2; they dimed everything and it sounded horrible but brilliant. As a rule of thumb, however, it's always good to use just enough gain to get the job done, and not to use it as a crutch.

Features that can enhance a distortion pedal include its EQ, which lets you shape your tone (with three- and even four-band EQs being the gold standard), and imaginative switching options such as selectable clipping modes, which let you choose between different voices of distortion. A little versatility goes a long way, even when melting faces.

THE BEST DISTORTION PEDALS AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW



FENDER PUGILIST

Controls: Tone A, Gain A, Tone B, Gain B, Blend, Blend on/off, Bass boost, Level

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- Sounds excellent
- Tweak-able
- It's a steal for its price

Cons:

- ♥ High-gain outshines the crunch
- ♥ Blend might cause confusion at first

Fender have stacked the Pugilist with all the gain you need, and even if it takes a bit of time to dial in what you need and negotiate the two gain channels via the blend, there's so much joy to be had.

Yes, it can function as an overdrive, but we're on the hunt for the best distortion pedals, and the Pugilist understands this, with oodles of gain that can be shaped to react to your pickups. Mode A is suited for more overdrive/crunch, while Mode B saturates the tone for a more modern metal sound. The bass boost is excellent for fattening up single coil tones.



WAMPLER SOVEREIGN

Controls: Volume, Mid contour, Tone, Gain, Bright/even switch, Gain/boost switch

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: Relay true bypass with soft switch

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- ▲ Hugely versatile tone control
- ▲ Well thought-out gain structure

Cons:

- ♥ Expensive
- ♥ Some sag with high-output pickups

Brian Wampler has packed a heap of features into a small enclosure. The Sovereign could probably fight in the overdrive category but has so much beef in its gain structure that goes way beyond.

The Sovereign's controls have changed name through the years - from "mid behaviour" to "mid contour", but their mastery over the pedal's midrange and highs is ever reliable. The pedal's soul lies in that mid contour.

The even/bright switch lets you toggle between more of a mid-heavy sound and top-heavy treble, while the standard/boost chooses between responsive overdriven tones and more gnarly levels of gain.



MXR M75 SUPER BADASS '75

Controls: Output, Distortion, Bass, Mid, Treble

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- ▲ Low noise, large output
- ▲ Three-band EQ
- ▲ Produces versatile analog distortion

Cons:

- ♥ Unconvincing at low and high gain extremes

Like the Sovereign, the M75 has a default voice that speaks in British EL34 tube crunch. Keep everything at noon to maintain that sort of equilibrium, but if you're chasing heaps of ugly-delicious metal gain, roll it forward to 2 o'clock onwards.

The three-band EQ is everything in changing the character of the M75's gain. Take out some of those mids for late '80s Metallica scooped crunch, boost them for that '70s vibe.

When it comes to the best distortion pedals, the M75 is a no-brainer that takes seconds to find the tone you want - an indestructible little powerhouse of versatile analog distortion.



JHS MODDED PROCO RAT 'PACK RAT'

Controls: Distortion, Filter, Volume, Three-way mode toggle

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- ▲ Excellent upgrade adds tone options
- ▲ Epic sustain and harmonics
- ▲ Filthy gain

Cons:

- ♥ Close to fuzz at the extremes

Like the DS-1, the ProCat RAT is the stuff of legend, favoured by James Hetfield, Thom Yorke, Dave Grohl... It has similarly been modded a thousand times. This Pack Rat model from JHS pedals upgrades the pedal and installs a three-way clipping selector for vintage, open boost and turbo RAT modes.

The character of the old LMN308 is here, but under the hood the components have been upgraded. The cheapo capacitors are gone, their replacements made from metal film and tantalum. There's less noise. But let's not kid ourselves, you can't tame a RAT. Pure grind, rich and fizzing distortion awaits!



BOSS DS-1

Controls: Level, Tone, Distortion

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: Buffered

Pros:

- Excellent value
- Classic gain structure
- Easily modded

Cons:

- Mids can be thin

The Boss DS-1's set-up is simple: level, tone and distortion, with a rubber-topped foot-pedal to switch it on and off. The pedal is happy adding a little crunch, some extra oomph, but it keeps the integrity of your guitar tone steady when dimed.

There's plenty of versatility. The DS-1's tone knob really can tweak your highs, perfect for pinch harmonics. Dial it back to thicken up your rhythm tone or to fatten up single coil pickups.



KHDK DARK BLOOD

Controls: Gain, Volume, Doom, Gate, Hi/lo switch

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- Supreme metal tone
- Inbuilt noise gate

Cons:

- Costs a lot of dough
- You spent your money on wah

Metallica's flamboyant lead guitarist knows his way around a distorted metal tone and the Dark Blood is one of the best distortion pedals thanks to a hefty tone modelled in the high-gain American tube amp style.

The gain is tight and thick, with plenty of bass response courtesy of the appropriately named "doom" control, which intuitively shapes your low-end.

You can find some really devastating rhythm tones setting the hi/lo switch to lo and tweaking said "doom" setting, but an onboard noise suppressor keeps things sane and there are plenty of sparkling highs to be dialled in on what is a great all-rounder for metal.



EARTHQUAKER DEVICES ACAPULCO GOLD V2

Controls: Volume

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- Loud and gnarly distortion
- Simple to operate

Cons:

- Lack of EQ
- High-gain fuzz isn't for everyone

The Acapulco Gold is dominated by giant output volume knob and its brief is devastatingly simple: to bring the power and tone of a Sunn Model T amp and house it inside a small pedal.

And it works: at low volumes - say, nine o'clock on the dial - this works as a neat little overdrive, but keep turning it clockwise and the gain - and the volume - keeps coming. The final destination is a thick, fat and open distortion, with a little fuzz overtones, that makes for amazing '70s metal tones.

Adjust your guitar's tone knob to tease different voicings from the pedal. And wear earplugs.



TC ELECTRONIC EYEMASTER

Controls: Gain, Volume

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- ▲ Classic death metal tone
- ▲ Simple design
- ▲ Great value

Cons:

- ♥ A one-trick wolverine

Another small enclosure pedal of simple design housing an enormous and classic metal distortion tone: it must be a Boss? No, but the Eyemaster, named after the Entombed song, is unashamedly channeling the dimed Boss HM-1 Heavy Metal with equally dimed Peavey Bandit for that classic Swedish death metal sound.

Designed and built in Denmark, this pedal is indestructible, but it comes with a three-year warranty just in case.

Push it all the way for death metal nastiness, dark, raw fuzz energy. There's just gain and level to play with, but relax, TC Electronic fixed the tone. They know why you're here; you took the left hand path.



WALRUS AUDIO IRON HORSE LM308 V2

Controls: Level, Tone, Distortion, Three-way mode toggle

Sockets: Input, output, power

Bypass: True

Power: Nine-volt power supply, nine-volt battery

Pros:

- ▲ Switchable clipping options
- ▲ Excellent gain structure

Cons:

- ♥ Takes a bit of adjusting

The Iron Horse V2 sees the unit updated with a more dynamic tone control and a new level control that makes it easier to dial in unity gain (i.e. when the pedal's output level is the same as when it isn't in the signal chain). The distortion circuit has been tweaked too for more subtle low-gain tones.

Key features include the three-way toggle switch that selects between clipping diodes letting you choose from slightly compressed to more compressed and totally open distorted tones.

The enclosure is finished with some neat artwork from illustrator Adam Forster. We'd love to see a craft beer tie-in.



DIEZEL HERBERT PREAMP

Controls: Midcut master, Midcut intensity, Normal master, Gain, Treble, Middle, Bass, Presence, Deep

Sockets: Input, remote, to clean amp output, to power amp output

Bypass: True

Power: 12-to-18-volt DC power supply

Pros:

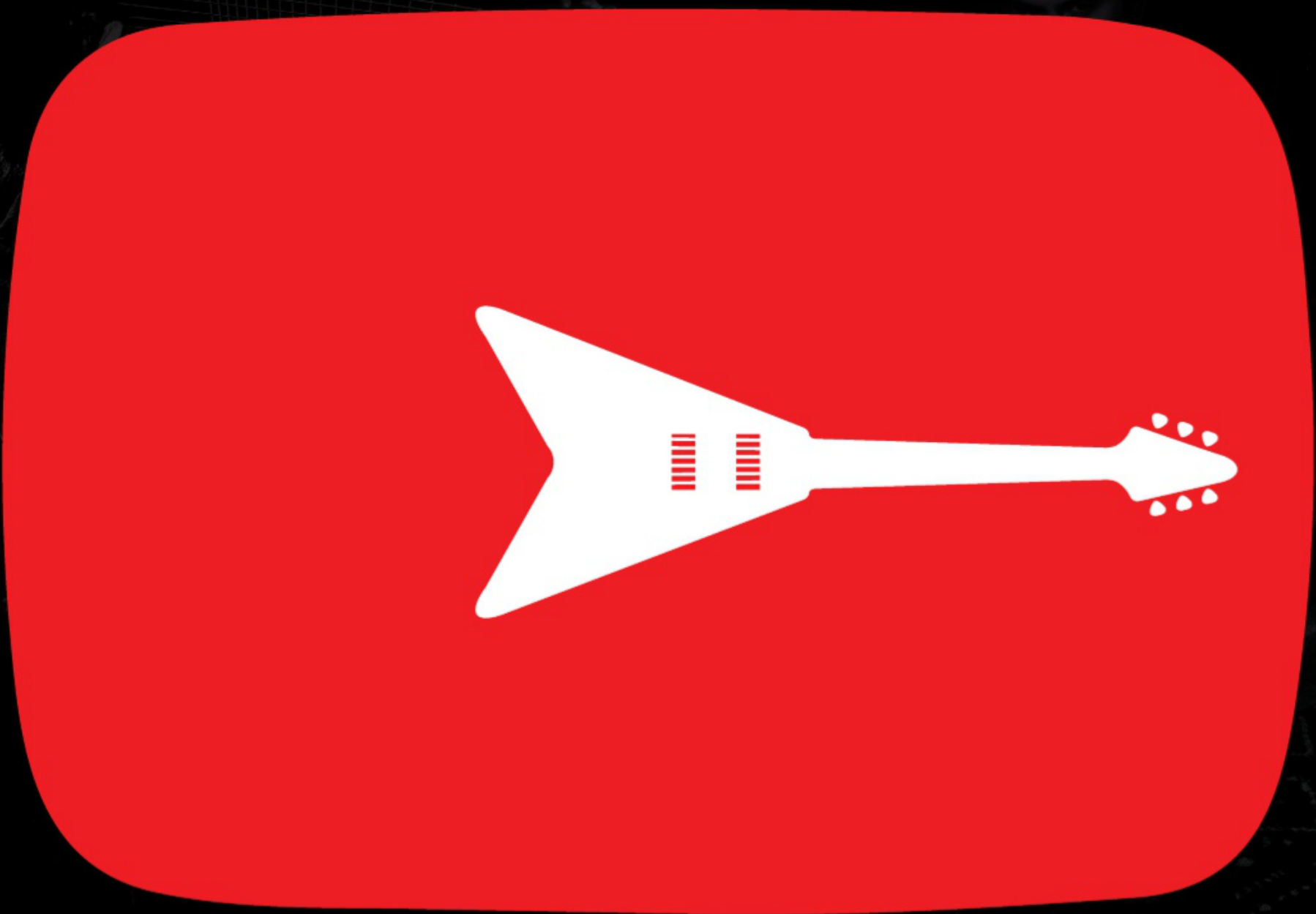
- ▲ Incredible metal amp tones
- ▲ Switchable mids

Cons:

- ♥ It's pricey
- ♥ Takes a bit of getting used to

The Herbert is not a distortion pedal in the purest sense but it can sure be used as such. Taking the city-leveling tone of the Diezel's 180-watt lead head and putting it on the floor, this is a sure-fire way of adding high-gain filth to your signal.

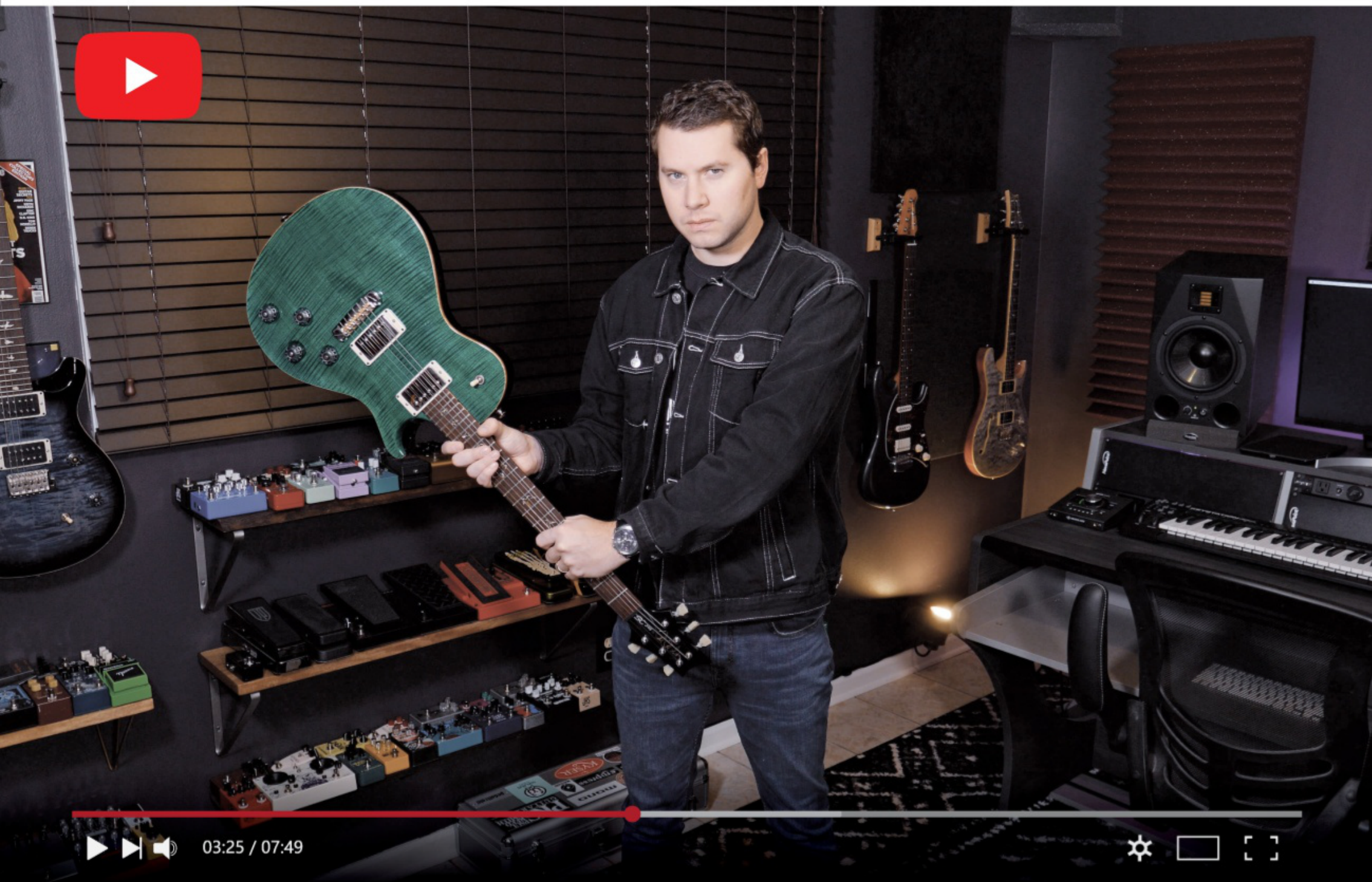
This stompbox ain't cheap but the amp it takes its preamp circuitry from isn't either, and featuring the same dynamic EQ options as its namesake, the Herbert has incredible distortion on-tap. Outputs let you send to a clean amp or alternatively through a power amp or effects loop.



ALGORITHM AND BLUES

A handful of YouTube guitar heroes show how to get their music (and maybe even their jokes) out to a massive audience - no record label or radio play needed.

WORDS BY **ADAM KOVAC.**



Pictured: Tyler Larson

The staccato rhythm of the opening riff to Trivium's "In Waves" is blasting through Chicago's House of Blues when frontman Matt Heafy announces a special guest. Howard Jones, the hulking former frontman of Killswitch Engage and current face of fellow metalcoreers Light The Torch, comes strutting onstage and unleashes a blood-curdling scream before walking over and wrapping his arm around another guy who's been asked to sit in.

Leaning into the crowd as he palm-mutes, Jared Dines is wearing his signature backwards baseball cap and the biggest grin imaginable. Dines might not have the portfolio of Heafy or Jones, but he's got his own kind of fame. Over the past few years, Dines has reached millions of eyeballs and eardrums – not through headlining tours, but through YouTube videos with titles like "Things Beginner Guitarists Say" and "If Lady Gaga Was Metal".

With more than two million subscribers, Dines has become one of the most prominent figures in the metal YouTube world, with a brand based on equal parts goofy comedy, actual musical chops and a deep knowledge of metalhead life in general and guitar culture in particular.

Video might have killed the radio star, but it's unlikely that streaming is going to kill the metal god. Still, a creative pack of musicians, equally comfortable with cameras and Les Pauls, are showing that it's possible to get your music – and

your jokes – out to a wide audience: no record company or radio play needed.

Days after the Chicago show, as Trivium are getting ready to play in the North Dakota town that pop-culture writer Chuck Klosterman once called "Fargo, Rock City", Dines is reflecting on his unlikely rise to becoming one of the leaders of the "YouTube guitar universe" pack. "I definitely had no idea what I was doing when I first started," he says. "I've always been a huge fan of music and metal and guitar. Ever since I was a kid, I enjoyed making little home videos."

The music world can be a self-serious place, with artists spouting profound-sounding sound bites about artistry and integrity. But the day-to-day absurdities are rife for piss-taking: for every moment of artistic breakthrough in a writing session, most rock musicians go through hours of mundanity in guitar stores, studios, jam rooms and tour vans. That's why Dines videos such as "Things Audio Engineers Say in the Studio" or "Things Guitarists Never Say" hit such a chord.

But while being funny for the sake of being funny is great, it's ultimately a means to an end. While Dines is making some money from YouTube, it's more important as a marketing tool, pushing fans to buy his merch or attracting sponsors.

For several years, Dines teamed up with fellow YouTuber Ryan "Fluff" Bruce in hard rock band Rest, Repose but took great pains to say his channel wasn't meant to promote the band, even as it brought in bigger crowds to the shows (Dines

left the band in February, FYI). But other YouTube guitarists are less hesitant about making videos to help sell themselves in other ways.

Tyler Larson, who posts under the name Music Is Win, is another content creator who enjoys poking at the quirks of guitar culture. His video "Bass Is Easy" will probably get chuckles from six-stringers, while sending our low-end brethren into screaming fits about Billy Sheehan.

In his videos, Larson – a former Guitar World contributor – regularly pushes his Guitar Super System subscription series of lessons, offering a taste on YouTube by demonstrating riffs, giving pointers on gear and dissecting theory. But unlike hundreds of other teachers putting up dry videos demonstrating the CAGED system, Larson's method relies on a healthy dose of screwing around.

"I don't think putting up a video saying, 'Hey, I'm

"I figured I would try and gain some attention, just injecting a little bit of humour into what I do and creating stuff I would want to watch."

TYLER LARSON

“YouTube collaborations are incredible. They benefit both artists, and everyone involved gets something out of it. You’re sharing your market.”

SARAH LONGFIELD

a guitar teacher, go buy my stuff’ was a very good value proposition to pitch to people on the internet,” he explains. “I figured I would try and gain some attention, just injecting a little bit of humour into what I do and creating stuff I would want to watch.”

Of course, still others are using YouTube to push the music they’ve written. Take Leo Moracchioli, the lanky, braided-beard Norwegian whose metal covers of pop hits have gotten him mainstream radio play and invitations to take part on the concert-on-a-cruise Shiprocked alongside Stone Sour and Seether. Over the past four years, Moracchioli has tackled everything from Adele to ZZ Top, Cotton Eyed Joe to “The Macarena.” He didn’t invent reimagining songs in genres very different from the original, but his tireless work ethic (he’s posted more than 260 covers in less than five years, along with miscellaneous vlogs and

tutorials) and visual panache set him apart. Sure, you can find other metal covers of the Bloodhound Gang’s pornographic hit “The Bad Touch,” but can you find one where the artist plays every instrument and dresses up like a big fuzzy rabbit or wears happy-face contact lenses in the music video?

Moracchioli originally was doing YouTube videos in conjunction with recording bands in Frog Leap Studios, the facility he opened in his home. For two years, though, he’s been focusing solely on his channel, where he directs viewers to entire compilations of his covers on Amazon and iTunes.

“I’m one guy sitting here with 20 albums in four years, and it’s selling like crazy,” he says. “Without naming numbers, it’s insane financial craziness for me, especially compared to some of the guys. What I earn most on is selling my music, and then you have the ads and Patreon site.”

While Moracchioli rarely plays live, preferring to spend his time with his wife and daughter (both of whom have made appearances in his videos – content creation can be a family business), Sarah Longfield has used a decade-long YouTube presence to launch a more conventional music career. Less skit or comedy-focused than others, her channel showcases her mind-boggling technique and chronicles her evolution from covering Pantera and Meshuggah tunes as a teen to her recent output that, while still based on insane guitar playing, owes more to electronic artists like Bonobo. She’s still keeping a foot in the metal game, recently touring with Wintersun,

Felix Martin and Archspire, but says with a record deal in hand, she’s hoping to move away from that genre and bring her YouTube followers along for the ride.

“It ended up being a great resume for me because when the label signed me, they said, ‘We saw you on YouTube, and your video got a million views. Why haven’t you been signed?’,” she says.

Music has long been a competitive calling – back in the era when bands would kill to get their music on the radio, when getting consumers to drop their cash on a CD was the ultimate end-goal, bands were fighting for limited resources. But consumers now watch YouTube for free, and artists are learning that they don’t need to fight. Run a piece of string between content-creating guitarists, and you’ll soon end up with a gigantic knot. Dines, Longfield and Larson were among the participants in an all-star team up that produced the song and video “Dread Machine.” Moracchioli has had substantial amounts of cameos on his various covers. While touring the country for a video series based around visiting guitar stores in all 50 states, Larson says he’s hoping to stop in to see some of his favourites and possibly record some team-ups.

“YouTube collaborations are incredible. They benefit both artists, and everyone involved gets something out of it. You’re sharing your market,” Longfield says. “All of a sudden, your videos pop up on their sidebar, their videos pop up on your sidebar. It’s a bunch of Type A, go-getter people who just want to work, work, work all the time. It’s

Pictured: Sarah Longfield





Pictured: Jared Dines

so inspiring to be around. The music industry is the polar opposite! Everybody is fighting tooth and nail to get anywhere.”

“There definitely is a whole community there,” Moracchioli adds. “Especially at the Winter NAMM Show in Anaheim, California, [where] we met, and I’ve become friends with a lot of them, especially the U.K. guys. We all know each other. Rob Scallon, I talk with him all the time on Facebook. We all know each other and if there’s anything, we ask, ‘Hey, want to join on this or this?’ If it doesn’t fit, it doesn’t fit, but we’re all very cool. It never felt like a business; it’s just fellow musicians helping each other out because we’re all in the same situation.”

In his early days, Dines got a major boost via collaborations with fellow old-timer Scallon, and the two still frequently trade riffs and solos for their fans’ entertainment. (Scallon also gave an early boost to Longfield, sparking a series in which the two cover Slayer and Cannibal Corpse songs on ukuleles, to hilarious and frequently terrifying effect.) It’s a fun way to keep things fresh, but also to meet new friends and business partners.

“It’s a smart thing to do – collabs are great,” Dines says. “A lot of people have collab’ed with me and a lot of smaller YouTubers see a growth from that. I’m sure I’ve seen growth from previous collabs as well. It’s more like I’m a fan of that artist or that musician, and I think we can do something really cool together.”

Talking to musician YouTubers, they’ll deny the cross-channel appearances are simply about analytics. None would admit to looking at a particularly successful video and copying it for more

views. There’s an admission of looking at what’s worked well for them and keeping it in mind, but gaming the site’s algorithmic system doesn’t hold much appeal.

“I think people say the phrase ‘YouTube algorithm’ without actually understanding what it means,” Larson says. “As far as I know, if your content is good, then people watch. I think there’s maybe certain elements to the platform that will boost your video up, but I’m not as concerned with that as I am with creating the best content. The only thing I can control is how good the content is.”

Another thing that can be frighteningly out of control for a creator is how much of their personal life can bleed into their work. Though there’s no paparazzi chasing them, fanbases can be hungry to know the real person. Some cases can be harder to deal with than others.

“How much are you willing to give of yourself?” Longfield asks. “If I had it my way, I would much rather be releasing music and art and stuff without my face attached to it. I don’t really love being in front of the camera. I hate to say it, but as a girl, there’s so much focus on your appearance and aesthetic, it kind of takes away from what I’m creating. Positively or negatively, people view it through a different lens.”

Even without that kind of pressure, there can be demands to share more than you might want. After suffering burnout, Dines felt the obligation to post a video explaining his exhaustion after years of posting consistently. More recently, Dines confessed to his followers that he had spent years quietly suffering from depression and anxiety but

vowed to continue making videos while seeking help for his mental health.

“If it’s anything that affects my work or my state of mind or something serious, I try and keep them in touch with that,” Dines says. “I feel like that’s fair to them, to know what to expect from me, what I’m going through and just be real with them... . When you’re in a job that’s solely based on what your mind can create, sometimes you just can’t come up with a song. You can’t come up with a new joke, you’re just not in the right mindset.”

While there is a tight-knit guitar scene on YouTube, it’s a field that gets more crowded by the day. Since the end of MTV’s video era, countless unsigned artists have turned to YouTube as a means of promotion. With a good camera and some creativity, there’s nothing to visually separate some weekend warriors from the rock stars with thousands of dollars in their video budgets.

The approach hasn’t gone unnoticed. Rather than YouTubers trying to emulate rock stars, it’s gone the other way. Even as more people

“...If you know a little about video and music and maybe recording and being creative, YouTube is perfect.”

LEO MORACCHIOLI

“...It’s more like I’m a fan of that artist or that musician, and I think we can do something really cool together.”

JARED DINES

join up in their bid to become YouTube famous, conventionally famous people are rushing in, eager to find new audiences who are growing up in an era where watching videos on cable television must sound adorably quaint. Heafy is typical of this new approach, running a successful channel of his own and streaming himself pwning n00bs at Fortnite on his Twitch channel. Given the band’s comfort with that type of controlled intimacy, it was a logical step for Dines to hit the road with Trivium, uploading regular content from the tour to his channel, from backstage looks at life on the road to footage of the shows.

With established players getting into the game, the YouTube field is crowded – a gigantic year-end

collaboration of shredders posted to Dines’ channel showcased 30 guitarists soloing their brains out. For those just getting into the game, it can seem like a daunting task to try and make a name for themselves. The bad news is, it is really, really difficult. The good news is, those who have already made it have some words of advice.

“Try to know a little about everything,” Moracchioli says. “I’m not a fantastic guitar player or video guy, but I know a little about everything. If you know a little about video and music and maybe recording and being creative, YouTube is perfect.”

“It’s really just sticking with it,” Longfield adds. “You have to do it so much and for so long. Some people can just start up, and right away they pick the right thing and do it at the right time and it works, but I think more than anything consistency is key.”

In addition to that consistency, Larson says aspiring YouTubers should have authenticity – a creative voice that is true to them – and quality – a desire to keep improving on their content, whether it be figuring out better camera angles or working on their voiceovers.

“It is very hard and it’s something you have to work for like anything else,” he says. “I will say, it’s probably the best job in the world because of what doors it opens up if you’re willing to put in that grind. It can sometimes take years, depending on

your content type to get to a place where you’re feeling comfortable. The one thing I’ve learned about all YouTubers who are successful that I’ve met is the work ethic. It’s really hard to be your own boss and not punch a time clock, but it’s also really liberating.”

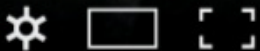
In some ways, being a good YouTuber is the same as being a good guitarist. You’re constantly looking to improve, looking for inspiration, trying to find your own way of expressing yourself that’s different from everybody else out there. It’s said that if you hear Steve Vai or Slash or David Gilmour play a note through somebody else’s rig, you can still tell it’s them. The same goes for making videos – you have to hone your technique until you’re unmistakably you. Take it from Dines, a guy who turned messing around with a video camera and making skits with his friends into guest spots onstage with bonafide rock stars.

“Don’t try to be your favourite YouTuber, don’t take what your favourite YouTuber does and re-emulate it,” he says. “I see a lot of that with not just my content but other guitar players’ content as well. Try and do something original. You can do it with something you’re really knowledgeable about and something you can really give to YouTube that hasn’t been given to them 10,000 times already.”

Pictured: Leo Moracchiolo



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RIFFS FIT FOR A PRINCE

JOSHUA ROTHKOPF RANKS THE TEN MOST RIGHTEOUS GUITAR MOMENTS FROM THE PURPLE ONE'S OUTRAGEOUSLY FUNKY BODY OF WORK.

The response to Prince's death in April 2016 was a global rainstorm of emotion. He was many things to many people: a whirling funketeer who woke up sexual urges, an iconoclast who inspired individual expression, a symbol of everything pop could be.

Belatedly, though, a consensus is forming behind his primary status as a fearsome guitarist. Prince was so gifted, he overshadowed this trait himself, with tastefully plucked hits like Kiss, Cream and Raspberry Beret. You already know those tunes.

Here, however, is a list of the truly mind-blowing numbers – some of them deep cuts, others from Prince's essential 1984 masterpiece *Purple Rain* – that should convince even skeptics.

Note: Only the six-string sizzle of Prince is included (sorry, *Revolution* sideman Dez Dickerson and your mighty solo for "Little Red Corvette").

10. "U GOT THE LOOK"

The Jessica Rabbit of 12-bar-blues tunes, "U Got The Look" is the hip-swivelling high point of Prince's majestic double album *Sign o' the Times*. Never before had he saturated his sound in so much distortion; the treatment becomes a wink to the listener that's just as explicit as the lyrics.

Unholy squeals and atonal moans emanate from a disturbed, almost Frippian place. When Prince finally cuts loose with some pentatonic licks, his sexual hunger is a palpable thing.

9. "ALEXA DE PARIS"

Prince's black-and-white movie musical *Under The Cherry Moon* repulsed a majority of critics and audiences, but the music – collected in the *Parade* LP – signalled a high degree of creative growth.

Heard onscreen (but only purchasable as the flip side of a single) is this incredible instrumental, which even a skilled pair of ears could easily confuse for primo Jeff Beck. Lushly supported by the orchestrations of longtime collaborator Clare Fischer, Prince takes a song-long excursion into mysterious modes, abrupt key changes and, ultimately, his most adventurously exposed solo flight. It's one hell of a trip.

8. "SHE'S ALWAYS IN MY HAIR"

As confusing as Prince's psychedelic *Around The World In A Day* album was for the mainstream rock audience he had just won over with *Purple Rain*, the artist was apparently doing exactly what he wanted.

Take this fierce castaway track that he relegated to the scrap heap (it probably got more spins in

guitar-centric households than the A-side). The central riff is hard as nails, and when he explodes into a yowling mid-song solo, the speedy precision of his runs is daunting.

7. "PURPLE RAIN"

Closing out its titular record on an emotional high, Prince's soulful anthem of atonement is stuffed to the brim with technique.

First, a note about then-19-year-old Wendy Melvoin's delicately strummed rhythm part, enriched by a chorus pedal working overtime. It's often misplayed – make sure to stretch your fret hand out to accommodate those extended Fadd9 and Ebadd9 chords. (These shapes might have been inspired by Andy Summers' decade-defining "Every Breath You Take", which was a massive hit at the time.)

By the time you make it to Prince's fiery exit statement, which combines speedy runs with hummable repeated themes, you're completely in his pocket. He would play this classic for the rest of his life. It was the final song at his last concert.

6. "WHEN DOVES CRY"

Don't rush us. This album is a bonafide guitar classic, so let's take our time with it. Until you can fire up your octaver and execute the insane piece of squonk that introduces Prince's immortal single, you should pay attention.

Drenched in barely controlled feedback and propelled by blurred-pick-hand frenzy, it's a disturbing way into a strange song: skeletal, bass-free, impossibly arresting.

Later, Prince's lengthy outro solo calls back to his earliest records, yet bolstered with newfound maturity, it italicises the ache at the heart of the lyric. (He also plays the smarty-pants synth solo. If only all pop songs were this sophisticated.

5. "COMPUTER BLUE"

Even after woodshedding for what must have been years to conquer lead-guitar playing and strutting funk shuffles, Prince clearly believed in a kind of pop futurism that took inspiration from Frank Zappa, David Bowie, *Blade Runner* and even

fusion. This dazzling piece of music originally extended to a 14-minute suite complete with multiple monologues (you can find bootlegs of it), but the cutdown on *Purple Rain* is astounding.

After some Adrian Belew-like bird squeals, the main riff is foxy and brainy; then comes a furious transitional interlude of 16th-note flurries leading into the soaring solo of "Father's Song", a motif credited to Prince's own dad, acclaimed jazz composer John L. Nelson.

4. "LET'S GO CRAZY"

Prince reinvented himself as a prophet, preacher and party animal on the first track of the most exhilarating album of the '80s. The slashed-out riff sweeps you on your feet, leading you directly to his swirling solo – a perfect expression of joy – laden with Boss stompbox flange and attitude.

Then, the only thing that could possibly improve "Let's Go Crazy" actually happens: a second solo (on a *Billboard* No. 1, no less), tearing the universe apart with its roaring private cadenza that extends over an avalanche of pounding electro-drums.

It is, undoubtedly, the craziest piece of guitar work the Purple One ever committed to tape, but as you'll see, the story hardly ends there.

3. "LADY CAB DRIVER"

Lean in for this one. To understand Prince is to understand funk, and this intricately calibrated eight-minute jam is a masterclass in subtlety.

Throughout the track are his twin clean guitars, interlaced in a tightly strummed pattern that could make Chic's Nile Rodgers green with envy. The

explosively distorted soloing of the first two albums is on its way, mainly at the six-minute mark, but if you mastered every syncopated chicka of this song, your swagger would be huge.

2. "BAMBI"

A crunchy, almost metallic standout on Prince's eponymous second LP conjures a troubling realisation: "Bambi" is both sleazier and harder than any KISS song ever recorded.

The riff, adorned with full-neck skids and double-stop screeches, gets more powerful with each repetition. Prince's soloing, meanwhile – a drooling construction of escalating bends and lusty vibrato come-ons – would make him the MVP in any rock outfit.

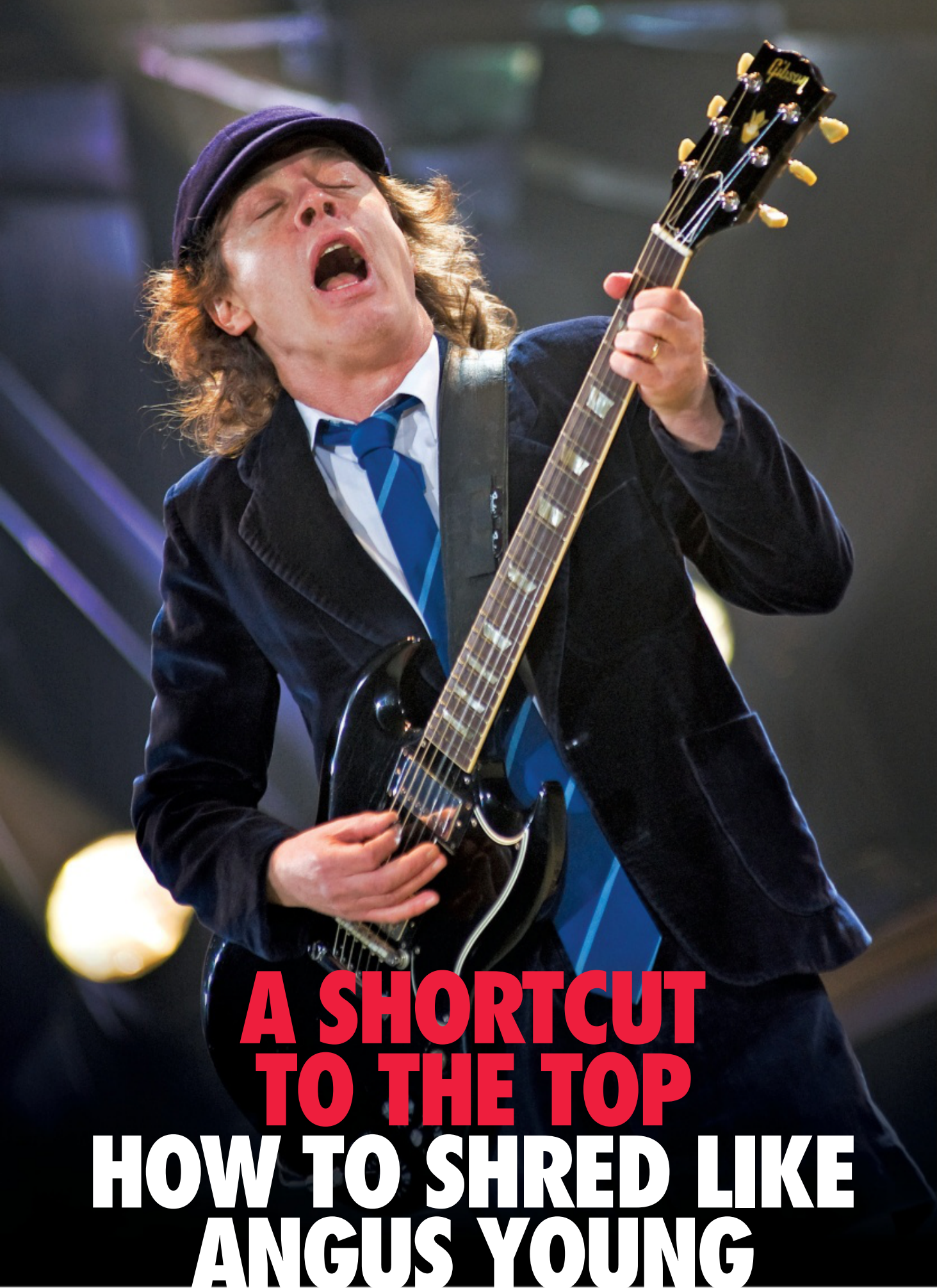
1. "I'M YOURS"

Released during a springtime of seismic guitar eruptions (*Van Halen* had just hit stores), Prince's debut album featured a 19-year-old Minnesotan who played every instrument, sang in a glorious falsetto and produced as well.

We don't have to pretend that Prince's songwriting is as developed as it will be, but the last track is an absolute screamer: five minutes of overdriven shredding, Billy Sheehan-worthy bass riffage, pinched artificial harmonics and cascades of guitar heroics.

Stoked in Funkadelic-style fires, it's a disturbing display of chops. He doesn't need to be this good, this soon, yet he is. The outro stretch is shocking.





A SHORTCUT TO THE TOP HOW TO SHRED LIKE ANGUS YOUNG

ON THE HUNT FOR SOME ROCK 'N' ROLL DAMNATION OR HOPING TO MAP OUT YOUR OWN HIGHWAY TO HELL? WHETHER YOU'RE A BAD BOY LOOKING TO BOOGIE OR A GIRL WHO'S GOT RHYTHM, WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED.

WORDS BY **AMIT SHARMA.**

Few rock guitarists have ever earned the same respect from the blues world as Angus Young. There's an undeniable, tangible honesty to AC/DC's music that paid homage to the very roots of rock 'n' roll, sticking to the traditional formula of a few easy chords and powerful pentatonic licks.

Along with his brother Malcolm, who sadly passed away in 2017, Angus's raw and uncomplicated tones echoed that essence of sonic purity – favouring a more direct and undiluted kind of attack.

With rumours of the icons being back in the studio reunited with singer Brian Johnson, who they had parted ways with in 2016, we thought we'd look at the recipe for those world-conquering guitar sounds.

One thing to remember is that while Angus

Young's signal path has been long renowned for its simplicity, it's one that works because of the sheer quality of its combined ingredients. There are no



pedals to hide behind – you need a good-sounding humbucker-equipped guitar running through a mid-range-y and vintage-sounding tube amp. The rest of the tone, as he's so often reminded us, comes from the hands...

GIBSON SG

Although he's been occasionally spotted holding a Les Paul, ES335 and even a Fender Mustang on one occasion – there really is only one guitar associated with AC/DC's duck-walking lead maestro. And it would be fair to say his loyalty to the Gibson SG has never waned...

"I liked the SGs because they were light," Angus told *Guitar World* in 1984. "I tried Fenders but they were too heavy and they just didn't have the balls. And I didn't want to put on them DiMarzios because then everyone sounds the same. It's like you're listening to the guy down the street. And I liked the hard sound of the Gibson."

PLEXI-STYLE AMP

That infamous AC/DC crunch is one of the most classic examples of Marshall magic. Save for a few television appearances with an Orange OR100, and dabbling with Wizard Amps in more recent years, the Marshall logo has proudly followed Angus wherever he goes. It's a tradition which continues to this day.

On *Back In Black*, he used various Super Leads, including a '76 1959. On *Let There Be Rock* and *Powerage*, it was predominantly late-'70s Marshall 2203s. Elsewhere, he's been known to use other Marshalls like the JTM45, 1959SLP, Super Bass, 9001 Tube Preamp and 1974X – which might explain why the guitarist has been seen using up to ten different heads for their live performances.

PEDALS

Considering Angus's signal path is pretty much as basic as it gets, there's not really much needed on the pedal front here. The only pedal he used on AC/DC's last tour was a Rocktron Hush at a very low setting for a discrete noise reduction that didn't squash or suck his tones – operating more like a gate to control the noise coming from running vintage Marshalls at full blast.

"I found that pedals were too much to fool around with," Angus once told *Guitar World*. "You'd be halfway through a solo and the batteries would go dead and conk out. And if you tread on the lead going to the pedal, something would always go wrong. Or some crazy kid would pull the lead out just at the moment when you're about to do your big number on it."

STRINGS

Angus has played 9-42 gauge strings since the early days, and has been an Ernie Ball endorsee for around four decades. 🎸

Wanna dive even deeper into the sound of Australia's undefeated rock 'n' roll champion? Amit riffs on the exact bits of gear you'll need to suss out on the *Guitar World* website. Head to: **bit.ly/ACDCgear**



CLICK 'N' RIFF

WHAT TO LOOK FOR TO GET THE BEST DEALS WHEN BUYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS ONLINE. WORDS BY **DAN ORKIN**.

With all that's going on in the world, the one silver lining is that we have a lot more time to work on our hobbies and interests – and that might well mean you consider investing a little more money in your guitar gear, too.

Given that most of us can no longer get to a physical store for the time being, you might have a few reservations about buying online – but there's no need to fear, as Reverb's Dan Orkin is here to dispel any worries you may have, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

Here, Dan shares his advice for what to look for when making a musical instrument purchase online – whether this is your first guitar, or a new addition to your collection.

GENERAL TIPS FOR BUYING GUITARS ONLINE

1. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS

Treat buying a guitar online similar to shopping for a guitar in-store. If you're curious about how it sounds, what it feels like in your hands, or even what the headstock looks like close-up – just ask.

Sellers are more than happy to provide you with more information or additional photos if that means that it will help you feel more confident about buying a guitar from them. On Reverb, you'll see a "message seller" button beside every piece of gear listed for sale, making it really easy to connect directly with the seller.

2. NEGOTIATE

Many sellers on Reverb accept offers below the asking price, so don't be afraid to negotiate – it's a

completely normal part of buying guitars, in general. Around 15-20% off original asking price is the sweet spot for a reasonable offer, but we generally see players get anywhere from 5 to 30 percent off by making an offer.

3. CONSIDER PURCHASING USED GEAR

If you're looking for a guitar that sounds great and is affordable, you should absolutely consider buying used gear. Not only does used gear maintain its quality, but also you can save an average of 20 percent off the original price and often even more.

Plus if you decide that you want to try something new, you can typically resell a used guitar for close to the same price you paid for it. Plus, there's the undeniable cool factor that comes from old guitars.

4. CHECK THE RETURN POLICY

On sites like Reverb that feature many different sellers, shops are able to create their own individual return policies. Take the extra step to make sure you understand a shop's policy on returns before you purchase. Again, it's the sort of thing you can feel comfortable communicating with the seller about before you finalise a purchase.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIRST-TIME BUYERS

PRICING

In terms of price, the technology that goes into modern guitar construction has become sophisticated enough that most of the big makers can create consistently high-quality guitars at a reasonable price range of \$150 – \$500 for an

acoustic and \$200 – \$800 for an electric.

That said, when you pay a little bit more, there will usually be a noticeable improvement in playability and quality due to the use of higher-quality materials, construction methods, and components.

BRANDS

As far as brand selection, there are some characteristics that have come to define the reputation of many of the big players. When it comes to acoustic guitars, Taylor guitars are known for their innovative shapes and features, whereas Martin, the company that invented many of the main styles of acoustic, are often the go-to choice for vintage-style instruments.

Big brands like Yamaha and Takamine offer dozens of reliable models, as do other brands like Seagull, Breedlove, and Eastman.

If you're thinking about starting with an electric guitar, most popular brands have fantastic introductory offerings. Squier Stratocasters are an ever-popular first time guitar, and the Les Paul Special II and Paul Reed Smith SE Series also give first timers a lot of bang for their buck. If you buy used on Reverb, you can usually snag something a little higher-end like a Made-in-Mexico Fender model for prices similar to the above mentioned entry lines.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUYING DURING COVID-19

Many local music shops, independent retailers, boutique gear makers, and more that have had to close the doors of their physical stores are still open via Reverb and shipping without delays or issues. If you've got your eye on a new piece of gear, now is a great time to support these businesses online.

Not only are most instruments shipping without issue, but the vast majority of items are also getting shipped within 72 hours and lots of sellers are offering free two-day shipping. As major shipping carriers continue to operate, the vast majority of packages are arriving on time. 📦

JUST THE ESSENTIALS

NOW THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO SHOP ONLINE LIKE A PRO, LET'S GET YOUR GUITARSENAL ALL BEEFED UP FOR SOME SERIOUS SHREDDING SESSIONS. WORDS BY **CHRIS BARNES**.

If you've been inspired to start learning the electric or acoustic guitar during the Coronavirus lockdown, there are a few gear essentials and guitar accessories you should consider to help supercharge your guitar development and enjoyment of the instrument. This guide covers everything you'll need to keep your guitar in shape and sounding great. What's even better is that, once you've paid for your guitar, nothing else on this list will break the bank.



TUNER

Not only does a guitar tuner help you tune your own instrument and keep it sounding great, it also helps you stay in tune with your jam buddies or the rest of your band. The minimalist Korg Pitchclip 2 attaches to your guitar's headstock and enables quick tuning thanks to a crisp LED display. If you're serious about the guitar, a tuner should be one of your first purchases.



AMPS

There has never been more choice when it comes to great budget guitar amps for beginner guitarists. Of course a low price is one thing, but it also needs to perform well, sound great and offer functionality and enough features that you can grow into as you progress. If your playing will mostly be bedroom-based, the tiny Blackstar Fly 3 is a great starting point. If your sights are set on gigging, the Boss Katana-100 comes highly recommended and will perform from the bedroom to the stage.



STRAP

A quality guitar strap can mean the difference between your cherished guitar staying put and losing a chunk from the body after it hits the cold, hard floor. Your new guitar will be in safe hands with the Ernie Ball Polypro. It's available in a range of colors, and features a two-inch wide polypropylene webbing, stitched to black leather ends for extra support.



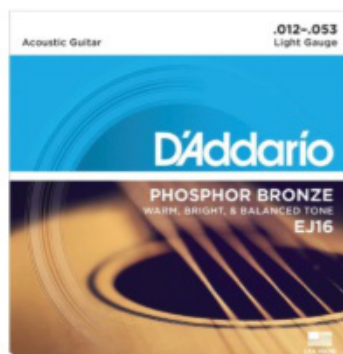
CABLE

A great beginner electric guitar and amp is useless unless you have a quality cable connecting the two. Usually, a cheap guitar cable is a false economy, needing swift replacement or driving you mad with unwanted noise in your signal. Beginner guitarists should look for a blend of durability and performance from their cable. For us, that job is ably performed by the D'Addario Planet Waves American Stage Cable.



CASE

If you want your new guitar to last, it's important to use adequate protection for when you start taking your guitar to lessons, jams or band practice. To begin with there's no need to spend loads of cash on a plush hard case; all you need is a quality gig bag in which you can stash your guitar plus other essential accessories. When budget is tight, we're big fans of the Gator Economy Gigbag, which is available for both electric and acoustic guitar.



STRINGS

A fresh set of electric or acoustic guitar strings can transform a guitar. They're dirt cheap and easy to fit, too. To begin with you'll want a string set that sounds great and lasts a while, leaving you free to focus on learning the ropes. Ernie Ball's popular Super Slinky strings are the perfect choice for electric players, while D'Addario's EJ16 Phosphor Bronzes are an ideal addition to your new acoustic guitar.



CAPO

The capo is a super affordable piece of gear that can dramatically change your guitar sound with huge potential for songwriters and guitarists who play covers. In use, capos act as a moveable nut that you can move up to any fret on the guitar, changing the guitar's pitch as it goes. At such low prices, they're well worth experimenting with.



PICKS

Guitar picks (also known as plectrums) remain one of the most important but often-overlooked accessories in a guitarist's arsenal, making a dramatic difference to your playing style and tone. When choosing picks, it's worth considering the pick shape, thickness and the material as all will have an impact on your playing comfort and tone. Dunlop has huge options within its Tortex range. We'd suggest starting there.



LESSONS

All of this essential guitar gear is only one part of the puzzle. The next step is to start learning. Looking for lessons online is an obvious place to start, but it can be difficult to separate the good from bad. We like Fender Play because it's a well structured, app/PC/Mac-based tool that arms guitarists with the most important techniques courtesy of step-by-step learning and progress tracking. It's loaded with great songs to learn, too.

SONY

Made for
iPhone | iPod

Google Assistant

Industry-leading noise cancellation*

Truly wireless. Truly comfortable.

Introducing the NEW **WF-1000XM3** in-ear headphones



"The best noise-cancelling
earbuds you can buy."

Sony WF-1000XM3, What Hi-Fi?, 01/2020



*As of June 1st 2019. According to research by Sony Corporation, measured using JEITA-compliant guidelines. In truly wireless style and overhead style of wireless noise cancelling headphones market. *Apple, iPhone, iPod and iPod touch are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. ^Google is a trademark of Google LLC.

AUSTRALIAN recording TECHNIQUE

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WITH CALLAN ORR

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RECORDING TIPS

HOW TO NOT SUCK IN THE STUDIO • AN
INTRO GUIDE FOR BUDDING SESSIONERS



RECORDING TECHNIQUES WITH CALLAN ORR

MELBOURNITE METALCORE TITANS **DREAM ON DREAMER** ARE CALLING IT A DAY IN 2020 – BUT NOT BEFORE THEY RELEASE ONE LAST SPEAKER-BUSTING BELTER OF SEARING RIFFS AND BRUTAL BREAKDOWNS, PRODUCED ENTIRELY IN-HOUSE BY LEAD SHREDDER AND BACKING VOCALIST **CALLAN ORR**. SO, HOW DID HE GO ABOUT MAKING IT AN ALBUM WORTH DEFINING THE BAND'S DECADE-LONG LEGACY? WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Metalcore is a dangerous genre for most producers to play with, primarily since its key characteristics – huge walls of frenetic, effects-laden riffage and punishingly heavy wallops of bassy, down-tuned juts and seismic drum fills – are impossibly easy to bake in the mixing process, leading to muddy, overblown messes of sound.

Rising up the ranks throughout the 2010s as one of Australia's leading forces in metalcore mayhem, Dream On Dreamer are one such band whose sound is nearly impeccable from an audiophile's perspective, their lashings of grit and grunt sewn together with the faultless finesse of the finest out there. And there's one conclusive reason why their sound is so dialled-in:

they call the shots themselves, with lead guitarist and backing vocalist Callan Orr leading the charge behind the decks.

The band themselves are getting ready to close up shop, with album number five – *What If I Told You It Doesn't Get Better* – positioned as their sharp, scuzzy and searing swansong. Reigning in elements of

all the highlights across Dream On Dreamer's tenure, the ten-tracker plays out like a 'greatest hits' compilation for the Melbourne quartet. And according to Orr, it was a surprisingly easy record to smash out.

***What If I Told You It Doesn't Get Better* has been described as “the most diligently crafted and strongest representation of the band's themes and values to date”. How did you want to achieve that through the album's production?**

Ironically, I think the best way to achieve that is to not try too hard – just trust your instincts and try to have fun. If you can learn to make your process enjoyable, I think you'll find that you'll naturally do more work and be more attentive. Removing stress removes the anxious resistance that stops you from performing at your best!

You've had a hand in producing Dream On Dreamer's material in-house since Loveless in 2013. How do you feel your skills have grown over four records?

If you play me a song off *Loveless*, my skin will probably crawl off my body and into the bin. I still love those songs and I love that record – I love what it represents for us as a band starting a new chapter, and I actually think it's some of our best work as a whole – but we had so much pressure from our label to rush that production and the mix just isn't there. However, the subsequent record that I produced, *It Comes And Goes*, I'm still very happy with. I have to give a shoutout to my main man Dave Petrovic for the amazing vocal production.

You had Dave Petrovic co-produce with you on It Comes And Goes, and Matt Goldman on Songs Of Solitude before that, but What If I Told You... is a full solo operation. What made you want to tackle this one on your own again?

We always love working with Dave Petrovic – he did our very first EP, *Hope*, and has been a great friend of ours ever since. In hindsight, I would love to have worked with him on every single release, but we have always been about trying things slightly differently and therefore have worked with a bunch of different producers. But he's our number one. He also taught me a lot – I wouldn't have been able to pull this record off without his help and guidance. We decided to do this one as a solo operation solely due to budget constraints – we wanted to try saving those costs and plugging them into other avenues such as marketing and PR.



Knowing that this would be the last Dream On Dreamer album after 11 years of storied shredding and legacy-building, did that put any additional pressure on you to make the record stand out or sound especially great?

This record had absolutely no pressure at all. I think there was a lot of confidence found from the last one. We really just wanted to make a sequel to, or evolution of *It Comes And Goes*. I actually wrote all the songs instrumentally a couple of months after that release, just because we were buzzing so much from all the feedback. So it was the most organic process to date. And in my experience, that sort of flow state leads to the best results. Fingers crossed this one hits the mark!

“
THANKFULLY THE BAND WAS THERE TO SUPPORT ME, AND IT TURNED OUT TO BE THE MOST HEALING EXPERIENCE I COULD HAVE HOPED FOR.

What was the biggest challenge you faced in recording this album, and how did you overcome it?

I was actually going through a pretty big change in my personal life while recording the vocals and mixing this record. I won't go into too much detail, but it was a struggle. It was a “couldn't keep down food and constantly had a sick feeling in my stomach” sort of situation. So I suppose the hardest part was being able to separate my personal life from the task at hand. Thankfully the band was there to support me, and it turned out to be the most healing experience I could have hoped for. I gained such an appreciation for music and my job through the whole experience. I have such a passion for what I do, and it's something that no one can ever take away from me.

What was the most gratifying part of making this album?

I think the most rewarding thing to listen back on is the programming. It's an element I got into when we released “Don't Lose Your Heart” in 2015, and it seemed to be a huge key to the song's success. It's a very enjoyable process – it's very much a case of throwing everything at the wall and seeing what sticks. So again, no overthinking, just getting into a flow and saving the critical thinking for later. Listening back to all the ideas that came out is awesome because it feels like something I didn't actually do – it just sort of happened.

Run us through the studio setup

you had for *What If I Told You...*

Honestly, these days you don't need much to make something – just a computer, interface and cheap microphone (we used the Shure SM7), and the rest is in your imagination. I could have made this record with just those three things.

What's your secret behind recording music that can sound so ball-tearingly heavy one second, and then atmospheric and lowkey the next, without the transition ever feeling out-of-place or jarring?

I think the key is lots and lots of programming layers. You could take the drums and guitars out of this album and it would all still sound very musical and listenable. Meanwhile, if you took those programmed elements out, I think this record would be very boring and stale. It's sort of the driving force behind it.

On a track like “Sentimental”, you're fluctuating between these huge guitar-driven choruses, and verses that revel in really cerebral synths and drum beats. What's the philosophy behind using dissonance and contrast to set a mood or exemplify thematic tone in a song?

Again, my sensei Dave Petrovic taught me the importance of making the chorus the climax of the song. It seems obvious, but it's something I didn't really understand or appreciate until he spelled it out for me. It's very important to make sure the

chorus stands out dynamically and has a lift in energy. That often means dialling things back for the verses, rather than trying to do too much for the chorus. Also, hearing distorted guitars for 40 minutes straight is not my idea of a good time. Maybe my ears are getting old and tired.

When you're producing a record that you also perform on, are you paying much attention to how you're going to replicate certain tones and recreate certain soundscapes in a live atmosphere?

Not at all. I think your main focus, when you're in the studio, should be making things sound awesome and not letting anything get in the way of that. You can always find a way to make things work live – or if not, do an adaptation that brings the song to life in a new way for the live show.

What does the future hold for yourself as a musician and producer? Do you have any new projects on the horizon, or any goals you're excited to kick?

I'm currently working on a heap of cool projects, co-writing the new Calibum record and finishing up production work with Young Lions, Bad/Love, Drown This City and Bad Juju, plus a few other bits and pieces. I'm also in the early stages of starting a new creative project with my US producer buddy Cameron Mizell – who owns Chango Studios in Florida – which I'm very excited about. I'll always be making music. 



HOW TO NOT SUCK AS A STUDIO GUITARIST

EVERYONE'S FIRST TIME IN A RECORDING STUDIO IS PRETTY DAUNTING, BUT THERE ARE SEVEN COMMON MISTAKES THAT GUITARISTS ARE ESPECIALLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO. HERE'S WHAT THEY ARE, AND HOW TO STEER CLEAR OF THEM. WORDS BY **RON ZABROCKI**.

So your band is looking to take it to the next level. Or perhaps someone has offered to pay your way out of the home studio scene and into a big studio you've only seen pictures of.

In this feature, I want to discuss the pitfalls I have witnessed and how to avoid them. I swear I could make a living saving bands money – if they would only listen. You don't have to trust me, but read on. I may just be saving you not only thousands of dollars, but your actual career.

1. BEING UNREHEARSED

Sounds like common sense to me. But I only wish you could witness how many times I've been in the studio and the two guitarists have no idea what the other is playing. That goes double for the bassist. Completely unprepared. When you rehearse, do more than play at ear-shattering volumes. Discuss. Know everything about everything. Be as prepared as you can be and only on the songs you are planning to record. Solos, rhythms, sounds.

2. BRINGING FRIENDS TO THE STUDIO

If they're not in the band and have no reason to be there, they are not allowed. Period. You are there to work. A roadie or two or a guitar tech is fine. As long as they are there to do the job and then be quiet. Sometimes "friends" can be substances. Leave that for the release party.

3. NOT USING A CLICK TRACK

This one comes from my trusted engineer par excellence and friend, Tim Conklin. If you have never rehearsed with a click track, don't be talked into using one while the clock ticks away your

money! It is a vibe killer and a time waster if you are unprepared.

4. ADDING INSTRUMENTS THAT NO-ONE IS PREPARED FOR

Look at all those shiny percussion instruments and keyboards. Of course, your ballad needs a fucking cello sample! Right? Wrong! If you needed a cello, then it should have been discussed and arranged at the rehearsal. Same with percussion. If you need it and no one in the band knows how to play it properly, bring along someone who does. We call the box of percussion the "money box" in the studio. It's the biggest time and money waster there is. And we get to sit and watch you learn how to use a shaker at \$60 per hour – or more!

5. NOT USING YOUR OWN GEAR

You use a Crate amp and are perfectly happy with the sound. You play an Epiphone Les Paul and it feels like home in your hands. Then you get to the studio and the "guy" there convinces you to use Amp Farm or a Marshall or whatever and the "real" Les Paul. Sure. These might be more expensive and better gear than you have, but can you play as well using this new gear? Will it change the sound of the band that everyone likes? Is it because the fucking guy only knows how to get a sound using his gear instead of being a pro who knows how to capture your sound? Bring your own gear and use it!

6. USING A PRODUCER UNFAMILIAR WITH YOUR SOUND

You've been working with a local guy and getting good results. He's even a fan and friend. Then this situation arises and he gets written right out of the

picture in favour of a name producer because, you know, that's what it takes to make it. His name and the studio's name. Well you are so wrong. If you knew how many "name" producers projects never see light of day, you would fall over. But please don't believe me. Just hand the \$11K or more and points and part of your publishing over to the name guy who doesn't even know you. He'll be more than grateful. Or ... use the guy you can trust with a qualified engineer from the studio!

7. NOT HAVING A BUDGET AND KNOWING WHERE EVERY CENT GOES

Know how long each aspect of the recording will take and have the budget allotted for it. Know how long mixing will take – and does it have to take place in the expensive studio? Most producers can and do mix in the comfort of their own home studio. It saves money and they know the gear and sound. And let's not forget about the mastering. Do you need Bob Ludwig to master it? I will go on record to say I have heard people of his fame destroy recordings. It's all about how well it was recorded and mixed. And not to mention how good the songs and performance are, because let me tell you, if the song is crap and the band is crap, no big "name" or auto tune or studio or mastering is going to save it. Deep Purple's *Machine Head* was recorded from a truck parked outside a hotel, and the band was assembled in a hallway. Be original – and listen to me! Be the first. I'm not going to name any names of those who didn't. You've never heard of them anyway.

Be true to yourself. Listen to the sound in your head and heart. Follow it. Take advice only from those you trust. And please, don't be stupid. Think. Rehearse. Rewrite. Rehearse some more. Choose wisely. Then, make history – your history. 🎸

WANT TO BE A SESSION GUITARIST? READ THIS FIRST!

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HOW THE LIFE OF A SESSION GUITARIST HAS EVOLVED? OR DEVOLVED? YOU SHOULD, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE HOPING TO MAKE THIS YOUR CAREER. HERE'S A VERY BROAD GENERALISATION. WORDS BY **RON ZABROCKI**.



Original session guys would carry a guitar or two, go to the studio where the session was booked, play and run to the next. We're talking '40s and '50s and very jazz-based music. The next generation of session guitarists became very much like a gang in the '60s and '70s. More guitars were brought to sessions. Sometimes the special effect of the day was required – fuzz, trem, reverb/echo, etcetera. The basics.

The instruments changed a bit with electric 12-strings and baritone guitars. These were the beginnings of superstar players from the Wrecking Crew and Muscle Shoals to the hitmakers of Motown. Late-'70s and '80s technology ruled the day.

Rack upon rack of truly expensive studio gear was carted from studio to studio. Guitars were hot rodded like early dragsters and the investment in pedalboards to amps was beyond the budget of only the truly busy. Sound was as important as technical ability and sight-reading chops.

The '90s saw the digital age begin to rear its head walk on the beach. Smaller all-in-one effects and smaller amps joined forces with a retro appreciation of older instruments. The vintage guitar craze sent guitar prices soaring while these cherished instruments were often plugged into less-than-stellar amps and early modellers. Change always has its growing pains.

Now here we are, well into the 21st century. Most gear is not carried. A studio guitarist owns his or her own studio, literally. It's software based, with plugins, rack-based effects and stompboxes, plus old and new amps and effects and a collection of instruments.

Not only do we need to play guitar; we also need to have than a small degree of engineering chops. We own a small but mighty microphone collection, preamps and compressors, converters. Our studio is part of our package and most definitely a part of the sound. The clock we are on is our own. Speed equals dollars, but the

responsibilities are greater than just laying down a part and leaving. What once took the time it took to play the part now involves a plethora of extra tasks.

Digital does not mean faster or easier. We setup, download, upload, review and discuss, lay down multiple tracks using gear from all time periods, send MP3s for review, clean up tracks, organise, gather, backup, create end-to-end files and upload and mail. And if you're like me, you also add other instruments and vocals to any number of projects every day, repeating all the necessary safety and organisation requirements to stay on top of the madness.

You'll be holding a mouse more than a guitar, that is for certain. And you do it alone, often for weeks at a time.

Buying gear and budgeting toward upgrades is a constant concern. I just went through a serious investment in pedals – \$2,500. My next investment is in upgrading my entire recording section of my studio. That was close to \$5,000. Computer, software, effects and visual monitors; it's all part of the job. Actually, it's the price you pay to have the job!

Other prices aren't so easily seen. These include finding time to practice, exercise, sleep, clean, have relationships and satisfy your own creative needs after playing basic chords on a seemingly endless supply of less-than-stellar songs.

Where will the next decade take us? I have a few thoughts. However, I really miss the old days. Walk in, say hi and hear the jokes and stories. Play my part and leave it in the hands of the engineers and producer. Laugh a bit more and go to the next session. Those are rare for me – but it's still the norm for a few.

Still want to be a session guitarist? *Good.* 



RRP: CONTACT DISTRIBUTOR

ACOUSTICA MIXCRAFT 9 PRO STUDIO

ACOUSTICA MIXCRAFT'S LATEST UPDATE PUTS IT UP THERE WITH THE BEST PC DAWs CURRENTLY AVAILABLE. SO IS IT TIME FOR YOU TO OPEN A NEW DAW?

Acoustica's Mixcraft DAW is one of those quietly successful applications that doesn't seem to blow its own trumpet, yet scores consistently well whenever it's reviewed on these pages. In short, it does the job well, so doesn't need to shout from the rooftops about it! It might also not be on your radar because it's a PC-only DAW, but if it is on your radar, you'll know it comes packed with enough features to be a serious PC contender. It's already a bargain as is, but there's also a cut-down Recording Studio version that lacks the Celemony Melodyne integration, a lot of the included plugin instruments and effects and other features – we think Pro Studio is well worth the extra few bucks.

Mixcraft has always offered a welcoming music production environment with a claimed 'great ease of use combined with raw power', and it's hard to argue with this. It's a traditional DAW in the sense that tracks go top to bottom and arrangement flows left to right. There's a well-featured mixer where you expect it to be and the UI is very welcoming indeed and easy to interact with, so the workflow is almost second to none on this platform. These refinements and a series of pro features have come through regular updates over many years that have seen the software mature to its current 'Pro Studio' status.

This latest 9 Pro Studio version has a wealth of additions, like a new suite of plugin effects and instruments including Cherry Audio's marvellous Voltage Modular Ignite, plus there are additional automation and mix features and the ability to detach and attach UI panels.

After buying, you'll download the main 9 Pro program installer (clocking in around 540MB) and unlock it with a serial code. You'll also likely have to use a separate code and download to unlock the aforementioned Voltage Modular software.

It's a very easy process and the installer takes you through all of the extras so you'll soon be up and running. What we've always loved about this DAW is the smooth resizing of Windows so the mixer, for example, invades your arrangement just to the level you wish, and track width and height adjustments, along with zooming, are all slick and precise.

The panel detachment feature is new to v9 – you could only do it with the lower panel in v8 – and it adds a great level of customisation to how the software is laid out, and you will want to use it, as taken as one block, Mixcraft can initially feel daunting. However, once you get into it, this feeling soon passes; loading instruments and effects, resizing, and customising all become second nature.

So to the newcomers and Cherry Audio's modular synth system needs no introduction to regular readers as a version of it is featured in the Plugin Suite. Here you get 45 software modules – including oscillators, effects and arpeggiator – so you can quickly experience the joys of hardware modular synthesis in your DAW. The new TB bundle of multi effects (including MultiFX, Reverb, Parametric EQ, BusCompressor, Barricade, De-esser and Compressor), is, of course, welcome but finds itself in a crowded field that already includes Mastering Essentials from iZotope and dozens of other mixing

and creative effects that are very good indeed. However, the new additions mean that the library covers just about every mixing and mastering function you could wish for – this side of Mixcraft really is very well featured indeed.

Perhaps more welcome is the additional functionality within the mixer – with new Gain, Drive, Compressor and other effects as standard along the channel strip – plus the automation features which allow curved, tempo and pitch automation and are very easy to implement and offer some excellent and precise control (not to mention optional LFO control) over your mix movement and evolution.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Mixcraft 9 Pro Studio might have only had a single-figure number of improvements and additions, but they are all pretty major ones. We love Cherry Audio's Voltage Modular, but really you should be upgrading for features like the new suite of plugins and the additional workflow enhancements.

As to whether you should take the leap from your existing DAW, that is always the harder question to answer. It runs slickly on a PC, and offers this smooth music-making experience with enough extras – including a large and well-implemented sound library – to help you make pretty much any genre of music you could wish for. The only question is: are you brave enough to close one DAW to open another? Certainly Mixcraft will feel like a familiar change, no matter what your existing platform, and it punches right up there with the best of them. 

► TOP FEATURES

- Curved automation, and tempo and pitch automation
- New effects and instruments
- Advanced plug-in automation and control
- Step recording and piano roll improvements
- Single-click audio-to-MIDI conversion

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Nice new workflow additions
- Massive plugin effects library
- Some very good instruments
- Incredibly slick interface
- Feels like a mature DAW

CONS

- A little dark at first
- Some instruments look quite old

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- Pickup covers
- New pickguard
- New knobs
- New switch tip
- Wire cutters
- 60/40 solder
- Partially soldered wiring loom
- 40-watt soldering iron
- PH1 and PH2 screwdrivers
- Adjustable spanner
- Wiring diagram

READY MADE

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**SKILL
LEVEL**
INTERMEDIATE

PICKGUARD PITSTOP

MAKE USE OF THE STRAT'S UNIQUE DESIGN TO EASILY LOAD SOME PUPS STRAIGHT INTO YOUR GUITAR – WITH MINIMUM FIDDLING. WORDS BY **JACK ELLIS**.

One of the best things about a Stratocaster is that it's a pickguard design – which means that almost all of the serviceable parts are mounted straight onto an easily removable pickguard. This makes switch-ups like this a doddle. Take a look at a Les Paul: to re-wire that you've got to run cables up through the middle of the guitar; put the pickups in the same manner; do what wiring you can out of the guitar; and solder the rest – while not melting the sides of the electronics cavity. We'd rather be in the pit stop

crew for team Strat!

There are thousands of upgrade parts for Strats, so choosing is in fact harder than fitting... And of course, make sure you watch out for snake oil! The owner of this American Professional Strat has opted for some Klein Epic 1962 pickups as a matching set. He's also supplied us with a partially wired loom, including some nice parts all mounted on a new Fender pickguard. We'll build the pickguard up, solder it and fit it to the guitar.



- 1** We have a set of nearly identical matched pickups - but which one's which? This brand helpfully tells us on the rear! If you have no clue, you can connect the hookup wires to a multimeter and test the resistance - the one with the highest resistance is likely to be the bridge.



- 4** Fit the pickup selector through the slot in the pickguard, and tighten it up. The knobs and the switch tip just push on. These are small details, but this is the 'official' Fender knob alignment! Twist the metal pot shaft all the way to 10, then line up the 10 on the volume knob with the pickup screw. Call us fussy...



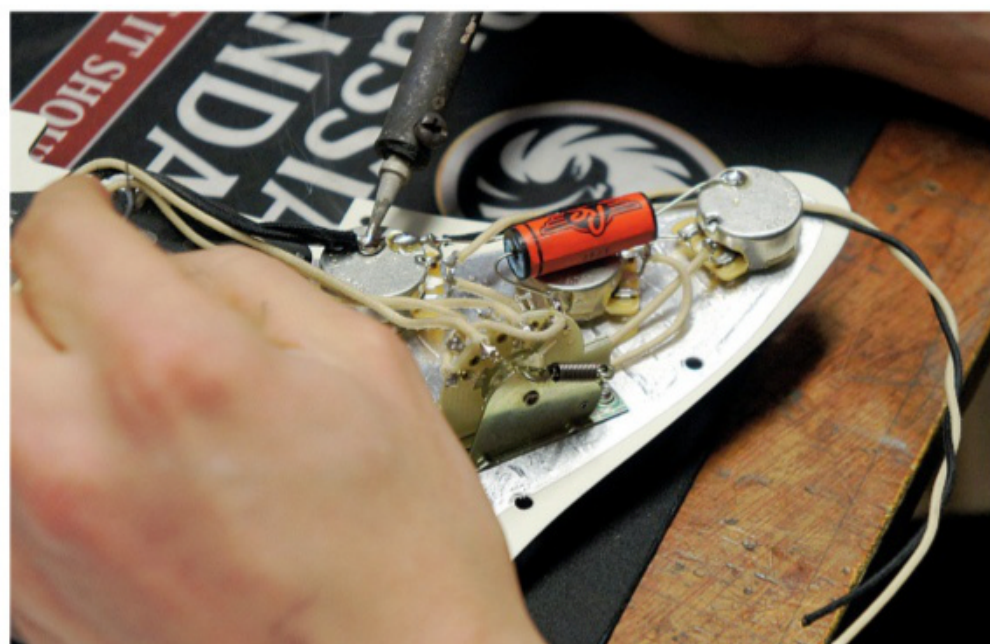
- 2** Carefully put your new pickups inside their plastic covers. Those fine winds are incredibly delicate - we've seen them break with the help of a screw getting attracted to them many times. The pickup screws go through the guard, through the spring and into the forbon pickup baseplate. Yes, it's fiddly - the spring can fly off.



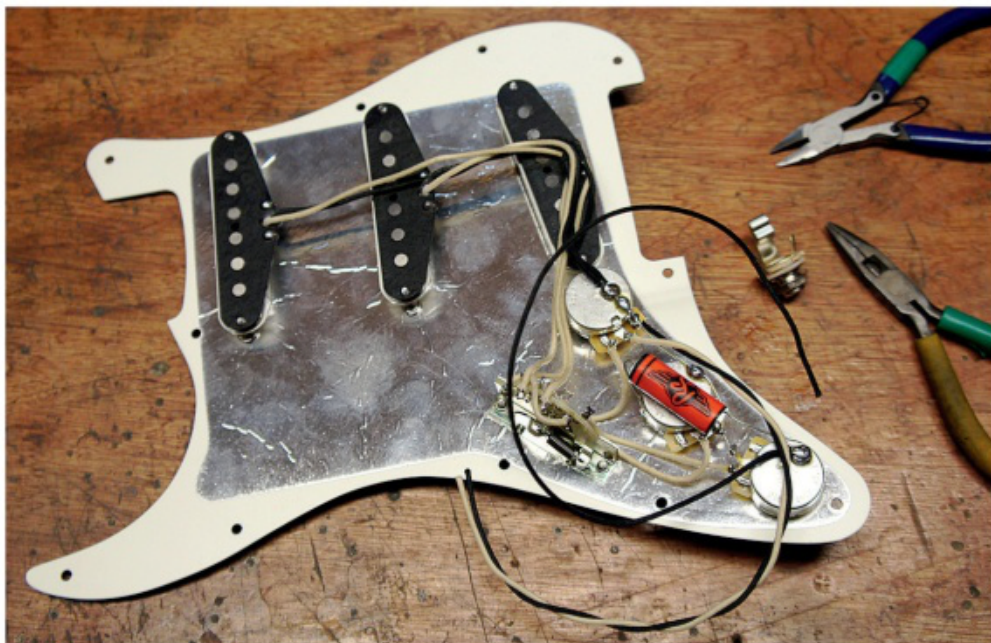
- 5** Flip the 'guard over to complete the circuit. There are six pickup wires that need sending home, but this is an easy task with a wiring diagram. Get the soldering iron on and let it warm up fully (conveniently the time it takes to brew up). Each cable is trimmed to length, wire exposed then tinned, along with the receiving solder lug.



- 3** Don't worry about setting the pickups' final height; that's done when they're strung up. Time to pop the pots through; the star washer goes on the back and helps the pot grab onto the rear of the pickguard. Be very careful not to damage your pickguard though - line the edges of your spanner with masking tape to be sure.



- 6** With everything in place, it's time to solder. Join up the three white wires to pickup selector lugs. There should be a medium blob of solder on the volume pot, ready to receive the black ground wires. Twist those three together, and solder them on with plenty of heat.



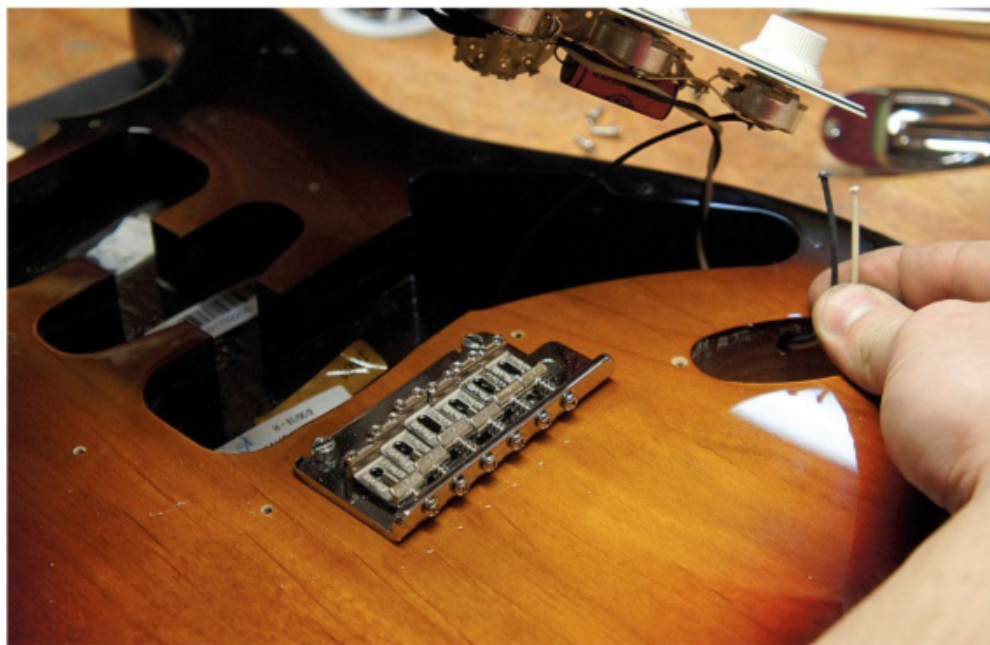
7 Tidy up your cables. We're doing our best, so it may as well look the part too. Can you see the three wires hanging off? They're the hot and ground going to the jack socket, and one more black wire that's just been attached. That's the tremolo claw wire or 'string ground'. We'll solder those on in a moment.



10 Now it's time to introduce the new guard to the body. Post the jack wires hot and ground through the small opening, sending them to the jack socket rout. The tremolo claw wire needs to be sent through too; this hole is usually harder to find, but it is there!



8 Now we've got our lovely new guard ready to go, let's strip down the old one. Loosen off all the parts from the old pickguard and stash all the small screws. Make sure they do not find a way to get stuck to a pickup, as they will break it given half a chance.



11 We're using the brand-new Switchcraft jack socket, so that's been tinned and is now getting the two wires soldered on. By the way, this is the correct way to orient the jack socket component - long leg downward. This gives the sprung leg on the jack socket enough room to click in correctly.



9 With these delightful old guts on show, there are only three wires holding it in place - and those are exactly the three wires that we need to solder when our new ones go in. Remove the jack socket plate and chop the two-jack wire; chop the tremolo claw wire too.



12 Due to its size, the tremolo claw saps the heat from your iron, making it difficult to get a good solder joint. An 80-watt soldering iron excels here, but 40 watts will just take longer to reach temperature. Get a decent pool of solder on there to be sure. We're done! Screw on the 'guard and marvel at your handywork.



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ EIGHTH NOTE STRUMMING
- ✓ DOUBLE SPEED 16TH NOTES
- ✓ TWO EASY RHYTHM EXAMPLES

GETTING STARTED WITH STRUMMING RHYTHMS

IT'S A STAPLE TECHNIQUE OF ALMOST EVERY GENRE, AND TODAY, WE'RE TEACHING YOU HOW TO GET IT DOWN LIKE A PRO.

“Strumming is fairly simple, right? Is there really that much to learn?”

Well, for the uninitiated, let's explain what strumming is first. When you play the guitar, you pluck the strings with a pick, and you'll either strike downwards or upwards. Strumming just means you'll be using a mixture of downstrokes and upstrokes, striking several strings at once.

“So it's pretty easy then...”

Generally, yes! If you're just starting out on the guitar, practise strumming a chord using steady, regular downstrokes. If you're playing an open E chord or a G then strum all six strings. If you're playing a D chord strum only the top four strings (the thinnest, highest pitched ones). There's a bit of a knack to targeting the right strings, so expect to make gradual progress.

“How do I take my technique to the next level?”

Once you've got the basics down, your next aim is to start to sync your pick strokes with the rhythm of the music. You're probably doing this already, so let's make sure you understand how and why it works so you'll always play in time.

“Okay. How do I start practising?”

Have a swing at the exercises here and see how you go.

“Down, up, down, up – it's easy, isn't it?”

It's not just about the pick strokes – the idea is that you'll be synchronising with any music you're playing over. So, as long as the music has a four count, you'll be playing a downstroke on the numbered pulse and your upstrokes will fall in between. It's not the only way to strum, but it's used a lot in all styles of guitar music.

“I get it. It's as much about the music as the strumming itself.”

That's right! Take a look at the first example and you'll see how the strumming ‘interlocks’ with the music. Although you don't strum every down- or up-stroke, you can keep your picking motion going so that you stay in time.

“How do I tackle the second tab example?”

This one is at double speed, so you'll play four pick strokes (down, up, down, up) for every musical pulse. It's much more energetic, so make sure to practise slowly at first.

STRUMMER LOVING...

LEARN THE INS AND OUTS OF ‘DOWN AND UP’ STYLE STRUMMING

1) COUNT TO FOUR

1 2 3 4

Most music has a rhythmic pulse which you can count or clap along with to keep time. The most common pulse is a four count.

2) STRUM ALONG TO YOUR COUNT

1 2 3 4
≥ ≥ ≥ ≥

Fret a chord you know, count to four and play a downstroke on each number. The ≥ is the musical sign telling you to play a downstroke.

3) ADD UPSTROKES

1 2 3 4
≥ ≤ ≥ ≤ ≥ ≤ ≥ ≤

Keep your four-count and downstrokes going then introduce upstrokes (shown with a ≤ symbol) in between for a steady strummed rhythm.

4) DOUBLE SPEED

If you're feeling brave try playing at double speed! That means you'll be playing ‘down up, down up’ on every number.

1) EASY STRUMMING

♩ = 100 C Em Am Play 4 times

Although you only strum three times in Bar #1, try to keep your strumming arm moving constantly – it'll help you stay in time.

2) DOUBLE SPEED

C Em Am Play 4 times

Here we're strumming twice as fast. If you keep a constant strumming motion going you should play 16 strokes in each bar of music.

MINOR KEYS AND MODES

GET A FEEL FOR THE SWEET, EXOTIC SOUNDS OF THE DORIAN AND PHRYGIAN MODES.

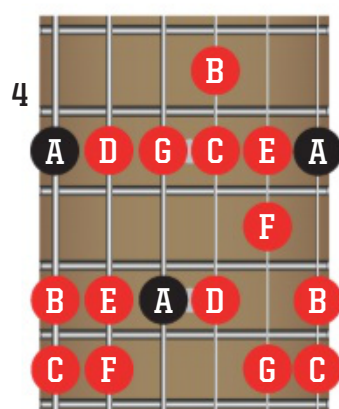
When learning about modes, musicians often ask: how do modes help me improve my guitar playing? The answer? Well, to put it simply, every mode has its own musical mood – a bit like each chord

has its unique character. So, whether you're playing a solo or writing a chord progression, modes offer a wide palette of emotion and atmosphere for your music.

Modes are easy to understand too – they're

simply scales that start on a note other than the root. Sure, there's the inevitable jargon to contend with but once you understand this simple idea then the world of modes is your musical oyster! Read on and we'll explain all.

1) THE A NATURAL MINOR SCALE



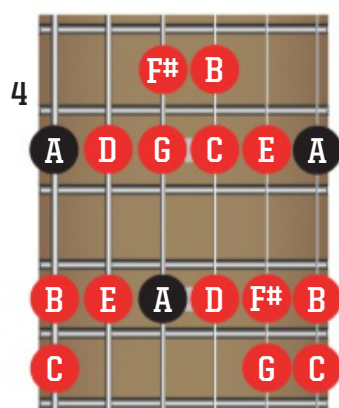
A natural minor scale

This is your starting point. Using the natural minor scale means you're in a bog-standard minor key.



Check the tab against the scale box – you'll see we're using notes from the natural minor scale throughout, giving our lick the trademark dark sound of a 'pure' minor key. What you can't see is that the chords use notes from the scale too, ensuring the minor feel.

2) THE A DORIAN MODE



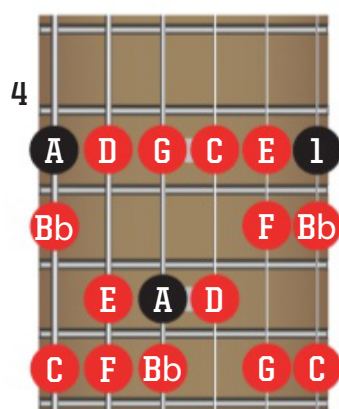
A Dorian mode

Create the A Dorian mode by changing the F note in the natural minor scale to an F#. Simple!



This is the same lick as before except we've swapped the F notes for F#s (including in the chords) to give a sweeter Dorian flavour. Why? Changing just one note makes a huge difference to the musical mood. Change a different note – get a different flavour.

3) THE A PHRYGIAN MODE



A Phrygian mode

Create the A Phrygian mode by changing the B note in the natural minor scale to a Bb.



By using B^b notes instead of B, this lick is in A Phrygian. Style-wise, we've stuck once again to our Arctic Monkeys meets The Police indie vibe, but the one-note harmony change is still really powerful. Make sure to experiment with this idea in your own music.



SINGER-SONGWRITER TIPS

USE YOUR GUITAR TO FIND THE BEST KEY FOR YOUR VOICE. WORDS BY **JIMMY LESLIE**.

Having some singing ability gives you an artistic leg up on guitarists who only work the fretboard, and it makes you more hireable and desirable. Whether you have a dynamite voice or can barely carry a tune, these tips can help you maximise your magic as a singing guitarist.

PICK THE BEST KEY

It's normal to want to play a cover tune in its original key. But if the melody lies outside your vocal range – or if you've dreamed up an alternate melody that's an unrealistic stretch for your vocal cords – you won't do the song or yourself any favours by taking that approach. To find your vocal range, do this: Sing the lowest note you can hit well, and mark its location on the fretboard. Do the same for the high end of your range. Now sing “Yeah, yeah, yeah” as loud and strong as possible, using a few different notes, and mark them on the fretboard. Your power lies in that area, so most of your big chorus notes should happen within it. If the rest of a given melody that you're auditioning falls within your total range, you're good to go in that key. If not...

UNCHAIN THE MELODY

Melodies are not written in stone, especially not those you've created. If you're totally fixated on a certain melody, then skip to the steps below.

Otherwise, follow the example set by the greats and bend it to suit your voice at any given time. The highest notes are usually the most troublesome, and falsetto notes can be particularly elusive in live performance. Stellar vocalists like Freddie Mercury, Elton John and Robert Plant took ample melodic liberties onstage even in their prime, and more so as their range reduced with age. Plant is particularly adept at finding alternative melodic routes, saving his mojo for an occasional high-wire act. Helpful hint for performing covers: learn the live versions!

CAPO LOGIC

Using a capo can be the simplest guitar move to make a vocal melody suit your style. Applying a capo within the first few frets will raise the melody by that number of half steps, so it's perfect for problematic low notes. Strapping one higher up the neck can also solve other vocal issues, but the guitar tone changes significantly. The Rolling Stones' “You Can't Always Get What You Want” is a great example. The guitar is tuned to open G with a capo at the fifth fret, putting the song in the key of C, with a chimey tone. If a capo doesn't cut it, try...

TRANSPPOSITION TIPS

Transposing keys is a mathematical matter. Start by moving a piece of the melody or chord structure to find a more comfortable key, and then

transpose everything else accordingly. Use scale tones for melodies, and represent chords with Roman numerals to make the math more obvious. Using barre chords makes the overall shape of the progression easier to spot on the fretboard. A side effect of transposition is how it affects playability, such as the way open strings ring out, and how chords flow. If those are too crucial to lose...

CHANGE THE TUNING

Those pegs at the end of the headstock are made to be moved, so don't be afraid to turn them to your advantage. Even the most die-hard fan of standard tuning can appreciate how lowering the whole enchilada a little brings the vocal melody within range without changing playability on the instrument. And using an alternate tuning rather than a capo can lead to all sorts of awesome options while it maximises the amount of open-string ring to support the vocal melody.

GENERALLY SPEAKING

Once you have a solid idea of where your voice sits in the grand scheme of things, you'll develop an ear for determining what works when you sing a cover song and learn how to set the key for an original composition. Even accomplished vocalists will find it's a good idea to work the fretboard to make the most of their unique voice. 



TUNING MANOEUVRES

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO USING ALTERNATE TUNINGS. WORDS BY **JIMMY LESLIE**.

If you're an acoustic cat who uses multiple tunings for a solo or singer-songwriter set, it's essential that you manoeuvre from one to the next efficiently to keep momentum. Even if you have great ears, it's smart to have a digital tuner (and a backup battery) handy at all times. A surefire way to lose an audience's attention is by making copious fine-tuning adjustments by ear and accounting for your instrument's every little idiosyncrasy.

If your guitar has cheap tuners, consider upgrading them. It's relatively easy and affordable. For that matter, if you have multiple acoustics, designate one for each of your main tunings, and use the following logic to flow from there.

GROUP TUNES BY TUNINGS

If you have a significant collection of songs in different tunings, consider creating a master set list that groups them by tuning rather than title or artist. You'll want to mine a particular tuning for a few songs before moving on, but probably not more than three in a row. Your opener should not be your most exotic tuning. Save that like a pitcher would a change-up or a curve. Throw a few fastballs down the middle first.

CONSIDER OVERALL STRING TENSION

Using standard tuning as a barometer, alternate tunings will either increase or decrease overall tension as you tune up or down. For example, open

E is an upward move, since the fifth, fourth and third strings go up in pitch a whole step, a whole step and a half step, respectively. Open G, on the other hand, is a downward dive, as the sixth, fifth and first strings each drop a whole step. Some tunings include moves in both directions, leaving overall string tension relatively unchanged.

If your set involves songs in multiple alternate tunings, group them according to the direction of their tuning. Pretend you're operating an elevator with stops on multiple floors. If you tuned down for your first move and you have another tuning that's even lower, it makes sense to deal with both in the same section of a set. Consider them the lobby and the basement. The same applies to raised-tension tunings. Those are the top floors. Let's consider tension-neutral manoeuvres to be stops at various doors on the same floor. The logic is to economise motion by moving from door to door, rather than from one end of the hallway to the other.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS

From standard tuning, drop the sixth string a whole step to land in drop-D tuning, which is commonly used to add a tad of grungy bottom end. Drop the first string down a step as well to achieve double drop-D tuning, and you're ready to play authentic versions of Neil Young & Crazy Horse's "Cinnamon Girl" and the Doobie Brothers' "Black Water." Now drop the fifth string from A to G, and

you're in open G, where you'll find most of the Stones' biggest hits. Undo the previous manoeuvre and lower the second string a whole step, to A, and you're in DADGAD, which had a modal quality illustrated by Jimmy Page on Led Zeppelin's "Black Mountain Side" and "Kashmir". Lower the third string a half step, to F#, and you're in open D, ready to play authentic Delta blues.

From there, it's easy to make a cool move that puts you back in standard, but a whole step deeper. Lower the fifth string a whole step, to G, lower the fourth string a whole step, to C, and drop the third string a half step, to F. Now all your standard tunes have more bottom end, and it's easier to hit the high notes in the vocal melody, so save the songs on which you could use a little help for this "lower standard." Play this paragraph in reverse, and you'll wind up back in true standard.

PLAN YOUR BANTER

Talking while tuning is an art. You don't want to slow your tuning process down too much, but having a story ready that you can easily tell about the previous or upcoming song will make the time pass more quickly for the audience. Some masters of banter include Trace Bundy and Andy McKee, who actually explain tuning manoeuvres as they perform them, using creative techniques that hold the general public's interest and thrill guitar zealots hungry for geeky information. Talk is cheap, but solid information is invaluable. 

TOP PICK



ENTER SHIKARI

Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible

AMBUSH REALITY / SO RECORDINGS



Before hitting play on *Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible*, make sure to rid yourself of any lingering expectations. Not because Enter Shikari won't live up to them, of course – to put it succinctly, this is effortlessly

one of their fiercest and most cerebral bodies of work yet – but because it's truly impossible to predict all the meteoric surprises, purist-enraging musical excursions and kaleidoscopic plot twists the English electroniccore warriors pull throughout its mercilessly unhinged and defiantly ambitious 45-minute runtime.

Right off the bat, the LP marks a luminous return to form for the quartet after 2017's middling *The Spark*: where that record embraced subtlety and cohesion, LP6 is raw, powerful and impassioned. And, perhaps most importantly, shredder Rory Clewlow is allowed to wreak frenzied havoc on his fretboard once more; though not as blindingly intense as some of their earlier, more metallic work, the riffs on this album are consistently engrossing and razor-sharp. There are a million and one different sounds and styles strewn across this sonic battlefield, and yet it's always Clewlow's craftsmanship that we find ourselves frothing the hardest over (though we here at *Australian Guitar* may, shockingly, have a slight bias).

For those fussy eaters and genre purists amongst us, save yourself the pain and find something more vanilla to enjoy. It's a stupendous feat in itself that Shikari have crafted such a fluid and flavourful record that a cut like "Apocalypses Anonymous" (a filthy downtempo club banger) can sit comfortably alongside "The Pressure's On" (an effervescent synthpop slow-burner), "The Dreamer's Hotel" (a belting pop-punk romp) and "Elegy For Extinction" (a full-on orchestral epic). Even on a thematic wavelength, Rou Reynolds and co. pin a bubbly queer anthem next to a slamming political takedown and make the transition feel completely natural – some *truly* insane shit, if we may say so ourselves.

Like most of the band's discography, you'll be doing yourself a disservice not to let your first playthrough of *Nothing* ring out in its entirety, volume cranked to 11 through your best pair of headphones or hi-fi setup. Not only do the tracks bend and bleed to form a cohesive, yet dizzyingly adventurous journey, but the production (led by Reynolds himself, no less) is so dense, diverse and dynamic that the LP as a whole offers a riveting minefield of musical easter eggs to unearth.

At once uneasy, nihilistic and strewn in a palpable sense of anxiety, yet buoyant, upbeat and explosively fun, *Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible* will certainly go down amongst Enter Shikari's brightest achievements. And it's a *very* fitting album for 2020, to say the least.

MATT DORIA

CUSTARD

Respect All Lifeforms

ABC



Their time in the spotlight may long since have fizzled, but Custard's quirks shine as bright as ever on album #8 – unequivocally their best post-reunion. The playful, tongue-in-cheek sarcasm

and searing wit strike at every turn. The guitars are gristly and groovy and immediately earwormish, frontman Dave McCormack riffing with a buoyant spryness around Paul Medew's poignantly prickly basslines. The production is tight, yet loose and lowkey, echoing the scrappy and youthful zest that made the Brisbane rockers such a fiery force to be reckoned with in the '90s. Its lead single asks, "Will we ever be that funky again?" There's an argument to be made that Custard have never *been* so funky. Break out the good wine and crank this one loud.

DANCE GAVIN DANCE

Afterburner

RISE



It's not often a band's ninth album has them hit strides as breathtaking or bold as Dance Gavin Dance have with *Afterburner*. But the Sacramento memecore scorchers seem endlessly

inspired, and between the summery Latin flavours of "Calentamiento Global", breakneck-paced calamity of "Say Hi" and slinky funk edge of "Strawberry's Wake", they've funnelled a brain-burstingly hefty wealth of that inspiration into their craft. And though all the quintessential archetypes of a DGD record are present – the noodly, pseudo-mathy guitar passages; the dips and dives between shoegazesque airiness and deathcorish brutality; the oftentimes downright hilarious one-liners from screamer Jon Mess – *Afterburner* is daringly experimental, with much of the band's sharpest writing to date and near-incalculable replay value.

EMERY

White Line Fever

BC MUSIC



If not their most inventive effort, LP8 is another loud and lucid set of punchy post-hardcore and soul-stirring emo from a band that stands staunchly as categorical proof why neither genre

will ever truly stale. Toby Morrell's lead vocals are worth particular note, his soulful, radiant howl twisting and twining around every monolithic melody like his vocal cords have a mind of their own. Guitars are crunchy and callous when he taps into his inner teen angst and otherwise dextrously rhythmic and colourful – here stands some of Emery's strongest and most emotive fretwork, Matt Carter in full rockstar mode when he launches into every blistering riff; there are some nice little pseudo-solos and tasteful flickers of reverb here and there, too.

NICOLE ATKINS

Italian Ice

SINGLE LOCK / COOKING VINYL



Slick, stirring and just that tempting tad smoky, LP5 may well be Nicole Atkins' magnum opus. The guitars are sparse and understated, focus undoubtedly set on her rich, crooner-

ready vocal prowess; though when given the chance to swagger in the foreground, the fretwork at play always threatens to steal the show – it's frisky and funky and ever so fierce, whether booming as an overdriven solo or a chill plucked rhythm twinkling under Atkins' soaring howl; notable highlights come when her affection for '60s psychedelica peeks through on "Mind Eraser" and "Captain". Altogether, Atkins explores such a diverse and dynamic set of influences on *Italian Ice* that the end result is veraciously bold, inventive and enticing.

THE STROKES

The New Abnormal

RCA / SONY



Blending fiery solos and charismatic noodling with crisp electronic beats and some of their most dizzyingly buoyant vocal melodies, The Strokes are here to declare a comeback of the most eruptive

magnitude with their sixth studio album, and first in well over a decade to justify their status as the kings of indie-rock. Immediately striking is the interplay between singer Julian Casablanca (here belting with such incandescent passion that our throats hurt just listening to it) and lead guitarist Albert Hammond Jr – the latter's inhumanly tight grasp on rhythm and the former's impenetrable swagger are a match made in post-rock heaven; throw in some breezy '80s synths and a rhythm section that's all types of tenacious, and you've got what might just go down as the 2020s' first true masterpiece. Definitely one worthy of its overpriced vinyl set.

SISTER SANDY

Floruit

INDEPENDENT



They mightn't yet be a household name, but we're predicting it won't be long before every emo revivalist and their cat start spamming their Twitter feeds with Sister Sandy lyrics.

Floruit is the Ohio trio's second album of doughy DIY pop-punk anthems, and packs across its ten searing and sharply produced tracks a cascade of insanely massive hooks and catchy-as-hell choruses. Ebbing and flowing around his warm and warbly vocal quips, Chris Joecken's guitar work toes a needle-fine line between clean and crunch; there's an almost grungy edge to his perfervid fretting, yet somehow he makes it all sound cool and ethereal. Loveably loose, jaunty and nostalgic, *Floruit* is well worth a punt for '90s skate- and '00s pop-punk tragics alike.



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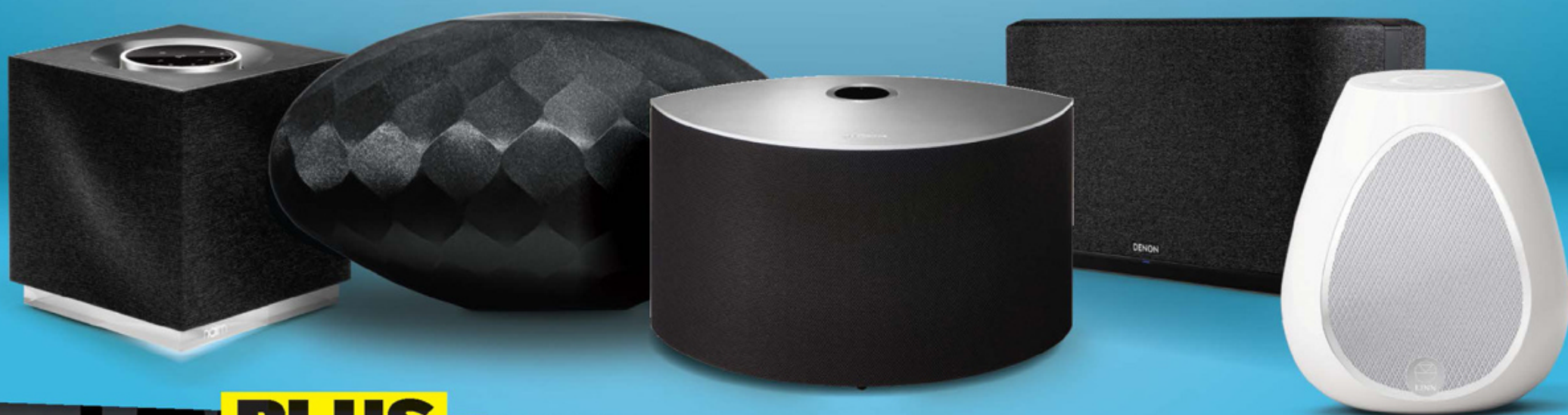


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RRP: \$7,999

ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN CUTLASS JASON RICHARDSON HH 7-STRING

CURRENTLY RIPPING IT UP IN **ALL THAT REMAINS**, SHREDLORD SUPREME **JASON RICHARDSON** IS A METAL GUITARIST WORTH HIS BREAKDOWNS. BUT IS HIS SIGNATURE MODEL WORTHY OF THE PIT, OR IS IT A WALL OF BLEH? WORDS BY **MATT BLACKETT**.

I don't like being wrong, but I do like being pleasantly surprised. I proclaimed loudly and often during the Steve Vai Passion and Warfare years – an era that also gave us the likes of Korn and Limp Bizkit – that the seven-string fad would prove to be exactly that: a fad. I was partly right. Those bands didn't age quite as gracefully as their initial success might have foretold, and Vai went back to the six-string for much of his Vai-style awesomeness.

But the seven-string guitar did not go away. In fact, it continued to gain traction with rock and metal guitarists, and it remains a touchstone for players, guitar builders and pickup manufacturers alike. Countless guitarists love the extended range that a low B or a dropped low A can provide to their stylings, and All That Remains guitarist and solo artist Jason Richardson is guilty as charged. His intricate and expansive prog-metal trip informed the machine you see here, and I use the term machine advisedly. The Cutlass Artist Series Jason Richardson HH 7-String is, depending on how you employ it, a hot rod, a jet engine or a space ship. Here's why.

It's rock solid. I've bragged about Music Man instruments in the past, but those are humble brags. They build beautiful, borderline flawless guitars. This one, right out of the case, was resonant, loud and ringing. It feels great, with a perfectly smooth, roasted maple neck. It looks great, with its crazy-cool buckeye burl top. Not everyone will go for this, but if you want something that is not a flame maple or a solid color, this is kind of amazing. It's woody, earthy and hip in an understated way.

The neck is wide, thin (front to back), and flat (although not as flat as the Petrucci model I last

reviewed). I'm a baseball bat guy. I generally go for a much fatter neck that I can wrap my thumb around and have it support my palm. But once I got over that, I really appreciated what this neck brings to the table. A lot of techniques just seem to work on this guitar. Big wide stretches, three-note-per-string hammer ons and Chapman Stick-esque polyphonic two-handed parts are all a breeze. I instantly recorded some of those parts because I don't feel like any of my guitars can really do them.

The pickups on this instrument are very punchy and clear. They maintain clarity on complex chords, even down to the registers that I (used to) hate on seven-strings. There is a musical string-to-string separation, a big distinction between the bridge and neck pickups and a very usable middle position. You actually get a lot more tonal options than you might think with a two-humbucker guitar with a three-way switch. The middle position automatically splits coils on both pickups, which is bright and jangly, and the tone control has a pull function to split the coils of either humbucker in positions one and three. These tones are definitely an added value to a humbucker instrument, and I would absolutely use them. What I found interesting, though, was the fact that they are all so different from one another. Rather than producing subtle variations on the same sounds, the split function on the Richardson almost makes it sound like three distinct guitars. And that doesn't even take into account the boost.

The volume knob has a pull feature that engages a whopping 20 decibels of boost. This is a real secret weapon on this guitar. Plugged into a Kemper

Profiler set to an AC30 tone, I could get semi-dirty rhythm tones all day long, and then pull up on the volume knob for a lead tone that was smooth and creamy. It really works. You could definitely do a gig with a one-sound amp, riding a crunch tone for rhythms, rolling down the well-voiced volume knob for clean sounds and hitting the onboard boost for solos. So if the coil-split can make the Cutlass sound like three different guitars, the boost function gives you like five different guitars (and a few different amps). *Woah!*

The JR is already flexible enough with just the six highest strings, but we should probably talk about the low-B string and all that it brings. It's big and speaks clearly and doesn't flub out, even though the scale length is 25.5 inches. After struggling a bit to use the low B in a musical way, I put the Cutlass into a dropped-A tuning (not totally easy given the floating trem), gaining a one-finger power-chord capability on the three low strings. That made me see the light as to how I might incorporate a seven-string into my bag of tricks. I learned a lot in the process.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In conclusion, this guitar is a perfect example of this kind of guitar. Obviously, it's not for everyone, but it's awesome. I'll say it again: I learned a lot from playing this guitar. That might be the highest praise I can give it, aside from, you know, the whole "great build, great tone, great quality control" kind of thing. If you've never played a seven-string, you should play this guitar. Even if you've played a bunch of seven-strings, you should play this guitar. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- Music Man custom floating tremolo and humbuckers
- Roasted, figured maple neck
- 24 medium jumbo frets
- Schaller M6-IND locking tuners
- Volume knob pull feature

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Superior build quality
- ▲ Innovative cosmetics
- ▲ Great playability

CONS

- ♥ None

► CONTACT

CMC

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Web: cmcmusic.com.au



RRP: \$1,199

FENDER LEAD III

IS THIS REBIRTH OF A LATE '70S MODEL GETTING THE SECOND CHANCE IT DESERVES? WORDS BY **ROB LAING**.

Guitars are discontinued for all kinds of reasons – some simply don't connect with enough players and for others it just isn't their time... Reissues can give lost gems a second life; a chance to find the fanbase that eluded them first time around. Which brings us here for the encore of the Fender Lead. It wasn't exactly a flash in the pan design originally, though.

Produced between 1979 and 1982, the Lead eventually encompassed three guises in its original lifetime; the single humbucker Lead I with series/parallel switch, the Lead II with two single-coils and a phase switch and finally, the double humbucker Lead III that surfaced in 1982 with coil selector switch.

Bono picked up a Lead II in U2's earlier days; Clapton's is sitting in London's Hard Rock Cafe. Even St Vincent has a heavily-modded model. Even so, the Lead is not exactly a ubiquitous cult model. Switching configurations aside, it's tempting to dismiss the Lead as a budget Strat alternative that gave way to the advent of the Japanese Squier series in 1982. But spending time with one reveals a distinct shape that holds its own. It is a Strat alternative that players might actually prefer.

The Lead II and III are returning but the I has been left out of the reunion. While not being badged as a strict 'reissue', the two Leads for 2020 do stay authentic to some degree. They're now part of Fender's ever-growing Mexican Player Series so

that means Player series pickups and tuners, plus the modern C neck profile.

The Lead III potentially offers the widest tonal options of the two new models, and what'd'ya know – that's what we have here, in the Purple Metallic finish Fender is the keenest to showcase of the selection.

The 25.5-inch scale may be the same as a Strat but the narrower, more double-cut body makes the Lead III look and feel more compact. According to your own preferences, that could win you round if you've never taken to Leo's original or immediately turn you off. But make no mistake, it's distinct in the Fender catalogue. We like it a lot and the guitar feels close and personal sitting down, with a balance on the strap, too.

We like that metallic finish; it's certainly won a fair few fans in the office and works very well with the black-and-white-edged pickguard. Though CITES changes suggest rosewood will be working its way to more models this year, the Player series is sticking with pau ferro for now. It's undeniably a lighter alternative, but there's not much in it in terms of feel.

This is one of the most playable examples of the modern C neck we've encountered – the action is low and fast. People talk about the speed of flat profiles from the likes of Ibanez, but a well-set-up Fender C is an addictive thing indeed. John Mayer claims the slack in the strings is the key to a great guitar, and there's a sense of easier wins for your

bends and vibrato offered with the elasticity here that we love. The large heel block is definitely from the older school, but the acoustic experience here bodes well for plugging in.

The thin alder bodies of Fenders with this scale length are typically bright sounding guitars and that in turn leads to a lively tonality when humbuckers are brought into play. That's here in spades from these Alnico IIs – a crisper crunch along with some welcome versatility.

A caveat worth remembering is that despite the 'best of both worlds' concept, coil-splits aren't the same as the full-fat single-coil experience. The level drops a little when you split here, but so does the bottom end. What you gain is three more single-coil-esque flavours – we especially like the mid position split here, a great balance of throaty punch that recalls the middle territory of a Strat that's also great for strumming with the volume wound down a notch.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This is an interesting mix of the distinct with Strat traits; the familiar and the fresh all from an unlikely comeback. The Lead III really must be tried out to see what it offers in feel and tone, but we think it feels good and plays great. Rather than badge this as worthy addition to a guitar arsenal, we think it holds its own as a potential main squeeze to cover your needs. 

► TOP FEATURES

- Narrower, more double-cut body
- Slick metallic finish
- Modern C neck
- Light pau ferro body
- Alnico II humbuckers

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Great alternative to a standard Strat
- ▲ Tones as classic as its design
- ▲ Super playable

CONS

- ▼ Coil-split means you're sacrificing some tonal weight

► CONTACT

FENDER

Ph: (02) 8198 1300

Web: fender.com

RRP: \$3,899

FENDER '62 PRINCETON CHRIS STAPLETON EDITION

FENDER'S FIRST SIGNATURE AMP FOR A COUNTRY ARTIST REVIVES A FAVOURITE FROM THE GLORY YEARS AND ADDS A TWEAK (OR TWO).

WORDS BY **NICK GUPPY**.



For many guitarists, the biggest stars of the vintage small valve-combo market are the Tweed and 'Blackface'-era amplifiers made by Fender during the 50s and early 60s. That's no surprise, of course, because since their introduction, Tweed and 'Blackface' Champs, Princetons and Deluxes have been used by some of the world's top players on stage and in the studio, producing many of rock's all-time epic guitar tones.

But there's more to Fender's small amp heritage. Just under the radar but equally worthy are the blonde and 'Brownface' amplifiers made roughly between 1959 and 1963. This was a time of transition: the introduction of Tolex covering, forward-facing controls, twin channels, alternative loudspeakers and the new tremolo effect were all part of Fender's drive to appeal to a wider range of players.

One of the most coveted amps from this period is the 6G2 'Brownface' Princeton and Fender has just released a very special Custom Shop signature version of it, named for the multi-award-winning American country star Chris Stapleton.

Fender's Custom Shop worked closely with Chris to arrive at what might be considered an idealised version of his prized originals. The Stapleton's cabinet is made from lock-jointed pine boards for strength, lightness and resonance, expertly covered in brown Tolex, with the correct wheat speaker grille. Care has been taken to preserve original dimensions and corner radiuses, and the result is a seriously good-looking and very portable combo.

The electronics sit inside a traditional steel chassis, held firmly by four bolts in chrome strap washers. The circuit is built on an eyelet board, which is the traditional American method for valve amp building, where components are hand-soldered into strategically placed brass eyelets punched into a stiff fibre board. With a few small changes, the Stapleton's parts and layout are very close to the original, including reproductions of the original blue Ajax coupling capacitors. The build quality is first class, with Schumacher transformers, neatly routed wiring and perfect soldering. Our sample was the correct UK voltage

but came with a moulded European Schuko plug on the end of a captive mains lead. There are grounded and non-grounded UK adaptors for this type of plug and it's important to use the right one. We'd expect regular UK models to come with a three-pin UK plug, though.

The transition theme continues in the '62 Princeton's classic 6G2 circuit, which you could say sits halfway between a Tweed amp and the later 'Blackface' models - it has a fixed bias output stage, a cathodyne phase inverter and the famous 'harmonic tremolo' effect, using one half of a 12AX7 along with a few other components to modulate the output stage bias.

Controls are simple, like most Fenders from this era, with a pair of high- and low-gain input jacks feeding volume, tone, tremolo speed and intensity. One significant difference between the Stapleton and an original '62 Princeton is the loudspeaker, which has been upgraded from the standard ten-inch to a special Eminence custom-design 12-inch. Overall, the Stapleton looks and smells right, even down to small details such as the engraved brass signature plate, leather carry handle and chrome strap washers.

The Princeton powers up smoothly with no need for a standby switch thanks to the 5Y3 rectifier, which ramps up voltages over a few seconds as opposed to the instant thump of silicon diodes. On pure all-valve circuits like this, it's not unusual to hear a little hum while voltages stabilise, although once everything's warmed up the Stapleton is practically free of hum and hiss.

Its clean sounds have exceptionally pleasing definition and detail, with a sweet yet bright top-end, alloyed with a balanced midrange and a punchy low-end, enhanced by the custom-designed 12-inch Eminence driver. Guitars are easy to dial in with the single tone control, which is just right for our Strat and Les Paul with the knob parked at around one o'clock. As the volume control is pushed past noon, the Princeton's sumptuous cleans give way to a warm, punchy and very dynamic overdrive that gets thicker and more gained-out in the

last quarter of the volume knob's travel, without increasing the volume too much.

The Princeton's tremolo effect is one of the things that make it so coveted. Linked to the output stage bias, the effect is ducked when you hit the strings hard, so single notes and chords don't lose all of their attack. Far from simple volume up/down ramps, this tremolo is warm and lets the tone breathe. The speed range will suit most needs, although we felt it could have been moved down a little, with more range at the slow end.

There's ample volume for smaller gigs thanks to the loudspeaker's high sensitivity, with the best all-round sounds happening with the volume control on around two to three o'clock. The Stapleton is instant Americana in a box, generating authentic tones that sound as though they've been plucked straight out of 1960s Nashville, yet remaining very contemporary and versatile enough to cover many styles.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Signature models often include features that limit their wider appeal. However, where the Stapleton Edition is concerned, it's practically identical to the original. Built with obvious respect, except for a few subtle circuit tweaks that enhance its character, and a superlative upgraded 12-inch loudspeaker, the Stapleton is perfect not just for home and studio but also small stages, where the high-sensitivity speaker makes the most of its 12-watt output.

As high-end boutique amplifiers go, it's perhaps a little on the pricey side, but you get what you pay for and then some, as the outfit includes a unique heavy duty twill cover made by American outdoor apparel specialists Filson. Whether or not country music is your thing, Fender's '62 Princeton Chris Stapleton Edition is capable of sitting in many different musical genres, with one of the sweetest tones we've ever heard. Aimed at well-heeled amateurs, pro players and inevitably collectors, it's a fitting tribute to Fender's glory years and an amp that deserves to be heard. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- Built with lock-jointed pine boards for strength, lightness and resonance
- Original dimensions and corner radiuses, with time-accurate wheat grille
- 5Y3 rectifier
- Single-button tremolo footswitch
- 1x12-inch Eminence CS Signature

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Superlative clean and natural overdrive tones
- ▲ Fabulous tremolo effect

CONS

- ▲ A lot of money for a 12-watt valve combo (but in this case, it's not hard to justify)

► CONTACT

FENDER

Ph: (02) 8198 1300

Web: fender.com



RRP: \$8,499

GIBSON SHERYL CROW COUNTRY WESTERN SUPREME

FROM THE SECOND SHE BROKE THROUGH IN '87, COUNTRY-POP ICON **SHERYL CROW** HAS SHONE WITH A TONE ALL OF HER OWN. NOW, IN PARTNERING WITH GIBSON, SHE'S GIVING US THE CHANCE TO TRY IT OUT FOR OURSELVES, NO BACKSTREET METHODS NECESSARY. WORDS BY **JIMMY LESLIE**.

This is the most highly customised Country Western in Gibson history, according to the venerable manufacturer. The idea was to use Crow's own sweet-sounding classic CW as a baseline and add a dose of punch and projection via a hand-scalloped, advanced X-bracing pattern from the 1930s. This was applied to a thermally aged Sitka spruce top, which was adhered to mahogany back and sides with hot hide glue. Outfitted with top-shelf electronics, the guitar was made with the professional performer in mind.

Like the lady herself, the Sheryl Crow Signature Country Western Supreme is an eye catcher. With a quick glance at the front, it might look rather like a traditional Country Western with squared shoulders, a "belly-up" bridge and an expanded hummingbird-style pickguard, plus a few subtle enhancements, such as white bean tuner knobs. But there's nothing subtle about its mahogany back, sides and neck, which are stained a luminous lipstick red. I love it, even if the hue is a bit bright compared to the spruce top's "antiqued" finish and medium-dark rosewood fingerboard. Cream-coloured binding helps bring the

overall color scheme together. Players that can back it up with their own stylistic magnificence will likely find Crow's CWS quite appealing.

The full round neck feels instantly inviting in the hand. The width at the nut measures 1.725 inches, which is a tad narrower than some modern dreadnoughts, yet slightly wider than the traditional 1.69 inches. The nut is on the tall side, and its sides aren't as smooth as they could be, but I enjoy how the unique width comes into play. Barre and cowboy chords are a breeze, and strumming away with a pick comes naturally, yet there's still enough space between the strings to accommodate fingerstyle playing. And even though the guitar is a full-bodied dreadnought with onboard electronics, it feels light as a feather.

Unlike so many dreadnoughts, the Crow Country Western's hallmark tone is not a booming bottom but rather a satisfying midrange and a brilliant top end that's very present without being brittle. Chords sound together as one voice, yet single-note runs pop out individually with surprising clarity. The percussive front end of solid plectrum

strumming comes across loud and clear, making this model a natural companion for players who want a sound that will cut through a mix in the studio or onstage.

Plugged in to an AER Compact 60/3 TE, the Amulet M undersaddle pickup, with its stealthy soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls, did a fantastic job of representing the Crow signature's acoustic character. The electrified tone was evenly balanced from string to string and note to note, and it didn't quack out when I whacked out some big cowboy chords with strong attack.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The main thing is that the Sheryl Crow Country Western Supreme truly sings! It's a dream acoustic for the performing singer/songwriter who has an ear for elegance and an eye for the extraordinary. This instrument is not cheap, but everybody knows that if you want the real deal, it's going to cost a little more. True Crow fans, Gibson lovers and acoustic aficionados of many stripes will appreciate this Supreme offering from Gibson. 

► TOP FEATURES

- Mahogany neck, back and sides
- Thermally aged Sitka spruce top
- Amulet M undersaddle pickup with soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls
- Uniquely sized 1.725-inch neck

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Exceptional playability
- ▲ Brilliant acoustic and amplified tone
- ▲ Custom Shop craftsmanship
- ▲ Colourful appearance

CONS

- ▲ Nut sides could be smoother
- ▲ Luminous red back, sides and neck might be a bit bright for conservative tastes

► CONTACT

AUSTRALIS

Ph: (02) 9698 4444

Web: australismusic.com.au



RRP: \$199

AUDIENT EVO 4 PORTABLE AUDIO INTERFACE

YET ANOTHER ENTRY INTO THE CROWDED ENTRY-LEVEL RECORDING INTERFACE MARKET. THE BRITISH AUDIO TECHNOLOGISTS HOPE THAT SOME UNIQUE USER-FRIENDLY INNOVATIONS WILL MAKE THE EVO 4 A NO-BRAINER FOR BEGINNERS AND DIGITAL MULTITASKERS. WORDS BY **ALEX WILSON**.

Last year, one of my bandmates got in touch and asked me about an audio interface for his teenage son, who's become really passionate about guitar. I did recommend him something good and cheap, but to be honest it felt a bit arbitrary selecting one product out from a sea of lookalikes (and soundalikes). The democratisation of audio production has led to an explosion of cheap consumer gear. In practice this amounts to companies just repackaging the same old features and designs under competing brand marquees. Audient's new brand of EVO interfaces is an admirable attempt to bring some new features to the table. These innovations are not just novelty for the sake of it, they can meaningfully improve the quality of recordings and the device's workflow.

The most trumpeted of these new features is 'Smartgain' – an algorithm that Audient have built into the guts of the device that listens to the input signal and sets the gain at an optimal level for clean recordings. Digital clipping can ruin an otherwise fine recording, and novices often lack the know-how or critical ear to it until the damage is done.

The claim is that, after pressing the big green button on the front of the EVO 4, you can stop worrying about this issue. Well, I can report that this works well in practice as well as theory. I tested the Smartgain feature with a bunch of different signals – spoken voice and acoustic guitar via mic, 5-string active bass, passive electric guitar and electric piano via DI – and avoided clipping my recordings in all cases. It is possible to trick the algorithm into failure by unexpectedly switching up your performance dynamics, but this is an outlier case that wouldn't apply in the real world. In short, this is a clever, cool and well-executed feature.

The same can be said for the 'loopback' feature. Loopback is a kind of audio routing where the

system sounds of your host device (anything from a desktop to a phone) are recorded alongside your mic and instrument sources. This is a crucial technical hurdle to overcome in the world of livestreaming and digital content and would usually require tricky hardware workarounds or third-party software. By building this functionality right into the device itself, Audient have solved this problem in a clean and elegant fashion. This is potentially the 'killer app' of the EVO 4 and stands to give it a real edge for aspiring podcasters, Twitch streamers and aspiring YouTube stars. Again, a smart feature implemented in a straightforward way.

The rest of the EVO 4's feature list is strong while losing a couple of nice-to-have capabilities in favour of keeping the unit light, small and cheap. For example, the fact that it can be powered entirely by the USB-C connection is great, but the protocol is USB 2.0, not the more current USB 3.0. So there's a small decrease in performance trading off against the portability. And while the EVO 4 is surprisingly inexpensive, look closely at the tech specs: The analog-to-digital converters can only write files at a maximum of 96kbps, whereas most competing products in this price range can extend this to 192kbps.

For the purposes of this review I feel it's important to be transparent about where sacrifices have been made to keep the cost down. However, when I was using this interface, I didn't feel like these engineering limitations translated obviously into subpar recordings. The preamps and A/D conversion are transparent, capturing the sound of my go-to instruments without introducing unwanted artifacts or tonal changes. To be sure, the EVO 4 lacks the musicality of the premium inputs found in the best gear (think Universal Audio, RME, Antelope etc), but holds the line well enough against competitors in the

same price bracket. One omission that I don't think is justifiable: plugging into the headphone jack disables the main monitor sends. Something that is possible to work around, but makes things a little harder than they should be.

Audient have doubled down on the beginner-friendly aspect of the EVO 4 by offering access to their online software portal, ARC, as part of the purchase and registration of the unit. The products on offer, from brands like Steinberg and Two Notes, are ones that would be found in many professional setups. I remember the bad old days back when I was teaching myself home recording and having access to pro software required a massive investment which a newbie simply could not afford. What's on offer here is plenty to get started with, and no need to worry that you're missing out on the good stuff.

The final thing to say about the EVO 4 is how nice it is to use in an ergonomic sense. I like having notches in the movement of the main volume knob so I can commit a gain level to memory and come back to it. The 'big knob' design has been very well implemented. It's simple to have the EVO 4 sit at one's workspace with all the controls necessary to engineer at one's fingertips. Being housed in plastic rather than some kind of metal makes the EVO 4 feel a bit less bombproof than other portable interfaces, but this is a small price to pay considering the price you'll pay to own it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Audient have delivered a solid product that's a strong contender for people starting out in their musical recording journey, or digital "creative" types that need a bit more sonic juice in their production rig. There are some trade-offs that occur at such a low price-point, but they have been thought through well enough and don't really grate on the user. 🎧

► TOP FEATURES

- Smartgain Mode
- Built-in audio loopback
- Access to Audient's ARC software bundle
- two combi jack inputs and one Hi-Z instrument input.
- Bus-powered via USB-C

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Clever, user-friendly design innovations
- ▲ Small, light and stylish
- ▲ Good hands-on workflow

CONS

- ▲ Analog-to-digital and USB specs are lower than competing products
- ▲ Lack of MIDI compatibility
- ▲ Plugging in headphones automatically mutes the master outputs

► CONTACT

STUDIO CONNECTIONS

Ph: (03) 9416 8097

Web: studioconnections.com.au



PIGTRONIX RESOTRON TRACKING FILTER

BRING THE SOUND OF '70S SYNTHS TO YOUR BOARD WITH A PITCH-TRACKING FEATURE.

WORDS BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

RRP: \$549

An envelope filter isn't an immediate shoo-in for everybody's pedalboard, but since they first appeared in the 1970s, plenty of players have embraced their auto-wah capabilities or their ability to mimic certain analogue synth tones, notably squelchy filter sweeps. The traditional envelope filter pedal is based around dynamics: basically, the harder you play, the stronger the effect. This new all-analogue pedal is designed on the one hand to provide those traditional sounds with both up and down

envelope modes, but also introduces the concept of a pitch-following filter with the effect based purely on the actual notes you play rather than how hard you play them.

The Resotron's 24dB/oct filter circuitry is based on the SSM2040 chip as found on some vintage synths. It can be set to work as a low-pass or high-pass filter or in band-pass mode for typical wah tones. With adjustment to these voices with standard filter Peak and Cutoff knobs, there's loads of sonic potential, response to your playing being

set by the Sensitivity knob. You can dial in several subtle variations on the auto-wah experience for funky riffing, reggae rhythms and Jerry Garcia leads for the Deadheads among us, but you can also coax out some tones that you might expect from a phaser or flanger.

Plugging in an expression pedal allows foot control of the filter cutoff if you'd like a more conventional wah experience, and the problem of an envelope filter's sound receding into the mix when the pedal is engaged is countered here by onboard compression, mixed in with the Blend control, which keeps things punchy and present without affecting sensitivity.

Pitch mode offers something else again. Its Glide knob sets how long it takes for the filter to move between notes, higher settings with some languid swelling-in of the effect being particularly nice. Needless to say, there's loads of control juxtaposition to explore if you want to get a bit 'out there'. And if you want to get really wacky or just head further away from conventional guitar, engaging the Oscillate switch conjures up a shedload of monophonic synth sounds.

THE BOTTOM LINE

All the classic envelope filter sounds are here with plenty of nuanced variations, but there's more for the bold to explore.



Electro-Harmonix Q-Tron Plus

The classic vintage 1970s envelope filter is the Mu-Tron III, designed by Mike Beigel, who many years

later designed the Q-Tron for EHX. This latest version adds an effects loop between the preamp and filter section for more versatility.



Earthquaker Devices Spatial Delivery V2

This envelope filter has a 'Sample and Hold' mode alongside the standard up and down sweep modes. It also features a knob that morphs between high-pass and low-pass filters (with band-pass in the middle) instead of a switch.



WMD Protostar

WMD claims that this is the most powerful and versatile envelope filter on the planet. It certainly has plenty of control over

the effect and includes an end-of-chain compressor and dry/wet mix for parallel filtering and compression effects.

► TOP FEATURES

- Built-in compression
- Huge range of envelope filter sounds
- Expression pedal compatibility
- Based on real, vintage analogue synths
- Easy to mold for different tones

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Pitch mode and Oscillate button offer further sonic experiences
- ▲ Compact size

CONS

- ▲ 18-volt operation could tie up two outputs on some power distributors

► CONTACT

DYNAMIC

Ph: (02) 9939 1299

Web: dynamicmusic.com.au



RRP: \$849.99

YAMAHA THR30II WIRELESS COMBO

YAMAHA'S DESKTOP AMP RANGE GOES CABLE-FREE AND PACKS IN MORE FEATURES THAN A SWISS ARMY KNIFE. BUT CAN YOU REALLY USE IT FOR HOME, STUDIO AND STAGE? WORDS BY **NICK GUPPY**. PHOTO BY **OLLY CURTIS**.

Traditionally, many guitarists tended to use two amplifiers: a bigger amp for the stage and a smaller one for the studio. Back in 2011, this status quo shifted when Yamaha spotted a niche for something else. Its concept was built around a third type of guitar amp, not another black vinyl-covered box sat on the floor but a design that could fit comfortably on a bookshelf or desktop with a home-friendly feature set. Thus was born the popular and highly successful THR series, which is still going strong today thanks to new models and firmware upgrades. Despite a growing number of imitators, the desktop amp is something Yamaha has always owned and to underline that the company has made what could be the most significant addition yet in the shape of the new THR Mark II series, which includes wireless and non-wireless 20-watt combos, and the new range-topping 30-watt THR30II Wireless we have here.

With a slightly larger footprint to accommodate its beefed-up loudspeakers, the THR30II Wireless is still roughly the same size as a four-slice toaster, featuring an injection-moulded black plastic case topped with a one-piece steel control panel and speaker grille. The steelwork is finished in a lounge-friendly cream colour, with a thin aluminium trim and a pair of sunset orange LEDs adding a valve-like warm illumination behind the grille, which protects two full-range 3.5-inch loudspeakers in a ported enclosure designed to enhance bass and stereo spread.

The controls look broadly similar to the original THR, with a few significant additions. There are five memory save/recall buttons and a Bluetooth pairing

button. The amp selections have been expanded, with three distinct modes for each of the THR's eight voices (which include options for bass, acoustic guitar and a flat response for music playback). The colour of the indicator LEDs helpfully changes depending on the mode: red for classic, blue for boutique, green for modern. The amp controls are reassuringly familiar, with programmable knobs for gain, master volume, bass, mid and treble.

Effects are taken care of by two knobs that vary the mix level and effects type. The modulation effects include chorus, flanging, phasing and tremolo, while the echo/reverb knob gives you a choice of echo, echo mixed with reverb, and hall or spring reverb programs. Two more non-programmable knobs govern guitar and audio output, while a small round LED display shows you the patch number. Next to this display there's a tap tempo button that also toggles the THR's chromatic tuner and extended stereo field functions.

Around the back there's a stereo pair of line outs, which connect to balanced or unbalanced jack plug leads, together with a USB socket and a power socket for the THR's laptop-style power supply. When Yamaha says 'wireless', it means it; the THR30II Wireless is fully compatible with the Line 6 Relay G10T transmitter, while mains power is augmented with a rechargeable battery pack giving up to five hours of unplugged play time. The THR30II's Bluetooth connects to the THR Remote app to enable real-time editing of all the amp controls. The app also accesses extra parameters including a compressor and noise gate, 16 different

cabinet emulations and two extra reverb models. There's also provision for adding a third-party Bluetooth foot controller, and you can stream audio to the THR30II Wireless from any Bluetooth-enabled mobile device.

With no alternating current inside its case, the THR30II is remarkably free of background noise. There's just a little hiss at extreme gain and volume settings, but at more sensible levels the noise floor is practically non-existent.

The 15 guitar amp models are extraordinary. Yamaha doesn't use brand names as references, so there are no direct comparisons to be made, but the instruction manual descriptions give you a pretty good idea. There's an uncanny 'real' dynamic response – the clean models produce snappy treble and surprisingly full bass, while low- to medium-gain models have a hyper-realistic touch sensitivity that feels just like you're plugging into a classic valve amp. At the higher gain end of the spectrum, you can pile on practically infinite distortion so careful EQ is needed to stop things getting out of control. Fortunately, the THR's bass, mid and treble controls are very precise and smooth.

Bass mode offers three voices specially tailored for the lower octaves, with a choice of condenser, dynamic and valve microphone models in acoustic guitar mode, while the flat/music playback mode gives three different EQ settings. The effects are equally impressive. In super wide mode with a hint of tremolo and spring reverb, the illusion of playing through something much bigger and heavier is very convincing.

The THR Remote app lets you customise the THR without getting bogged down in endless parameters. We like the clean, crisply rendered 2D graphics and intuitive layout, which made editing a breeze. The THR30II's 15W+15W output power is just about enough to handle small gigs, although you'll get the best results using the line outs into a PA – take note that without the power supply plugged in, the THR throttles back to half power to extend battery life.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Valve amps are great but often limiting in terms of flexibility. They're also heavy things to cart around and, especially where vintage gear is concerned, it's hard to keep them operating in peak condition. Just as digital cameras eventually converted most photographers from film, guitar amp modelling technology is now so good that on most occasions you can have your cake and eat it. It's hard to find anything less than brilliant in Yamaha's THR30II; everything you might want from a home/desktop guitar amp is right here. Being able to plug in and play without the need for leads and mains cables is so convenient, with streaming audio making it a perfect partner for practice, busking and recording.

Today, Yamaha doesn't have this niche to itself any more and there's some strong competition. However, with something to offer all kinds of players, we think the new THR30II Wireless is still there at the top. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- THR Remote app
- Remote foot controller capability
- Audio streaming via Bluetooth
- Two full-range 3.5-inch loudspeakers
- Colour-changing indicator LEDs

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- ▲ Top-quality, market-leading sounds from a deceptively simple interface
- ▲ Wireless functions work perfectly
- ▲ THR Remote app is great

CONS

- ▲ It's pricey against the competition
- ▲ Couple of extra finish choices would add to the appeal

► CONTACT

YAMAHA AUSTRALIA

Ph: (03) 9693 5111

Web: au.yamaha.com



RRP: \$1,099

MARSHALL ORIGIN 50H AMP HEAD

WE'RE GOING BACK TO BASICS, BABY! WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

While I truly love love multi-channel guitar amps for the undeniable versatility they can provide when performing live, I often wonder if we guitarists were actually better off when we didn't have such a wide variety of tones, all easily accessible simply at the flick of a footswitch. For example, when I think of the greatest guitar tones of all time, most examples come from players who used single-channel Marshall heads during the '60s, '70s and '80s. Even the great Marshall tones that emerged during the '90s and new millennium often came from players who used older or reissue single-channel amp heads.

Marshall's new Origin series of guitar amps provide a welcome return to the philosophy of "less is more". The Marshall Origin50H amp head is kind of like a long-lost brother of a '70s JMP 50-watt head, providing a single-channel design and a dead-simple control panel. Marshall did manage to squeeze in a few modern and highly welcome conveniences like variable power output, a boost function and effects loop, but at its heart the Origin50H is all about providing the most beloved classic Marshall tone in its most pure and unadulterated form. Even better, Marshall's Origin amps are affordably priced, making genuine classic Marshall tone more accessible than ever.

The Marshall Origin50H is a single-channel, all-tube 50-watt amp head featuring a pair of EL34 tubes for the power amp section and three ECC83 tubes for the preamp and effects loop. The front panel controls are arranged in three sections, with Presence and Master in the Output section, treble, middle, bass and tilt in the EQ section, and a gain control with pull boost function in the final section.

Next to the power on/off toggle switch is a three-position toggle switch with low (one-watt), mid (ten-watt) and high output (50-watt) settings. The amp provides only a single quarter-inch guitar input jack, but the tilt control provides the classic voices of bright and normal input channels as well as the blend of both that players would get by using a jumper cable between the two on a four-input amp.

Rear panel features include an effects loop with quarter-inch send and return jacks, a jack for the included footswitch that engages the boost function and effects loop, a quarter-inch DI output, and three speaker output jacks for connecting eight- or 16-ohm speaker cabinets or a pair of 16-ohm cabs. The shell's dimensions are a little shorter than those of a classic Marshall "smallbox" head, and the overall weight is about 12 kilograms, which is very welcome for players who are tired of lugging big, heavy heads to gigs.

Like the classic Marshall JMP amps of the '70s, the Origin50H excels at overdriven tones that are raw, organic and vibrant with a certain midrange character that can only be described as "Marshall". If you love the tones of Jimi, Jimmy, Billy, Eddie or Angus, the Origin50H can get you pretty damn close. This is not a high-gain amp by any means, although engaging the boost function can provide suitable compression and saturation for smooth, sustaining solos. The clean headroom is actually quite generous and impressive, which is welcome news for fans of signature Marshall clean tones as well as players looking for a solid foundation for a pedal-centric rig.

The one-, ten- and 50-watt output settings provide dramatic differences in output level, with the single-watt setting being about the level of loud talking while the 50-watt setting is more than loud enough for use on stage. The amp sounds best with the Master control set from eight to ten, and with my mid-'60s SG I nailed "Highway to Hell" tones with the EQ set to 6, 6, 6... Wait a second...

THE BOTTOM LINE

The classic Marshall overdrive and clean tones that guitarists know and love have never been more affordable or accessible, all thanks to the Origin50H. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- Two EL34 tubes for the power amp section and three ECC83 tubes for the preamp and effects loop
- Effects loop with quarter-inch send and return jacks
- Lightweight build
- Three output options with distinct tonal variance

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- The Tilt control delivers the tones of a classic Marshall's normal or bright channels, as well as a blend of the two
- The Output switch provides one-, ten- and 50-watt output settings to provide that distinctive Marshall overdrive grind, at bedroom to stage volume levels

CONS

- None

► CONTACT

ELECTRIC FACTORY

Ph: (03) 9474 1000

Web: elfa.com.au



RRP: \$449

MOOER GE-150 AMP MODELLER AND MULTI-EFFECTS UNIT

LESS IS MOOER WITH THIS NICELY PRICED AMP-MODELLING MULTI-EFFECTS.

WORDS BY **MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN.**

The past two years have seen a radical shift from Mooer. It has gone from the original purveyor of pocket money-friendly micro pedals with – ahem – familiar origins to an effects powerhouse in its own right, producing some astounding flagship devices, including the GE300 amp modeller/multi-effects. The GE150 combines the company's reputation for value for money with its more recent innovative streak to produce a feature-packed multi-effects priced comfortably below the \$500 mark.

For the modest outlay, you're getting 55 amp models – derived from Mooer's best-selling Micro Preamp series, no less – as well as a whopping 151 effects. While the unit packs its own array of Impulse Responses, what takes this above and beyond a typical multi-effects unit is the inbuilt ability to add your own.

It's a handy practice tool too, with drum rhythms and metronome settings, an aux in jack, and a micro-USB, which even allows you to record direct via your phone. All it takes is a quick

peruse of the 200 onboard presets to confirm that this multi-effects is punching way above its price tag. While there are half as many models as on the GE300, there will be more than enough for most players out there.

The clean models – particularly the Mesa Mk3 effort – compress beautifully, while the Jazz 120 model is as pristine as any recorded tones from the solid-state classic. The models that stand out correspond with our faves from the Micro Preamp range, so we quickly found our chug saviours in the 5150 and Engl Powerball sounds, which deliver all the aggression and saturation your heart could desire, minus the fizz. Any sounds that have a little too much top-end can be tamed via the handy onboard EQ, which is easily accessible on each patch.

This is no downsized GE300, however, and that becomes apparent while delving into the effects selection. There's a reasonable selection, but you're limited in terms of tweaking: each effect offers only three or four parameters, which limits

your choice when it comes to modulations. We'd recommend avoiding the shonky pitch shifter, but the delays and reverbs are stellar, if a bit vanilla. There are two footswitches for cycling through presets, but holding the left activates a built-in tuner, while keeping your foot on the right activates the 80-second looper.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you're shopping for a new multi-effects unit, the GE150 is a very sound choice – particularly if realistic tones and a robust feature set are more important to you than soundscaping. Kudos to Mooer – despite its light weight, the whole package looks sleek and feels rock-solid, particularly the smooth-operating expression pedal. It looks a lot pricier than it is, which is plus if you're looking to impress your punters.

You won't find better amp-modelled sounds from any other multi-effects in this price range, and that alone makes this diminutive unit worthy of your rig. 🎸

► TOP FEATURES

- 55 amp models
- 151 effects
- Ability to add your own IRs
- Drum rhythms and metronome
- Built-in tuner

► WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- 🟢 Best amp modelling in its price class
- 🟢 Excellent value

CONS

- 🟢 Effects could be more tweakable
- 🟢 Shonky pitch-shifter

► CONTACT

JADE MC

Ph: (03) 9457 8000

Web: jademcaustralia.com.au



SHREDDING THROUGH A CRISIS

AUSTRALIAN GUITAR EDITOR **MATT DORIA** RIFFS THROUGH A FEW WAYS TO HELP STRUGGLING ARTISTS AS THEY WADE THROUGH THESE MOST UNCERTAIN OF TIMES. PHOTO BY **BRITT ANDREWS**.

You might have noticed that in this issue of Australian Guitar, we've forgone the usual Axes In Action column. No, we haven't suddenly decided that live music no longer butters our proverbial muffin; rather, there haven't been any gigs for us to hit since the outbreak of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic – no mosh pits to cut loose in and no breakdowns to bang our heads to, all because despite millennia of human evolution, we're *still* not immune to every possible viral infection. *Sigh*.

COVID-19 has wreaked merciless havoc on virtually every industry in the first world's current capitalistic hellscape, but perhaps none has suffered quite the blow that the arts and culture sector has. Though it was musicians, performers and artists of all ilk that banded together the strongest to raise millions for the government when bushfires ravaged Australia at the start of the year, backs have been turned on them now in favour of egregious corporate bailouts and continued ignorance towards the validity of creative occupations.

So, by cruel proxy, most of your favourite artists are struggling to make ends meet right now. Lots of them are unable to claim recent stimulus benefits due to the way their jobs are classified by their respective governments, and unfortunately, we can't pay our rent in 'exposure' alone. It's always a great move to consider donating directly where artists have PayPal, Ko-fi or Venmo accounts set up; sign up to their Patreon pages, if they've got 'em; or see if you can shell out for some demos and rarities through Bandcamp.

But of course, there's a lot more you can do than just sling over your spare change – especially if you're not in a position to shake out your wallet on a whim yourself. Here are some of the best ways you can help your favourite shredheads and pitlords put bread on the table right now:

STOCK UP ON MERCH

Aside from touring, merch is where most bands make their crust. No matter how stocked up your wardrobe already is, you can never have too many shirts – and if there's anyone out there putting the biggest mainstream designers to shame, it's the graphic designer behind your favourite local punk band. And now that supermarkets don't spit out free plastic bags at the counter anymore, you could likely do with a reusable fabric tote repping a killer design of its own – why not pick one up from a record label's webstore and show that neo-prog septet you spend your Sunday arvos jamming out to some more love?

It's still pretty hot outside, too, and nobody wants a sunburnt noggin when they dip out for their ~essential~ milk and bread run – how's about grabbing a cap with your favourite power-pop legend's name embroidered across the rim? In this age of competitive creativity, there's no shortage of merch options on the market, and the crews behind them will be endlessly appreciative if you pick some up.

KEEP YOUR TICKETS

So there aren't many axes being put in action right now, thanks to experts' staunch advice against hosting public gatherings. A litany of high-profile tours and festivals have seen the axe as of late, but don't go rushing for those refunds just yet. If the artist (or ticket provider) gives you the option to, hold on to your tickets for their inevitable rescheduled shows. Most tours won't have been revised just yet, since the rest of the year's gigging calendar is relatively up-in-the-air right now. But it's almost guaranteed that once COVID-19 wraps up its world tour, your favourite acts will resume theirs, and aim to hit all the cities they'd initially planned to.

By keeping your tickets to their shows, you're sending a bold message of support to those artists – that you *are* keen to see them tear shit up when

it's possible again, and that it *is* worth making the effort to head back out onstage. You're also helping to make sure they have the funds ready to invest in touring once they're able to. A good handful of touring artists will make severe losses when the live music scene is resuscitated, by sheer virtue (or vice) of the costs involved versus the viability of profit. Your early devotion to keeping the dream alive via ticket purchases will soften the blow considerably when it comes to paying for venue hire, travel, backline and so forth.

STREAM LIKE CRAZY

Though it takes roughly two-and-a-half gazillion streams on Spotify, Apple Music or the like to rack up any significant dollarage, every cent counts right now, and every second streamed translates to another dust-speck of gold on the pile. If you've got an active subscription to a music streaming platform, use it as often as you can; hell, whack a playlist on your desktop, fill it with local acts and keep it chugging on repeat overnight with the volume off.

Most physical LPs and cassettes nowadays come with download codes, and while it's great to take advantage of those for on-the-go listening, if you're just uploading those MP3s to iTunes (or an equivalent) – where you broadcast music in the exact same way you would with a streaming subscription – you're missing out on a much-valued opportunity to continue helping the artist to survive and thrive.

Consider album and single purchases as once-off shows of superficial love to your favourite artists, and make streaming your default method of music consumption. Sure, your CDs or records become more like trinkets than products with actual purpose, but their value is still there, and, by ignoring them in favour of streaming their contents, you're supporting those artists *even more*.

SPREAD THE LOVE

Much like in the transmission of COVID-19 itself, word of mouth is a powerful tool in helping artists brave its storm. Found a new band whose debut single you can't get enough of? Spread the word like you're a goddamn prophet: spam the hell out of your mates with YouTube links, brag about how you've discovered the next big thing on Facebook and Twitter, double-tap the hell out of their pics on Instagram, and jump on Triple J Unearthed to leave a glowing review and pressure the youth broadcaster into slinging them some airtime.

One big trend we've seen come from the pandemic is an onslaught of artists turning to Instagram and Twitch to livestream one-on-one performances – you might not be able to catch them in the pit, but that doesn't mean you can't watch them cut sick in the moment. If one of the artists you froth plan to jump in front of their webcam with axe in hand, make sure every living soul you know is primed to tune in; grandma will learn to love metalcore, goddammit!

A great way to feed two birds with one scone here is to support your local music media outlets (like, say, *Australian Guitar*) – their entire existence serves to let people know what's happening in the music world, and now is as great a time as ever to embrace that convenience. The next time you're stuck for a gift idea, consider signing your mate/sibling/grandparent up for a subscription to a mag like *AG*. Then, not only will they be able to support the music scene themselves and find their next favourite band, but they might just come across one of our ultra-valuable lesson or technique features and decide to pick their own instrument up! 



Electro-Voice

MIX IT UP!

The EVOLVE 30M is designed to deliver a significant step up in all-around performance for a column system in its size/price category – superior Electro-Voice sound quality and flexible functionality combined in a very compact package.

It is equipped with the most complete feature set in its class, including an eight-channel digital mixer, studio-quality onboard effects, and remote control of all audio, effects and mix functions via the next-generation Electro-Voice QuickSmart Mobile application.

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