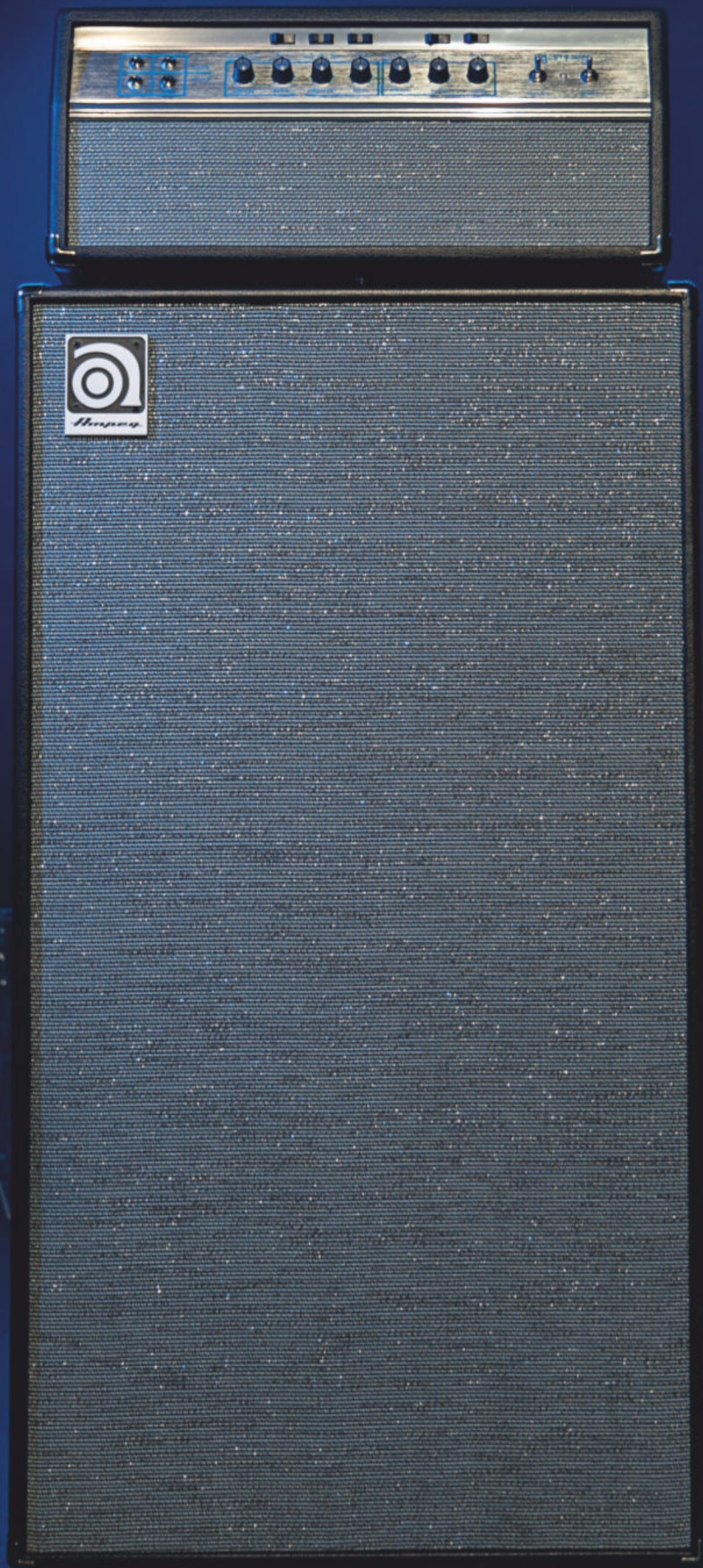


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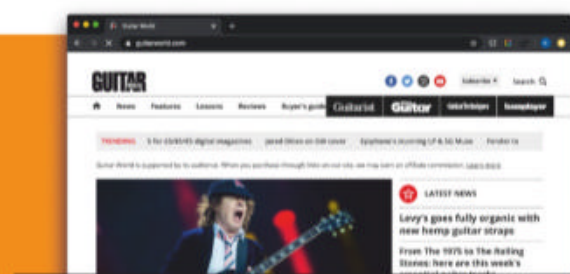
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AC/DC OFFICIALLY REVEAL 2020 COMEBACK AND NEW LINEUP

WORDS: RICHARD BIENSTOCK

As speculated, the official AC/DC 2020 lineup is electric guitar player and stalwart leader Angus Young, vocalist Brian Johnson, bassist Cliff Williams, drummer Phil Rudd and rhythm guitarist Stevie Young: the same configuration that played on the band's most recent album, 2014's *Rock Or Bust*.

Since that album's release, drummer Phil Rudd had been replaced on the *Rock Or Bust* tour by Chris Slade, after Rudd was found guilty of drug possession and other charges in 2015. Later on during the outing, Brian Johnson exited the band due to hearing issues, with his slot filled by Axl Rose for

the remaining dates.

At the end of the tour, Williams announced his retirement from the band after close to 40 years of service. Meanwhile, guitarist Stevie Young, who is also Angus' nephew, stepped in for founding member Malcolm Young in 2014 when it was revealed he was suffering from dementia. Young passed away in 2017.

In addition to a new photo, readers of local newspapers in the UK have been treated to AC/DC ads featuring the question "Are you ready?" above the new PWR UP logo - the same one that appeared on a poster outside Young's old Sydney high school, Ashfield Boys.



FENDER UNVEILS TASH SULTANA SIGNATURE STRAT

Words: Michael Astley-Brown

Fender has been on a signature guitar roll of late, and looping pioneer Tash Sultana is the latest recipient of a signature Stratocaster. Sultana's made-in-Mexico model makes a statement with its Transparent Cherry-finished alder body, pearloid pickguard, matching headstock and gold hardware, but it's got some versatile sonic tricks onboard, too.

The HSS pickup configuration is composed of a coil-splittable DoubleTap humbucker, as well as two Yosemite single-coils, as seen in Fender's American Performer series. The tone controls adjust the neck/middle and bridge pickups respectively.

Other specs include a deep C-shaped maple neck with 9.5-inch radius, 22 medium jumbo frets and a vintage-style Synchronized tremolo. Signature touches include a custom 'skull' neckplate, as well as Sultana's signature on the rear of the headstock.

DEFTONES' STEPHEN CARPENTER UNLEASHES HIS HEAVIEST RIFFS YET IN NEW SIDE-PROJECT

Words: Richard Bienstock

Deftones guitarist Stephen Carpenter recently got his heavy on with the band's new album *Ohms*. Now, however, he's upped the distorted guitar riffage tenfold with "A Reason For Being" - a new track from his side project Sol Invicto. The grinding instrumental also features SikTh members Dan Foord (drums) and James Leach (bass), as well as production from Technical Itch and Richie Londres.

In a statement, the band said: "Even as artists who create music for dystopian times, we never expected to be actually living in those times. With all that's happening right now, we have decided to share a new song and our music, which is our Ikigai, or, reason for being."

ELECTRO-HARMONIX RECREATES LO-FI GAMING SOUNDS WITH THE MAINFRAME BITCRUSHER

Words: Michael Astley-Brown

For all its insane creations, Electro-Harmonix's lineup has been lacking in perhaps the zaniest effect type of all: the bit-crusher. That's set to change, however, with the launch of the Mainframe.

The new pedal delivers cult sounds from arcade machines and videogames, using sample rate reductions ranging from 48kHz to 110Hz, and bit depth reduction that spans 24-bit to 1-bit. Those artefacts can be further adjusted via a high/low/band-pass filter, while a cunning Sample Rate Tuning Mode sets the sample rate to the pitch of a note played on guitar. It will then track your playing and adjust the sample rate accordingly.

There are also secondary controls for input gain, filter strength and styles of sample rate and bit depth reduction, which can yield altogether fuzzier tones. Other features include programmable presets and expression pedal settings.



AROUND THE WEB

Australian Guitar is proud to be a part of the *Guitar World* family! Did you know they have a whole world of exclusive online-only content to explore? Here's what we've been loving the most...

THE STORY OF THE FENDER SPLATOCASTER: A GUITAR WORLD READER'S DREAM COME TRUE

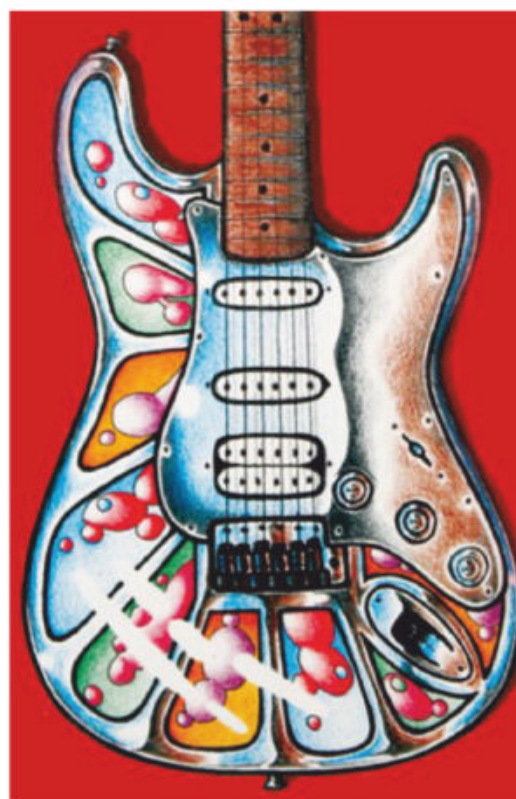
Words: Jeff Kitts

In the July 2004 issue, *Guitar World* announced what would ultimately prove to be the most successful contest in the magazine's history: the *Design Your Dream Guitar* contest. Readers were asked to submit a drawing of their dream guitar, with the winning design to be built by the Fender Custom Shop.

We knew we'd get at least a few pro-level renderings (as well as some angry prisoner art, crayon sketches and grade-school illustrations), but what we didn't expect was the sheer number of entries. By the time our New York City mail carrier delivered the last envelope to our doorstep, thousands of submissions had been received.

The winning design, which was announced in the Holiday 2004 issue, was by reader Jimmy Stout, whose innovative "Splatocaster" featured a Strat-shaped aluminium body with clear, fluid-filled cavities.

★ Check it out: <http://bit.ly/SplatYourDreams>



SARAH LONGFIELD PUTS STATE-OF-THE-ART AEROS LOOP STUDIO THROUGH ITS PACES

Words: Richard Bienstock

Like most of us, "state-of-the-art" shredder Sarah Longfield isn't overly adept at using loop studios. But as she demonstrates in this new video for Singular Sound's Aeros Loop Studio, with the right gear looping is not only easy - it can also be fun.

"I have never done live looping before, so bear with me," she says, adding that "it ended up being a lot more fun than I thought, if any of you out there are also scared of looping."

As Longfield points out, the Aeros boasts a ridiculous amount of features, including a stereo looper that allows you to record up to 36 unique loops per song; an onboard scroll wheel that provides hands-free mixing during the live performance and unlimited overdubs; 48 hours of record time on a SD card; and the ability to quantise your tracks to any time signature or play in free form mode.

★ Check it out: <http://bit.ly/LongfieldLoops>



GIBSON, MATT HEAFY AND DREW BARRYMORE GIFT A LES PAUL CLASSIC TO A COMMUNITY HERO

Words: Richard Bienstock

We're always game for a story that combines guitars and feel-good vibes, and this one's got plenty of both. Gibson recently brought together Trivium singer and guitarist Matt Heafy, and actress Drew Barrymore, to gift a Les Paul Classic electric guitar to deserving "community hero" Hector Velasco.

Velasco, who works as a UPS delivery man, gave a four-year-old named Langston - who since the pandemic began has been cooped up at home - a special surprise. Langston would ask Hector every day if he had a package for him, and one day he did: Hector put together a special delivery of toys and candy and gave it to the boy.

As a thank you, Langston's parents, in conjunction with Gibson and Heafy, put together a special delivery for Velasco.

★ Check it out: <http://bit.ly/RiffDelivery>



JIMI HENDRIX: PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE ULTIMATE GUITAR HERO, 50 YEARS ON

Words: Amit Sharma

In many ways, it's like the electric guitar didn't really exist before him. Of course, Jimi Hendrix had his influences - Muddy Waters and Albert King to name just two. But it was Hendrix who radically revolutionised the instrument once and for all, and the impact he made in the late 60s has not been surpassed in all the years since.

It was Jimi who turned the six-string into a weapon, with its bullets cast in a melting pot of hot-rodded blues, molten fuzz and screaming psychedelia. No longer did the guitar feel like it was in the background, accompanying the rest of the band or adding melodies to help reinforce a lyric. It was now the undisputed star of the show.

★ Check it out: <http://bit.ly/Hendrix4Ever>



CORY WONG ENLISTS JOE SATRIANI FOR THE SHREDDIEST FUNK JAM OF 2020

Words: Michael Astley-Brown

Cory Wong is surely the most prolific guitarist on the planet at this point in time. The funky man with the helicopter right hand is now gearing up to release his eighth (!) album of 2020, *The Striped Album*, and this time he's brought along some very special guests... Including one of the electric guitar's all-time greats.

"Massive" is the first single to be released from the forthcoming effort, and features the formidable talents of Joe Satriani, who demonstrates his sharp blues phrasing with a wealth of high-gain wah leads, delivered over Wong's uber-tight minor-key vamps.

★ Check it out: <http://bit.ly/FunkOverload>



GREATEST HITS

Photo: Gareth Owens

THEY ARE everything great about Australia's thriving indie-rock scene squeezed into the one bottle. It all makes sense when you find out this terrific trio hail from the Gold Coast – they make bright, bouncy tunes perfect for summer jaunts along the sand, ripened with ultra-sharp, '70s styled guitar lines hitting that perfect sweet spot between jangliness and fuzz.

THEY SOUND LIKE a relic of a better time – around ten months ago, when we were soaking in all the vibes at whatever summer festival would let us through the gates. They're perfectly suited for a mid-arvo groove at something like Splendour The Grass; but until such a time is possible again, we recommend cranking up the car speakers, chucking on "Lemon Joe" and taking in the breeze.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE MGMT, Babe Rainbow and Tame Impala – but also getting up early, hitting the surf and topping it off with a shot of espresso and a cold shower, rather than a blunt and a bath. Their jams are a little more on the jovial side, suited better for a boogie than a swoon.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the back-to-back bangers on Greatest Hits' debut EP, *Volume One*. As expected, it's a total pain in the ass to find via search engine – but trust us, it's well worth the effort. Between the summery strums of "Phil, Slow It Down", the dizzy slow-burn of "Trying" and the soulful swagger of "One Afternoon", this is 20 minutes of idyllic indie you won't soon forget.



ROMAN TRAGEDY

Photo: Ivan Souriyavong

THEY ARE the centremost sliver of gold in the venn diagram between A+ Twitter memes, loveable personalities, infectious ambition and equally bright and brash, fist-pump-worthy power-pop ebullience. Native to Sydney, but sure to make their major splash on the national circuit in no time, Josie Rizko [guitar] and Maz Boulougouris [vocals] revel in mind-numbingly catchy hooks, soundscapes stacked with jangly guitars and punchy drums, and downright explosive chrousos.

THEY SOUND LIKE the kind of act tame enough to be played over the PA at your local K-Mart, but edgy enough that you'll find yourself in the middle of the homewares isle with your phone raised like a battle sword, trying to find a clear enough signal for your Shazam app to recognise – because there's just no way you'll be able to focus on picking the right scent of candle until you've followed your next favourite band on Spotify.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Bleachers, Against The Current, The Killers, and dorky coming-of-age dramadies written by people you're pretty sure have never even *seen* a real high school.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the debut single "Bittersweet" – three minutes and 15 seconds of beautifully overdriven riffage, glassy keys and galvanised vocal melodies that are impossible not to melt into. With its spirit consistently upbeat and punchy, it's a surefire pick-me-up for any morning commute or gym playlist.



SOUTHEAST DESERT METAL

Photo: Oliver Eclipse

THEY ARE Australia's most remote crew of diehard shredheads, local to the outback town of Ltyntye Apurte (about 80km South of Alice Springs) but making their vicious and visceral spin on hard-rock heard all around the country. With strong ties to family, community and culture at their core, the quartet use their art to tell stories as powerful and authentic as their sound.

THEY SOUND LIKE what your tastebuds hear when you munch down on a big, juicy habenero pepper – pure, unrelenting spice in sonic form. The riffs at play are absolutely monstrous, Chris Wallace and Gavin Hayes tearing out serpentine soundscapes of unrelenting fury as if they were fighting off dragons with their fretboards. Add in Wallace's captivating knack for narrative, and you've got a brutal brew of stories and shredding unlike anything you've ever heard before.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Iron Maiden, AC/DC and Black Sabbath – their style is heavily rooted in the gruff and guttural heavy metal uprising that drove the '80s insane, with a distinct edge of modern flavours lingering in the breakdowns.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT 2018's *Break The Silence* album, which is not only fantastic for how it weaves contemporary metal styles with elements of their Indigenous Australian culture, but also just for how crazily well all four of these legends gel when they jam out – the full-band dynamic on this record is next-level.



SHANNEN JAMES

Photo: Ellena Louise

SHE IS a Melbourne-native singer-songwriter who's virtually stolen our hearts in 2020. Triple J's Declan Byrne said it best: "Shannen James isn't just one to watch. She's one whose songs you'd learn all the words to; one you'd get to the festival early to see; one who you're convinced is singing about your life."

SHE SOUNDS LIKE a total nightmare for a genre perfectionist. "Indie-rock" might be the easiest sticker to stamp her with, but James' full musical palate is much too dense and dynamic to quantify succinctly: littered throughout her catalogue are hits of warm folk, smoky soul and prickly pop, glittery psychedelia and punchy rock 'n' roll – each song is its own hand-painted masterpiece with flecks of colour from all over the spectrum. We can't begin to imagine what she'd do with a full album to work with.

YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE HAIM, Gretta Ray and The 1975. The grace with which she ebbs and flows around a beat, Telecaster roaring in tandem with her rich, driving vocal melodies, is something words could never do justice. Just imagining how her tunes would translate to the stage has this scribe head-to-toe in goosebumps – here's hoping she's got a tour on the cards soon!

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the explosively enigmatic *Arrows* EP, which just landed on Ivy Leage Records and crams a full spate of sly, summery sprightliness and powerful emotional poignancy into six inescapably catchy bops.



DAVE THE BAND

Photo: Thom Mitchell

THEY ARE three endearingly enthusiastic punk-rockers from Newcastle, keen to set the scene alight with their tirelessly spirited gems of tongue-in-cheek vocal quips and six-string calamity.

THEY SOUND LIKE the soundtrack to a carefree Sunday arvo at the pub, loose and luminous with just a hint of solemnity looming under the skin. You won't find any crazy time signature bends, key changes or technical nonsense in their three-minute thrashers: Dave are all about tight, jammy hooks and catchy choruses that stick to their listeners' ears like peanut butter to a pup's chops.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Kisschasy, Dune Rats and Joyce Manor. Noah Church belts his raw and relatable lyrics with an unapologetically thick Australian accent, the likes of which we saw come into mainstream prominence with bands like Luca Brasi and The Hard Aches. It works perfectly for the trio's kinetic, backyard-ready liveliness – their songs demand to be chanted along to, tinny in one fist and the other raised high with pride.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the debut album *Slob Stories*, fresh out of the oven on Believe Records. It's an adoringly animated 30-minute romp of 4/4 anarchy à la walloping overdrive and nods to classic pop-punk, laid down by none other than '90s rock legend Steve Albini (Nirvana, Pixies, etc), who's managed to capture Dave's DIY spirit and industrious energy with vicious aplomb.



KEE'AHN

Photo: Naomi Lee Beveridge

SHE IS a Kuku Yalanji, Jirrbal and Badu Island blueswoman with fingers that dance around her fretboard like ballerinas on an opera stage, and a singing voice that soars out into the distance, galvanic, warm and all kinds of enchanting. Her name (from the Wik people of Cape York) means to dance, sing and play – it's without a doubt she lives up to the prodigy gifted to her.

SHE SOUNDS LIKE a hot cup of tea on a cold winter's evening, the dewy haze of a morning drive through the mountains, or an unprompted text from a friend you'd been thinking about – Kee'ahn elicits pure euphoria with her rich and riveting musicality; her sound may be lowkey, but the vibe she wields is bloody enormous.

YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Nina Simone, Thelma Plum and Leon Bridges. She was also recently awarded the 2020 Archie Roach Foundation Award, so fans of the Mooroopna roots icon should absolutely see what she's about.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT her debut single "Better Things", which simmers and sears with crystalline guitars, dusty and understated horns, and vocal harmonies that you'll immediately want to relive once the last notes buzz out. Once you've let the four-minute epic take over your body, track down the recording of Kee'ahn's set from *Delivered Live* back in August: it is 25 minutes of the most beautiful and bewitching live blues you'll ever see, every note she plucks and word she howls cutting deeper and deeper into the soul.



HARPER BLOOM

Photo: Lisa Businovski

SHE IS a beam of light, waterfall and scoop of ice cream in human form – the kind of storyteller you'd immediately want to become friends with after hearing one of her sprawling folk-pop reveries, and a songwriter whose knack for blending dance-pop attitudes with low-fi acoustic jamming is so fantastic you'd think she sold her soul for the skill.

SHE SOUNDS LIKE the next big name in Australian indie. Before even releasing enough songs to count on one hand, Bloom had caught the eye of industry heavyweights like Triple J, BIGSOUND and New World Artists... We're betting on it now: by the end of 2021, she'll have sold out a national theatre tour.

YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Alex The Astronaut, Ball Park Music and Angie McMahon, with an extra shot of coffee and a big drizzle of honey on top. In an interview with *Tone Deaf*, Bloom said she'd describe her music to her grandma as "Paul Kelly meets ELO" – a fair analysis if we'd ever seen one!

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT her first batch of inescapably upbeat and earwormish singles "Mary", "Walk My Way" and "You're The Music", all three of which canter along with bright and bubbly guitars, glittery keys and booming vocal hooks. There's an EP on the horizon – the pictorially titled *Faith, Sex And Skin* – which Bloom teamed up with renowned producer Benjamin McCarthy (G-Flip, Gordi, Alex the Astronaut) to lay down.



HEY HARRIETT

Photo: Alexander Robertson

THEY ARE five Adelaidian indie-rockers with spirits as high as they've cranked the volume knobs on their instruments. Their biggest tunes are bursting at the seams with authentic and infectious energy, but as proved by slower cuts like "Not Allowed" and mid-tempo head-boppers like "More", their sonic arsenal is powerfully polychromatic and their chemistry impressively dynamic.

THEY SOUND LIKE the band 2020 *needs*: their art comes from the heart, all down-to-earth and bullshit free, but it's also fun as hell and delightfully sprightly.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE San Cisco, The Beths and Last Dinosaurs. They downright master that million-dollar blend of effervescent guitars and twirling vocals hooks – you can just as easily bop along to them on the dancefloor or sit back and get lost in their transcendental soundscapes. But however you choose to enjoy them, you're guaranteed *to* enjoy them.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT Last year's debut EP *Nipslip*, which kicks off on a high note with the jaunty and jammy (and very aptly titled) "Honest", before rolling listeners down a hill of sprightly pop and breezy folk vibes, all wrapped up in bright, noodly guitars and vocal melodies you'll almost immediately find yourself singing along to (whether or not you actually know the words). Catch them live if you can, too – it feels truly special to watch these five loveable legends jam and gel as mates in the moment.



Photo: Jason Sondock

DANNY MILLER

HAILS FROM QUEENS, NEW YORK USA
PLAYS IN LEWIS DEL MAR
SOUNDS LIKE TRANSCENDENTAL, HIGH-CONCEPT ALT-ROCK
LATEST DROP *AUGUST* (LP OUT NOW VIA FADER)

What's your current go-to guitar?

I have an Alvarez Parlor acoustic, which is currently the guitar I play onstage and record with. I came across it because I was travelling with an older Martin 000, but that guitar was getting too beaten up with all the flying, and the maintenance costs were starting to add up. I wanted something with great tone and resonance, but that I didn't have to be precious about. I bought my first Alvarez Parlor in 2016 when we were touring heavily, and a couple months after copping it, I smashed it during a performance on television. I walked right into a guitar store the next day and bought a new one for \$200. Can't go wrong at that price!

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

I fell in love with guitar through learning about latin folk music. My family is Nicaraguan, and my first guitar teacher, Amilcar Cruz, was also from there. Amilcar played with the Sacasa family, a legendary music family in Nicaragua, and he taught me about the history of protest music and storytelling in latin folklórico songs. The idea of being a poet or generational storyteller really resonated with me. My first guitar was my father's first guitar. It's a no-name classical guitar from the late '70s, purchased somewhere along the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. I still play it all the time. It is probably my most prized possession.

What inspires you as a player?

Aside from latin music, my guitar playing is also very influenced by ambient and Brazilian music. I've adopted a lot of chord voicings and melody movement that I've found on '70s and '80s tropicalia and Brazilian folk records. One album in particular, *Clube Da Esquina*, greatly influenced my playing and note choices. I also love artists like Steve Reich, Brian Eno, and Arthur Russell. A lot of the more drone-y, arpeggiating parts I write are influenced by impressionism, and the desire to imbue these most recent songs with a sense of breathing and subtle motion.

Are you much of a gear nerd?

I'm not much of a gear nerd on the whole. I feel it often gets in the way of my creativity, but I've been trying to experiment with it more as well. Currently, my favorite piece I own is an older model of the Zvex Fuzz Factory pedal. That shit slaps.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

Not really, but I dig Fender's Offset Japanese Telecaster. Maybe a pre-war Martin, too.

What would your signature model look like?

It would probably be something I made by hand. I'd love to make a guitar myself one day - even if it was a broomstick glued to a frying pan, with some shoelaces over it. I'd love to make a guitar that nobody knew how to play, so it would get you thinking outside your zone.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...

I'd love to play with Blake Mills. Maybe we'd do "Many Rivers To Cross" by Jimmy Cliff. Or maybe an eight-hour jam with Santana and a ten-piece band with two drummers.



Photo: Rick Clifford

HENDRIK WIPPRECHT

HAILS FROM HOBART, TAS
PLAYS IN A. SWAYZE & THE GHOSTS
SOUNDS LIKE RED-HOT PUNK ROCK WITH A MELODIC EDGE
LATEST DROP *PAID SALVATION* (LP OUT NOW VIA IVY LEAGUE)

What's your current go-to guitar?

My dad bought me a 1977 USA Mustang, and I f***in' love it! It feeds back pretty harshly and makes the sound engineer pretty upset. I can't get enough!

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

When I was four years old, my older brother borrowed a Yamaha nylon-string classical guitar from a cousin of ours. He didn't use it, so I picked it up and just never put it down. I still have it now and use it for a lot of writing.

What inspires you as a player?

The Velvet Underground, Metallica, Opeth, Queens Of The Stone Age, Death, Eddy Current Suppression Ring, RAGE, System, Parquet Courts, Nirvana... These are the kind of bands I just wanted to replicate when I was younger (and still do now). I can't help but have their style of playing influence me. I'd start ten different bands if I had the time!

Are you much of a gear nerd?

I love a great amp! I used to be into pedals, but I got a little bored with them to be honest. Plugging a guitar straight into my Marshall JCM800 and getting the right EQ sounds incredible, and experimenting with tone influences my playing as a guitarist. Maybe one day I'll get a Mesa Boogie.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

I want Steve Albini's Travis Bean! The next time Shellac come to Australia, I may buy a balaclava...

What would your signature model look like?

I'd probably want the body made into a 3D shape of my head with my lips as the bridge. I love Ibanez, and I wouldn't mind a legitimate 'Wizard's neck' for my signature model. Any dead wizards around?

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...

It'd have to be Josh Homme, and the song would be "Regular John". He'd then ask me to join the band so I could die happy (and rich).



Photo: Laura Partain

COURTNEY MARIE ANDREWS

HAILS FROM PHOENIX, ARIZONA USA

PLAYS SOLO

SOUNDS LIKE DREAMY, SLOW-BURNING CROONERS

LATEST DROP OLD FLOWERS (LP OUT NOW VIA FAT POSSUM)

What's your current go-to guitar?

My current go-to guitar is a '90s Takamine Nylon. I was on the hunt for a mid-priced nylon-stringer, and a friend found this at a small vintage guitar shop in Nashville. They're very underrated guitars, and a lot of the country guys have them in their arsenal. It has a very warm and balanced sound, and the neck is the perfect size.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

With acoustics, the love generally lies in how the guitar resonates and how balanced it is. I fell in love with the way it feels to play it. My first guitar was, funnily, a cheap nylon-string guitar from Mexico that my uncle got me for my birthday one year.

What inspires you as a player?

I am a big fan of fingerstyle guitar, so early on I loved Jose Gonzalez, Joni Mitchell, Leo Kottke Elizabeth Cotten and Mississippi John Hurt. Songwriters who play the guitar with open tunings and with great inventive style are of great interest to me. More recently, I'm very into Hawaiian slack-key guitar. I incorporated flatpicking and fingerstyle techniques so I could perform more dynamically as a solo artist early on.

Are you much of a gear nerd?

I wouldn't call myself a gear nerd. I like workhorse-type gear. If I find something I like, I generally stick with it for a long time. I love vintage Fender amps – the classics – and Strymon makes great pedals.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

No. I use gear as a tool to summon songs and creativity, and am very rarely enamored by the gear itself. Sometimes the greatest guitars can be \$100 no-name thrift store finds.

What would your signature model look like?

I'd probably make a D-18 dreadnought with a thinner neck for smaller hands, Brazilian rosewood, and a pretty pearl inlay on the fretboard.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...

I'd play with Elizabeth Cotten and ask her to show me some pickin' tricks.



Photo: Brandon Lung

DAVID POTTER

HAILS FROM SYDNEY, NSW

PLAYS IN STAND ATLANTIC

SOUNDS LIKE PUNCHY POP-PUNK FOR ENERGY DRINK ADS

LATEST DROP PINK ELEPHANT (LP OUT NOW VIA HOPELESS)

What's your current go-to guitar?

I'm playing a Fender Jazzmaster that I picked up from a pawn shop that I used to work at in Burwood. When it first came in it was incredibly cheap and was all I could afford at the time – it wasn't in great condition and took a lot of love to get into good playing order, but now with a few mods it's in top shape, and it sounds and plays amazingly.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

My first axe was actually a really terrible Ashton bass guitar that I saved up for months for when I was in high school. I was absolutely terrible at playing it, but it was such a huge outlet for me when I was a teenager and such a great way to de-stress. A little while later, my older brother bought a cheap Ibanez electric guitar, and that was when I first started to actually practise and play more seriously, and I haven't been able to put down the guitar since.

What inspires you as a player?

Tim Henson from Polyphia is an absolutely amazing guitarist – I would love to be able to play half as good as him some day. I was really inspired by the way his guitar playing interacts with and mimics the production elements and other textures in the songs – it's almost like an EDM or hip-hop producer's approach to guitar playing. Not only that, but I've been working a lot more on my hybrid picking and use of expressive techniques since I got really heavily into his music and playing.

Are you much of a gear nerd?

Like most guitarists, I used to spend many hours watching rig rundowns and gear demos on YouTube, and trying to plan the biggest, most elaborate rigs that I could, constantly searching second-hand marketplaces to pick up whatever gear I could. But more recently, with the realities of touring full-time, I've gotten much more into the idea of making the most streamlined and tidy rig that I can. For that reason I absolutely love my Kemper profiling amp. It takes up three rack units, I can model every amp and effect that we use in the studio, and all the patch changes are controlled by MIDI from our playback rig. The only piece of gear that I need to keep onstage is my Shure GLXD16, which doubles as a tuner.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

Ever since I first played a guitar with an EverTune bridge installed, I've wanted one for myself. The idea of a guitar that almost never goes out of tune sounds perfect to me, considering how much I just throw and trash around my guitar when we play live. Tuning stability has always been a major problem, and an EverTune bridge would be a lifesaver.

What would your signature model look like?

I'd start with a Fender offset body shape, because I find them really comfortable to play and I just think they look really cool. 22-fret neck with a maple fretboard, Bare Knuckle P-90 in the bridge and a humbucker in the neck, but with a switch for a coil split because it's always great to have that single-coil tone. Finish it up with an EverTune bridge and some locking machine heads, and then paint it black with a neon pink pickguard.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...

I have an absolutely huge respect for Tosin Abasi and his playing, and would absolutely love to jam "The Woven Web" or any Animals As Leaders songs – just so I could step back and watch him play some of those massive thump parts.

SAD, BUT STILL RAD

EQUALLY CHARISMATIC AND CHAOTIC, THE DEBUT ALBUM FROM **CRY CLUB** IS A REVOLUTIONARY POP-ROCK ROMP YOU'LL NEED TO HEAR TO BELIEVE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **GIULIA MCGAURAN**.

There aren't enough pages in this whole magazine to cover everything there is to know about Cry Club. In two absolutely stacked years of back-to-back bangers, the kaleidoscopic Melbourne-via-Wollongong pop duo have proved three things to be true:

1. They can make virtually any vibe gel effortlessly with their fantastical fusion of synth and shred – from molten, math-inflicted punk chaos (“Robert Smith”) to deep, smoke-soaked club house (“DFTM”), to shimmery, ‘90s-channeling acoustic balladry (“Lighters”) and everything in-between.

2. They don't need a room full of songwriters or a billion-dollar budget to make pop music capable of rivalling the biggest names out there. Their forthcoming debut full-length was recorded on one guitar – a slightly dodgy homemade Jazzmaster that rifford Jonathon Tooke built at 17, no less – on a budget that would make you think the band sold their soul to Satan for soundscapes as tight, rich and clean as they mustered.

3. They are truly unstoppable. Heather Riley [vocals] and Tooke were just one date shy of wrapping up a sold-out national tour in support of “Robert Smith” when the Coronavirus pandemic hit, and despite being unable to get back out on the road, hype surrounding them has only skyrocketed in the last few months – thanks in no short part to the announcement of that aforementioned debut, *God I'm Such A Mess*.

Before the album launches next month – after which we're giving it a year before Cry Club become the biggest name in Australian music – we caught up with Tooke to vibe on how he and Riley whipped up their masterpiece.

How did you find that this album shapeshifted as you worked it?

It's an interesting one, because it was made over such a long period of time. Our producer, Gab [Strum]... He's a busy boy! There were points where we were like, “Alright, you're going to America for two months, can we just get a bunch of sessions in before you go?” And then he'd come back from America and go on his own tour for the Japanese Wallpaper project, and then he'd be DJ-ing for Allday for a month or two. And in the meantime, not only was he doing our record, but he'd be in the studio five or six days a week with multiple different people and projects. So it was just a case of finding the times that worked for all of us.

At the start, it was like, “Okay, we need to focus on the singles,” because we didn't have the time to really dive into a full record. And then when it came time to go, “Alright, let's get into the album tracks,” we hit an impasse and Gab was like, “You know you're allowed to have intros on the deep cuts, right?” We had this one song, “Wish” – it was an audience-favourite track from

the early days but it was too slow to play in half-hour sets, whereas it works really well on a 45-minute long album. Because y'know, if you're investing yourself into that much time for one band's music, there's only so much 150BPM pop-rock you can handle in one bite.

One thing that really stands out about this project is that when you combine both of your personalities as artists, you get this very powerful style and character that is entirely unique to Cry Club. Between your background in audio engineering and history playing in heavier and more technical bands, and Heather's history with musical theatre and acting, do you find that your respective cultural upbringings are integral in cracking the code behind Cry Club?

For sure. I've been playing in bands for, like, ten years now, and I've experienced all the positives and negatives that come with that. I was a session player for a while, I toured with Bec Sandridge, I played in a twelve-piece gospel band and a mathcore band, going and playing all these weird house shows and that sort of stuff... And I think coming out of that, if I was to collect all of those experiences and describe how they intersect with Cry Club, it would be that I just want to be more direct with this project. I want it to be audience-facing.

I've seen a lot of projects where it's like, “This is just for our own satisfaction.” The biggest Cry Club fans in the world are Heather and I, because we endlessly listen to our own music, but we want to be making stuff that connects with other people as well, and making sure that the bridge between us and them is less opaque. We can play some really wild stuff – the end of “Dissolve”, for example, is this crazy huge key signature change, and we have that riff in “Robert Smith” where it's in 9/4 – but we try to frame those things in a really accessible way. I have this whole philosophy that if you're doing something complex, you need to frame it simply, and if you're doing something simple, you need to frame it in a complex way – just so that it's constantly engaging.

At the root level, how does a Cry Club song come to life?

For a lot of what the first record is, because every song was approached with the idea that we want to play it live, our formula was that it had to start with a drum part that could be performed by a real drummer, a bass guitar part and one guitar part, and then a vocal. And the song has to exist completely within that structure – if it's not working with those super minimal elements, then those elements need to change. And then when it comes to the production, that's where we can start

layering all the other stuff on.

A lot of the songs on the record started with me working on an instrumental with those basic elements, and then Heather and I working on a vocal and writing the lyrics together, and then stepping back and going, “Alright, where can we push this?”

What can you tell us about your go-to guitar?

Heather makes fun of me because of how many times I tell this story, but it's actually a guitar that I put together as a teenager. Because at the time I couldn't afford a real Fender Jazzmaster – the only Jazzmasters you could buy in shops were, like, \$2,500, and I was 17 so I obviously didn't have that money! I was on a website called offsetguitars.com – that was the forum I spent all my time on as a teenager, which says everything you need to know about me as a person – and I was asking everyone, like, “I want to put together a Jazzmaster! Here's my plan! What does everyone think?”

So the neck and the body come from a company named MJT, and the pickups are Curtis Novak pickups that were wired in by a company called Rothstein Guitars. It has a standard Jazzmaster neck, and then the bridge is a stacked P-90, so it's a P-180, and I made them give me a little coil tap so that when it's up, it's just a standard P-90. It's wired so that the neck pickup is standard, but this back one is so hot that it redlines anything it gets near. Anytime I need some super crazy, like, there-is-no-transience-to-my-guitar-at-all kind of stuff, it's like, “*Alright, back pickup time!*” I have a bunch of other guitars at home, but this is the only one I have in the studio at the moment, because I'm only working on Cry Club stuff right now.

So why that guitar for Cry Club?

I wish I could give you a really technical answer like, “Ah, I love it's midrange, and the sustain is great” – but the sustain on it is actually shit, and I can't even bend on it because it's a '60s-style neck and it's got this giant curve. But it has an extended scale length, and it works really well in alternate tunings – all Cry Club songs are in E standard, but the G is an F#; that's just to make me dumb enough to do weird stuff. And a lot of my guitars on this record are incredibly dry. Because the part just needs to be good – I can layer it in effects after the fact, but in the moment, I just need to make sure the part is right.

I'm doing a lot of effects in Pro Tools that I'm trying to match live, but honestly, a lot of it is just caveman shit. I am by no means a tone wizard – I pull up the same NI Guitar Rig preset every time I start playing this guitar on a song. I want to make sure my parts work well without effects, so that when I do apply them, it's like I'm icing the cake, not just trying to cover up a mistake. 🍩

THE NEW RAZZLE DAZZLE

BLENDING FUTURISTIC SOUNDS WITH NOSTALGIC ATTITUDES, **I DON'T KNOW HOW BUT THEY FOUND ME** (A.K.A. **IDKHOW**) BRING MORE THAN JUST THE RAZZMATAZZ TO THEIR AS-TITLED DEBUT ALBUM.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **LAUREN PERRY**.

Few acts have managed to score major international breakouts with maniacally devoted fanbases quite the way I Don't Know How But They Found Me (also known by their much more page space-friendly moniker, iDKHow) have – especially when you find out they did it all before even formally announcing the project.

See, iDKHow is the pairing up of two inimitably idiosyncratic alt-scene icons, Dallan Weekes and Ryan Seaman (ex-members of Panic! At The Disco and Falling In Reverse, respectively), and iDKHow is a narratively focussed retro-pop project as curiously quirky as it is furiously funky. It's the perfect pastiche of household names and a truly out-there concept, and as proved by their crash-hot debut album *Razzmatazz*, the hype is well-earned.

Spread across a tight 12 slivers of glittery synths, roaring bass, ear-tickling effects and vocal melodies more captivating than a car crash, *Razzmatazz* is a surefire end-of-year list-topper for any fans of '80s dance-pop and hair-metal, but also just a killer body of work in its own respect. It's wickedly fun, shamelessly experimental, and has a damn heap of replay value thanks to just how much left-field freakiness Weekes and Seaman were keen to cram in.

Before you fire up your own stream of the record (or do it right and slap the 12-inch down on your platter), check out what Weekes had to say about the making of this eagerly awaited epic.

This is the debut album for iDKHow, but through projects like The Brobecks and your stint in Panic! At The Disco, you're certainly no stranger to "the scene". How have you been able to funnel what you've learned over the years into iDKHow, to the most of this project as it grows its legs?

I think from any given pursuit – whether it's a job, or music, or school, whatever – you take experiences with you as you go. And if you're smart, you'll take the good things with you and leave behind the bad. That's certainly what I've tried to do, as I've progressed from one sphere to the next in the music world. There are things that you either experience or see, and if they resonate with you, you'll go, "Yeah, I think I'd like to employ that in my own technique." And the things that you don't like or that affect you in a negative way, you leave those things behind – or at least you try to.

So between *Razzmatazz* and the 1981 EP, we know there's a storyline, or a world of pseudo-fiction, in which iDKHow exists. How did you want this album to tell the next chapter in that story?

I wanted to take the story that we initially came out of the gate with, and push it in a bit of a new direction. It's inspired a lot by artists I admired growing up – like David Bowie, who did *Ziggy Stardust*, or The Beatles and *Sgt. Pepper*; y'know, these artists who created fictional beings and stories to present their art. And just growing up in the time that I did, and the way I discovered music – that was probably the biggest inspiration for the aesthetics of iDKHow. But it's not something I want

to have to do forever. So rather than continue that same storyline, we decided to have it take a bit of a left-hand turn with this record.

Can you talk a bit more about where the project is heading from here, narratively?

Sure! The initial narrative was that [iDKHow] was a band from 40-plus years ago, which just got forgotten about over time. Which is a pretty common story, actually – there are plenty of really brilliant musicians who never really had their moment of cultural significance. A great example of that is a band called Death, from Detroit – and I discovered a lot of bands like them through the internet, so we decided to take that experience that a lot of older musicians have lived, and recreate it in a semi-fictional way. But for this new record... Without giving too much away, we're pulling the curtain back a little bit more – there's a little bit more to the story, if you look closely enough.

How do you straddle the line between authenticity and schtick?

I don't want to lean too hard into the conceit of the aesthetics – because y'know, they *are* fictional. And there are bands who certainly do lean heavily into it. A band like Ghost would be a good example – they're playing characters on and off the stage, and that's not necessarily something we wanted to do. We wanted to take a page out of The Beatles' playbook: after they made *Sgt. Pepper*, they would still do press as themselves – they were just presenting their music with a story around it, which was meant to give their fans a space for their imagination to wander around in.

It's just an opportunity to create more art, rather than just make 12 songs and go, "Here you go, here's 12 songs." To me, that would just feel like a wasted opportunity. So we're singing and you're writing about things that are quite real, but presenting them in a semi-fictional way. And maybe that serves a purpose other than having a way to entertain people, too – it's almost like I'm putting a shield up in front of myself, to kind of protect myself from what I'm singing about.

I think part of it has to come down to who you and Ryan are behind the music. It's clear that your personality – or at least the parts of it you put out there – matches the eccentricity of your art.

I never, ever want to write something that feels disingenuous, or like it doesn't have any meaning behind it. There are plenty of artists out there who treat music like a product first and art second – they treat it more like it's Coca-Cola than a form of expression or self-reflection. And I just can't bring myself to do it that way.

Are you a big believer in experimentation?

Yeah! I love to experiment. I rarely get the opportunity to do that in the studio, but in the small amount of space we had to record this album with our producer [Tim Pagnotta] in LA, he was really willing to get weird with me. And that involved things like taking apart cassette tapes and recorders, and finding ways to mess up sounds and make them sound older than they really are, or invent whole new sounds.

I have a tendency to throw everything and the

kitchen sink at a recording, and to have a producer on-hand to let me do that, and then subtract elements out of the recording until we had just what was needed to present the idea – that was a really great way for me to be able to work and operate. Because if we don't try something, then I'll always have that question mark over my head – even if I'm wrong. But if I have the opportunity to try it, then at the very least, I won't ever have to think about it again.

Do there exist iDKHow demos that were too weird even for yourself?

No. I will never, ever limit myself to being too weird. I think that would be a mistake for any artist, to restrict what they'd allow themselves to do. What you allow yourself to put out into the world, that's a different story. But at the very least, get it out of your head. Get it out of your system. Because who knows, maybe it'll work!

Are you still all about the P Bass?

Yeah! The [Fender Precision Bass] is my go-to; that's where I start and usually where I finish. Every once in a while, I'll pull out a semi-hollow, too. On this record in particular, I recorded a lot with an Epiphone Violin Bass, which I've never done before, because those things are tiny and I'm, like, six-foot-three. I've always felt really weird on them – the Hofners have always felt like these little toys that I'm just going to break in half if I touch. But this Epiphone one had some weight to it, felt really great and just sounded *amazing*, so I used it a lot on this record. 🎸



THREE TIMES THE FURY

ON THEIR POIGNANT AND EMPOWERING NEW ALBUM *USE ME*, PVRIS FRONTWOMAN **LYNN GUNN** TAKES CHARGE AND EMBRACES HER WELL-EARNED TURN IN THE SPOTLIGHT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **SASHA SAMSONOVA**.



Despite always being at the forefront of their creative output, Lynn Gunn has often been overshadowed by her bandmates in PVRIS – and not just because of how small she is as a person when standing beside them. For years, Gunn felt the pressure to minimise her voice and downplay how responsible she was for her band’s work – partly out of fear she’d look selfish, but mostly because when you’re a woman in rock and alternative music, owning the spotlight comes with significant risks.

But for PVRIS album #3, Gunn has stepped up to the plate and defiantly rejected the culture that pushed her into the shadows. From the cover art of *Use Me* to the narrative surrounding it, she’s unashamedly celebrating that it’s *her* work to be proud of – that *she’s* responsible for all of the summery pop bops and searing rock jams that fill its tracklist, and goddammit, she isn’t going to sacrifice that credit because some major-label dickhead in a suit warned her against it.

And so she should take the credit – *Use Me* is, in so many ways and for so many reasons, PVRIS’ most ambitious and outstanding release to date. It presents a much louder, prouder, more confident and fearless Gunn than ever before – and, not to mention, a sonic palate downright bursting at the seams with top-notch beats and brilliant production.

When we get a hold of Gunn to chat about the album, she’s hanging out at the beach, her laugh bright and her enthusiasm infectious. This is the age of PVRIS 2.0, after all, and she’s embracing it with her head raised high.

This record shows you taking a stand as a songwriter, stepping up to the forefront and owning your role as the main creative force in PVRIS. Has it been a liberating journey so far, being able to embrace that spotlight and lead the charge on LP3?

It’s not even really been about the spotlight, to be honest. It’s just about just wanting to be truthful and authentic to what is actually happening behind the scenes, and to be transparent and open about the creative process – not having to dodge any weird rules about the format of the band or things like that.

In the past, I used to kind of shrink down whenever I’d talk about writing and collaborating, because I felt like I couldn’t really take that charge or talk about how involved I was – just to, like, uphold the dynamic. We had this perception of what a band’s dynamic should be from watching and studying a lot of the bands that we came up playing with, but that was never really how PVRIS worked. So it just feels really freeing, in the

sense that I can actually genuinely create, and talk about the creative process as openly as possible.

Three albums down and almost a decade in, what made now the right time to make such a monumental leap forward?

It was kind of naturally just happening anyway, with the way that this last album was written. The whole process of making the album was very – it was all pretty new and very scattered, and just a very different way of making an album as opposed how it has been in the past. I worked on it pretty much alone, and I had to do a lot of stuff on the fly, as far as tracking instruments and writing lyrics went. It was really chaotic for the album to get finished, and the easiest way for that to happen was to just leave it with me and let me work on it alone.

Everybody in the band is in a different place in their life now as well, as far as where we are when we’re off tour and we’re not all together. But it all felt very natural in the end. It’s been the best dynamic for everybody moving forward, I think – which has been very comforting as well.

Working on the fly and in more isolated settings, does the atmosphere around this record feel different to you, compared to the first two?

I think as far as creating on the fly went, there were a lot of similarities but also a lot of differences. It was similar in the sense that there would be no structure or conventional time limit on how things were made. The first two albums were definitely made in a bit more of a traditional fashion, as far as going, “Alright, we’re going to lock ourselves up for this long with this producer, and we have to leave at this time with an album ready to go.” But within that small bit of structure, there was a lot of going with the flow and tracking as we were writing, writing as we were tracking and creating very intuitively.

And with this album, it was definitely very intuitive in that sense of there not being any structure. Every song was treated and approached differently, from the writing to the tracking to the production. But as far as the freedom in creating it went, and I guess the intention behind the album – that’s always been the same. At the end of the day, however a body of work is made, the main intention is that we want to make something that feels exciting and refreshing. I always want that excitement to translate to the record, too – and to do that, you kind of just have to roll the dice and hope for the best.

This record totally blew me away how many different sounds and styles you explore, and

how you bring them all together into this celebration of pop music and the genre’s innate diversity. Going into the writing process for this record, were you excited to mess around a lot and throw a bunch of stuff at the wall to see what would stick, or did you have a pretty clear vision for what you wanted it to be at the start?

It was a little bit of both. The most important thing about working with whoever I’m collaborating with is knowing that the dynamic is going to suit us all. From the core, everything needs to be coming from me, and will be, and needs to be steered by what feels right for me. It’s all about bringing in the right collaborators – because that can really enhance the art, or it can flip an idea on its head and make it something that really compliments whatever I’m bringing to the table.

This has definitely been the closest to where I’ve imagined PVRIS being since really early on, and I think part of that comes from finally saying, “F*** it” and just going for it. And having the right collaborators to help bring that to life, and crack that vision further... Like dude, JT Daly was such a great, great, great producer, and such a great partner to have in making this album. We were very much on the same page, and he really understood where I wanted to take this album.

JT is a really diverse producer as well, just as far as what he’s capable of doing. My intention is always to just focus on making a great song, and I like to always have something new and exciting to drive that in the production. The song might be something very simple when it’s written down, or something that’s very intentionally crafted, but if it was masked in a different style of production, might be something totally different.

And JT was really good at helping me find what I was looking for with these songs, and knowing when to dig into the aggressive parts and when to pull back, and understanding the dynamic of that. I could nerd out about JT for hours, to be honest!

Can we nerd out about guitars for a little?

Hell yeah we can! We were using a little bit of everything. JT has a Jaguar that I played so much – we tracked using that guitar for pretty much everything, actually. I’ve used my Jazzmaster and Mustang a bit, too... I’m a Fender person all the way. I just prefer the sound, I prefer the styles, and I think they’re a much more timeless brand of guitar. And we have a really great relationship with them – they’ve always been really supportive of our band and provided us with instruments whenever we’ve need them, so I’m ride or die with Fender for life. 🎸

ONE PETAL AT A TIME

EARNING A MAJOR LABEL SMASH-HIT AND FENDER'S SEAL OF APPROVAL JUST TWO YEARS INTO HER CAREER, **BEABADOOBEE** CERTAINLY ISN'T HERE TO F*** AROUND.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **CALLUM HARRISON**.

Yknow that feeling when you see a word for the first time, and then suddenly you notice it pop up everywhere? That's called the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon, and there's a good chance you've been experiencing it recently with Beabadoobee. But fear not: Filipino singer-songwriter Beatrice Laus is neither industry plant nor scientific phenomenon, but rather an indie-pop vanguard blazing her own trails to stardom with hypnotising gems of dreamy, droning guitars and bewitchingly bold vocals.

Since dropping the "Coffee" single from her bedroom at age 16 (less than four years ago), the Britain-based up-and-comer has played for sold-out arenas with acts like Clairo and The 1975, become a bonafide YouTube sensation, released four stunning solo EPs on Sony offshoot Dirty Hit, and even caught the eye of Fender, who gave her a lucrative sponsorship and advertising deal for their new Offset Player Series range.

The past two years have been especially wild for Laus, but she's only getting started. Just this month, she released her *absolutely astonishing* debut full-length, *Fake It Flowers*: 41 straight minutes of equally slick, searing and soul-moving indie-rock, her warm and warbly voice dancing delicately over mountainous peaks and valleys of guitars teetering effortlessly between clean and crunchy.

A few days before it came out, we hopped online with a notably buzzy Laus to vibe on her meteoric rise to the top, how she's keen to shake it up with *Fake It Flowers*, and what mystical mirth lies waiting over the horizon.

Your work ethic has been pretty insane thus far – you had two EPs each in 2018 and 2019, and now a full-length album out year. Are you just constantly coming up with ideas?

Yeah! During the process of working on *Fake It Flowers*, I put myself into the role of just writing as much as I could. And after I got off tour last year, I just had *so* many songs locked up in the bank – songs that didn't make it to the EPs and songs I had written after, before or during tour – and I had way more than enough for an album. And I was like, "Yeah no, I'm

ready to do an album." I had written *Fake It Flowers* and I had written the stuff that I'm going to release after *Fake It Flowers*... I'm in this really weird type of limbo state where I haven't been able to write much as of late, but I feel like I should just accept that and live within this era, and just appreciate everything that's happened so far.

How do you juggle your work-life balance?

It's a learning process. I didn't expect any of this to happen, y'know, I didn't think music was going to be a thing – my plan was to be a nursery teacher! But then this happened all of a sudden, so I'm still sort of getting used to some parts of it. It's really hard to get used to some of it – especially for someone like me who never thought I'd be able to make a career for myself in music. But it's cool – I appreciate everything that's happened along the way. This is a blessing, and I'm really grateful for it. It's just about taming the feeling of being overwhelmed and nervous, and all the anxiety that comes along with that.

Do you reckon you'll be one of those artists that has a new record out every year?

If that happens, I'd be cool with it. I feel like it really depends on my workflow, and how quickly I'm able to write in the future... But I do write a lot, I suppose, so if that does end up being the case, then sure!

I was reading earlier about how your parents raised you on a healthy diet of bands like The Smiths, The Cranberries and Sonic Youth. Would you say rock music has always been a core part of your DNA?

My mum used to play a lot of artists like Alanis Morissette, and I think because that was always in the background of my childhood, and having her play all these amazing women from around that time, that really kind of paved the way for how I found music growing up. And then the friends I met and the music we used to talk about and listen to, that's when I found The Smiths and The Cure – and then I found Pavement

and Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine... I was just progressively weaving my way into it. And now I'm back on everything that was in the background of my childhood, like Alanis Morissette, Suzanne Vega, Juliana Hatfield – and y'know, finding bands like Veruca Salt and all these artists that continue to inspire me... I just love music, man.

What made you gravitate towards the guitar?

Well, I played the violin for about seven years, and I think that got me used to stringed instruments. And then I moved to the guitar and I haven't touched a violin since – so I don't even know if I can still play that. But I remember being in RE class and watching *Juno*, and that's how it all kind of started. It's an amazing film on its own, but the soundtrack just stuck out so much for me. It sparked something within me, and I was like, "Woah, I want to make songs like this!" That really influenced the type of songs I made at the beginning of my career, like "Coffee".

I'm legitimately jealous of how quickly you've become so great at playing the guitar. Do you feel like you're still learning the ropes as you keep hitting these milestones?

Oh yeah. I'm definitely still a beginner, and I don't think I'm an amazing guitarist – my guitarist Jacob is an amazing guitarist. I can find good chord progressions, but I can't shred. I think what really helped me was the tunings I find, and the alternate tunings we play in. I have this massive Sonic Youth book, which I still haven't delved into properly, and it has all their tunings in it. My manager gave it to me as a birthday present, and there's, like, actual pages where it shows the neck and all the chords to their songs – it's the biggest hack ever!

How did your recent collaboration with Fender come about?

I guess they just knew that I played the guitar, and they knew I was really interested in learning more. They knew I had a lot of tunings, and they've really helped with that – I have a stupid amount of guitars in my rig now [*laughs*]. I have a guitar for each tuning, and then a spare for each, and then also all of Jacob's guitars... Honestly, I think it's just an excuse to get loads of cute guitars.

Have you guys spoken about the potential of a signature model yet?

Not yet, but that is totally a dream of mine!

So hypothetically, they hit you up tomorrow and go, "Yo, Bea, let's f*in' do this thing!" What would it look like?**

I am absolutely in love with the Jazzmaster I used in the studio, so it would just be that, with the P-90s and everything the same... It's so freaking heavy, and I am such a tiny person – I complain about that shit all the time, but I do not mind at all if it sounds like that guitar. I'll start lifting weights, I don't care! So it's that guitar, but it's in, like, a unicorn vomit finish – the colours are this weird, trippy blend of pink and silver and purple and blue, and it looks really girly! 



FEEDING THE FIRE

THE FRONT BOTTOMS MASTERED THEIR TRANSITION FROM BASEMENT-STAPLE FOLK-PUNKS TO ARENA-PACKING POP KINGS. NOW, THEY'RE THROWING CAUTION TO THE WIND WITH AN ALBUM OF PURE, UNFILTERED CHAOS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **MARK JAWORSKI**.

In the span of five albums, two EPs and a handful of scattered mixtapes and one-off drops, The Front Bottoms have donned many a cap. Most will agree on their folk-punk phase as their most defining: the go-to structure was a bed of raw, harshly strummed acoustics, playful horns and jangly keys over which frontman Brian Sella would wax lyrical – with clarity and polish defiantly optional – on frayed connections, anxiety and general early-adulthood turbulence. But as Sella grew up, so too did The Front Bottoms' sound.

2015's *Back On Top* saw them throw everything and the kitchen sink into one big, overblown musical smoothie of pop, rock, funk, punk, balladry and even a little tropical flare. Almost in rebellion of how motley it was, the follow-up – 2017's ultra polished and pop-focussed *Going Grey* – was notably understated. But if anything, it seemed The Front Bottoms had found a comfortable medium to exist within; a formula to which future instalments could adapt.

And then came *In Sickness & In Flames*. Album #5 is not only the Jersey duo's most experimental work by an unapologetically wide margin – it is, in all the most idyllic ways one could imagine, an absolute clusterf***. It makes *Back On Top* feel milquetoast in comparison. Pop it on shuffle and one second, you'll be tapping your toes to a catchy and kitschy dance-pop number – the next, you're being roundhouse kicked in the temple by a wicked overdriven post-metal riff. Just as you're regaining composure, you'll hear a country scorcher pave the way for a piano ballad to fill the frame.

There was no way we *couldn't* immediately hop on the phone with Sella once we'd settled down from our playthrough. The Front Bottoms have officially entered chaos mode, and we *needed* to know everything about it. Thankfully, we got a ring...

In a way, this record feels like a response to *Going Grey*: that LP was very tight, focussed and pop-centric, whereas *Sickness* is very loose, jammy and experimental. Was that a deliberate contrast you wanted to nail?

Nothing was really deliberate. The Front Bottoms is just kind of a reflection of the life Mat and I live – because it's been our lives' work for so long, it just happens the way that it happens. Because it is like an art project, essentially, we always try to go with the flow. But it is a bit like that, y'know? Whenever you finish a big art project, like an album, whatever you do next is always going to be a little bit like a reaction, or a response to what came before it. So there definitely was a bit of that going on, but it wasn't super deliberate.

On some of these songs – especially like

“Montgomery Forever” and “Leaf Pile” – the guitars are just f*ing insane... Like, you are just absolutely shredding on this record. Was it fun to unlock your inner rockstar?**

Hell yeah! It was ripping, y'know? It was a fun experience because we got to get in a room together and basically just jam out. It was me, Mat and our producer friend Erik [Kase Romero], and Erik would be like, “Okay, I've got this guitar riff.” And then he's just rip out this absolutely insane thing. He would normally play bass with us, but he filled in a lot of the guitar stuff on this one.

He and I would exchange riff ideas back and forth all the time – and he's just A+ when it comes to engineering and musicianship and stuff like that, so we were very lucky to have him in the studio with us. But it was definitely a ripper. Especially a riff like “Leaf Pile” – that riff is so intense and heavy and scary, and I feel like with the acoustic guitar playing that heavy riff, it's just kind of extra cool. I'm glad we got to experiment with that.

There's also a bit of a bluesy edge to “The Hard Way”, which is pretty new for The Front Bottoms. Have you always had a soft spot for the twanger side of the musical spectrum?

Yeah, I think so! It always gets to a certain point, when you're playing with guitars, that you're going to fall into certain patterns. So with a song like that, because it is just those four chords driving it along, it kind of has a rock 'n' roll vibe – it definitely goes into that country sort of twang, and that's something I was really excited about.

There's a song called “Carry You Down The Street” that we have from, like, a *way* long time ago – and also “I Think Your Nose Is Bleeding” – those two songs from The Front Bottoms' early days, to me, feel like country songs. I don't think they really *sound* like country songs, but that attitude is definitely there.

So it's always sort of been there, it's just that at the time, with how we were expressing the music, it wasn't really in the forefront. But it definitely is on “The Hard Way”, hell yeah. With that little guitar solo, we were definitely trying to tap into that country vibe a little bit. We were all just rockin' and rollin' together, so all of that energy just came out naturally.

What guitars did you have to rock 'n' roll with?

On this record, I was playing a very simple Epiphone acoustic-electric – it's one of the Masterbilt models, but, like, at the cheaper end of the line. I would always play those live because plugged into an amp, it just rips. And then y'know, I'm not really like a gear head, so I would just kind of grab whatever was around in the studio.

There was a classical guitar with nylon strings that we got to put on a lot of stuff – that was really fun to play around with. I got a Fender acoustic-electric towards the end of the process as well, which was cool.

What is it about that Masterbilt Epiphone that you adore so dearly?

It's rugged, y'know? I always try to play the guitar as rough as I can. So even though the electronics maybe don't sound the best, or as clean as something else out there, it doesn't matter – it just has to be loud and sturdy. I kind of like that energy in general. If I go into a guitar store, I'm buying, like, the wackiest guitar I can find. I like the wacky stuff and the cheap stuff – the stuff that's going to make you go, “Dude, what the f***?” That's more my flavour – all that expensive stuff doesn't really do it for me.

It fits the overall vibe of The Front Bottoms, I think – it's not flashy or technically insane, it's just loose and fun.

Oh, 100 percent! I just like the vibe of having to work with what you've got – that's always been how we've worked best. It keeps us feeling creative, y'know?

It's clear that Mike Sapone's influence as a producer is lacquered all over this album. What was it like working with him?

Mike Sapone, man! What a guy. He was very inspiring in the studio. Probably my favourite thing about him was that he was so positive, y'know? There was never any negative energy whatsoever, and he would really let you go nuts with the creative stuff – any and all ideas were exercised. And I think that's why it was so good to work with him, because if somebody had an idea, he would just be like, “Okay, let's take that to the extreme and see what happens.”

Having some really experimental songs for this album, did it just make sense to work with a producer who's ostensibly best known for making weird-as-f* records?**

Yeah, man, that's exactly it. I mean, the song “Love At First Sight”: we had that sample that I had recorded – it was just this random little voice memo of our friend playing at an open-mic night – and we just put it in there, I sent it to Mike and he looped it, and it somehow became a song. And it like, “Okay, yeah, shit, this is cool.” So it was definitely all about that process of experimenting and trying new things that we would never have thought to do in the past. And y'know, Mike Sapone is the best of the best to experiment with. I don't know how his brain works, but it does some wacky shit, man. 🎧

SOPHIE HOPES FINDS HER ROAR

THE DUMB DAYS ARE OVER AND **TIRED LION** ARE READY FOR A SECOND SHOT AT LIFE, THANKS IN NO SHORT PART TO THE RED-HOT RESILIENCE OF THEIR BADASS FRONTWOMAN.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **HAIDEE LORENZ**.

To say it's been a long time coming would be one hell of an understatement, but after almost three icy years of anxiety, uncertainty and difficult self-care, Tired Lion are finally back on the prowl and ready to make their next attack on Australia's thriving grunge-punk revival scene.

'Their' might not be the right word, however: despite her insistence of it not *technically* being a solo project given the new record's full-bodied sound, and the fact she'll drag a team of mates up onstage with her once touring becomes viable, everything in Tired Lion – and everything on the ripping new album *Breakfast For Pathetics*, out in November on Dew Process – comes at the helm of sole surviving member Sophie Hopes, following a period of chaotic upheaval after the cycle for 2017's *Dumb Days* came to an unceremonious end.

After relocating from Perth to Brisbane, Hopes was effectively abandoned by her bandmates, who scuttled off to form a new project while the frontwoman was left to rebuild Tired Lion from the ground up. But thanks in no short part to her unwavering resilience, determination to prove her strength and unf***withable talent with axe in hand, Hopes was able to bounce right back with an album bigger, boomier and more impenetrably badass than anything her old crew could've wished to scrounge up.

Now *Breakfast* is ready to be served, and Hopes is looking straight down a bright new path ahead for Tired Lion. Let's find out how she lined up the pavers.

Were you always determined to keep pushing on with this project as Tired Lion, or was that up in the air for a while?

It was definitely up in the air for a while. It wasn't easy. I got to a point where I kind of thought, "Well, everyone else has given up, so maybe I should too." And then I just... Like, I wish I was a quitter [*laughs*]. But unfortunately, my parents didn't raise me to be one – I just stuck at it for ages, and for while I thought, "Maybe I should just change everything and f*** Tired Lion off completely, just do it under a different name and start from the very beginning."

But it kind of sucks because everything I had been working towards up until that moment, it all counts. I wasn't ready to just throw that all in the bin. So it was pretty difficult at the start, trying to figure out where I was going to take it, and the journey that it's taken me on has been really interesting. But I feel like this was totally meant to happen, in some weird way. I think I've really come into my own through this experience, and I've figured a lot of things out about myself.

So having really taken the reins with this record, do the songs feel more creatively liberating, or do you feel closer to them?

Totally. I guess when you're in a band, you've everybody around you and there's sort of like this extra layer of security – if you're putting yourself out there, it's not as scary because it's a 'band thing', and there's no direct spotlight on you. You can kind of hide behind your bandmates whenever you want to. And that was the scary thing about doing it on my own, because I *hate* talking about my songs! I hate putting myself out there. I write music because it helps me to get through things, so the fact that this is all 100

percent me is *terrifying*. But it is also very liberating.

This record feels a lot tighter and more focussed than *Dumb Days* – which isn't to say that record wasn't great, this one is just a total step up in those respects. Was that something you wanted to nail with this LP?

I really appreciate that, because I have worked so *f***ing hard* on this record for the last three years. And you get kind of nervous, y'know? Like I was saying, when it's all down to one person, you can't hide behind anyone – so that's awesome to hear. And that's exactly what I was aiming for. I don't know, maybe I just wanted to prove to myself that I've got this, and that I *could* do a record all on my own.

And it's been scary, because I had so many comments on our three-year anniversary post for *Dumb Days* where people were saying, "Oh my God, I love this record, it got me through all of this shit, I still listen to it in my car..." And I'm just here like, "Shit, I wonder if this new record is good enough to compete with that."

I feel like you learn a lot from doing the debut album that really helps out when it comes time to do the next one.

Oh, absolutely. I have grown so much as a musician since *Dumb Days* came out – like, I am so much better at guitar now. I always used to just kind of take it easy, because Matt [Tanner, ex-lead guitarist] would come in with his parts and handle everything. So doing this record, I didn't really have the choice to not improve. I worked on it every single day, I learned how to program drums, and I just practised whenever I could. And I've kind of developed my own – in a non-lame way – signature guitar vibe. It's not too complicated... I guess you could say it's kind of like that Pavement-esque style where it's like the shit version of being good at the guitar.

So in this photo, you're posing with the classic off-white Jazzmaster that's been on your hip since the very early days of Tired Lion. What is it about this guitar that makes you so inseparable from it?

The story behind it just means so much to me. I didn't have a whole lot of money when the band was starting off, but I went into this music store called Concept Music in Perth – that's where I bought my very first guitar, which one of those super cute beginner Strat packs where it comes with the solid-state amp and the tuner and all that cheap stuff. I went back into that store and I was just, like, frothing over this Jazzmaster.

And the dude behind the counter, Tony – he'd been watching me grow from the minute I bought

that little, shitty Strat pack, all the way to playing shows in Perth and kind of moving up the chain, to then playing shows in different countries and stuff – and he was just staring at me, looking at this guitar. I was like, "Man, I so want this! I wish I could buy it." You know what it's like being a musician when you're just barely scraping by – you can't afford shit like that. But Tony turned around and just said, "I ordered that guitar for you." Like... *What!?* And he was like, "You can take as long as you want to pay it off." I was just like, "Are you serious dude? This is insane!"

It was pretty cool, because we had this really important show that night – this was before we got signed to a booking agent, and we had some industry people coming to check us out – and Tony secretly let me take the Jazzmaster out of the store, use it that night and bring it back the next day.

I just love that guitar so much, and it's never failed me. I did try to buy a new guitar recently. I thought, "I want something fresh!" I was in the middle of writing this record, and you know how picking out a new instrument can give you a different type of inspiration, or whatever? So I gave it a shot and I bought a Jag-Stang, but I ended up being like, "Oh... This is shit." Kurt Cobain designed a horrible f***ing guitar, man! Like, there's no cutaway – it especially sucks for girls as well, your boobs just sit flat with the guitar. But I'll give it one thing: the neck is a lot shorter than my Jazzmaster, so I felt like a total shredlord.

So yeah, I gave that a go for a while, but I ended up just thinking, "Nah, this isn't doing it for me." And then I picked up the Jazzmaster – which I'd neglected for about a year at that point – and I was like, "Man, why did I put this thing down!?" It's the best! I can't get over it. 🎸





PANIC ATTACK

ROCK 'N' ROLL AIN'T DEAD – JUST LOOK AT ENGLISH SHREDHEADS **NOTHING BUT THIEVES** FOR PROOF. IN FACT ON ALBUM #3, THEY'RE TAKING THEIR SIGNATURE MODERN ROCK MAYHEM TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA.**

Back in 2017 (ah, simpler times), *Australian Guitar* was granted the privilege to hang out with Nothing But Thieves ahead of their Sydney show opening for Muse – a gig that would see them blast 30 minutes of their powerful and poignant pop-rock directly into the eardrums of approximately 21,000 concertgoers.

At this point, the English fivesome had just lifted the cloche on their hotly anticipated second album, *Broken Machine*, and had been kicking around the scene for a little over five years. They were no certainly no small-time hobbying rockers at this stage (they were, after all, the direct support for one of the world's biggest rock acts on a sold-out arena tour), but we could sense the nerves bounding around – it was clear that Nothing But Thieves were, however well they hid it, unprepared for their recent catapulting into the mainstream.

Three years later, the band have grown well into their fit of modern rock's new ringleaders: frontman Conor Mason speaks jovially with as much confidence as pride, rearing to wax lyrical on how he's exploring an exciting new world of pop and hip-hop influences. *Broken Machine* is old news, too – it's all about *Moral Panic* now: an album that builds on the roaring rock 'n' roll that NBT cut their teeth on with kaleidoscopic synths and songwriting detours that take them in a myriad of unanticipated new directions.

But don't sweat about their comfort in fame leading to them ditching their guitars. Mason swears up and down to us that six strings, four chords and the truth are all the band will ever care about at their core... But then again, since they *have* the opportunity to explore beyond the boundaries of such, why wouldn't they? *Moral Panic* only just came out, but it's already dominating the charts from Sydney to Spain – thanks in no short part because Nothing But Thieves refuse to rest on their laurels.

It's a weird, wild and uneasy new world that lies ahead for us – and as you'll read in our following down-to-earth chat with him, Mason wants to make the soundtrack for it.

It's always a cop-out to go, "Oh, you can tell you've improved your skills" or whatever – but this really does sound like the definitive Nothing But Thieves record: a true evolution of the stylistic threads you'd sown in albums

one and two.

I feel like it just comes from experience, and from knowing ourselves better as artists now. And of course, just getting better at our craft. I think it's like anything – if you made Wotsits for a living, you'd get better at it after making them for 10,000 hours. The amount of hours that I've spent writing, that Dom [Craik] has spent with a guitar in his lap and that Joe [Langridge-Brown] has spent doing everything behind the scenes... All of that has just made us better songwriters.

So how *did* you want this record to build creatively on everything you'd done before?

It actually started in Australia! I had a day off in Sydney and I was walking with Dom, doing that whole kind of Harbour Walk thing. This was just after we did the second album, and out of nowhere he just turned to me and he was like, "Mate, I think our melodies could be better. I think we could be more interesting." And I remember at the time being, like... Not offended, but just like, "Oh... Really?" [*Laughs*]. But then I was reflecting back on it, and I was like, "Yeah, okay, he does have a point." So I started studying the flow and rhythm of hip-hop, and pop movements throughout history, and all this stuff that I wouldn't normally study.

I think that's all just kind of transcended into what we write now. And Dom is a wicked producer – he's been producing pop and hip-hop artists for years now, and I think that's just made him more aware of what we could do and where we could take our songs. And he's really pushed us with that knowledge. He's always trying to find the newest way to present a rock band, and I really like that. People always say shit like, "They need to bring rock back," but I hate that phrase – I think we need to move rock *forward*. Because it died in its tracks for a reason, I think.

Even outside of Nothing But Thieves, I'm always writing from the perspective of a learner. And under a pop background, that just has more energy and it's more interesting to me, rhythmically and in terms of what's possible to present with your sound.

I can name at least a dozen bands that started off with a heavy rock slant, tasted chart success and then went full bore into the digital pop realm. But even as Nothing But Thieves continues to climb the ladder, you've kept things very analogue and instrumental: there

are crunchy guitars and real drums in every track – hell, even some math-rock vibes on "Phobia"! Was it important for you to maintain that authenticity as instrumentalists?

100 percent! That's another thing I've noticed a lot more of lately – when bands try to become modern, they think the way to do that is just slap a crappy synth on the sound they already have and call it a day. And it's not. For us, we still want to keep things as organic as we can, using real instruments and having *real* songs – and just finding ways to make that atmosphere more modern-sounding and experimental without compromising on our authenticity as a band.

I do think that with this record, if you stripped everything back down to its barest form, there'd still be songs in there. There's always the soul of a song that exists when you take away all the synths and the production, and that's always been really important for us. But just because our songwriting has gotten better, we've been able to build more on those souls and do more with our sound.

So what's the dynamic like between yourself, Joe and Dom as guitarists?

Joe and Dom are both the driving force of the guitars. Dom's brain is always in this odd, boisterous, zany, jaunty sort of world. He's always going, "Where can I move around the beat? How can I make this guitar part as hard and as interesting as possible?" And I really like that – he's always trying to pull it and push it, and he just never wants to do any kind of standard settings or stereotypical rock tones.

I think Dom writes most of the guitar parts, but Joe's got this great ear for the lead playing – he's got a really good ear for solos and the melodic side of it all. And then where I come in, in terms of anything to do with the guitars or the music – I'll just take a step back from everything and listen to each part individually, like I would with a melody or anything else. So whether it's a synth, a guitar or a melody line, this or that, I'll always think, "Can I sing that back? How I can make that the best it can possibly be?"

Sometimes if Dom's writing a riff and he comes up with something super interesting, I'll just question him and be like, "How about that note there stays in the same beat as that hook, so the sequence flows better?" But I think it's good for me to take a step back and not actually touch the guitar when it comes to writing. 🎸

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

THEIR NEW ALBUM MAY BE CALLED *A CELEBRATION OF ENDINGS*, BUT DON'T GET IT TWISTED: **BIFFY CLYRO** AIN'T GOING ANYWHERE SOON.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

It was a ballsy move when, in an era marked predominantly by its crippling (if well-earned) negativity, Biffy Clyro set out to make the happiest album of the year. Their eighth proper LP of genre-bending glory (not counting last year's full-length soundtrack to the *Balance, Not Symmetry* film), *A Celebration Of Endings* is an overwhelmingly optimistic offering from the Scottish rockers, who spend 45 minutes searching earnestly for diamonds in a mountain of shit. And beyond all odds, they unearth some – eleven of them, to be exact, their haul shiny and succinct.

A Celebration Of Endings launched to some of the most intense critical acclaim that Biffy Clyro had ever seen, and for good reason: we could all use a smile right now, and the trio elicit more than plenty of them with riff after riff of loveably crunchy guitars and the kind of wonderfully accented wails only Simon Neil can belt with such aplomb.

We caught up with Biffy's bassist James Johnson to find out how LP8 made it over the line and why it's such a special release for the band, the unexpected catalyst for why it's so damn loud and caked in colour, and how he and his bandmates managed to come up with the most the outright most insane Biffy Clyro tune to date.

The conspiracy theorist in me is worried about that title: is this foretelling the end of Biffy Clyro?

You can rest easy, Matt, we're not going anywhere! The album is really about change. It was partially about changing the personal circumstances within the band, because we had a couple of long-term relationships that came to a bit of an acrimonious end before we started making the record. And it's about dealing with the changes that society has been going through, and the changes it *needs* to go through. It's about celebrating and embracing all of that change. Because change can be a difficult thing in life – but society is going to change for the better, and I think it's time to celebrate that.

Even with the COVID delay, this marks the shortest gap there's been between Biffy Clyro records. What made you guys want to jump right back into the studio and bash this one out so quickly?

The *Balance, Not Symmetry* album was a really exciting project for us – it was such an amazing experience, because it had always been a dream of ours to go out and make a movie soundtrack. But I think the way that came around, the way we kind of wrote for it and how it all came together... I don't want to rubbish it, but it doesn't feel like a proper album – we don't consider that to be a part of our actual discography. But again, that's not to rubbish it, or to imply that we didn't put all of our effort into it – it was just something different for us to do.

Ellipsis was definitely our last real album, and that was three or four years ago now. But we like to stay busy as a band, y'know? We love being a band and we love making music – it's not a job to us at all, it's our life – so it just felt obvious for us to just keep pushing ahead with the next thing as soon as we finished the *Balance, Not Symmetry* album.

Listening to this record front to back, it's a bit of a rollercoaster ride – one moment, you have these huge wallops of attack and distortion, and then the next you've got these really tight, cruisy pop melodies. How did you go about striking that balance between the light and the dark?

I think we'll always have one foot firmly in the door as a guitar rock band – y'know, that's our history and that's our makeup, that's who we are. But we're a band that likes to push ourselves as well, and we don't want to keep making the same record over and over again. We want to feel that we've got something new to say, musically and lyrically, and we always want to be pushing ourselves in new directions.

We always take influences from a lot of different places – maybe less so on this record, actually. I know that seems strange, but mostly, what brought us to this point is what we'd been doing musically over the last couple of albums, the *Balance, Not Symmetry* soundtrack and the *MTV Unplugged* show – those things really informed what we were trying to do this time around. Every album we do is a reaction to what came before – whether that was *Ellipsis* as our last album, or the *Balance, Not Symmetry* soundtrack, or doing *Unplugged*.

MTV Unplugged was especially eye-opening for us, actually. Sitting down and playing in these really posh venues, really exploring the songs in a different way and sharing that with the audience – it was such an amazing experience, and it took us right out of our comfort zone. But that being said, it did also remind us that we wanted to rock the f*** out on whatever we did next.

Would you say that's a testament to the chemistry you have as a band?

I think so. We have a connection as people that goes way back to when we were kids – y'know, we all grew up together, so I think there's a reasonable amount of telepathy going on when we're making music as a band. We've made so much music together, and spent so much time in each other's company, that we have our own language when it comes to being creative. And I think that's really important – it allows the band to take these massive right-hand turns at moments.

That's the key to how we're able to change up our sound without changing the core elements of our



band. It's really important for us to take you on a journey with each album. And y'know, [*A Celebration Of Endings*] isn't a long album – it's 40 minutes or something – but when you get to the end of "Cop Syrup", you really feel that you've listened to a huge body of work. And that's kind of what we wanted: we want to take you on a journey. We want the record to be a companion piece to your life – we don't want it to be a little bit of noise in the background.

I'm glad you mentioned "Cop Syrup", because that is easily one of the most batshit crazy tracks in Biffy Clyro's entire catalogue. How did that song come to be?

I think a lot of ambition went into that song, to be honest. Adam and Simon had the idea for that middle section of the song – that big kind of orchestral, psychedelic section. Simon was playing around with that chord pattern, and we all felt that it was really strong and really dreamlike – it just moved us to a beautiful place in our minds. And then one day, we had the idea to make it collide with this punk rock song that we had. I think it sort of shows the two sides of Simon's brain – y'know, nobody is a straight line, and "Cop Syrup" is a great example of the ambition that Simon has for the band and for the music.

Y'know, we've been a band for a long time, and there's influences all round – but ultimately, it's just about the feel of a song for us. And I think when you go through a tough moment and you come out on the other side with more confidence, it's a really special thing. That's where I think we've found ourselves as a band, and that's where those lyrics comes from: "*It's self preservation / Baby, I'm scorched earth / You're hearts and minds / F*** everybody!*"

Simon came up with those lyrics – he was like, "I only need Ben and James to make music!" And it's slightly tongue-in-cheek: he's not that cruel a man [*laughs*]. But it does come from that feeling that we've got a real strength as a band, with the connection that we have. 🐾



15 YEARS OF REASONING

LOOK AT THIS PHOTOGRAPH... OKAY, NOW READ THIS INTERVIEW, WHERE **NICKELBACK** BASSIST **MIKE KROEGER** LOOKS BACK ON 15 YEARS OF THE ICONIC *ALL THE RIGHT REASONS*.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **RICHARD BELAND**.

Love ‘em or hate ‘em, the cultural impact of Canadian crunch-pop quartet Nickelback is simply irrefutable. It started out of desperation: frontman Chad Kroeger was working a dead-end job at a Starbucks (where prices ending in ‘99’ meant he’d often hand customers a *nickel back* in change – so now you know where that name comes from), and recorded the band’s debut EP on half a \$4,000 loan from his stepfather (the other half went, naturally, to his shroom dealer).

The investment quite obviously paid off, and by the turn of the 21st century, Nickelback were packing stadiums full of radio-rock fans young and old alike in any city that would host them. And in 2005 – defying the odds waged against them by their own team – Nickelback would release one of the most successful albums in rock history with *All The Right Reasons*. And one glance at the tracklist makes it clear just why: “Photograph”, “Far Away”, “Rockstar”, “Animals”... It’s absolutely jam-packed (pun intended) with setlist staples.

15 years later, bassist Mike Kroeger looks back on the album with a fond reverence – which makes sense when you learn how little faith Roadrunner Records had towards it at the time of release, before it went on to become one of a very select few diamond-certified rock LPs. To celebrate the anniversary, the band have released a special expanded edition of *All The Right Reasons* featuring rarities, live performances and a full remaster of the original album mix.

He also gifted us with a few minutes of his time to help crank up the nostalgia machine. Shall we dive right in?

Looking back on this record as the artist and the music lover you are today, how do you feel about it? Do you think it’s aged well?

Well, I suppose I do. The initial response to the album was very good, and the tour went forever which is usually a good sign – if you go on the road and never come home, that usually means you’ve done something right. It was two years on the road with multiple trips to virtually every inhabited continent, and it was fantastic.

And y’know, it was funny because after the success that we had with *Silver Side Up*, with the song “How You Remind Me” and all that, everybody was saying, “Okay guys, it’s pretty normal now that your career is going to wind down.” And then we did another record, *The Long Road*, and that was largely considered to be a failure because it only sold five

million copies. Such a big failure, right!?

And then we came out with *All The Right Reasons*, and that gave us an even bigger resurgence – it turned out to be our biggest record to date!

A good handful of the most iconic Nickelback songs are on this record. What was that writing process like? Were the ideas just pouring out of you?

It was productive, but there were definitely some hard times. Creativity is like that, y’know? Sometimes it flows freely, and sometimes you’ve gotta kind of fight for it a little bit – and fight *with* it a little bit. But overall, it was a great experience. It was intense and it was a lot of work, but we came out of it with a great album. It seems that if you don’t leave a little bit of your sanity behind when you make an album, you haven’t dug deep enough. And we most definitely left some of our sanity behind on *All The Right Reasons*.

You guys were able to use a guitar part from the late, great Dimebag Darrell on “Side Of A Bullet”. How did that happen?

We’d known the Pantera guys since a really early time in our career. They were fans of ours from the beginning, and we would always see them out on the road or whenever we would go through Dallas; they would come out and ply us with alcohol. It was always fun to be around those guys. They were our brothers. And then when Dime was murdered, we wanted to pay tribute to him. We were able to get some of his unused solos and a few other bits of his playing that we would actually lay into the track... It was a really special thing for us.

The guy was a legend, as well as his brother – that whole band was, y’know? They didn’t give a f***. I mean, if you know anything about Pantera, you know they didn’t give a f***. They were just doing what they did. A lot of people didn’t like the fact that they were friends with us, or fans of our music – but the metal world can be a little intense to its own, y’know? So it was just really cool that they didn’t care about that, and they just wanted to be friends with us because they liked what we did.

There is nothing more metal than being friends with a band like Nickelback.

I remember the first time I met those guys, we were

in a limo somewhere in Dallas, a little bit drunk and listening to Christina Aguilera. And I remember Vinnie just going crazy, saying how he thought it was the best shit ever. I was just sitting there going, “What am I witnessing right now!?” They were really just fans of music – they didn’t really let genres or personalities get in the way of what they liked. They just liked what they liked, and they appreciated what they appreciated. And like you say, that’s so f***ing metal.

Speaking of which, last year you noted that you wanted to put a full-on metal record out. Is that still the goal?

I know the interview you’re talking about – that was an interesting one, because there was a little bit of context manipulation going on there. That’s the same article, I believe, where the person wrote that I wanted Nickelback to make a Slayer cover album – which is not really what I said. What I said was that I would like to make a Slayer cover album – y’know, me, Mike, not the band Nickelback, but just myself.

And the same kind of goes for a heavy metal record; [2017’s] *Feed The Machine* is about as consistently heavy as we’re ever going to get. There was that goal there to make a heavier album, which we obviously did – but y’know, we’re looking to the next thing now. I do still want to make a metal album for myself, though. That’s certainly where I live, and that’s where I’m the most comfortable as a musician.

What I love most about Nickelback is that you’ve got a very catchy and approachable, pop-oriented rock sound, but there is this underlying energy and grit that feels very much in line with what you’d expect from a metal band. Are you always trying to find new ways to inject a bit of that influence into your songwriting?

We all come from different places, musically, but the one thing all four of us have in common is that we all have our roots in heavy metal. So it’s not that hard for any one of us to coax out some heavier shit, y’know? We all grew up on Metallica, Megadeth, Anthrax, Slayer... The boys are a little lighter on the Slayer than I am, but they’re certainly one of my favourites to glean some influence from. I’m really on a Slayer jag right now, actually, just going through their whole catalogue again. 🎸

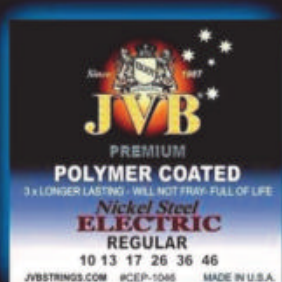


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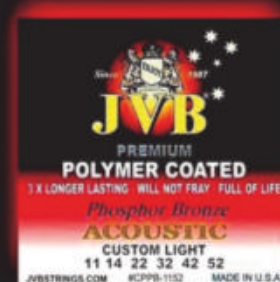
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A NEW AGE WAR CRY

2020 HAS PUT UP ONE HELL OF A FIGHT THUS FAR, BUT FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN NU-METAL MANIACS IN **SEETHER**, IT'S JUST ANOTHER YEAR IN THE LIFE – ONE THEY'RE READY TO SHOW WHAT'S WHAT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Though inspired by the sounds of the '90s, the South African hard-rockers in Seether have delivered an album notably well-suited for 2020 in *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum* (translating from Latin to *If You Want Peace, Prepare For War*).

As frontman Shaun Morgan agrees with palpable enthusiasm, the 50-minute monolith marks a major turning point for the band: it's not only their sharpest and most meticulous effort to date – that much due to Morgan returning to the producer's chair after cutting his teeth on 2017's *Poison The Parish* – but it's also their most authentic, Morgan tapping deep into his inner turmoil to brew an artistic statement as bleak as it is bold.

In addition, *Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum* is the first Seether album to feature Corey Lowery on lead guitars. With his frenetic fretage, Lowery brings a deft edge of heavy metal to the fold – but he also helped out behind the scenes, making the team behind the desk the strongest Seether en masse have ever had to work with.

As the band gears up to conquer the world virtually via livestreamed performance, we had a chat with Morgan about why taking over the reins as producer was the best decision he's made in Seether thus far, why Lowery was the perfect man for the job left open by Bryan Wickman, and why you should never fill your studio with expensive gear if your intentions are to force it all on people.

So this is the second Seether album that you've produced yourself, after *Poison The Parish* in 2017. Did going into this record feel easier, or more exciting, having already dipped your feet into the process?

Yeah, I was very excited about it. The first one was terrifying, because the onus was on me to deliver [*laughs*]. I opted to take on that responsibility and that risk myself, and I'm glad I did, because I've finally learned, after so many years, to trust my instincts.

We've worked with great producers in the past, and we've worked with terrible producers in the past. The best producer we ever had was Brendan O'Brien – I learned everything I needed to know from him. He gave me confidence in myself and my songwriting, and because of that, I felt like I could get to the point where I'd be able to do a record without anybody's help. And to be quite honest, the last two albums, *Poison The Parish* and now this one, they're my favourite sounding Seether albums – because I didn't have a producer trying to inject their own sound into it.

We worked with this one guy, Howard Benson:

he's a producer, fine, I don't love or hate the guy – but he and his engineer, they would buy up a bunch of guitars and amps, and because they spent all their money on those guitars and amps, they just wanted to use them all the time. So you'd come into the studio and they'd say, "Okay, *this* will be your distorted guitar for the album, *this* will be your clean guitar, and *these* are the amps we'll use." And so ultimately, they're just creating albums where it's different bands all sounding the same – which doesn't make any sense to me, y'know? So I learned from Howard not to ever do that.

But yeah, it's always exciting to steer the ship! It was especially fun this time around because Corey had just joined the band, and he assistant-engineered the record alongside Matt Hyde, who we did the last one with as well. And we made a really great team between the three of us. It went really smoothly. I mean, we did 21 entire tracks – not mixed, but completely edited and put together with all the band guys – in 17 days. That's a rate of productivity we haven't seen in quite some time.

On the first album we ever did, the producer dragged us out into a three-month process to do 12 songs, which I thought was ridiculous; we had to record "Fine Again" from the ground up four or five times, because he was never in the studio to do it properly. So being at the helm of it all myself is quite thrilling. Last time it was nerve wracking and I was terrified, but this time I actually felt pretty good; I feel like the songs are even stronger than they were last time, to be honest.

I guess the only pressure I felt this time was that I needed to exceed the expectations we laid down with the last one, and I needed to leap right over the bar I set on that record. And I think I did it! I can confidently say that this is the best album I've done – certainly the better of the two that I've produced.

What made Corey the best choice to take the reins on lead guitar?

Well, he came out on tour with us – that was the tour we did with Nickelback in the UK. Then we did South Africa, then Australia and New Zealand, and then we flew back to the UK – and that was all in the span of four weeks. We did all these countries and all these time zones, and we managed to get through it in one piece without killing each other. So we knew right away that he was up for the challenge.

But I've known him for 15, 16 years now. He was in a band called Dark New Day, and we were on a tour with them and a band called Crossfade way back in the day – it was probably the most fun I've ever had in my life. At the end of that tour, a lot of us were crying over the fact it was ending, because we had become such good

friends between all three bands. It was a brotherhood. It was an absolute circus, but it was a brotherhood.

So I've known Corey since then, but the thing is, he never told me he played guitar. And that's the interesting thing about it! Because I've always just known him as a bassist – he'd only ever been a bassist in all the bands he's been in since I met him. So every time I asked him, "Hey man, do you know a guitarist?" He would say, "Yeah, yeah," and would help me find somebody else, never telling me that *he* could play the damn guitar. And then he finally did, and he came out and played guitar with us, and I was like, "Goddammit man, this is who we've needed forever!"

He brings a lot to the table with his personality alone – he's a really energetic and positive guy – and he brings a lot of expertise with him as well. He's a great Pro Tools engineer. And he's just one of those guys that you like to be around, y'know? He will find a reason to be happy when there certainly doesn't seem to be one.

What was the studio dynamic like between the two of you as guitarists? Were you throwing many ideas back and forth, or experimenting with different parts together?

Well, I wrote all the stuff. I think the understanding with these guys is just that Seether is my thing, as far as the songwriting goes. There have been times where we've written albums together – we've been in a room and we've jammed and written stuff as a unit – and there's other times when I'm doing it and they just kind of let me run with it, because y'know, Seether is basically everything that I hear in my head.

So what Corey was instrumental with – no pun intended – was that he came to the studio and he learned all the guitar parts, so that I didn't have to track all the guitars like I normally do. Usually I'm the only guitarist, so I have to play the rhythms, the overdubs and the solos, the re-dos... And y'know, it's not a chore, but it takes up time. So what's nice about him knowing the parts was that could record them all interchangeably. One day I'd say, "Okay, well you play this rhythm part, I'll play the solo, you do the overdub, and then..." And then the other day we'd do the opposite.

It was cool to have that freedom and flexibility – and the fact that I was able to trust him was amazing. I've had guitarists before where they were great players, but they didn't have the feel that I was looking for. And you almost don't want them to ruin a moment that you're got in your head, because the way they bend their notes was just not how you'd imagine it. So Corey and I are quite simpatico in that sense, where we both play quite similarly. 🎸



THEY CONQUERED THE '90S, NOUGHTS AND TENS, AND NOW **SEVENDUST** ARE KICKING OFF THEIR ROARING '20S WITH AN ALBUM SET TO REDEFINE THE VERY CORE OF THEIR SIGNATURE STYLE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Whether you consider it lucky, unlucky, or don't give a shit about superstition, it's hard to deny that 13 is a pretty impressive number when it comes to the amount of albums one has put out. Especially in the case of a band like Sevendust, who continue to one-up themselves – and their signature searing and commandeering alt-metal sound – with each new release. *Blood & Stone* is no different, shaking things up with the beautifully balls-to-the-wall riffs, maniacally monstrous singalongs, and the occasional unexpected plot-twist (like a cover of Soundgarden's “The Day I Tried To Live”, presented in tribute to the late, great Chris Cornell).

As we learned chatting with lead guitarist Clint Lowery, the key to Sevendust's enduring success is their refusal to stagnate – for as long as their hands can lift their instruments and their vocal chords can muster the lyrics, they're keen to keep reinventing the wheel, then promptly smashing it to pieces.

It's not often that a band's 13th album will be their best, but this is just an absolute ripper. This far into your career, how do you manage to keep things feeling fresh and exciting, not just for the fans but for yourselves as artists?

Oh man, that's always the challenge. To be honest with you, we never expected to go past two or three records, y'know? But one thing I think has kept us on our toes, and kept the chemistry alive and the thrill still there, is just the relationship we have with each other – there's a very strong mutual respect that we all have for each other. I mean, we're brothers – we fight, and we do all the things that people who spend a lot of time together do, but at the end of the day, we adore our fans.

Sure, music is our livelihood – it keeps the lights on and keeps food on the table – but at the end of the day, we still get those chills when the lights go down and we hear the crowd start to cheer. I honestly see every one of the guys, at some point, get pepped up on that stuff. So it's cool. We still dig it! And we're going to continue to do it for as long as we all dig it.

So is this the definitive Sevendust album?

I think it definitely has all of the ingredients that makes up our sound. We always accomplish that on some level: sometimes we stray a little bit towards the melodic side and sometimes we go a little heavier, sometimes we go a little more odd or a little more technical – but at the end of the day, it always just comes down to Lajon [Witherspoon] being a soulful singer, Morgan [Rose] being very persuasive...

And we're from the South, y'know? There's a flavour to that which is hard to describe – it's just an attitude, I suppose, just like you have an attitude in punk rock, or in hip-hop, or in the blues. We have that vibe; we have a culture, and a presence that you know can only come from the South.

Do you find that you're still discovering new ways to present yourself as a guitarist?

Yeah, I mean, there's always a new trick that you're trying to add to the arsenal. There's always a discovery to be made. When I was younger, I played all the time – I played for eight hours a day, just bullshitting constantly, so I discovered those things quicker. Now I'll play the guitar just to write, for the most part – I don't really practise for soloing or anything like that. But occasionally I'll stumble upon some kind of movement that excites me.

At the moment, I'm doing these things with slide techniques and string-skipping – that's my flavour of the month. And then in the studio, I've really gotten into layering, and trying new ways orchestrate how I'll layer guitars – making sure they don't fight for frequency, making sure they all have a place in the mix... I love doing that stuff, I could do that all day!

What guitars did you have in the studio this time around?

I always have the PRS Custom 22 that I've named Bruce Lee; it *always* has to make an appearance. PRS sent it to me years and years and years ago – probably around the time of our second record [*Home*], and I fell in love with it there and then. It has its own soul, man. So that's always been one of my favourites to record with.

I used a lot of the PRS baritone guitars as well – they're what I call the war horses for the type of music we play. There's a couple of songs in drop G# sharp, so I need that longer scale neck and that chunkier sort of built. So we used those a lot for the main parts. And then for the colour, I was messing around with some other guitars, like a PRS Star, just to kind of get more of a thin, nitty kind of tone.

You guys were initially scheduled to tour Australia with Steel Panther back in May, which obviously didn't happen; but the last word we got was that you're back on for February 2021. Is that still the plan?

I was actually thinking about that yesterday, I've been meaning to reach out to them about it. I talk to the Steel Panther guys quite a bit, but I haven't heard

any updates – I don't if it's canned or if it's going to go through, or what the situation in Australia and New Zealand is as far as allowing people in. You guys have handled the pandemic a lot better than we have, so I don't know if they'd even allow us in.

As far as I know, we're still on – but you know how it all is, and how it's all been unfolding – they keep pushing things back, so would it surprise me if they postponed again? No. But as of right now, everyone seems to be optimistic.

Are there any songs on the new record that you're especially keen to bust out?

I put together a setlist that we're going to do for a livestream coming up, and I have to say, a couple of the songs on this record are the ones I'm most excited to play. There's a song called “Dying To Live” that I really, really love. We'll play about three or four songs off the new record, because it's a really exciting record for us and we want to celebrate it as much as we can.

Usually we'd only play about one or two songs from a new record – maybe three, at the most – just because we have other songs that we have to get to. But we're going to play a lot of these new ones. Obviously we've got to play “Blood From A Stone”, and the Soundgarden cover that we did [“The Day I Tried To Live”]. And then there's a few others on there that I really want to do – there's one called “Alone” that I'm super excited to rip out.

Do you write many of your parts with the live show in mind?

I was talking to Morgan about this the other day, and I think in the future, we're going to make much more of a conscious effort to. After doing this for so long, you get a sense of how things are going to go. After watching a song perform well and really translate to a crowd, you learn what kinds of tempos, fills and riffs are going to be attractive to the audiences.

And y'know, sometimes it doesn't go as planned – sometimes you think, “Aw, this song's gonna be great,” but then you play it and nobody really cares about it. But it's usually the case that we know our audiences well enough that we can predict what they'll be into, and we'll take advantage of those things when it comes to putting a set together.

We definitely want to keep the energy alive, so the first thing we think about when we're writing a setlist is what kind of songs will get people moving. But when we're writing the songs, the live show doesn't even enter our minds – we want the song to serve the song, first and foremost. 🎸

KNOT WHAT YOU'D EXPECT

HE BROUGHT NU-METAL TO THE MASSES IN **SLIPKNOT** AND GOT GRUNGY WITH **STONE SOUR** – NOW, **COREY TAYLOR** IS PUTTING HIS PEDAL TO THE METAL WITH A SOLO ALBUM OF SEARING '70S ROCK 'N' ROLL.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Between the sadistic and visceral nu-metal grit of Slipknot and the pummelling post-grunge punch of Stone Sour, it's safe to say that Corey Taylor's creative heels are planted firmly in the '90s. Or it would've been until recently: with his long-gestating solo album finally upon us, the 46-year-old Iowan has tapped way back into his roots and embraced the equally cool and uncouth crunch of '50s-thru-'70s rock 'n' roll – think along the lines of AC/DC, Rose Tattoo and all the other classic bands that called Alberts home back in the day.

But of course, this is Corey Taylor we're talking about – *CMFT* was never going to be a simple or straightforward 50 minutes for you to pop on and rock out to from cover to cover. This is a dude whose entire existence revolves around sharp and severe left-hand turns – from the belting first solo on “HWY 666” to the semi-satirical hardcore punk juts on “European Tour Bus Bathroom Song”, Taylor takes the listener on an all-out rollercoaster ride through distant peaks and valleys of classic rock. It's an absolutely breathtaking experience to embark on – but one that demands you shed all expectations for before you do, if only so that you can truly be prepared for anything. Because with a record like this, you really should be.

With *CMFT* now out and wreaking havoc in the wild (courtesy of Roadrunner Records), we went one-on-one with Taylor to figure out how he made it all happen.

We've been fans of Slipknot and Stone Sour since the beginning, but nothing could have prepared us for how totally f*ing crazy this LP is. Was it your goal to surprise everyone with how wild and loose you get on the record?**

I don't know if that was the goal – I think it's a byproduct, absolutely. I've always been the guy that puts it out there that if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it wholeheartedly. So if I was going to do a solo album, I didn't want it to feel like either of my other band. There would have been no point if I was going to do that, y'know? If I was going to do a solo album, I wanted it to represent a whole different part of my musical prowess, and songwriting talent.

And that's really where this stuff came from – most of these songs have been sitting around for almost 20 years. I love the fact that people are so taken aback by it – that's the best compliment I've heard about this album so far, that people are like, “I didn't know what to expect, but it was exactly

what I needed!” That f***ing makes my life, man!

Did you look at this record as an opportunity to explore all the genres of music you love and make your own sort of playlist of influences?

A little bit. To me, it was more about sharing my influences, and realising that I'm influenced by so many different genres, bands, movements and whatnot, that there was no way this album *wasn't* going to feel very diverse. But it still just feels like an awesome rock album, y'know?

My approach to making albums has always been, y'know, let's not lay everything out for people and make it easy – let's challenge the listener; let's put things together differently and make sure that it isn't reminiscent of anything that I've done before. And that was the case with this album as well – I wanted to put something together that would really grab people by surprise, throw them through a loop and leave them going, “Holy f***!”

I do take people through a lot of different genres on this album, but you don't really feel it until you listen to it in retrospect and you go, “Huh, that *was* pretty all over the place!” But when you're *in* it, it feels very connected.

You mentioned that a lot of these songs came from your archives – why is it only now that you feel you were able to make this record?

I was just waiting for the time to do it. It had to be the right vibe. But I was going to go in and make this album regardless of COVID. My plan was to finish up the tour cycle with Slipknot throughout this year, then go in and record this album in January and February of 2021. I just moved it up because y'know, everything got put on hold.

It just felt like it was time to get it all out of my system. The more time I spent listening to these songs, the more I knew that I wanted to put them out. I knew that none of them fit with either band – and after doing so many records with Slipknot and Stone Sour, I felt like it was time for me to show people something different; to really put myself out there in a way that nobody had ever seen before.

So why these 13 songs in particular?

Because they were the best songs at the time. I wanted this album to be stacked with the best songs that I have, because you don't get a second chance to make that first impression. It was like, “Let's just go all-out, right out the gate, and just make everyone lose their minds.” I wanted it to have that old-school feel

that every song may not be a single, but every song is important – every song is f***ing vital to this record. I don't want to f*** around, y'know? I just wanted killer songs that people would want to sing along to.

You've put together an insanely talented group of collaborators to bring this record to life. What was it like to curate the CMFT band?

They're some of my best friends, man. I've had the privilege of playing with these guys in various projects over the course of almost 20 years. My best friend Jason [Christopher] is on bass, we've got [Christian 'Tooch' Martucci] from Stone Sour... I was jamming with Tooch for years before Stone Sour. Zach Throne, who is an incredible guitar player, he and I have been doing stuff together since 2003.

And then Dustin [Robert], who was in Jericho, is such a criminally underrated drummer – he can just play anything! And that was key. Y'know, anybody can put together a diverse album, but if your drummer can't really make his way through all of those different genres, it's not going to work. And that's just how talented that kid is, man. I've known him since 2005, 2006 – so we've been good friends for 14 years.

This band was such a great unit, talent-wise. But the most important thing was how good we all get along – how much excitement we bring to the table when we get together. It's one thing to be able to go onstage with a bunch of people who can play the parts, but it's another thing entirely to be stoked about being able to hang out with your friends *and* play music with them.

Were you recording live to tape?

Probably 99 percent of the music was done live, with the exception of acoustics, vocals, keys and some of the solos. But everything else is live – everything is right there in the room, all of us just jamming it and going f***ing wild with it.

Was that important to capture the raw energy you were all feeling?

I think so. I mean, it was definitely something we all wanted to try. There was such a great vibe when we were rehearsing, so we looked at each other and we were like, “Man, we should try to do this live.” And it just worked! Honestly, we spent less time recording than we did just hanging out. We would all do the same thing – we'd come in for two hours, bullshit and drink coffee with everybody, and then we would go in and play a few songs. It was f***ing ridiculous, dude, we were such assholes about it. We were just like, “Oh, I guess we should f***in' go in and play.” And then we'd just bang it out. It was the best bro-hang ever. 🍻

THE BRIGHTEST BULB IN THE ROOM



PERIPHERY MAY BE OFF-SEASON, BUT **MISHA MANSOOR** IS KEEPING BUSY – LIKE, “TEN **BULB** ALBUMS IN FIVE MONTHS, WITH EVEN MORE IN THE MAKING” KIND OF BUSY.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **EKATERINA GORBACHEVA**.

Before he hit the big leagues as the backbone of djent-pioneering mosh powerhouse Periphery, turning brains to liquid by the theatre-load with his breakneck-paced riffs and turbulent bends, Misha Mansoor was simply a seven-string-obsessed shredhead with more song ideas in his mind than hours in the day to make them a reality. It was the turn of a new decade, and forums were all the rage – so, under the moniker Bulb, he utilised them to share hours upon hours of his genre-bending fretwork.

Nowadays, Mansoor’s formative work as Bulb has a devout cult following, re-uploads of his rarities garnering millions of views each. So, before he officially reignites his old spark with a proper solo album until the Bulb name (set to be released in 2021 via his own 3DOT Recordings label), Mansoor has decided to make his archive of old ideas readily available in the form of ten meticulously curated volumes – eight of which are solely comprised of the old guitar-based cuts, with one album of electronic remixes and one of orchestral interpretations.

With all ten volumes now available to stream (we recommend pacing yourself, though – there’s over six hours of delicious djent to chew through here), we got Mansoor on the line to run us through the whole shebang.

Did you update any of these old recordings, or are all of the LPs just pure, cut-and-dry collections of those snapshots in time?

I didn’t – the main reason being that I wouldn’t even be able to open most of those projects if I tried [*laughs*]. I think the impetus for all of this was the fact that currently, if you wanted to listen to any of this stuff, you’d have to know about it – which would require knowing about the forums I used to be a part of, and maybe some of the stuff on my old Soundcloud, neither of which are very well-known or publicised. And then I see people passing around Dropbox links for the songs, posting them up on YouTube and circulating them in their own ways. And so I was like, “Maybe I should make this a little bit easier on everyone.”

So that was kind of the main reason: I wanted it all to be easier to find and listen to. But it’s not about rediscovering or reimagining any of it. The only thing I did was I had some of the tracks remastered – but it’s a very light mastering job, just so everything would fit the same way if you were to listen to different volumes in sequence, or whatever – nothing would really jump out as being out of place.

Of course, you’re listening to about a decade and a

half of me progressively learning how to make and produce music, and not really knowing what I’m doing for a good chunk of it. So the quality definitely varies, without a doubt.

So how do you feel about a lot of that early material, now that you’ve grown so much as a guitarist and producer? Do you kind of wish you could’ve updated some of it, or do you look back on it all super fondly?

Well I’ll put it to you this way: the stuff I wish I could update, I will. There’s something very raw about those original demos, and it’s kind of nostalgic for me. I don’t look back at it like, “Wow, that sounds great” – it sounds *rough*, y’know? It brings back memories of the challenges I was facing at those points in time, whether it was with the mixing, or musically, or whatever. I can definitely hear how I’ve improved from then to now.

The plan is for these archival volumes to exist as a precursor to an official solo album – something that will be a very deliberate release, and that will have songs I’m recording, or re-recording, right now. And a lot of those will be songs from the archives, but sort of done properly – given the justice they deserve.

How do you differentiate between a proper song and a demo?

Moving forward, there’s going to be two categories that a project will fall into. Because I write a lot of stuff and I write with a lot of different projects, there’s a lot of stuff out there that literally nobody has ever heard – and that nobody likely ever will hear. There are lots of demos that just never materialised into real songs, and maybe to some extent they’ll fit into a continuation of these archival volumes.

I’ve just been writing more stuff than ever lately, but I haven’t been uploading things because to some degree, I’ve been protecting the material – in case it ends up on a Periphery album or some other project, y’know? But it’s also a matter of there now being years and years worth of material like that. So the way I’m thinking about it is that, while for now *Volume 8* is the last one, it’s far from the last archive album I’ve got ready to go.

Volume 9 could very easily happen, and that would just be something along the same lines where it would be a compilation of either incomplete ideas, or complete ideas that just nothing ever made it onto a record. Rather than letting them fall into the ether, I’ll just put them out there for people to check out, if they feel like it. And maybe I’ll revisit them one day and

parts of them will end up in a Periphery song or whatever – who knows, right? But at least it’s out there, and not just sitting in my Dropbox wasting storage.

But then I also like the idea of having solo albums, which will be these very deliberate collections of songs that I’m especially proud of, and that I’m putting a lot of effort in to present to people. And those will get more formal releases with vinyl and merch and all of that good stuff.

When do you think we might start to hear some of the *new-new* Bulb stuff?

It’s all about strategic timing. There’s really nothing stopping me from just putting it all out right now, but I do think there should be some order to it all. I mean, even with these ten archival albums, I wanted to put them all out at once, but our manager was like, “Maybe you should separate them by at least a couple weeks.”

I think that ended up being a good call, because it allows people to digest each volume on its own – but it’s all still coming out quick enough that there’s something to look forward to. Because I think if I just dropped 110 songs at once, the first ten or 20 would’ve gotten listened to, and then the other 90 would have just fallen into the abyss.

I’ll put the solo album out this year if I can, and either leading up to that or after it, further archives will come out. And I might just keep updating those as I keep writing and demoing stuff, because I don’t think any of it is really sacred. If something from the archive ends up as a complete song on a Periphery album, that won’t really bother me. That’s always been kind of the ‘easter egg’ relationship we’ve had with our fans anyway – in a lot of the back catalogue, you can hear ideas or riffs, or even entire sections of songs, that started off as demos on my Soundcloud. Some musicians wouldn’t want that stuff to be out there, but I personally don’t care.

Would it be safe to assume that *Periphery V* is on the cards as well?

In theory, yes! The biggest logistical problem right now is just that we can’t easily meet up, and the whole point of Periphery is that we all write and collaborate together. I have all these ideas that would be cool for Periphery, but it doesn’t really start until we all meet up. But y’know, it’s looking like it’s going to be pretty difficult to move around the States for a while longer, so maybe we’ll have to get more creative and try some online sessions or something – which is honestly something I’m not thrilled about, but y’know, beggars can’t be choosers. 🎸

METAL MEDITATION

NINE ALBUMS DOWN, THE ALT-METAL ASSASSINS IN **DEFTONES** CONTINUE TO REINVENT THEMSELVES – AND THE SOUND THAT MADE THEM ONE OF THE WORLD’S MOST ENTICING MUSICAL OUTFITS TO BEGIN WITH.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **TAMAR LEVINE**.

We love our bass-slinging siblings dearly, but, well, we’re called *Australian Guitar* for a reason, so we’ll just put it bluntly: the guitar (as in, the *real* guitar) is always going to be the star on any great rock album. There are admittedly a few outlier acts that give us a run for our money, however – one of which being Californian alt-metal outfit Deftones, who’d be nothing without the gravelly grunt of Sergio Vega’s four-string fury.

Their ninth album, *Ohms*, is a career-defining onslaught of delightfully down-tuned volatility. It was released to some of the most fervent critical acclaim the quintet have seen since their 2000 magnum opus, *White Pony*, and deservedly so: the way they balance airiness and aggression, and explore a wealth of tones ranging from angelic to angular, is simply phenomenal – as too is the continued strength of their collective songwriting chops and determination to evolve stylistically.

And at the core of it all, of course, is Vega’s next-level bassage. The sheer gallantry with which he juts against lead guitarist Stephen Carpenter cannot be understated – not can the way his floor-rattling rumbles weave around Chino Moreno’s impassioned vocals. We’re not implying that it’s a competition, but if it were, Vega would be the true MVP of this album – which is why we were over the moon when we heard he was keen to wax lyrical about it for *Australian Guitar*!

Heading into this enormous ninth chapter of the Deftones story, how did you want *Ohms* to push yourselves one step further, and what did you want to explore on this record that you haven’t before?

Well, I would say that we never head into an album with an overarching goal. Our goal as a band, and as a collective of artists, is just to make something that we’re all excited about. Now as individuals, we all have specific agendas and ideas that we want to explore.

We like to enter a recording process with a sort of palate refresh – for this one, Stephen [Carpenter, lead guitars] started playing a nine-string, I introduced some new tunings to my rig, and Chino [Moreno, vocals and guitar] got some new pedals,

Frank [Delgado, keys and synth] got some new pedals and a new keyboard, and Abe [Cunningham, drums] got a new kit... We all have new toys and new sounds, and as individuals, things that are exciting to us. And how that collides within the band is the organic aspect of it.

What did you introduce into your arsenal for this record?

For me, it was all new tunings. My writing process was the same – I think it was the same for everyone – but I just introduced some new tunings. I write a lot of my stuff on a Fender Bass VI – I did over half of *Gore* on that – and I also write on a guitar.

And because I do a lot of home demos, I can smash out a song idea from start to finish whenever I like. For instance, there’s a song on this record called “Genesis” where I started demoing that as soon as the idea popped up into my head – I programmed the drums and keyboards, played the bass and guitar parts, and then emailed it out to the guys.

But what made that new for me was that I did it all in a new tuning – because at a certain point in the process, some of the stuff I had written on the Bass VI, I showed Chino and he was like, “Hey, what if we played it like this?” So that was cool.

You play a lot harder and with a lot more attack than I’ve seen from a lot of rock bassists. Do you consider your approach towards the instrument to be more in line with that of a traditional guitarist?

I don’t know if it’s so much that I approach it like a guitar, but I certainly like to explore the bass as a lead instrument. Some of my all-time favourite bands are bass-driven. I think some people associate the bass as being a reactionary instrument – other people write the songs, and the bassist just finds their space in that song. But that’s not my dynamic. It’s a very forward-charging instrument, and it has to be for me to enjoy playing it.

Especially on a track like “The Spell Of Mathematics”, it is that really deep, driving low-end that carries the album at large.

I have to give my kudos to Terry Date [producer] in terms of the overall richness and sonic girth of this

record. There’s something that he does that he brings that out of us, y’know? For all but two songs on the record, I’m playing in a B tuning – it’s still a four-string bass, but I haven’t done that before, so that allowed me to go deeper. And my sound has a lot of crunch and a lot of compression, so it’s very articulated. Between Stephen and myself, with Stephen playing a nine-string guitar, we can get pretty deep!

The way that Terry captures music, and the way that he works with instruments, is really exciting. I just consider him to be a genius. And Chino also tunes down as well – we’re playing in a couple of different tunings to shake things up between songs, but Chino has one tuning where he has his low string down to A, so we’re all playing in lower registers. Just for fun, y’know? It’s nothing intentional. It didn’t factor into the songwriting process as a conscious creative thing, but it was definitely a fun thing to do.

Is it a very collaborative sort of energy when you’re all in a room together?

Yes! I think that’s really how it all works. There’s a lot of active listening in the rehearsal room, so if someone has an idea, we can all jump in and put our fingerprints on it. Let’s say Frank plays something on a keyboard, and Chino finds it exciting – he’s quick to pick up on that riff and accompany it on the guitar. So it can start from anywhere.

And everything is constantly being recorded, from the first rehearsals or the first writing sessions that we’re all there for – I’ll set up my laptop and we’ll put a couple of mics in the room, and we’ll have everything documented.

So you can watch songs shapeshift and evolve in realtime.

Exactly. And it’s a huge thing, because the songs do shapeshift. You can be playing one riff for an hour straight, but it’ll go through several permutations throughout that time. So we have the ability to go back and listen to it from when the idea first came up, and choose whatever the best version of it is. And ideas don’t get lost that way, either – if we take an idea too far in one direction and it becomes something else entirely, we’re still able to go back and see what the original idea was. 🎧





POWER FOR THE PUBLIC

AFTER TWO ENORMOUS, GAME-CHANGING CONCEPT ALBUMS, **THE LEMON TWIGS** DIAL THINGS BACK A NOTCH FOR THEIR AMBITIOUSLY LOWKEY THIRD ALBUM.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **MICHAEL HILL**.

It's not exactly common that a relatively straightforward pop-rock album would be a shock to the system for any pop-rock band's fanbase. But then again, The Lemon Twigs are anything but straightforward. In a storied six years, the Long Island-native duo, comprised of emphatic and eccentric brothers Brian and Michael D'Addario, have made quite a name for themselves as wickedly experimental and obsessively ambitious, whose retro-flavoured concept albums (like 2018's *Go To School*) simply need to be heard to be believed.

Songs For The General Public is their third album, and although it did end up straying a good slick to the left of your standard Top 40 fare, it started off conceptually as just that: an album Brian or Mike could hand any regular fan of pop or rock (albeit hopefully one with a soft spot for the old-school psychedelic era of such) and immediately convert them to the cult of the Twigs. And it is an easily approachable album, in all the best ways one could be – catchy, fun, stimulating – without ever veering into mundane territory.

Above all, what The Lemon Twigs have mastered with *Songs For The General Public* is the ability to make their trademark stylistic schtick – bright, throwback thrillers packed from start to finish with instrumental idiosyncrasy – work for listeners who may not typically be so musically adventurous. It's an entry point to their one-of-a-kind sonic circus: if you dig what you hear on this LP, there's a good chance they can rope you into either of its more out-there predecessors. And by that point, just try to shed your obsession with this deliriously dynamic duo.

Australian Guitar caught up with Brian to chat about how the band set out to make set of *Songs For The General Public*, what's next on the cards (spoiler: something *entirely* different), and why you just can't beat the good ol' Fender Strat for a great guitar-pop tune.

After putting out a record like *Go To School* – this sprawling, conceptual epic about a chimpanzee raised as a human boy – did it feel like an obvious decision to follow it up a looser and more down-to-earth record?

Yeah. I really like the idea of having all of our records be very contrasting and going in a totally different direction with every new one that we make. For example, with this record, we've made a pretty straightforward

pop album, and there are tonnes of records that we've started floating around, but the one that I want to finish next is a really sparse acoustic record.

Because there's a lot going on with this one – every song is very big and powerful, and we were just kind of throwing every idea that we had onto them. Some more than others, of course – there weren't any strings on this record, for example, but they're all pretty heavily arranged and there's lot of instruments and synths and stuff. So for the next one, we want to be very natural.

So far it seems like everything that we've done has been, in a way, a response to what we did before it. We're trying to approach The Lemon Twigs from a very different angle every time we do. We could produce all of our records the same way – I mean, our songwriting style is kind of just our songwriting style, that's always the same – but then it wouldn't be as interesting or fun.

So in making an album that would appeal to the general public first and foremost, did you find that you had to... Not necessarily water yourselves or your style down, but consciously avoid getting too weird or experimental with some of these songs?

Not really. I mean, the title itself – in the middle of the recording process, we thought the album would be titled *Hell On Wheels*. Because once we introduced those types of songs – like “Hell On Wheels” and “Leather Together” – the whole thing took on a very different attitude. It wasn't just, like, “These are pop songs and this a pop Lemon Twigs record” anymore; it was about a directness that we felt calling to us.

The title doesn't really have to do with this album necessarily being *for* everybody; there is a sense of reaching out – whether it hits them negatively or positively – and it's not like there's this record that exists and you have to kind of get inside it, y'know? This record kind of comes at you and either hits you positively *or* negatively. We wanted you to be able to hear everything and soak in all the instrumentation, but it didn't mean that we weren't going to throw some things off-kilter.

And then once we finished the record and we started playing it for people, I started to realise that the title is almost ironic, in a way. I was like, “Okay, this isn't the

radio-friendly pop album I thought it was.” We thought that we were appealing to what people like, but we were obviously just appealing to what it is that we think people like – which we're so disconnected from. We don't know what people like – we just know what we like.

What guitars were you playing for this record?

I used a Fender Strat for the most of it. For song “Fight” we used a BC Rich guitar alongside the Strat, but we used the BC Rich for all of the lead stuff. It was a Mockingbird – it's the one that Slash played, and it was such a beautiful guitar. Michael used this Gibson at Sonora [Studios] in LA that actually got stolen – this Gibson that was made out of a table. I guess it wasn't even really a Gibson, it was a custom guitar that had a Gibson neck and a chunk of wood from an old 18th or 19th century dining table for the body. It had a very heavy sound.

What is it about the Strat that just makes your heart skip a beat?

I like the way that mine feels. It's very comfortable – I've played it onstage more than any other guitar, and the ideas just kind of flow from it for me. If I'm in a studio or something, and there are all these guitars that are unfamiliar to me, it's kind of hard to be creative.

But y'know, I don't necessarily have a loyalty to the Strat or anything – it's just the guitar that I gravitate towards most because I know my way around it. When there's a guitar that you haven't really used that much, or a tone that you're not really familiar with, sometimes it's hard to work with. But when it's that guitar, I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm just so comfortable with it.

Do you find that you and Michael have very different approaches to the guitar?

Oh yeah! I mean, you can hear it all over the record: “The One” and “Live In Favour Of Tomorrow”, those are my songs, and they have a very slick style which I like to play with – the solos are pretty well thought-out and smooth. And with Michael's guitar playing, like on “Hell On Wheels” or “Leather Together”, it's like everything is so spontaneous, and it has a really exciting, kind of rough sound. And y'know, one is good for certain songs, and the other is good for other songs. 🎸



THE SOUNDTRACK TO INSANITY

FOR HIS FOURTH ALBUM, THE GENRE-BENDING MUSICAL MAGICIAN BEST KNOWN AS **FANTASTIC NEGRITO** POSES A STRIKINGLY TIMELY QUESTION: *HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND YET?*

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **LYLE OWERKO**.

There are effectively two categories of people alive in 2020: those whose mental health and overall sanity have taken a meteoric nosedive since January, and those who aren't paying enough attention to the world around them. It feels like these past ten months have lasted a decade each, what with the bushfires, floods, global health crisis, economic downfall, rise in Western neo-fascism, etcetera, etcetera... Can you tell we're a little bit jaded?

The music industry has especially taken one hell of a kick to its metaphorical crotch. Most bands out there can't tour, push records out on schedule or get out and about with their fans – it's not a great time to be on the precipice of your mainstream breakthrough, to say the least. And if you're active in both politics *and* music, you're almost certain to be on, what, your fourth mental breakdown of the year so far? Fifth?

Some artists have been fortunate enough to channel their frustrations into art, however. For the Californian blues and roots luminary best known as Fantastic Negrito, music quickly became a coping mechanism to deal with the oppression and depression his day-to-day life was being flooded by. The end result is a timely album with a timely question for its listener: *Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?*

The two-time Grammy winner's fourth album, out now on Cooking Vinyl, is his most insular work to date, each of its 11 tracks dedicated to someone Fantastic Negrito is close to. But musically it's his most far-reaching, with hints of pop, rap, funk, soul, rock 'n' roll, blues and beyond all gelling into one beautiful chasm of sonic colour. As we learned from the man himself, it's as crucial a body of work for himself as it is for the world he's still figuring out how to navigate.

How are you vibing on everything now that the record's out there, and people have had a chance to really soak it all in?

I always change so much between each of my records, I think people are going to hate them when they come out; the jump in sound between *The Last Days Of Oakland* and *Please Don't Be Dead* was really drastic for some people, and I think the leap from that record to *Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?* is even wider. I was in a funkier mood when I was making this record, so it's a lot funkier. And that's a good thing, y'know?

I think the question is very timely, too. I could've asked that question at any time in history: "Have you lost your mind yet?" But I think it's all extremely relevant today with everything going on right now. A song like "How Long?" is extremely timely, especially with the proliferation of gun violence in America and this recent resurgence in police brutality.

It was good to break out and do some collaborations, too. I did one with E-40, "Searching For Captain Save A Hoe", and then one with my fellow *NPR Tiny Desk Concert* winner, Tarriona 'Tank' Ball, on "I'm So Happy I Cry". That was a different one, but I love that song.

And it's so diverse. This record is spread across four different genres on Spotify – it's on the rock playlist, it's on the funk/soul playlist, it's on the blues playlist, it's on the alternative hip-hop playlist... I'm very happy with those results – I feel great that people are listening to it and becoming engaged, and it's great that it means something to them, because that's why I do this – I did this to become a contributor.

How does music help you to reckon with, or process everything that's happening around you?

It's extremely cathartic. It's a vehicle for myself to express what I'm feeling, and human expression is extremely vital – that's how we resonate, that's how we survive and that's how we individualise ourselves. And my message goes out to you, man, it goes out to my peers. My struggle and my joy and my optimism – it all goes out to you.

I mean, this album is... It's visceral. It's a feeling album – I feel like it was so important to bring in the Hammond B3 to kind of be the star of the record, because it's an extremely visceral instrument; it's not a very heady, y'know, brainiac album; it's this soulful rock, blues, stompin', gospel, black roots, funk-rock, soul... Blues, alligator shoes, cornbread – I mean, it's swanky and it's unapologetic, and... I need that. I need that for myself.

Funk, soul and blues – this kind of music is innately very personal, but when you invite someone into your world and have them connect with you through that music, it's a special thing. It means something more than just the sum of its parts.

That's it, man. This was the hardest album that I ever made, because it was so personal – it was more micro than macro. Each song was about a specific person I knew and how they were dealing with the world – their mental health through all this technological chaos, and the internet, and the proliferation of too much information, where the mainstream machine is telling us how to think, how to vote, what to say, what slogan we should repeat, who we should scream it at...

Left-wing politics is extremely polarising, and it's so exhausting and toxic – I did lose my mind through all of it. And the way that I lived to reclaim it was just

by sitting in that studio, man, firing up that Hammond B3, grabbing my trusty guitars and bass, and letting the songwriting games begin.

What were those trusty guitars?

There's three of them. I used the Chapman semi-hollow Telecaster model, which was just outstanding. This guy from England, Rob Chapman: he's a genius, man. I played that on all the rhythm parts on the album. The Gibson Les Paul – y'know, I always have to use that, that one's a classic.

But the strange star of the record was this ABS-style hollowbody that had... Man, I can't even call it a pickup, it's a microphone! It was this 1960s Harmony that was broken, battered... It was literally split into four pieces, and I had it glued back together – and all the slide solos that you hear were played on that guitar.

What made you want to take so much care to restore that guitar?

It's like me, y'know? It's the story of Fantastic Negrito: discarded, broken, battered, lost in the world... But I had a feeling about it – just like I have a feeling about *Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?* and all the records I've done: it's gotta be beautiful. And it was – if you listen to the guitar solo on "Chocolate Samurai", or that really strange part that almost sounds like a glockenspiel on "King Frustration" – all these solos are played on that guitar, and they sound incredible. It was an amazing piece of wood.

Some of the tones you play with on this record... I think the best way I could describe them is that they're luscious. They're bright, bouncy and catchy, but simultaneously so deep and funky. What are your secrets?

This is probably going to make you cringe a little bit, but I usually just had an amp – the Orange Tremlord on this record, to be exact – and I'd just plug right into that baby. I turn everything off on that amp and it's just so clean. I get it in there clean, and then once I'm in there, I'm able to do a little bit of manipulation with a couple of pedals. I've got a pretty standard wah pedal that I use, and I've got a fuzz pedal. But I don't really try to do too much, y'know?

A lot of it's just ugly tones that end up being very big and beautiful and warm – but there's still an ugliness to them. I try to keep some of that ugliness in there. It's very organic. I'm very open to what can happen – what the possibilities are when it comes to effects and pedals. The spring reverb is a go-to, of course, and that Tremlord amp has an incredible vibrato. But other than that, I don't like to play favourites. 🎸



A DOUBLE SHOT OF THE BLUES

THOUGH THEY'RE BOTH UNDENIABLY PHENOMENAL SONGWRITERS IN THEIR OWN RESPECTS, SOMETHING *TRULY* MAGICAL HAPPENED WHEN **JOSH TESKEY** AND **ASH GRUNWALD** TEAMED UP...

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **TOM DUNPHY**.

You only have to look at next year's Bluesfest lineup for proof that roots, blues and folk music is alive and thriving Down Under. Hell, even in the underground there is no short supply of fantastic hollowbody harmonisers out there – and right at the tippy top of the food chain, thanks to their transcendental talents behind the fretboard and viscerally powerful voices, are Ash Grunwald and The Teskey Brothers. Both have reigned high and mighty as the 2010s' defacto icons of Australian rhythm and blues, with Grunwald's 2015 opus *Now* and the Teskeys' ripping 2017 breakthrough *Half Mile Harvest* especially notable releases.

For 2020, Grunwald and Josh Teskey have teamed up – with the other brother Sam close by as he mans the console – for their most faithful approach to the blues yet: a raw, rootsy and all-over ripping collection of tunes as organic and authentic as they come, both in respect to how they're presented *and* how they were written. *Push The Blues Away* isn't a particularly weighty release, at just 30 minutes of back-and-forth jamming, but therein lies part of its charm: Teskey and Grunwald didn't set out to create some big, career-defining masterpiece with this record – rather, they were just keen to hop into a studio, pick up some guitars and see what would happen.

It's this 'go with the flow' attitude that's led to one of the year's cruisiest and most easily approachable releases; you won't need a money-back guarantee because if you like the blues, or Grunwald or Teskey's other works, you're almost certain to love this record. Before it lands on shelves in November, we caught up for a chat with both of the soulful songwriters.

Let's kick things off at the very start: how did the idea for this record come about?

Josh: It all began when Ash asked The Teskey Brothers to be the rhythm section on one of the songs for his last album, *Mojo* – we obviously jumped at that opportunity, and I did a bit of singing on that one as well, and we just had a lot of fun. Chatting with Ash, talking through the record he was making and really getting to know him, we just had such a blast doing that. We got together to do a film clip for our song, and it was the first time we'd actually met – I'd seen him play a bunch of shows over the years, but he came out to our studio in Warrandyte and hung out.

We had a lot of downtime between shots, and in that time, we just started jamming on some old blues songs. Ash had his guitar in hand, I was playing a bit of harmonica, and we just got to playing some old tunes! And we just started thinking out loud, y'know, "How cool would it be, one day, to go right back to basics

and just make a real straight-up blues album – just a couple of guitars, a harmonica, and just have fun with it." And y'know, Ash being the hustle that he is, a few months later he hit me up and said, "Hey, we should actually do that blues record!"

We'd just finished the cycle for a Teskey Brothers record so I had a bit of time on my hands, and *Mojo* was finished as well so Ash had a bit of time on his hands, and we just went, "Yeah, let's do it." We gave ourselves about two weeks before we got into it, and we both started doing some old-fashioned blues-style songwriting. We got my brother Sam to produce and engineer the record for us – it was all on analogue tape, pretty much everything played live in the room, just real raw and down-to-earth. It was such a blast.

What is it about the blues that resonates so much with you as a musician?

Ash: I've always been drawn to it, since I was a little kid. I was 12 in 1988, so y'know, I went headfirst into the '90s where guitar solos were *off!* But in the '80s, in a mainstream song they'd usually have a slide solo or something, and as a kid, I'd hear that and go, "What *is* that!? Why does that sound cool!?" After a while, I learned there was a word for that soulful thing that was always catching my ear: blues. And so I was hooked.

Melbourne community radio played a really big part in that when I was a kid – I used to have a tape player that I'd radio shows on and listen back to them over and over again. And there was a really good live blues scene in Melbourne as well, so I became influenced by that and eventually became a part of it. I was about 20, playing at a country pub before I was even a real musician, and there used to be these ten-year-olds busking across the street every weekend – and that was Josh and Sam Teskey! And so the cycle continues!

That is some Disney movie-level coincidental shit right there!

Ash: The funniest thing about this whole project is that it goes so far back. It was the St. Andrews Pub – I used to play there on Saturday afternoons, and the boys would busk over at the markets across the street. I didn't even have an album out, I was just getting started out myself. So it's actually pretty insane how far back we go! That's also why this album is so special, because we've got so much in common, right down to where we came from.

While other guitar-driven genres like metal, punk and rock have all gone through different waves and generational shifts throughout the decades, the blues are almost sacred in that as a style, it's remained pretty authentic to

what it was in the '40s, '50s and '60s. What is it about the blues that you think has kept it so untouchably timeless?

Josh: It's always been around, y'know? It was old-timey stuff back in the '50s when rock 'n' roll was just starting to take over. It's always been here, and I think it's always going to stay here. People can put their spin on it and it'll have its place in a modern pop or soul or RnB record – it sneaks its way in there and finds a way to rub its influence off on other styles – but then you have these kinds of albums like what we've done, that are really true to what the blues was in its heyday.

I think it's just always going to have a place in people's hearts – people continue to love those old records, and they're just kind of timeless. They create a really nice atmosphere – it's the kind of stuff you'll put on and it'll instantly transport you to a time and place you wish you could go back to.

What guitars were you both jamming on?

Josh: I'm mostly playing my Memphis Custom 335 – I think it's a 1957 reissue, it's one of the ones from the custom shop with the hand-cast neck and the old, original lacquers on it. I love that guitar. I bought it myself right before we released *Half Mile Harvest*, just when we started doing music full-time as The Teskey Brothers. So that's that kind of Gibson-y sound that you hear on the record – it's mostly in the background but it sticks out a bit.

On the acoustic numbers and the fingerpicking-style ones that I'm doing, I'm actually just playing my Cole Clark – the Fat Lady, which is just that classic sort of Australian acoustic sound. And that one, I've been playing forever. I got that guitar when I was about 15 years old, and it's been to hell and back, the poor thing! I did a lot of busking on that, so it's got a lot of beautiful wear and tear. It's unfortunately taken a bit of a backseat lately, just because it hasn't quite got the resonance it used to have onstage – but it still sounds beautiful when it's miced up, so that's always my go-to acoustic in the studio.

Ash: I was playing my National Steels. I a baritone tri-cone National Steel, which is just a beautiful instrument, and then I also have one called a Revolver – it's a cedar body, almost looks a little bit like an electric, but it's got a single cone in it and it's really good for strumming. It has a really barky kind of sound; you can really hear the onset of the notes, whatever you strum goes *'tuk-tuk-tuk'*. Whereas the tri-cone is a smoother, more sustained sound – it almost sounds like it's plugged in, like it's an electric, and there's a more sing-y kind of slide tone that you can get out of that thing. 🎸



HI-FI SOUNDS FOR HIGH TENSION

SOMETHING FOR KATE ARE BACK WITH AN EPIC NEW ALBUM OF BIG, LUSH MUSICAL ATMOSPHERES AND WARM, KALEIDOSCOPIIC MELODIES: EXACTLY WHAT THIS CLUSTERF*** OF A YEAR HAS NEEDED.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **DANIEL BOUD**.

It's been a great year for comebacks, hasn't it? I mean, the world as we know it may be rapidly decaying beneath our feet, but at least all our old favourite bands have swung back into action to help beef up our doomsday playlists!

One such act making quite a fitting addition to the fray is Melbourne's pop-rock powerhouse Something For Kate. Their first album since 2012's *Leave Your Soul To Science* is a broad, booming epic of brittle keys, beautiful strings, boisterous drum beats and belting guitar riffs – soundscapes that sprawl out into the horizon as Paul Dempsey [vocals and guitar], Steph Ashworth [bass] and Clint Hyndman [drums] explore every corner of their motley and manic musicality.

Fittingly dubbed *The Modern Medieval* for its lyrical themes (how archaic systems of oppression still wreak havoc on supposedly 'established' societies), LP7 is much more than just a riveting return to form for the band who virtually defined Australian alt-rock in the 2000s. It's their most ambitious, determined and intriguing body of work yet – and goddammit, they hit every notch on the goalposts with effortless aplomb.

It's as if Something For Kate have spent years hiding in the shadows, watching patiently as we all progressively lost more and more of our sanity, waiting until the world finally cracked the barrier on breaking point until they swung into action, the exact album we need for right now tucked firmly in tow.

From his home studio – which is littered with guitars of every shape, size and colour you could think of – we caught up with Dempsey (taking a break from sitting in on his son's online math lessons) to explore just how *The Modern Medieval* came to life.

How would you say this record best encapsulates what Something For Kate is in the year 2020?

I don't know if it does encapsulate the band, because y'know, we've had a really long career up to this point – to encapsulate ourselves entirely in one record would be impossible, just because we've changed so much. We started out as very angry, noisy, almost punk sort of band, and then we learned how to make records and how to write songs a little better, and everything got a bit more crafted and polished... Y'know, we've tried on a number of different hats over the years, but I guess the one consistent thing is that we've only ever done it

our way, and to please ourselves.

I suppose that's how you could encapsulate Something For Kate: after 25 years, we still don't seem to give a shit about what is considered 'popular'. And thankfully, it seems like that's just as irrelevant as ever anyway – from what I can observe, there aren't really any fads or trends in music anymore because anything and everything is possible. People don't give a f*** about radio presenters, or what's going to get you on this playlist or that blog.

I wanted to ask because of this quote you gave in the album's press release: "We wanted to make a really polished hi-fi rock record, because so much of what I hear these days is deliberately unpolished." When I talk to bands that have that sort of lo-fi, garage-y sound, a lot of them say it's because they want to channel the energy of bands from the '90s and the 2000s – around when Something For Kate was in its breakout period. Are you just tired of hearing bands try to recapture artificially what it is you were doing naturally?

I'm not tired of anyone else doing whatever they want. I am suspicious, though, of artists trying to channel the sounds of other artists. For me, it's always been about trying to channel something you *haven't* heard before. When we were thinking about the songs that we'd written for this album, and all the myriads of different ways we could go about capturing them and producing them, we didn't want to low-fi it. We didn't want to be coy about sounding good; sounding big; sounding lush.

I'm generalising, obviously, but it seems like there's almost a stigma nowadays about sounding too good or too polished or too hi-fi. It's a weird conversation, because obviously it's all completely subjective, but I don't know – I had noticed what seemed to me like this concerted effort on the part of some people to try and make their records sound like they were made with equipment that nobody uses anymore, in studios that don't exist anymore, to sound like a time that isn't now.

And I get it – nostalgia is a heavy thing for a lot of people, they get nostalgic about a certain time or certain sounds... I guess I'm just less interested in nostalgia. All that old stuff exists already. If I'm listening to a record that came out in 2020, I want to

listen to a record that sounds like 2020!

If people want something that sounds like *Elsewhere For Eight Minutes*, that LP still exists.

Exactly. But again, it's all completely subjective. I will never judge anyone for what they like. There's enough other people doing that.

Were there any new playing techniques or styles that you were keen to explore on this LP?

Yeah! I feel like as a guitarist, I was incredibly late to learn things about tone, and just how much you can evoke in someone by the tones you choose. You listen to a record like *Elsewhere For Eight Minutes* and it's pretty much the same guitar sound all the way through – because I just didn't know any better. I just turned it up loud and went! I always just let my playing do the talking, and I've only just recently learning how I can also use all these other technical tools – amps, guitars, pedals – all these different things that will take my playing and put it through some different lenses.

This is the first album we've made where I was really confident about choosing different tones and sounds that I wanted, and because of that I think there's a lot more textures and colours and atmospheric things on this record. And playing-wise as well, my style sort of keeps changing – there's some really complex fingerpicking-type things on this album that I never would have thought to do 15 years ago.

I think by making those two solo records that were a little bit more acoustic, I've been able to evolve a bit as a guitarist. I've always liked polyrhythmic things, and things with confusing melodies or surprising time signatures – and I've found that fingerpicking allows me to do more of those things, as opposed to just playing with a plectrum.

But if there's one pretty constant thing about Something For Kate, it's that we always want the songs to flow. We don't want them to be jarring or whatever; it's important that they flow from beginning to end. But at the same time, we don't necessarily want you to be able to predict what's going to happen next. You don't want it to be jarring or confusing or overtly prog-rock, but you also don't want it to just be a straightforward 4/4 bore, where you know the second chorus is the same as the first one, then you know it's going to go to a bridge, etcetera. 🎧



In the days...

THE MUSIC INDUSTRY HAS CHANGED IN ENDLESS AND ENTIRELY UNPREDICTABLE WAYS SINCE THE GLORY DAYS OF THE EARLY '70S. BUT ONE THING REMAINS THE SAME: HARD AND HEAVY, NO-BULLSHIT ROCK 'N' ROLL IS AS CRUCIAL AS EVER. AND THE ENTRY POINT FOR ANY ROCK OR METAL FAN WORTH THEIR PATCH-PADDED LEATHER JACKET IS THE GENRE-SPURRING EPIC *PARANOID*, AS MUCH A STAPLE OF THE **BLACK SABBATH** CATALOGUE AS IT IS ONE OF GUITAR MUSIC ITSELF. TO CELEBRATE THE ALBUM'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY, WE SWUNG WAY BACK TO ITS INCEPTION WITH THE MAN, MYTH AND MANIAC HIMSELF, **TONY IOMMI**.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**

Perhaps it's the big, belting crang that introduces us to "War Pigs". Maybe it's the wailing drawl that rips into frame without warning, scaring many a tike shitless before the lead riff of "Iron Man" bleeds in. Or, if your roots lie in rock tones a tad more melodic, it might be the unsuspecting first notes that start "Fairies Wear Boots". But whatever it is, there's something about *Paranoid* – the smash-hit second album by British hard-rock pioneers Black Sabbath (one could brand them metal, but purists' eyes would roll, then glare in one's direction) – that almost any fan of the guitar can note as a pivotal moment in their musical upbringing.

Paranoid didn't invent heavy rock music, but its impact on the genre is downright undeniable. The record launched a generation of would-be virtuosos into the limelight, many of whom started out with their fretboards in hand as nothing more than a conduit to imitate Tony Iommi. The same is true 50 years on from its October '70 release – *Paranoid* hasn't aged a day, sonically, and its themes are more relevant now than ever before.

Such is something Iommi himself certainly doesn't take for granted. *Australian Guitar* calls him up on an otherwise average weekday morning to chat about the album's recently issued deluxe edition – and though one might expect such a rock 'n' roll legend of his caliber to shrug through the motions of such an interview, Iommi is instead warm and buoyant and bursting at the seams of his bath robe with excitement. Given a chance to reminisce on Black Sabbath's halcyon days, there's a palpable sense of giddiness in his voice; Iommi doesn't so much care to chat about the band's so-called 'peak' or the years that saw him rake in millions per tour – it's the blood, sweat and tears which bred Sabbath's first few albums that he's most proud of.

How's everything in your corner of the world right now?

I'm hanging in there! I do what everybody else does in my world – I go out for walks in the morning, play for a bit, do some other stuff around the house... There's quite a bit going on in my life, but not a lot musically I must admit. I have done a few things in the studio recently – I did a track with the chap from Pink Floyd a few weeks ago, Nick Mason. Yeah, we did a little thing for charity which was really good. And that's about it, really. I've been putting a few ideas down with my engineer here and there – I've had all these riffs piling up over the years, and finally I've decided to start putting them down.

Are you working towards a new solo album?

Well, for the minute I'm just putting ideas down to get them out of my head. I could possibly do a solo album, either instrumentally or with vocals – I don't know yet, though, I'm not exactly sure what I'm doing to do with these ideas. I just know that I want to do them, because I've got hundreds and hundreds of riffs that I've come up with and recorded very roughly, but I need to actually do something with them properly – y'know, with drums and bass and whatnot.

Originally, the idea was to do some scoring work for a few films, or maybe something else along those lines. They could be used for a lot of things, really. So I might do some of that, some with singers and some without singers. That's the good thing about the position I'm in at the moment – I can't go on tour, but I can still pick and choose what I want to do.

The hot topic right now is the 50th anniversary of *Paranoid*, which you and the rest of the Black Sabbath team have celebrated with a downright

stunning re-release. It's crazy to think, honestly: the year is 2020, the music industry has changed in so many unthinkable ways since the '70s, and yet *Paranoid* remains an absolutely essential entry point for any true rock or metal fan. Were you thinking about the longevity of the record, or whether it would have a lasting impact on people back when it was all coming together?

Well, you never really think about that when you're actually recording an album – you never think about how long it's going to last or whatever. You make albums because you enjoy doing it, and that's what you're about. Y'know, back then we were just desperate to get music out – that's all you'd think about in them days. But you're right, it's brilliant that the early [Black Sabbath] albums are going stronger than ever. New generations are catching onto this music we'd done back in the '70s as if it was something the label put out last week. And we're finding more of it being used in things like car commercials and movies – the songs keep popping up everywhere, which is great.

How do you feel about the record today? Do you see it as the classic we all do, or do you have to look at it more critically, from the lens of the undeniable virtuoso you've grown into?

Those records are history, them. They're part of my makeup, and I really like them. I really do! It's great when I can listen back to the *Black Sabbath* album and the *Paranoid* album, and be reminded of the band we were in them days. They've got that character in them, which only we had in them days. They were done with *meaning* and

they were done basic as could be – they weren't overly produced or anything like that, we just sort of went into the studio, plugged in and played our hearts out!

It wasn't like things are today, where you've got all these computers and you're overdubbing this, modulating that, putting this effect on that track... In them days, you had to *make* your sound – you couldn't buy a gadget that made whatever sound you wanted, you had to put the hard yards in and build a tone yourself. And I felt that was great, really, because you believe in it more when you've made it all yourself. I mean, my guitar sound – I *worked* on that. I overloaded the amp and stuff and found my own ways to get that heavy sound. In them days, you couldn't buy amps that sounded like that naturally – I had to play around with them and mess with the electronics so that it would give me that sound.

Same with any of the effects on the album, they were always made by us. It wasn't like today, where you can go into a folder on a computer and go, "Yep, we'll use that tone." You had to make your own effects with pedals and amps – which I think was such a big part of Black Sabbath back then. It was good to be able to do that, because it made us creative.

That makes it even more impressive when you consider how little time you all to get that stuff in order for the *Paranoid* album – you were in the studio just four months after the self-titled Sabbath record came out. What drew you back into the fray so quickly? Were the ideas just pouring out in those early years?

Well... No [*laughs*]. What it was was that we'd done the first album, and it started taking off and we were selling a pretty decent amount of records after a few weeks. And we were working hard – we were doing shows every night, and the label wanted us to go in and do another album fairly quick to keep the momentum up. So we started writing some songs, and I used some of the ideas that I'd



In my lunch break, when the other guys went out to get a pint and a pie or whatever they had, I sat in the studio and just twiddled around for a bit, and I came up with "Paranoid".

had while we were touring. Because we were doing nightclubs and bars, and we'd play these ridiculously long hours as the house band.

When we played in Germany, we'd play seven 45-minute spots in a single night – a bloody long time in them days! You'd play 45 minutes, then you'd have a 15-minute break, and then you'd play another 45 minutes, and so on... And of course, we only had enough songs for one 45-minute set, so we had to extend stuff and make stuff up on the spot. And that, in a lot of ways, helped us create some of our most interesting songs. I'd come up with different riffs in the jam section, and we had a couple of songs come out of that – “War Pigs” was one of them.

Then when it came time to make the album, we went into the studio and got everything ready, but we didn't have enough songs for a proper album. We recorded everything we had, and then the producer, Rodger Bain, said, “We need one more song!” So in my lunch break, when the other guys went out to get a pint and a pie or whatever they had, I sat in the studio and just twiddled around for a bit, and I came up with “Paranoid”.

It was a tricky one, because Rodger said, “We need a song that's short – it *can't* be long,” and I sort of went, “Oh God!” I'd never written a short song before! All the Sabbath stuff was quite long in them days, because we liked those big, epic numbers that took you for a ride. But I came up with this riff, and when the band came back I played it to them, and they all seemed to like it. And it was really basic – it was just going to be a bit of filler for the album because we didn't have enough songs, but of course it ended up becoming a hit! Geezer did all the lyrics for that one, so obviously it was great.

Had you been sitting on that lick for much time before then, or was it truly spur-of-the-moment?

No, I had no idea to base it on, I just came up with it in that moment. I tended to do that with a lot of the stuff on those Sabbath records – a lot of the stuff we've put out in the past was written there and then; the ideas would come up less than a minute before we'd put them through the amp. I mean, in this day and age, now, I

put ideas down and go back to them, because I have the technology that allows me to. But in them days, you didn't have that luxury – you had to come up with a riff and put it down on tape, and that was it.

But it was a lot different then as well, because the scope was broader: there weren't many bands around playing the sort of things that we were playing in them days. So we had a lot of creative real estate to come up with different riffs. Nowadays, there's millions of bands playing metal riffs, so you can quite easily step on any of those toes and say, “Well, *that* sounds like *that*,” or, “*They're* copying *them*.” But with our early stuff, you couldn't say any of that because there was nobody else doing it.

You were really just trying to capture the immediacy of the excitement, and the energy you all had in those days.

Yes, absolutely! I mean, on the first two albums we only *had* a short period to put these ideas down. With the first album, we only had a couple of days. We took a few more days to do *Paranoid*, and that was sort of a luxury, really, because we wouldn't have to put everything down in the same day – we could take a few days to really figure everything out and get the songs right, which was good.

But it was all the same procedure – you'd set your gear up, the engineer would put a mic in front of the cabinet, and you'd play like you'd play at a gig. You'd give it the same sort of energy, the same power, and then you'd capture it all on tape. The bloke at the console might say, “Oh, can you do it again?” But most of the songs, we didn't play that much at all – we played them a few times each and that was it.

That's all you really need when you have a great song on your hands!

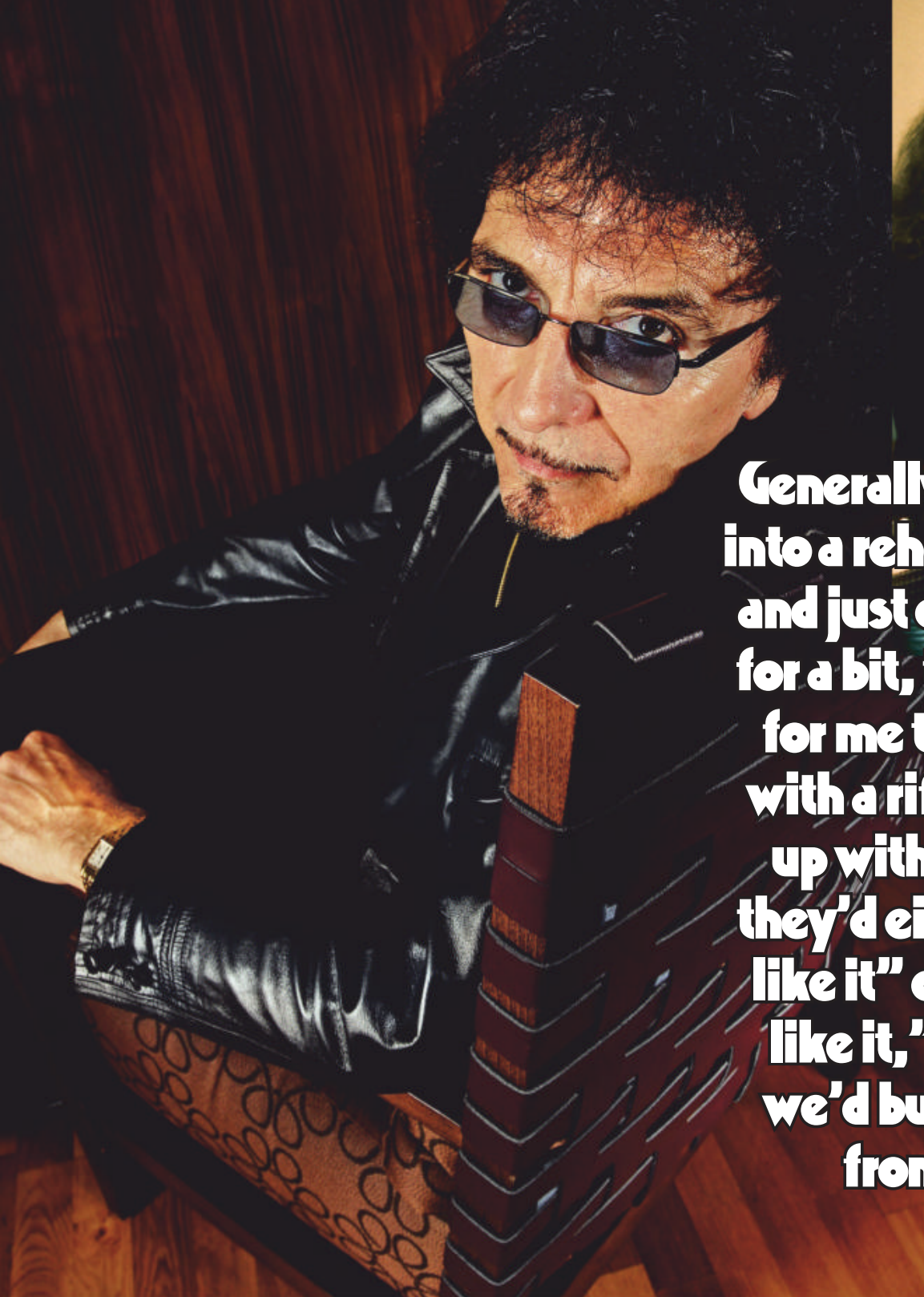
That's right. When you do too many takes, you can start to go too deep. And I have gone down that road, later in life, where I'd get too involved with the songs and I'd start changing things around – but the songs didn't need it, y'know? I'd waste all this time chopping and changing, and then I would listen to the original idea and go, “Oh yeah, *that's* what I was going for! That sounds better!” But in them days, you didn't do that – you built it all up at that time, while the idea was still fresh on your hands.

So when you'd play the songs from *Paranoid* live as the years went on, would you improvise much with the parts or take them in any wild directions, or were you always pretty staunch on playing by the rules?

No, we'd improvise! None of those early tracks would sound the same when we played them live, because they'd either get a bit faster or a bit slower, or I'd play a different guitar, mess around with some different bits... They'd all be slightly different. And that, again, was a good thing because we'd be playing how we felt [the song] at the time when we'd play it. And that's what's good about writing the song and recording it fairly quickly – you're capturing that sort of rawness, y'know, instead of working it all out and letting it turn into something else.

Quite often we'd play a song in the rehearsal and we'd play it one way, and then we'd take a break, do something else, and then come back to that song in a totally different way. Because we never played to metronomes and all that stuff in them days – you'd play it however you felt it, and whatever timing we'd start off with was what we went with. And we'd always end up in a different timing – it'd get faster or slower, or go through a few changes – but that was part of it, y'know? The feel, and where it took you, was so crucial to the energy of a song.





Generally, we'd get into a rehearsal room and just dick around for a bit, they'd wait for me to come up with a riff, I'd come up with a riff and they'd either say, "I like it" or, "I don't like it," and then we'd build a song from that.



The second album is always a big stepping stone for bands, whereas the first is often a little more intimidating because you don't have any real studio experience under your belt. What did you learn from doing the first Sabbath album that you were able to utilise, or take advantage of, when you were making *Paranoid*?

Well I mean for us, that first album... We were very excited about it, but we'd obviously never done an album before, so it was a whole new thing for us. We'd never worked with a producer or had an engineer hovering over us. And when we did the second album, we had the same producer, Rodger Bain, so by that point we'd already worked with him, and that made it a lot easier because we sort of knew what to expect. We'd gotten friendly together, and it became a little team.

And so it was a lot more comfortable to do the second album, really - mostly because there wasn't that insane rush. With the first album, everything was rushed - we had a matter of days to get our stuff together and pull out an album, and most of the tracks had to be done there and then; you couldn't have another go at them if you messed something up, which was a terrifying prospect for a small-time band doing their first record. So the second album was a lot more relaxed, as far as that all went.

It was after *Paranoid* came out that we really felt the heat of it. Because that album went to number one - *then* it became a pressure for us. Because once you've been to number one, then the next album... Where are you gonna go with it? What is there to achieve?

The impact of *Paranoid* on heavy music was pretty much instant: it charted high right off the bat, and it wasn't long before people started declaring it one of the greatest and most influential albums of the rock genre. It feels like that would've been a blessing and a curse, though. Did those early wins put much pressure on you, as a songwriter, to hit those same highs or achieve that same level of success?

The main pressure it put on us was around what kind of band we were. We were getting onto all these TV shows in England - we did *Top Of The Pops* because "Paranoid" became a hit single, and we were attracting a different type of audience which we didn't really want. Y'know, we didn't really want screaming kids and stuff like that, but that's the crowd *Top Of The Pops* had - they had a lot of young girls and kids that listened to the radio. And we weren't that type of band, y'know?

We wanted genuine fans who would be with us right through to the end. But when we did "Paranoid" as a single and we did all the TV stuff, we started having people come to the shows to hear "Paranoid" and then go home. And these sorts of people: they'd come to a show and see what else we were about, and then we'd never see them again. But we wanted to build up a solid base of real fans - and I mean yeah, some of them would have stuck around from the TV crowds, but we tried to get away from that scene. We didn't want to be pulled into that image of being a pop band, because we weren't!

So after "Paranoid", we said to our management that we wouldn't do another single. And we didn't, for a while - and then we did, but y'know, by that point we'd attracted the right people and we were touring properly on our own merit.

Look at where metal has come in the half-century since then: so many bands have tried to emulate the sound and spirit of Black Sabbath, but nobody has ever *really* cracked the code. What is it about the authenticity of Black Sabbath that makes it impossible to replicate?

Well, I wouldn't know [*laughs*]. I think it's one of those things where when you play as that unit, that's what it is. If you ever hear Queen play, you can tell it's Brian May playing the guitar - y'know, he's got *that sound*. And different people have different things that make their sounds so unique. It's hard to copy that thing because it's not just the way you play, it's the vibrato, it's the way your fingers move around the fretboard, it's the energy you put into every note... It's a whole range of things that makes that sound, and for me... Well, I don't know how hard it would be to top because I can obviously do it - I can just plug in and get that Tony Iommi sound because I *am* Tony Iommi. So it's hard to explain from another angle.

How important was the creative chemistry that you had when the four of you got into a room together?

That's the other part of it. We had such a great chemistry. Generally, we'd get into a rehearsal room and just dick around for a bit, they'd wait for me to come up with a riff, I'd come up with a riff and they'd either say, "I like it" or, "I don't like it," and then we'd build a song from that. And everybody would



Eventually, I met a guy who was a pretty decent guitar builder; I teamed up with him and put the money in for him to make me something custom. The idea I came up with was to build my own pickups and do a 24-fret guitar – and it sort of worked, surprisingly.

come up with their parts around that riff, and then Ozzy would put some kind of melody on it, and then we'd build the song up. Everybody contributed to all their parts like their lives relied on it.

Were you ever swapping instruments or experimenting with different versions of the formula?

We tried that – but it was a bit disastrous, really! Geezer and I decided we were going to do all the string sections ourselves, so we got ourselves a violin and a cello, and gave it a whack... And it was bloody *awful*. I mean it just didn't work at all. And then I bought a sitar and tried that, and that was crap. We used to try different things, and I think as far as I got, I played the flute on a couple of tracks... Well, I think it made it onto one track in the end. But that was about it, really.

I remember reading that just before you recorded *Paranoid*, you had a few small modifications made to your Gibson SG – like the inclusion of Simlux pickups. What was the importance of those?

In them days, the pickups were P-90s, and they used to whistle and feed back all the time. Because we played *loud*, and because I used the amp and I had this preamp modified to boost the channel, it used to pick up everything – taxis and street dogs and God knows what else – and the pickups were very sensitive, so they'd sort of start whistling and feeding back and sounding absolutely horrid. So I tried all different ways to stop that – insulating the inside of the guitar with copper, and then having the pickups dipped in wax... All sorts of bloody things.

And eventually, I met a guy who was a pretty decent guitar builder; I teamed up with him and put the money in for him to make me something custom. The idea I came up with was to build my own pickups and do a 24-fret guitar – and it sort of worked, surprisingly. Mainly just for myself at first, of course, but it benefitted other people as well. I mean, my guitar used to scream like mad – it was uncontrollable! The volume, the treble boost and the booster, all together, just made for this unbearable screech. And I wanted to try and stop that. So by working on that, we created the pickups that are still part of the Monkey SG today.

You've played a lot of different guitars throughout the years, but it's always that SG you come back to in the end. Is that just the quintessential heavy rock guitar?

When we did the first album, it was a Strat, but the pickup went on the second song. I only had the SG as a backup, really – I bought it ages beforehand, but I'd really never used it 'til then. But I *had* to use it when we did the first album, and that was basically the first time I played that guitar properly. It was a bit of a worry at the time, but after that session, that became *the* guitar. I did have a white, three-pickup SG as well, which is actually the one I recorded *Paranoid* with. But the red 'Monkey' guitar was the one I used all the time onstage.

I didn't have a lot of guitars back then – I only really had that one to play on, so I used to carry it around with me everywhere, and it became like gold to me. I'd have it right next to my bed in the hotels, I wouldn't let anyone touch it and I wouldn't take my eyes off it – it was one of those... It's just a precious thing, y'know? It's a part of me. Everyone has that thing where it's *your* thing, and if you lose that, you lose your value. And that became my thing.

Did you look at it as your good luck charm?

Well, it was! It was a good luck charm *and* a bad luck charm, because I used to have so many bloody problems with it. Because of the setup I had – I used lighter strings, and the neck on this particular one, in them days you could touch it and it would go *eww-oooh-ah-oooh-ah-eww*. Y'know, it wasn't very stable. But I got used to it over the years and had a lot of the issues fixed, and it became glued to me. I really liked it! That's why we recently did another model of it at Gibson.

Do you find that you're still finding new ways to explore the guitar and enhance your arsenal of techniques?

I don't really know – I mean I'm certainly not a technical player, by any means. Especially these days, you see some of the kids out there and they're just brilliant, y'know, they're inventing all these new techniques with scales and stuff... I'm not that type of player. I'll come up with something that I like, and that's it – it might be very basic, but to me, music is about what you can present; it doesn't have to be technically brilliant, it's just about how you put it out there.

So if you come up with a simple riff that really captivates you, then that's as good as all the other guitar players out there doing all these crazy fretboard gymnastics. And those kids are fantastic, y'know – I couldn't do that stuff! But I'm from a different era, and I still play in the same vein I did in them days. That's what I was about with my playing. I play what I can manage, really.

So what's next? Do you still feel like bringing Sabbath back for the 2022 Commonwealth Games?

Yeah! We spoke about that, and we were asked by them if we'd do it... But y'know, you never truly know what's down the line. It depends on how healthy everybody in the band is by then. But it'd be nice to do it – I'd really love to play with the guys again. Certainly no big tours, of course – but I'd like to do a few shows with them. We'll have to see.

I do miss actually being onstage and playing – I miss playing shows in general, because that's really what it's all about, y'know? It's that chemistry between the fans and yourselves which creates that real euphoria. I'm not into doing most of the other stuff you have to do to be a career musician – photographs and interviews and all of that stuff. What we're about is the music, and that's it. 



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As soon as she burst onto the scene with her 2015 single “Ocean Eyes”, it was clear that Billie Eilish was a force to be reckoned with. In the years since, she’s established herself as a new kind of pop culture icon, taking the fashion and music industries by storm on her own terms. Billie’s meteoric ascent to pop stardom started with the ukulele, the first instrument she learned to play. Designed in collaboration with Billie, her Signature Ukulele is a stage-ready instrument that embodies her bold and unmistakable style. This concert ukulele is built with sapele top, back, and sides, featuring a matte black finish with Billie’s “blohsh” symbol. It also includes a Fishman Kula preamp for those looking to plug in.

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This stylish, feathered-grey accessory bag is perfect for pedalboards, multi-effect units, MIDI controllers, drum machines, photo equipment and so much more. The interior of the bag’s main compartment measures 16-by-ten-by-4.5 inches, and includes a movable divider to customise the fit. Your gear will be cradled securely by the rigid foam interior, which is designed to cushion from bumps and scrapes. The large front and rear external storage pockets are great for tossing in small items such as cables, manuals, electronics, keys, and other little bits you need close at hand.



GET THE SOUND

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE PLAYING QUEEN'S "NOW I'M HERE"

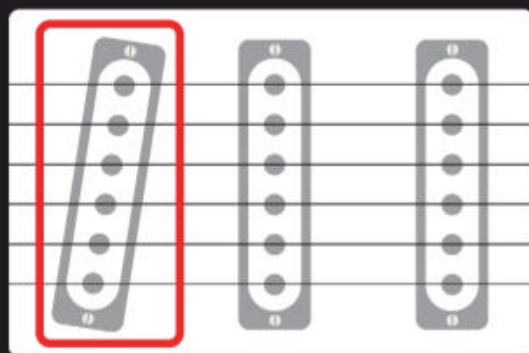
Featuring on Queen's 1974 *Sheer Heart Attack* album, "Now I'm Here" is about the band's experiences on their first tour of America. The lyrics reveal references to the infamous 'Dungeon' club in New Orleans, and to Mott The Hoople, who

Queen were supporting. The song remains a firm fan favourite and was performed on every Queen show from 1974 to 1986 – and is currently the opening song on the Queen and Adam Lambert tour.

The song has three main tonal centres: the opening riff is in D, the main signature riff is in E and the verses and solos are in the B Mixolydian mode. Brian seamlessly links these key changes so they are almost unnoticeable. As the E riff is the main hook of the song, there is no typical chorus section, so in our tab we refer to the ascending major chords as the chorus. Read on as we break the track down piece by piece.

GET THE SOUND

CHANNEL OVERDRIVE

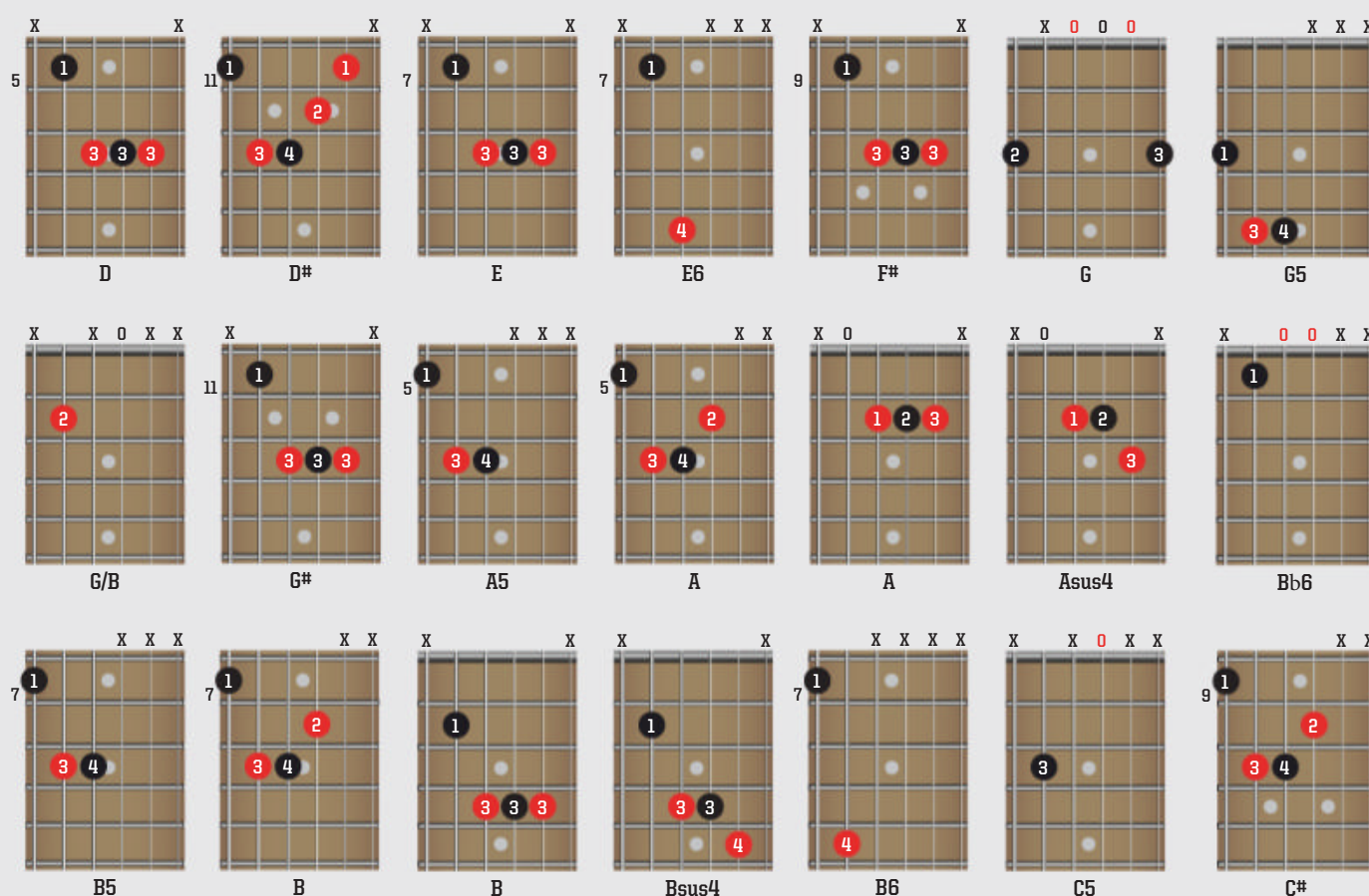


Opt for a bridge humbucker for the whole song. It's roughly equivalent to Brian's 'in phase' twin single-coil approach. If you play a Strat, a lone bridge pickup will get you closer to Brian's tone than bridge and middle.

Brian famously plays his own homemade Red Special guitar, which has three single-coil pickups that can be used in a multitude of combinations. Add to this the Vox AC30 amp and the Treble Booster pedal to add gain, and you have the core of Brian's sound. For straight-ahead rock songs like this, Brian typically used the middle and bridge pickups in an 'in phase' position. For our track, we used a Brian May Guitars Red Special through IK Multimedia's AmpliTube Brian May plugin. We selected the "Now I'm Here" preset and off we went, picking with an old English sixpence for that Brian style metallic pick attack.

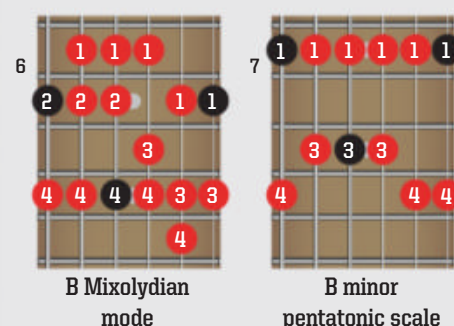
CHORDS

There are a lot of chords here, but they fit together in logical progressions, which means learning them in context isn't such a challenge. The intro starts in D and has a descending sequence (Csus2, G/B, Bb6) – these chords all have an open G note in common. The chorus section has an ascending sequence of major chords, which account for most of the chords here, but there are only two essential shapes which are barre chords rooted on the fifth and sixth strings. Finally we have the verse which follows a rock 'n' roll style riff on fifth and sixth diads.



SCALES

The two solos are played over a B-E-A chord progression – the fifth, first and fourth chords from the key of E major (the notes of E major are E F# G# A B C# D#). However, B is the root chord, so Brian is using a 'mode' of the scale known as the Mixolydian mode. This is the name given to the mode starting on the fifth note of the major scale – so here it's B Mixolydian (B C# D# E F# G# A). Great for blues-rock but with a sometimes overly cheerful sound, a common trick is to darken the Mixolydian mode by using the minor pentatonic scale. During both solos you can hear Brian having fun with the interplay between the minor and major third intervals of both scales.





FULL
TAB

QUEEN

“NOW I’M HERE”

“NOW I’M HERE”
Words and Music by Brian May
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QUEEN - “NOW I’M HERE” • Intro

♩=134

D⁵

Play 4 times

A D⁵ D D⁵

PM

TAB

1

Csus²

G/B

B^b6

TAB

4

Csus² D⁵

A D⁵ D

PM

TAB

7

D⁵ Csus²

1. **G/B Csus² D⁵**

2. **G/B A**

PM

TAB

10

Use palm-muted downstrokes to play these D5 powerchords, lifting your palm for the accented A and D chords in the fifth bar. As you play the descending Csus2 and G/B chords, use the underside of your fretting finger to mute the idle fourth string, so you can continue to play downstrokes across all three strings.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Bridge #1

0:35

A Asus⁴ A Asus⁴ B

let ring

1

5

This section is loud, so don't be afraid to hit the strings with confidence. There's a 'pushed' feel, which means the chord changes happen one eighth note earlier than the first beat of each bar – but keep your foot tapping on the downbeat throughout to ensure good timing.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Main riff

0:48 1:36

B⁵ A⁵ D⁵ A⁵ B⁵ F^{#5} E D A

TAB

This riff uses the E blues scale (E G A Bb B D) and E Mixolydian mode (E F# G# A B C# D). Brian mixes up the notes from the two scales, rather than switching between one scale and the other – giving a colourful sound. Keep your picking hand moving in a constant eighth-note motion to stay in the groove.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Verses #1 and #2

1:00 1:47

B⁵ B⁶ B⁵ B⁶ B⁵ B⁶ B⁵ E E⁵ E⁶ E⁵ E D⁵ A⁵

PM PM PM PM PM PM

Verse 1 ending Verse 2 ending

1 5

This section is a bluesy rock 'n' roll riff. Play the B5 and E chords with your first and third fingers, and reach up with your fourth finger to add the 11th fret note to each chord. Note that both verses are the same except for the final bar. We've included the alternate endings in the tab for you.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Chorus #1

[illegible]

The opening change from A5 to D (a fourth interval) is essentially repeated at the seventh, ninth and 11th frets, albeit with some changes in the rhythm. Brian plays the sixth-string root notes with his thumb over the top of the neck, but you could play 'fingers only' if you prefer.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Bridge #2

[illegible]

This bridge is almost the same as the second half of the first bridge, except there are some slight rhythmic variations and it's half the length. The final open E note sets up a repeat of the main riff here too, so play this note as a 'tie' into that riff. After the repeat of the main riff, play the verse with the second ending, before heading into the second chorus.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Chorus #2

This chorus starts a tone lower than the first chorus – something that is almost unnoticeable in the context of the song, and testament to Queen’s genius as songwriters. The chords ascend the neck in the same ‘up a forth, then up two frets’ fashion here as well.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Solo #1

2:16

B E A B E A

PB6 RP PB6

1

TAB

6 7 (7) (8) (8) (7) (7) (7) BD (7) (6) 4 4 4 4 4 7 7 7 7 7 4 7 8 9 9 4 6 4 4 BU 6 (8) 4

5

B E A B E A

TAB

6 7 7 7 7 9 7 8 9 8 10 10 10 10 10 9 9 7 7 9 7 7 9 7 7 8 9 9 7 7 8 9 9 7 8 9 8 9 10 10 8 10 10 9 8 9 11 11

9

B E A B E

TAB

10 7 7 10 10 10 8 10 10 10 10 12 12 12 8 10 10 10 10 9 7 8 7 9 (10) 7 9 (11)

12

A B E A

PM

TAB

(9) 7 9 7 9 7 7 7 7 9 7 7 (8) 9 7 7 (8) 9 7 7 (8) 9 7 7

15

B E A B

RP RP

TAB

7 5 7 7 7 5 7 7 7 10 (12) 7 7 10 (12) 7 7 10 (12) 7 7 10 (12) 10 (12) 9 7 7 9 7 9 7 10 7 7 5 5

Brian starts the solo in what looks like the G# minor pentatonic scale – but in fact it's a B major pentatonic, thanks to the B root notes. In the fourth bar, he slides this shape up to the seventh fret where it sounds like a B minor pentatonic, but he also adds B Mixolydian notes. Brian makes great use of minor to major thirds, double-stop slides and bluesy bends in this solo.

QUEEN - "NOW I'M HERE" • Solo #2 (cont'd)

5

8

12

16

20

24

This solo is played over the same chord progression as the first solo, and this time Brian uses more double-stops and slides as well as repeating licks with quarter-note bends. These bends are typically played in order to 'sweeten' the minor third note, which isn't technically in the key so can sound a little out of tune without curling the note up slightly.



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READY, SHREDDY, GO!

HIGH-OUTPUT HUMBUCKERS, A SPEEDY NECK AND A HEADSTOCK THAT WOULDN'T MAKE IT PAST AIRPORT SECURITY? HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A METAL GUITAR.

WORDS BY JONATHAN HORSLEY.

Given that the business of playing metal makes some very specific demands of an electric guitar, a degree of specialism can help no end in finding the right guitar for the job. Just as there are many types of metal, the metal guitar comes in various guises, too.

Here, we're going to take a look at some of them, walking through some of the choices you will face when it comes to pickups, a hard-tail vs. floating vibrato, shape, build, and whether a blood splatter finish is too necro for playing your little sister's eighth-grade graduation ceremony.

WHAT IS A HEAVY METAL GUITAR?

If the original heavy metal guitar was Tony Iommi's heavily modded 1964 Gibson SG Special – a.k.a. 'Monkey' – then the metal guitar of today is much changed. Having passed through the febrile evolutionary plane of '80s shred guitar, it might take the form of a mutated S-style, hot-rodged with sharper cutaways and enhanced upper-fret access – such as a Jackson Soloist or a Schecter Reaper 6.

Alternatively, we could be looking at next-gen shapes from the likes of B.C. Rich, Jackson et al – guitars that took the late '50s modernism of Gibson's Ted McCarty era (the Flying V and Explorer) and ran with it. Shapes such as the B.C. Rich Warlock and Jackson Kelly are old-school classics, tailor-made for metal.

The last 40 years has witnessed an arm's race for more gain, played out on pedalboards and guitar amps – but chasing metal tone is a process that starts with your electric guitar pickups.

A VULGAR DISPLAY OF PICKUPS

For metal, we'll typically be looking for high-output humbucking pickups. The rationale is simple: humbuckers have a fuller tone than single-coils, and with a higher output, they will send your amp into overdrive sooner. They also help keep unwanted noise at bay.

Some metal players are moving away from this simple calculus as they look for new textures in gain. Gina Gleason and John Dyer Baizley of Baroness

use Fenders with single-coils, sacrificing beefiness for clarity and using that clarity in heavily processed fuzz tones. It's an approach that could work in a variety of contexts, not least in the treble-scratch fuzz of black metal. But for now, let's stay on this left-hand path down the high-output humbucker rabbit hole.

The early '70s saw the DiMarzio Super Distortion establish itself as the humbucker of choice for rock and metal players. Compared to the low-to-medium output of classic humbuckers like the PAF, the Super Distortion was wound to punch the front end of your amp hard, driving it harder. KISS' Ace Frehley and Def Leppard's Phil Collen were early adopters.

The market soon exploded, Seymour Duncan and EMG joining DiMarzio in winding hotter pickups. EMG was a game-changer, popularising active humbuckers that came with a battery-powered preamp and a searing output.

Ideal for more extreme styles when you want a solid, slightly compressed chug, EMGs found fans in Metallica's James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett. Before long, a set of active EMG-80/81 or 61/80 humbuckers in the neck and bridge positions became a no-brainer.

Active pickups remain an attractive proposition, capable of keeping that low-end solid. But with so many high-output passive options, with powerful ceramic magnets and DCR readings around ~15 kohms, it's certainly not a matter of 'active or bust'. Need some low-end djent power? A Bare Knuckle Painkiller will eat those tones up.

And yet, have these been usurped by Fishman's Fluence pickups? Used by Stephen Carpenter, Devin Townsend and Tosin Abasi, the Fluence set offers switchable voicings. Time will tell. If you see a guitar you like, check out the pickups and visit their manufacturer's site. They'll typically have some helpful spec and will give you an idea of what style they are best suited to.

PLAYABILITY AND BUILD

Playability is crucial. Unless you're playing some epically glacial funeral

doom, you're going to need something shreddable. There's no getting around it – metal is a predominantly shred-adjacent activity. Here we'll be looking for a reasonably svelte neck profile – say 20 millimetres deep or less at the first fret, with not too much of a taper as it fills out towards the body, and a compound radius fingerboard with jumbo frets. Of course a fine player can shred the lacquer off a fat-necked guitar, but a thin neck eases speed. Again, it's a question of preference.

That goes for the bridge, too. If you want to perform some harmonic dive-bombs, dousing them in reverb for a Doppler effect, you'll need a floating vibrato with a locking nut – most commonly a Floyd Rose, but a Kahler will get a similar effect.

Those with no need for a whammy, and will be routinely changing your tunings a la Iommi, seek out a guitar with a hard-tail bridge – you'll spend more time playing. Locking tuners are a bonus if you like to play hard. Remember, this is metal: no prizes for tickling it.

As for super-low tunings, and the bass-heavy hugger-mugger, consider a specialist tool such as a longer-scaled baritone electric or extended-range guitar with seven or eight strings.

DO YOU NEED A CRAZY SHAPE?

If you have the frame to carry off a Dean Razorback or a Jackson Warrior, more power to your elbow. Shapes can be cool, but take a note of caution; not all are well-balanced for playing seated.

The V shapes can be notoriously tricky to play seated; you have to wedge it on your thigh and play it a little like a classical player. We'd consider that a small price to pay, but then the Jackson RR5 has always been one of our favourite metal guitars – or rather, favourite guitars period. Reverse headstocks are a definite bonus – a simple power move for adding metal kudos that any Ibanez RG model or old-school ESP/LTD Horizon wears particularly well.

But shapes and pointed edges? They're a question of style. Ultimately, find a guitar with enough power in the pickups and a feel that allows you to express yourself freely, and you'll make it metal. And if it's got a blood-splatter finish? Just make sure you write riffs that do it justice. 





KEEPIN' IT WYLD

BILL & TED FACE THE MUSIC HAS BECOME 2020'S MOST TRIUMPHANT CELEBRATION OF THE ELECTRIC GUITAR'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE. MUSIC SUPERVISOR **JONATHAN LEAHY** REVEALS HOW THE MOVIE'S BODACIOUS SOUNDTRACK AND RESPLENDENT SHOWCASE OF GIBSON ELECTRICS CAME TO BE.

WORDS BY **MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN.**

When news of a *Bill & Ted* threequel first broke, decades after the beloved originals, it's fair to say it set a few alarm bells ringing. Could Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter recapture the fresh-faced magic of those original performances? Would the film end up a pastiche of the '80s rock it previously glamorised? And would the production team get those all-important guitars right?

Audiences and guitarists alike needn't have worried: *Bill & Ted Face The Music* is a most triumphant celebration of all things electric guitar – past, present and future. In their quest to write a song that will unite the galaxy (no pressure), the titular duo once again travel through time, join a band composed of the greatest musicians in history, and learn a lot about the power of music – and themselves – in the process.

It's sharply written, funny and surprisingly heartwarming – and, crucially, delivers a killer contemporary soundtrack and attention to detail on the guitar front. That's largely thanks to the watchful eye of Jonathan Leahy, an in-demand film and music supervisor with credits on mega-series *Girls*, *The Society* and *Good Girls* to his name. A player himself, Leahy was well-placed for the job.

"As a guitarist and just as a kid who grew up in the '80s and '90s, this franchise means a lot to me," he enthuses. "The first two films are just so iconic

– they're cult classics and pop culture signposts that mark the end of the pre-grunge era. When the director [Dean Parisot] called me about doing the third film. I was both thrilled and terrified. It was a huge risk to revisit San Dimas after all these years, but the script was great and Alex and Keanu were onboard, so how could I say no? Getting the gig was a guitarist's dream come true."

There are few movie franchises where getting the guitars right is more important – and having a music supervisor who actually plays proved integral to the film's six-string accuracy. Co-producer Ashley Waldron quickly signed Gibson Brands as the movie's official guitar partner, providing the iconic instruments that Bill and Ted use to save the world – not to mention countless other electrics from its stable of marques, including Epiphone, Kramer and Steinberger. Waldron brought in Leahy and the Gibson team to ensure music and guitar-playing remained a central focus of the story.

"I'm a gear guy so the instruments you see on camera are important to me, and I knew they'd be important to fans, too," Leahy explains. "I took a look at the most important guitars featured in the first two films, the Steinbergers, the SG and the Flying V, and discussed with the director and supervisors what we wanted to do in this third film."

"Gibson Brands is home to all of these instruments, as well as Epiphone and the shred sled supreme,

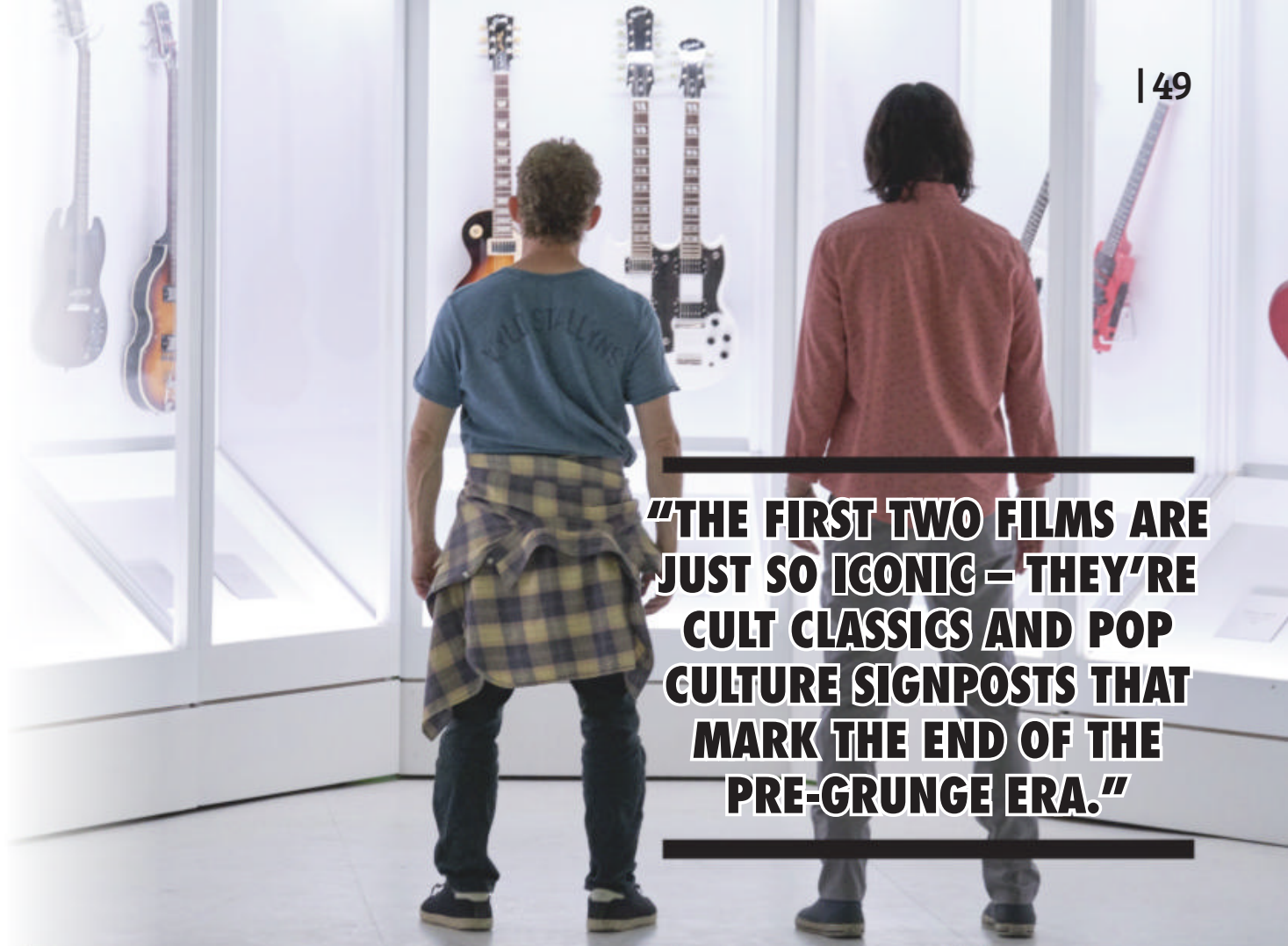
Kramer. We connected with Gibson very early on and they were most excellent partners on this. At this point, they feel like family – they worked really hard to make sure the film had everything it needed, all the way up to the Weezer video which we just shot ["The Beginning Of The End"]. They're caretakers of Keanu's hero guitar, and sorted out the logistics to make sure that the guitar Rivers [Cuomo] plays in the video is the same guitar Keanu plays at the end of the film. They are a most dependable bandmate."

Gibson provided over 30 guitars for the movie from its various brands, including specific models that were absolutely essential to filming – instruments that Leahy was quick to identify.

"When Bill and Ted travel to the future, having Steinbergers in that scene was something that I absolutely insisted upon," he recalls. "Fans would demand it, and they'd be right. When it came to the big guitar solo at the end, it seemed fitting that they play the same type of instruments – SG and Flying V – that they play at the end of *Bogus Journey* – except now they don't have the custom paint jobs; they're more simple, classic, mature – kind of reflecting that Bill and Ted have grown up."

Asked which guitar he wanted to take home after filming, Leahy names a Tobacco Burst Les Paul Standard '50s – albeit for reasons beyond the usual look and sound.

"That guitar has a history which is similar to the



“THE FIRST TWO FILMS ARE JUST SO ICONIC – THEY’RE CULT CLASSICS AND POP CULTURE SIGNPOSTS THAT MARK THE END OF THE PRE-GRUNGE ERA.”



years-long struggle to make *Face The Music*,” he explains. “Decades after the last *Bill & Ted* movie, we went back to the original formula, were respectful of the characters people already knew and loved, but also created something new at the same time. It feels a lot like the rebirth of Gibson in the JC [Curleigh] era, and in particular the love and care that they’ve put into the new line of Les Pauls.”

Using guitars not only as props but as instruments that tell a story in themselves is emblematic of Leahy’s keen-eyed approach. That dedication was echoed by Reeves and Winter, who – although both bass players originally – knuckled down to not only perform live on set, but also add a couple of new musical strings to their bows.

“There’s a lot of music performance in the film, and Alex and Keanu really wanted to get it right, so I arranged to have instructors work with them on a bunch of different instruments,” Leahy reveals. “Keanu plays bagpipes in one scene, and he was determined to get that right, so I arranged for a professional player to work with him. After a couple lessons, they told me that Keanu was the best student they ever had.

“Same thing with Alex playing acoustic and singing ‘Those Who Rock’ – they were really dedicated to being real with the music performances. The guitar and vocals you hear in that scene are captured live, performed by the actors. I had Wendy Wang, who co-wrote that song, fly to New Orleans to work with the guys to get it right. I feel like it’s the musical equivalent of doing your own stunts.”

A SOUNDTRACK TO UNITE THE WORLD

Besides getting the action and aesthetics right on set, Leahy had another mammoth task before him: the soundtrack. While it would have been easy to rest on the *Bill & Ted* franchise’s ’80s/’90s metal

laurels, the supervisor had a clear vision for the soundtrack: to represent guitar playing in 2020.

“This is a *Bill & Ted* film, and I knew from the beginning that I wanted to make the soundtrack a celebration of the electric guitar,” Leahy says. “Not in a retro or nostalgic way, but in a vital this-is-what’s-happening-right-now way.”

Alongside Reeves’ bagpipe showcase are huge tracks from Weezer, Mastodon, Lamb of God, Cold War Kids and FIDLAR – several of which were written especially for the movie. It turns out the impressive roster didn’t take much convincing.

“There is a massive amount of love for this franchise in the music community, and among guitarists in particular, so when I approached artists I was met with enthusiasm and excitement,” Leahy says. “When I’m working on a movie, my job is to put the right songs in the right spots. So when Death gets in a SWAT van in the bowels of hell, then yells, ‘Let’s rock!’ and slams down his scythe, launching them through seven layers of the underworld, yeah, you better believe I’m calling Mastodon!”

Alongside Mastodon at the top of Leahy’s wishlist was Weezer – who were coincidentally working on their still-to-be-released album of guitar heroics, *Van Weezer*.

“I approached Weezer early in the process for a whole bunch of reasons,” Leahy says. “Number one, they’re a great band. Number two, Rivers is down to shred. They’re capable of making epic rock that has a joyful, adolescent quality, which reminds me of Bill and Ted jamming in that garage back in 1989. They’re an American rock institution that wields electric guitars with pride, and their first gig was on the same bill as [Keanu Reeves’ late ’90s alt-rock band] Dogstar, so it just seems like it was meant to be. And has there ever been a more *Bill & Ted* lyric than ‘in heavy

metal we trust’?”

Leahy is effusive in his praise for every artist on the soundtrack – from Big Black Delta’s Jonathan Bates “embracing his deepest, darkest Floyd Rose fantasies” for a pair of tracks, to FIDLAR’s ferocious effort and Cold War Kids’ anthemic closer – but in terms of composition, one song stands out as a highlight.

“Maybe the most fun we had was working with Lamb of God, who agreed to build their song, ‘The Death Of Us’, around the prison chant that the very muscular Wyld Stallyns are performing in the yard,” Leahy says. “Again, we got to work with living legends to create something special just for the movie. Another dream come true. That track is a beast.”

Speaking of beasts, there was one virtuoso that immediately sprang to mind when it came to filling the much-coveted “air shredder” position: Tosin Abasi.

“He was one of the first people I called,” recalls Leahy. “I wanted to make sure that when Bill and Ted play air guitar in *Face The Music*, you hear something incredible being played by a living legend, just as we heard Steve Vai in *Bogus Journey*. Tosin and his Animals As Leaders bandmate Javier Reyes join Wyld Stallyns on the soundtrack version of Face The Music, which I also thought was fitting since Steve Vai accompanied KISS on ‘God Gave Rock ‘N’ Roll To You’.”

This sense of continuity, in tandem with themes of growth and modernisation, ensures the movie and its soundtrack act as a true love letter to the electric guitar in 2020. They celebrate the instrument’s heritage of excess, but also portray a future – and in the film, that’s taken quite literally – where it still reigns supreme. And to that, we can only say: *party on, dudes!* 



THE LIGHT SIDE

THE SOFTEST TUNES FROM MUSIC'S HEAVIEST HITTERS.

WORDS BY **JOE BOSSO.**

Slash might've said it best: "There's no lying with the acoustic guitar. There's something very pure and very humbling about it." It's a profound statement coming from one of rock 'n' roll's most celebrated electric guitarists.

But strip away all the muck of multi-layered overdubs, rack effects and endless symphonies of tracks, and you separate the dodgers hiding behind studio wizardry from the artists who know that a great song only needs six strings and a melody.

Here are 25 of hard-rock's best acoustic jams. Some are purely unplugged, while others start out that way before ascending into grand opuses. Either way, what makes these songs iconic is their elemental simplicity. In other words, all you need to bring them to life is an acoustic guitar and a little feeling. And from the looks of these rockers, some gaudy jewellery helps.

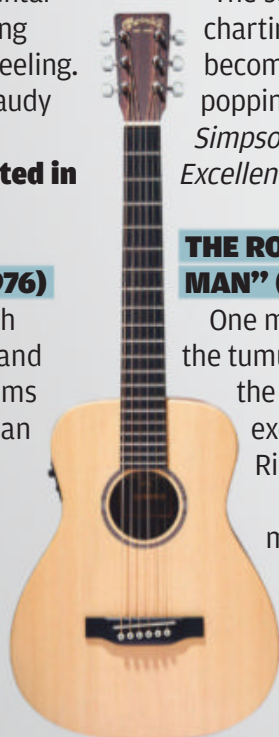
Note that these songs are not presented in any particular order.

BOSTON - "MORE THAN A FEELING" (1976)

Tom Scholz's soaring leads (recorded with an early version of his Rockman amp unit) and crunchy, multi-tracked electric guitar rhythms have more than a little to do with "More Than A Feeling" becoming one of classic rock's most enduring anthems. But it's the song's lilting, arpeggiated acoustic intro that puts fans in the mood.

Working as something of a one-man band in his basement, Scholz - one of music's first DIY dudes - played all the guitar parts on "Feeling". For the arpeggiated intro and verses, he used a Yamaha 12-string, while the more fully strummed choruses called for a Guild D-40.

A bit of trivia: Noting the similarities between "More Than A Feeling" and "Smells Like Teen Spirit", Kurt Cobain teased fans at Nirvana's 1992's Reading Festival performance with a few bars of the Boston classic.



KANSAS - "DUST IN THE WIND" (1977)

When Vicci Livgren overheard her husband (Kansas guitarist Kerry) practicing finger exercises on his acoustic one day, she told him she heard a song there and suggested he add some lyrics. He listened, and the result was "Dust In The Wind".

A departure from Kansas' characteristic prog-rock bombast, "Dust In The Wind" was a stark, plaintive meditation on the meaning of life. While many assume that the track features a 12-string acoustic, the rich unplugged sound is actually the result of multiple six-strings (a few in Nashville tuning), played by Livgren and co-guitarist Rich Williams.

The song became Kansas' only top-ten single, charting at #6 in 1978. In the years since, it's become something of a cultural touchstone, popping up everywhere from TV shows like *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* to movies like *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* and *Old School*.

THE ROLLING STONES - "STREET FIGHTING MAN" (1968)

One might assume this rebel yell, released during the tumultuous summer of 1968, would rage with the sound of electric guitars. Not so: with the exception of an electric bass played by Keith Richards, the track is 100 percent acoustic.

Preparing a demo for the song, Richards mic'd two acoustics and recorded them into a cheap Phillips mono cassette recorder. The guitarist was so enamoured with the resulting distortion (the machine had no limiters, causing the signal to overload) he decided to go au naturel and ditch the electrics.

THE WHO - "PINBALL WIZARD" (1969)

By 1969, Pete Townshend was known as much for smashing guitars as he was for playing them. But on The Who's groundbreaking *Tommy*, he demonstrated some astonishing six-string skills. And with an acoustic in his hands (check out "It's

A Boy" for some deft blues-meets-flamenco work), he was unstoppable. Although electrics bolster the verses and choruses of the album's centrepiece, "Pinball Wizard", a 1968 Gibson J-200 acoustic is the dominant instrument throughout.

Townshend's furiously strummed barre chords (which he deemed 'mock baroque'), heard in the intro and breakdown section, provide the kind of power and majesty befitting a genuine rock opera.

BAD COMPANY - "FEEL LIKE MAKIN' LOVE" (1975)

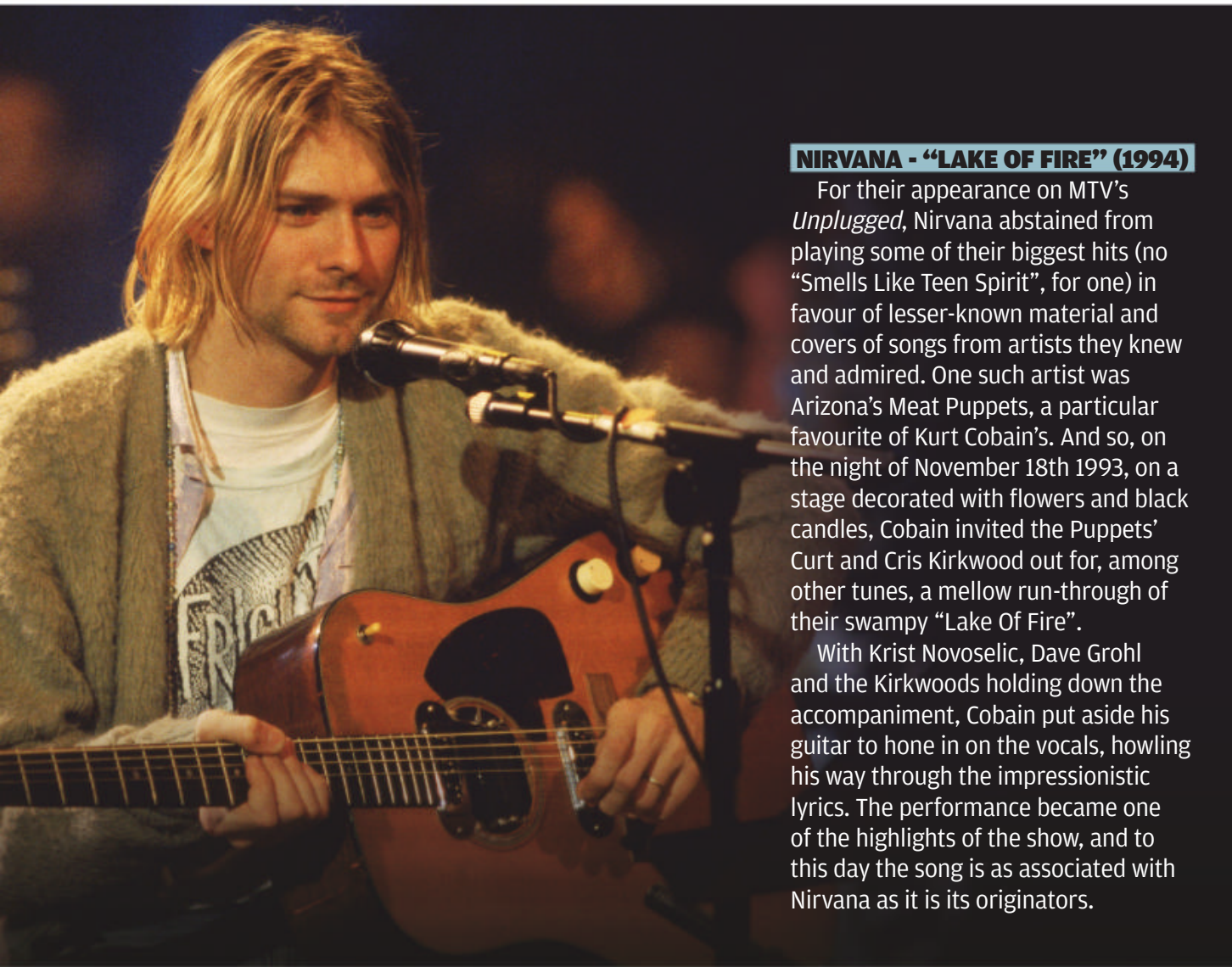
As the first band signed to Led Zeppelin's Swan Song label, Bad Company - led by former Free singer Paul Rodgers and former Mott The Hoople guitarist Mick Ralphs - followed their bosses' lead and specialised in sweaty, swaggering blues-rock.

Taking another lesson from the Zepmen, Ralphs juxtaposed chiming acoustics with explosive power chords on this top-ten smash, to wondrous effect. The bright, jangly acoustics lend a relaxed, down-home country vibe to the verses, while the electric guitars in the chorus scream with big, brash British rock. Presumably, quite a few people felt like doing the nasty after hearing this cut.

JOHNNY THUNDERS - "SO ALONE" (1978)

As a member of proto-punk glam-rockers The New York Dolls - and later with his own band, the Heartbreakers - Johnny Thunders knew how to dish out rough and ragged three-chord rock. And with a Les Paul Junior slung well below his waist, he had 'cool' written all over him.

So it came as a surprise when Thunders, on his debut solo album, issued this poetic acoustic ballad. Tempering his patented pounding style, the singer-songwriter lays out his junkie lifestyle with unflinching candour, practically caressing his guitar strings in the process. Melancholic and remorseful, the song has come to serve as an elegy of sorts for the troubled Thunders, who died of an apparent drug overdose in 1991.



NIRVANA - "LAKE OF FIRE" (1994)

For their appearance on MTV's *Unplugged*, Nirvana abstained from playing some of their biggest hits (no "Smells Like Teen Spirit", for one) in favour of lesser-known material and covers of songs from artists they knew and admired. One such artist was Arizona's Meat Puppets, a particular favourite of Kurt Cobain's. And so, on the night of November 18th 1993, on a stage decorated with flowers and black candles, Cobain invited the Puppets' Curt and Cris Kirkwood out for, among other tunes, a mellow run-through of their swampy "Lake Of Fire".

With Krist Novoselic, Dave Grohl and the Kirkwoods holding down the accompaniment, Cobain put aside his guitar to hone in on the vocals, howling his way through the impressionistic lyrics. The performance became one of the highlights of the show, and to this day the song is as associated with Nirvana as it is its originators.

RUSH - "CLOSER TO THE HEART" (1977)

By 1977, Rush had firmly established themselves as fine purveyors of glorious 20-minute sci-fi opuses that could fill entire album sides. But on this, their fifth studio release, the Canadian prog trio demonstrated their ability to be hooky, concise and, with "Closer To The Heart", radio-friendly.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the song's gentle, ringing 12-string acoustic guitar intro is that it was written by bassist Geddy Lee, rather than guitarist Alex Lifeson. The same figure is later repeated after a particularly ripping electric guitar solo - only this time, the 12-string acoustic is smartly doubled by a six-string electric.

YES - "ROUNABOUT" (1971)

Pick up a Martin 00-8 acoustic, pluck octave harmonics at the 12th fret (essentially comprising an Em chord) and voila! You'll have a whole room of guitar dudes sitting up and taking notice. And with good reason - this simple move is Steve Howe's signature opening line to "Roundabout", Yes' breakthrough 1971 hit.

Make it past Howe's unaccompanied, harmonic-heavy intro, and you just might have a chance at mastering this intricate prog-rock masterpiece, in

which acoustics and electrics - played in classical, jazzy and rocking splendour - weave in, out and 'roundabout'. As for the lyrics: well, this is prog - you're on your own there.

RANDY RHOADS - "DEE" (1980)

With his inventive, neoclassical spin on Eddie Van Halen's already established bag of tricks, Randy Rhoads became the new heavy metal guitar king after fans heard his work on Ozzy Osbourne's 1980 solo debut, *Blizzard Of Ozz*. But while electrified Ozz rockers like "Crazy Train" and "I Don't Know" wowed the metal masses, it was the solo classical piece "Dee" that was Rhoads' true masterpiece.

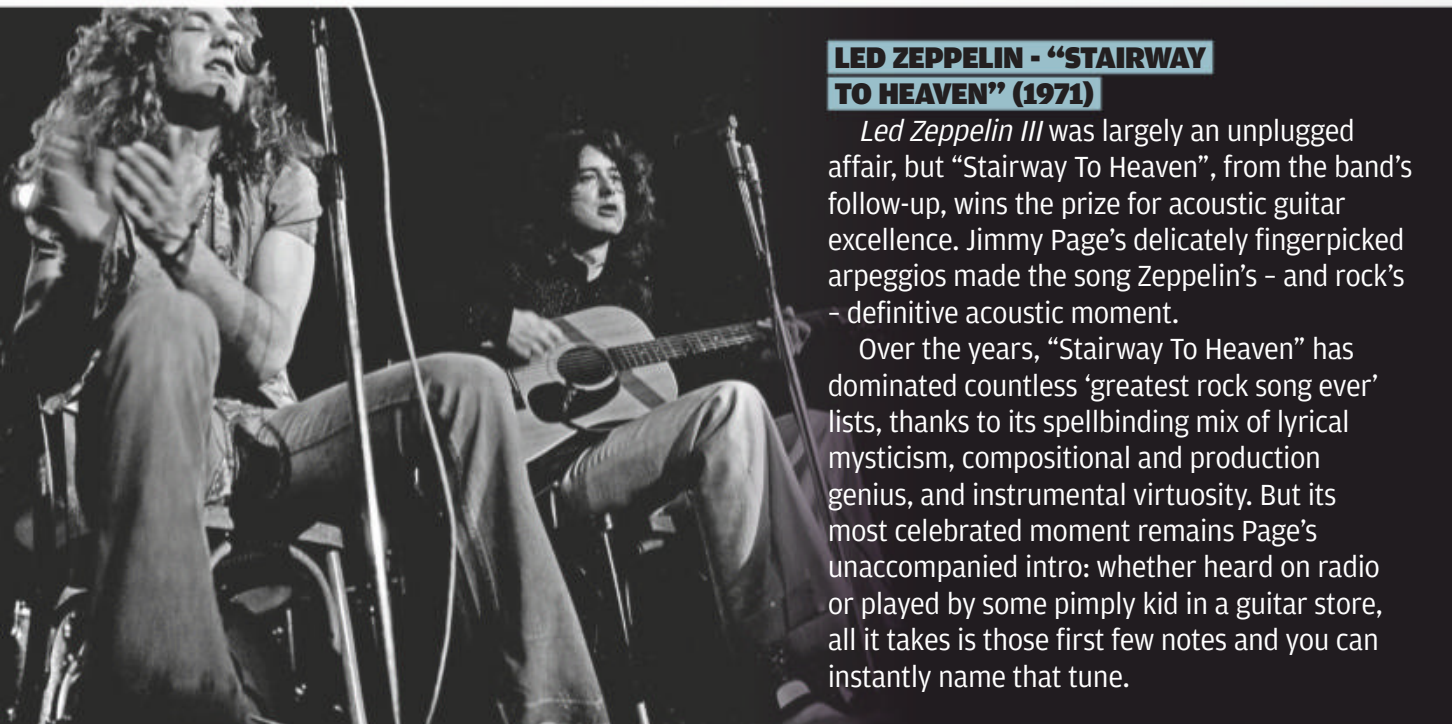
Rhoads grew up in a musical family - his mother, Delores, runs a music school in North Hollywood, California - so it was only fitting that "Dee" paid tribute to the woman who inspired and nurtured his dreams. Fingerpicked on a nylon-string acoustic, the piece is by turns playful, melancholic, heartbreaking and hopeful.

Tragically, Rhoads was killed in a 1982 plane crash at the age of 25. Five years later, Ozzy Osbourne included an extended outtake version of "Dee" on his album *Tribute*, reminding us all of Rhoads' immense (and largely untapped) talent.

LED ZEPPELIN - "STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN" (1971)

Led Zeppelin III was largely an unplugged affair, but "Stairway To Heaven", from the band's follow-up, wins the prize for acoustic guitar excellence. Jimmy Page's delicately fingerpicked arpeggios made the song Zeppelin's - and rock's - definitive acoustic moment.

Over the years, "Stairway To Heaven" has dominated countless 'greatest rock song ever' lists, thanks to its spellbinding mix of lyrical mysticism, compositional and production genius, and instrumental virtuosity. But its most celebrated moment remains Page's unaccompanied intro: whether heard on radio or played by some pimply kid in a guitar store, all it takes is those first few notes and you can instantly name that tune.



VAN HALEN - "COULD THIS BE MAGIC?" (1980)

Eddie Van Halen gave acoustic-shred fetishists much to chew on in 1979 with "Spanish Fly", a hummingbird-fast flamenco instrumental from *Van Halen II*. But guitarists of all stripes found a lot to like in the bluesy and boozy, slightly off-kilter "Could This Be Magic?".

The track, which marks the guitarist's first recorded bottleneck moment, finds Eddie's whimsical acoustic slide-playing expertly shadowing David Lee Roth's vocal on the verses. The idea to use a slide came from producer Ted Templeman, and while Eddie was initially leery of trying it, he practiced for a few days and - in typical VH style - pulled off the part with aplomb.

Another first: "Could This Be Magic?" represents the debut of an outside singer on a Van Halen album. Templeman suggested a different sound for one of the choruses and brought in country singer Nicolette Larson, who was working in a neighbouring studio, to lend her support. Listen closely following Eddie's slide solo to hear Larson and Diamond Dave make sweet harmonised magic.

BON JOVI - "SLIPPERY WHEN WET" (1986)

The story is legend: Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora ride into the 1989 MTV Video Music Awards, do the acoustic-duo thing on "Wanted Dead Or Alive", and before you can say 'dreadnought', the *Unplugged* series is born.

The song is no slouch either. On it, Sambora lays down some fancy acoustic finger work, picking out descending arpeggios and bluesy bends as JBJ rolls his fascination with the Old West into a story about the weariness of life on the road. The result was a smash hit, insuring that Bon Jovi would see a million faces and rock them all for many years to come.

METALLICA - "FADE TO BLACK" (1984)

Recorded way back in the early days of thrash, "Fade To Black" is rightly acknowledged as the genre's first power ballad. A seven-minute rumination on despair and suicide, the song is built around singer and guitarist James Hetfield's mournful, arpeggiated acoustic picking - over which Kirk Hammett adds some beautiful and soaring electric leads.

Of course, this being Metallica, things remain sweet and mellow for only so long. Midway through, the song builds in intensity, shifting rhythms and adding plenty of heavily distorted six-strings, culminating in an extended and explosive Hammett solo.

While hardcore metalheads at the time accused Metallica of selling out by recording a ballad, "Fade To Black" remains one of the group's most well-known and beloved songs. And it's still a concert staple to this day. Besides, as Hetfield famously once said, "Limiting yourself to please your audience is bullshit."

POISON - "EVERY ROSE HAS ITS THORN" (1988)

When you think of '80s power ballads, one song stands head, hair and shoulders above the rest: "Every Rose Has Its Thorn". Penned by singer Bret Michaels after he discovered his girlfriend had been cheating on him, the 1988 smash hit proved that glam-metal dudes have feelings too.

While the recorded version features a typically histrionic electric guitar solo from Poison's C.C. DeVille, Michaels' lyrical directness, solid song construction and strong acoustic playing rule the day. Michaels has said that "people related to the song because I related to the song," and indeed, "Every Rose Has Its Thorn" - which hit #1 on the charts in

**GREEN DAY - “GOOD RIDDANCE (TIME OF YOUR LIFE)” (1997)**

When recording what would be the album version of this acoustic ballad, Green Day leader Billie Joe Armstrong flubbed the opening G/D chord – twice – and after the second time deadpanned, “F***.” Fortunately, he soldiered on, and despite the uttered expletive, “Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)” enjoyed huge crossover success and stands as the band’s biggest hit to date – which was hardly anticipated.

At the time, Green Day were considered little more than snot-nosed (albeit multi-Platinum) Bay Area ruffians, and an acoustic guitar-and-strings ballad wasn’t what most people expected to hear from them. For that reason, bassist Mike Dirnt called the song the ‘most punk’ thing they could have done. Which just goes to show that even punks can wear their hearts on their sleeves.

1988 – has since become a defining tune of its era. As for that ex-girlfriend? She’s now a hedge fund investor.

GUNS N’ ROSES - “PATIENCE” (1988)

Although *GN’R Lies* features a number of acoustic tracks – including the country-ish, darkly comedic “Used to Love Her” – it was the lovelorn “Patience”, a glacial-paced ballad, that marked the most radical left-turn for the normally hard-rocking group – and also gave them one of their biggest hits.

The song was recorded in a single take, with Slash, Izzy Stradlin and Duff McKagan all on acoustics. Axl Rose, for his part, contributes some fine whistling at the intro. The final two minutes stand as the Gunners’ kumbaya moment, with the whole band cooing the song’s title in sweet harmony. Then everybody got in a fight – but that’s another story.

JANE’S ADDICTION - “JANE SAYS” (1988)

It’s five minutes long, features just two chords (G and A), and with its steel drum ornamentation, sounds like something Jimmy Buffett might have conjured up after a three-day orgy of sponge cake and margaritas. Nonetheless, “Jane Says” remains one of the LA punk-metal band’s most enduring songs.

Perhaps its durability can be attributed to the fact it doesn’t fit neatly in the group’s canon. In place of frenzied, psychedelic metal dispatched with tectonic force, we get a wistful, straightforward acoustic ditty, tailor-made for campfires and backyard cookouts. Coming from Perry Farrell, Dave Navarro and co, that’s pretty shocking.

EXTREME - “MORE THAN WORDS” (1990)

In the late ‘80s, Extreme carved out a niche as the funkiest hard rockers on the block, with a sound that, thanks to guitar hero Nuno Bettencourt, straddled the line between Van Halen shred and Aerosmith strut.

And so it was something of a kick in the head when Bettencourt and singer Gary Cherone unleashed the Everly Brothers homage “More Than Words”.

Aside from a couple of finger snaps, the only accompaniment to Cherone and Bettencourt’s harmonising voices was Bettencourt’s fingerpicking on a Washburn acoustic and the percussive knocking of his hand against the guitar’s top. The result was a smash hit: “More Than Words” hit #1 on the Billboard charts in 1991, and led a generation of would-be shred heroes to put down the electric, grab an acoustic, and knock the hell out of it.

THE BLACK CROWES - “SHE TALKS TO ANGELS” (1990)

“Jealous Again”, “Twice As Hard” and “Hard To Handle” put Atlanta’s Black Crowes on the map as a raucous, genuine-article blues-rock ensemble. But it was this soulful acoustic-driven number, about the ravages of heroin addiction, that put the band over the top – and gave it a #1 hit.

For the recording, guitarist Rich Robinson (who wrote the music to the song when he was just 15) played a Martin D-28 in open D tuning. Although he capoed the second fret, effectively giving him an open E tuning, there’s a certain feel and texture to his sound that fits the wrenching nature of the track. Add in brother Chris Robinson’s soulful, yearning vocal, and you have something truly heavenly.

QUEENSRÿCHE - “SILENT LUCIDITY” (1990)

Let’s say you’re a proggy metal band (from Seattle, of all places), best known for releasing a kitchen-sink concept album about government overthrow (1988’s *Operation: Mindcrime*)... or something like that. What do you do for an encore? If you’re Queensrÿche, you whip up a kitchen-sink acoustic song about dream consciousness... Or something like that.

“Silent Lucidity” features songwriter and guitarist Chris DeGarmo on Spanish six-string guitar in the intro and verses, playing a sweetly arpeggiated pattern that beautifully mixes fretted notes and open strings. The song drifts steadily along, adding electrics, voice-overs and swelling orchestration until practically busting at the seams with sound. And yet it ends as it began, with DeGarmo’s lone acoustic.

ALICE IN CHAINS - “NO EXCUSES” (1994)

With their 1992 EP *Sap*, Alice in Chains served notice that they had more to offer than merely distorted grunge. Melodic and full of somber beauty, *Sap* set the stage for *Jar Of Flies*, which firmly established AIC as a band of uncommon, if very bleak, depth.

“No Excuses” marked something of a departure for the band. With its gentle, easygoing pace and hopeful (for Alice in Chains, at least) lyrics about enduring life’s hills and valleys, “No Excuses” is practically toe-tappin’ and good-timey. But the real revelation is guitarist Jerry Cantrell’s wide-as-the-Grand-Canyon acoustic sound – full, ringing and droning for days.

FOO FIGHTERS - “EVERLONG” (2006)

The full-band version of “Everlong” that appeared on the Foo Fighters’ 1997 album, *The Colour And The Shape*, was a raging slab of rock that seemed hard to beat. But when Dave Grohl appeared on Howard Stern’s radio show later that year and performed an impromptu acoustic version, listeners went wild, and bootlegs soon abounded.

Musically, the composition is positively Townshend-esque, built around a simple, movable progression in a drop D (D-A-D-G-B-E) tuning. The studio version features Dave Grohl pumping wildly on the drums (Taylor Hawkins had not yet joined the band), but it’s his tense, driving solo acoustic reading that truly sets pulses quickening.

STAIN'D - “OUTSIDE” (2001)

Sludgy, down-tuned electric guitars bulldoze the choruses of the official recording, but originally this song was an all-acoustic ballad: Staind lead singer Aaron Lewis used to perform a half-finished version of “Outside” during solo shows.

One night in Biloxi, Mississippi, as Staind were preparing to open for Limp Bizkit on the 1999 *Family Values Tour*, the singer was asked to do a number with Fred Durst providing backing vocals. Onstage, Lewis came up with the lyrics to complete the tune he’d been labouring over for months. Radio stations picked up on the live acoustic version and helped build a buzz for “Outside” months before the official version was released on *Break The Cycle*. The song – and the album’s – success launched a thousand nu-metal power ballads in its wake.

NICKELBACK - “PHOTOGRAPH” (2005)

It sold more than 1.4 million digital downloads in the US, reached #2 on the Billboard Hot 100 and was voted the fifth most annoying song of all time in a *Rolling Stone* poll. Such is the case with Nickelback’s “Photograph”: love it or hate it, the tune gets a reaction.

Like many a country-tinged power ballad, electric guitars fire up the song’s choruses – but the backbone of “Photograph” rests in the heartfelt strumming of an unplugged axe. And if it’s a formula that Chad Kroeger and co. have repeated to great success, so have scores of modern rock bands that have followed in the band’s wake.

Chances are when a power ballad with big guitars and an even bigger chorus works its way up the charts today, there’s a little bit of that “Photograph” magic in there somewhere. 



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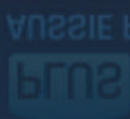


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HANGING BY A STRING

FOUR SIGNS YOUR STRINGS NEED REPLACING, FOUR WAYS TO EXTEND THE LIFE OF THEM, AND ONE REASON WHY BOILING THEM SHOULD ONLY EVER BE A LAST RESORT. WORDS BY.

WORDS BY **AMIT SHARMA.**

Honestly, there's not much point in playing an expensive guitar through a high-end, hand-wired guitar amp if you're not bothering to change your strings as needed. Though you might hear certain bass players speaking of their preference for the dullness that comes with using older and more worn-in sets, the same appeal very rarely crosses over into guitar – whether you play electric or acoustic.

There's a reason why professional touring and recording guitarists change their set for every show or studio session: newer strings will always breathe more life into your tone, with more sustain, clarity and resonance. Ultimately, even to the untrained ear, these are noticeable differences, guaranteed to enhance your music and help translate it to full effect.

Here's how you can tell when it's time to replace your strings, and what you can do to get the most out of your existing set...

HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOUR STRINGS NEED CHANGING

1. LACK OF BRIGHTNESS AND SUSTAIN

The first thing to go with any set of strings is that initial brightness. Each player will have their own preference as to how long each set will meet their demands, though it's often lead guitarists – who play a lot of single-note melodies and therefore are more dependent on natural sustain – that will prefer the extra 'oomph' you get out of a newer set. If you want those solos to really pop out, that brightness can carry you a long way...

2. STRINGS WON'T STAY IN TUNE

Perhaps most crucially of all, if your strings can't stay in pitch, the instrument they are on effectively becomes redundant. How well the string has been strung also plays a part here – though assuming all is well and good above the nut, there is no reason for a guitar to need constant adjusting. Even instruments with a floating trem system should return to a

reasonably dependable tuning. So when strings are not behaving normally – particularly the thinner ones, which are susceptible to breakage – it's probably time to give them a change.

3. OBVIOUS KINKS

If you can see any kinks along the wire – particularly above the frets – it's usually a telltale sign of heavy usage. That doesn't necessarily mean they won't hold tune, but even a minor effect on intonation is an anomaly not worth having. Naturally, they tend to appear around the areas that get the most usage – guitarists tuned to standard might find that to be the third, fifth, seventh, twelfth and fifteenth frets – so it's worth keeping an eye out.

4. SIGNS OF RUST

While it's good practice to keep all parts of an instrument clean, there will come a point where the accumulation of sweat, oil and dirt begins to rust and discolour your strings. The time it takes may vary from player to player – some guitarists might find the acidity on their hands more potent (for lack of a better word) than others, and therefore need to change strings more often.

HOW TO GET MORE LIFE OUT OF YOUR STRINGS

1. CLEAN YOUR HANDS BEFORE PLAYING

It seems like such an obvious idea, but let's face it – we've all ended up picking up a guitar while devouring a packet of chips, or even halfway through a meal. It's no secret that inspiration can take hold at any time, but it's still worth giving your hands a quick wash before exploring it. An instrument with less chocolate on the neck will usually be easier to play, so there is that benefit too...

2. NEVER OPEN A FRESH PACK FOR ONE STRING

We've all done it and regretted it later down

the line. All it means is that you'll end up with a surplus of the four thickest strings which will inevitably lose their freshness, collect dust and end up in the bin. Considering how easy it is to order a set of singles online, it's good practice to have spare high Es in abundance.

3. CLEAN YOUR STRINGS AND THE FRETBOARD

Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness when it comes to your strings. Getting into the habit of cleaning them before and after each use – even just five seconds with a rag – can help your strings sound better and last longer. Better still, you can use a string cleaner like Fast Fret by GHS or Ernie Ball's Wonder Wipes. The same goes for the fretboard itself, which collects and absorbs grime from all those hours of sweaty musical navigation.

4. USE COATED STRINGS

Elixir Strings have become famous for their coated sets, which are true to their claim of lasting three to five times longer than your regular ones. By reducing the accumulation of debris and blocking corrosion from elements like skin oil, their Nanoweb and Polyweb ranges also sound brighter for longer – maintaining that ear-pleasing response over months of usage, instead of weeks. Ernie Ball, D'Addario and DR Strings have also been widely praised for their coated products.

SO THE INTERNET TOLD ME TO BOIL MY STRINGS...

Arguably more common with bass players than guitarists, there is some truth to this old myth. Guitar strings are incredibly affordable, so for the majority of players this would be a waste of time and energy. But if you find yourself with no spare income and craving some freshness from a dull set of strings, boiling them for up to five minutes may work for a few hours. It's far from ideal, so better to think of it as a last-resort-meets-worst-case-scenario kind of option. 



HIT IT LIKE HENDRIX

JIMI HENDRIX'S TONE HAS TRANSCENDED GENERATIONS AND INFLUENCED LEGIONS OF GUITAR PLAYERS. FIND OUT HOW TO RECREATE IT IN THIS COMPREHENSIVE GEAR GUIDE.

WORDS BY **JONATHAN HORSLEY.**

The greatest player to ever have picked up an electric guitar? Surely. Jimi Hendrix was a man whose sound was rooted in blues, but seemingly refracted through the cosmos and the psychedelic feedback loop of the swinging '60s.

His style is a lost art. Hendrix used volumes in ways that were unique to him and prohibited by the practicalities of modern stages, sound limits and so on. Who knows what Hendrix would have come up with if he was still with us.

Thinking of Jimi as an elementary player, perhaps his earth, wind and fire would be the Fender Stratocaster, Marshall stack and wah/uni-vibe. There is a massive industry in creating gear that puts some of that magic at your fingertips. Sure, we can buy these – that's the easy part. The rest is all in the brain and fingers.

GITARS

In the mind's eye, Hendrix will always be Strat in hand – but he played all kinds of guitars. When he was a session player for the Isley Brothers, he played a blonde Fender Duo-Sonic. When he played with Little Richard, he used a Jazzmaster, proving – perhaps beyond doubt – that off-sets have always been cool and everyone should chill out. He also had a variety of Gibson Flying Vs, an SG Custom, a Silvertone-era U-1 Danelectro with a Shorthorn body.

According to *Jimi Hendrix Gear* by Harry Shapiro, Michael Heatley and Roger Mayer, he traded his U-1 for an Epiphone Wilshire. And sure, he used the odd acoustic: notably a Martin D-45 and an Epiphone FT-79. But for our purposes, we're going to stay electric and stick with the Strat, the Flying V, and okay, one SG – because we really need an affordable option for a vibrola.

NO EXPENSE SPARED

Fender Custom Shop Jimi Hendrix Stratocaster in Olympic White

Nicknamed Izabella, this was the Woodstock Strat – the Star Spangled Banner Strat – a 1968 Strat modded for Hendrix with a strap button on the lower horn, with a stripeless maple neck carved into an oval C-profile.

This is the one. As part of Fender's Custom Shop Tribute series, the detail with which it is replicated is forensic. There are only 250 pieces available worldwide, so you'd best get that deposit down now.

Gibson Custom 1967 Flying V with Maestro Vibrola in Antique Natural

A meticulous Custom Shop recreation of a '67 V, this will let you recreate that Hendrix-with-V experience as witnessed on blazing sets such as his at the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival. With its Maestro Vibrola, medium C profile neck with long tenon, Kluson tuners and Custombucker Alnico III pickups, this is total vintage power.

This is the one to dig out for jamming "Red House" or "Dolly Dagger" – it always seemed to be on those tunes that he broke out the Gibsons.

ON A BUDGET

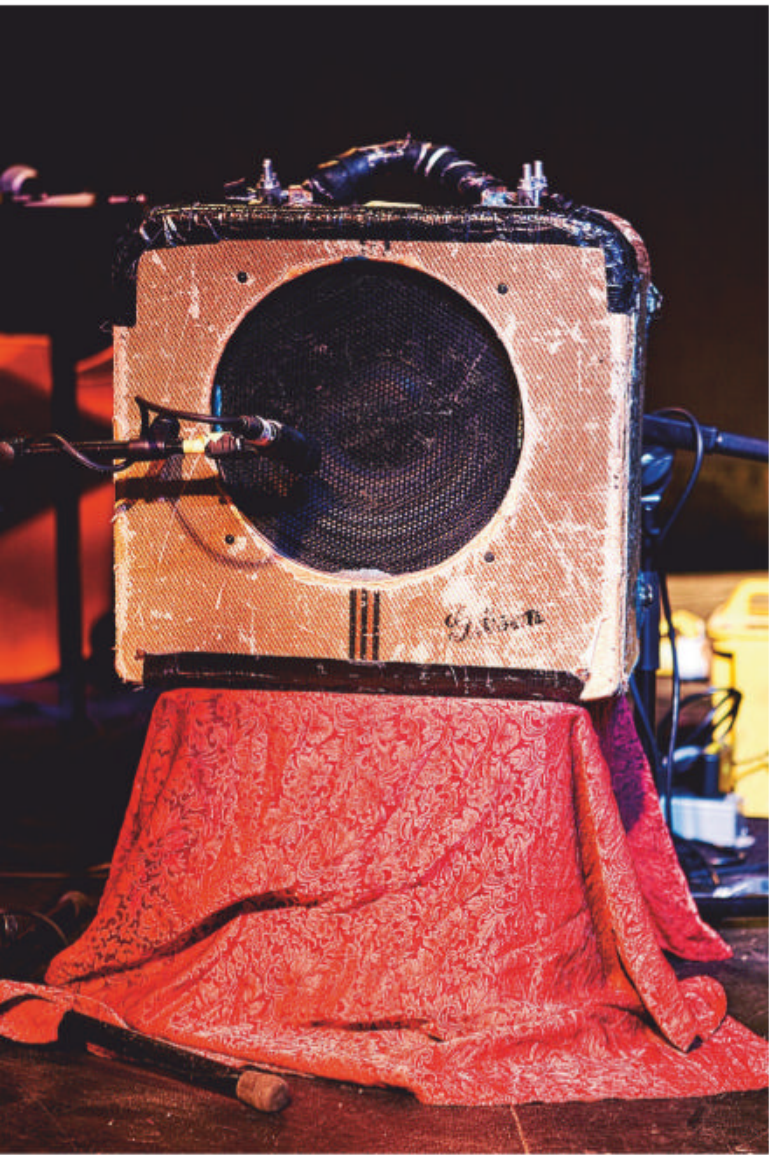
Fender Jimi Hendrix Stratocaster in Olympic White

The production line signature Strat has an alder body, bolt-on maple neck and fretboard, and a slightly flatter 9.5-inch fretboard radius (rather than the chokably old-school 7.25 that Jimi would have played), but the tone is excellent for the money. It looks cool, too, with right-handed versions boasting a reverse '70s-style Strat headstock. It has three American Vintage '65 single-coils, with the bridge pickup mounted on a reverse slant for a warmer tone.

Want to mod this? Consider a set of Seymour Duncan's signature Hendrix pickups – a few hundred bucks will change this guitar's voice plenty and give it more of a Hendrix '68 tone.

Epiphone SG Standard '61 Maestro Vibrola in Vintage Cherry

Sadly, Epiphone doesn't yet have a Flying V with a Maestro, but the new Inspired By Gibson collection has a really sweet SG with a Maestro that would be just the thing



for the aforementioned “Red House” jam. Featuring PAF-like ProBuckers with Alnico II magnets, with the bridge ‘bucker wound a bit hotter, this is a bonafide rock machine.

AMPS

Marshall by name, Marshall by nature. Sure, Hendrix used all kinds of amps – Bassmans, Twins, Supro Thunderbolts, Sunn 100s – but it was Marshall’s 100-watt Super Lead that he would become synonymous with, cranking it hard and using his guitar to tame the madness when needed. The volume was crucial, and the full-stacks helped create the environment in which his alchemy could take effect.

NO EXPENSE SPARED

Marshall 1959HW Handwired Plexi Head with full stack

If you do buy one and gig it in the style of Jimi Hendrix, please do send in a photo of the sound engineer’s face after you’ve dined it. A quartet of EL34 tubes are housed in the power section, with a trio of ECC83s sitting in the preamp.

With a boutique ’67 reissue such as this, it would be rude indeed not to partner it with the ’67 Flying V and let nature take its course. The matching angled and straight extension cabinets will make sure you squeeze everything you need from it.

Marshall Studio Vintage 20-watt one-by-ten combo

If you’re worried the full stack and 100-watt head might cause ear and wallet trouble – and by all rights you should – this small combo format of the 1959SLP should hit all the right notes. Great for blues *and* rock, this one offers a single-channel, no-fuss setup. It has a three-band EQ, and you can patch the inputs for more tonal options.

ON A BUDGET

Marshall Origin 5C five-watt tube combo

For some Hendrix-at-home flavour, the Origin should do the job. At just five watts there’s still plenty of volume, but it should be a little more manageable. The TILT blend control gives you more control over your treble, while the three-band EQ, boost and presence will help you find plenty of classic Marshall tones.

If the five-watts aren’t enough – or rather, if the eight-inch speaker sounds a little dinky to your ears – you could always scale up with the 20- or 50-watt versions. Around a grand will get you the 50-watt combo with a 12-inch Celestion G12N-60 Midnight.

EFFECTS

Volume (and its volatile effect on single-coil guitar pickups) was probably Hendrix’s most potent effect – but he also deployed a cornucopia of fuzzes, octave fuzzes, wah, uni-vibe and Leslie effects. So, let’s run through some that could definitely do the job on your pedalboard.

NO EXPENSE SPARED

Roger Mayer Octavia Classic fuzz

Roger Mayer’s name is written into rock’s storied history for his pioneering work with effects. This analog fuzz is his most-famous stompbox, has been cloned countless, and dates back to ’67. Its circuit is a strange brew: a frequency doubler, envelope generator and amplitude modulator with an additional frequency shaping filter. It’s dynamic, unruly if you want it to be, and darn it, it’s really expensive.

Hammond Leslie 002-Leslie modulation pedal

If you want to spirit the audience off into a world of head-spinning bliss, you’ll need a rotary speaker effect. This one has all the dizzying swirl you could ever want. It’s also hugely tweakable, so there is a heap of tone to explore.

Fulltone Mini Deja’Vibe MkII

The Deja’Vibe achieves that distinctive uni-vibe throb the old-fashioned way, through a 100 percent analog circuit that features 13 discrete transistors and Fulltone’s glass lens/hermetically sealed photocells with correct incandescent bulb. Top-mounted jacks and a smaller enclosure make this very pedalboard-friendly.

Dunlop MC404 Custom Audio Electronics wah

If you’re serious about your wah game, you’re going to want the best – and this, designed with Bob Bradshaw, is quite possibly the finest you can get. At its price, it represents excellent value, too. You can tweak the output and the sweep, and there are two modes and onboard MXR MC-401 Boost/LineDriver.

ON A BUDGET

Fulltone OF-2 Octafuzz

A clone of the Tycobrahe Octavia (which itself was a clone of Mayer’s early 24V Octavia), this has an abundance of octave-up harmonic overtones – the sort of effervescent dirt and fizz that Hendrix got plenty of mileage out of. It has the



heavy-duty construction you’d expect from Fulltone and is made in the USA.

Dunlop JHF1 Jimi Hendrix Fuzz Face Pedal

If we’re going to do this right, we’re going to need something round, with a hand-wired circuitboard and a BC108 silicon transistor to help recreate the kind of gnarly fuzz tones Hendrix got from his Dallas-Arbiter fuzz in the late ’60s.

Dunlop JHW1 Jimi Hendrix Signature Fuzz Face Mini Pedal

If you really can’t decide between the aggressive silicon sounds and the softer germanium dirt, you could always plump for this, which houses both in this custom-graphic enclosure. Besides, this takes up hardly any space on your ‘board.

TC Electronic Vibraclone

This might not be as transformative or as versatile as the Leslie, but it does only cost around a hundred bucks, and will give you a nice bit of movement in your tone.

MXR Uni-Vibe M68

The MXR Chorus/Vibrato is often likened to a Leslie tone. Side-by-side they’re quite different, but if money was tight, you could forego the Leslie in favour of this beautiful warble. The MXR Uni-Vibe offers excellent value for a hugely musical effect.

Dunlop JH1D Jimi Hendrix Signature Cry Baby wah

Dunlop says that this recreates the original wahs that Hendrix used, rehousing the Thomas Organ Company’s design in a modern crinkle finish aluminium chassis. Simple, classic, and comes in at a decent price.





GOOD AS GRETSCH

THE STORY OF A ROCK 'N' ROLL ICON

BUILT FOR **CHET ATKINS**, THE GRETSCH G6120 FOUND FAME IN THE HANDS OF **EDDIE COCHRAN** AND HIS DISCIPLE, **BRIAN SETZER**. HERE, WE EXPLORE THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SIX-STRING ROCKABILLY REBEL...

WORDS BY **ED MITCHELL**.

If you happened to have been at home on February 19th, 1981 and living in the UK, you were probably watching *Top Of The Pops*. That night, you would have seen a trio of feral-looking kids blasting through their latest 45RPM single – something called “Rock This Town”. It’s a brilliant performance: the sound of rockabilly at a time when New Romantic was all the rage.

Front and centre is this Brian Setzer character, with his sky-high pompadour and a big orange Gretsch G6120. First impressions: the kid can really play. And where the hell did he get that killer-looking guitar?

“When I started out with the whole Gretsch thing, I had no idea what it would sound like,” says Setzer. “I just wanted to look like Eddie Cochran...”

CONSTANT COMPANION

The Gretsch G6120 might have had Nashville picker and producer Chet Atkins’ name on the pickguard, but it was rock ‘n’ roll rebel Eddie Cochran who made it famous.

As his near-constant companion, Eddie took his relationship with the guitar to the next level when he made it his dance partner during a performance of “Teenage Heaven” in the 1959 jukebox flick, *Go, Johnny, Go!*

It was with him when he was involved in a car crash near Bath in England on April 17th, 1960. The Gretsch survived, but sadly, Eddie didn’t. He was just 21.

Aged 16, Eddie bought his G6120 from Bell Gardens Music in the titular Bell Gardens, California, in 1955. He soon personalised the guitar, scraping the gold paint and the Atkins signpost logo off the underside of his

guitar’s pickguard, leaving the Perspex translucent. He also replaced the G6120’s neck pickup – a single-coil DeArmond – with a ‘dog-ear’ Gibson P-90.

The G6120 model was launched in 1954, just a year before Eddie bagged his. The double-bound 16-inch wide, two-and-seven-eighths-inch-deep laminated maple-bodied guitar was shipped in Amber Red and the now-iconic Orange finishes. You got bound f-holes, of course, either side of a pair of DeArmond single-coils.

Electronics consisted of a volume for each pickup, a master tone and a three-way pickup selector switch. The classic master volume knob was mounted near the cutaway. Other features included a gold Bigsby vibrato with a fixed arm, an aluminium floating bridge and top nut, Chet’s signpost and signature gold pickguard, and a longhorn steer inlay on the headstock. The Western vibe continued with celluloid block fingerboard inlays featuring prickly cacti and cattle on the Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, and the conspicuous ‘G’ brand logo burned into the guitar’s top.

By the middle of 1956, the G6120 was tweaked with plain block fingerboard inlays, a moveable vibrato arm, and a horseshoe motif

on the headstock in place of the steer. A year later, the ‘G’ brand was dropped and the block fingerboard inlays were given ‘humptops’. 1958 was a pivotal year for the G6120 – and Brian Setzer. This is the first year we get Filter’Tron humbuckers, and an ebony fingerboard loaded with neo-classical thumbnail inlays also makes its debut.

“ALL THAT CHANGED IN ‘59 WAS A GRETSCH-STAMPED V BIGSBY, METAL TO BONE NUT SWAP, AND THE ZERO FRET THAT BRIAN TOOK HIS CHISEL TO ON HIS STRAY CAT G6120.”





The 'love it or leave it' preset tone switch joins the three-way pickup selector on the guitar's upper bout joins the party, too. All that changed in '59 was a Gretsch-stamped V Bigsby, metal to bone nut swap, and the zero fret that Brian took his chisel to on his Stray Cat G6120.

That's almost all the news that's fit to print. The only other thing you need to know is that Gretsch reduced the depth of the G6120 in 1960 to the (2.5-inch) measurement you'll find on Brian's new signature models.

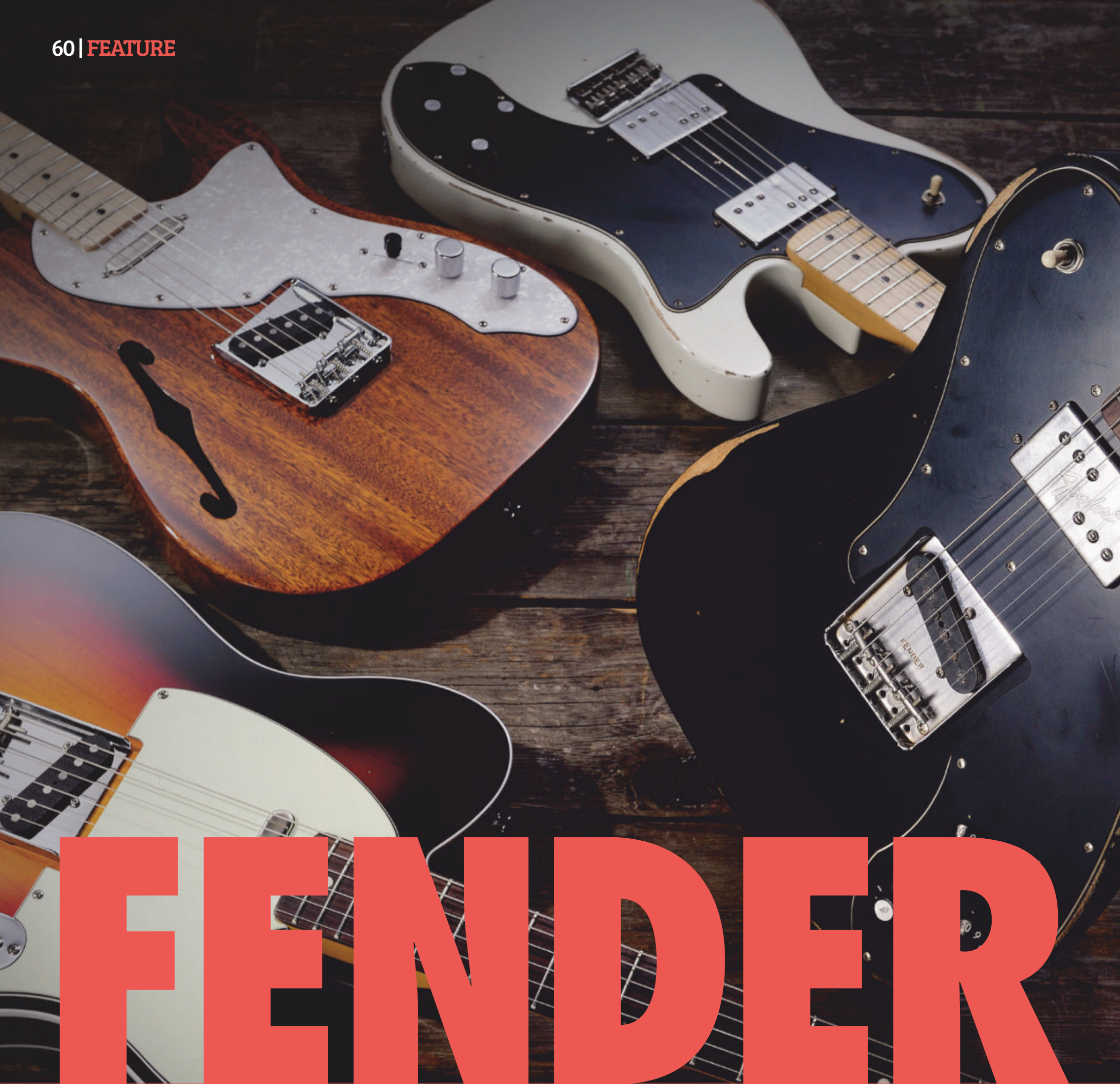
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Most of us get the aesthetic beauty of the G6120. Pete Townshend of The Who didn't. When Joe Walsh gifted him a vintage model back in the day, he wasn't especially grateful.

As he remarked to *Guitar Player* in 1972: "I said, 'Great, cheers, man.' I was being polite. I opened the case and it was bright orange and I thought, 'Ugh! It's horrible, I hate it.' [But] I went home and went into my studio and plugged it in, and it totally wrecked me out. It's the best guitar I've got now."

Weirdly, Townshend is an Eddie Cochran nut. The Who covered "Summertime Blues" live on countless occasions. The guitar did earn its keep, however, when it was used on *Who's Next* (1971) and 1973's Mod opera *Quadrophenia*. He smashed the guitar in 1973, but later had it repaired. He used it almost exclusively in the studio since, as it wouldn't stay in tune onstage. Brian Setzer could help him out with that...

45 years on from the purchase of his first '59, Brian's loyalty to the G6120 has never faltered. That commitment works both ways. "At the end of the day, it's my drill and hammer - it's my tool," he says. "I make a living with it. It's gotta play in tune. It's got to travel well. That guitar has been through it all with me. I bought the thing for 100 bucks and it was all in pieces. I put it together and it was the best thing I ever heard. It still is!" 



FENDER

WE PAY HOMAGE TO WHAT IS ARGUABLY FENDER'S MOST ICONIC ELECTRIC GUITAR,
AND HELP YOU FIGURE OUT WHICH IS THE BEST TELECASTER FOR YOU.

WORDS BY **AMIT SHARMA.**

BENDER



Regardless of what your needs are, you'll have a lot of fun finding the best Telecaster for your style. The Tele is one of the world's most iconic electric guitars, and as such, there's a huge choice within the range. The Fender Telecaster was the very first mass-produced solidbody electric guitar, and has a widespread appeal that is only rivalled by a few other companies and builds.

The Fender Tele has graced recordings from rock 'n' roll trailblazers like Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, right the way through to Danny Gatton and James Burton. Even modern guitar masters like Slipknot and Radiohead are riding the Tele train. What this means is that you'll be in good company if you decide to invest in one of the axes in this guide.

Beyond this intro, you'll find some very tempting options in the Telecaster stable, whether you're a beginner player or die-hard Fender fan. But before we unveil our pick of the best Telecasters, let's take a look at what to expect.

WHAT IS THE BEST TELE AROUND?

Our top picks for the best Tele starts with the Fender American Professional Telecaster: a seriously beautiful and versatile guitar that pays homage to the originals while bringing them right up to date. If you're currently shopping for a top-level American-made Telecaster, the American Professionals are certainly worth a look. Unlike some of the other options out there, these guitars pay full tribute to the original models, with only a handful of modernisations and updates – many which aren't detectable to the eye.

We can also highly recommend the Fender Richie Kotzen Telecaster. The singer/guitarist has been responsible for some of the greatest Fender tones in recent decades, and oftentimes that's down to the Tele in his hands. These DiMarzio-equipped signatures were made available globally in 2013 (having initially only been sold in Japan) and offer world-class tones with no compromise in playability.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TELE FOR YOU

Telecasters come in many forms, from the original solid-body design through to the lighter semi-hollow Thinline models that offer more of a natural acoustic resonance. It's worth having an idea of what kind of sounds you hear in your head, and which kinds of musicians have been associated with the many models on offer.

While it's worth bearing in mind that there are no rules when it comes to what you use, solidbody guitars are generally considered more suited to those looking for punch, thickness and sustain. Semi-hollow guitars are renowned for their openness and clarity – often favoured by more chordal players.

When choosing the best Telecaster for you, also think about whether you want or need single-coils or humbuckers. While there have never been more aftermarket electric guitar pickups available to help players hone in on their favourite tones, it makes sense to invest in a Telecaster that can handle the sounds you're looking for right out the box.

Fender's typically noiseless and lower-output single-coils work wonders for those playing funk, RnB and country, though higher-gain players may be more suited to higher-output pickups like humbuckers. To get a better idea of how much power you need, look at the guitarists you're hoping to sound like.



Squier Affinity Series Telecaster

The best Tele for beginners on a budget.

RRP: \$489

Body: Alder

Neck: Maple (C-shape)

Scale: 25.5 inches

Fingerboard: Indian Laurel

Frets: 22

Pickups: Two Vintage-Style Single-Coils

Controls: Master Volume / Master Tone

Hardware: Chrome

PROS

- ▲ No cheaper Fender-made Tele
- ▲ Plenty of finish options

CONS

- ♥ Not much at this price



Fender Squier Classic Vibe '70s Telecaster Thinline

The most affordable Fender semi-hollow out there.

RRP: \$899

Body: Soft Maple

Neck: Maple (C-shape)

Scale: 25.5 inches

Fingerboard: Maple

Frets: 21

Pickups: Two Fender Wide-Range Humbucking

Controls: Master Volume / Master Tone

Hardware: Nickel

PROS

- ▲ Amazing value for money
- ▲ Revoiced wide-range humbuckers
- ▲ Great for rock

CONS

- ♥ None

The Squier Affinity series is Fender's shot at offering unique designs and historic tones at the budget end of the market. For those starting their journey in guitar, these instruments offer tremendous value for money – and though they can't offer the full Fender experience, costing around a fifth of the cheapest American-made models, these guitars are virtually unbeatable within the sub-grand end of the market.

Whether you're a beginner or you've just always wanted to add a basic Tele to the collection, with some classic finishes including the Butterscotch Blonde (favoured by Bruce Springsteen) and tantalising racing colours, this could very well be the best Telecaster for you.

Famously used by the likes of Bob Dylan, Thom Yorke and Jim Adkins, Thinline Telecasters were originally made as a lighter-bodied alternative, with routing cavities and a single f-hole that added to its more acoustic-sounding and warmer 'woody' resonance.

The only Thinline in the Fender Squier range certainly offers a lot for its budget price-point, from build to playability. Like the Vintera '70s models, it features two Wide Range humbuckers to help players tap into warmer and more overdriven sounds – which, coupled with the semi-hollow construction, helps avoid some of the more shrill tones classic Telecasters were famous for.

This is a great option for those hoping to dial in rock tones or hit big-sounding chords on a budget.



Fender Vintera '70s Telecaster Deluxe

A highly functional and affordable throwback to the wonder years.

RRP: \$1,799

Body: Alder

Neck: Maple (Thin C-shape)

Scale: 25.5 inches

Fingerboard: Maple

Frets: 21

Pickups: Two Fender Wide-Range Humbucking

Controls: Volume 1 (Neck) / Volume 2 (Bridge) / Tone 1 (Neck) / Tone 2 (Bridge)

Hardware: Nickel / Chrome

PROS

- ▲ Amazing value for money
- ▲ Revoiced wide-range humbuckers

CONS

- ♥ Not as suited to brighter Tele tones

After an increase in higher gain players over the course of the 1960s, Fender hired former Gibson pickup guru Seth Love to help update their debut solidbody electric design. The fruits of that collaboration arrived in 1972 as the Telecaster Deluxe, using the all-new Wide Range humbucker to dial in more overdriven tones.

The new Ensenada factory-made Vintera series offers a whole range of throwback Telecasters from the big F's groundbreaking first three decades. But the '70s Deluxe – available in three wonderfully classic finishes – has definitely earned its place near the top of our best Telecasters list.

The humbuckers are incredibly musical, both clean and distorted, and offer a bit less of that famous Tele twang in favour of more grit and power. All in all, the Fender Vintera '70s Telecaster Deluxe is a brilliantly versatile and more wallet-friendly tribute to one of the more rock-focused models in Fender history.



Fender Vintera '50s Telecaster Modified

A Mexican-made Telecaster powered by Custom Shop pickups.

RRP: \$1,999

Body: Alder or Ash

Neck: Maple (Thick Soft V-shape)

Scale: 25.5 inches

Fingerboard: Maple

Frets: 21

Pickups: Custom Shop Twisted Single-Coil (Neck) and Custom Shop Vintage-Style Single-Coil (Bridge)

Controls: Master Volume / Master Tone

Hardware: Nickel / Chrome

PROS

- ▲ Great finishes and value for money
- ▲ Fender Custom Shop pickups...
- ▲ ...With a four-way selector

CONS

- ♥ V-shaped necks aren't for everyone

At the slightly higher end of the Fender Vintera range sits the '50 Modified Telecaster, which combines some of Fender's most sought-after Custom Shop colours with pickups from the actual Custom Shop. In this case, you're getting a Vintage-Style single-coil in the neck and a high output Alnico 5 twisted single-coil in the bridge – which, along with the four-way selector and S1 switch, will be able to cover some serious tonal ground.

The neck profile is a softer variation of the V-Shape profile from the late 50s, so not quite as extreme and still quite thick-feeling. Ultimately, if you're looking for a mid-priced guitar that screams class and can cover pretty much any kind of gig, this might be the best Telecaster for you.



Fender Jim Root Telecaster

Undoubtedly the heaviest Telecaster in Fender history.

RRP: \$2,499

Body: Mahogany

Neck: Maple (Modern C-shape)

Scale: 25.5 inches

Fingerboard: Ebony or Maple

Frets: 22

Pickups: EMG 60 (Neck) and EMG 81 (Bridge)

Controls: Master Volume

Hardware: Black

PROS

- ▲ A more affordable artist guitar
- ▲ High-powered active EMG 'buckers

CONS

- ♥ Far from an original Tele sound

As the guitarist in one of the most successful metal bands the world has seen, Slipknot guitarist Jim Root (aka #4) knows a thing or two about high-gain tones. His signature Telecaster features some less-than-usual appointments, including an ebony fingerboard, locking tuners, black hardware, no tone control, a Hardtail strings-through body bridge and his favourite active EMG pickup set.

The result of this collaboration with Fender is a high-powered workhorse that will be able to cut through the mix, and have no problem voicing the kind of lower tunings that bands like Slipknot were responsible for popularising. It's not a classic Telecaster by any means, but for metal fans, it's a no-brainer.



Fender Richie Kotzen Telecaster

The Tele behind nearly all of the guitarist's world-beating tones.

RRP: \$3,299

Body: Ash w/ Flame Maple Laminated Top

Neck: Maple (Large C-shape)

Scale: 25.5 inches

Fingerboard: Maple

Frets: 22

Pickups: DiMarzio Twang King (Neck) and The Chopper T (Bridge)

Controls: Master Volume / Series/Parallel Rotary Switch

Hardware: Gold

PROS

- ▲ One of the best signature Teles
- ▲ DiMarzio pickups with parallel switch

CONS

- ♥ Neck may not suit beginners

The fact that American guitar virtuoso Richie Kotzen has stuck with his signature Telecaster for the large majority of his career speaks volumes. It's an instrument that can take him from classic Fender tones for RnB and funky lines through to incredibly musical high-powered gains with effortless ease. All that is thanks to a single-coil Alnico 5 DiMarzio Twang King in the neck and a ceramic stacked humbucker – the Chopper T – in the bridge.

Then there's the contoured ash body for increased playability, a bound flame maple top to help cut through, a fatter neck profile, and a series-parallel rotary switch where you'd usually find a tone control (which functions as a mid-boost). Finished in a gorgeous Brown Sunburst to match its exquisite gold hardware, this is without question one of the most stunning Telecasters in the world.

Fender American Professional Telecaster

Everything you want from a classic Telecaster with modern functionality.

RRP: \$2,949
Body: Ash
Neck: Maple (Deep C-shape)
Scale: 25.5 inches
Fingerboard: Maple
Frets: 22
Pickups: Two V-Mod Single-Coils
Controls: Master Volume w/ Treble Bleed / Master Tone
Hardware: Nickel / Chrome

PROS

- ▲ American-made
- ▲ Tim Shaw-designed single-coils
- ▲ Treble bleed circuit

CONS

- ♥ Neck might not suit beginners

The American Professional series brings the Telecaster into the modern age while staying incredibly faithful to the original design. A few tiny adjustments make a world of difference – from the Treble Bleed circuit that retains the high-end when your guitar volume is turned down, to the redesigned ‘ashtray’ bridge that’s angled better for the picking hand.

The Deep C neck sits in between a Modern C and U in terms of shape, and coupled with the narrow tall frets offers extra hold and control. As for the circuitry, the Tim Shaw-designed V-Mod single-coils are engineered using a proprietary blend of alnico magnet types. In the neck pickup, an Alnico 5 under the bass strings delivers detailed low end, while an Alnico 2 under the treble strings adds warmth and clarity; the bridge is powered exclusively by Alnico 5 magnets.

It’s all of these tiny extras and adjustments which – without affecting the visual aesthetics of such a classic guitar – make the American Professional series a very dominant presence in the Telecaster lineup.

“THE DEEP C NECK SITS IN BETWEEN A MODERN C AND U IN TERMS OF SHAPE, AND COUPLED WITH THE NARROW TALL FRETS OFFERS EXTRA HOLD AND CONTROL.”



Fender American Ultra Telecaster

The Big F puts a contemporary spin on its new top-line Telecaster.

RRP: \$3,899
Body: Alder*
Neck: Maple (Bolt-On)
Scale: 25.5 inches
Fingerboard: Rosewood and Maple
Frets: 22 (Medium Jumbo)
Pickups: Two Ultra Noiseless Vintage Tele Single-Coil
Controls: Master Control w/ S-1 Switch / Master Tone / Three-Way Blade Selector
Hardware: Six-Saddle American Tele w/ Chromed Brass Saddles

PROS

- ▲ S-1 switching and ultra noiseless pickups offer wide sweep of Tele tones
- ▲ A very playable Tele
- ▲ Some of the smartest new Fender finishes in years
- ▲ Locking tuners

CONS

- ♥ Might be too new-school for some

Fender’s American Ultra Series was one of those event launches we only see every few years or so. It saw Fender revise its flagship US models, rolling out a number of contemporary features to suit today’s player, including compound radius fretboards, tapered heels, newly sculpted bodies, noiseless pickups and locking tuners. The Fender logo is rendered in gold foil on the headstock.

The American Ultra Tele wears these updates well. It has a compound 10-to-14-inch radius that feels right, especially atop the new Modern D profile neck. It’s a profile that plays quick but fills the palm in all the right ways, with its satin finish a super-smooth enabler for swift position shifts.

There are a suit of stunning new finishes – Texas Tea and Mocha Burst are particularly mind-blowing – but for all the modern accoutrements, the American Ultra Tele is still a textbook Tele, with raunchy twang and more than a little snarl when you turn the gain up. The S-1 switch allied to the three-way pickup position switching makes it sound a little like a ‘greatest hits’ of Tele tone. That in itself is enough of a recommendation.



Fender Parallel Universe Vol II Troublemaker Telecaster

The Telecaster reimaged... As a Les Paul?

RRP: \$4,899
Body: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany (Modern C-shape)
Scale: 25.5 inches
Fingerboard: Maple
Frets: 22
Pickups: Two Custom Double Tap Humbuckers
Controls: Volume 1 (Neck) / Tone 1 (Neck) / Volume 2 (Bridge) / Tone 2 (Bridge)
Hardware: Gold

PROS

- ▲ Unusual and collectable
- ▲ Custom Double Tap pickups

CONS

- ♥ One of the most expensive Teles

Looking almost more like a ‘70s Gibson Les Paul Custom thanks to its off-white finish, humbucker pickups, gold hardware and adjusto-matic bridge, this all-new Troublemaker Tele Deluxe (unveiled at NAMM this year) oozes class and functionality. And much like those famous Gibsons guitars, it boasts a mahogany body and neck for more pronounced mids and increased sustain.

Granted, that might sound a long way off what the original Telecasters were famous for – but the Parallel Series exists purely to enable Fender to go further with their world-class engineering and defy the very conventions they helped create. It’s further proof, if such was ever needed, that Fender are still the masters of innovation. 





EDDIE FOREVER

IN THE WAKE OF **EDDIE VAN HALEN'S** UNFORTUNATE PASSING AT AGE 65, GUITAR WORLD'S **MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN** LENDS HIS WORDS IN MEMORIAL OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST TALENTED, INNOVATIVE AND BELOVED GUITAR PLAYERS.

Eddie Van Halen, trailblazing Van Halen guitarist and one of the greatest guitar players of all time, died aged 65 on Tuesday, October 6th 2020.

His son, Van Halen bassist Wolfgang Van Halen, confirmed the news on Twitter with a statement that reads, "I can't believe I'm having to write this, but my father, Edward Lodewijk Van Halen, has lost his long and arduous battle with cancer this morning. He was the best father I could ever ask for. Every moment I've shared with him on and off stage was a gift. My heart is broken and I don't think I'll ever fully recover from this loss. I love you so much, Pop."

Eddie initially underwent treatment for throat cancer in 2000, before being declared cancer-free in 2002. Reports suggested the cancer had returned late last year. He is widely regarded as one of the guitar's most groundbreaking players - he was recently voted fourth place on Total Guitar's list of the greatest rock guitarists of all time - and changed the landscape for every player that followed with innovations in both playing style and gear.

Born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands on January 26 1955, Eddie emigrated to Pasadena, California with his older brother, Alex Van Halen, in February 1962.

Eddie's musical career started out on piano, where his inability to read music would often lead to him improvising his way around pieces from Bach or Mozart. But it was hearing his brother Alex's performance of The Surfaris' "Wipe Out" that led him to switch to electric guitar.

The brothers formed an early band called The

Broken Combs while at Hamilton Elementary School in Pasadena, at which time Eddie was still in fourth grade, which inspired him to focus on developing a career in music.

The roots of Van Halen were established 1972 when Alex and Eddie founded Genesis, later Mammoth, eventually changing the name to Van Halen in 1974 with the arrival of frontman David Lee Roth and bassist Michael Anthony. Prior to his joining, Eddie was handling both vocals and guitars, his six-string contributions heavily inspired by idols Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix.

"We played everywhere and anywhere, from backyard parties to places the size of your bathroom," Eddie told Guitar Player in 1978. "And we did it all without a manager, agent, or record company. We used to print up flyers announcing where we were going to play and stuff them into high school lockers. The first time we played we drew maybe 900 people, and the last time we played without a manager we drew 3,300 people."

The band's stellar live reputation earned them a recording contract with Warner Bros in 1977, which led to the creation and release of their landmark debut. 1978's Van Halen went on to change the face of guitar playing to come, thanks to Eddie's fiery and adventurous playing style, from the tight rhythmic riffs of "Runnin' With The Devil" and "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" to incendiary instrumental "Eruption", whose two-hand tapping techniques ushered in a whole generation of shredders.

Recalling the creation of "Eruption" in 1996, Eddie told Guitar World, "While we were recording



the album, I showed up at the studio early one day and started to warm up because I had a gig on the weekend and I wanted to practise my solo guitar spot. Our producer, Ted Templeman, happened to walk by and he asked, 'What's that? Let's put it on tape!'

"I played it two or three times for the record, and we kept the one that seemed to flow. Ted and Donn [Lande, engineer] liked it, and everyone else agreed that we should throw it on. I didn't even play it right. There's a mistake at the top end of it. Whenever I hear it, I always think, 'Man, I could have played that better.'"

Eddie's status as one of a new breed of guitar gods was cemented when Michael Jackson tapped him up to perform the iconic solo on global smash "Beat It".

As well as his playing, Eddie's gear innovations proved similarly influential, as he fused Stratocaster-style bodies with Gibson PAF humbuckers in his iconic striped "Frankenstein" model, which gave rise to a whole new trend of SuperStrat electric guitars in the '80s.

"Nobody taught me how to do guitar work: I learned by trial and error," he told *Guitar Player*. "I have messed up a lot of good guitars that way, but now I know what I'm doing, and I can do whatever I want to get them the way I want them. I hate store-bought, off-the-rack guitars. They don't do what I want them to do, which is kick ass and scream."

Van Halen's legendary 'brown sound' came courtesy of Marshall Super Lead 100-watt heads, run at lower voltages for a warmer, fatter overdriven tone. The sought-after tone was made available to the rest of the guitar world with the announcement of a signature amp, the Peavey 5150, in 1992, before it became part of the EVH Gear product line-up at its launch in 2007.

A string of successful albums with David Lee Roth followed Van Halen's debut, including 1984, which showcased some of Eddie's incandescent guitar playing yet with "Hot For Teacher", and a surprise shift to a more synth-driven sound courtesy of "Jump".

"When I first played 'Jump' for the band, nobody wanted to have anything to do with it," he told *Guitar World* in 2014. "Dave said that I was a guitar hero and I shouldn't be playing keyboards. My response was if I want to play a tuba or Bavarian cheese whistle, I will do it."

Tensions mounted within the band during touring of the album, leading to Roth's departure and the arrival of new frontman Sammy Hagar in 1986. Four albums followed with Hagar, with the band winning a Grammy Award for Best Hard Rock Performance With Vocal for the album *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge* in 1992. Hagar departed in 1996, after which followed a short-lived reunion with Roth and a single album fronted by Extreme's Gary Cherone.

Van Halen reunited with Roth, and released what would prove to be their final album, *A Different Kind of Truth*, in 2012. The band toured in support of the album, concluding their final live dates in October 2015.

All in all, Eddie's legacy is impossible to overestimate. From rock to blues, metal and beyond, his seismic rhythm playing, virtuosic leads and gear innovations have impacted every electric guitar player who has followed, and ensure his legacy will live on forever.

"If you want to be a rock guitarist you have to enjoy what you are doing," Eddie told *Guitar Player* in 1978. "You can't pick up a guitar and say, 'I want to be a rock star' just because you want to be one. You have to enjoy playing guitar. If you don't enjoy it, then it's useless."

There are few guitarists outside of his heroes, Clapton and Hendrix, who can match the degree of influence with which Eddie Van Halen has exerted on popular music.

BACK TO WHERE IT ALL STARTED

EDDIE VAN HALEN FIRST APPEARED ON THE COVER OF *GUITAR WORLD* WITH THE JANUARY '81 ISSUE. THEY ASKED READERS IF A YOUNG EVH WAS THE WORLD'S GREATEST GUITARIST, AND, VIA HEADLINE, DUBBED HIM *THE NEW KING OF HEAVY METAL GUITAR*.

*To celebrate Eddie's perennial legacy in the wake of his untimely passing, we're presenting the original interview, as conducted for *Guitar World* by **John Stix**, in its entirety.*

Were you as good a piano player as you are a guitarist?

I won first prize four years in a row at Long Beach City College for my category. The piano is a universal instrument. If you start there, learn your theory and how to read, you can go on to any other instrument.

Sounds like you had a solid foundation in the basics.

Well, I'm not a good reader. I would read and remember. The one thing I do have is good ears. I don't mean perfect pitch, but ears for picking things up. I developed my ear through piano theory, but I never had a guitar lesson in my life, except from Eric Clapton off of records.

Do you have the ability to think something and play it immediately?

Not automatically or perfectly, but that's the thing I don't think when I play. It's spontaneous, it's feeling. It's not calculated or figured out ahead of time. That's why you might say I play off the wall. When I was in junior college at Pasadena City, I took scoring and arranging class with a Dr. Fischer. Frank Zappa had also been his student. Dr. Fischer was very avant-garde and the one thing he taught me was f*** the rules. If it sounds good, it is good.

I take it you took to the guitar fairly easily?

Not to sound-ego-out, but I was a natural. My father has been a professional musician all his life, and he said, 'Kid you've got it.' Some people have got it and some people don't. Even people who don't have it can practise long enough to get it down to a point.

But there's always a difference between a person who has the feel and those who don't. The difference is in the amount of emotion expressed in your playing. I listened to Debussy by two different pianists and it was like day and night. One guy had it and every note was beautiful. The other guy had lead fingers.

Did you go through a period of imitation before your own days of invention?

Definitely, and Clapton was it. I knew every note he played. That's what I was known for around home. Me, Alex and another bass player called ourselves Mammoth and we were the junior Cream. [Shortly before going on stage, Eddie played Clapton's Crossroads solo for me, calling it "one of the best live recorded songs ever".]

It's funny; when I do interviews and tell people Clapton was my main influence, they go "Who?" Because they're thinking about Clapton doing Lay Down Sally, not the Bluesbreakers or Cream."

Your current trio and a singer format is not much different than Cream. Have you ever thought of working with another guitarist?

I've never played with another guitarist because I make enough sound on my own. What I loved about Cream is that everybody had to put out. It was three people making all this noise and you could hear each person.

The Allman Brothers' feel is something I never got into. Duane was an excellent slide guitarist, but I never cared for Dickie Betts. I found their music too cluttered for my taste.

In your Clapton days, I'm sure you did some intense studying on the instrument. Do you





still work as hard to improve your playing?

Yes, but I don't call it practise. This will sound real funny to you, but we tour for eight weeks and then take eight days off. When I'm home on a break, I lock myself in my room and play guitar.

After two or three hours, I start getting into this total meditation. It's a feeling few people experience, and that's usually when I come up with weird stuff. It just flows. I can't force myself. I don't sit down and say I've got to practise.

Can you be specific about how you play better today than, say, when the first album was released?

I don't consider myself a better player. I consider myself different. With the technical ability I have, I can play just about as fast as I'd like to play. Any faster at the volume I play, and I'd have distortion. So technically there's no reason to get any faster.

But do you still reach any new plateaus?

Sure I do.

Can you point some out on your records?

The solo on "Cradle Will Rock" is different. One guitar player who I respect and think is the baddest, is Allan Holdsworth. I do one short lick on "Cradle which is very spontaneous. That came out because I've been listening to this guy. On the second album I expanded a little more on harmonics.

You're talking about hitting false harmonics by using your right hand to hit the fretboard?

Yes. First I just used my first finger on the right hand to hit a note (Heard on Eruption from the first Van Halen album). Then I discovered the harmonic by hitting the fret an octave above where the left hand is positioned. Now I'm expanding on that, by using all the harmonics in between the octave.

I also use the slap technique, which I got from black bass players. Jimi Hendrix influenced me on how to hold the pick when I do the harmonics. I saw the Hendrix movie and discovered where the pick goes when it disappears. He holds it between the joints of his middle finger. I pick weird too. I use the thumb and the middle finger.

One thing that strikes me about your playing is that of all the high-energy players, you don't take long guitar solos.

I haven't heard anyone do a long interesting guitar solo outside of early

Clapton. I do a guitar solo in the live show which is long, and some people may think boring, but I have fun. Clapton was my favourite.

With his feel he'd hit one note where someone else would hit twenty, and his one would do something to you, whereas the other person's twenty would leave you flat.

I'm going to turn that against you, pointing out your own note-y-ness.

I'm not Eric Clapton. I might play fast, but there's a lot of people who play fast with no feel at all. I think I'm high-energy, but I think I combine a little more feel and some different techniques than other high-energy players.

Have you ever thought that you may now be part of the guitar heritage you once studied? Thinking of players like Beck, Page, Clapton and Hendrix, you may be next in line.

It's very hard to say. That's like me telling you I'm the best. I can't say that. I'm not. I can't say I'm going to influence people, but I know a lot of people are using their right hand on the fingerboard now that never did it before.

Would you like to be thought of as a great player?

I'd just like people to like what I play. I don't want people to say, "You're Number One". It's a matter of taste. To me Allan Holdsworth is Number One. Other kids might listen to him and not even understand what he's doing. Older people might think I suck.

Hard rock is usually associated with a younger crowd. I think it's something you grow through more than with.

When I want to rock out, I put on the albums that were happening when I was 15. Does that make sense to you?

Yes. It might be that's what you remember as the good times. It could be because you don't like what's on now. Rock 'n' roll is for 12- to 21-year-olds. When you get past that age, people have more responsibilities. They don't buy records anymore, they stop going to concerts, they have jobs, and a lot more troubles.

What about your quieter side? Beck, Page and Leslie West all put out acoustic guitar pieces that contrasted with their normal styles.

There's a lot you haven't heard yet. I had more of an acoustic intro to "In A Simple Rhyme", but the reason we didn't do it is because everyone would immediately go, "He's pulling a Zeppelin." We did "Could This Be Magic?", but it's a joke.

Have you started thinking about the fourth album?

I've got a load of ideas, but we don't know what we're going to do until we walk into that studio. What we do is tour for ten months, come home, go to the basement and make songs out of the ideas.

We invite Ted [Templeman, producer] down and he picks what he likes. We argue a bit, compromise, and we usually have a final say on what material goes on. We spend a week rehearsing in the basement and go straight in the studio.

Sounds like you like to work quickly.

For "Women And Children First", it took four days for the music and six days for the singing. "Dance The Night Away" (on *Van Halen II*) was written on the spot, in the studio. I never played slide guitar before "Could This Be Magic?" I had something totally different in mind for the song, and Ted says, "Try playing slide?" I did it right there on the spot and that was it.

"Cradle Will Rock" was first take. A bunch of songs were first takes. We don't go for perfection, we just go for spirit. There are mistakes, but I'm happy with everything that's on our records. That's not to say when we do them live we might do it differently."

Do you have a preference between live work and recording?

Performing, of course! I play for self-satisfaction, but it makes it even better when other people enjoy it. 



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YOUR STUDIO MIXES



RECORDING TECHNIQUES WITH ALAIN JOHANNES

WHETHER FOR HIS FRENZIED FRETTING AND BOISTEROUS BASS WORK IN BANDS LIKE **ELEVEN**, **QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE** AND **THEM CROOKED VULTURES**, OR FOR HIS GENRE-DEFINING WIZARDRY BEHIND THE CONSOLE AS A PRODUCER AND ENGINEER, THERE ARE PLENTY OF REASONS WHY **ALAIN JOHANNES** IS SUCH A REVERED NAME IN ROCK, GRUNGE, PUNK, AND PRETTY MUCH ANY GENRE OF GUITAR MUSIC THAT MADE IT THROUGH THE '90S. WITH HIS LATEST SOLO ALBUM *HUM* DOING THE ROUNDS, WE CAUGHT UP WITH JOHANNES TO GLEAN SOME OF HIS SIGNATURE BRIGHT, ENERGETIC WISDOM.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

When you're making your own music, do you follow the same formulas you would as a producer with any other band, or do you need to approach it from a different perspective?

I approach every project in the way that I feel is most natural - my resonance and my empathy and my desire to connect to the project as a part of it, whether as an assistant, a guide or a team player, or a family member to the music - which means that every time I work on a new record, it's a different set of things that happen. I don't have one definitive way of doing it. First of all, I need to resonate with what the artist I'm producing wants to achieve, and figure out what my role is in helping them do that. Sometimes it's intensive, and sometimes it's very mild. It might just be that I need to make a happy environment for them to feel creative in, and make sure that creativity gets documented and recorded properly. Sometimes they want me to get in there and contribute to the writing and the arrangement and all of that stuff.

When it comes to my own stuff, I think I've prepared my entire life by loving and learning other instruments. I've spent years collecting equipment, and I've got my setup to a very efficient point - I can just go into the room and there's five or six different microphones ready in different positions, and depending on what instrument I'm using, I'll choose what microphone to use. And all the microphones and the instruments and everything - the

percussion and my horns, my 60-plus stringed instruments and all the exotic instruments - they're all basically living in this space, just ready to be grabbed.

I love flowing with whatever the music dictates, or whatever my instincts are telling me to do. For example, on a couple of tunes I used a banjo, because I'm yet to purchase a hurdy-gurdy but I wanted that kind of medieval, pagan feeling. And I totally knew that if I tuned the banjo in roots and fifths and played it with a bow, with that midrange that it has, and get a couple strings droning in the same note, I would get that feeling. And I just love that kind of spontaneous, improvisational kind of approach - it happens really quickly and there's very little thinking to it.

Do you find it difficult to be objective when you're in that position?

I don't, because for some reason I've got this view towards my music that it's something that already exists in the ether - I'm just receiving a transmission from the universe that I'm supposed to decode through my particular filters. I don't really look at it like, "Oh, this is mine, I did this" - I mean obviously, y'know, it says 'written and performed by Alain Johannes' on the sticker, but it's not mine to claim - the music is there, and I'm just here to help it come into existence. It feels natural to me that way, and it helps me be able to look at it afterwards and go, "Yeah, this is music!" It just happens to be mine, y'know? I don't want to attach an ego to it -

whether it's good or not, or whatever - I'm really trying to just document the feeling I have and my state of being in a particular time.

The first takes are always some of my favourites. The closest I can get to the exact moment song appears is usually the best, because it has the most energy to me - it has the particular kind of that energy that I like, which I listen for in other music as well. And y'know, I know full well that if I start to obsess over a tone or a guitar solo, and then I might do ten takes of it before I realise that the first one was the one that felt the best for the song. Learning that throughout the years was crucial - especially when I was younger, because y'know, when you're green to it all, you think that there *has* to be a process and it has to be arduous, and you have to torture yourself, and only through blood, sweat and tears can you get amazing results. But that couldn't be less true.

I'll tell you what though, starting the record is always the hardest part. I can't will that to happen - I can never convince myself to just sit down and go, "Alright, I'm going to start making music now," because if I'm going to come up with a good idea, then it's going to happen at whatever spontaneous moment it's going to happen in, y'know? And to put a timeframe on making an album just doesn't make sense. A good album might take four days to make, like *Spark*, or 14, like *Fragments* - or other records I've been a part of where it took ten months or whatever.

What is it about the way music was made in the '90s that makes it so beloved amongst people today?

My first recordings were in the '80s, straight out of high school, and so that time period was particularly exciting for me. But my approach was just what everybody else was doing - and *everybody* was doing it that way. You can spot an '80s-sounding song a mile away. And I think the way things changed in the '90s was a reaction to that - and MTV, and a lot of the things that happened in the cultural shift back then. And also, the energy in Seattle at the time - there was just this amazing pool of talent that happened to be there for some reason. I don't know if it was the environment that fostered it - a little darker and colder, more melancholy, and just more interesting than what came from a lot of the happier pop or hair metal or whatever else was happening at the time.

I think the way that a lot of those records were made - especially in some of the earlier studios that still had the analogue technology, before everyone went digital - they made them more timeless sounding. It's like jeans, a t-shirt, a leather jacket and a pair of boots: there aren't too many distinctive features about that outfit, but it's always cool - that kind of stuff works almost any time, anywhere - you can wear that and just *know* you look stylish. And when you record music without too many effects and you're just capturing the energy, it tends to have a more timeless kind of sound. A lot of those recordings in the '90s were very full-sounding and very powerful, but they didn't have a lot of fat around the edges.

I mean sonically, y'know, you can't really pigeonhole it - it's more the feeling of the music that you look at and say, "Oh, that's from the '90s." There was just something in the air at that point in time; especially in Seattle. The movement and the name 'grunge' was ascribed to it after the fact, but it just happened to be one of those moments and places.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned about making music?

I think this constant surge towards autonomy is so overdue. Music used to be so prohibitive, y'know? You could rehearse and do demos and stuff, but to actually go and make a master recording, you had to hire a studio and pay for engineers, producers, maybe session musicians... So pretty early on, Natasha [Shneider] and I started keeping some recording gear around - enough to get things going that we could make good recordings on our own. And I think the key was having our own studio when Eleven was born, thanks to Chris Cornell inviting the president of A&M over, him liking our music and giving us a record deal, and then letting us use the budget for the album to buy the gear that would become the studio in our house. 

15 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR MIXES

BY FOLLOWING SOME BASIC STEPS USED BY MOST PROFESSIONAL MIXDOWN ENGINEERS, YOUR TRACKS WILL BE IMPROVED EXPONENTIALLY.

WORDS BY **RON ZABROCKI**.

1. USE REFERENCES

Listen to tried-and-true mixes, possibly similar to what you are mixing. This will get your ears used to the monitors and put your head in the right place. Without references, you might be lost before you begin – unless you do tonnes of mixing in your own professional studio.

2. VOLUME

Obvious, right? But use volume changes to enhance dynamics. A de-esser is a frequency-based volume control – use one to tame sibilance. And remember, silence is also a part of volume. Use it. Mutes. Automation. Try some old-school tricks like matching bass volume to the vocals. And begin watching the output level – it needs to be constantly watched.

3. PANNING

Be realistic first and abstract later. Use panning to increase definition, width and depth. Ask yourself if the drums really need to be in stereo. Or is mono a better choice for verses and stereo for choruses? Should guitars be hard right and left? Maybe three quarters of the way is right, and wider on choruses.

4. MIDRANGE

It's all about the midrange – this is where most music lives. Learn it. Embrace it. Learn to control it with volume and panning. Do not let it clutter up the middle. But do not be afraid of it.

5. LOWER MIDRANGE

This is the biggest area where we find muddiness and cluttered, ill-defined mixes. Learn to cut it, not boost it.

6. EQ

As far as EQ is concerned, cut before you boost. Listen before you do anything. Once understood, be fearless – when need be. But mostly be cautious. Use EQ also to carve out frequencies to make room for vocals and such. Learn about shelving and bell curves. Learn what we mean by “Q”.

7. DO IT YOUR WAY

Build a mix in a way you are comfortable. Some start with drums. Others, vocals. All ways are valid.

8. START DRY

You'll be surprised how much better your mixes will be when concentrating on the steak instead of the sizzle. If you can make a mix sound great dry, enhancing with small amounts of special effects will only help.

9. GUT INSTINCTS

Learn to set up a mix fast using instincts, and save it. Overthinking will often result in a lifeless mix. I have often toiled for hours on a mix only to realise it ended up sounding like crap. Then I started over and worked fast –

way better. Not always, but this can be a great starting point. Trust yourself.

10. DYNAMICS / COMPRESSION / LIMITING

These can and should be used to correct problems, shape the overall sound, and tame less-than-controlled drummers and bassists. Keep the rhythm section solid. These can also be used to keep a vocal present – not to mention pump up a less-than-powerful sound.

11. SPATIAL EFFECTS / DELAYS / REVERBS

Use only as much of these as needed. Use only where needed. Use delay before the reverb to separate the reverb from the source. Less mud. More clarity and definition.

12. MODULATION EFFECTS

Flange, phase, etcetera – use as ear candy. Enhance sections. Can be used on entire mixes for wild sounds. Most often used on individual instruments in small doses to add interest.

13. OUTPUT LEVEL

Be careful here. Too loud and you will add distortion; too low and noise might become present. I am safe at this point and I check my output level often. I do use a limiter to grab peaks only, just to be safe. I also use an EQ and compressor here, but both of these are not always used. Glue the mix together a bit. And watch the volume. Mixing too loud will only hurt your ears, fatigue you and create mixes that only sound good when played loud. Low to moderate listening volumes go a long way to revealing a true mix.

14. MIXES

I always do alternate mixes – especially if I am fatigued and questions arise. I always listen back the next day with a fresh perspective. Mixes with vocals up or down, bass up or down, drums up or down, etcetera – having these done already helps me immediately compare them, and usually aids in my remixing using these changes.

15. BREAK THE RULES

You have to know the rules in order to truly break them! Start with the previously mentioned mixing considerations, then do what you feel sounds correct! Exploration and experimentation have no pathway, nor any real expected payoff. You have to get through it to realise the fruits of your labor! That new sound could be sitting in the area between your mind and your laptop. Find your sound. 🎧





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POSITIVE GRID BIAS FX 2 MOBILE

NEXT-GENERATION IOS MOBILE GUITAR PROCESSING FROM POSITIVE GRID.

After a decade of growing familiar with apps and interfaces for our mobiles, we're past the novelty of being able to play our guitar through our phone or tablet. Our main first world problem is no longer how to do it, but rather which app we choose to indulge our guitar playing on-the-go. Positive Grid's BIAS FX was something of a game-changer in this regard, and now, five years on from its original tablet-only release, Positive Grid has followed up with the BIAS FX 2 Mobile app.

So what's new? Well, quite a lot, actually. BIAS FX 2 Mobile is available in four different versions, unlocked via in-app purchases: Free, Standard, Professional and Elite. Not only has Positive Grid vastly expanded the number of amps, cabs and effects on offer, it's added a built-in looper, its new Guitar Match function and ToneCloud preset resource across the board.

Meanwhile, the Professional and Elite versions of the app offer IR-loading capabilities, dual-mic positioning and the Elite version benefits from three new Fuzz, Time and Harmonizer models as well as eight new HD studio rack-style effects.

There's quite a lot to digest, and depending on which version you choose you'll receive more of everything. For example, the Free version of the app comes with four amps and eight effects pedals to experiment with. By comparison, the \$109.99 Elite version (at the time of writing currently on offer at \$79.99) comes with 106 amps and 141 effects pedals. That's a hardware-worthy number of features – and with a desktop plug-in price to match for the full Elite version, our expectations are high!

The main screen of the app displays your complete signal path, as well as this you can see your input and output levels, access the tuner, metronome, looper, Guitar Match function and output settings. It's laid out in an intuitive manner, with options for a dual or single signal path, allowing you to split your signal and run it

through two individual amp and effects rigs before it blends them back to your stereo output.

Making changes to your pedals and amp is as simple as double-tapping an existing pedal, or pressing the add or replace buttons if you're starting from scratch. From here you get an enlarged view of the module you're editing with easily-accessible controls for amps and pedals, plus the model finder drop-down menu allowing you to switch to different pedals or amps. When you've finished tweaking, you simply close the screen and you're back to your main rig overview.

Amp-wise, BIAS has you covered for everything from the cleanest of cleans with models based on amps such as the Roland JC-120, right up to modern high-gain amps. But what we really like about the selection is that you're by no means limited to the usual handful of 'Tweed', 'Plexi' 'Treadplate' models.

Positive Grid has clearly set out to deliver not just variety, but a comprehensive list of emulations including all the big guns you'd expect (Marshall, Fender, Vox, Mesa-Boogie, Peavey, Orange etc.) but there are also Dumbles, Dr Z, Matchless, Two Rock. In many cases there are multiple emulations of brands within each category too.

The same goes for the effects section. Need a noise gate? Positive Grid has provided four. Each with their own list of modes and options for you to tweak. Obviously it would be a strange effect to really get excited about, but the point here is that every section of BIAS FX 2 Mobile is packed with features.

The sonic quality is there to match, too. The overdrive section alone contains thirteen drive pedals ranging from Tube Screamers (both kinds) to a Klon. There are vintage Fuzz Face emulations right through to an approximation of modern classics like the Z.Vex Fuzz Factory, while the EQ, Modulation, Delay and Reverb categories are as equally well-stocked.

If you've never tried auditioning 20 delay pedals back

to back, you'll most certainly enjoy flicking through the list on offer here, ranging from straight digital delays through analogue-style, tape emulations, harmonised echoes, reversed delays... You get the point.

Obviously this cavernous list of gear is the top offering – unless you pay for the full Elite bundle, you'll receive around half this amount from the Professional bundle, and fewer again if you opt for the Standard or Free versions. As mentioned, all four levels come with the looper, which in itself is a creative, fun and easy-to-use addition which we actually found ourselves going back to again and again while experimenting with different presets. It's a credit to Positive Grid that it is included across the board, as it could quite easily have been an add-on purchase in its own right.

The one feature that left us slightly cold is the new Guitar Match function. The idea is that you can 'sample' the sound of a guitar's pickups and then apply the captured response to another guitar; even if it has completely different electronics.

On paper, it sounds brilliant, and while it works to a point, we found that it added a noticeable change in feel regardless of the guitars we used. The result was definitely an altered tone, however, it introduced a short latency, which also seems to have the effect of dulling the attack of our picking somewhat. It's definitely a useable function, but not quite ready to morph a Strat into a Les Paul Terminator 1000-style just yet.

We should also mention that Positive Grid has included detailed MIDI control of every function of every piece of gear on the list. This means that with an addition of a MIDI foot pedal you can not only jump between presets, but switch amps, change volumes, EQ settings, drive levels, or any other function of the gear by simply 'long-pressing' the unit you wish to have control over, and quickly assign any of its parameters to an external switch, knob or expression pedal with the simple MIDI Learn function. 🎛️

▶ WHAT WE RECKON

PROS

- Easy to understand
- Brilliant sound quality
- Huge number of models in the full version
- Generous inclusions even in the free version
- Full MIDI controller support for footswitches

CONS

- The higher tiers do become expensive 'for an app'
- No Positive Grid foot controller available at the time of writing
- No Android version yet

▶ CONTACT

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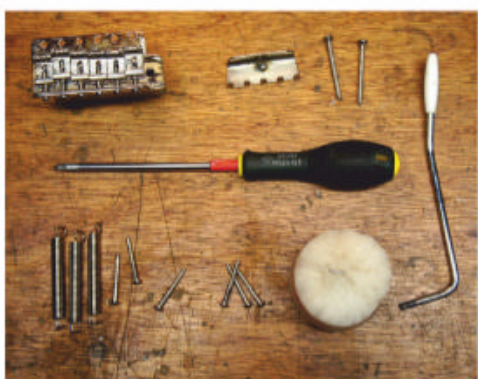


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remember
Modern style Strat bridges with two posts do away with the need for these six misunderstood screws and reduce friction at the same time.

SETTING UP STRAT TREMOLO SCREWS

YOUR GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND SETTING THE COUPLING SCREWS THAT HOLD YOUR BRIDGE ON.

WORDS BY **JACK ELLIS.**

In this article we're covering a strange, small but crucial part of setting up a 'vintage' Strat-style tremolo - you can have as many goes at it as you like until you're happy, but once it's set properly there's no reason to ever change it.

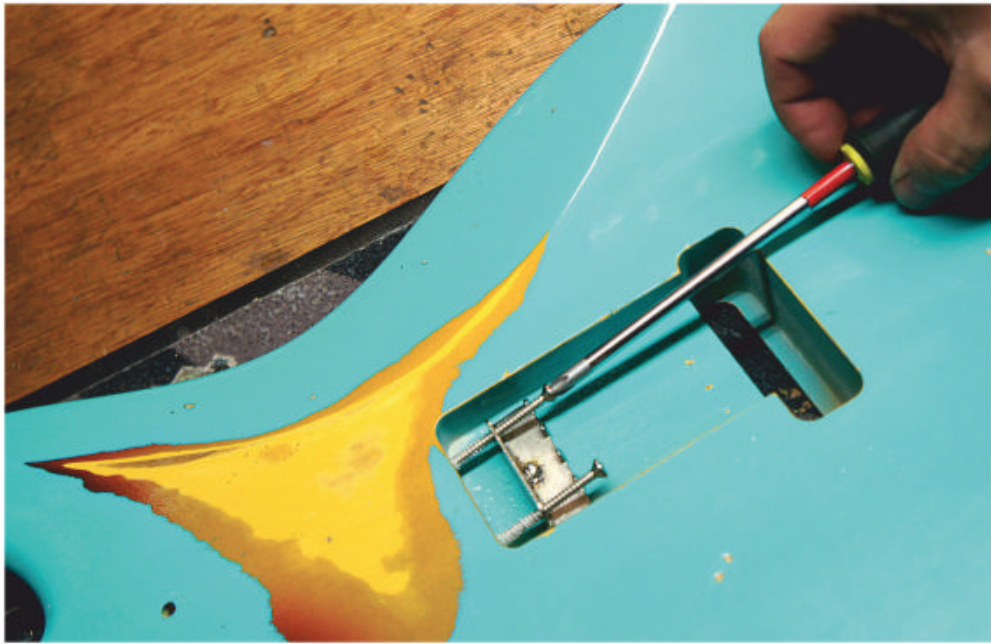
What do these screws do?

Well for a starter they're the fastening wood screws for the tremolo. That's not all though; they also allow the trem plate to tilt just like a hinge thanks to a bevel on the rear of the tremolo plate.

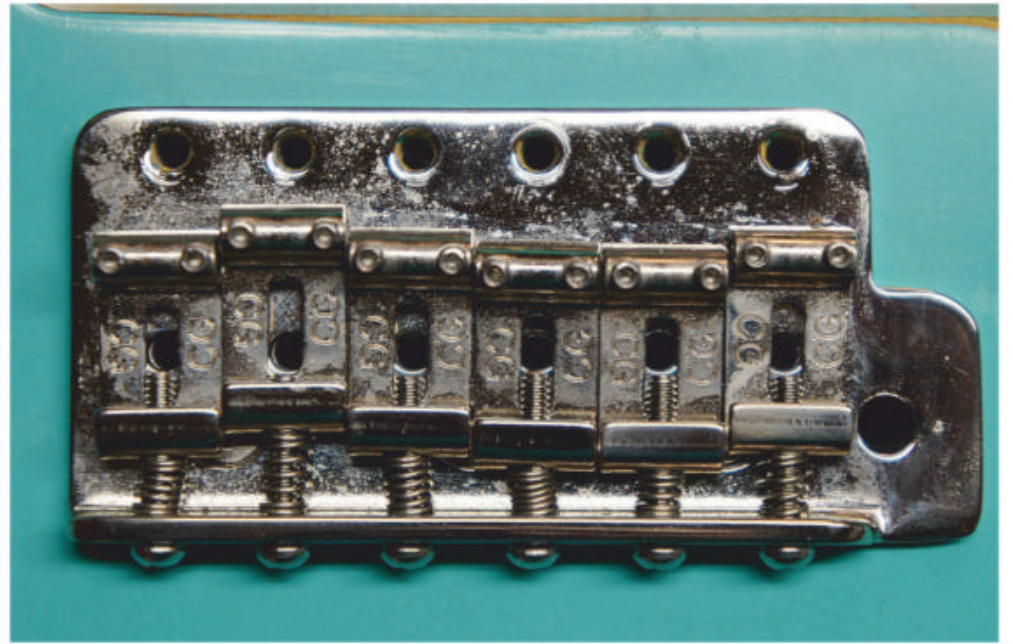
Why are there six of them?

Each screw increases the surface area that's connected to the wood. This is called coupling - you can set up your six-screw trem with only the outer two screws, but you'll suffer a worse coupling. Coupling is responsible for the transfer of string vibration to the guitar body and therefore sustain and tonality!

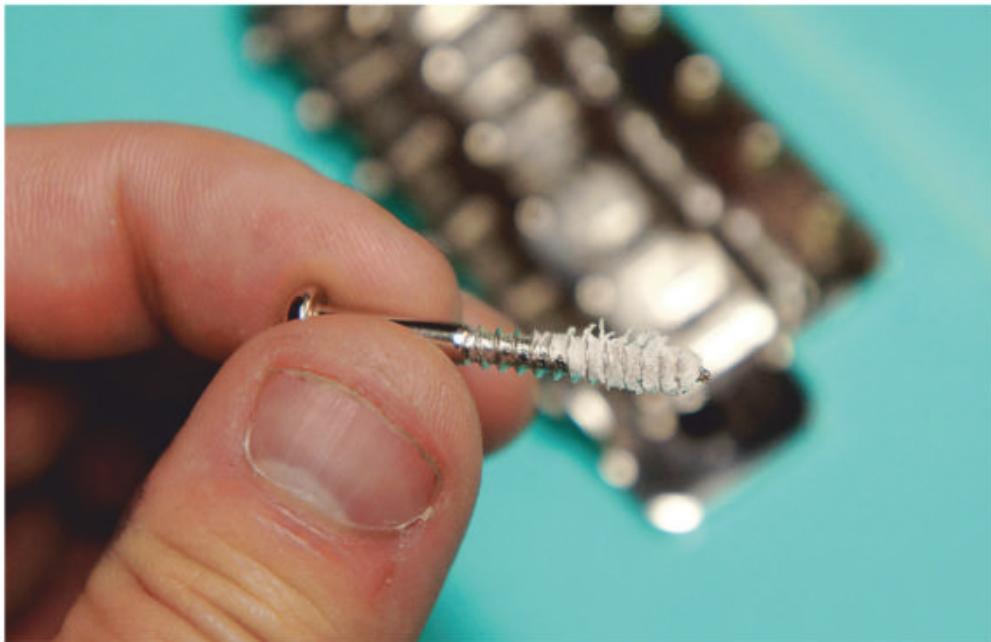
There's one true setting for these screws that allows your tremolo to be set floating, flat or even blocked - they all need the same. We'll show you how this mysterious task is done.



1 This new bridge came with a tremolo spring claw to install. This fellow goes into the back cavity and is held in with two screws. As these screws are quite girthy and are likely being screwed into hardwood, so let's give them a fighting chance. Rubbing the screw threads on wax really helps them in. We'll need the claw later on.



2 Our six-screw vintage-style bridge absolutely needs the corresponding holes in the guitar body to line up perfectly. We have a match here, but mismatches are common, and never good. If your bridge is mismatched or wonky then it needs taking to a pro. Alternatively, you could buy another bridge with a matching hole spacing.



3 It worked well last time, so let's wax the wood screw threads again. This is one of the six screws that fasten the tremolo to the body; getting a good quality bridge will also ensure that you get decent screws. We've seen some very sketchy, soft screws in our time, which are bad because they can shear off inside the body.



4 Pop all six screws in, but leave the middle four proud. Here's the technical part: we're going to first focus on the outside two screws. If these are tightened all the way then the tremolo will dump forward and won't sit flat. On the other hand, leave them too loose and the front can tip up - it's a fine balance.



5 Here's what it looks like when the screws are too loose. This allows the tremolo toe to be pulled upwards by the springs, causing bad tuning issues, excessive crunching from the tremolo and irregular sustain as you move the tremolo. Think about it - when you dip the tremolo arm the contact point on the body will shift.



6 Here the screws are too tight, which stops the trem resting down properly, even when you pull the tremolo arm upward. If you force it you will bend parts of the tremolo. It will sound terrible after this, and again it will be awful for tuning stability. At the extreme, the timber may be damaged and lose its flat surface. Very, very not good.

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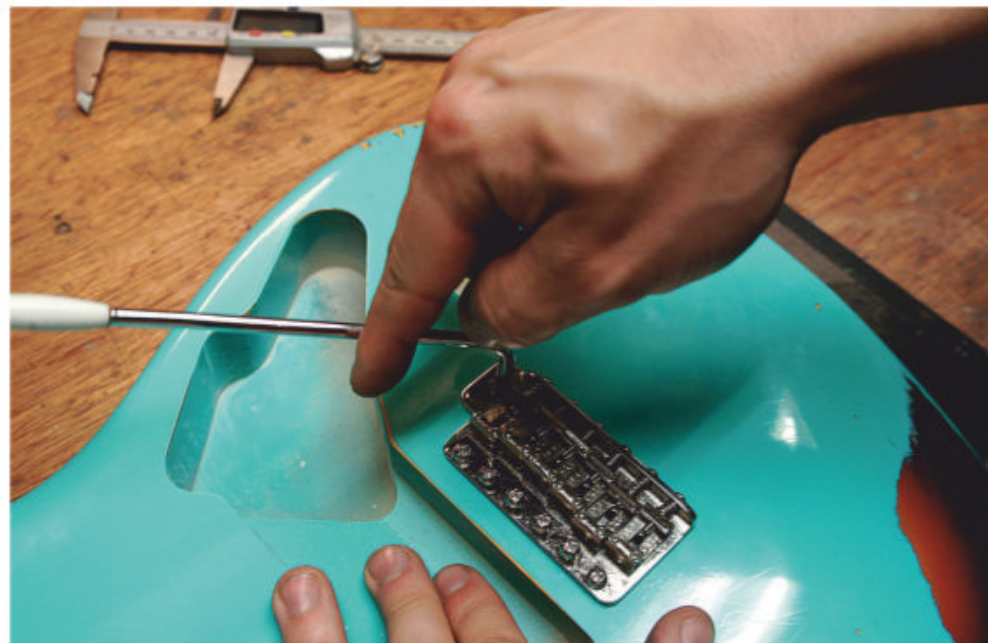
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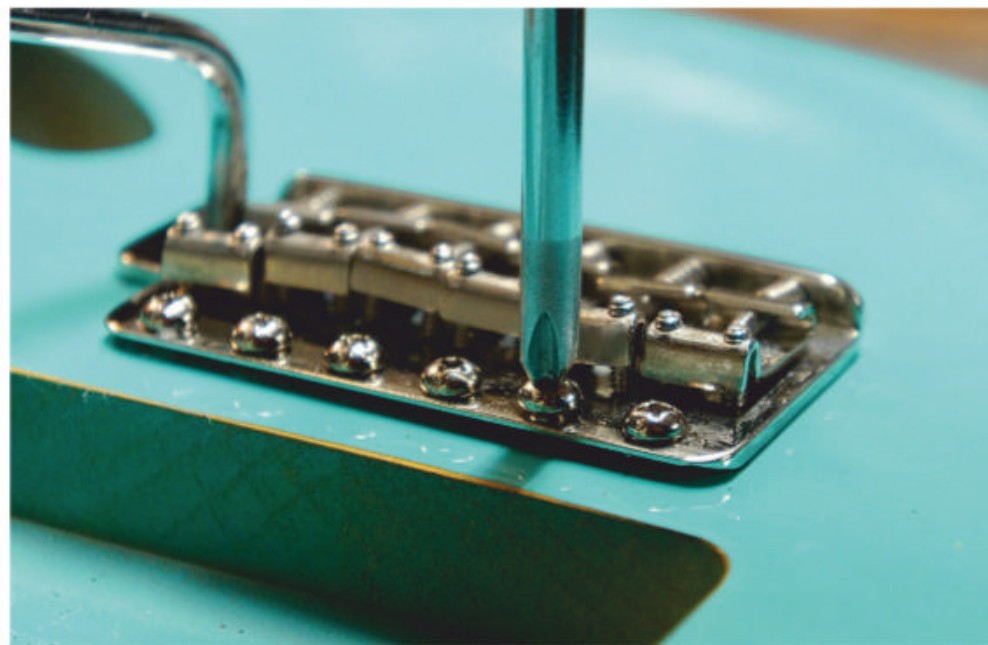
7 Balance is restored. This is what you want: a nice even contact at both the toe and the heel of the tremolo plate. Bear in mind that this also needs to be identical on both sides of the tremolo, bass and treble. Can you see that we've only been tinkering with the outermost two screws?



8 If only we had a little handle so we could easily check our settings... ah! The tremolo arm. Screw it in all the way down so there's no clunking between the thread of the arm and the block, then test that the tremolo has free movement and is not sticking (or rubbing on anything in the rear cavity!)



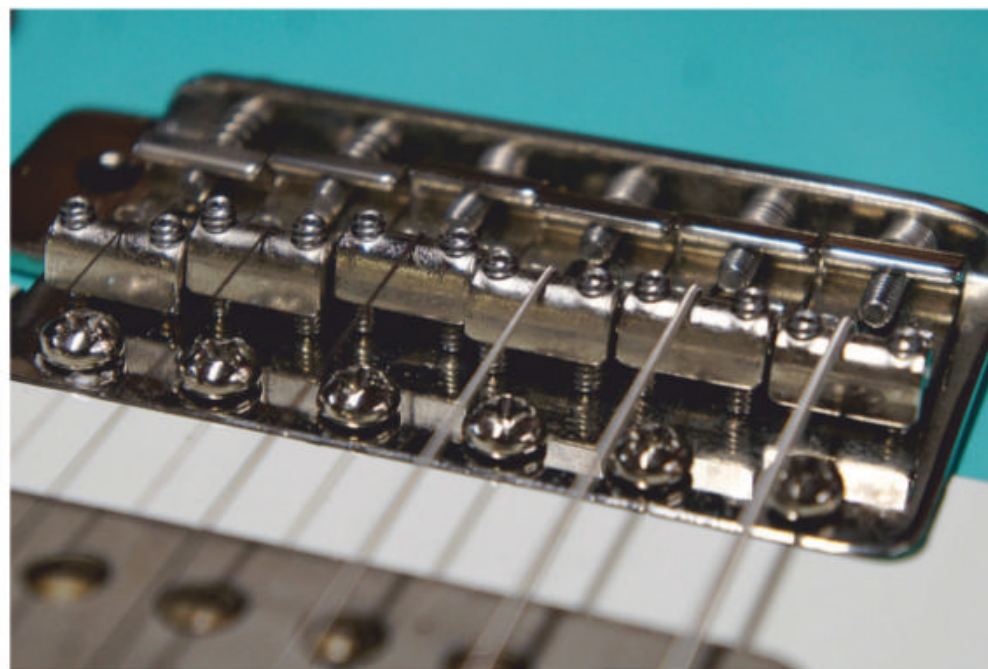
9 Top tip: without springs or strings in the way we can use the sound of the tremolo hitting the paint to determine its settings. You should have a nice crisp "thunk" when the trem reaches the paint, indicating a solid contact. If the screws are too tight then it will soften that sound. Experiment and set the outside two screws.



10 With your "thunk" achieved, you can now edge the middle screws down. Keep testing the sound and feel to make sure you don't disturb it. Our method is to bring the screw down to the point where it affects the sound and then slacken it off. If in doubt it's better to unscrew a quarter of a turn. Keep testing until it's bang on.



11 Pop those springs in, you'll be thankful that you didn't crank up the tremolo claw loads in step one now. Choosing a tension setting for your tremolo is a whole other article, but it runs in tandem with your string gauge and tuning choice. Setting these three or so springs allows you to also tilt the tremolo - go nuts!



12 Here's the bridge after setup. The saddle's radius, action and intonation have all been set up and the tremolo, by the owners choice, has been set flush to the paintwork. Now that the fastening screws are set you're free to set the tremolo flat or floating as you like. This is set for life now - or until you change the bridge again. 🎸



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ EFFECTIVE PICKING FOR YOUR SOLOS
- ✓ IMPROVE YOUR TIMING
- ✓ TWO HARD-ROCK LEAD LICKS

PICKING UP THE BASICS

MASTER THE BASICS OF PICKING AND IMPROVE YOUR SOLOING TECHNIQUES WITH THIS IN-DEPTH LESSON BY **CHRIS BIRD**.

“I already use a pick. What more do I really need to know?”

Good question! Picking is a surprisingly involved area of guitar playing. Though you only have to choose between downstrokes and upstrokes, how you employ that triangular piece of plastic can have a major impact on technique, playing speed, and even your tone.

“Well, consider me surprised! What else can you tell me?”

When you pluck your guitar's strings, you'll use either a downstroke or an upstroke. Simple, right? However, if you use a technique known as 'alternate picking', you can improve your timing and speed. You'll probably do it naturally – it's harder to explain than it is to get started, in fact.

“You might as well try and explain it, though!”

Yes, well here goes! The idea is to sync your downstrokes and upstrokes in time with the music you're playing. You'll probably feel emphasis in the music which will guide you. Take a look at the boxout where we explain more.

“Down, up, down, up – I get it, but I'm struggling to apply it to my playing.”

Remember, most real music features space and rhythm – not just constant runs of

alternate picking. The trick is to keep your down-up motion going even where there isn't a note to play. Take a listen to the first verse in Cory Wong's “The Optimist” to hear how it's done.

“Do lots of guitar players tend to use alternate picking?”

Every guitarist uses it to some extent. Certain songs even feature long runs of pure alternate picking. For instance, Rammstein's jaw-dropping shock-rock epic “Deutschland” features Richard Kruspe's cool alternate picked line played in unison with the synth. Full-on alternate picking like this is really hard, though – for now, you're better off using it in small bursts, where it'll actually be easier than using only downstrokes or some other rhythm. Like we say: it'll help you stay in time and gradually build speed.

“Got it. Shall we play some music?”

Sure! Take a look at the first tab example below. It's a fairly simple hard rock lead guitar line. There are potentially several different ways you could pick it, but be sure to start with a down-up-down run to manage that quick opening phrase. Our second tab example follows essentially the same rhythm, but with different notes. You can use strict alternating or experiment with a more fluid approach.

PICKING TIPS...

Alternate picking in three different time signatures.

First, note that $\geq$ and v are the symbols for downstrokes and upstrokes respectively.

1) PICK IN 4/4 TIME

Count to four in time with the music. Pick down on the numbered beats and up in between.

1 2 3 4
 $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v

2) PICK IN 3/4 TIME

3/4 time is like 4/4, but with three beats in each bar. Again, use alternate down- and upstrokes.

1 2 3
 $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v

3) PICK IN 4/4 TIME AT DOUBLE SPEED

Here you'll be playing four pick strokes for every beat. It's common in funk and in faster soloing.

1 2 3 4
 $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v

4) PICK IN 6/8 TIME

It's actually easier to get the 6/8 feel by counting '1 & a 2 & a' here. Still, you're just swapping between down- and upstrokes.

1 2 3 4 5 6
 $\geq$ v $\geq$ v $\geq$ v

1 LICK #1

$\text{♩} = 95$ A^5 G^5 A^5 N.C. A^5 G^5 A^5 G/B C^5

TAB: 7 5 7 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 4 5

Picking: $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$

Playing down-up-down on the first three notes is much easier than playing all downstrokes, or any other combination of downs and ups.

2 LICK #2

A^5 G^5 A^5 N.C. A^5 G^5 A^5 G/B C^5

TAB: 8 7 5 7 5 8 7 5 7 5 7 5

Picking: $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$ $\square$

Follow our picking directions to keep your alternate picking in sync with the music. There are other options, but this is the best way to stay in time.



MINOR PENTATONIC RIFFS

USE THIS ESSENTIAL SCALE SHAPE TO GIVE YOUR RIFFS A WICKED BOOST OF FLAVOUR.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **CHRIS BIRD**.

“What’s the minor pentatonic scale?”

This is a sequence of notes that guitarists use a lot. And we mean a lot! It appears extensively in blues, metal, jazz, and almost any pop- and rock-based styles for that matter. Greats like Angus Young and BB King – as well as more contemporary rockers like Scott Holiday, Jake Kiszka and Joel O’Keeffe – base loads of riffs and solos around it.

“Interesting. Tell me more.”

Well, the minor pentatonic scale gets its name from ‘penta-’ meaning ‘five’ and ‘-tonic’ meaning ‘tones’, or more simply, ‘notes’. Obviously, what we’re telling you is that it’s a five-note scale. And just like a minor chord, there’s a dark, moody vibe – that’s what minor means, if you remember.

“It’s a moody five-note scale. I get it! How can I use it in my playing?”

The easiest way to use the scale is to play one note at a time – so that means you’ll be playing simple solos or riffs. We’ve looked at pentatonic solos before, so let’s look at riffs here.

“Okay – what exactly is a riff?”

It’s a fairly loose term, but generally, it refers to a short, repeating line of music. Think of tracks like “Layla” by Derek And The Dominos, “Seven

Nation Army” by The White Stripes or “Blow” by Ed Sheeran, Chris Stapleton and Bruno Mars. They’re not all 100 percent strictly pentatonic, but they’re solid examples of riffs.

“I get it. Show me the scale!”

Sure! In the boxout labelled “Shape Up Your Playing”, we’ve given you two shapes of the E minor pentatonic scale.

“I’m not sure I understand the second shape...”

It’s still the E minor pentatonic scale, but we’ve added some notes below the E. Try ignoring the low notes and just playing from E to E – you’ll start to get a feel for the low notes soon.

“How do I start playing my own riffs?”

Try playing our first tab example below to get the idea. We took a handful of notes from the first shape and... Well, played around! Improvising like this is a great way to write riffs. Just aim for something simple that sticks in your mind, rather than playing a solo.

“The second example seems harder...”

There’s a quick flurry of notes at the start, admittedly, but it’s all taken from the scale shapes we’ve looked at. Play through the scales again and it should start to feel familiar.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ HOW TO USE THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE
- ✓ TWO MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE SHAPES
- ✓ TWO HARD-ROCK RIFFS

SHAPE UP YOUR PLAYING

Two essential minor pentatonic scale shapes

There are two shapes to learn here. Spend most of your time on the first one – it’s the easiest one to remember because it starts and ends on a root note. It’s also played in open position, which also makes it a bit easier. The second shape moves the scale up the fretboard, and includes three notes below its root note – but we can explain that!

1) E MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE IN OPEN POSITION

The dots tell you where to put your fingers on the fretboard. You’ll be playing one note at a time, so if you start on the lowest note and work your way up, you’ll have E, G, A, B, D, and another E note.



E minor pentatonic scale

2) FARTHER UP THE FRETBOARD

This is the same scale, but here we’re starting on a higher E note. The dots might be in a different part of the fretboard, but these are still the same five notes (E, G, A, B and D). It doesn’t matter where you play them – these five notes played together will always form the E minor pentatonic scale.



E minor pentatonic scale

1 EASY OPEN-POSITION RIFF

♩=120

E⁵

1/4

Play 4 times

Take a look at the first scale shape, then play this riff where we’ve used every note from the E minor pentatonic scale. Try reordering them to make up your own riff.

2 SAME SCALE, DIFFERENT POSITION

E⁵

1/4

Play 4 times

This one’s a bit harder. Just remember: it’s still the E minor pentatonic scale because the notes are the same (E G A B D).

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ WHAT CHORD TONES ARE
- ✓ SIMPLE WAYS TO USE THEM IN SOLOS
- ✓ A LICK USING CHORD TONES



GETTING STARTED WITH...

CHORDS FOR SOLOS

DITCH SCALE SHAPES AND USE CHORD TONES FOR A CREATIVE APPROACH TO YOUR FIRST GUITAR SOLOS.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **CHRIS BIRD.**

“What on Earth is chord tone soloing?”

Solos are usually accompanied by a set of chords called a progression. Each chord contains notes – these are the chord tones. In this situation, though, we’re going to play them individually (known as an ‘arpeggio’) and use them for soloing.

“Surely chords are chords? How do you use them in solos?”

Some guitarists like to map their lead lines – either by writing solos in advance or by being skilled improvisers – to these chords to give their playing a synergy with the rest of the music. The most effective way of doing this is to use the notes from the chords being played.

“Gotta be honest, I’m feeling a little intimidated right now...”

Chord tone soloing can get really complex, but don’t get bogged down in the theory at this stage; just aim to incorporate some notes from chords in your playing. If you know the chords in the music, you’re equipped with loads of notes that’ll also work in a solo.

“If I’m not getting deep into the theory, what’s the point?”

If you base your leads on scales exclusively,

you’ll have a tendency to move around the scale by playing the next highest or lowest note – this quickly gets old and leaves your solos sounding like streams of notes that are the musical equivalent of repeatedly going up and down a ladder. Using chord tones automatically produces bigger jumps between notes (aka ‘intervals’) and can be a platform for some really creative ideas.

“That sounds interesting, where can I hear it in action?”

You can hear jazz pioneer Charlie Christian deftly playing over fast chord changes in the jaw-dropping “Solo Flight”. It doesn’t always have to be so technical, though. Slash’s main theme in Guns N’ Roses’ “Estranged” shows how chord tones’ bigger intervals can be used to create a catchy melody.

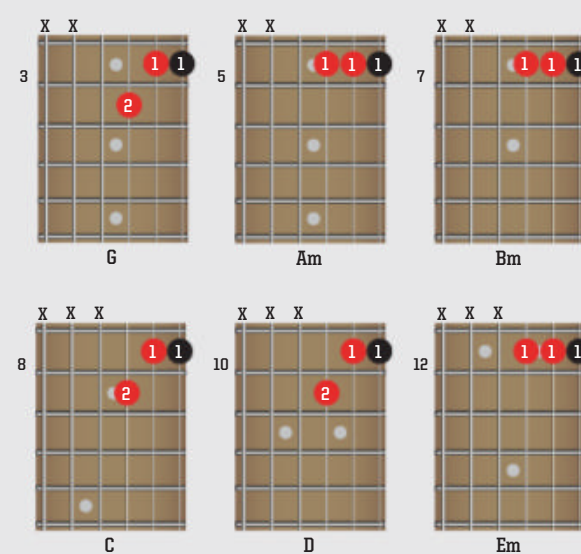
“I’m sold! Where do I start?”

The first step is to get these new note combinations under your fingers. They will feel odd at first – especially when you have to move across strings on adjacent notes. The first tab exercise shows you the notes/tones from the G, Am, Bm and C chords. Our second example shows how you can add a smattering of this new approach to a lead guitar lick.

MORE CHORDS

Learn the chords, memorise the notes, and play better solos!

These six chords are all from the same key (G major, as it happens), but they’re not bog-standard open shapes. Plotted across the highest strings and ascending the fretboard, they’re perfectly suited to wailing leads – once you start playing chord tones, anyway!



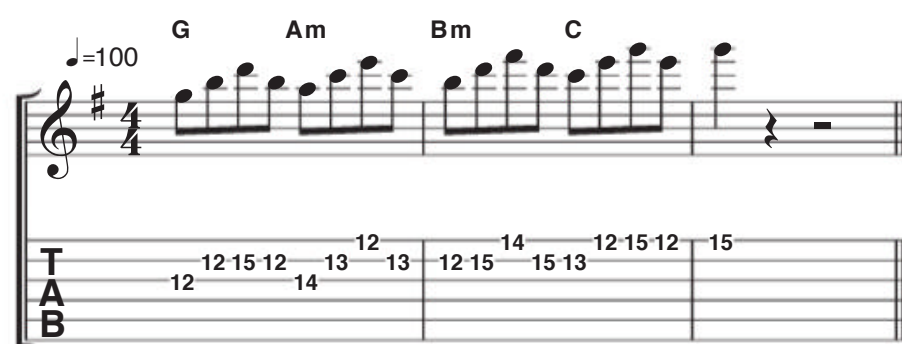
STEP 1

Play each chord as a chord – just strum like you would any other chord, taking care to keep the idle strings quiet.

STEP 2

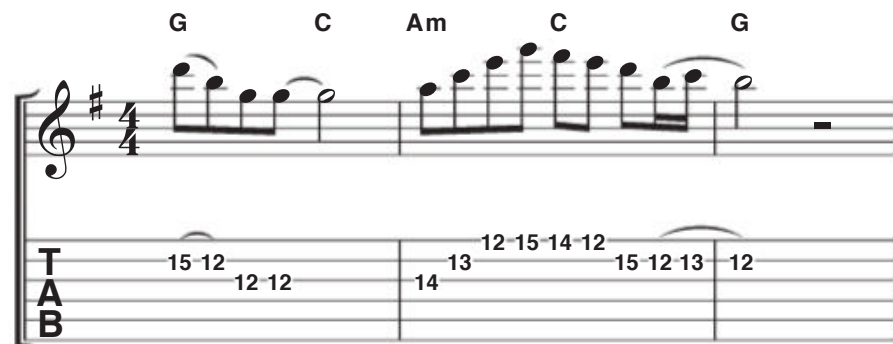
Now think ‘lead guitar’ and play each note from each chord separately.

1 G, AM, BM AND C CHORD TONES



Start very slowly and gradually build up speed. Make sure none of the notes bleed into each other.

2 LEAD GUITAR LICK



Play the scale a few times before attempting this melodic lick. This will help you get used to how the scale sits under your fingers.

HARMONISING MELODIES

FOLLOW OUR THEORY TIPS AND LEARN HOW TO ACCOMPANY YOUR LEAD LICKS WITH SOME ESSENTIAL CHORDS.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **CHRIS BIRD**.

Many guitarists spend a lot of time working out how to solo over chords. Well, the opposite is also a common stumbling block. So, instead of starting with a chord progression and figuring out what to play over it, you'd be starting with a melodic lick that you want to put chords to. Your first step is to work out what key you're in. It's usually easy to pin down the root note by ear. Next, decide whether you need a major or minor sound. Playing any notes three frets above the root? That's a minor. Four frets, and you're in major territory. Read on and we'll show you how to choose some chords.



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ ONE BALLAD-STYLE TABBED LICK
- ✓ FIVE CHORD PROGRESSIONS

1 ROCK BALLAD LICK

♩=75

Am Em Am F Dm⁷ F G Am

TAB

13 12 10 12 12 10 8 10 10 8 10 7 (8)(7) 5 7 5 7 5 7 [7] 7 8 7 10 10 7 [7] 10 14 [14]

This rock-ballad-style lick is in the key of A minor, which uses the notes A, B, C, D, E, F and G. The backing chords also use these notes. For example, Am uses A, C and E notes; Em uses E, G and B; F is made up of F, A and C. Sharing notes is a guaranteed way to match up your licks and chords and keep them in the same key.

3 DEVELOP YOUR EAR

| Em⁷ / Dm⁷ / | Am / F / | Em⁷ / F / | Em⁷ / Dm⁷ / ||

Now try playing the lick over these chords. It'll sound different, of course, but all the chords use notes from the key of A minor – so everything is still in key.

4 NOTES FROM OUTSIDE THE KEY

| G / F / | Em⁷ / Dm⁷ / | Em⁷ / F / | G / Dm⁷ / ||

The notes in the first chord (G) are almost the same the beginning of the previous progression (Em⁷): E, G, B and D for Em⁷, then G, B and D for a G chord.

3 DEVELOP YOUR EAR

| Cmaj⁷ / Bm⁷ / | Am / G / | F / Em⁷ / | Dm⁷ / F / ||

Once again, the chords are different but all the notes are from A minor. The idea is to develop your ear for how these similar chords change the feel of the music.

4 NOTES FROM OUTSIDE THE KEY

| A⁷ / D⁷ / | A⁷ / G / | F / Em⁷ / | Dm⁷ / A⁷ / ||

You can try adding notes from outside the key too – just remember that it won't always work. Here we're adding a C# note (in the A⁷ chord) and an F# (D⁷).

SUSS OUT THESE SUS CHORDS

GO BEYOND BASIC MAJORS AND GET SOME NEW SHAPES SUSSED WITH OUR LOOK AT SUS CHORDS.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **CHRIS BIRD**.



Theory helps explain the creative aspects of music. Ponder on that for a moment. Theory isn't there to give you strict rules to follow – it's your music and your rules! No, theory should help explain what's going on. The structures and scales you learn are just commonly-used patterns. Get to grips with them and gradually you'll understand how the guitarists you love write and play.

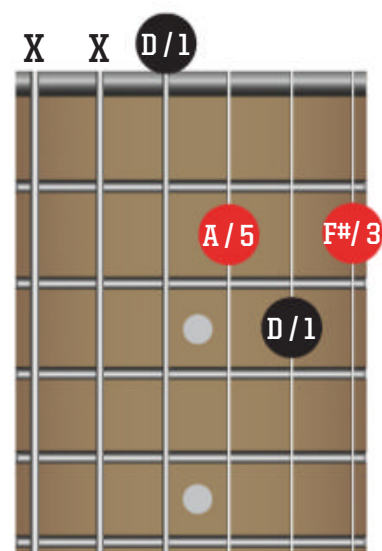
Which brings us on to this issue's lesson on suspended (or 'sus') chords. Most guitarists start playing sus chords long before they

know how they work – there are loads of easy shapes, after all.

So, how does knowing the theory help you? Well, once equipped with a little essential knowledge, you can start to plot new shapes around the fretboard. You'll develop your ear, too, and start improvising around these essential shapes. And if chords aren't immediately exciting to you, just remember that you can write riffs, arpeggios and melodies around these ideas too. Before you know it, you'll be incorporating these ideas into your playing.

1) NICE AN' D'EASY!

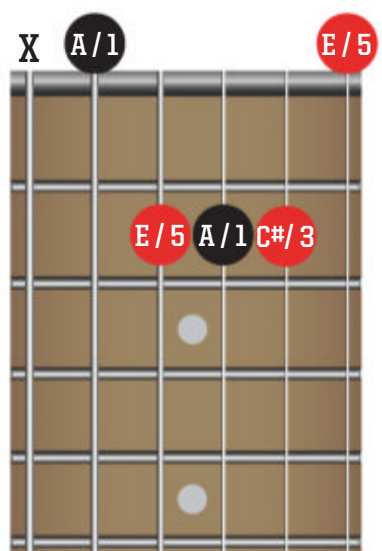
Let's start with one of the easiest chords of all: D. It's a beginner chord and super easy to play. The notes are D, F# and A, just spread out in a different order to make it easier to play. Let's move on to the theory, then... The D major scale has seven notes: D E F# G A B C#. Try to remember that D, F# and A are the first, third and fifth notes; we've marked them 1, 3 and 5.



D (notes & intervals)

2) GETTING IT SUSSED

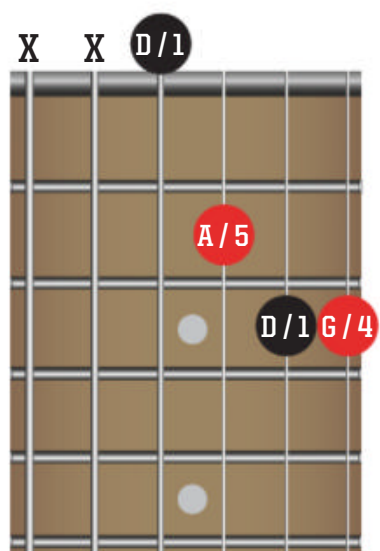
Dsus4 is about as easy as guitar chords get. If you were using your first three fingers to fret the D chord, just drop your fourth finger down to play the new note. Theory-wise, you'll be ditching the third (F#) and replacing it with a fourth (G). The third is said to be 'suspended' in favour of the fourth, hence the name D 'sus' 4.



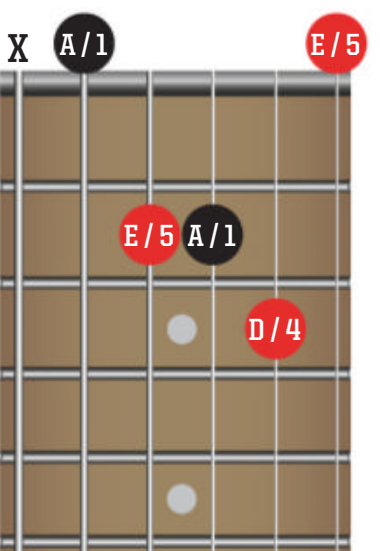
A (notes & intervals)

3) NOW TRY A

Let's try it with another easy open chord – this time A. Again, aim to identify the notes and their corresponding intervals. Get your head around that, and you'll be well on your way to sus chord mastery all across the fretboard. The notes in an A chord are A, C# and E – the first, third and fifth notes of the A major scale (A B C# D E F# G#).



Dsus4 (notes & intervals)



Asus4 (notes & intervals)

4) ASUS4

Look back at D and Dsus4. Remember, we ditched the third interval and replaced it with a fourth. Well, the shape's slightly different here, but the process is the same. Play the third fret on the second string and your third interval (C#) becomes a fourth (D) to give you Asus4. Whichever major chord you're playing, you'll find the fourth one fret higher than the third.

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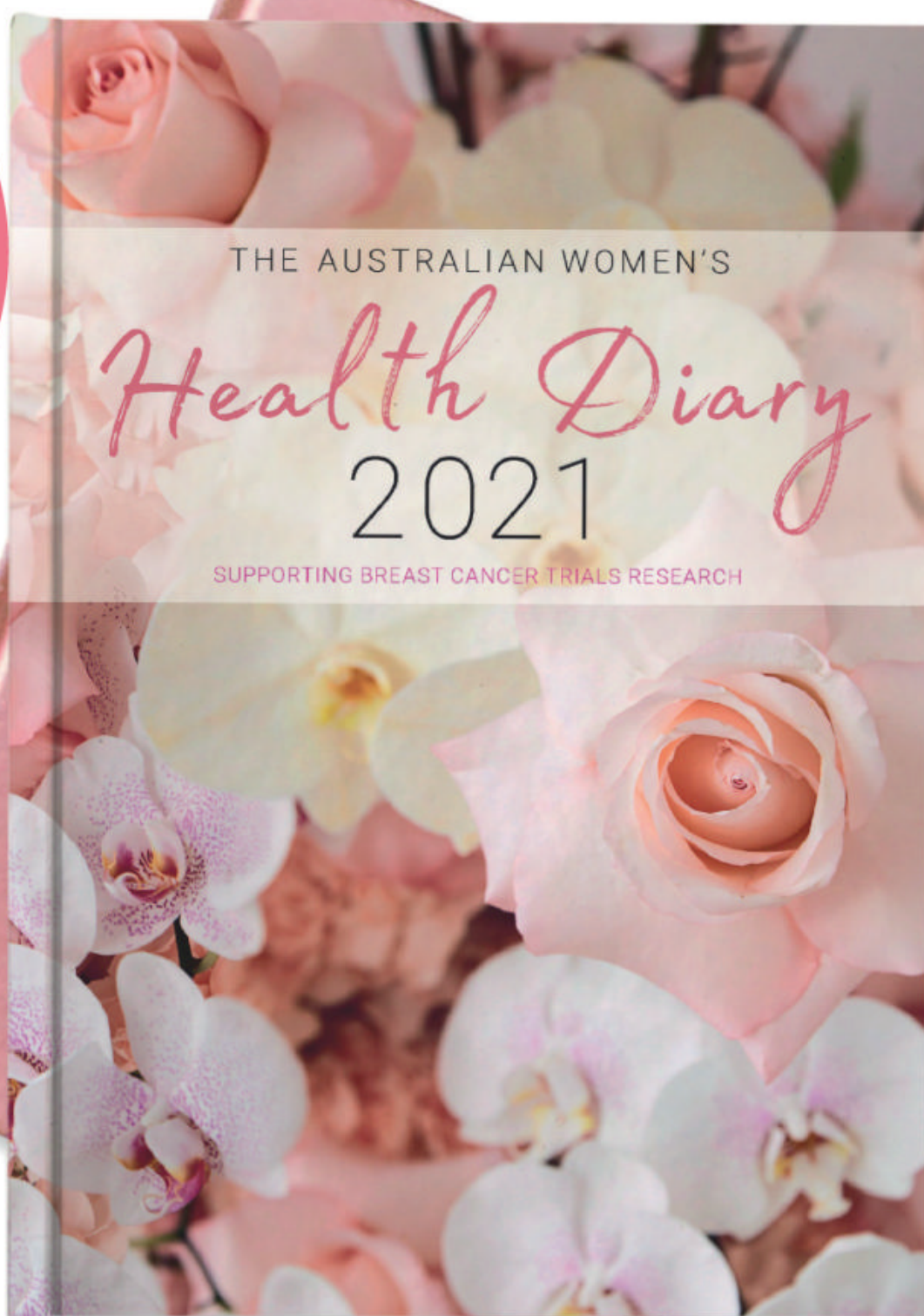


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ad TOP PICK



LAURA JANE GRACE

Stay Alive

POLYVINYL / COOKING VINYL



According to a criminally underrated offcut from 2010's *White Crosses*, Against Me! frontwoman Laura Jane Grace once dreamed that Bob Dylan was a friend of hers (the track is titled, quite aptly,

"Bob Dylan Dream"). We're not sure if that amity ever blossomed, but it's clear that Grace still admires the Minnesotan folk god - her first proper solo album, *Stay Alive*, is delightfully Dylanesque: it's bold and bright and beautifully bare-bones, packed with delicate acoustic twangs and tongue-in-cheek lyrical whimsy; a far cry from the gritty, guttural punk rock that Grace (quite literally) cut her teeth on.

Upon the LP's surprise release on October 2nd, Grace was quick to note that "if at any point you refer to this album as an 'acoustic album', my six-string strumming ghost will haunt ten generations of your family, every night of their lives with bedroom busking from 11pm to 6am." We duly heed the warning, but can't ignore the album's innate suitability for campfire singalongs - all but four cuts on *Stay Alive* showcase solely Grace, her acoustic guitar and her warm, charismatic singing voice.

In a lot of ways, it feels like a natural progression from her 2018 release with The Devouring Mothers [*Bought To Rot*], of which roughly half was centred around these folksy, bluesy stabs of introspection. But where that record had slivers of punk and pop and colourful rock 'n' rock to fill in the gaps, *Stay Alive* is defiantly naked all the way through, monochrome and sans SFX. We're still tugging at the proverbial frills of Grace's dress for another album of battered yells and chugging guitars, but in the meantime, there's plenty to sate fans' hungers on this lowkey detour. The guitar lines are simple yet striking, each prickly noodle and dusty strum derobing another step forward in this flowery lucid-dream journey. Grace's knack for poetic, pseudo-fantastical storytelling is tighter and more enrapturing here than it's ever been.

Add in the luscious sense of roominess that Steve Albini's loose and laidback production gifts it, and the inescapable luminosity with which Grace spouts every punchy and polychromatic quip, and *Stay Alive* becomes much more than a compendium of short, scattered ideas that Grace had while pent up in quarantine. It's a snapshot of her signature spasmodic, spur-of-the-moment creative buoyancy - a love letter to spontaneity, old-school acoustic folk, and ice cream.

All in all, *Stay Alive* is a duly welcomed status update to Laura Jane Grace's personal stream of songwriting social media, and in its own right a top-notch acoustic alb--SJ#S8!2A NO, GHOST LAURA, PUT DOWN THE KNIFE!!!!

WORDS: MATT DORIA • PHOTO: ALEX VISCIOUS

BEN HARPER

Winter Is For Lovers

ANTI-



Ben Harper's love for the humble lap-steel comes to a bold (and incalculably beautiful) peak with this 15-track instrumental trawl down trails of smoky soul, melancholic Americana and slick, summery folk. It's

downright incredible how much artistic ground the Californian bluesman is able to cover unaccompanied on *Winter* - the whole LP is just his prized Monteleone lap-steel, inhumanly articulate fretting hands and unfettered love for music as a spoon with which to stir emotion. Highlights are the whistling slinkiness of his slidework on "Inland Empire", the sinister grit of his bends on "Joshua Tree" and his serpentine solo on "Bizanet", but there is simply so much on this record to be taken aback and blown away by. It's a 30-minute record that feels like it's over in five, but takes you on a journey that should realistically span hours.

BLAKE SCOTT

Niscitam

WING SING



The solo debut from The Peep Tempel's captain is expectedly confronting, gruff and grimy lead guitar lines clashing and clanging with an equally idyllic and unnerving crudity; there's the looming threat that at any

second, the mix could erupt into hellish disarray - and yet it's never jarring or distasteful. It's a calculated, cerebral discomfort that Scott embraces, his dark and sultry ruminations twisting and twining around riffs that outright command your attention. But there too are slivers of arcadian elegance to be unearthed on *Niscitam* - a crisp and charismatic noodling on "Bullfloat Zen" and simmering bassline on "Kalashnikov", for example. In all, it's a tense and timely masterpiece on which Scott falls into the role of Australian rock dog with enthralling ease and infallible authenticity.

KURT VILE

Speed, Sound, Lonely KV

MATADOR / REMOTE CONTROL



Unsurprising for any fan of the laidback Pennsylvanian indie-folker, Kurt Vile's new five-tracker is driven by his typical twangy, from-the-hip noodling and soulful, pseudo-Southern drawl. The centrepiece is a duet

with John Prine on the late country classic's luminous "How Lucky", a bright and bewitching tribute framed palpably around Vile's deep adoration and respect for Prine. But it's the EP's two original cuts - the dizzy, droning "Dandelions" and the cruisy, cantering "Pearls" - that leave the most of a lasting impact once Vile's last twirling pluck winds out; understated and loveably lackadaisical, they're so easy to get swept up in. Production is sparse and the mixes are raw, dry room reverb and the occasional pop of a stool or click of a heel making this feel more like an intimate live performance than a polished product.

OBSCURA HAIL

Siren

DOT DASH



We kick things off with a dry, crunchy riff that sounds well suited to hardcore - then immediately dive into a particoloured pop gem ("Doomer") that balances its underlying grit with glittering vocal

melodies and a cruisy, cantering beat that gently hints you should tap your toes along. The four cuts that follow simmer with a similar balance of coarseness and charm; they're rough around the edges in a cute and kitschy way, like a DIY punk bar with plastic butterflies blu-tacked to the walls. "Penumbra" stands out the most, its summery haze and nostalgic joviality doling it infinite replay value. The lo-fi edge that underlines *Siren* would likely overstay its welcome on a full-length effort, but here it's tasteful and gels stunningly well with the buzzy, honeyed sprightliness of Sean Conran and Tamara Issa's see-sawing vocals.

PILLOW QUEENS

In Waiting

AWAL



With razor-sharp riffs, belting hooks and vocal runs drenched in emotional fury, this unforgivingly catchy and wickedly poignant debut is sure to make Pillow Queens an alt scene staple. The Irish

quartet juggle atmospheric indie numbers and incandescent rock anthems with virtuosic aplomb, dipping and diving around varying notches of intensity so that the bigger jams feel earned and exciting, but the slower cuts never even border on boring. So too does this showcase the dizzying deftness of string-splitter Cathy McGuinness - whether she's ripping a thick, thunderous onslaught of volcanic distortion or a tight, temperamental emo strum, her work with the fretboard is always effortlessly enchanting. This is definitely one to crank up high.

WAX CHATELS

Clot

FLYING NUN



Defying all possible rules of logic, Wax Chattels have brewed up an album of rich and riveting guitar riffs that doesn't actually feature a single guitar. Just shy of 40 minutes long, the Kiwi trio proffer

Clot as rugged and raw as it comes: it's a headfirst dive into a callous chasm of grinding bass leads, wailing distortion and loose, thrashing drums, little care favoured to structure or flow as they explore jazzy bouts of improv and walloping drops of electronic chaos. It's ballsy and blistering dance-punk for the post-dystopian underground club scene the distant future awaits, fast-tracked to serve as the soundtrack for 2020's last chunk of clusterf***ery. Here stands a record primed for late-night drives at deadly speeds, cheap beer benders and those midweek morning commutes where you just need to let out some angst.



VOX SDC-1 MINI ELECTRIC + GIULIETTA 3PS + GIULIETTA 3D

LET'S LOOK AT TWO INNOVATIVE ARCHTOPS AND A PINT-SIZED PRACTISE BUDDY. REVIEW BY **ALEX WILSON**.

RRP: \$399.99 (SDC-1) • \$1,399 (VGA-3PS) • \$1,699 (VGA-3D)

After a bit of time reviewing guitars, one can't help but notice the staying power of classic designs. Here at AG, we have an awful lot of guitars come across the desk that are basically tweaking at the edges of the iconic Gibson and Fender blueprints. Indeed, many fine companies enjoy decades of lucrative business with said tweaking as the core business plan.

Obviously this indicates that post-war designers got a hell of a lot right, what with our trusty Strats and LPs still holding high honour despite the transformative impact of digital technology in the rest of guitar culture, the music industry and society at large. On the other hand, there's definitely a conservatism to guitar design. Despite the incredible creative possibilities afforded by digital sound (or even just a different body shape), the world of luthiery has not always stuck the landing when rolling out innovative products that capture the heart of the customer.

Granted, Line 6 still has a diverse lineup of axes sporting its Variax technology, and fanned frets seem here to stay, but does anyone remember Gibson's MaGIC system and its digital guitars? If you do, you'd know Gibson would probably like to forget that part of its rocky road coming into the new millennium.

The three Vox guitars we have today all challenge convention to a greater or lesser extent. Two of them are innovations on the archtop guitar build – one of the cooler-looking, but more temperamental ways of making a guitar. The other is a pint-sized practise buddy. We'll have a look at the archtops first, both of which fall under the Giulietta line.

Both the VGA-3D and the VGA-3PS are stylish acoustic-electric guitars with a striking appearance. Vox have innovated on the standard archtop design by rendering the body a bit smaller – not only does this make the guitar a bit more portable and a bit less unwieldy, but it also helps minimise feedback: a

known issue with archtops. Your mileage may vary, but the art-deco contours of the Giulietta line are likely to appeal to a guitarist wanting a look that feels classic, but is actually a fresh body plan.

Not content to just make their guitars look nice, Vox have also included a detachable muting strip that sits between the bridge and the tailpiece. This ringing is an issue for archtop guitars and other axes with old-school bridge systems. Vox's solution here is elegant in all respects. While both guitars did require a bit of TLC coming out of the box, it wasn't anything too bad, and we can happily report that the overall build quality is good.

While the hardware and electronics are not absolute top-of-the-line, they are quiet and eminently playable – more than appropriate for mid-priced instruments.

VGA-3D

The most interesting of the axes here is definitely the VGA-3D. It's a sincere, yet user-friendly attempt to bridge the digital and analog divide we alluded to earlier. It's a similar concept to Line 6's Variax, leveraging modern tech to provide a many-guitars-in-one-kind of instrument. Whereas Variax has more customisation options and a separate app, Vox's proprietary AREOS-D Digital Modelling System aims to be a bit more user-friendly and immediate.

It runs on four AA batteries for power and is simply controlled from a small panel on the top of the body. There is an LCD display, a tuner, and settings are controlled with the normal volume/tone knobs, buttons and knobs on the panel, and the three-way pickup selector. By consulting the manual, twisting knobs and flicking switches, the player can easily





conjure up a wide variety of instrument emulations with a bit of common sense and experimentation.

While many of these sounds seem intended to go direct to front-of-house, there are also solid dry pickup signals on board as well, for use with a conventional amp, pedal setup. We really liked the inclusion of a headphone input for silent and mobile practise.

Vox haven't provided much information on exactly how the VOX AREOS-D system works beyond saying it interacts with their custom magnetic pickup and piezo system, but they do claim "the sophisticated approach results in a highly accurate and articulate representation of the modelled instrument." This is a fair statement of the VGA-3D's capabilities. As a rule, the sounds are both useful and enjoyable to play. You have several different acoustic models, including a nylon string, 12-string acoustic and electric, resonator, banjo, sitar and old-school lead synth. We probably forgot something in there, but the truth is that all these sounds are quite usable and pleasing.

There's a simple preset system included so that you have some options for switching between custom configurations. Using just the pickup switch, you can access three per song. Each custom sound comes with a configurable effect - either reverb or drive. The reverb is a nice, lush chamber sound that is well-considered for the emulations on hand; the drive honestly reminded us more of a classic rock fuzz than the archetypal pedal or amp sound, but this scribe is an unreconstructed riffboy - Vox didn't design an elegant digital archtop for him to crank the gain and thrash "Battery" out on it.

Which leads us to the next point: this is a well-made, good sounding instrument that integrates digital tech well. So who is it for? If you love your looping pedal and creating layered music with it, the VGA-3D will be a great ally in that endeavour. If you have a live gig or a practise regimen that requires an array of acoustic instruments, this is almost a no-brainer. Being able to go from, say, a smooth jazz clean tone, to a resonator or banjo sound, can potentially save many performers the hassle and worry of carrying multiple instruments around.

As signalled by its aesthetic, the VGA-3D stylistically leans towards these kinds of genres. Players who focus on rock and riffs won't find much that's compelling here, but then again, the instrument wasn't designed for them. If you a genre-skipping, explorative player who is relatively uninterested

in getting heavy, this guitar should definitely be something you try out.

VGA-3PS

The other contender in the Giulietta line is more straightforward than its digitally-equipped sibling. Sharing many of the same acoustic and hardware features, its signal flow is quite different. The 3PS boasts a Hybrid Bridge, a bridge with a piezo pickup in it, and the controls attached to the base of the pickguard. More classic archtop designs would either forgo a pickup entirely or mount it the electronics in the traditional fashion by cutting into the body. By interfering less with the guitar body, sustain and tone are meant to be improved. This is certainly true compared to the VGA-3D, which lacks a little body compared to its more acoustic companion.

The 3PS has a nice, rich low-end and good tails on the notes, not coming off too badly at all compared to our much bigger Cole Clark steel-string.

There's also a Super Capacitor Preamp System - a switchable active electronic design that gives a much louder signal out of the guitar than the normal passive operation. We found that it was clear, responsive and noiseless. Depending on how you are playing the guitar with it, the active output can be very bright. That's no big deal though, as it could be useful in some applications and is easily mitigated with the tone control if not. We also appreciated the low-end control pot. While it does need to be tweaked with a screwdriver, we can see this being very welcome in muddy live environments or recording applications.

It's easy to use the controls under the pickguard - a logical placement that doesn't take away any usability. The active electronics are charged by a USB input near the cable jack. This is the first USB-charging guitar we've come across - it's a cool idea and works

well, and it's great to see rechargeable power tech being used in a guitar design.

Overall, this is another win for Vox, which takes some of the best aspects of the VGA-3D and streamlines them for players with simple needs.

SDC-1

Last cab off the rank is this tiny terror: a pint-sized Gibson SG. This is one of those moments as a reviewer where we feel like it's hard to add more than what the punter can tell by looking at the picture: the SDC-1 tunes and plays and sounds like a normal guitar, yet it is (obviously) very small. The neck is just under 48 centimetres long, and the rest of the body is scaled accordingly. The size brings with it all the expected benefits and limitations that come with such a design.

We see this as the most valuable option for kids or players with small hands who want to get started on the electric guitar early in life. It's a quality instrument for the price: there is good tension on the neck, the pickup sounds fine, and despite the novelty factor, it is surprisingly playable. The SDC-1 provides a faithful approximation of a larger guitar that will be musical, exciting and cool for little sprogs whose hands are still growing.

Vox also pitches this instrument as a portable practise guitar. While it's true that, combined with one of their mini jack amps, it makes for a truly tiny electric setup, we're less convinced that many people will actually play this on public transport as the presser suggests. For anything more than basic finger strength, picking and scale exercises, the neck is just too different to the real thing. For example, chords that are a challenging stretch on a full neck, we can do with ease on the SDC-1. This raises some questions about whether techniques mastered on a mini-guitar will actually transfer over to a conventional neck. 🎸

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
Vox has made a name for themselves the past few years by innovating. They've kept their classic tube amps in the lineup but have consistently pushed design boundaries with products that generate fresh sounds and a stylish aesthetic. The three guitars here should be on the radar of curious players and are a testament to the adventurous philosophy of the company.	● The SDC-1 is a great practise guitar for kids. ● The Giulietta line perfectly blends electric and acoustic components. ● Both Giulietta guitars are very usable and enjoyable to play.	♥ The neck on the SDC-1 is oddly small. ♥ Functionality is limited for rock-centric players.	Yamaha Australia Ph: (03) 9693 5111 Web: au.yamaha.com



JVB TMT 500 3-IN-1 METRO TUNER + TMC 515 MINI CLIP-ON TUNER + TMC 511 CLIP-ON TUNER/METRONOME + JCT 615 MULTI-FUNCTION CAPO

THE TUNER IS A CRUCIAL PIECE OF GEAR FOR ANY GUITARIST WORTH THEIR FRETS. WHERE DOES JVB’S LINEUP STAND AMONGST ITS BEVY OF COMPETITORS?
REVIEW BY **ALEX WILSON**.

The tuner is one of those essential pieces of guitar kit that comes in many shapes and sizes. Most ordinary players have some kind of mixed interest between acoustic and electric guitars, so will need something more than just the trusty pedalboard tuner. This is where JVB comes in – they sent us four of their no-stomp tuners to test drive.

Before jumping into specifics about each item, we can say that these are well-built accessories. While the low price points would indicate inexpensive manufacturing, they are nonetheless responsive, bright and accurate across the board. Things like battery compartments and buttons feel solid enough, and the tuners feel up to years of work. The second thing that distinguishes this JVB line in the crowded tuner market is their highly functional design. JVB are seemingly intent on giving you a tuner that can multitask, and at a low price. To cap off the good vibes, batteries are even included.

The most extensive design is the TMT 500. In tuning terms, you get switchable inputs for guitar and bass to keep accuracy high. Different instruments or tunings can be easily accommodated by the chromatic mode, which is also very accurate – however there’s also a tone generator onboard for folks that want to do it by ear. The metronome is equally fully-featured; manipulated by five buttons on the front, its loud, steady and very customisable. Not only do you get a brilliant tempo control, but also swing and time signature controls. As well as the built-in mic, you get an attachable clip-on pickup to emulate the tuners described later in the article. There’s even an earpiece included, which would be great for warming up in loud environments (say, backstage).

While the TMT 500 is less streamlined than other options, it covers all bases. This makes it not

only a good choice for a jack-of-all-trades musician, but also a beginner who doesn’t yet know what really interests them. Not only will the tuner help them sound good and the metronome sharpen their chops, but the bevy of options in the TMT 500 will cover any instruments or gigs they might want to try out. For these same reasons, the TMT 500 would also be welcome in the desk drawers of a teacher or music production studio. The one useful addition we can think of would be some kind of case or bag to help transport the tuner as well as its earpiece and clip tuner.

Next in line is the JCT Guitar Capo and Tuner. This is a great way to economise a singer/strummer setup. The tuner itself, attached via a small joint to the capo, is a lot more spartan than the TMT 500 or the other clip-ons we’ll get to. But it doesn’t need to do all the extra features the TMT 500 does, considering it’s always going to be attached to a six-string guitar neck. It was certainly up to the task of keeping our guitars in tune, regardless of where the capo was. We compared the JCT capo to a couple of others in our studio – not only does it feel sturdy and reliable, but it holds the strings stably.

The JVB Digital Mini Clip Tuner – or TMC 515 – takes a bit of the complexity of the TMT 500 and splits the difference with the straightforward simplicity of the JCT. You get tuning settings for chromatic, guitar, bass, violin and ukulele, but

RRP: \$19.99+

it’s all controlled by one button. In practice, this means you choose an instrument setting, adjust the 360-degree swivel, tune, then play. In this respect, the TMC 515 differs from the rest of the JVB family in that it basically does one thing and does it well. If that’s all you want from your clip-on tuner, this is a fine choice.

But, for only a few bucks more, you can get yourself the JVB TMC 511. Doing everything its spartan sibling can, it also packs a better display and a straightforward metronome. For us, this is the MVP: the best in show and the model we’d pick if we were only able to grab one. While the TMT 500 is great, we don’t miss the extra functionality it offers too much, and the compact form factor here and colour options are cool. Everyone needs a good clip-on, and as an owner of similar items from big-hitters like Korg and TC Electronic, we can say that this works just as well for a smaller price. The metronome makes it a no-brainer.

There’s something here for everyone if a new tuner is calling for you. At the end of the day, all of these JVB pieces hold their own, performance-wise, while hurtingting the hip pocket a little less than the competition. Oh, and one final pro-tip: don’t rock a clip on tuner when you’re performing! As great as they might be, you’ve still gotta look cool.

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
The JVB tuner line offers a whole lot of bang for buck. The designs are well-considered, packing maximum functionality into small spaces.	- Exceptional value - Solid build quality - Wide range of features - Accurate as can be - Plenty of options in the lineup	The clip-ons will look super dorky if you rock them during a gig	JVB Strings Ph: (03) 9773 8583 Web: jvbstrings.com



DANELECTRO BACK TALK REVERSE DELAY

DANELECTRO'S VINTAGE PEDAL
REISSUES CONTINUE APACE WITH
THIS CULT DELAY STOMPBOX.
REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Danelectro's vintage range sees the retro-minded brand reissue a number of effects pedals that have went out of production over the years. Some, such as the 3699 Fuzz, date all the way back to Danelectro owner Steve Ridinger's '70s designs. Launched in the '90s, the Back Talk Reverse Delay pedal might be a little more recent, but it has nonetheless fallen off the radar - and as with pedals that fall of the radar, the price for a secondhand unit is rising.

Used versions of the strangely owl-shaped Back Talk from the early '00s can now sell for prices way in excess of \$500. Ripe for reissue, then - although this time it's less aerodynamically shaped. Designed for 1960s tape reverse effects, it takes any note you play and repeats a backwards version of it after a set delay time.

A Repeats knob governs the number of repeats from one to infinite, while the Speed knob sets the length of that delay, with results from otherworldly reverb'd tremolo-type effects through to longer backward echoes that can sound mesmerising, especially when you can get your playing right in sync with them. Key to the effect is the Mix knob, which can go from dialling in just enough haunting ambience to pique your audience's interest, through to removing the dry sound completely for a fully psychedelic experience.

Many multi-delay pedals will give you reverse delay, but there's something about this one's chewy warm sound and smooth playability that sets it apart.

VERDICT	DISTRIBUTOR
Niche? Absolutely. But if you really like reverse delay, then having a dedicated pedal for it makes perfect sense. This one is warm and musical.	Australasian Music Supplies Ph: (03) 9549 1500 Web: austmusic.com.au
PROS	CONS
● Mix knob is a powerful ambience shaper. ● Warmer tone than many multi-delays. ● Fun, old-school setup and tones.	♥ None, if you can spare the pedalboard space.



DANELECTRO 3699 FUZZ

THE VINTAGE-LOVING BRAND
RESURRECTS AN OCTAVE FUZZ
CLASSIC DESIGNED BY **STEVE
RIDINGER** HIMSELF. REVIEW
BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

The aim of Danelectro's 'vintage' pedal range, complete with its distressed housings, is to revive the sounds of certain 'lost' pedals. So far, with The Breakdown and The Eisenhower Fuzz, the new additions haven't named specific pedals, instead dropping broad hints as to which long-lost classics are being emulated - which leaves the sleuthing to us. That policy seems to have changed with the latest in the series.

Danelectro owner Steve Ridinger created the FOXX pedal line in the '70s, and the first of these newbies resurrects what is that company's best-known pedal: the Tone Machine octave fuzz. It's now named the 3699 Fuzz, 3699 being the numbers that represent the letters FOXX on a vintage telephone dial.

We last looked at an official reissue of a FOXX Tone Machine in 2005, when the brand was revived in its original battery-only flock-covered form. This one, though, puts practicality first in a pedalboard-friendly enclosure with crucial modern accoutrements and an added footswitch for the octave effect. There's also a toggle-switched mid-boost, so you can fill out the original's more hollowed-out tone with punchy heft.

Gain-selected NOS transistors have apparently been used to best reproduce the original's robustly versatile fuzz sound, which can be finely focused here with a wide-ranging tone knob that moves clockwise from thick and sludgy, adding more top-end texture through to an aggressive rasp fest that really cuts through.

The octave here has been rejigged to be more prominent than the original, which might not suit purists seeking the ghostly presence of an upper harmonic, but it does open up a whole extra practical range of tones.

VERDICT	DISTRIBUTOR
An updated revival of a classic pedal, from the guy who designed it in the first place, the 3699 offers some hefty yet versatile fuzz tones.	Australasian Music Supplies Ph: (03) 9549 1500 Web: austmusic.com.au
PROS	CONS
● Very cool old-school fuzz tones. ● Footswitchable octave effect. ● Toggle-switched mids boost.	♥ Newly voiced octave effect isn't as subtle as the original.



FENDER REFLECTING POOL DELAY/REVERB

TREVOR CURWEN DIVES IN FOR
A SONIC SOAKING WITH THIS
ONE-BOX AMBIENT SOLUTION.

If you're going to have delay and reverb on your pedalboard, both effects in the same pedal can be a practical way to save space, power outlets and audio cabling, as well as likely looking neater. This good-looking stereo and mono pedal appears at first to be a combination of Fender's Mirror Image Delay and the Marine Layer Reverb pedals, but it's much more than just that.

The delay side of the pedal is equipped with an easily operated tap tempo footswitch allied to seven selectable subdivisions. Standard Feedback and Level knobs respectively adjust the number of repeats and their volume against the dry sound through to fully wet, while modulation can be added via Rate and Depth knobs.

There's also a Mix knob, which controls the feature that sets this particular delay apart from many others on the market. As with the Mirror Image's fixed-volume extra dotted eighth note, you can add in a secondary repeat related to the main repeat. Here, however, you get control over its volume, the relative levels of this secondary tap and the main repeat being set via this Mix knob, which has a 50:50 mix at its central position.

The Analog and Tape delays both reflect the tonal flavour of the originals very well, but the extra nuance of lower fidelity and altered EQ greatly increases flexibility. There are three selectable reverb types - Hall, Room and Special - each with three variations. The Hall and Room variations are small, medium and large versions of the chosen space - but select the Special type and it will offer a Shimmer reverb with high octaves, a Gated/Reverse reverb and a Modulated reverb.

Besides knobs for reverb Level, Decay and Damp, an Extra knob controls low-frequency roll-off for the Hall and Room reverbs but adjusts the Shimmer reverb's octave level, sets the Gated/Reverse reverb's tail shape to determine whether you hear reverse, gated or just a typical small space, and controls the mod depth of the modulated reverb.

VERDICT	DISTRIBUTOR
A versatile offering with a wide range of ambience and some great-sounding algorithms.	Fender Ph: (02) 8198 1300 Web: fender.com
PROS	CONS
● Two effects in one pedal. ● Flexible use of a secondary delay. ● Tap tempo with a range of subdivisions. ● Variable delay repeat quality.	♥ We'd liked to have seen a specific spring emulation.

RRP: \$329

RRP: \$329

RRP: \$599



FENDER
COMPUGILIST

THIS DISTORTION AND COMPRESSOR COMBO OFFERS AN ARRAY OF PRACTICAL TONE-BOOSTING OPTIONS. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Fender has drawn on its Bends compressor and Pugilist distortion pedals to create the Compugilist, which puts separately switchable compressor and distortion functions in the one ultra-convenient pedal. While you don't get the full feature set here, you do get the essential controls for each.

The compressor side is in the classic Dyna Comp mould, keeping your dynamics even, but capable of getting squashier and adding some snap to the start of your note – the nature of which can be dialled in with the Recovery knob, usefully adjusting the compression envelope.

Meanwhile, the volume knob is capable of building in a boost. The distortion has plenty of range, from edgy early break-up drive through to cranked amp, with a Tone knob to adjust the upper-mid presence and top-end, plus a switched Bass Boost for fat low-end.

This pedal offers plenty of practical options, such as using the compressor as a boost for the drive or using both sides to build your overall tone.

RRP: \$299

VERDICT DISTRIBUTOR

Compression and distortion in one box is a smart idea; and while you don't get the full feature set of their respective standalone pedals, the combination is well implemented here.

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

PROS CONS

- Effects are separately switchable.
- Well-designed enclosure.
- Value for money.
- Works as a boost..
- You only get three controls on the compressor.



FENDER POUR
OVER ENV FILTER

THE BIG F ADDS AN ENVELOPE FILTER TO ITS EVER-EXPANDING LINEUP OF PEDALS. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Envelope filters, eh? One could make the case that Mike Beigel's

RRP: \$299

Musitronics got it right with the Mu-Tron III in the '70s, and that everyone since has been using that template and just adding their own bells and whistles. Fender's first foray into the genre has a similar set of controls to a Mu-Tron on the right with the familiar three-way filter choice (high-pass, low-pass and bandpass) and an Up/Down switch. Here, however, there's the addition of a distortion section on the left-hand side via a toggle switch.

Without the distortion, there are variations of auto-wah, quacky shifted tonality and filter sweeps available with careful juxtaposition of the controls – but bringing in the distortion adds an instant edge and throatiness that can make those filter sweeps more synth-like, and get you closer to some talkbox-like sounds.

You can also use the distortion on its own, possibly adding some tonal shading rather than filter movement. As with the other pedals in Fender's lineup, the knobs have LED lights that you can turn on and off via a switch on the side of the pedal. The Pour Over is housed in the now-familiar anodised aluminium Fender enclosure, and it really is a great design. It also features offset I/O jacks and a battery that is a cinch to change via a pull-down flap.

VERDICT DISTRIBUTOR

There's plenty to explore here if you're up for taking your pedalboard in a more left-field direction, with onboard gain adding grit and a synth-esque effect to the filter sweeps.

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

PROS CONS

- Wide range of transformative filter tones.
- Gain circuit can be used on its own.
- Another well-designed Fender pedal.
- Very attractive price.
- Envelope filter remains a niche effect.



FENDER TRAPPER
DUAL FUZZ

FENDER BOLSTERS ITS PEDAL LINE-UP WITH A MULTI-VOICED FUZZ THAT'S BLESSED WITH AN OCTAVE SWITCH FOR ADDED HIJINKS. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

What's better than a fuzz pedal? Answer:

RRP: \$349

two fuzz pedals. The Trapper isn't exactly that, but it does feature two different fuzz voices and lets you footswitch between the two. Fuzz 1, which has Fuzz and Level controls, is a smooth, everyday silicon fuzz which is also capable of octave fuzz via a toggle switch that adds in the extra harmonic element. The second fuzz is more full-on hooligan, and while it only has a Level control, it also has an integrated noise gate – the idea being that you use your guitar volume and tone controls to bring out its variations; back off your guitar volume for sputter and glitch.

Both circuits feed an EQ array consisting of a Tone knob that rolls off treble and a Contour knob that has bass boost/treble cut at one extreme and the opposite at the other, with scooped mids at its centre. Between the two knobs you can dial in loads of tonal variation, from thick and woolly to eardrum-shredding spikiness.

There's no surprise in the styling – it's the same anodised aluminium chassis with practical offset input and output jacks, a 'jewel' bypass LED, and the familiar knobs with optional blue LED position markers. Power is by nine-volt adaptor or nine-volt battery, which has probably the easiest access of any pedal we've seen – the whole of the end of the pedal is a pull-down flap.

VERDICT DISTRIBUTOR

The Trapper is a dynamic, versatile fuzz, with two discrete core flavours – one a little more feral than the other – and an octave function that opens up a world of quasi-synth overtones.

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

PROS CONS

- Three fuzz flavours in one box (if you count the octave fuzz).
- It's a bargain.
- The Fender pedal-build template remains convincing.
- Not much at this price.

FENDER CD-60S ALL-MAHOGANY ACOUSTIC

HAS FENDER JUST RAISED THE BAR FOR THE ENTRY-LEVEL ACOUSTIC? REVIEW BY **JONATHAN HORSLEY**.

Manufacturers such as Fender have changed how we look at the beginner acoustic guitar for good. Instruments such as this quite superlative CD-60S All-Mahogany are recalibrating our expectations, offering a playing experience that can only inspire today's beginners. This is a big deal. There was once a time when even the very prospect of the entry-level acoustic would send shivers down the spine – and not tingles of pleasure. How much more fun would learning the guitar have been if the CD-60S had been around... And the option of a solid mahogany top on a 200-dollar guitar? That's progress.

RRP: \$399

Part of Fender's Classic Design series, the CD-60S All-Mahogany switches up typical beginner's fare with a dreadnought acoustic that pairs that very attractive solid-mahogany top with laminated mahogany on the back and sides.

An all-mahogany build? In the tonewood menu that might read 'warm', 'mellow', 'pronounced midrange with caramel aftertaste', but first we must draw your attention to the neck. It is what Fender describes as its 'easy-to-play' shape, and what we'd probably call a thin C shape. Potatoes, pot-ah-toes, it is slim, easy fit, perfect for players with smaller hands or those with a bit of growing to do. The walnut fingerboard is a flattish 12-inch radius, with the edges rolled off for a smooth feel. It's exceptionally comfortable for the fretting hand.

This, of course, is the name of the game. Your guitar shouldn't offer too much fight – fretting your first barre chords is challenging enough. Compared to



smaller-bodied acoustics such as orchestra or parlor models, the dreadnought shape can feel cumbersome, and that is something to bear in mind if you have a smaller frame, but you will be rewarded with a deeper tone. Dreadnoughts are typically loud, and the CD-60S doesn't hold back.

If you're using a pick, there's a very musical balance to its voice that skews towards the organic woodiness of Delta blues, yet with an abundant presence and

clarity to make the CD-60S All-Mahogany a good fit for fingerstyles, too. The bass notes bloom nicely, and here we are getting the benefit from that resonant solid top. Under the hood, Fender has opted for a tried-and-tested scalloped X-bracing pattern.

You could alternatively spring for Fender's spruce-topped CD-60S. It has a little extra sparkle in the top end. But there's something very alluring about the All-Mahogany dread'. It has an old-school charm and a new-school feel, with a very respectable factory setup that promises to repay your practicing efforts in tone.

Crucially for a beginner's acoustic, Fender gets the neck profile bang on. The CD-60S is a joy to play, and backs this up with an impressive tone, making chords sound full and wide, yet with a detailed midrange and a vibrant top-end that adds a little magic to the mix. 

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
The CD-60S is one very playable dreadnought with a wide, well-balanced tone that belies its modest price. Ideal for beginners, but fun for all.	- Neck profile is very approachable for beginners and young players. - Warm but balanced tones. - Will suit flatpicking and fingerstyle alike. - It looks great.	- Finish is a little untidy under the hood. - Dreadnought shape can be a bit boxy for children.	Fender Ph: (02) 8198 1300 Web: fender.com

FENDER JIM ROOT JAZZMASTER V4

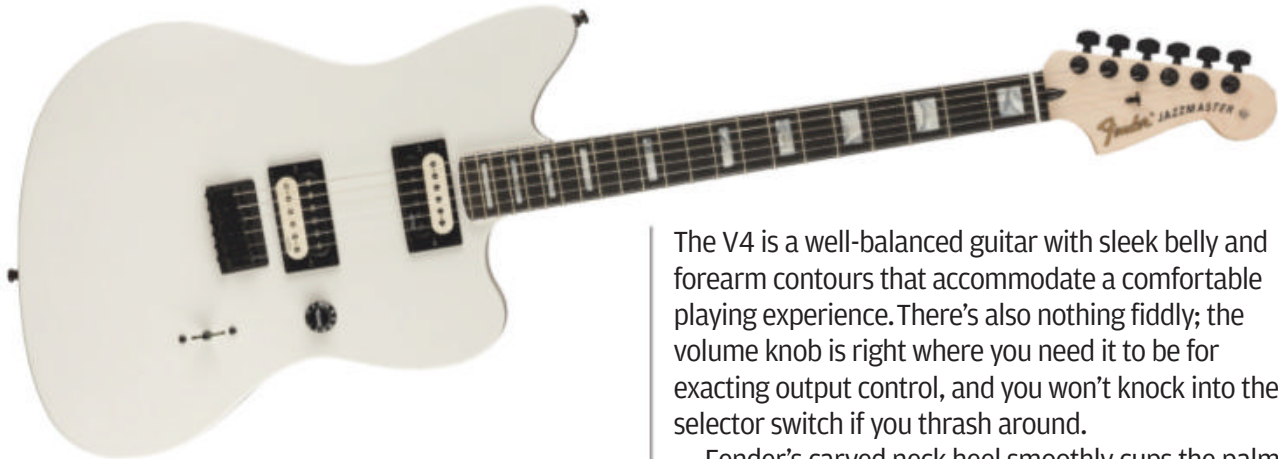
IT'S A JAZZMASTER, JIM, BUT 'KNOT AS WE KNOW IT – IT'S THE LATEST MINIMALIST METAL MACHINE FOR JIM ROOT AND IT'S FIERCE. REVIEW BY **PAUL RIARIO**.

There is no gray area when it comes to Slipknot guitarist Jim Root's vision for his signature models from Fender. It's literally black and white. Finishes aside, there's equally no gray area in each instrument's concept. If anything, his signature instruments clearly sport the bare minimum to get the job done, and Root undoubtedly loves using Fender's iconic shapes without any of the bells and whistles associated with their original formulas.

RRP: \$2,699

His latest signature model shows off a more elevated look with block inlays and open-coil pickups, but still remains as stripped down as his other guitars and is designed to deliver in-your-face tone with brute force. With classic offset contours, a dense body shape and a spartan control layout, the V4 seriously makes you appreciate how capable this artist model is for metal.

Uncomplicated and unpretentious, the guitar features a mahogany slab body, contoured neck heel, maple neck with a slim C-shaped profile, a bound ebony fingerboard with a 12-inch radius, 22 jumbo frets and block position inlays, EMG Jim Root Signature Daemonum



open-coil active humbucking pickups, single volume control knob and three-way pickup switch, hard-tail string-through-body bridge, and Fender locking tuners.

The super-flat 12-inch radius removes any chance of fretting out when bending sky-high notes. The minimalist aesthetic continues through to the controls, with just a single volume control and a three-way pickup selector switch – a far cry from your regular Jazzmaster. A set of locking tuners helps keep everything stable.

The V4 is a well-balanced guitar with sleek belly and forearm contours that accommodate a comfortable playing experience. There's also nothing fiddly; the volume knob is right where you need it to be for exacting output control, and you won't knock into the selector switch if you thrash around.

Fender's carved neck heel smoothly cups the palm of your hand when you find yourself shredding past the 14th fret, and I'm amused by the large luminlay fluorescent side dots that really emphasise where you are on the neck if it ever seems unclear.

There's no mistaking the Jim Root Jazzmaster V4 as a guitar made to precisely execute drop tunings and all forms of metal brutality. I had the guitar in standard and Drop B tunings, and it's abundantly clear the active EMG Daemonum pickups complement the guitar's aggressive leanings with percussive clarity and raw power.

The bridge and neck pickups exhibit full-bodied tone with a crisp and throaty midrange that excels with high-gain distortion and down-tunings with heavier string gauges. It's an unbridled growl that remains taut for muscular riffing, and that's exactly what I'd expect from this no-nonsense Jazzmaster. 

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
For all its starkness and simplicity, the Fender Jim Root Jazzmaster V4 is Root's most refined signature guitar yet – a veritable metal machine with pulverising tone and fluent ergonomics.	- Active EMGs are assertive with clear note-to-note definition. - Effortless playability. - Perfect for metal and performs well in lower tunings.	A little minimally appointed for some.	Fender Ph: (02) 8198 1300 Web: fender.com

FENDER '64 CUSTOM PRINCETON REVERB AMP

THIS HAND-WIRED REISSUE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR SMALL AMP MIGHT JUST SPARE YOU THE OVERHEATED VINTAGE MARKET. REVIEW BY **CHRIS GILL**.

Partly thanks to session players like Tommy Tedesco and Steve Lukather, the Princeton is known as the most recorded amp in the world. It's also appeared on stage and in the studio with rockers like Pete Townshend, Mike Campbell and St. Vincent, country pickers Clarence White, Marty Stuart and Kenny Vaughan, and even jazz guitarists like Bill Frisell. Stars like them may have made the Princeton an icon, but its success and longevity lie with the millions of unknown players like you and I who have made it a reliable staple for practise, recording and club gigs.

RRP: \$4,699

With the Fender '64 Custom Princeton Reverb, Fender has resurrected the most beloved model in all of its former glory. It's designed for players with a discriminating ear who desire classic Princeton Reverb tone and performance, but don't want to spend \$5,000 or more for an original vintage model that's more than likely missing original parts.

True to the original, the '64 Custom Princeton Reverb is a single-channel, 12-watt all-tube amp with reverb and tremolo. The power amp is driven by a pair of 6V6 tubes, while the preamp is driven by one and a half 12AX7 tubes with the other half split to the phase inverter. The third 12AX7 is split between reverb recovery and tremolo, a 12AT7 drives the long-spring reverb tank and the rectifier is a 5AR4/GZ34 tube.

There's also a pair of inputs (normal and -6dB), volume, treble, bass, reverb, speed and intensity knobs on the front panel and a power switch, quarter-inch internal and external speaker jacks and jack



for the included two-button reverb/tremolo on/off footswitch on the rear panel.

While the hand-wired construction, period-correct cosmetics and high-quality components are all welcome details, what truly makes the '64 Custom Princeton Reverb worth its price is its stellar tone. Like the original, the clean tones are among the absolute best available, especially when paired with its

gorgeous, lush tube-driven reverb. Individual notes have ample body, and percussive snaps of the low E string deliver a tight, drum-like wallop.

The impressive clean headroom and overall warmth and richness makes this amp an ideal base for a pedal-based rig for gigging or recording. The tremolo is also mightily impressive, with a rich, organic texture that smoothly emerges on the decay of sustained notes and ducks out of the way when playing more aggressively.

The Princeton Reverb's tone transforms to overdrive grit with the volume at 5 using a humbucker-equipped ES-335, or at 7 with a single-coil Strat. The overdrive becomes satisfyingly raunchy with the volume at 10, but the tone never becomes compressed or tubby and note definition and percussive attack remains brilliant.

The tone cleans up beautifully by backing down the guitar's volume control, so I heartily recommend Jim Campilongo's tried-and-true approach of leaving the volume at 10 and using the guitar's volume control as your "channel switcher." The volume output is more than ample for most gigs and absolutely perfect for studio recording. 

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
Fender's '64 Custom Princeton Reverb delivers the timeless tone, features and performance that made the blackface Princeton Reverb a coveted classic, but at a much more reasonable price than a vintage model.	- Hand-wired, meticulous build. - Classic Princeton tone. - Jensen Alnico P10R is a great pairing. - Lives up to its reputation. - Cheaper than vintage models.	 None.	Fender Ph: (02) 8198 1300 Web: fender.com

ORANGE CRUSH ACOUSTIC 30 TWIN CHANNEL AMP

ORANGE PUTS A LITTLE COLOR IN ACOUSTIC PLAYERS' CHEEKS WITH A VERY SMART AMP YOU CAN TAKE ANYWHERE. REVIEW BY **ROB LAING**.

When you think of Orange Amplification, the word 'acoustic' isn't usually anywhere in sight. But here we are in an unexpected chapter for the British icon; an Orange acoustic amp, and the latest addition to its hugely successful Crush range of practice amps. We say practice, but this is designed for performing outside of the home, too. Literally outside; as well as mains power it can be battery powered for five hours at 50% volume and eight hours at low volume.

RRP: \$729

But this Orange needs a lot of juice for that: ten AA batteries. So obviously we'd recommend an investment in rechargeables or you'll be busking for battery money. The power unit is also external here rather than the much more universal 'kettle lead' IEC variety, so don't lose it! The controls are marked by icons rather than words, and will be a head

scratcher to Orange newbies. The manual explains all and they're part of Orange identity - you'll soon learn the Bass, Treble, Mid and Gain, etcetera.

We're fans of angled combos, and if anything we think the wedge here could be steeper - but it's combined with neat and portable dimensions, and the usual high standard of Orange build quality.

Channel 1 is focussed on a wider range of guitar EQ options while Channel 2 is for mics. A reverb and chorus control can also be applied to both channels or individually with the blend control. But you have to choose between the effects; you can't have both at the same time for your guitar tone, which is a shame.

Reverb is the side most players will come back to and the scope moves from plate to a lush hall-type, but there's Leslie-esque fun to be found at the extremes of chorus, too. We found the



Crush Acoustic 30 to be loud for such a compact combo. Testing with both a Danelectro with a Fishman piezo system and another with an active magnetic soundhole pickup, the EQ is highly responsive.

It's worth spending extra time with it to dial in to suit your instrument and tastes, especially with the Gain and Mid controls. We ended up dialling back more with the magnetic pickup guitar to scoop the mids for a more organic sound, hardly surprising with the metallic character of a soundhole pickup.

The Crush 30 is in a tricky spot; the \$729 price point puts it up against strong 60-watt fare like the Fishman Loudbox Mini and Sonnet from Blackstar, which both also have Bluetooth connectivity (this doesn't) at levels you can play in a band situation if needed. But if you're specifically after battery-powered options that are compact and offer mic input for solo performances, this is a good option. 

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
For a small but perfectly formed acoustic combo for solo performances, the Orange Crush Acoustic 30 offers a very respectable performance.	- Angled cabinet with good build. - Good EQ - It's as portable as it gets. - Effects loop plays nice with your pedalboard.	- Wireless operation is hard on batteries. - Reverb and chorus can't be run simultaneously.	Australis Music Group Ph: (02) 9698 4444 Web: australismusic.com.au

EPIPHONE SG SPECIAL P-90

THIS SG ISN'T JUST INSPIRED BY GIBSON – IT COULD BE THE PERFECT COMPROMISE ALTOGETHER. REVIEW BY **ROB LAING**.

Is the P-90 the ‘best of both worlds’ pickup? There’s definitely an argument for it being the tonal middle-ground between the traditional single-coil and humbucker. With a single pole-piece, P-90s are single-coil by anatomy and their shorter and wider bobbin allows for greater low end girth and grit. They’re also tied closely to the Gibson story – the company’s solid body electric pickup of choice until the advent of the humbucker in 1955.

Which bring us to another best of both worlds question – is Epiphone’s 2020 ‘Inspired By Gibson’ range also the perfect blend of value and tone?

The Faded Pelham Blue here follows the 2019 Gibson model’s take on a classic, but it isn’t faded in the natural grain way of our early 2000s Gibson SG Special Faded (or the 2020 Epiphone SG Classic). It’s a metallic gloss lacquer and it’s a very appealing take on a familiar colour.

The 2020 Inspired By Gibson range sees Epiphone using the ‘open book’ headstock design that is closer to Gibson models. A more minimal Special pickguard than the significantly larger ‘batwing’ style found on SG Standards allows the finish to shine. And the P-90 Pro pickup is fully wax potted to help eliminate unwanted feedback.

If you’re picky about setting your intonation, the ‘60s-style lightning wraparound bridge could prove a sticking point here. Like the Epiphone Les Paul Special, there’s no Tune-o-matic here. Of course, you could upgrade to an intonatable version in the future but we’d prefer it as a stock feature to offer more



RRP: \$999

home setup control. We like low action but this is a little buzzy for us, and a neck check reveals a small truss rod turn is needed and an easy fix. The reassuring news is that the fretwork is even and tidy here. The ‘60s slim taper neck still feels meaty but less of a Marmite shape than our Gibson’s chunkier ‘50s shape – but we’re surprised to find that unlike that guitar, this will dip on the strap if you let go. Both weigh over ten kilos, too. The P-90 Pros here have a darker tonality than we’ve found on our own mahogany Thinline

Telecaster. And they feel closer to the vintage-voiced humbucker side of the field in that respect, which makes for a bridge pickup that’s satisfying for classic rock and blues sustain with low-end presence, while sounding organic and full for cleaner territory. The neck is a little too murky though and may need a hotter upgrade in time, or raising in the interim. The CTS pots make for a responsive way to clean up your sound from the guitar with the volume control, taking advantage of the P-90s’ strummier, more open strengths over some traditional humbuckers. All in, this is a stunning-looking guitar for a crazy low price, which finds Epiphone offering a compelling option for players priced out by Gibson – one they can enjoy and then invest in to upgrade.

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
With beautifully belting tones well-suited for everything from blues and folk to hardcore punk, Epiphone’s P-90-fitted powerhouse is an easy win for shredders priced out by Gibson’s more upscale offerings.	- Fully wax-potted P-90 Pro pickup. - Very satisfying for classic rock and blues. - As close to a Gibson as you can get from an Epiphone.	- The ‘60s-style lightning wraparound bridge could be annoying. - No Tune-o-matic bridge.	Australis Music Group Ph: (02) 9698 4444 Web: australismusic.com.au

IBANEZ PREMIUM SR2405W BASS

A SENSIBLY PRICED FIVE-STRING THAT DELIVERS A SERIOUS PUNCH. REVIEW BY **MIKE BROOKS**.



RRP: \$3,299

We’ve been suitably impressed by various basses from the Ibanez camp over the years – and the sumptuous finishes keep on coming. This SR five-stringer exhibits a rather fetching low-gloss topcoat, somewhere between a high-gloss finish and the smoothness of a satin surface. The hardware looks top-notch, and the electronics package should in theory give the player all the tonal options they could need. But does this SR model cover familiar ground? The neck length feels longer than it is, although we can assure you that it’s certainly a 34-inch scale. The panga panga and purpleheart five-piece laminate neck

feels rigid, while the neck pocket looks very solid and tightly attached. The neck does feel heavy, and there is some noticeable headstock bias on and off the strap, but it isn’t uncomfortable to play. Neck rigidity is further enhanced by titanium rods, which should keep the timbers in order, even burdened with the extra mass required of a five-string neck. The neck profile is slinky with a nut width of 45 millimetres, but the neck depth is slim enough to offset the broadness of the fingerboard. Hardware and finishing are of a high level throughout. The abalone oval front-facing position markers are an example of this, with white dots sitting along the side edge, as is the recessed jack socket along the lower body edge. The gold Ibanez monorail bridge units and Gotoh machine heads work well and the bridge units

allow three-way adjustments to be made. The control set looks a little fussy, but it isn’t in practise. Volume and pickup pan controls are backed up by a three-band EQ, a three-band mid-frequency selector switch and an active/passive switch. The treble control acts as a passive tone control in passive mode. Up top you’ve got a set of gold Gotoh tuners that helps keep tuning solid. The active Aguilar Super Double single-coils offer a wide range of tones, and the fit and finish is all quality. There are hand-crimped frets and abalone inlays on this panga panga fretboard – it looks and feels great. Ibanez basses are well known for having a fair degree of snap to their tone, and this has that as well as a standout low-mid bias which offers a woody rasp. Hooked up to an Aguilar Tone Hammer, it has a nice organic tone, but the Ibanez EQ has equal amounts of power and finesse across all the frequencies. The passive performance is also impressive, and although it doesn’t quite have the sonic punch that the active EQ offers, the natural response works in its favour. The woody bark courtesy of the timbers, alongside the Aguilar Super Double pickups and passive tone control, provide some rich passive tones. The 18-millimetre string spacing can be adjusted at the bridge should you choose to change it, but overall this is a bass which was designed with playability in mind: this latest iteration of the SR design ticks all of the boxes in that respect. Comfort comes courtesy of the sleekly-designed neck, and as five-string basses go, this is a mighty fine example.

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
A great looking, great playing bass with plenty of tonal options – and it won’t cost the earth.	- Punchy tones. - A very playable five-string. - Top value. - Excellent build and finish.	Might be a bit blingy for some players.	Australis Music Group Ph: (02) 9698 4444 Web: australismusic.com.au

AGUILAR DB925 BASS PREAMP

A NEW TONE-SHAPING PEDAL FROM AGUILAR IN A SMALL, BUT PERFECTLY FORMED, PACKAGE. REVIEW BY **STUART CLAYTON**.

The recent range of Silver Anniversary pedals, celebrating Aguilar’s 25th anniversary, includes the DB925, an all-FET broadband preamp pedal allowing tonal sculpting of your bass tone. Housed in a micro pedal format, the limited footprint on your pedalboard is a positive aspect while the potential improvement to your regular bass tone is significant.

At first glance, the casing and sturdy build quality are what we’ve come to expect from Aguilar – and although the two controls are small and vertical, the potential for damage is limited. Offering 18 decibels of broadband boost from the bass (40Hz) and treble (4kHz) controls, the frequencies around these two points are also boosted, which sweetens the overall tonal response. This means that increasing or decreasing the bass control will also affect the low mids, while operating the treble control will affect the upper-mid frequencies.

In operation, the unit’s sonic performance is impressive, adding more presence and power to the bottom end, tightening up the mids with detail and definition and – when pushed – offering a glassy, sparkly top end even when using strings that have long since been played in. The improved tonal depth propels passive instrument performance, while active instruments may only need a slight tweak here and

there as they already have an active EQ on board. The pedal is still usable in the latter case, as it gives the player the opportunity to create a different tone which can be switched in or out as and when required.

Thankfully, all of the tonal possibilities are musical, and neither control sounds harsh, extreme or unusable when pushed to its respective limits. As a result, we can see many players gravitating towards this pedal for the tonal possibilities it has to offer.

This pedal performs a particular function, of course. If you prefer to control your mid-frequencies with a separate control, consider Aguilar’s ever-popular Tone Hammer DI pedal. The asking price is not insignificant, and some players may question this unit’s flexibility compared to other preamp pedals on the market. Still, as with all the best preamps, when we turned the DB925 off and returned to our non-effected tone, we found ourselves wondering why we’d put up with our bass sounding like that for so long – and that counts for a lot.



CHECK LOCAL RETAILER FOR PRICING

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
An impressive new release from Aguilar, the DB925 can transform your passive bass performance, or act as an always-on tone sweetener.	- Excellent tone-shaping. - Particularly effective with passive basses. - Small footprint.	Pricey compared to similar pedals.	CMI Music & Audio Ph: (03) 9315 2244 Web: cmi.com.au

ZOOM B3N MULTI-EFFECTS PROCESSOR

AN AFFORDABLE BASS MULTI-EFFECTS THAT CAN HANDLE JUST ABOUT ANYTHING YOU THROW AT IT.

REVIEW BY **E.E. BRADMAN** AND **BOBBY VEGA**.

Zoom’s B3n – the successor to the company’s popular B3 pedal – has 67 tweakable effects, includes amp models paying homage to Ampeg, Aguilar, Fender, SWR, and Trace Elliot, and allows for 150 custom patches that combine up to seven effects, amps, and cabs.

An aux in jack, headphone jack, and handful of rhythms make it a cool practise tool, while a USB input makes it easy to update firmware, download new patches, and tweak your creations. The B3n manages to accomplish all this while being seven inches deep, nine inches wide, and weighing just under three pounds.

The B3, released in 2012, has seven more amp models and 44 more effects. But with the B3n, it’s easy to download more amp models and effects with the free Guitar Lab software. The B3n also forgoes its predecessor’s active/passive input pad, as well as its XLR out with pre/post and ground lift; Zoom says that not having an XLR on the B3n keeps costs and size down while creating fewer parts that could fail.

The flipside of cramming so much functionality into a small box is that it can take a minute to understand the B3n’s menus. Although the navigation is an improvement over the B3’s, some may blanch at the tap-dancing and manoeuvring necessary to get the

most from the B3n.

Since he began playing back in the early ’70s, Bobby Vega has collected a couple rooms full of prime bass gear, including many of the inspirations for the B3n’s sounds. I knew it would be fun to run through the pedal with him. Powering up the B3n, we were automatically in “memory mode,” and we began making our way through the B3n’s 75 patches (each patch combines several effects).

We hit our first snag when we realised that in memory mode, it was impossible to modify effects or bypass them completely – for that, we’d have to be in “stomp mode,” which was more flexible but not as immediately satisfying. If you’ve read any of Bobby’s columns in Guitar World, you probably know he’s a funny man with strong opinions. The compressed tone of most of the B3n’s presets clashed with his penchant for extreme dynamics, and it would have been nice to have an input-level control for some of his hotter basses.

Fortunately, there was plenty to like: The pedal’s offerings run the gamut from standard to silly, the noise floor is nice and low, and once we got the hang of it, the B3n gave up the goods. For every “Gremlins” (“this patch sounds like gremlins walking in your bass,” says the manual), there are several usable



staples that worked right out of the box.

The unit’s 15 overdrives and distortions offer plenty of variety; Bobby particularly liked the “ODB-Overdrive” for Jack Casady-like saturation, the Jeff Ament-ish distortion of “SA-Drive”, and the whistles and whines of “Rock Drive.” Many of the patches, especially the grittier ones, made him wish he could send a clean signal out of one side of the stereo output and a dirty signal from the other.

The B3n also offers 17 modulation effects, as well as 19 dynamics and filter choices, and although Bobby wasn’t impressed by the note blossom on “Defret” or the lows on “+LoOctave”, he had a great time slapping with “MX Clean.” We were surprised that a Dunlop Volume (X) expression pedal didn’t work with the B3n; Zoom recommends its own FP02M model.

We spent quality time with the B3n’s 11 delays and reverbs, its easy-to-use looper, as well as its 68 drum patterns, which Bobby deemed useful for practise and recording demos. Like every amp/cab simulation, the models on the B3n struck us mostly as good starting points for custom EQ/compression packages.

The B3n has plenty of tools and toys for students, solo adventurers, and gig masters. Although it offers easy access to its gifts, the B3n richly rewards those who spend time dialling in the details.

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
A small multi-effects box with lots to offer, and a price that’s just right.	The holy trinity of a multi-effects unit: variety, flexibility and affordability.	- No XLR jack. - Not compatible with all expression pedals.	Dynamic Music Ph: (02) 9939 1299 Web: dynamicmusic.com.au



CORT GOLD-OC6 ACOUSTIC

AN ALL-SOLID OM ACOUSTIC THAT’S FISHMAN-POWERED AND FEATURE-PACKED, WITH A PRICE THAT WON’T BREAK YOUR HEART. REVIEW BY **DAVID MEAD**.

RRP: \$1,599

Once upon a time, an acoustic maker who spec’d out its instruments with the ‘all-solid woods’ merit badge to the forefront could be king or queen of the heap. But times have changed and conservation now rules the roost, meaning that now some of the six-string formulae of yore are considered to be all but invalid. We speak to luthiers all the time, and many are saying that sometimes laminated sides are actually a very sensible idea, especially when you look at things from the point of view of structural integrity.

“Think of the body of an acoustic guitar to be a little like a drum,” one luthier told us. “You need a rigid frame with a resonant, flexible top to make it work.” Okay, we can see that’s a plan. The big manufacturers have been at it for a while, too. Taylor offers ‘layered’ backs and sides, Martin uses ‘fine veneer’ and has taken the even more extreme route of using high-pressure laminate backs and sides on some of its lower-priced models.

So, where does that leave us in the ‘all-solid woods’ debate now that we’re all being encouraged to be more ecologically aware? Well, there is another way. Traditionalists can still have all-solid woods if that’s what floats their boat. You can pay top dollar for the remaining supplies of the rare stuff, or you can choose your woods with one eye on the planet’s dwindling resources (and your own pocket) and act accordingly – which is what Cort is doing here.

The Gold-OC6 wears its ‘all-solid woods’ spec with pride, and nobody’s planet is going to end up devastated in the process. Sounds good on paper, but what’s it like in practice? Well, Cort’s Gold-OC6 is an OM cutaway acoustic, the company telling us that “this body style, initially developed in the 1920s, captures the pre-war era tone that is often sought after. Sonically, it delivers a sound that is larger than its compact size would hint at and with a level of dynamic responsiveness that is a joy to play.”

In order to achieve this the company has employed a Sitka spruce top that’s been treated with Cort’s own variation on the torrefaction process – Cort calls it ATV, which stands for ‘Aged To Vintage’ – where the wood is baked to remove excess moisture and render it more resonant at the same time. Everything looks in order here with a fine-looking piece of timber and an old-timey amber glow that ticks the aesthetics box nicely.

The back and sides are okoume, a mahogany-esque

wood that is turning up more and more often these days. In fact, it features on the Eastman SB55/v reviewed later on in this issue. Okoume is light in weight (something we noticed immediately on picking up the OC6), hails from the Gabon region of Central Africa, and looks a lot like mahogany from a cosmetic point of view.

The Cort’s neck is another mahogany substitute called paladium, a wood that is widely available in the southern hemisphere, particularly in India and southeast Asia, and once again could easily pass for mahogany with even a relatively well-trained eye. While we’re here, it’s notable that whereas the two principal methods for neck joints on acoustic guitars are either bolt-on or the more traditional dovetail joint, Cort has chosen to use a hybrid of both.

The OC6’s neck fits into the body via a dovetail joint and is secured using a bolt; the best of both worlds, then. The neck has also been strengthened with two strips of walnut that sit either side of the truss rod. Both features have an air of sophistication to them and we’ve not seen too many acoustics pass our way with this kind of thing going on under the hood, especially at this price.

Returning to the guitar’s construction, we find a Macassar ebony fretboard with mother-of-pearl inlays in all the familiar places. The bridge is Macassar ebony, too, and the mother-of-pearl inlay styling is reflected in two small flourishes either side of the bone saddle. Cort has gone to great lengths to give this guitar a good level of kerb appeal to go along with its impressive selection of alternative body woods.

As we’ve mentioned, the first thing you notice when you pick up the OC6 is its weight. It’s a lot lighter than you think, especially if you’re familiar with OM-style acoustics in general. The next thing is the width of the nut. At 43 millimetres, the nut width is similar in terms of feel to that of a Fender American Pro Strat, and Cort tells us that this is something players with smaller hands will find more comfortable.

Acoustic traditionalists who enjoy a little more space for their digits at this point might be a little disappointed as the Cort’s spec here is a few millimetres short of Martin’s current OM spec, for instance. Those of us with a somewhat ‘Desperate Dan’ glove size might suffer a few collisions in this region, too. Those few extra millimetres down there can make all the difference.

As far as sounds go, a few casual chordal strums reveal a broad and breathy sound typical of this body size with a good amount of volume and excellent sustain. If we were adopting the OC6, we’d put a slightly heavier gauge of string on it in order to pull out the lower mids and bass a little more, but a lot of that is down to personal preference as there’s plenty of both to work with here. As far as the trebles go, there’s a good proportion of sweetness and presence without any problems in terms of projection. This thing is loud.

The OC6 comes equipped with a Fishman Flex Blend system that combines an under-saddle piezo with a mic that is located under the bridge side of the guitar’s soundhole. The three controls comprise volume, blend and tone, the latter of which has been calibrated to offer the player everything from a totally flat EQ to the scooped mids you find on many a fingerstylist’s tonal setup. There’s even a tuner that automatically mutes the guitar’s output for discreet tweaks or alternative tuning mischief when playing live.

There’s an awful lot here to play with – plenty of bang for one’s buck, you might say. Ecologically speaking, your mind is at rest with this instrument on your lap and construction features such as the reinforced neck, torrefied top, double-lock neck joint and the flexible Fishman pickup system represent some detailed thinking on Cort’s behalf.

It’s true that the relatively narrow nut width will put off some players, but, thinking positively, players who are used to electric guitars might feel more at home during the occasional acoustic number in their band’s set with this model. 🎸

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
An incredibly well-appointed acoustic for the price. The narrow nut won’t be to everyone’s tastes, but there’s a lot to like here.	Well-thought-out construction. Good sounds with great onstage potential. All-solid woods? Impressive spec for the money. Gigbag included.	That narrow nut might be an annoyance to some fingerstylists.	Dynamic Music Ph: (02) 9939 1299 Web: dynamicmusic.com.au



RRP: \$1,899

GRETSCH G5410T ELECTROMATIC “RAT ROD”

COMBINING OLD-SCHOOL CURB APPEAL WITH MODERN PERFORMANCE, THIS IS A SILVER DREAM MACHINE FROM THE KINGS OF ROCKABILLY. REVIEW BY **ED MITCHELL**.

If you spend enough time glued to the gogglebox, you'll find you can't move for American car restoration shows. The plots are always a bit on the thin side. And there's usually a stupid deadline... a deadline that can't possibly be met. Yet something that looks as though it was pulled from the trash compactor on the Death Star is transformed into a sleek new conveyance with minutes to spare. Every. Single. Episode.

Quite often these shows will produce something described as a “Rat Rod”. Beloved by rockabilly cats and kittens, these things are the antithesis of megabucks hot-rods with their expensive paint and polished chrome. Rat Rods generally boast visible wear and tear and flat, primer-style paint. Luckily, the new Gretsch G5410T Electromatic “Rat Rod” that just rolled onto our forecourt has plenty of the latter and none of the former.

Built in Korea, this hollow-bodied behemoth is basically a modified take on the iconic G6120, which is the guitar the doomed rocker Eddie Cochran, Nashville boss Chet Atkins and Stray Cat Brian Setzer all bestowed iconic status upon.

At the heart of the beast you'll find the top, back and sides pressed from sheets of laminate maple and bound in aged white plastic and black purfling. That's your cake. The icing is the '50s-style bound oversized f-holes, classic chrome ‘G-Arrow’ control knobs, not to mention the obligatory old-school wiggle stick, in this case a stiff-feeling but workable licensed Bigsby B60 True Vibrato. The latter is partnered with a six-saddle Adjusto-Matic bridge with an anchored wooden base.

In terms of the electrical appointments, the G5410T comes loaded with a pair of the house Black Top Filter'Tron humbuckers. These are fed into a master volume with treble bleed circuit, a dedicated volume control for each pickup, a master tone and a three-way selector.

Now, the pickups might be called Black Tops but they actually have red inserts. Nowhere in the Gretsch sales literature for this guitar does it explain why these inserts are so cool. They make the Black Tops look like hot-rod tail lights. It must have been deliberate. Someone needs to take a bow.

Befitting the whole Rat Rod thing, our G5410T is coated in Matte Vintage White paint. There are two other finishes available: you can have Matte Black with a red ‘Plexi’ scratchplate, or Matte Phantom Metallic – a cool silver grey – with the same black ‘guard as our review model. The Matte Vintage White paint is also applied to the back of our guitar's 625-millimetre (24.6-inch) scale set maple neck and its headstock face.

Now, considering this is a sub-\$2,000 Gretsch guitar, you might expect to find the fingerboard is cut from one of those rosewood substitutes: pau ferro or Indian laurel. You'd be wrong. The G5410T has a rosewood 'board just like the Professional Series stuff, with aged white binding and late '50s-style pearloid ‘Neo-Classic Thumbnail’ inlays. The smaller late-50s-style headstock plays host to a set of beautiful open-back tuners and a 42.9-millimetre-width Graph Tech NuBone top nut.

The G5410T's neck profile is slim. It's described as a ‘U’ profile, which for many of you will likely suggest the identically named fat-as-hell necks on early '50s Broadcasters, Nocasters and Teles. Nope. This is really slim. Figure in the 22 medium jumbo frets and a reasonably flattish 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius and you'll realise our ‘Built For Speed’ description isn't just a Stray Cats reference. If you like 'em thin, you'll be equally content with the faultless playability. This thing almost plays itself.

If there are any footprints in the ointment, they come courtesy of the Bigsby: it's just not as loose and smooth feeling as the US-made versions. That

said, tuning stability is impressive.

Acoustically, this guitar is loud. Despite the Gretsch promo material claiming this guitar's body is 57 millimetres (2.25 inches) deep, it's actually the same 63.5-millimetre (2.5-inch) depth as a Brian Setzer Hot Rod. That full-bodied delivery feeds right into the pickups.

The bridge pickup chimes as expected when clean but snarls when you start feeding it some gain. Introducing both Filter'Trons to each other adds some warmth to the clarity of the bridge unit for a classic rockabilly voice. This is even more evident when fingerpicking. Switching to the neck pickup solo works great for jazz comping but also reveals a punchy blues tone when overdrive is kicked in. The clarity of the bridge pickup is echoed by the note separation of the neck unit, which can become satisfyingly unpredictable when you work in an old-school fuzz box.

Some Gretsch Electromatics flaunt the modern tones of the Broad'Tron humbuckers. The G5420T's Filter'Trons will be more familiar to vintage geeks. This is what a Gretsch should sound like, whether your interpretation of that runs to AC/DC, '60s mod or '50s rock 'n' roll.

So what's the verdict? Pah! All Gretsch has done is take one of its most iconic designs, customised it to look even cooler, and made it more affordable. The fiends.

Seriously, though, this thing streets at less than \$2,000 Australian dollars. So if you've been smudging up the music-shop windows dreaming of the day you can have it away on your toes with a Setzer Hot Rod or Nashville, then the G5410T could put you out of your misery.

This guitar couldn't look any cuter, either. But it's about more than just the looks. The pickups actually have enough vintage-style tone to keep the greasers happy, and the kind of grunt that punk cats like Tim Armstrong of Rancid can't get enough of. If you fancy this thing, our advice is don't hang about. Gretsch has a habit of introducing new finishes a bit further down the road and then dropping existing colour codes. So if you like the look you should probably put your foot down. There's always a deadline, man... 

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
Gretsch takes one of its most iconic designs and gives it a street-ready makeover and offers it up for less than two grand. It's insanely good value for one of the coolest guitars on the market.	- It looks amazing. - Exceptional tones. - More versatile than you might think. - Very playable.	A bit more girth in the neck profile would make it perfect.	Gretsch Australia Web: gretsch.com.au

STRYMON COMPADRE DUAL VOICE COMPRESSOR AND BOOST PEDAL

COULD THIS BE YOUR AMP'S NEW FRONT-END? REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Arguably, there are two pedals that you can put before your amp to give you a range of practical tonal options without getting too far removed from its core sound: compression and boost. Strymon's new Compadre offers just this combination with digitally controlled, fully analogue audio signal processing, which delivers separately footswitchable boost and compression sections that you can choose to use individually or together.

The Boost section has options for targeting its frequency range, while the VCA-based compression section provides two different compressors – one offering the type of compression you'd expect from vintage studio rack compressors, and the other for the harder squeeze associated with classic stompboxes.

The compressor comes first in the signal chain, and there's nothing complicated about it. You simply choose Studio or Squeeze mode and use the large knob to turn up the compression, which it does by lowering the threshold above which compression occurs. The Level knob adjusts the pedal's output when the compressor is engaged, cutting or boosting the level by up to six decibels. A Dry knob is becoming a must-have feature on compression pedals, and here it mixes your dry signal in with the compressed.

The transparent subtlety of the Studio mode should be your choice if you're not looking to use compression as a blatant effect. Here, you can

RRP: \$715

keep sound consistent and add smoothly decaying sustain without being too obvious, especially if you mix in some dry sound to retain the natural feel of your note attack. It's classy tone strengthening and conditioning that doesn't jump out at you but that you'd miss it if it was bypassed.

By contrast, the Squeeze mode, while still capable of subtlety in evening out the sound and increasing sustain, can go further into compression as an effect, with an obvious clamping down on note transients that works brilliantly for a country player doing some chicken pickin' and pedal-steel-style bends.

The Boost offers up to 14 decibels in its Flat EQ setting, delivering straight volume boosts and plenty of full-range amp-driving capability, but the two extra EQ options greatly increase the flexibility. The Treble setting is a classic treble booster, pushing upper mid and high frequencies and tightening up the bottom end, while the Mid setting brings forward midrange frequencies that will fatten up any tone.

If you yearn for something a little grittier than a straight clean boost, a rear-panel switch selects between that and a soft clipping boost circuit. Switch

it to Dirt and the boost becomes more like an overdrive, conspicuously Tube Screamer-like in the Mid setting.

It's dead easy to use in a WYSIWYG way, tweaking knobs as necessary, but it does have presets if you're happy to connect up some external gear to access them. You can save the settings of all the pedal's knobs and toggle switches, including the rear Boost Type switch, plus the bypass state of both Boost and Compressor.

Like the Strymon pedals that sport a Favourite footswitch, you can store a Favourite setting here that can be accessed by connecting a Strymon MiniSwitch or another external latching footswitch. Alternatively, Strymon's MultiSwitch Plus three-button footswitch will give you access to three presets. Much more is available via MIDI where you can not only access a full 300 presets but remotely control patch parameters, too.



VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
A unique design that shows real grown-up thinking, the Compadre's practicality could make it the essential link between your guitar and your amp.	- Two compression types and three boost types. - Dry blend control. - Practical size for a twin-footswitch pedal. - Expression pedal volume control.	None.	Noise Toys Imports Ph: (07) 3367 3558 Web: noisetoyimports.com.au

BOSS WAZA-AIR OVER-EAR AMP-PHONES

BOSS MAY HAVE JUST DESIGNED THE BEST PRACTISE AMP(S) EVER. REVIEW BY **PAUL RIARIO**.

They say that practise makes perfect, but for guitarists, a practise routine can be a dull affair when you're stuck in a room with just headphones and an amp. Wouldn't it be far more exciting if you had something that allows you to take your practise and playing anywhere?

Well, following on the success of the Katana-Air, a pioneering product that Boss touted as "the world's first totally wireless guitar amplifier", the company have pushed the envelope even further by introducing the forward-thinking Boss Waza-Air, a personal wireless guitar headphone system that integrates spatial technology and a gyro sensor to deliver a virtual and 3D-like "amp-in-room" experience.

Add to that the premium Katana amp and effect tones, Bluetooth audio streaming and sound editing via your smartphone (from the free Boss Tone Studio app), and the Boss Waza-Air may be the ultimate all-in-one practise-and-play-anywhere solution.

There are no cables to be found because Waza-Air pairs its headphones with a low-latency WL-T wireless transmitter. Both units have built-in rechargeable lithium-ion batteries with an auto standby/wake

function to conserve battery life. And it's a long battery life, too – the headphones last for about five hours of play time, while the transmitter hangs around for roughly 12 hours.

The headphones feature custom-designed 50-millimetre drivers for studio-quality sound, soft conforming earpads and a wide headband for a secure and comfortable fit, plus power and Bluetooth-enable switches, a chrome-knurled guitar volume wheel and two plastic buttons that access the six onboard preset memories and tuner, and which also can control playback when streaming from your mobile device.

Waza-Air's visceral engine is its advanced 3D algorithms, which provide three separate and spatially realistic environments (Surround, Static and Stage). Surround captures the immersive atmosphere of playing in a virtual recording studio, while Static activates the gyro sensor and places the amp and ambient room sound in front of you and pans it in relation to your head movements. Stage places the amp sound behind you, creating a virtual "live setting" that delivers lifelike sound and feel.

Once they're fully charged, simply inserting the WL-T

RRP: \$699



transmitter into the Waza-Air's quarter-inch headphone jack instantly pairs both units for total wireless play. With no cables to get tangled up in, you have freedom to move about as you play while hearing your guitar in three novel environment settings. Surround mode is virtual-reality candy for your ears, but what's wild is the panoramic effect triggered by your head turning in Static and Stage modes.

The aural sensation is surreal. And with the free Tone Studio app, you have 360-degree rotation control on where to place your guitar and audio positions. The Katana-Air voicings are intrinsically Boss-sounding, meaning they have a digital sheen combined with desirable analog overtones that sound completely organic. It's the most pleasing high-gain and clean tones, with each sounding incredibly dimensional through these high-fidelity headphones.

VERDICT	PROS	CONS	DISTRIBUTOR
Here stands a game-changing personal wireless headphone system with 3D sound, built-in amps and effects, Bluetooth audio streaming, and the ability to play and practise anywhere, cable-free.	3D sound from comfortable headphones. - A silent practise tool you can take anywhere. - More than 50 effects from Boss' Katana series.	The price of entry.	Roland Australia Ph: (02) 9982-8266 Web: roland.com/au



HOW TO CRANK UP YOUR CATALOGUE

AS GUITARISTS, WE'RE EXCELLENT AT WRITING RIFFS. BUT FINISHING ENTIRE SONGS? THAT'S ANOTHER STORY...

WORDS BY **JUDI GLASER.**

You've come up with a cool guitar lick and... That's about it. It's just sitting there, waiting for you to turn it into a song or a composition. Does this sound familiar?

We're great at beginnings, less so with endings – that's what I've realised from my own experience. My voice memo library is full of under-one-minute ideas which, if I don't take action, will most likely remain in that format. Similarly, my guitar students frequently create great starting points, but usually struggle to finalise their tracks.

It may seem like a chore getting to that finish line and releasing what we've written into the world. It often feels like a weight we bear on our shoulders that we need to lift, so that we can then move on to the next project. But why does this happen? I can think of a few reasons:

Perfectionism. There is always something to improve or correct. If you consider yourself a perfectionist, I guess you are rarely satisfied with the current state of your track.

Procrastination. If you're a procrastinator (and who isn't?), you think that a better variation is right around the corner, and when it arrives, you realise there's another one coming – and another, and so on.

Time constraints. Yes, life is super busy. Work, family, studies... Who has time to release a single, let alone a whole album?

Lack of support. Maybe you have writer's block, or you just don't know what to do next, and you could probably use some professional or musical advice.

Self-criticism. Perhaps you think that your music isn't good enough, and it's not worth investing your time in. Or you may wonder, "Why bother? There are so many great guitarists out there already."

Personally, I've experienced all of the above on some level. So here are some possible solutions that I've found helpful:

1. REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU'RE ONLY HUMAN

Yes, you can always improve your writing and recordings, but you may get stuck in a never-ending cycle that will affect your productivity – thus, the vast amount of work you put in can result in just a few releases. Also, no one's perfect, and all the greatest have some cool little imperfections. Take, for example, the tiny mistake in Eddie Van Halen's "Eruption" (at the 1:06 mark).

2. SET A DEADLINE

It could be anything from a special occasion, like a birthday, or a random date that looks nice (11/11/2020 maybe). Even if you won't meet the deadline, your progress will bring you much closer to completion by that date. Also, we all know how hard we work, including all-nighters, to complete a task with a hard deadline.

3. GET PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes we're so engaged in what we're trying to accomplish that we forget why we started doing it in the first place. Especially in

our unique times, don't forget to interact with those around you and elsewhere, and let people you trust listen to your tracks to get fresh points of view – particularly if they're not musicians themselves, as they can offer feedback that is free of the critique that naturally comes with a professional ear. Yet, while taking comments onboard, always trust your own instincts.

4. WRITE NEW MATERIAL

If you have more music in the pipeline, this will hopefully create a positive pressure and push you to work on finalising and releasing your unfinished tracks.

5. GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

I don't mean therapy (although that may be necessary in some cases), but rather finding a producer, manager or even guitar teacher to guide you. Over time, I've accepted that my role as a guitar tutor is to serve as a mentor or coach, as well as just teaching.

I hope this helps! My passion is to create original music and to help others do so as well. I released an album very recently, facing all of the aforementioned issues, and the satisfaction it gave me has fueled my motivation to carry on releasing my and my students' music more frequently. 🎵

Judi Glaser is a guitarist, composer and guitar teacher who specialises in creativity. His new album, *Love Blue Electric*, is out now.



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