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34 COVER STORY: AC/DC POWERS UP ONCE MORE

They said it would never happen – that after years of setbacks due to logistical issues, health problems and unfortunate passings, AC/DC was finally done for. But hell hath no fury like the biggest rock band in the damn world! Angus and Stevie Young, Brian Johnson, Phil Rudd and Cliff Williams have all returned to deliver a brand new album: the bold and bombastic *Power Up*. In this special edition of *Australian Guitar*, we're presenting two enormous (and enormously rare) one-on-one conversations with Angus – one about *Power Up*, and the other about Angus' own inimitable artistry and red-hot riffing skills. Get around it!

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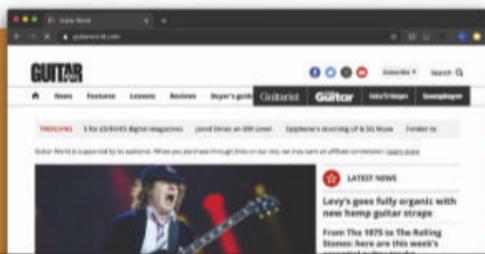
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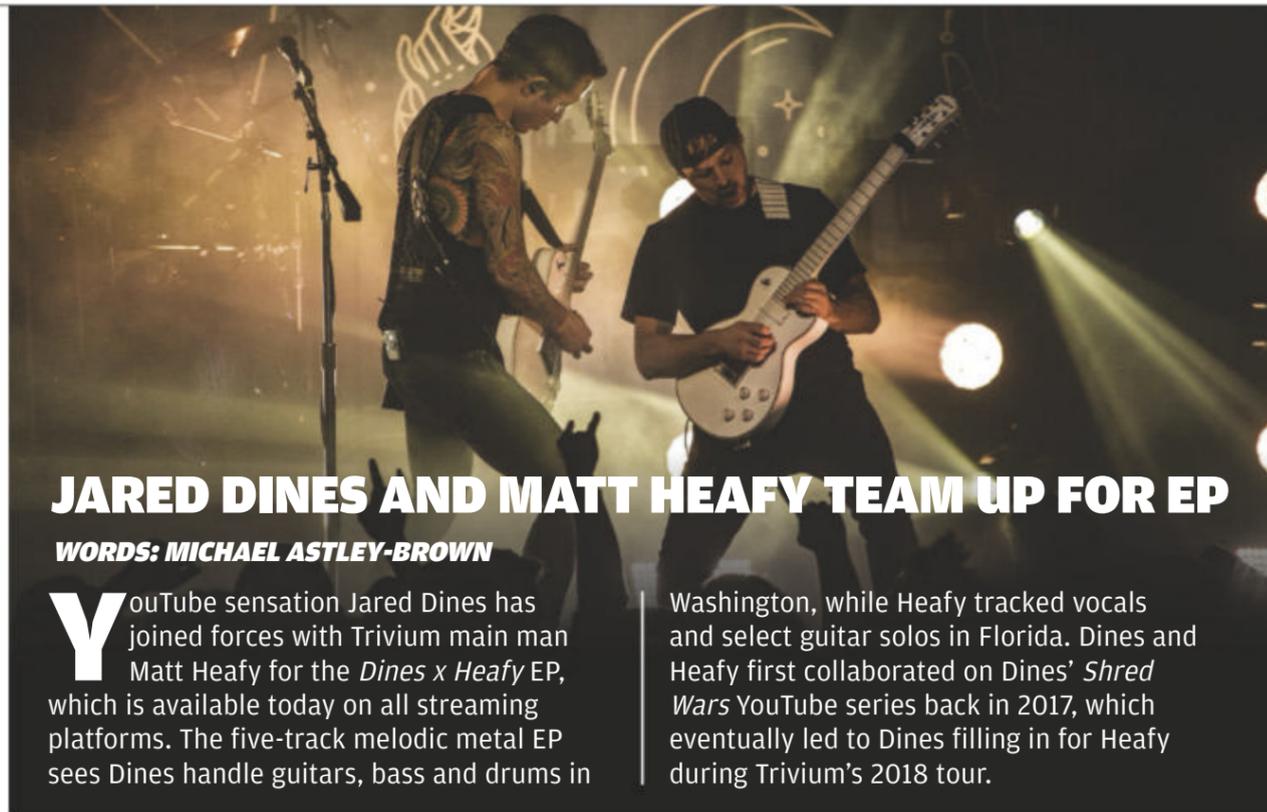
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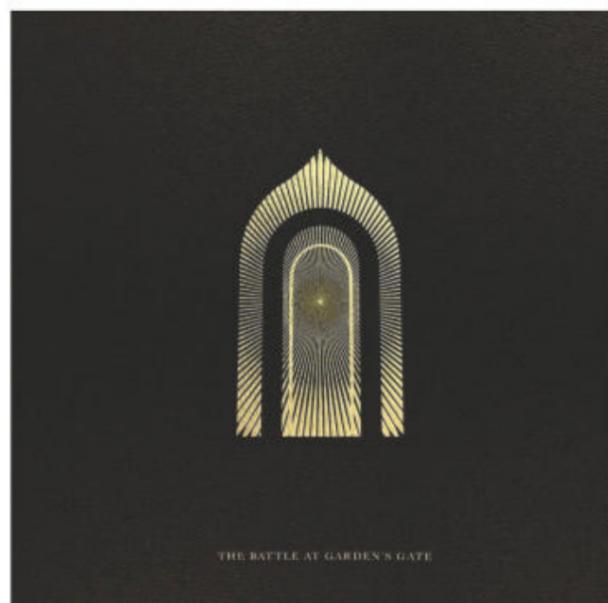


JARED DINES AND MATT HEAFY TEAM UP FOR EP

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

YouTube sensation Jared Dines has joined forces with Trivium main man Matt Heafy for the *Dines x Heafy* EP, which is available today on all streaming platforms. The five-track melodic metal EP sees Dines handle guitars, bass and drums in

Washington, while Heafy tracked vocals and select guitar solos in Florida. Dines and Heafy first collaborated on Dines' *Shred Wars* YouTube series back in 2017, which eventually led to Dines filling in for Heafy during Trivium's 2018 tour.



GRETA VAN FLEET ANNOUNCE ALBUM #2

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

Grammy-winning classic-rockers Greta Van Fleet have confirmed a new album, *The Battle At Garden's Gate*, set for release on April 16th, 2021. *The Battle At Garden's Gate* is said to be informed by the band's experiences touring the world, and coming into contact with new cultures, histories and philosophies. We're promised more spacious arrangements and dynamics, some folkier acoustic offerings, and even some guitar noise freakouts worthy of rivalling Neil Young.

ELECTRO-HARMONIX TAKES ITS VIBRATO/CHORUS GAME TO THE NEXT LEVEL

WORDS: MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

Electro-Harmonix are renowned for their bucket brigade-based modulation pedals, and now the company have announced a new analog chorus/vibrato set to join the ranks: the Eddy. As you'd expect, the pedal's circuitry is all-analog, but offers a wealth of flexibility courtesy of envelope and expression control over modulation rate and depth, as well as LFO shape adjustment and a tone control. You can switch between vibrato or chorus via a toggle switch, while an external expression pedal can be set to adjust rate or depth.



GIBSON EXPANDS THE SLASH COLLECTION WITH "VICTORIA" GOLDTOP

WORDS: SAM ROCHE

Gibson made history in 2020 by announcing the Slash Collection, celebrating three decades of partnership with the Guns N' Roses guitarist and marking its very-first evergreen artist collection. The guitar giant has now announced the first addition to the collection since its launch: the Gibson Slash "Victoria" Goldtop. It boasts a similar set of specs to that of the collection's four previous Les Paul Standards, including a solid mahogany body with an AAA maple top, C-shaped neck profile with a 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, and a pair of Custom BurstBucker Alnico II pickups controlled via two sets of volume and tone knobs and a three-way toggle.

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...



JOE BONAMASSA SHARES HIS GREATEST FINDS FROM A LIFETIME OF BUYING AND SELLING GUITARS

Words: David Mead

Every guitar player who turns up for a *Bought & Sold* interview has got a few stories to tell and wisdom to share, but none are as well positioned as Mr. Joe Bonamassa to talk about the buying and selling of electric guitars and amplifiers. The blues master and proprietor of Nerdville has one of the

coolest guitar collections on the planet. It's not just the numbers – which are impressive – it is his focus. He knows what he likes, and that, folks, is one of the key takeaways from this one.

With his new album, *Royal Tea*, out on record store shelves virtual and physical, Bonamassa recants some of his gear buying war stories, and shares some times should you be considering entering the vintage guitar market.

Check it out: <http://bit.ly/JoesBestBuys>



JAY LEONARD J WRITES AND RECORDS A WHOLE SONG USING ONLY HIS JAMMY MODULAR DIGITAL GUITAR

Words: Richard Bienstock

We first met the Jammy – a portable, modular digital travel guitar that features 15 standard-sized frets, touch sensors to track finger positions, string muting and bending levels, and a detachable neck – back in 2018 and were immediately wowed. Able to fit into most backpacks, the battery-powered six-string can be plugged straight into an amp, a DAW or headphones. The guitar's sound is both generated and processed on board, so different effects can be used without the need of a mobile app.

But that's only the beginning of what the Jammy is capable of. In this demo video, in-demand recording and touring guitarist Jay Leonard J writes and records an entire song in just five minutes using only the Jammy MIDI guitar – which, he says with amazement, “looks like something Johnny 5 from *Short Circuit* would play.” It's a completely digital guitar, but he says “it has real strings on it so there is a tactile experience.”

Check it out: <http://bit.ly/FretsOfTheFuture>



YOUTUBE SHREDDER TURNS A FURIOUS PASTOR'S COVID-19 EXORCISM INTO A RIPPING METAL JAM

Words: Richard Bienstock

We've met YouTube electric guitar player Andre Antunes before, witnessing his impressive videos playing Dire Straits' “Sultans Of Swing” in the style of 12 guitarists, and stringing together famous solos from the likes of Steve Vai and Carlos Santana into one song. He's also performed ridiculously complex arrangements of Mozart's “Moonlight Sonata” and Vivaldi's “The Four Seasons”, as well as originals like “The Washing Machine Song”, where he jams along with, well, a washing machine.

Now Antunes and his guitar have taken on COVID-19 itself, with a new video where he combines some proggy metal riffage with Texas-based Pastor Kenneth Copeland's fire-and-brimstone onstage exorcism of COVID from the US.

Check it out: <http://bit.ly/CoronaCore>



MEET THE INTELOCASTER: A STRAT MADE FROM OLD COMPUTER PARTS

Words: Richard Bienstock

You've met the Les-o-Caster, a Les Paul/Strat hybrid. Now how about we introduce you to the Intelocaster, a Stratocaster-like guitar with a body constructed from the guts of old laptop computers? This newest bizarre build comes courtesy of YouTuber AWDCUTLASS, who begins by mixing together epoxy resin and epoxy hardener and pouring it into a Stratocaster-shaped body frame. He then places the frame in a high pressure tank to solidify the epoxy mixture and remove the air bubbles. This solid epoxy structure serves as the back of the guitar's body, over which he piles a layer of laptop insides. From there, it's more epoxy, then more insides, then more epoxy, and so on, resulting in a 3D visual effect.

Check it out: <http://bit.ly/GlitchGuitar>



HEAR EDDIE VAN HALEN GET COSMIC ON A NEWLY UNEARTHED COVER OF JIMI HENDRIX'S “IF 6 WAS 9”

Words: Richard Bienstock

Keyboardist David Garfield has played with everyone from Larry Carlton and Steve Lukather to George Benson and Smokey Robinson. But one of the highlights of his career came in the late '90s, when he recorded with Eddie Van Halen. Now, for the first time, Garfield is releasing that track, a cover of Jimi Hendrix's “If 6 Was 9”, and *Guitar World* is happy to be premiering the collaboration.

The cut, which appears on Garfield's new EP *Guitar Heroes OTB, Vol. 1*, also features singer and guitarist Michael Landau, bassist Will Lee and drummer Simon Phillips. But right up front is Eddie, who contributes an absolutely wild and psychedelic guitar performance to the Hendrix classic.

Check it out: <http://bit.ly/EddieVanHendrix>



SIOBHAN COTCHIN

Photo: Annie Harvey

SHE IS the future queen of Australian country, fresh out of WA with ambitions high and guitar gripped tightly. At age 20, she sings like she's lived a generation, raw and rootsy and nothing short of riveting.

SHE SOUNDS LIKE the heart and soul of country's greatest spun through a distinctly modern web. Her playing is bold and tight and feels emphatically impassioned, and there's genuine, palpable emotion in every line she roars into the mic. The rawness of her lead tone is subdued by crisp, contemporary production – and that isn't at all to its detriment; instead, it posits Siobhan as a choice to pioneer the future of Australian country.

YOU'LL DIG HER IF YOU LIKE Kacey Musgraves, Lucinda Williams and Bruce Springsteen – ideally blast from the cassette deck in a beaten-up Jeep as you barrel down the bushlands. If anyone's gonna write the next A-tier outback anthem, it's Cotchin.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT any of the ripping four singles Cotchin debuted with in 2020. Whether it's the dry, dusty twang and heart-on-sleeve howls of "Tear Myself Apart", the roaring leads and soulful harmonies of "The Fair-Weather Friend Blues", the scene-stealing solo work on "Do You Know What I Mean?" or the slick and simmering lull of "Just The Way It Is", you're bound to find something that'll make your ears prick up.



GOOD PASH

Photo: April Josie

THEY ARE five good mates from Sydney blending summery psych-rock and blistering punk with a nice little sprinkle of sass and wit. They've been a staple of the local pub scene since the good ol' days of 2016; rumour has it that ever since then, scientists have been trying to find a single bad vibe in the air whenever a song of theirs plays. Four years on and they still come up short every time.

THEY SOUND LIKE the "one more beer" that turns a casual Friday arvo out into a bender worthy of the history books. A little scratchy and scuzzy but with a whole lot of spirit, Good Pash dole big, fist-in-the-air hooks aplenty. Pop their tunes on whenever you need a lil' midweek pick-me-up and you'll never feel the blues again. (Note: *Australian Guitar* takes no responsibility for any post-Good Pash bluesing. Terms and conditions may apply. Always read the label.)

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE The White Stripes, Courtney Barnett, Violent Soho... Basically any band that could make you want to cut sick in the pit and keep a giant smile on your dial the whole time. The quintet shine with their infectious energy and infallible liveliness – not that you'd look at a band named Good Pash and think they'd take things super seriously to begin with, of course.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the recent double A-side "Delete Me"/"Get Your Mind On Other Things". Or if you still haven't shaken the holiday spirit, they even dropped a Christmas jam ("Fairytale Of New York") last year!



AGNES MANNERS

Photo: Dave Le Page

THEY ARE an experimental emo-pop outfit from Sydney who deal in poignant and picturesque soundscapes bellied with luminous strings and soaring guitars. Initially the brainchild of artcore trailblazer Matthew Gravalin (formerly of Hellions and The Bride), Agnes Manners is now a fully fleshed-out band ready to bring the beauty and brutishness of *Fantasia Famish* to life.

THEY SOUND LIKE a night at the opera gone horribly, yet comically wrong, where the resulting night of chaos and calamity takes place entirely within the theatre's walls. You'll laugh. You'll cry. You'll have the time of your goddamn life.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE The National, Forgive Durden and Panic! At The Disco. Fans of Gravalin's work in Hellions will feel especially at home, too – it feels like this is what he was inching the band towards with their last two LPs in particular. Without the boundaries of Hellions' established background, however, Gravalin is able to flesh his concept out to its full thematic potential.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the aforementioned debut album *Fantasia Famish*, which takes listeners on a bewitching ride through mountainous peaks and valleys of bliss and bleakness alike. The LP at every turn heady and heartfelt, Gravalin trades the volume and intensity of his former projects for a smokier, more opaquely theatrical dynamic. Don't take that to mean there aren't some skull-rattlingly hectic moments to be unearthed, though...



BLESSED

Photo: @VisualsByRazak

HE IS Australia's answer to the monolithic rise of the emo-rap empire. Cutting his teeth with low-fi freestyles in the Western Sydney underground, the Ghana-born luminary rapped as Miracle until rediscovering his childhood love for pop-punk, rebranding and carving out a new path as one of Australia's most innovative and uncompromising musical forces to break out in the past decade.

HE SOUNDS LIKE a genre-bending genius who should be jamming out his anthems in sold-out arenas. It's immediately hypnotising the way Blessed fuses dry, crunchy guitar lines with glittering hip-hop beats and warm, droning vocal runs.

YOU'LL DIG HIM IF YOU LIKE Kid Cudi, Lil Peep and Khalid. He's got Cudi's acerbic, soulful-yet-understated singing downpat, Peep's knack for grungy, overdriven guitar-led beats, and Khalid's youthful spirit – and into it all, he injects a surge of his own inimitable flair, equally brooding and buoyant and all-over banging.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT his fierce and forcible debut full-length, *Music Is The Medicine*. Though billed strictly as a mixtape, the 12-tracker sounds infallibly sharp and tight, and feels more authentically impactful than most proper albums released last year. Blessed also dropped over 30 loose singles throughout 2020 – our suggestion is to throw them all in a playlist, sink into the couch and spiral off on an hourlong journey of pure sonic power.



BERMUDA BAY

Photo: Emerald

THEY ARE Adelaide's most fiercely funky group of dancefloor deviants, with a red-hot swagger that simply commands your attention. They've been playing together since age 14, and with two gloriously groovy, infinitely replayable EPs under their belts (with plenty more tunes to come), it's without a doubt they'll soon be taking stages by storm around the globe.

THEY SOUND LIKE a three-day weekend you didn't know about until the night before it started. It's still over too soon (like any of Bermuda Bay's releases), but it's still better than what you're used to (like any of Bermuda Bay's releases). You end it with a feeling of true appreciation (like... You get it).

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Tame Impala, M83 and Last Dinosaurs. Their warm and warbly, ultra-danceable disco-pop gems spur visions of neon lights, glittery bodypaint, and 24-hour kebab shops in perfect walking distance from the club you just spent six hours sweating up a storm in. Their tracks are instant mood-setters - pop one on when you're getting ready for your next night out and thank us later.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the inescapably rousing *Expectations* EP, which landed at the tail end of 2020 with the perfect set of slick and suave jams to ring in the new year. Make sure to catch them live, too, where they crank the vibes up to 11 and get a dancefloor raging like a pack of dogs in a butcher's shop.



AZIM ZAIN AND HIS LOVELY BONES

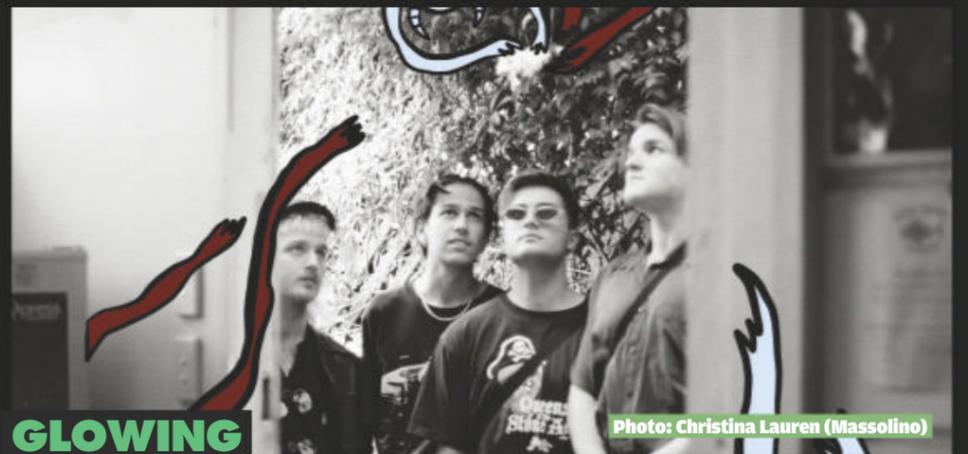
Photo: Iana Borodinskaja

HE IS a Malaysian-born, Canberra-based rock dog with a keen ear for melody and a heartache he wears proudly on his sleeves. Equal parts catchy, charismatic and chaotic, his painfully underrated pop-punk anthems feel like instant classics upon first listen, effortlessly powerful and authentic. He's well overdue for a mainstream breakthrough - get this man a headlining theatre tour, pronto!

HE SOUNDS LIKE the kind of stuff you'd blast through your car speakers at a truly unsafe volume while you zoom down the highway, trees blurring by as you scream along at the top of your lungs. You're not necessarily sad, but you need to *feel* something - day or night, Zain is there to help you with that.

YOU'LL DIG HIM IF YOU LIKE Modern Baseball, Waxahatchee and The Dangerous Summer. There's a folksy twinge to some of the mellower and more melancholic passages that Zain occasionally heads down, but for the most part it's all about those big, boomy sadcore hooks that make you wanna spin-kick strangers in mosh pits and hug them at the same time.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the massively melodic, jam-heavy emotional gut-punch that is Zain's long-awaited debut album, *Be Good*. The ten-track epic plays out like the culmination of a lifetime's highs and lows, from the volatile buoyancy of "Passenger Seat" and "Holiday Home" to the big, beautiful eruption of passion and catharsis in the seven-minute scorcher "Playing Pretend".



GLOWING

Photo: Christina Lauren (Massolino)

THEY ARE an Adelaidian alt-rock outfit with more raw, untamed power than any golden-era Marvel hero would know what to do with.

THEY SOUND LIKE the musical equivalent of a *Final Destination* death scene: absolutely unhinged, but impossible to look away from. And then as soon as it's over (it being either a splatter of gore or one of Glowing's riffs), you're already waiting impatiently for the next one.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Jawbreaker, Sorority Noise, and their fellow SA-native pitlords in West Thebarton (or Teenage Joans, or Towns, or... Actually come to think of it, Adelaide is just a great place to be a rock fan right now). If you're into mid-'00s emo-punk where angsty and earnest vocals ebb and flow over punishing Telecaster juts and rhythm lines that feel more like they're subliminally advertising overdrive pedals than rolling out actual notes - where a track can flicker from a sober lull to all-out hardcore chaos in the blink of an eye - then you might just find your new favourite band in Glowing.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT the five-track frenzy of ruthless energy and volcanic potency they've deceitfully dubbed *No Fun*. Bursting at the seams with thrashing riffs and rip-roaring solos, the foursome waste no time going full-on apeshit here. It runs just a shred over 15 minutes long, but expect to enjoy hours upon hours of heartfelt headbanging with this mini-monster.



RELIQA

Photo: Kangiten Productions

THEY ARE a genre-bending band of misfits from the NSW Central Coast, where the emphatic howls of frontwoman Monique Pym dance delicately over a bed of garish and guttural riffs from shredhead Brandon Lloyd and basslord Miles Knox.

THEY SOUND LIKE a billion-volt jolt to the eardrums that you'll never stop craving once you feel it. There's a base layer of prog-metal to their overarching sound, but they don't seem to follow any particular stylistic formula. One moment, they'll be neck deep in a thrashing riptide of down-tuned math licks and ear-splitting blastbeats, and the next they'll be cantering along with a sliver of almost balladesque beauty.

YOU'LL DIG THEM IF YOU LIKE Northlane, The Beautiful Monument and My Chemical Romance. But if you're looking for a band that sounds exactly like them (or anything else, for that matter), jog on - Reliqa are truly one of a kind.

YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT their sole release of 2020, "Mr. Magic". In just over four minutes, the band cram in an album's worth of punishing metal riffs, keys, strings and layered vocal harmonies, one heck of a breakdown, some dips in pace and detours into stylistic territories that shouldn't work but immediately do, and even a cool little chant-along bit. And yet, it never feels rushed or convoluted. It's some crazy black magic they've probably made a deal with the devil to pull off... And if we may say so ourselves: totally worth the eternal damnation.



Photo: Ophelia Symons

MATT STEVENS + PAUL MUSOLINO

HAILS FROM MELBOURNE, VIC
PLAYS IN THE GLOOM IN THE CORNER
SOUNDS LIKE MIND-MELTING MATHCORE CHAOS
LATEST DROP ULTIMA PLUVIA (EP OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

What's your current go-to guitar?

Matt: I love my Fender Player Stratocaster HSS. I remember wanting a Stratocaster for a couple years, so one day I just walked into East Gate Music and played as many as I could. I also really liked a Japanese Stratocaster I played, but was astonished to find that the Player Series Stratocaster was a quarter of the price! It was a no-brainer for me to purchase that guitar - I love how the neck feels, along with the versatility of the humbucker and single-coil pickups.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

Paul: I just remember watching the music video for Metallica's "One" - as soon as the solo started, I thought, "I want to do that one day," and it went from there. My first ever guitar was a cheap SX Les Paul copy in Tobacco Burst, which came in a pack. It wasn't great, but that guitar travelled with me from rock to metal, and even deathcore. It's since been destroyed and sent to the dump though, unfortunately.

What inspires you as a player?

Paul: I personally draw so much influence from so many different styles of guitar playing. At the moment, pretty much anything that The Acacia Strain and Meshuggah do tends to stay on repeat. That constant inspiration definitely bleeds into my songwriting as I push to write more heavy and chaotic music.

Are you much of a gear nerd?

Matt: Paul definitely is - I'd say he's double the guitar nerd I'll ever be so I usually run anything gear-related by him before I think for myself [laughs]. I like to keep things simple with my live setup - my favourite part of it is my Kemper. It's such a versatile piece of equipment, and I'm constantly finding new sounds that inspire me to write in an entirely different way.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

Matt: A seven-string Ernie Ball Music Man baritone, so that I can comfortably use an Ernie Ball guitar when I play live with Gloom. We love our guitars in low tunings - our main tuning is drop F on a seven-string. I own a John Petrucci BFR seven-string which I love absolutely everything about, so I'd be all about anything similar to that with a baritone scale.

What would your signature model look like?

Paul: I would love an all-black Gibson Explorer shape with a massive baritone scale; seven strings, ebony fretboard, and some passive pickups. I've always idolised the Explorer, but unfortunately none have matched the specs I require. I basically want something James Hetfield would love and hate at the same time.

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

Matt: AJ Rebollo. I'd just love to improvise or write a track with him. I really enjoy his ability to make riffs bounce along with section that relies heavily on playing chords with melody in-between. I took a lot of influence from AJ when I played in my previous band, as I was the only guitarist and we didn't sample any guitar parts. In this way I was constricted by writing guitar parts that offered melodic and chordal elements.



Photo: Alex Radelich

JARRYD JAMES

HAILS FROM BRISBANE, QLD
PLAYS SOLO
SOUNDS LIKE SLICK, SOULFUL CLUB ANTHEMS
LATEST DROP P.M. (LP OUT JANUARY 22ND VIA UNIVERSAL)

What's your current go-to guitar?

My favourite guitar at the moment is actually a bass - it's a 1978 Fender Musicmaster. I bought it a few years ago from Southside Guitars in Williamsburg, and ever since I got it, I've taken it to pretty much every session I've been in. I find it to be a great tool to get ideas started - it's just so easy to handle; it's basically a guitar with bass strings on it.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

My very first guitar was one that belonged to my father. I never met him, and he died when I was quite young - around two-years-old - and when I was in high school, it was given to me by his mother. It's an old Ibanez dreadnought acoustic, and along with it I also inherited one of those original Pignose amps. Those are really cool little things.

What inspires you as a player?

I grew up listening to Bob Dylan, so naturally figured out how to fingerpick as soon as possible. My mum also had a lot of Leo Kottke albums that grabbed my ear. David Gilmour is one of my all-time favourites, and in more modern times I'd have to say Rivers Cuomo of Weezer for his perfectly simple and melodic solos.

Are you much of a gear nerd?

I'm the opposite of a gear nerd - I have really simple needs and tastes. I have a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe Tweed, it's a newer one but for some reason it came with a vintage Jensen Alnico speaker in it, which I think is quite unusual. Other than that, I don't own a lot of pedals - just a couple Boss delays and tremolo. When I record, I mostly use plugins for effects.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

I'd really love to find an old Martin D-28 someday. So expensive though!

What would your signature model look like?

I'm only half serious when I say this, but it would be a left-handed Fender Strat, flipped Hendrix-style back into a right-hander, and then road-worn, but not *too* much. I have a Fender Jazz Bass that I did the same thing to - I bought it off my friend George McCardle, who used to play in Little River Band, and customised it so I could use it.

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

I'll say D'Angelo for this, and I reckon it would be fun to just jam random stuff with him - maybe a little 12-bar blues action.



Photo: Ruby Boland

MADDY JANE

HAILS FROM BRUNY ISLAND, TAS
PLAYS SOLO (WITH A KILLER BACKING BAND)
SOUNDS LIKE HIGH-ENERGY ALT-ROCK WITH A FOLK EDGE
LATEST DROP "YOU'RE NOT MINE" (SINGLE OUT NOW VIA SONY)

What's your current go-to guitar?

I'm pretty much always playing my 2015/16 Japanese (MIJ) Classic '60s Tele Custom - it's a Candy Apple red, double-bound beauty that I saved from being stuck at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I nagged the guy in the shop to sell me this Tele - he said he was selling it to the Uni, but I went in every day and nagged until he made the right decision and let me have it. I love it for all the reasons: it's perfect for my sound, my small hands *and* my playing style!

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

My first guitar was a pretty cheap acoustic that I stuck shells on with Blu-Tack! I fell in love with the guitar because once I'd learned just a few things from my music teacher in high school, I found that there was so much to explore. I loved it because it was the perfect instrument to allow me to back myself singing. I started writing songs as soon as I knew a few chords and could work things out to express my little self.

What inspires you as a player?

Ranging from Courtney Barnett to Paul Kelly to Danielle Haim - those are the kinds of guitarists I channel when playing, but there are so many guitarists I admire for soundcraft in general, and that I take from when arranging songs or writing guitar lines. I'm no solo shredder, so I maybe don't channel them as much live, but I think I favour a couple of guitarist teams because my lead guitarist, James Hunt, is so much a part of how we work out the guitar together. I usually write lines for him to play on top of what I'm playing to get what I'm hearing in the two guitars.

Are you much of a gear nerd?

I'm a wannabe gear nerd, I suppose? I love the magic of sound more than the technicalities, but do really nerd out at Telecasters; chorus, overdrive and delay pedals; and pretty much anything vintage. I actually have this overdrive pedal that was custom-made for me by Red Sun Music. I got to make my own sound and I picked out all the frequencies!

Do you have any 'white whales'?

I really want a baritone guitar!

What would your signature model look like?

Look, probably just like the one I own [*laughs*]. But maybe it would be pink or orange. I love anything vintage looking, so if I did a custom model it would look super vintage with all the old knobs and bells, with a Tele or Les Paul kind of body so it's not too big. It would also need to have a scale length of 24.75-inches for my little hands, and a slim '60s-style neck!

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

Danielle Haim. I would love to jam with all three HAIM sisters, but I just love Danielle's playing, hooks and riffs. She is one of my biggest inspirations.



Photo: Britt Andrews

KELLY JANSCH

HAILS FROM WOLLONGONG, NSW
PLAYS IN TOTTY
SOUNDS LIKE POP-PUNK MADE BY A SENTIENT SKATEBOARD WHO LIVES ON A DIET OF MOUNTAIN DEW AND WEED
LATEST DROP GARDEN (EP OUT NOW VIA RATBAG/BMG)

What's your current go-to guitar?

I pretty much always reach for my Fender Powercaster. I got it as a present for my birthday last year (thanks Simon!). I'd never seen one before - I think they were pretty new at the time - but I love the size of it. It's really lightweight too, which is great when you've got the back problems of an 80-year-old. I think part of why I love it so much is because it's sentimental, and it wasn't something I knew I wanted until I got it. It's really versatile with the bridge humbucker and P-90 style pickup in the neck.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

I grew up surrounded by music - my two older brothers and my dad always played the guitar. I've always played flute, so I honestly didn't gravitate towards the guitar until I was around 17 and I started looking up basic chords on *Ultimate Guitar*. I was just playing along to songs I liked at the time, and I bought my own guitar when I was 19 - it was a white Squire Telecaster Deluxe. I was living and working in Brisbane with no friends and heaps of spare time. I was looking at a specific shop online and had zero knowledge of what I was buying, but it was actually a sick guitar! It's got two Fender Wide Range humbuckers, which make it sound so crisp.

What inspires you as a player?

Honestly, I look up to the people closest to me, my mates in bands and my brothers. Their influence is what pushes me to become better, expand my knowledge and develop my own styles. It feels funny to call myself a guitarist!

Are you much of a gear nerd?

I try to get deep into that world, but my knowledge isn't huge. I think I'm more in it by association, because our drummer Chris is a big gear nerd. My favourite amp is a JCM800, mainly because I want to be like J Mascis, but also because playing through that with a Fender Twin next to it is just sick. Huge, thick tones. In terms of pedals, I love my Boss DS-1, and I just started playing with a Way Huge Green Rhino for my overdrive. I like to keep things pretty simple.

Do you have any 'white whales'?

I've always wanted a Fender Jag HH. There's also this guitar that I once saw on vintage resale Instagram shop. It was a Jazzmaster, but it had F holes and a squared-off body and sides. It was sparkly pink with a matching headstock. I wish I could remember the name of the shop... I saw it go live and definitely couldn't afford it at the time, but I still see it in my dreams!

What would your signature model look like?

I reckon I'd just want it to be my Powercaster, but with a light pink body and matching headstock, and a black pickguard with purple binding around the outside. Very specific colours, but with the same specs as the Powercaster. That guitar is my true love.

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

I would give anything to play with Frank Zappa. I don't know how well I'd keep up with his mastery, but he is hands-down the first person I'd choose to play with if I had the chance. It would be so sick to sit down with a guitar and tap into the brain of J Mascis, too.

HOT GEAR

FENDER TASH SULTANA STRATOCASTER

RRP: \$1,999 • fender.com

Finished in vibrant Transparent Cherry and furnished with all-gold hardware, the Tash Sultana Stratocaster has good looks to match its upscale appointments. The clarity and sparkle of Yosemite single-coil Strat pickups, combined with the powerful Double Tap humbucking bridge pickup, deliver a wide range of tonal options at your fingertips. The Modern C-shape maple neck, with 9.5-inch radius, and 22 medium jumbo frets provides comfortable modern playability, while the vintage-style synchronised tremolo offers classic Strat vibrato action. Other features include a matching painted headstock and custom “skull” neck plate.



LINE 6 SPIDER V 20 MKII GUITAR AMP

RRP: \$329.99 • au.yamaha.com

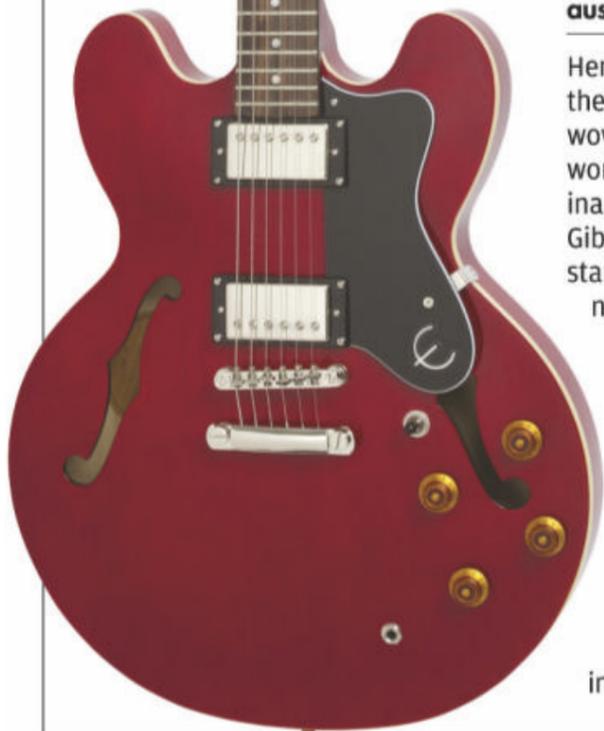
The Spider V 20 MkII amp sounds great right out of the box. Plug in and immediately rock one of 16 new MkII preset tones, or craft your own with the easy-to-use controls. Each preset contains up to three effects that can be switched in and out stompbox-style, using the dedicated FX buttons on the front panel. Turning the Reverb knob adds atmosphere and depth to your sound. Tap in delay times and modulation rates with the Tap/Tuner button, or press and hold it to access the onboard tuner. Connect the Spider V 20 MkII to your Mac, PC, iOS or Android device via the USB port and use the free Spider V Remote app to edit your tones, access additional tones via the cloud, and record your performances with the included Steinberg Cubase LE DAW.



EPIPHONE “INSPIRED BY GIBSON” ES-335

RRP: \$1,499+
australismusic.com.au

Here stands Epiphone’s version of the historic ES-335, which has been wowing guitar players all over the world for over six decades. From its inaugural appearance in 1958, the Gibson ES-335 set an unmatched standard. The Epiphone ES-335 is no exception – it is simply one of the best deals today for guitar players who want the classic sound of an ES-335 at an accessible price. This ES-335 is crafted with a layered maple top, back, and sides, coupled with a solid maple tone block to create the amazing sustain, warmth, and resonant tones that players crave in a semi-hollow instrument.



BEHRINGER MONOPOLY ANALOG POLYPHONIC SYNTH

RRP: \$1,269 • australismusic.com.au

The 1980s were an amazing decade for electronic music. Artists like Vince Clarke and bands like Depeche Mode used synthesisers to great effect, and it was none other than the MonoPoly synth – which was only available for three years before being taken off shelves – that they did it with. A true collector’s item, Behringer brings this beauty into the 21st century as an ultra-affordable, and even more feature-packed, homage to the original. Conjure up virtually any sound imaginable with incredible finesse and ease. The pure analog signal path is based on the authentic MonoPoly circuitry as well as VCO, VCF and VCA designs from the ‘80s.





KYSER NEON QUICK-CHANGE ACOUSTIC CAPO

RRP: \$44.95 • cmcmusic.com.au

From the walls of Texas' most famous honky tonks to the bright lights of the most historic musical cities in the world, nothing speaks louder than neon. In an homage to the bars and clubs where every guitarist gets their start, Kyser presents the first of its curated colour collections for the player who loves to make a statement. The Neon collection boasts four all-new, wildly vibrant powdercoat paint colours designed to turn heads in any venue. The collection harkens back to the origins of the Kyser company in true '80s spirit, equipping its seminal Quick-Change design with a black spring and black boot for an added touch of "new-retro" sensibility.



EARTHQUAKER DEVICES AVALANCHE RUN STEREO REVERB & DELAY WITH TAP TEMPO

RRP: \$659.99 • au.yamaha.com

The Avalanche Run is a dreamy, stereosonic and exploratory multi-tool that includes up to two seconds of delay time, reverse delay,

tap tempo with subdivision control, switchable true bypass or buffered bypass with five different tail lengths (including a sound-on-sound style lo-fi looping mode), and an assignable expression control that maps the expression jack to a control of your choice - including the toggle! The delay section allows tweaking from tape emulation to bucket brigade styles, and the cavernous, plate-style reverb has just a touch of modulation. Otherworldly reverse delay and dynamic swelling reverb settings are accessible through a three-way toggle switch, too. And that's just the beginning...

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN STINGRAY SHORT SCALE BASS

RRP: \$1,650 • cmcmusic.com.au

The Sterling by Music Man short-scale StingRay bass is the newest addition to the StingRay collection, offering the iconic design with a short-scale makeover for the first time. The new short-scale bass features a 30-inch scale for easier playability, passive boost, and a Sterling by Music Man humbucking pickup with higher output neodymium magnets and a three-way rotary switch. The pickup configuration includes parallel, true single-coil, and series modes. Available in Daphne Blue with Maple Fretboard and Olympic White with Rosewood Fretboard.



FENDER TREAD-LIGHT WAH PEDAL

RRP: \$239 • fender.com

Not able to see your wah pedal in the dark? Don't cry about it. Fender's Tread-Light Wah Pedal contains a unique, switchable under-treadle LED that allows for ease of visibility onstage under any light. It features adjustable treble and a three-way, top-mounted mid-frequency toggle for a variety of tonal options. The internal buffer can be switched to a buffered or classic wah effect. The stage-ready chassis and treadle are crafted from lightweight, durable anodised aluminium, with a wooden pad designed for the rigours of live performance.



FISHMAN POWERTAP INFINITY PICKUP SYSTEM

PRICE: CHECK RETAILER

dynamicmusic.com.au

The PowerTap Infinity pickup system, from the new Fishman Acoustic PowerTap series, combines the superior performance and tone of Fishman's Matrix Infinity undersaddle pickup system with a totally new soundboard body sensor. The result is a new world of percussive performance elements and tactile dynamics for guitarists of

all styles. With the addition of Tap pickup technology, players can add new performance dynamics of Touch, Ambience and Percussion. A redesigned, sealed enclosure for the soundhole-mounted Volume and Tone control module allows players to effortlessly make adjustments to their sound.

ZOOM H8 MULTI-TRACK HANDY RECORDER

RRP: \$979

dynamicmusic.com.au

The Zoom H8 Handy Recorder gives you an eight-input, 12-channel portable recorder with interchangeable capsules and a touchscreen interface. Powered by three separate app-driven interface options, the H8 seamlessly adapts depending on your needs, giving you everything you need to capture audio on location, record music, or produce a podcast, all at the touch of your finger! It also comes with the Zoom XYH-6 microphone, consisting of two matched, high-quality unidirectional mics for capturing sounds directly in front of your H8 recorder.



ad

TOP PICK



POWDERFINGER

Unreleased (1998-2010)

UNIVERSAL



Though dreams of a proper, full-fat comeback still aren't likely to come true anytime soon, Powderfinger have finally sauntered back out into the spotlight – their first time as a full, well-oiled unit in ten viciously long years – holding in tow

(as a follow-up to the instantly iconic *One Night Lonely* livestream) almost 40 minutes of previously unheard gold from across their 12-year stint as Australia's most charismatically crushing rock titans.

In more than a few ways, the simply titled *Unreleased* compilation may be more lucrative to longtime 'Finger fans than any new set of tunes ever could be; here the band don't have to emulate the good ol' days, because, well, these *are* the good ol' days – fully intact is the emphatically youthful prickliness in Bernard Fanning's singing, the dry, unpolished grit in his voice carrying a wallop of character with every earnest line he belts. The interplay between his and Darren Middleton's rugged and rough shredding feels beautifully authentic – because it *is*. Especially on the earlier cuts showcased, when the band were far more concerned with jamming out and playing rockstar than writing hits (and actually *being* rockstars), you can really hear when a riff came about in the spur of the moment, or when there's a tinge of improv being weaved into a solo. It's not all squeaky clean or overly tight – it's *fun*. And that's what defined Powderfinger at their strongest points: the unapologetic sprightliness and raw zeal they shone with.

As we wind deeper down the rabbit hole into Powderfinger's mid-'00s peak, we're treated to some of their sharpest and most emotionally rousing songwriting efforts: the punchy Tele juts and trickling synth on "Rule Of Thumb" make clear how far the band came in writing songs aimed to get stadiums full of fans thrashing about; the stiff and searing poetry on closer "Wrecking Ball" shows Fanning at his most determined to get a sea of lighters waved around, the understated keys and vocal harmonies adding a wonderful touch to the almost country-esque guitars that whistle and warble on.

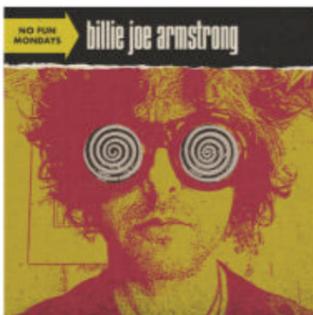
It's absolutely mind-boggling to think Powderfinger were just going to let these gems rot away in the vault. They claim the tracks weren't unearthed until now because they had "no place" on earlier releases, yet they offer some of the band's catchiest, liveliest and most all-out rockin' material. It feels like a 'greatest hits' CD from a parallel universe where these were all platinum-selling singles in their own rights – a breathtaking barrel down Powderfinger's stylistic hall of fame, from their loose and livid halcyon days to their opulent final breaths. An essential grab for any level of fan.

WORDS: MATT DORIA

BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG

No Fun Mondays

REPRISE / WARNER



It's rare for an album of covers to rival any great artist's own work. But the effort Billie Joe Armstrong put into his 2020 lockdown project can't be understated. No matter how disparate the source

material, Armstrong ties each track together with his big, soaring singalong voice and loveably gritty fretwork. You can hear how much fun he had dipping into his new-wave edge on "Kids In America"; when he hits the chorus on "Corpus Christi", you can tell how strongly he envisioned howling it out to a jam-packed stadium. Perhaps most importantly, though, Armstrong doesn't merely emulate his heroes on this tirelessly spirited love letter to them – he makes each song entirely his own, keeping the integrity of each intact while spinning them all through his own jammy and jovial punkabilly lens.

HACHIKU

I'll Probably Be Asleep

MILK! / REMOTE CONTROL



There's a gorgeous undercurrent of ethereality that ripples through Hachiku's endearing and dynamic (if a tad on the short side) debut. But it's crucial, here, not to mistake delicateness

for simplicity: the soundscapes on display swell and soar with mountainous highs and harrowing lows – the focal point is always Anika Ostendorf's honeyed and heartfelt vocal melodies, but peer beyond and you'll see a forest of bustling musical foliage. Guitars simmer along with a warbly psych-rock warmth that beautifully accompanies the bright, glittery keys in the foreground; they're understated, but play their role perfectly. The chemistry can feel a bit kitschy at times, but that's part of the charm to Hachiku's vibe: it's supposed to be a little jagged around the edges, like a diamond necklace with a rusted chain.

JOE BONAMASSA

Royal Tea

J&R ADVENTURES



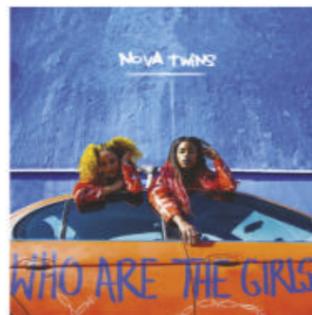
For solo album #14, Joe Bonamassa looks far beyond the boundaries of the blues and taps into a much statelier, more overtly theatrical well of inspiration. Strings bubble and brew alongside the rich

and reverberant howl of his electric leads; big, roaring solos and viciously fat jam sections (where we come about as close as we will to hearing Bonamassa's take on heavy metal) are met with drum passages and backing lines nothing short of epic. It's impressive, too, the way he leaps from style to style – in the opening cut alone, we get everything from orchestral grandeur to blistering rock 'n' roll, twangy southern soul and folk balladry. This is, without a doubt, the best we've heard from the New York virtuoso in at least a decade – we anxiously await its inevitable live reproduction.

NOVA TWINS

Who Are The Girls?

333 WRECKORDS CREW



With the bite of Ecce Vandal, the energy of WAAX and the grit of DZ Deathrays, we admittedly thought the Nova Twins were Aussies at first. We're bummed to learn they aren't, because we'd do anything to

catch the cuts on this rip-roaring debut – raw, spry and intense – in the flesh right now. Fans of our local punk output will adore this punchy and impassioned set of devilish dance-punk, from the speaker-throttling "Bullet" and mosh-ready "Play Fair" to the outright hypnotising "Ivory Tower". Equally as poignant as the barbed vocal quips that Amy Love and Georgia South trade is the former's fretwork, grungy and punchy and almost dubstep-esque, each riff belted out with more energy than most hardcore bands could muster. It's hard not to envision a huge future ahead for these up-and-coming rippers.

PINEGROVE

Amperland, NY

ROUGH TRADE / REMOTE CONTROL



Showcasing all the best parts of the band's idiosyncratic spirit, *Amperland, NY* works equally great as an entry point for potential new 'pinenuts' as it does the soundtrack to Pinegrove's titular

high-concept arthouse film. The charmingly analogue affair re-appropriates 22 of the emo-country icons' greatest and most emotionally stirring gems, adding to them deeper and more fleshed-out arrangements, a greater sense of cinematic opulence, and a perfectly struck balance between the rough, low-fi edginess of their early recordings and the crisp, polished shimmer of 2020's *Marigold* LP. The earliest cuts obviously benefit most from this, but the record as a whole sounds resoundingly tight and calculated. And for those already deep in the band's lore, there are plenty of little flourishes abound to make these cuts feel fresh.

STUMPS

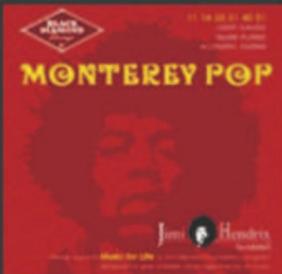
All Out Friends

COOKING VINYL



Driven by slick and summery, ultra-jangly guitar leads, shimmering synths and soulful vocal hooks that belt far beyond the foreground, Stumps have rung a dismal year out with a

well-earned dose of over-the-top ebullience. Even in its most reflective points (like the aptly gloomy "2020"), the Sydney trio make it hard not to have toes tapping or shoulders swaying – and when they kick into full force on power-pop epics like "I've Had Enough" and "Daffodils", dancing in your seat like a total maniac is *absolutely* mandatory. Of course, we'd be remiss not to note how candidly earnest the record is beneath its bouncy, bombastic veneer – *All Our Friends* is a retro-tinged indie-rock epic with equal parts heart and spirit, and plenty of both to share.



Jimi  Hendrix
foundation™

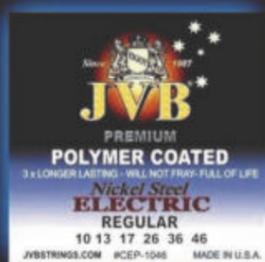


Black Diamond Strings is excited to partner with the Jimi Hendrix Foundation's "Music for Life" Program. Each set of guitar strings comes with a retro collectible sticker. There are 3 different packages each representing one of Jim's iconic performances: the Monterey Pop Festival, Royal Albert Hall and last but not least, Woodstock. A portion of the proceeds will benefit Jimi Hendrix Foundation Music for Life Program

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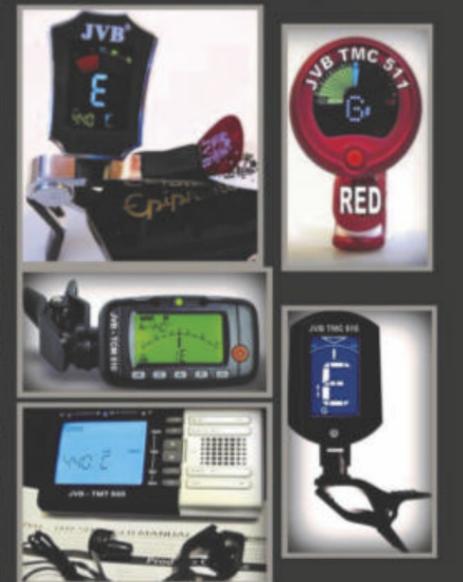
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ANOTHER SHOT OF GOLD

MODERN-DAY FOLK LORD **PASSENGER** DOESN'T QUITE UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF A 'BREAK', HAVING JUST RELEASED HIS EIGHTH ALBUM IN EIGHT YEARS. ON THIS ONE, HE PLUNGES RIGHT INTO THE DEEPEST, MOST EMO DEPTHS OF HIS HEART.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ZAKARY WALTERS**.

Despite being one of the most heavily streamed artists of all time (his 2012 hit "Let Her Go" racking up over a billion plays of its own), with tens of millions of albums sold and more arenas packed with diehard fans than you could fit typed out on this whole page, Passenger (or to his mates and mum, Mike Rosenberg) is almost scarily down-to-earth. He answers our Zoom call from his lowkey Brighton living room, dressed in favourite footy team's jersey and sipping gently on a cup of tea, winding down from a long day of waxing lyrical about his 13th album.

As implied by the title *Songs For The Drunk And Brokenhearted*, the record is distinctly deep and melancholic, its narratively focussed ten tracks being written at a particularly tumultuous point in Rosenberg's life. But he's quick to note that in pouring his soul into song, Rosenberg is able to liberate himself from the sadness that surrounds the record - for him, the disc is proof of how far he's come since hitting the low that inspired it. And he's champing at the bit of an opportunity to hit the road and embrace the record, in all its grey and gloom, with crowds full of similarly brokenhearted punters.

Until such a time comes, Rosenberg is content spending his nights chatting about the little jams he writes in his bedroom with a Gibson Hummingbird on his lap - like he does here for *Australian Guitar!*

Thematically, you've described this LP as

being "populated by drunk and brokenhearted characters" with the bar as a recurring motif. How did you want to convey that on a musical wavelength?

I think with all of my records, I try to maintain a healthy balance of different feelings. I'm a massive fan of bands like The Smiths, who always put those quite sad and weird lyrics to really jangly, upbeat and catchy guitar lines. I think there's a couple of moments on this record that remind me of that, especially with the title track and "What You're Waiting For" - I feel like they have that toe-tappy vibe for the first couple of listens, and then when you kind of hone in on the lyrics, you might realise that there's a slightly darker undercurrent at play.

The rollout for this album is very optimistic, though, like how you've partnered with Ecologi and The Eden Project to plant a tree for every copy sold.

I think we've been pretty environmentally conscious for a while. I think if you're making any kind of physical product nowadays, the onus is on you to come up with a way of offsetting the environmental damage that causes. It's not going to save the planet, but at least it's a step in the right direction. We looked into biodegradable shrink-wrap and all of this other stuff for the albums themselves, too - it alleviates a little bit of the guilt, I suppose [laughs].

Well, like how you donated all the profits from your last two records to charities around the UK - I have to give you props for being dedicated to doing good with your success as an artist.

Y'know, I never thought I would be successful like this. I think with any type of fame or popularity, you get to the point where it's just the sensible thing to do to be a good guy and give back a little bit - wherever you can.

So the tracklisting for this record is doubled and mirrored, with an acoustic version of the entire album playing out in reverse order after the main affair is done. Where did that idea come from?

I don't know. Funnily, we were going to start the record off with "London In The Spring", but we ended up finishing with it. It probably sprung from the idea of myself being like, "Well, I still kind of like ['London In The Spring'] as an opening track - maybe we could do that with the acoustic version." And then that idea would have spun into someone saying, "Well, why don't we just mirror the whole tracklist?" I also think that if people are listening to the record on a streaming platform, it would be kind of weird to listen to the album once and then have the same album play again in an acoustic format - it just felt like a nice little twist, I suppose.

What kind of guitars were you swinging around in the studio for this record?

For the most part I played my Gibson Hummingbird, which is not particularly old or sexy, but it's just got a really sweet tone. For the last couple of records, I've been playing a really old Gibson that I bought in Japan a few years ago for quite a lot of money. It's a pretty special guitar - it's old and Japanese and lovely - but I just really love the tone of the Hummingbird. I think it's softer, a little warmer, and it requires a lot less space. And it blends in with the other instruments a lot better. Because mate, my records aren't about my guitar playing, much of the time - y'know, there are some moments where I want to let it shine, whenever there's a nice melody or whatever, and I think I'm an okay player, but it's never really the essence of it. My parts just need to kind of sit and bubble away a lot of the time. Whereas Benny Edgar, who's the lead player on this album, he's incredible - I'm very lucky to have him playing on the record.

How did you get around the Hummingbird?

My first real 'nice' guitar was a J-45 - in fact I bought it from the Gladesville Guitar Factory along Parramatta Road in Sydney. It was way before "Let Her Go" happened - I was busking in Australia and the guitar I had at the time was f***ed, so I was like, "Okay, it's time to buy a nice guitar." It was like \$2,000 Aussie dollars or something ridiculous like that, and it was like an enormous investment - I remember ringing my manager and being like, "F***, man, should I!?" But I ended up grabbing it, and I played that J-45 for years. And then I got a Hummingbird, just because it sounded lovely, but it's actually not that good on the road. The J-45s are just workhorses: you can smash them about, you can give them hell, and they'll never quit on you. And they've got a lovely, warm bottom-end, so when it's just me onstage, it really fills the room. Whereas the Hummingbirds, I think in the studio they're beautiful, but on the road they're a little more temperamental and a bit more precious about things. 🎸

INHUMAN NATURE

BRING ME THE HORIZON CONTINUE TO REINVENT THE CORE FOUNDATIONS OF HEAVY MUSIC WITH ANOTHER KALEIDOSCOPIC ONSLAUGHT OF BEATS AND BREAKDOWNS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **YULIA SHUR**.

Few bands have done as much to revolutionise the heavy music landscape as Bring Me The Horizon. The little Sheffield shredders that could have come a long way since the summery days of '06, when they'd fill basements to the brim with mosh-hungry maniacs keen to get their teeth elbowed in to a soundtrack of garish, ghastly deathcore. They now reign with a frenzied fusion of post-rock riffs and underground electro beats, their sixth (and supposedly final) album *Amo* bringing them to an artistic peak most other genre-bending creatives could only dream of.

Since eschewing the traditional album campaign in favour of loose, off-the-cuff single and EP releases, Bring Me The Horizon have truly embraced their freedom in the music industry: their fans range from bonafide steel-crunching metalheads to dancefloor deviants in flower crowns – they can do whatever the f*** they want, knowing full well that a sea of kids will swarm at their knees to eat it up. And on their new nine-tracker *Post Human: Survival Horror* – the first in a four-part series of mini-LPs set to culminate in an epic new era for 2022 – the quintet truly push the limits of their artistic boundaries.

From drum 'n' bass beatdowns to stadium-rock choruses, slithers of j-pop and industrial metal, there's a whole world of erratic and explosive flourishes sandwiched between the frantic hardcore blasts of "Dear Diary" and the ethereal balladry of "Butterflies". But according to guitarist Lee Malia, the record wasn't some insanely convoluted practise in experimentation – in fact, it was one of their most lowkey, straight-to-the-punch record-making stints to date.

So you guys are calling this an EP, but at nine tracks over 35 minutes, it's a pretty weighty release. Is there a distinction you wanted to make between this as its own thing versus what you'd consider to be a BMTH 'album'?

I guess we didn't think it would be as long as it ended up – we were only thinking about doing four or five songs, so that's why we called it an EP in the first place. The idea is to do four of these [*Post Human*] releases over the next year or so, and the next releases might

be shorter, but with this one it just kind of made sense to keep writing and making songs. We really got into a flow with our songwriting, so we just carried on after we finished those first five songs. But I think it also helps that we're calling these releases EP, because the next one might be five songs and 20 minutes long – we're not going to do 'albums' anymore, because I feel like you've gotta commit to at least ten songs on an album. The EP format just gives you a bit more freedom.

How did the COVID pandemic shape how you approached this record as an artist?

Just working from home, the difference has been massive. We've always written songs together, even if it's just been two or three of us at a time – we've always kind of gone somewhere, and for our last album, *Amo*, we'd built a room where we went every day and worked on it like a nine-to-five job. To just suddenly have to do it all from home, it's so different. I did all my parts with my home setup – it's all DIs and through a computer. So it was a very different way of working, but it turned out sounding really good. Luckily there's a plugin that I have all my amp sounds on anyway, so I still had all my own tones on tap.

Especially over the last few records, BMTH have blurred the lines between heavy music and pop in ways that a lot of us wouldn't have ever thought to be possible. And on this record in particular, it feels like you've really mastered the ebb and flow between those very contrasting sounds and styles. Was that something you were especially conscious of in the creative process?

We always knew "Dear Diary" was going to be the opener. There are a lot of those little bits on the CD where they almost sound like throwbacks to the way we used to do riffs, but they're done in a more tasteful way – they're woven in and out throughout the songs, rather than jammed in there as five-minute breakdowns and diminished scales. But the order of the CD always comes together near the end of the process, because it keeps changing. One minute we'll

be like, "Okay, this is the tracklisting!" And then we'll completely change our minds, over and over, right up until the last minute. Because until you can sit back listen through it all as a whole thing, you can't quite get your head around what order it should be in. But with this CD, the first song and the last song were obvious from the get-go, because they sound like what a first song and a last song should sound like.

Did it feel good to get back into shredder mode on "Dear Diary"?

Yeah man, it was cool. It didn't have the solo there at first – Jordan [Fish, keys] actually recorded himself screaming down a microphone, like, "Nee-are-wee-ah-wow!" And he said, "Can you do something like this on this section?" So I was just like, "Yeah, alright." I wanted to go as Slayer as I possibly could – I really tried to channel what I imagine they'd do for a crazy ten-second thrash solo. Yeah, it felt cool. I ended up using this super old guitar that I'd used to record *Count Your Blessings* with, because it was the only guitar I had left with a whammy bar on it. It was cool to do something that we wouldn't have done for the last, like, three albums. It would have seemed so out of place on a record like *Amo*, but for some reason it just made sense to do it now.

Can you tell us more about the guitars you used on this record?

I actually did a lot of the main riffs on a PRS baritone – it's a hollowbody one with P-90s, and it almost sounds like a bass when you put the gain on it. It just sounds really heavy, which was honestly a bit surprising – I thought that since it's a hollowbody with P-90s, it might sound weird, but it actually sounded really good. And then if I doubled stuff, I was using a solidbody ES-335 that I've got – a 1970s model. And then I used the Ibanez for all the shreddy bits.

With how experimental BMTH is at its core, do you often find yourself throwing a whole bunch of shit at the wall to see what sticks?

I guess less so on this record – I think it's got a much more consistent sound than *Amo* did – that record was definitely where I lost my mind a bit, going mad with pedals and effects and weird stuff. In the studio it was just chains and chains of pedals, recreating synthesiser sounds and inventing totally new sounds. But this one is a lot more reined in, sound-wise. A lot of the core sound is just the tones I've used for ages, but when they're mixed in with Jordan's stuff and all the extra bits and pieces on the CD, it sounds like one big, solid in-your-face kind of sound.

Was that because you had a clearer vision of what you were looking for?

It just worked, combined with everything else that's going on in the tracks. Because the synths are kind of bassy anyway, and there's a lot of synths playing along with the riffs, if you get what I mean – they're the same notes, just played a different way. They're all gained-up synths with distortion on them, too, so with the baritone tuned super low it all just kind of fades into one sound. And that worked really well, so we decided to go with it for the whole CD. 



WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

LOVE 'IM OR HATE 'IM, THERE'S NO STOPPING **YUNGBLUD**'S PUNK REVOLUTION, EQUAL PARTS THRASHY AND THEATRICAL. HE'S ALREADY TAKEN OVER ENGLAND – NEXT UP, THE WORLD.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **HARIS NUKEM**.

If there's just one story in music worthy of the Netflix biopic treatment, it's the evolution of punk. From the brash and gaudy uprising of the Sex Pistols and Ramones to the right-wing's worst nightmare of bands like NOFX, Against Me! and Anti-Flag, all the way to the modern-day rise of mosh-starved maniacs like PUP, Turnstile and Knocked Loose.

But just like the culture itself, punk as a genre has bounced around and bled into all different corners of the sonic spectrum – nowadays we have punk bands with violins, punk bands with horn sections, all-synth punk bands and solo punks that play acoustically. There is no one 'type' of punk sound out there – which is kind of the point, when you really think about it.

Capitalising on this is 23-year-old Yorkshire hellion Dominic Harrison, better known to his legion of teeth-cutting anti-fascist rascals as Yungblud. With his ultra-catchy hooks and head-turning aesthetic (both of which following just one rule: if it isn't garishly over-the-top or sure to make conservative pundits on Twitter shit their dacks, it's nowhere near good enough), Harrison has fast become an unlikely mainstream icon – a poster boy for edginess in a sea of safe-playing popstars.

With his second full-length effort – the bold and booming, plot-twist-heavy *Weird!* – Harrison wants to make it abundantly clear that he's not here to make a hit, rack up millions or stuff his arms full of industry awards. If he has one ambition, it's to start a revolution: one of defiant self-love and acceptance, of eschewing the status quo and embracing that no two people are the same – that conservatism in 2021 is simply embarrassing, binaries are meant to be smashed and conventions are meant to be challenged.

The new age of punk is here, and as *Australian Guitar* learns first-hand, Yungblud is ecstatic to be pioneering it.

What's the vibe you wanted to capture on this absolute beast of an album?

This record is so much more emotional than the first one – it's a lot bigger, a lot louder, a lot more dynamic. There's a lot of Queen in there, y'know? I was listening to a f***ing lot of Queen. And I don't know, my first album was so f***ing angry, y'know? I was this beautifully naïve, angry kid, who just felt misunderstood. I think a lot of people have loved me throughout my life, but they didn't understand me – and I think there's a massive difference between being loved and being understood. So the first album was a callout – is there anyone out there like me? And it turned out there were a lot of people out there like me! This next album is about those people – it's about every kid from every continent, of

every colour, shape and size, every personality and sexuality, that I've had the privilege to meet, and the way they've influenced my life.

I suppose that ties into the cover art, too, doesn't it? All those dissonant versions of you, they represent...

Me! Every single one of us has seven different personalities at any given moment, y'know? We all have multiple different sides, we're so three-dimensional, and these seven people make up who and what we are. I just wanted to radiate the idea that you can embrace that and you can be proud of that – be proud of every single shade of you and every different colour, and just rock out with them.

It's interesting as a journo, because this record challenges everything I've learned about the music industry. Usually in the case of an artist like yourself, you'll have the first record be what it is, and then following the trajectory you've been on, LP2 will be very radio-friendly, playing it all as safe as possible. But you've gone in the complete opposite direction – this album is punkier, edgier, more guitar-heavy... Was that something you had to fight for?

100 percent. So many people were pushing me to do this f***ing Tik Tok rap, and I was like, "...F*** off!" Yungblud isn't a f***ing hit machine. There's so much music with an agenda right now – so much music with a f***ing motive. I wanted to write music not for a motive, but for a *reason*. Because all I give a shit about is my fanbase. And I love that you were honest with me about how this album f***s with you as a journalist, because that's exactly what I wanted to do. I want to break the rules – that's the fun bit. When I have something to kick against, I'm at my best. I've got hits that didn't make it onto this record, which could have been international smashes – but they weren't telling the truth.

Why, by f***ing some miracle, have I gotten this far? It's because of my my fanbase and my community – they know I'm telling the truth to them, and I ain't gonna leave them behind. All I give a shit about is growing this little club, person by person – I'm never going to go, "Alright, cool, it's time for a f***ing hit on the radio now." Because by doing that, I'd lose my credibility – I'd lose my connection to my fans. And f*** that! I remember Grammy week, some geezer comes up to me wearing a f***ing canapé on his blazer – you know exactly what kind of dickhead I'm taking about – and he's like, "What's the formula, man?" And I'm like, "...What?" He's like, "How do you do it? What's the formula to your success?" As if this isn't a real f***ing thing – that I'm just playing some f***ing character! My formula is to tell the f***ing truth, mate!

I love that you're doing what you're doing as someone who's managed to crack the mainstream, because you're really challenging the ill-established – often conservative – notion of what's "acceptable" for a Top 40 artist. Do you feel like you have the power to spark a revolution in the pop sphere?

At the end of the day, I would love to. I think there's a revolution going on in our generation anyway. There's a revolution going on in sexuality and gender. There's a revolution going on in racial equality. There's a revolution going on in environmentalism. We might as well be talking about all that in our music, right, instead of hiding behind our f***ing Mercedes and a bottle of champagne. It's like what I was saying about how there's so much music with an agenda right now – we want to sever the head off the f***ing agenda, and keep it in our fridge.

Annihilate the binary!

F*** yeah, man! At the end of the day, I have three things I ask myself before I put a song out: Is it telling the truth? Could anybody else sing it? And *do I f***ing mean it?* And if I answer those three questions correctly, I'll put it out. And now I have an album of those songs. I think it's going to stick with people for a long time. Because that's the thing: music does have such a shelf life right now. It's done and then it's gone – nobody actually goes, "Yeah man, I'm going to put this album on for the next five years." And with guitar music right now, you really need to push the boundaries – rock music sounds different to the way it did last time, in the way that it sounded different to the way it did before last time, and the way before last time's last time.

I find that trends in rock music tend to be cyclical, but every cycle comes with its own innovations.

That's exactly it – it's always cyclical, and it always comes from inspiration and a place we've been before – because obviously, as a musician, you've been inspired by something that already exists. But it's never quite the same, right? And that's what I'm buzzing about – I want to do something different and naughty and spicy; something new! 🍷



UNDER LOCKE AND KEY

FIVE YEARS IN THE MAKING, THE NEW ALBUM FROM MELBOURNE'S INDIE-ROCK QUEEN **JESS LOCKE** IS EVERY BIT AS SILVERY AND SPECIAL AS ONE COULD DREAM.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.
PHOTO BY **IAN LAIDLAW**.



At face value, Jess Locke's music may seem rather cozy and quaint. But just as the Melbourne-native strummer is typically mellow and reserved until you get to know her (at which point she erupts into a luminous blur of liveliness and laughter), her art is secretly rich with polychromatic poignancy, shades of light and dark, sugar and acid twisting and twining around soundscapes far more intricate than they imply - you just need to pay a little closer attention to scratch beneath the initial coat of indie-pop tweeness.

Since the 2017 release of her sophomore solo effort *Universe*, Locke has only dug her heels deeper into the world of louder and more chaotic rock 'n' roll aesthetics: she joined The Smith Street Band, first in their touring pack as a backup vocalist and tambourinist, and then as a full-time guitarist and co-songwriter on 2020's *Don't Waste Your Anger* LP. She thinned out her own band's touring schedule, which led to her personal songwriting efforts spinning off in a whirlwind of wacky directions - without bassist Jim Morris and drummer Chris Rawsthorne to ground her ambitions, Locke began to explore creative avenues that weren't bound by what's possible to play on a stage.

Which leads us to solo album #3: the gauzy, glittery and overall ginormous *Don't Ask Yourself Why*. Pieced together in key slivers of creative intensity across the five years since she dropped *Universe*, it's effortlessly Locke's most adventurous and ambitious body of work. Stylistically, Locke herself puts it best: "it's rock, it's pop, it's folk, it's ambient, and just a teensy bit goth."

In effort to unearth some of the secrets behind what makes *Don't Ask Yourself Why* so goddamn brilliant, we gave Locke herself a call...

How did you want this album to build upon what you'd established creatively with your first two?

I definitely tried not to put any restrictions on myself when I was writing. It's also the first record I've written in a contained period of time, as opposed to the previous ones which were like a collection of these songs we'd been playing live as a band for years. We weren't playing as many shows last year, and then obviously no shows this year, so it was very much a 'written' record, where we're now going to have to find ways to recreate it live instead of vice versa.

I guess that process affected how it sounds, too - it's pretty expansive in terms of layers and sounds, and how we wanted to make the record first

and then worry about playing it live later. It's quite diverse - mainly because I didn't really plan the songs out before I started writing them. And then as I was writing them, I'd be like, "Oh, this would make a really good buzzy grunge song - let's go in that direction!" There's some folky, Neil Young-ish kind of vibes in there. We'll see what people think, I suppose, but I think it made for a really interesting record with lots of opposing ideas.

Do you think the record feels tighter than normal as a result of how contained the writing process was?

I think it does. I don't know how much that will come across to the listener, but it definitely makes me think of where I was when I was writing the record - and thematically, it all kind of fits together. In the past, a lot of my songs were more introspective - I think they still are, but there's definitely more of an outward sort of vibe as well. I mean, the world is insane at the moment - I feel like I couldn't help but just absorb everything! So it's very much more outward looking, and there's a lot more societal commentary. But of course, it's all still on a very personal level.

Were you excited to explore some new areas of your expertise as a guitarist on this record?

Yeah! There's definitely a bit more of a mix, for sure. I used quite a bit of a nylon-string guitar - a mix of nylon-stringed acoustics and some electric guitar, and I guess that was a bit different to the last record, which was pretty electric guitar-driven. I suppose it's a bit of a throwback to how I played when I started out - I was a bit more folk-oriented and acoustic guitar-based, and then I went in a more indie-rock direction later on. There's a couple of piano-based songs as well, which kind of harkens back to my childhood, when I had a few piano lessons and then gave them up because I was never very disciplined. I'm always trying to put my fingers in a million different pots [*laughs*].

How did his Rob Muinos' influence as a producer rub off on this album?

The first record I made was very DIY, just kind of recorded in houses and venues and thrown together at the end. And it was a similar process with the last one, Fitzy and I slapping together all the resources we had and being like, "Okay, these are the songs!" So working with Rob was great because it was a very comfortable and kind of homely vibe; he's just super knowledgeable and professional. He also took

things apart a bit more than I usually would have - he challenged us to really improve the songs, rather than just sort of rocking up and being like, "Well, you've got the songs, let's put them down."

It was a lot more collaborative than it's been in the past. I've always had a tendency to double my vocals, which is just, like, a stylistic thing that I'd gotten used to doing - I think it sounds cool, but it also becomes a bit of a crutch at the same time. So Rob was very passionate about not doing that as a crutch - he's not totally against it, but he encouraged me to be a lot more confident with my singing.

So his studio is connected to the Clingan Guitar Tone shop - were you able to take advantage of that and get your hands on a bunch of wicked gear?

I can't remember if we actually ended up using any of them on the record, but I know we were having a go with a few basses when we came in. It was pretty amazing, being able to just walk through the shop and be like, "Oh, maybe we should chuck that on the record!" There was this one Flying V that had a little speaker inside of it, and I was like, "Oh man, this would be sick!" I don't think that specifically ended up on there, but we did make use of some of the stuff - we borrowed a Mellotron off Ross, who was working with Jeremy [Clingan, shop owner] at the time. There's heaps of Mellotron synth parts on the record, so that was awesome. Jeremy set up all my guitars, too. It was definitely awesome to have all of that stuff at our disposal.

What guitars were you jamming out most on for this record?

I used my Mustang, which is what I play live most of the time - I absolutely love that guitar, so that definitely features heavily. And then it's a bit of a mix - there's quite a few songs that have Rob's nylon-string on it, and a custom-made guitar that he had built by T-Guitars in Bowral.

What is it about the Mustang that makes it so special for you?

It's got character. It's been around. It's a '95 Japanese-made model, and I bought it off another guy who was a touring musician, so it was all bashed up and worn-in. I don't know, I just feel like it's got a lot of character, and it feels good. I'm not a huge gear nerd, so I'm not constantly buying new guitars or upgrading - if I get something and it works, I'm like, "This is good. This is me. I'm happy with this." So until something goes wrong, I'll be playing that guitar. 🎸

BACK ON TOP

WITH ALL THE ODDS STACKED AGAINST THEM, **LUCA BRASI** POWERED THROUGH A NOTABLY ROUGH ALBUM CYCLE AND A GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS BACK-TO-BACK, COMING OUT THE OTHER SIDE WITH THEIR STRONGEST AND MOST UPBEAT SET OF TUNES YET. WE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING: *HOW THE F*** DID THEY DO IT!?*

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **NICK GREEN**.

The last time *Australian Guitar* caught up with Luca Brasi was in the winter of 2018, as the Tassie pub-rockers were gearing up to release their career-defining fourth album, *Stay*. To call it a monumental release would be an understatement: after the cracking the mainstream with their 2016 record, *If This Is All We're Going To Be*, all eyes were planted firmly on the foursome, desperate to see how they'd one-up themselves with a narrative-heavy epic co-produced with Aussie punk legend Darren Cordeaux (ex-Kisschasy). Understandably, the boys were nervous - but there was more to it than that.

Behind the scenes, Luca Brasi was struggling, and hard. They'd suddenly catapulted from local dive bars to capital city theatres, and were copping more media attention per week than they typically would in a year. Not to mention, the writing and recording processes for *Stay* were long and arduous, fraught with scheduling issues, pressure to succeed both internal and external, and severe lapses in mental health. Off the record, shredder Tom Busby admitted he was severely burnt out on songwriting; frontman Tyler Richardson made it clear that a fifth Luca Brasi record was anything but guaranteed.

And yet, somehow the band pushed through to make 2020 their most creatively gratifying year to date - ironically so, given how dire everything else in the world had been. Album #5 may be titled *Everything Is Tenuous*, but as far as the band themselves go, spirits have never been higher. When we link up with Busby to chat about the record, he looks almost surprisingly well-slept, and he's quick to wax lyrical on how excited he is to be heading into a new album cycle.

So what the hell happened!? How did Luca Brasi buck the odds and come roaring back in tip-top shape - especially since the *Stay* era was anything but lowkey? Well, according to Busby, all it took was a few good riffs, a few cold beers and a few jam sessions that reminded them just how fun it can be to rock out with your best mates.

What brought you out of that post-*Stay* slump? Do you remember what lit the spark that led to those creative

fireworks going off again?

At first it did feel like a bit of a chore. I was like, "Ah f***, do we really have to write new songs?" But luckily we had some riffs kicking around that were pretty cool - I had the music for "Tangled; Content", which literally missed out on being a *Stay* song by four weeks, and Pat [Marshall, rhythm guitar] had the music for "This Selfish Love". So we were like, "Right, let's just f***ing get back to work." But burnout was a good call: personally, I was belted after we finished *Stay*. I don't know if it was because of outside factors, personal life, uni stress and all of that... I remember being very, very stressed, nervous and anxious about the whole ordeal. "Everyone's going to hate it, this is shit, I'm shit..." So getting back into it for album number five, I was like, "Ah f***, here we go again..."

But after a few days it was just like, "Oh, we're just hanging out with each other, playing some guitars, going to Pat's house to sing some songs... This is actually fun!" I think we actually made a conscious effort to put heaps less pressure on ourselves. I was just like, "Ah yeah, here's a song, I wrote it in four minutes," and the next thing you know, Ty goes, "That's really cool, man, I've already written the chorus!" We were really just f***ing around together - whereas with *Stay*, it was like, "Oh my God, every tiny little note and chord has to be absolutely perfect, neer, neer, neer!" This time it was like, "Yep, this is a G chord, that's a C chord, there's a song, you beauty!" It was heaps more relaxed, and we had a lot more fun making it.

What was it like doing this album almost entirely in-house?

We did "Tangled" and "Selfish Love" with Andrei Eremin in Melbourne, who was a gun and had great ideas - we sent him the demos and he'd be like, "Try changing this little bit." So we'd try it and immediately go, "Oh! How did we not think of that!?" We discussed doing a few songs at a time so we didn't have to be in a studio for three weeks, get there after work at six o'clock and be there 'til two in the morning - Pat and Danny [Flood, drums] have two kids each now, so it's just not an option to do that anymore. And then Pat was the genius that said, "Why don't we record the drums where we rehearse, and then record everything else

ourselves?" We've got Line 6 Helix guitar modellers now, so we did one song like that as an experiment, Andre gave us some production notes and Darren Cordeaux gave us a few pointers, and then we got it mixed and we were like, "That sounds great!" So it was full steam ahead from there, the idea being that we wanted it to be a bit more casual... And then lockdown happened, so we had no choice anyways!

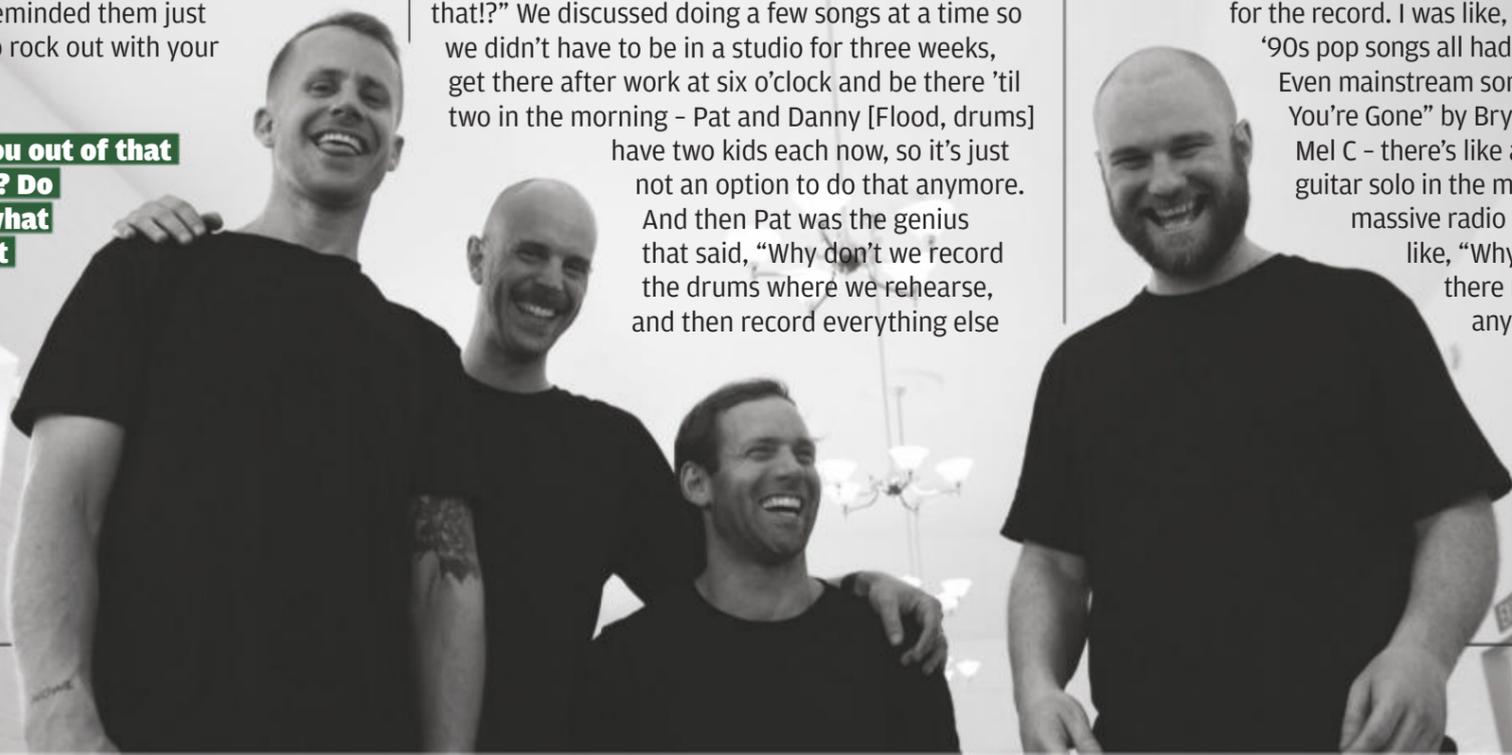
Having complete control over this record, do you feel more attached to it, or would you say it's more authentic to what Luca Brasi is at a core level?

Yeah, definitely. I think it absolutely is more authentic, and I think there was a freedom in just kind of being the masters of our own destiny. Because there are times when you work with producers where you're like, "I kind of want to try this" and they're like, "Nup, we should do it like this." But when I'm by myself, I can do whatever I want - and if the idea sucks, I haven't wasted anyone else's time. We all really enjoyed the freedom, and I think it is definitely more authentic to who we are and what we wanted to portray, musically, this time around.

Were you excited to really push yourself as a player on this record, too?

Absolutely! There are habits that every guitar player falls into. [*Everything Is Tenuous*] isn't really a complicated record - it's probably our most straightforward one, actually, but we really pushed ourselves to try different things. On the first track, there's a little guitar part that comes in the second verse - we were like, "Alright we need a second riff," so I scratched up a part and went, "Yeah, that sounds good, that fits." But then I went back to it later on, I was like, "I... Have literally done this exact part a million times." It's a little Blink-182-esque picking thing, and I was like, "No. Come on, man!" I had to step back and ask myself, "What do I want to do here? What would a country musician play?" That's literally what I thought to myself - I'm a massive fan of Davey Lane and what he does in *You Am I*, and especially on *Deliverance* he's got some real country-sounding licks in there. So I was like, "Alright, what would Davey Lane do?" And it doesn't sound like a country song at all, but the idea stuck that I just wanted to do something different to what I normally would.

The guitar solos are back, too! We've got one on "Dying To Feel Alive" - I sent a rough idea to Pat and I was like, "Can we do this? Is this an okay thing to do?" And he was like, "F*** yeah, man! Get it!" Because we'd recently had a discussion about '90s guitar pop - we love the Goo Goo Dolls, the Gin Blossoms and all of that shit, and that was a major inspiration for the record. I was like, "Man, all these '90s pop songs all had guitar solos." Even mainstream songs, like "When You're Gone" by Bryan Adams and Mel C - there's like a f***ing 16-bar guitar solo in the middle of it! This massive radio hit! So I was like, "Why the f*** are there no guitar solos anymore!?"





FREE WISHES

THE METALCORE GODS MUST BE FEELING MIGHTY GENEROUS THIS YEAR, KICKING IT OFF WITH A FRESH AND FIERY NEW EPIC FROM THE LUMINOUS LEGENDS IN **ARCHITECTS**.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ED MASON**.

Ask any metalcore diehard which bands are best serving the genre today, and they'll almost certainly respond with... Well, from experience, a bunch of weird, niche acts their housemates' cousins and such play in, who barely have a fanbase outside their hometown. But they'll throw in some big names too - and one of those is virtually guaranteed to be Architects. Thanks to their eight universally adored albums and a touring regimen that's seen them smash out approximately two bazillion shows in the past decade, the UK-native shredlords have built a community of fans as devoted as they are determined; if there's just one thing that goes harder than the band's tunes, it's their mosh pits.

With album number nine on the horizon, fears of the quintet running out of steam are admittedly justified - how long, after all, can the one band stay thrashing out to their hearts' content on just a consistent basis before they hit a ruinous burnout? Yet somehow, Architects are as sharp as they've ever been - *For Those That Wish To Exist* features some of the band's most exciting and ambitious music to date, lacquering onto their time-tested base of punishing breakdowns and red-hot solos a mountain of cinematic strings, crunchy synths, blistering drum beats and soul-stirring keys. It's balls-to-the-wall heavy, as you'd expect, but it's also nuanced and layered in such a way that proves Architects are still earnestly devoted to refining their craft, no matter how perfect it already may have been.

Before the band kick off what's sure to be one of their most intense and exciting eras yet, *Australian Guitar* sat down with rhythm guitarist Adam Christianson to learn a bit more about how Architects brewed up the beast that is *For Those That Wish To Exist*.

So this is easily one of the most experimental Architects records to date. Were you guys keen to really flex your creative muscles on this one?

For sure - mainly because the last three records were like a bit of a trilogy, cataloging what we were going through collectively as a band. We kind of wanted to start fresh and try some new things. And as well, when you're on your ninth record, you kind of

need to be trying something new - use your creative liberties and things like that.

What did that mean for you as a guitarist in particular?

All the guitar stuff is quite a bit more simple, I would say. Some of our earlier records were a lot more technical, and the band's changed quite a lot over the years. It's been a lot more about just serving the songs and things like that. There are a lot more electronic elements involved and there's a lot more going on sonically, so it's more about moving with those sonic differences than it is about playing. We experimented with some different octave effects.

It feels like you're using the guitar more as a tool to set an emotion than just riff out and go crazy. It's sounds very cinematic.

We've had that element going on for quite a while - probably since 2012, I would say - but it gets more expanded upon with every record. We definitely all really dig things like film scores and take a lot of inspiration from artists like Hans Zimmer. We try to use the guitar more as a complimentary instrument in some cases, as opposed to the main instrument. Because obviously, the double-edged sword of having a lot of elements in the one song is that you have to leave space for things. If there's this big string section and we've got a lot of electronics, there's not a lot of room left for us to really shred out. You have to find a place for the guitar to sit - it can't just barge through the mix all the time.

It's cool to see how many bands are really pushing the boundaries of metalcore and breathing new life into the genre right now. Why do you think it is that metalcore is currently going through this sort of reboot, or revolutionary period?

To a degree, certain genres of music - especially the heavier types - have a bit of a glass ceiling, as to what you can do with the sound. It's always a balancing act because if you go too far out of your lane, you get criticised for that, but if you're not different enough, people go, "Oh, it's just more of the same." I think it's just about wanting to breathe new life into the genre and expand what it can be, rather than be 'just a metalcore band' or whatever.

This is the second Architects record to be made entirely in-house, with production duties split between Dan [Searle, drums] and Josh [Middleton, lead guitar]. Do you find that such a setup allows you to be more flexible or experimental with your songwriting?

I think it just depends on the band, right? Some bands really benefit from having an outside perspective. But I feel like we're quite proficient with what we do. At this stage in your career, for the most part you'd hope you'd have worked out a lot of the kinks as far as what works and what doesn't work, and what you want to achieve with your art. Having it DIY, so to speak, you can really just do what you want, and flesh out your own vision for a song. Not to say that it's not beneficial to work with a producer - we just feel comfortable not needing one at this stage in our career.

Does that translate much to how you operate as a full unit?

Generally, yeah. Obviously this year has been very different - making this record was quite a fragmented process for us. Earlier on in our career, when we were younger and before the technology to record independently was so accessible, it was all about getting together in a room and hashing things out as a group. But now everyone's got their own recording rig at home, so you can kind of patch things together and pass ideas back and forth remotely. But it was certainly a very different process this time, just because of the pandemic situation - there were times where we *wanted* to be in the studio together but we just couldn't, and we had to adjust how we'd work together in some interesting ways.

How did you feel about the new recording setup as a creative?

I definitely miss the togetherness - because that's a big part of it, right? Even if songs were not necessarily written together, or whatever the situation was, part of the experience is being together in the studio when you're tracking things or listening back to mixes - being together and listening to things for the first time in a fleshed-out sense... That's such an important part of the experience. But y'know, we did the best we could to make it work for us! 🎧

THE SPIKE IN THE PUNCH

A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL OF ROCK AND POP SET TO IGNITE THE SCENE LIKE NEVER BEFORE, THE LATEST EFFORT FROM **YOU ME AT SIX** IS EASILY THEIR MOST AMBITIOUS, IF NOT THEIR OUTRIGHT BEST.

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

For pop-rock titans You Me At Six, the road to *Suckapunch* has been long and winding, fraught with potholes and speed-bumps aplenty. But now, on the cusp of the album's hotly anticipated release (after a handful of COVID-related delays, of course), rhythm guitarist Max Helyer looks back on it all with a sigh of relief and a slight chuckle. It took him and his bandmates almost two decades to reach the level they're at – the level they've always strived to reach, but never quite knew how to climb – and now that they've finally made it, there's nothing but good vibes.

Helyer describes *Suckapunch* as the definitive You Me At Six album, and such is certainly palpable when listening to it – from the glittery and lowkey “What’s It Like” to the absolutely mental “MAKEMEFEELALIVE”, LP7 showcases the band at their absolute most daring, unafraid to subvert traditional pop tropes with gritty punk attitudes, bassy electro-driven soundscapes and fiery rock ‘n’ roll riffs. To achieve such a diverse and dynamic set of musical gems, the band took it upon themselves to spread far and wide outside their comfort zones; in Helyer’s case, that meant putting down the guitar and exploring the world of digital audio workstations.

Was the idea to push yourselves as hard as you could on a creative wavelength?

Definitely. I mean, when you look at our band and the catalogue we've got, I think we always try to push ourselves forward with each new record. We want it to challenge the listener, y'know? We don't want to keep repeating the same formulas over and over again, because we feel like that would be copping our fans out of something fresh and exciting. But also for ourselves, as creatives, it's important to stay on your toes. Dan [Flint, drums]

and I, we've gotten a lot more into production and making music from home, using different tools to create our songs.

I spend a lot of time making music on a Mac now, whereas two or three records ago I would have to write a song on the guitar and hope for the best; I'd go, “Right, I've got this song idea... But, uh, I need everybody here to show you.” But now, Dan and I can build songs on our laptops to a state that showcases a fully formed direction and aesthetic. We have more control over, and ownership of, how the songs sound and the directions we can take them in. And we can be as big and brave and bold as we want to be, because y'know, if an idea doesn't work out, we can always just go back and change things around in the files.

What's your philosophy towards how you build a demo in that virtual space?

The best way to describe how I write a song is that I look at it as though I'm a painter – you start off with a blank canvas, which I'd look at as the production, and you have a palate of colours. And being able to add or subtract as many different colours as you want, it allows you to really dive down the rabbit hole and explore what's possible. I love being adventurous and creative, and that's why I'm a musician – it's the way I express myself. And some of the mistakes that happen in the production turn out to be some of the greatest things that can happen to a song. When we got into the studio with Dan Austin, I showed him some of the ideas I'd been working on, and was he like, “Oh, *that's* really cool and *that's* really cool,” and he was picking out all these different stems that he liked. I thought they would all be erased out or not used at all, but some of the

earliest little ideas I put down in Logic ended up making it to the final mix.

How did that dynamic translate to your role as a guitarist?

Well, when we were writing “MAKEMEFEELALIVE”, I was in a spot in my life where I felt a lot of anger and a bit of a rebellious attitude; I was listening to stuff like The Prodigy and Marilyn Manson, and kind of going back to my older, heavier roots – you don't forget where you come from, y'know? And I kind of wanted to bring that back to You Me At Six, knowing that for some of our fanbase, their favourite records are *Sinners Never Sleep* and *Take Off Your Colours*, which have a lot of aggression and anger to them. But also, working with Dan on the production level we'd started exploring, we said to ourselves, “Let's not make it all just super angry rock riffs – let's try to bring some breakbeat into it. Let's play with some flavours that our band hasn't touched on before.” We wanted to make it more exciting for ourselves. Because if the artists aren't excited when they're making the song, that's going to come through in the song itself.

I know you're still big on using an analogue signal chain for your guitar parts. Why have you remained so staunch on that?

I love the challenge. Every day is a new challenge when you're working with analogue equipment. Every scenario you go into, your amps are going to sound different. Different rooms are going to change the tone of what I'm playing, just by virtue of the acoustics. Our guitar tech turned around to me recently and went, “Man, I forgot how much of an amazing setup you have.” That's something I've been working on since 2013, I've really been honing in on my live sound and what I use to accomplish it. It's become somewhat like my baby, y'know? It's a part of who I am as a human being! It also compliments what the other guys do as well.

What are the crown jewels of your gear setup at the moment?

There's this company called Audio Kitchen – they're a boutique amp company from the UK, and the guy behind it, Steve Crow, is an amazing designer; I can't speak highly enough of him! Whatever he does in his studio, making these chipboards and getting his amps to sound the way they sound... I basically hunted him down after I saw the amps he'd made for some people. I think it was Yannis [Philippakis] from Foals, he was using this pedal called the Big Trees – it's like a tube distortion pedal, which was really cool, and I was really interested in buying one; and Steve had made custom guitar heads for the Foo Fighters, Queens Of The Stone Ages, the Arctic Monkeys, The Cure... So I was just like, “This guy must be doing something amazing.” So I hit him up and said, “Hey, can you do something up for me?”

That was in 2013, and he's been a very good friend of mine since. And I've noticed that a lot more people around the world now know about his products. Even when I was at Abbey Road for our Amazon Original session, one of the engineers was like, “Ah, I see you've got a Little Chopper! I'd love to get one of them!” That's a guy at Abbey Road, y'know? And Steve is just a guy who makes amps and pedals in a little suburban garage in London. When you've got an engineer working at a historical recording studio like Abbey Road saying, “Oh, I've heard about these amps, I've heard they're amazing,” that's when you know you're onto something! 🎸



MUCH MORE THAN LITTLE

THE NEW YEAR HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN, BUT IF 2021 HAS UP ITS SLEEVES AN INDIE-ROCK ALBUM MORE EMPHATIC OR ETHEREAL THAN **JULIEN BAKER'S** LATEST, WE'LL EAT OUR DAMN HATS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.
PHOTO BY **KYLE REINFORD**.



With her road-worn, off-white Tele in hand and her scratchy, sugar-sweetened ruminations on millennial angst, broken love and stormy inner crises, Julien Baker makes a theatre full of twenty-somethings feel like one incredibly gigantic, overly sweaty family reunion. It beggars belief how such simple indie-rock songs can burst through the barriers of emotional reclusivity; no matter how deep your feelings are buried, Julien wields the power to unearth them with no more than three chords and a sharp hook. And, like she does her own over three earnest and urgent studio albums, she encourages you to embrace those feelings.

The latest of her studio output is *Little Oblivions*: an album that builds on Baker's typically sparse and subdued soundscapes with a headphone-filling avalanche of luscious full-band instrumentation, daring thematic bombshells, and stylistic detours that show just how strong Baker's creative palate has grown in the five years since releasing 2017's *Turn Out The Lights*. It's an album as powerful as it is personal, and one certainly poised to launch Baker to enormous new heights.

Before the record bumps her right up from theatres to arenas, Baker sat down to run *Australian Guitar* through all its kaleidoscopic peaks and valleys.

So first of all, this album sounds absolutely beautiful. And that's not to say your first two records don't, but where those shine more for their sparseness and rawness, this album is beautiful more for how rich and dense - almost poppy - it sounds in parts.

It's interesting, because I feel like there's two aspects there to talk about. There's the idea of moving to a full-band sound, which isn't actually what we did. I played most of the drums and all the other instruments on the record, and then Calvin [Lauber], who helped me engineer the record, plays drums on one song and a synth on a couple of things. It's very much an individual-with-one-other-person kind of collaboration, but it does sound like a full-band thing. And that's new! I mean, we've been doing live sessions and trying to make the studio versions of the songs translate to a live setting for a while, but as far as the record itself goes, that was very new.

And then there's that notion of it being a pop-centric record, and yeah, man, that's something that more than one interviewer has said to me! Maybe that was a subconscious influence on this record, which I maybe didn't even realise. Because I didn't

deliberately set out to make a pop record. I know there are some songs on the record that, to me, sound like old 2000s emo bands, and that's definitely what I wanted to be channeling there. But they must have totally different analogues in other people's mental discographies, y'know?

Did that present much of a challenge for you as a songwriter, having all these new elements to work with and stylistic techniques to embrace?

I guess it depends on whether you're talking about the practise of songwriting encompassing production and arrangement, along with lyricism. Because I had all the songs written in my head and I knew how I wanted them all to sound in 2019, and then we recorded the majority of them, the new tracks and overdubs and things, throughout that year and into 2020. It's funny because not a tonne about my songwriting process changed, but a lot about the recording process did - and how much time I would spend on songs. When I write a song by myself in my room, with whatever instruments are available to me, that's the purest version of the song - that's its most stripped and vulnerable version. But I started to open myself up more to the idea of using percussive elements and synths, and bizarre noises and overdriven guitars.

It was pretty challenging. I mean, it was mostly challenging because I'm not good at drums - I have a basic understanding of how drums work, I guess. The person who plays drums with me live is Matthew Gilliam, who was in Forrister, and he's *incredible* at drums! But I wanted the drums on this record to have an "un-drummerly" sound on purpose, y'know? And it's funny because when I think of "un-drummerly" sounds, I always find myself referencing Jason McGerr's drums. He's a professional drummer - he drums in Death Cab For Cutie and he played drums on *The Con* by Tegan & Sara - but those drums are so... I don't know, they're so much different than a solo drummer, or a metal drummer who has rudiments down to 30-second notes. And that's kind of the sound I wanted to go for. I thought, "Well, if I play drums badly, it might sound like Jason McGerr's actual genius." And it doesn't [laughs].

It's "abstract".

Yeah, there we go! Exactly! But y'know, I feel like that would almost be oversimplifying it. I recently

made a score, and it was pretty minimal and electronically based. It was the experience of having the thought, like, "I could make a Jackson Pollock! A two-year-old could make a Jackson Pollock!" But then going and trying to do it, and realising how actually hard and deliberate the process is... Nothing about it is really haphazard - even the stuff that sounds intentionally low-fi, or intentionally minimalist, is actually very calculated.

What did your guitar rig look like for LP3?

It's always interesting talking to guitar magazines because I was never a guitar buff. For the longest time, I used an Ibanez Artcore, and then I got a Mexican Tele that I used for quite a while, and now what I'm playing is a solid maple American Standard Tele with a Lollar soapbar in the neck. I never quite liked the three-pickup Tex-Mex sound, and I never quite liked dual-bucker Deluxe Teles because they were always just too aggressive for me. But I'm also finding out that that was probably just because I'd put way too high-powered a speaker into my amp as a child, and I thought every guitar was way too aggressive for me. But y'know, that's learning where distortion comes from, what pickup distortion and overdrive and pedal distortion are, and how amps process all of that. But yeah, I was jamming mostly that American Standard Tele.

What's kept you faithful to the Telecaster?

As a child, I never had much breadth of knowledge about guitars. I got an SG, and I didn't really like my SG because the neck was too thick. Then I had an Ibanez Artcore, which I got because I wanted a hollowbody Gretsch or ES-335 but I couldn't afford one. And I mean, no shame on Ibanez! They have some great guitars, but that one just didn't have particularly good hardware, so I replaced it with a Telecaster - and that was, like, the Goldilocks zone. But it's interesting because it's like proximity breeding complacency - I know a Telecaster, I know how a Telecaster is supposed to sound and how it's supposed to work, and I've always just felt like there's not much I couldn't accomplish with it.

I remember my dad saying to me when I was a kid, "You ever see rock bands where they switch guitars every song? Well when you watch AC/DC, [Angus Young] is just playing one guitar!" I don't know how true that is - I've never seen AC/DC play - but I somehow internalised that as though I should only have one guitar that just does the job, y'know? 🎸



Bobcat

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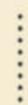
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A CRUSHING CLASH OF CULTURES

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU PAIR AN ICON OF EUROPEAN METAL WITH THE UNDEFEATED QUEEN OF JAPANESE POST-ROCK? YOU GET **AMAHIRU**: ONE OF THE MOST JAW-DROPPINGLY BADASS BANDS IN THE WORLD RIGHT NOW.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **TAKUMI NAKAJIMA**.

It's often said that music is the one truly universal language – perhaps the only human creation capable of transcending literally any cultural or political barrier. For those of us lucky enough to have experienced live music in a land foreign to our own, such a claim is instantly agreeable – there's no feeling quite as homely as standing arm in arm with a fellow metalhead in the middle of a mosh pit, even if you have clue at all what they're saying to you in-between songs.

For musicians themselves, too, it's a powerful experience to explore the intrinsic cultural ties bound to various forms of music. Especially in the modern day, we're seeing more and more artists fuse ethnically traditional tunes with contemporary genres; the most obvious example, for heavy metal fans at least, might be Sepultura's 1996 tribal-thrash masterpiece *Roots*.

Though it's undoubtedly Western pop music that's penetrated the most international markets, metal is probably the genre most communities can embrace on a core cultural level. There are types of metal totally unique to, or that thrive especially well in, pretty much every continent – from Australia's hardcore-influenced underground to the deep and doomy sounds of Europe, to the USA's love for southern thrash and the Asian boom in glitchy electronicore.

A collaboration between European shredhead Frédéric Leclercq (best known for his gravelly bass work in Dragonforce until 2019, and currently hopping between thrash and death metal in Kreator and Sinsaenum, respectively) and Japanese pop-rock rifflord Saki (whose 12-string turbulence is most often heard in Mary's Blood and Nemophila), Amahiru combines the ultra-bright melodicism of J-Rock with the bold and bombastic flair of European heavy metal.

Their self-titled debut album showcases almost an hour of unapologetically raw power, Saki and Leclercq both bringing their A game with an ear-splitting onslaught of searing hot solos, balls-to-the-wall breakdowns and downright inhumanly juicy jamming. And as she explains to *Australian Guitar*, such was something Saki was extremely keen to up her ante with in Amahiru.

What's the origin story behind this crazy new project?

It was in 2015, Mary's Blood opened for a Dragonforce show in Hong Kong, and that was the first time we met. And then when they came to Japan, we drank so much with Fred and the other guys, and we became friends very fast. Then it was maybe two years ago, I was thinking about making a solo album, and I was talking about that with my Japanese label. Dragonforce

is really popular here in Japan, so they were saying, "You're friends with Fred? What do you think about inviting him to play on the album?" I thought that was a good idea, so I convinced him to join the album for a couple of songs. But it was so fun to work with him and we both had a lot of ideas, so we decided to make Amahiru as its own project. And then one day Fred called me and said, "I had a dream that I signed a contract with our band name, and it was Amahiru." That's how we decided on the name [*laughs*].

Did the direction of music itself change when it pivoted from a solo project into a band?

It started off that I wrote the songs, but Fred also sent me some songs over email. At first, I didn't think about bringing any traditional Japanese styles to the album – but Fred said it had meaning to be there, and it would sound really cool to have the European style from him and the Japanese style from me, and bring those together. So I wrote some more using the Japanese scales, and we changed some little bits. Then last year, he came to Japan and we put everything together here, so we picked and finished writing all the songs together.

What was the chemistry like between the two of you as guitarists?

Fred has had such a long career, first with Heavenly and then Dragonforce, and now with Kreator – he just has so many ideas and he knows so much about music, not only the scales and the keys but how to make them sound very special and new as well. So I brought in some riffs and solos, then he took them and chose where

to put them. It was so much fun to collaborate with him, because he's almost like a teacher.

How does this project allow you to expand your horizons as a guitarist?

When I play in Mary's Blood, there are three other girls who are more into things like j-pop; they're not into heavy metal as much, so I can't play as hard as I do in Amahiru. Mary's Blood is selling internationally, but mainly we think about our Japanese customers, and it's hard to find a balance between the pop things and the heavy metal things as a member. Then for Amahiru, we're able to play in more hard-rock and heavy metal styles. I'm playing a lot more aggressive than I do in Mary's Blood. And Fred is a very good guitarist – I didn't know that he could play like so well, honestly. I went to see him play with Sinsaenum, his other band with Joey Jordison, and he was doing the death metal – I was so surprised that he could play like that! Normally people know him as a bassist in Dragonforce, so I was like, "How does he do that?" I kept being defeated by him because he's a very serious guitarist, and I usually play a lot more pop-style songs. So yeah, I try really hard to play heavier in Amahiru.

What can you tell us about your infamous red-and-gold Killer Fascist?

So the guitarist from a metal band called Loudness, Akira Takasaki, he made the Killer Guitars brand. It was about ten years ago, their president found me at some shows – I forget the exact details, but I was already playing a Killer guitar, and their president said, "What do you think about signing to Killer Guitars so we can support you?" So I signed a sponsorship deal with them, and I've been using their Fascist model since then. It's a seven-string guitar, but it's a little bit cleaner than a normal seven-string guitar. My hand is so little, so they made it custom for me. Killer Guitars are mainly built for heavy metal guitarists, so they have a very strong mid sound, which I like. I asked them to make me a guitar that was lighter than usual, and I also like the tone of the alder, so I asked them to make the body out of alder. 🎸



BACK TO THE FUTURE

FOR MOST ARTISTS WITH OVER 50 ALBUMS TO THEIR NAME, THE IDEA OF BREAKING NEW GROUND MIGHT SEEM OUTLANDISH, IF NOT OUTRIGHT IMPOSSIBLE. FOR PROG GOD **STEVEN WILSON**, THOUGH? WELL, IT'S A GODDAMN PIECE OF CAKE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **HAJO MUELLER**.

Though he's best known as one of the most revolutionary string-splitters in prog-rock history (thanks in no short part to his tenure fronting Porcupine Tree), Steven Wilson has his headstocks dipped deep in a myriad of genre-disparate pots. Take for example his sixth solo album - *The Future Bites*, hot off the presses via Universal - which blends with Wilson's signature serpentine fretwork an array of glitchy and glittery synths, keyboard solos and dance beats.

In many ways, *The Future Bites* is a highly conceptual effort. Sonically, it explores a realm of contemporary pop music sometimes minimalist, and sometimes absolutely bursting at the seams with captivatingly convoluted disarray. Thematically, it explores how technology has both benefitted and hindered the progression of modern society - it invites us on a critical journey through, as a press release informs us, a world where "ongoing, very public experiments with nascent technology on our lives take place constantly; where clicks and Tiks have become more important than human interaction."

It's a major stylistic departure for Wilson - for starters, guitars are often not the focal point of a song, but rather ancillary to these twisting and twining labyrinths of synthetic melody - but one the 53-year-old Londonite was ecstatic to dive into.

Ironically, given the album's themes, Wilson caught up with *Australian Guitar* to talk about *The Future Bites* via... Believe it or not... *Technology!* A Zoom call, of all things! What's next - telepathically sending us emoji over 5G wavelengths!? *SAY IT AIN'T SO, STEVEN!*

How did you want to flex your creative muscles on this record?

When I started writing this record, I became conscious that my previous records, in their own way, had all been homages to the past. *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* was an homage to conceptual '70s rock music; *To The Bone* was an homage to experimental pop in the '80s... So this time, I went, "Y'know what? No. I want to make an album that sounds like it could only be made now!" And I think that's what I've achieved. Part of that was being quite open-minded, I think.

I worked with a great producer on this album, David Kosten, and he was playing me some contemporary pop music - music I wouldn't normally listen to, but very inspiring because of the production techniques. Some of the sonics on some of those records are just... Artists like Billie Eilish, for example, who my two daughters listen to - I hadn't really concentrated on her music in the past, but when you really listen to those records, the production is just amazing - and definitely very fresh and very, very much of the now. So I think there was a conscious decision to try to do something which wouldn't be so easy to dismiss as nostalgic, or generic in any way. It's a very eclectic record, and I think that's interesting because it's difficult to put a record like this into any particular genre. But I like that. It's hard to sell a record like this, but I think that ultimately shows its quality in a sense.

I love that you're learning all these new techniques from artists born decades after you started making music.

When you're young, you're always listening to music made by people that are much older than you. But as you get older, you inevitably end up listening to music made by people much younger than you. I'm 53 now, so a lot of the music I listen to is made by people that are younger than me. And y'know, one of the most magical things about music is its ability to constantly evolve and constantly reinvent itself - and that is predominantly the domain of younger people, who perhaps don't have the weight of knowledge; they don't know or care about all the history of rock music. Sometimes I wish I didn't have that, because it's very easy to end up pastiching things that you love, or wear your influences too obviously on your sleeves.

So on this album, it was a question of trying to get out of my comfort zone, listening to music that I wouldn't normally listen to, made by much younger musicians - music that didn't have any sort of commonality between my own music, and music that could make me think about what I could be doing in different ways. My comfort zone is down that sort of conceptual rock rabbit hole, post-Pink Floyd, whatever it is. I've done that for most of my career - and I've made a lot of records that I'm very proud of, but I think I was getting a bit too complacent towards the end of the last decade. I needed to try making something that felt more edgy, more contemporary, and could stand in its own right as a record made in 2020.

How did that influence your role as a guitarist?

I ended up playing almost all of the guitar myself - which again, is quite unusual for me. Since the days of Porcupine Tree, I've tended to rely on other guitar players, and I've had some amazing players work on the past few records. But this time around I played most of the guitar myself, because I guess I wanted more of a 'sound design' aesthetic going on - I didn't necessarily want those epic, virtuosic guitar solos - which I love, by the way - I've just already done all of that. This time around, if you listen to some of the guitar solos, for

example, "Personal Shopper" or "Eminent Sleaze", they're very angular - they're quite abstract, and they're more about the sound design than the notes.

I think the beautiful thing about the guitar is that it is an endlessly adaptable instrument. It's a shame that you don't hear a lot of guitar in modern pop music. If I do hear a guitar, it's been so processed, quantised, sampled, beat-detected and glitched up that it doesn't sound like a guitar anymore - but I still believe in the possibilities of the guitar. So I approached it in a different context - a more electronic context - finding a way to incorporate the guitar into that very different musical vocabulary by using different processing techniques. I'm really proud of what I've done with the guitar on this record.

How do you find that sweet spot where the guitar has a place in the song, but still allows those other elements to shine?

It's about thinking more of the guitar as a sound source, which is there to be processed - it's not a sacred thing. You can take a guitar and you can f*** it up, you can put it through plugins and you can put it through pedals and you can reverse it, slow it down, speed it up - I've done all of those things on this record! I fed it through synthesisers and used MIDI plugins to modulate the sound of my guitars - in a way, it's bringing that electronic sensibility to the guitar. It's no different to a keyboard in that respect, in terms of what you can do with the instrument. And I really believe that if the guitar is going to prevail as we go further into the 21st century, that's what guitar players need to start doing a bit more.

We can't still be clinging on to the the Dave Gilmour tone or the Jimmy Page tone or the pentatonic scales - because honestly, most kids these days don't relate to that. One of the greatest tragedies of the 21st century is that rock music - particularly the guitar - hasn't really managed to reinvent itself. It's a shame, because I think for decades, it was doing that on a regular basis - the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s, right up until the age of bands like Nirvana and Oasis, the guitar was endlessly being reinvented. But come the 21st century... Nothing. I can't remember the last time I heard rock music on a Top 40 station - and that's a shame! 🤖



DOWN TO EARTH

AFTER BEING FORCED TO PAUSE THEIR TYPICALLY ULTRA-TURBULENT SCHEDULE, **TASH SULTANA** DECIDED – AGAINST ALL PLAUSIBLE ODDS – THAT THEY ACTUALLY APPRECIATED MOVING AT A CRUISER, MORE EASYGOING PACE. THE PRODUCT OF THAT? AN ALBUM OF PURE SONIC EUPHORIA.

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

Since the days when they'd stream bedroom-set jam sessions on YouTube, we at *Australian Guitar* have spouted nothing but love for Tash Sultana. But it'd be a lie to imply their chaotic energy was any shade of easy to work with: mania defines the multi-instrumentalist, hectic schedules, last-minute plot twists and spontaneous hops to foreign lands all the norm for an artist whose life moves at about 35 times the speed of the average human's. Do they even sleep? (We've asked that, half-jokingly: the answer is "some nights"). Scoring the rare interview with Sultana means being extra flexible, since they almost always call early and refuse to wait around – and being especially choosy with questions, since they don't have the time to f*** around with any small-talk.

At least, that's how things were a few years ago. Since hopping off the touring cycle for their explosively successful *Flow State* album, Sultana made the unconventional decision to hide away for a bit before kicking off their second album era. A well-earned break led the 23-year-old rocker to a poignant epiphany: things don't always have to be so excessively frenetic. It's okay – crucial, even – to stop and take a deep breath every once in a while, look around and feel the ground beneath your feet.

Cue: *Terra Firma*, the long awaited follow-up to *Flow State* and a journey not just into new sonic territories that Sultana had never before thought to explore, but too some intensely transformative and mindset-altering bouts of self-actualisation and reckoning. It's an album that only could exist with Sultana forced to hit the brakes on a trailblazing stint that had no end in sight – partially at the hand of the last year's world-halting Coronavirus pandemic, but mostly Sultana's own realisation that if they didn't take a second to chill out soon, the inevitable burnout would've been impossible to recover from.

Before they duck back out for another whirlwind bout of world domination, we caught up with Sultana to riff on why *Terra Firma* will go down as perhaps their most essential body of work...

What's the vibe like as you gear up for this new era? Are you as nervous or excited as you were the first time around, or have you almost gotten used to the hype?

I don't know about the hype, man, I've been feeling pretty invisible this year. I think we all have – the lack of a normal world can make you feel a little bit miserable. But you've just got to

keep trying to find where that validation is, and that's been my journey this year. That's a lot of what the album is about, and how it ended up the way that it did. But I'm not nervous at all. An album is just an extension of yourself as an artist; every time you make a new song, you're just further extending your capabilities as an artist. Y'know how people always say things like, "Oh yeah, their fourth album is shit," or, "I liked their other stuff"? I think that's a bad attitude to have towards music, because it's just art, y'know? It can go in whatever which way, and that's the cool thing about it. And if you're ever stuck, just get into the studio and co-write with people, try new stuff out, reinvent yourself! I don't see why it has to be so f***ing serious.

So the phrase *Terra Firma* obviously refers to the Earth – "firm land" in Latin if we're being totally literal. How is that title reflected on the album itself?

I've been living a really fast-paced life for quite a while, but when I got home at the end of last year, I had a handful of shows to wrap things up and that was it. Everything stopped. All the tours were cancelled, all the holidays were cancelled... The world hit a pause. Everyone was just waiting for me to snap and lose my mind, because I'm just naturally so wild. I can't sit still, I get bored super easy, I have really bad ADHD and all that – but I was just really chill. I was really mellow throughout the whole thing, and I enjoyed every lesson that I learned about it all. And in that time, I wrote an album that coincided with the realisations I was having within myself, which was that I'm at a really nice place at 25, I'm really thankful for everything that I've learned and I'm really thankful for all the people around me. I just felt super grounded.

Did you find yourself wanting to explore any new approaches to the guitar on this record?

Yeah, I did. It's all I did – every day was just practise, practise, practise! I've got a little Sunday-to-Saturday whiteboard schedule; I have to write everything down to stay focussed, and that's been a total lifesaver. So on a Monday I would practise piano scales, for example, and I'd do vocal warmups every day just to keep my voice nice and strong. Because singing is kind of like running a marathon: you can't just get up and run a marathon and expect to not do any damage – you've gotta keep training. And you've got to do the same with your voice and your playing, otherwise your talents start to wither away. There's no shows on, but there's plenty of time to get really deep into theory

and technique and all of that. So I would just be like, "Monday is piano, Tuesday is trumpet, Wednesday is guitar, Thursday is drums, blah, blah, blah..." And I practised entirely new rudiments and scales.

Speaking of the guitars themselves, what gear went into making this record?

I pretty much used only three electric guitars. I used my 1960 Fender Custom – it's like a heavy relic in this crazy light blue finish. I've swapped out the pickups in all of my guitars, and that one has a DiMarzio single-coil on the back. That guitar made it onto the majority of the record, and then I actually used a Gretsch for all of the warmer, thicker sounding rhythm parts. I has 11-52 gauge strings on that one; usually I go for the nines, but for that guitar I keep it nice and thick. And then the last guitar I used was my signature Stratocaster.

Which just hit shelves! Congratulations! What was it like getting down to the nitty-gritty with Fender?

It took a little bit of time, hey. That guitar took about 18 months to make, from the first prototype to the production kit – which ended up being totally different to the guitar we had at the start. The first prototype was a really deep brown and had a rosewood body. But you're not allowed to manufacture guitars in rosewood anymore, that was a new law that passed recently, so we had to change our course of direction. But I had this really, really nice American Pro Series Strat, and I thought, "Man, this is a nice guitar!" I'd used that a lot on the first record and on tour, and I realised: people are really fond of these because it's kind of like a new-age Strat where it's got the technology of today, but it's also incorporated the sound of the Strats from the '50s and the '60s.

So it's basically an American Pro Series Strat with a few little custom changes, like a single-coil tap and Yosemite pickups. We gave it this really bold Cherry Red coat – it's actually a stain that Fender has never used before, and they won't use again. I'm a massive fan of gold hardware, too, so we chucked that bling all over the guitar. It used to have a different scratchplate – it was tortoiseshell, but I swapped it out for the pearl because it made the red pop much more. And I just wanted it to be an affordable Stratocaster that young players of any gender could appreciate. It's custom made by me, but it's for everybody else. I even put my logo on the back, because I didn't want that to deter somebody away from the guitar if they're not a fan of mine; they don't have to flash my logo around. 

LIVE AND/OR LET LIVE

ON HER FIRST SOLO RELEASE IN OVER A DECADE, **AGAINST ME!** FRONTWOMAN **LAURA JANE GRACE** SEARCHES FOR BEAUTY AND BELONGING IN AN ERA DEFINED BY ISOLATION AND DESPAIR.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ALEXA VISCUS**.

If there's one fanbase out there who truly knows the definition of patience, it's that of Floridian punk band Against Me!. In the four years since releasing their fantastic seventh album, *Shape Shift With Me*, we've come annoyingly close to receiving a follow-up – first in 2018, before the material was scrapped in favour of *Bought To Rot*, an album by frontwoman Laura Jane Grace with her side-project The Devouring Mothers; and again in 2020, before the Coronavirus pandemic forced them to cancel a touring stint that would've led directly into a month of studio time.

Promises of a demo compilation – sneakily released under the pseudonym Angela Baker to avoid label dramas – were also cut when Grace decided instead to focus on recording a solo album in isolation. Thankfully however, that album – the 14-track *Stay Alive*, surprise-released online last October, with physical copies fresh on shelves – is fantastic. It's bright, dry and narrative-focussed, almost every track comprised of Grace and her acoustic guitar unfettered, all kinks and cracks laid bare as she sings and strums her heart out.

Stay Alive is the product of panic attacks, existential crises and isolation, frustration towards the music industry in toto and a defiant desire to rebel against the notion that art shouldn't exist in a time when its profitability isn't optimal. It's a record steeped in anger, and yet, it is truly beautiful. And so we caught up with Grace – via Zoom, much to her chagrin against the platform – to discuss how she was able to imbue such beauty in a scenario so ugly.

This is your first proper “solo album”, but you did have the Heart Burns EP all the way back in 2008 – had you tried to do another solo record since then, or has your mind just always been elsewhere?

I guess I don't necessarily approach it like that mentally, y'know? The categorisation that happens to stuff after the fact, to me, is usually pretty inconsequential. And if we were having a private conversation, I would just be like, “I don't give a f***.” It doesn't matter to me. Band record, solo record, side-project... Call it what you want, y'know? It doesn't make a difference to me, because the process is always the same – I start out writing songs on my guitar in my office, and then I'll bring them to the band if I feel like it needs to be a band record... But it's all about finding what feels good for the songs in the end, and the way that everything lined up for this record was inarguably what felt good for the songs. But I don't know... I think from hereon out, any

record I do that isn't with Against Me!, I want it to be billed as my ‘very first debut solo record’ [laughs].

How quickly did these songs come together? Are they very spur-of-the-moment in that you'd have the idea, tuck it away and move on to the next?

Well these songs were written over a two, three-year period of time, and they had taken on a bunch of different forms – there's full-band versions of all of them, and those full-band versions are much more fleshed-out with all the intros and re-intros and bridges and stuff that are more instrumental-based. So when I decided to do [the record] this way, it was about stripping all those parts off and getting back to what the core of what the song was at the start. And that was just acoustic guitar and vocals. I had fleshed out every possible angle a song could head in, tried it every different way, and then just pulled back to the bare basics of it. But in preparation for going into the studio with Steve, I was very focussed. I timed it with the moon – I was like, “Alright, it's a full moon tonight, so starting tomorrow, I'm going to practise these songs every single day. I'm going to run through them at least once, every day for the next complete moon cycle, until the next full moon.”

Hypothetically, will we eventually get full-band performances of these songs?

Well to me, there's no reason why we can't do that. With what we were just saying about how songs can die, it was just that I needed to get these songs out now, in whatever form I could. And y'know, going back through the history of Against Me!, that's the way the band started – I would write songs, record them as acoustic demos, and then we'd flesh them out as a band. That's what the majority of *Reinventing Axl Rose* is: different, more full-band versions of songs that were already recorded in a much more stripped-down element. So in looking at it that way, there's no reason why we can't come back and [play songs from *Stay Alive* as Against Me!] if we want to.” After this pandemic shit plays out, if we want to come out of the gates swinging and go on tour immediately as Against Me! before we put out a new record, well, we still have new songs that we'll be able to play.

It's just about not putting any limits on things. Because that's where everything was getting stuck with [the eighth Against Me! album] before we had to pack it up – thinking, like, “Oh it has to be this one way.” Going, “We're Against Me! – there's four

of us and we have to record the songs *this* way, and everyone has to have a part to play.” We were having trouble with that in the studio, and I was reaching a point of frustration because it's like, I can sing, I can play guitar, I can write the songs... “Everyone else, you've gotta do your own thing.” If we're not lining up in the moment and it's all feeling forced, then f*** it, y'know? Let's just walk away from it. When a pandemic basically is telling you, “Walk away from it for a second,” then you have to walk away from it.

I was going to ask if it felt like you'd come full-circle in a way, given how the early Against Me! stuff was all acoustic.

100 percent! And consciously, too. Especially in feeling like, “Alright, look – this time sucks. It sucks for everyone.” And there have been so many times over my career when fans have come up to me and been like, “Hey, I'd love to hear you do a record like [*Reinventing Axl Rose*] again!” Or even with *Heart Burns*, people being like, “I'd love to hear you do another thing like *Heart Burns*.” So if there was ever a time to just flay myself out to the fans and go, “F*** it, sure,” it's now, right? I'm just like, “Sure, if it would make you happy, I'll do it. That would make me happy, to make you happy.” Because f*** it, dude, we need some fan-service shit going on right now.

Speaking of which, we should talk about guitars! What were you playing on this LP?

I recorded this whole album on my Australian Maton guitar! I brought three different acoustics into the studio with me – I brought in a Gibson, a Yamaha and a Maton, and I was thinking I would do it with the Gibson, but the Maton just sounded the best. And that's the guitar on the whole record. I bought it when I was touring Australia with Chuck Regan in 2008. There's not even a DI – it was just strictly, like, a ribbon microphone on the guitar and a mic on my vocal, and that was it.

Is that your go-to for when you're having a casual strum at home as well?

I have this new Yamaha – I think it's a CSF or something like that – and that's been my at-home guitar for a while. But I'm non-monogamous when it comes to my guitar relationships. I get wrapped up into deep affairs with them that last for extended periods of time, but I love guitars and I have a lot of guitars, and I'll switch back and forth depending on the mood. ■



A WAVE WORTH SURFING

WITH ALBUM #2, THE GOTH-POP HELLIONS IN **PALE WAVES** SET THEIR SIGHTS ON WORLD DOMINATION. AS FOR HOW THEY'LL ACHIEVE IT? WELL, THEY'VE GOT TWO OF THE MOST INESCAPABLE DRAWCARDS IN THEIR CLUTCH: NOSTALGIA, AND EXISTENTIAL CRISES.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **NIALL LEA**.

Don't let their mercilessly over-the-top, crusty goth-punk shell steer you off - Pale Waves are all about spreading good vibes, bold and buoyant pop-rock jams and memories that'll last a lifetime. Like their mentors, the fellow Dirty Hit upstarts and binary-bending deviants in The 1975, the aesthetic-heavy quartet first chiselled out a passionate UK following - and now, on the cusp of releasing their second album, are ready to make one hell of a splash on the international scene. That album in question is the aptly experiential *Who Am I?* - a piercingly peppery set of chords, keys and quips that'll stick to your brain like gum in freshly washed hair.

The band declare *Who Am I?* to stand as the official Pale Waves manifesto, "inspiring inclusivity, self-discovery, and the notion of being whoever the hell you want to be." And as its grungy, washed-out cover art would imply, the record sounds like a freshly unearthed relic from the peak of emo-pop circa 2006. Which makes sense - as frontwoman Heather Baron-Gracie tells *Australian Guitar*, she and her bandmates were bitten quite hard by the nostalgia bug when it came to bashing out these bangers.

I always love when an album title asks a question! Is this one rhetorical, or something you wanted to explore thematically across the record itself?

I feel like this album is a journey through my emotional growth as a person across the past year. I came to the realisation that I really needed to grow up. Because when you're on tour, and you do the same day - the same routine around the same people - over and over again. You're constantly being babied, too: "Okay, you're here at this time and then you're doing this - is there anything I can do? Oh, your bags are already in the hotel." It's strange - it's totally amazing, but it does get a bit odd if you actually think about it. It's not the most natural job.

So I sort of took a step back, and I finally felt like I had the space to breathe for a second - and

that's when I knew that I needed to work on myself and realign my priorities. I had a bit of a meltdown, like, "Who am I? What is it that I want to leave this earth with?" And I wrote that song, "Who Am I?", when we were on tour with Halsey in Europe. I just sort of fell into this really huge slump - I tend to go into depressive states, but I hadn't fallen this low in quite a while. It sort of hit me all at once, and I just went into the bathroom and wrote "Who Am I?" And that really sums up the album, because it's all about me, like, yearning to understand who I am.

I love that you were able to turn your personal crisis into art.

That's the beauty of music, isn't it!?

Was there anything you learned from doing the first record that you were excited to bring over to this one?

Yeah! I feel like I've become more aware about what it is I want to say. I'd spent a lot more time listening to different genres of music. On the first album, I was really boxed in - I had boxed myself in with certain genres, but with this one, I've really branched out. It sounds very, like, 2000s, late '90s - and that's because I've been listening to way more music from those eras, and I've really found what types of music I like. I have much more of an inner love for country music right now - every night when I cook, I listen to country music!

I've just expanded my vision on so many different things. I've travelled the world and I've met so many people, and that's really helped me become more aware of the message I want to deliver as an artist. Whereas on the first album, I was like, "Oh my God, I don't know what I want to say!" It was cool, but I was overwhelmed, because I didn't feel confident or comfortable sharing a lot of myself with other people. I tried my best, and I feel like I did on certain tracks like "Noises" and "Drive", but at the same time I was really reserved, and I can really see that now after having written this second album.

Having really cut your teeth on the live circuit over the past few years, did you find yourselves approaching this record more with the stage in mind?

As an artist, I don't ever really think about that. I probably should, definitely - people do say that you should really take in mind what songs go down well live. I think with the next bit of material that we come out with, I really will bear that in mind more, because I feel like I was self-indulging, in a way, on these last two records - I just went into the studio and was like, "I want to record these sort of songs! I want to do this for me!" I'm sure it's going to be so fun and people are going to really enjoy it, but yeah. The next time around, I want to write songs that sound like Courtney Love - like a Hole cover band - way more grungy and nasty and guitar-driven! That's the sort of vibe I want to go for next, and I think that's what goes down so well. So I'm doing the complete opposite next time around.

What were you jamming out on for this one?

I had my 12-string Vox that I used a lot. I like using 12-string guitars because it's very Cure-like, y'know? It's very Robert Smith, and I do love The Cure - they were a massive influence on our first album. I think I just like the natural chorus that you get from a 12-string. You don't need to cram a bunch of pedals into it or anything - it just has this really magic charm to it. And then Rich [Costey, producer] had this acoustic, which isn't from a known brand or anything - his next door neighbour literally made it for him - and it sounded *amazing*. It was kind of similar to a Gibson with the body shape and the overall feel, but it had this really unique tone to it.

And then Hugo [Silvani, lead guitar] went through a bunch of shit - he's the typical gear nerd in the band, y'know, he likes to trial out *everything*. I'm more like, "I know how to play this guitar and I like how it sounds, I'm just going to stick with this." We did have this Strat that Rich brought in - I'm not sure what year it was, but that sounded unreal. You didn't need to manipulate it or anything - the raw sort of sound of it was incredible. 🎸



THE VOICE OF REASON

IRONICALLY, VERY LITTLE OF THE MATERIAL ON *IMPULSE VOICES* – THE LONG-AWAITED SECOND ALBUM FROM SCENE-LEADING PROG-ROCKER **PLINI** – CAME FROM *IMPULSE*. INSTEAD A RESULT OF LONG, INTROSPECTIVE STRETCHES OF TIME OFF-TOUR, THE ALBUM SHOWS A WHOLE NEW SIDE OF THE SYDNEY-BASED INSTRUMENTALIST.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **CHAD DAO**.

If all went according to plan, now would be around the time Plini finished up his first trek touring the world in support of his second full-length effort, *Impulse Voices*. Instead, the Sydney-based prog lord is gearing up for his first stint back on stages since a curtailed US run in February 2020. Fingers crossed, that is, granted no more COVID-related hiccups force him to postpone.

The original goal was to have LP2 hit shelves in the first half of last year. But when the world hit pause and Plini's future suddenly became anything but certain, he decided not to sweat the deadlines – in fact, most of what ended up making the cut for *Impulse Voices* came together well after its projected release date. The 28-year-old embraced the mellowness of life at home, spending his days exploring the intricacies of Sydney and its surroundings, catching up on podcasts and expanding his own musical horizons, then chipping away on tracks whenever he felt a strike of inspiration.

As Plini explained in a press release, “It was an extremely fun, rewarding and explorative process – the closest I’ve felt to the free-spiritedness I had when I first started writing music (way before ever releasing it), but informed by everything I’ve learnt and experienced in the last few years of tours and travel. To make an analogy, I feel like I designed a pretty cool house for the listener to inhabit with these songs, but it was made truly special by the masterfully-crafted furnishings and decorations added by Chris [Allison, drums], Simon [Grove, bassist and co-producer] and the rest of the musicians involved [Dave Mackay on piano and synthesizers, John Waugh on saxophone, Amy Turk

on electro-acoustic harp, and additional production from Devesh Dayal and Aleksandra Djelmash].”

Before heading off on what’s certain to be his most jam-packed touring cycle yet, Plini sat down with *Australian Guitar* to walk us through some of the finer details of *Impulse Voices*.

Were you inspired much creatively by what you were seeing and taking in around Sydney?

I would like to think so! I really have no idea, but my theory when it comes to gathering inspiration is that the more stuff in life that you can do, the more inspiration will come to you when you go to play your instrument. Because I think if I just stayed home and played the guitar all day, I wouldn’t be covering any new ground. I’d very quickly run out of good ideas, in terms of, like, the emotions and feelings that go into a song. But I think if I go and do stuff, see things and meet people, those little day-to-day experiences turn into something for my creative mind to express. That’s just my little theory, though – I’ll see if I still have any ideas in, like, 20 years. But at least it gives me something to do for now!

Did you find as well that being at home and not having the pressures of touring or any hectic schedules to stick by, you were able to experiment with things a little more?

Yeah, definitely! I planned to have the album finished around May or June so I could go on tour in the European summer and then cover the rest of the world throughout the rest of the year. But then it got to June and I think I had sent maybe two demos to my drummer. So the whole thing took about twice

the amount of time I originally set aside for myself – which was a huge blessing, because I spent way more time trying different things and tweaking arrangements, to the point where at this stage, I’m really happy with everything on the record. I don’t think has ever fully happened before, so that was cool.

As a self-taught guitarist as well, do you feel like in the few years between the *Sunhead EP* and now, you’ve picked up any new techniques?

I think there’s definitely a bunch of styles I hadn’t really done before, in terms of the guitarists I’ve been listening to for the last couple of years, who I sort of borrow things from in my own playing. And there are some tonal things which are a little bit different. It’s kind of hard to say, I guess, because the songs are different – when a certain song is a certain way or sounds like it should have a certain type of guitar playing on it, you don’t really think about what isn’t on it. So I guess with this album, there’s some parts that are more weird, jazz-fusion-y sort of things which I’d never done before. I’m playing my own version of what my favourite fusion players would sound like, if that makes sense. It’s still me, but there’s a bunch of new shit – which may or may not be pleasant for the listener.

I get the impression there’s a little more improvisational sort of stuff on this one.

In some of it, mostly just in the early stages. A few of the solos were improvised when I first made the demos, and a couple of [the songs on the album] are virtually demos that I learned to play better – because I’m really not much of an improviser in the way I record; I like things to sound like the most perfect possible version of them, so if in the first take there was a bend that wasn’t quite right or something, I’d re-practise the whole solo until I could play it perfectly. So yeah, the ideas were improvised, but the performances were very tightly curated.

I know you’re still all about your .strandberg* signature guitar – how’s that been holding up for you?

Really well, man! I got a prototype for a neck-thru model about a year ago, and we’ve been developing some signature pickups as well. So I’ve got the next iteration of the signature model ready to go, basically – it isn’t out yet, but it will be soon-ish, I think. I thought I had my dream guitar already, but it turns out it could be improved! So now I have my dream guitar *plus*.

What was the design process like between yourself and the team at Strandberg? Was there a sort of “anything goes” kind of vibe to the process?

Yeah – within the restraints of what they’re already doing with the guitar, of course. I’m not going to ask them for a headstock or a Les Paul body shape, because I don’t think that would end very well. But in terms of the electronics and the timbers and all that, it’s kind of up to me to figure out what I think I’d like best, and then more or less just ask them for it. And then they usually go, “Yeah, we think this is a terrible idea, how about this?” [Laughs]. It’s a good dynamic! It is mostly based on the production models they make, just with a couple of little personal tweaks, like the lack of a tone knob. 🎸

PUTTING THE 'O' IN 'HERO'

ON HER FIRST SOLO ALBUM IN SIX YEARS, **ORIANTHI** TAPS INTO A WICKED WORLD OF NEW INSPIRATION.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **JOSEPH LLANES**.

Not many of us can say we spent our formative years shredding out alongside such virtuosic legends as Steve Vai, Alice Cooper and Carlos Santana. Adelaidian rock queen Orianthi can, though - hell, her very first time on a stage outside the walls of her Anglican high school were with Mr. Vai, wailing out on her six-string as though she'd been doing it for decades (despite being just 15 years old herself). And in the 20 years since that faithful night, Orianthi's hunger to kick down the barriers of the music industry and riff her way to the top has only intensified.

On the outset, things may not look so hectic: she released her third solo album, *Heaven In This Hell*, in the early months of 2013, followed by a casual stint of world touring and a few lowkey side-projects like BeMyBand and a run playing alongside Dave Stewart. In 2017, she teamed up with Richie Sambora to debut the collaborative RSO project, which apexed in the 2018 album *Radio Free America*. But aside from those occasional blasts of off-kilter creativity, Orianthi has been almost alarmingly quiet.

Behind close doors, however, that's not at all the case. The LA-based songwriting gun has packed her last few years to the brim and beyond with artistic endeavours, collaborating with dozens of fellow musos ranging from venerable rock legends to up-and-coming pop luminaries, teaming up with Hollywood's finest to work on various projects for TV and film, and even toying around with some lucrative non-musical business ideas. She also has at least three other albums in the pipeline, not including her monolithic solo comeback, *O*.

Taking in elements from all her wild experiences over the past seven years, *O* is much more than your stock-standard rock 'n' roll album: though it's packed from cover to cover with red-hot riffs and soaring solos, there are slivers of grunge, sprinkles of pop and some truly unexpected (yet entirely welcome) hints of EDM to unearth throughout its dense and dynamic ten tracks.

Keen to vibe on everything about her new LP - as well as all the other exciting projects she has kicking around, her newfound appreciation for digital production, and her soon-to-launch signature acoustic with Gibson - Orianthi treated *Australian Guitar* to a grand ol' yarn.

Why did it take you this long to make another solo album?

Y'know, it's just a timing thing. I've

been working so hard on all these different projects - I've been working with a lot of Japanese artists and people like Sebastian Bach and Richie Sambora, I'm doing a lot of session work, collaborating with and writing songs for other people, *and* working on an animated movie. I was also working on a hip-hop album with P. Diddy's camp, believe it or not - a guitar-and-beat kind of situation, y'know? And that record still exists!

I actually have a couple of albums in the works: I have a pop record, I have the hip-hop record... I definitely went down some different rabbit holes, and tried a lot of different things. But then I sort of felt like, "Y'know what? I don't want to travel around with a guy and a computer, I want to travel around with a band!" So I said to Marti [Frederiksen, producer], "Hey, do you want to come and work on my new solo album?" And he was like, "Absolutely! Let's do it!" And he came back from Vegas - because he was working with Aerosmith there - and we just jumped into the studio straight away. And yeah, it was a lot of fun! So I didn't take a seven-year break, but it felt like now was the right time to put out my next solo record. And I'm working on another one right now, so there's lots more music to come.

Was there anything you took on from all those other projects that you were able to bring over to this new solo record?

Yeah! Working on a hip-hop record and a pop record with all these producers that use computers and beats and stuff, I learned a lot of new techniques when it came to working with samples.

I had beats that I would come up with on Logic and bring over to Marti, and then Marti would make them sound better and spice them up, and then we'd bring real drums in and flesh it all out with a real band. You can definitely hear a little bit of an experimental sound on this album, and some guitar tones that I'd never tried before. I really stepped out of the box.

Because you can't be chasing

after something superficial - you can't be chasing a hit, you've got to chase after a sound and a feeling. I think that's what really works these days, more than anything else, because people's attention spans are

like gnats. And we've become programmed that way because of how technology has evolved. We want something immediately, and then we're over it, onto the next thing. So y'know, you just kind of want to make something for yourself - make yourself feel something first, and then hopefully it makes other people feel something too. And then you keep on creating...

How did that apply to your creative approach as a guitarist?

I really wanted to go with what was right for the song, rather than, "Let's just do a balls-to-the-wall solo with the sound that I usually have." It was like, "Let's put it through the Kemper and my Orange, let's try a fuzz here, and let's f*** with it a bit more afterwards..." Because sometimes you put down a solo and it's like, "Okay, that's cool" - it sounds good and everything, but it doesn't sound like anything new or exciting. I wanted to really mess with sounds and try new stuff. And Marti was great with that, we spent a lot of time putting different effects on things together. But I predominantly used my Orange Rockerverb Mk III amp, which I absolutely love, and then we just sort of messed with stuff on the computer afterwards. Because I'm not a big pedal user - I have my guitar, my amp and a wah pedal, and that's basically my setup.

In other exciting news, you have a signature model Gibson J-200 coming out! What can you tell us about that?

Well, I am beyond honoured that I got approached by the heads of Gibson to collaborate on something they'd never done before, which is a hybrid acoustic.

I went down to Montana with a rep from out here [in Los Angeles], Ray - we went down and met up with Robi Johns, who is one of the most incredible acoustic guitar creators; he really brings dreams to life, y'know? I sat down with him for lunch and

I said, "This is kind of what I'm thinking" - I'm a huge Elvis fan, I grew up listening to players like him and Johnny Cash, and they all had J-200s, right? That was the 'thing' - that was the grand prize Gibson for me, y'know? The holy grail. And the guys at Gibson were like, "Isn't that a little big for you?" And I went, "It is!" It's a f***ing *big* guitar, but the sound is unmatched to any other acoustic. It has such a projection and depth to it that - but the neck is so boat-like; it's so hard to play leads on it. So I asked, "Can we put an ES-345 neck on a J-200 body?" And they were down!

It was actually so funny, I grabbed Bradley Cooper's guitar that he used for *A Star Is Born* - I was playing that and I was like, "Y'know what? This neck is great - let's fit this on the body of the J-200!" And they were like, "Well, we've never done something like that before, but... Sure!" And I've gotta tell you, the new model is hands-down one of the best acoustics I've ever played. I'm beyond honoured that I had a part in making it, and I can't wait for people to have it in their own hands! 



SMASHING DOWN A NEW DOOR

TO LEAP FORWARD INTO A BOLD AND BRAVE NEW CHAPTER, **THE SMASHING PUMPKINS** HEAD RIGHT BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **JONATHAN WEINER**.

In an age of fractured attention spans and a ghastly over-reliance on nostalgia porn, The Smashing Pumpkins dare to be defiant with their unapologetically erratic and experimental new album: the 72-minute long, synthpop-inspired *Cyr*. Its 20 tracks are bold and brooding and just the right tinge of buoyant – simplistic at first glance but structured like the perfect French pastry with layer upon layer of deep and dense artistic flair when you dig just a little deeper. Fans of the Pumpkins' ripping and raging grunge-rock anthems will almost certainly turn their noses up at *Cyr* – but Billy Corgan doesn't give a shit.

When we caught up with the 53-year-old father, musical multi-hyphenate and pro wrestling obsessive, one thing became immediately clear: though he's still emphatically outspoken, Corgan's appetite to reign at the top of the rock 'n' roll food chain has all but fizzled out entirely. He notes that he couldn't be happier with where he's at on his creative timeline, and even if the critics at large and his army of obsessives hate *Cyr* with a passion, he'll still hold the double-disc epic close to his heart.

Because at the end of the day, LP11 is authentic to what Corgan and his bandmates were excited to explore on their own creative wavelengths. It's not some half-assed attempt to dominate the airwaves or sell out of cheaply slapped-together vinyl boxsets – Corgan's got enough cash as it is, and he's ecstatic that he no longer has to worry about the financial validity of his artistic ambitions.

Speaking of which: let's find out exactly what they are in 2021, shall we?

There's an almost '80s synthpop, club music kind of vibe going on with this record. Where

did that inspiration come from?

I wanted to make some modern music, and that was the closest thing to it that I was interested in. Jeff [Schroder, guitars and keys] said it was almost like we went back to the early days of the band, but instead of going right into grunge, we took a hard left into goth and synthpop – and I think that's a very accurate way to put it. It seems to line up well with some of the more modern types of production, with the way people are making records right now. I don't think anybody's really solved the riddle of how to make guitar music in the way that we make guitar music, other than just cranking the guitars up and having a wall of sound – which we were obviously doing 25 years ago. So I was just trying to say something new, I think, and this sound is just where I landed in doing so.

In going back to the Pumpkins' roots, did you feel there was a more youthful, or collaborative energy between the four of you?

No – but it's never been that way, y'know? Generally speaking, the way we work is that I'll go off on some convoluted tangent, I'll explain it to my bandmates, and they'll look at me and go, "...Okay. I mean, cool, if that's what you want to do..." They've always been very supportive, but I do think they think I'm a bit crazy. And then we just get into it, y'know? We just kind of navigate where we can take the songs from there. And I think that where we work best is where I'm very clear about what I want, and then they're very clear about how they can contribute to that. But the songs have to be great. Even though we're known for our production, we're really a 'song band' first. People overlook that sometimes, that we have great songs, but that's all that ever matters. If we have great songs, we can always rise

up to the challenge of the production. But if we don't have great songs, then we're not interested enough to bother. We don't want to make cool-sounding records that have shit songs, like a lot of bands do. It's a fine business model, but it's not our business model.

So would you say this is the strongest the Pumpkins have been as a creative unit?

I think we're probably the most "on the same page" that we've been since *Machina*. But that's also when James [Iha, guitars and bass] left, so I don't know... We've always been able to run with the mentality that one plus one plus one equals more than three – which our former bandmate had a critical role in, but wasn't as involved in the musical decision-making as us three guys were. I think it's an interesting dynamic in that James and I really connected on a core set of groups like The Smiths and The Cure, but then Jimmy and I very much connected over our love for classic rock – Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Rush... And then of course through time and through cross-pollination, that expanded, but that's the core foundation of how we were – James brings a little bit more style and some stardust to what we do, and Jimmy is able to translate the language of rock and new-wave into emotion and power. It's a really weird dynamic, and I can't think of many other bands like that – but it works! And when it works, it's quite beautiful; it engenders in me an emotional response that I wouldn't otherwise have on my own.

What did your guitarsenal look like for *Cyr*?

I played my Reverend signature model a lot, and I also had a 1962 Gibson 335. There was one Gibson factory out in Detroit that made the same 335s that Eric Clapton and Ritchie Blackmore played – there's a certain series of 335s that only came from that one factory, and they're hotter than the other 335s. It's one of those, and it's honestly one of the best guitars I've ever bought – it's ridiculous. It sounds like early Cream. It's just got that *attack* to it, y'know?

Are you much of a slut for pedals?

Not so much anymore. I have a crazy vintage collection, so y'know... I love all the boutique pedals that are coming out right now, but most of them are recreations of pedals that I already own the originals of – I don't know if I really need the clone of the clone of the \$1,200 pedal I already have. Although I do have some clone pedals that are really, really good – there's a Klon Centaur clone that I bought off eBay for like \$25 which I used a lot on this album.

So how were you processing those guitar parts in tandem with all the new synthesizers and electronic elements?

I don't use computers for guitar. I don't like plugins or any of that stuff – I'm a firm believer that the distortion signatures of a guitar need to be organic. I certainly hear stuff that is attractive about digitally manipulated guitars, like the way you're able to move a part forward in the mix and stuff like that, but personally I don't give a f***. I grew up on Black Sabbath and Queen and Jimmy Page, y'know? I want power. I don't want any bullshit. I just want that pure, raw energy – which is why I'm willing to buy expensive vintage guitars and great amps. We also work with a lot of density – some of the tracks on *Cyr* have, like, nine synthesizers playing at the same time, on top of an analogue bass and some guitar work. In order for those guitars to cut through the mix, you have to have an analogue signal path. 





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REGARDLESS OF WHAT FATE THROWS AT 'EM, YOU JUST CAN'T KEEP A GREAT BAND DOWN. IN THIS ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW, INTREPID **AC/DC** ICON **ANGUS YOUNG** DISCUSSES LIFE AFTER **MALCOLM** AND THE BAND'S POSITIVELY CHARGED NEW ALBUM, *POWER UP*.

WORDS BY
RICHARD BIENSTOCK



Like all of us, Angus Young has been spending a lot of time at home lately. “It’s a bit different,” the 65-year-old AC/DC guitarist admits about life in the time of quarantining and social distancing. Although in some ways, he adds, not so much. “I guess I’m used to being tucked away somewhere in a room and just putting together ideas and songs,” he says with a laugh.

As it turns out, Young has indeed spent a fair amount of time these last few years “tucked away somewhere in a room and putting together ideas and songs.” Which is how we’ve wound up, rather unexpectedly but certainly quite happily, with *Power Up*, AC/DC’s 16th (or, if we’re counting in Australian, 17th) full-length effort.

As for what makes it unexpected? For starters, the band recorded it under a complete media blackout – traditional, social or otherwise. Aside from a few rumours – kicked off by surreptitious photos that surfaced in 2018 of various band members, coffee cups in hand, trolling alleyways around Vancouver’s Warehouse Studio, where they’ve recorded their last few efforts – things have been radio silent in the AC/DC camp for several years.

More significantly, of course, there’s the fact that since the end of the *Rock Or Bust* world tour there has been the looming question of just who, or even what, AC/DC is anymore. The tour itself was, like every AC/DC jaunt for decades now, a massive success – and maybe their most massive yet. It kicked off with a headlining stint in front of a crowd of more than 100,000 at, of all places, Coachella, and then over the next year-and-a-half proceeded to sell out arenas and stadiums from Brisbane to Buffalo, racking up ticket sales of more than \$200 million in the process.

Internally, however, things weren’t running so smoothly. AC/DC is not a band immune to trial and tragedy – the death of inimitable frontman Bon Scott in 1980, and the band’s subsequent resurrection with *Back In Black*, is a permanent part of rock lore – but even by their standards the *Rock Or Bust* era was exceedingly challenging.

It began with the pronouncement that the band’s co-founder, stalwart rhythm guitar player and, in many ways, musical and ideological rock (not to mention Angus’ older brother), Malcolm Young, was battling severe dementia and stepping away from the group. Malcolm co-wrote the songs on *Rock Or Bust*, but his parts on the recording, as well as his spot on the stage, were assumed by his and Angus’ nephew, Stevie Young. Malcolm passed away in November 2017 at age 64; just three weeks earlier, he and Angus’ older brother, George, who had helped guide AC/DC to success, as well as co-produced several of their albums from their 1975 debut, *High Voltage*, to 2000’s *Stiff Upper Lip*, died at age 70.

Experiencing this sort of deep loss would be difficult enough on its own. In AC/DC land, it was

compounded by the fact that, just prior to the release of *Rock Or Bust*, longtime drummer Phil Rudd, who had played with the band on and off since 1975, became mired in legal troubles and was replaced by a former drummer, Chris Slade.

Toward the end of the *Rock Or Bust* tour, meanwhile, singer Brian Johnson was forced to exit the band as a result of hearing loss, with his slot assumed, in a move no one could have seen coming, by Axl Rose. To put a final punctuation mark on events, by the time the tour wrapped in September 2016, bassist Cliff Williams announced his retirement from AC/DC after four decades with the band. Which meant that, just two years after the release of *Rock Or Bust*, only two members – Angus and Stevie – remained from the lineup that had recorded the album.

So what did Angus do? What Angus always does – he wrote. And while he didn’t have his brother next to him physically during this time, he did still have his riffs. According to Angus, the majority of the material on *Power Up*, as with *Rock Or Bust*, was constructed from songs and ideas he and Malcolm had logged over the years. “They were things that we knew were good, and so we put them aside and said, ‘We should get them down on record at some point,’” Angus says. “And I thought, well, maybe now’s the time to go through and pick out all those ideas.”

When it came to getting them down on tape, Angus called up a few friends. In fact, amazingly, *Power Up* finds the *Rock Or Bust*-era lineup – Angus, Stevie, Phil Rudd, Cliff Williams and, in a welcome return, Brian Johnson – back together and ready, to borrow a *Rock Or Bust* song title, to play ball.

The result is an album that is 100 percent pure and unrefined AC/DC (and with this band, is it ever not?). From the power-chord slam and “Thunderstruck”-like Angus single-note figure that kicks off the opening track, “Realize”, to the mid-tempo stomp of “Wild Reputation” and “Rejection”, the “Shake A Leg”-style boogie of “Demon Fire” and the deep-in-the-pocket grooves and big chorus

hooks of first single “Shot in the Dark”, *Power Up* finds the venerable lads in very fine – if not absolutely top – form.

Elsewhere, the new album is littered with all of the original band’s beloved calling cards – Brian Johnson’s gravel-soaked shrieks and growls, Phil Rudd’s impossibly solid and swinging drum wallop and, of course, Angus’ monolithic riffs and explosive solos – while throwing in a subtle curveball or two here and there.

Witness, for example, the twangy guitar lick that

punctuates the verses in “Kick You When You’re Down” or, more conspicuously, the honeyed Angus guitar line and ultra-melodic major-key chorus that highlights the (gasp!) almost ballad-like “Through The Mists Of Time”...

But as far as Angus is concerned, at the end of the day it’s all just AC/DC. “I treat everything as a song and I hear it as a song,” he says. “I’m not on some sort of mission.” Angus laughs. “That might not be the right word. But I just look at everything on the musical side and then I say, ‘Does it attract me?’”

“I ALWAYS GO POSITIVE WITH SONG IDEAS. AND WITH AC/DC, WE NEVER GET TOO SERIOUS ABOUT WHAT WE’RE DOING. WE DON’T TRY TO PUT IN, YOU KNOW, A REAL ‘STATEMENT’ THAT MEANS SOMETHING.”

You mentioned that many of the songs on *Power Up* have their origins in riffs you and Malcolm came up with together. Do you have a stockpile that you can just tap into whenever you’re writing music?

I have lots of ideas the two of us worked on pretty much through the years. Even when we were in studios and recording rooms there were always ideas that we would put down. It’s just something where, the two of us together, we always seemed to be playing back and forth and coming up with stuff. From the beginning that was always a part of us.

Do you also write on your own? Or do you prefer having someone to bounce ideas off?

I’ve done it both ways. You get an idea and if you have a tape recorder you try to put it down. And if you haven’t got a tape recorder you do your best to try and remember it. But then when Malcolm and myself would get together it would be a case of rolling through the ideas and seeing what we believed was material for AC/DC. And the material you’re hearing is stuff that we did that was always for AC/DC. We would try to separate what we had. You know, we could have 100 things, and out of that hundred here are 20 good, strong AC/DC ideas. And we’d put them to the side.

100 things? How many ideas do you think you have?

If I had to estimate? [Laughs] That’d be hard. But all I can say is I’ve got boxes full of stuff the two of us have done over the days.

For *Power Up*, you guys worked with Brendan O’Brien, who also produced your last two records. What does he bring to your sound as opposed to other producers you’ve had, like Harry Vanda and your brother George, or “Mutt” Lange?

Well, Brendan... I always say the role of your producer is pretty much that he’s your audience. He’s the man that’s sitting there hearing the whole picture, the outside ear that’s listening to everything. And he’ll tell you, “I think this is AC/DC,” or, “That bit there, I don’t know...” That’s the role he plays in order to get the best performance from you. And Brendan’s very talented. He knows his music. So if we get stuck somewhere, maybe if we say, “Oh, do we do a break here?,” he’ll sit down and we can have it out together and he’ll help us come up with a good idea to try.

On first listen, my early impression of *Power Up* is that it’s a bit darker in tone than *Rock Or Bust*.

A lot of it’s down to the songs and what you’re working on. But when we’re doing a song, I always think... I never go negative. I always go positive with song ideas. And with AC/DC, we never get too serious about what we’re doing. We don’t try to put in, you know, a real “statement” that means something. It’s just, that’s the mood when you wrote the song and then you bring it to the track.

If there’s any song on the record that sticks out as a slight departure from the standard AC/DC approach it’s “Through The Mists Of Time”. It has more of a major-key sound, and you also weave an incredibly melodic guitar line through it.

Yeah.

Did that one feel a bit different to you?

Um... no [laughs]. As I said earlier, I treat it as





a song and I hear it as a song. You know, my older brother George used to always tell me that chances are when you come up with an idea, you come up with an image. And he said, “You might even come up with a singin’ line, and it might not fit the track at that time but it sets the mood in what you do. So jot that down. If there’s birds twittering in the background, just write, “birds twittering”. Call it that, even just to get you started.” [Laughs] Obviously, you’re not going to write a song called “Birds Twittering”, but you just want to get something that’s going to fit in that melody line, if that makes sense.

Did that happen with any of these new tracks? Was there one where you wrote down a phrase like “birds twittering” and it turned into a song?

Well, I came up with a lot of titles. Malcolm would call them “hook titles”. And I’ve always done that. The two of us from the beginning always did that. So especially with titles and things, I’ve written down a lot over the years and I would just go through some of the books and mark out ones I liked and then sometimes bring singin’ lines. Or sometimes I might see a title and go, “That’s a great title.” And then I say, “Ah, I’ve got some great riffs here that’ll work with that.”

A good example of that might be something like “Hells Bells”, where the title is so evocative and the music really sounds like the name of the song.

Yeah. And that’s what you aim for. Or something like “Highway To Hell” - you hear those opening chords and you go, “Uh oh... what’s coming?”

“We’re on our way...”

It’s something a little ominous [laughs].

As far as titles are concerned, I want to ask about the name *Power Up*. It’s not too often that an AC/DC record isn’t titled after one of the songs on the tracklist. Is there any special significance here?

Well, the significant side of it was I just wanted something that meant something to the band, and especially to my brother. I always thought his whole thing with AC/DC was it had to be powerful as a band. So I wanted something that called up what we do and that sums up what AC/DC is. And also, being guitarists, whenever I would plug in the guitar I always felt I was plugged into the “big electrical grid” [laughs]. So *Power Up* just sounded

“MY OLDER BROTHER GEORGE ALWAYS USED TO TELL ME THAT CHANCES ARE WHEN YOU COME UP WITH AN IDEA, YOU COME UP WITH AN IMAGE.”

very powerful. Simple. Direct. Or you could go the other way and say it’s very *Frankenstein*, you know? Almost like creating a monster.

AC/DC has obviously experienced a lot of turmoil over the past few years. After you came off the *Rock Or Bust* tour and it was just you and Stevie remaining from the lineup that recorded the album, was there ever a moment where you felt, “This could be it”?

At that point you’re at the great unknown. We didn’t know what would happen. You’re in a bit of a case of limbo. But at the time you just go, “I’m committed to getting through this, and then after that I’ll concentrate on what comes.”

Could you ever envision a life without AC/DC in it?

Well, I’ve been doing this most of my life, since I was in my teens. So it’s very hard to think of something other than that when it comes to making music. I’ve always said if I do anything music-wise, I can only do it the AC/DC way. Even if I wasn’t in AC/DC, I think it would probably still sound like AC/DC [laughs].

After Brian Johnson exited so abruptly I think a lot of fans questioned whether he would ever return to the band. How did he come back into the picture for *Power Up*?

He was getting a lot of help with his hearing. And he kept up with it and kept trying various things to see how he could improve. Then he wanted to do something to test it out, so I think he did a few prep runs

to see how it would go. And the people who look after us, our management, they were all wanting to know, "When are you going to do an album?" So it was a case of seeing who wanted to be on board. And everyone was happy and wished to participate. So it was good. And Brian felt, yeah, he would come in and try and see how he would do.

Was it in Vancouver that the five members – you, Stevie, Brian, Phil and Cliff – first got back together and played as a full unit?

Yeah. And if you're in a recording studio you've got a different environment to, say, if you're playing live. You've got more control on the hearing side of things. You can isolate to very good listening levels.

What was the first thing you played together as a band?

If you're in a studio, you always try out some things even just to get your sounds together. So you play a little "Back In Black" or something.

Following the end of the Rock Or Bust tour, there had been rumours that you were going to continue on with Axl in the singer slot. Was there any consideration about doing a record together?

That never really came up. Axl was really

very generous and he helped us out to get through our touring side at a difficult spot. He had contacted us and said he could help if it didn't interfere with his own commitments of what he was doing. He wanted to come in and try songs that he himself liked, and he was suggesting songs I hadn't played in a long time. I'm definitely grateful that he volunteered and that he helped us finish off our commitment. But he has his own life.

On the guitar side of things, how did you and Stevie work together on this record?

Stevie is a bit like... Even when he was starting off with us he picked up on what Malcolm did rhythm-wise. I mean, Stevie can do solos and stuff like that too, but he went the route a bit like Malcolm. It's the rhythm that he enjoyed doing best and that's how he applied himself. And you know, Stevie had filled in for Malcolm in the past, in the '80s [when Malcolm left the *Blow Up Your Video* tour in 1988 to battle alcohol dependency].

So for me it was, I'm looking at somebody I know is dependable and who can also do that role. And I mean, nothing could ever replace Malcolm, because Malcolm is the founder and he set the whole style. But Stevie certainly can do the role. He knows how it should be. So it's just a case of the two of us sitting down and making sure we're in sync.

What gear were you using this time out?

Well, the guitar that I use and that I consistently use has always been the same guitar, the Gibson SG. And everyone always asks me what year it is. You know, I've heard somebody say, "Oh, it's a 1970s Gibson." And then other people say, "No, it's a bit earlier than that." I don't really know what year it is but all I know is it couldn't have been past 1970, because that's when I got it! [Laughs] So I used that a lot, and then I've got a few other guitars. One is a black SG, I think there's a photo of it from *Back In Black*. And then I have another SG that's maybe a '68 or '69, that I used on *Highway To Hell*.

So there are three guitars on the record, and they're all SGs.

Yeah. But the main, most consistent one is the one I've always had. It's got, like, lightning bolts on the fretboard that, I don't know, it was getting repaired and some guy put them in. I said, "What the hell is that?" And I didn't have time to go, "Can you put it back the way it was?" [Laughs].

How about amps?

Marshall. They're 100 watts. But they're all older, going back to the '70s. And the cabinets have the older-style Celestions.

How do you approach your solos? Do you work them out in advance or are you just going for it on the spot?

Well, if you go to a song that's dependent on following a lead line, you'd best get your lead lines sorted out. And it also depends on how prominent it is and how long you're gonna go - "Okay, am I going to do a long piece here or a rhythmic piece?" So it's always track by track what you do. Like on *Back In Black*, the track "Shoot To Thrill"? If you listen to where you would say, "Here comes the guitar solo...", it's actually more rhythmic playing. It's got a little bit of a guitar bite to it but it's more of a rhythmic thing.

And it's only really at the later part of the song, after a little breakdown piece, that the guitar - what you would call lead lines and phrases - picks up more. So what I'm trying to say is, it's really down to the song itself and how you hear it. Because one note can be a hell of a lot better than 50 notes, you know?

You clearly have this guitar thing figured out. Even so, does Angus Young ever sit at home and just practise?

Oh yeah! All the time.

What do you practise?

Sometimes I just sit and doodle. I'll maybe play a bit of blues or I'll try and get my fingers moving and see if I can come up with any different phrases. Experiment a little bit. So yeah, I do practise. But I mean, I don't sit there... even when I was younger, I didn't sort of say, "It's two o'clock - I'd better practise now!" I played when I felt good about playing. I'd pick up the guitar and start playing and then, you know, you end up going, "Oh geez, I've been sitting here now for hours!" [Laughs] You don't know where the time goes. ■



AMPED UP

IN THE WAKE OF **AC/DC'S** 17TH STUDIO ALBUM, *POWER UP*, WE LOOK BACK ON THE LONG AND LUCRATIVE JOURNEY AUSTRALIA'S ROCK 'N' ROLL HEROES HAVE BEEN TREKKING ON SINCE 1973 – STILL WITH NO END IN SIGHT, OF COURSE. SOLE FOUNDING MEMBER AND GUITARIST EXTRAORDINAIRE **ANGUS YOUNG** TALKS US THROUGH WHAT MADE **AC/DC** ROCK'S ULTIMATE FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH.

WORDS BY **PAUL ELLIOT**.

Angus Young is a rock 'n' roll legend, but not a man to take himself too seriously. As he once said of his art: "You don't go to the butcher for brain surgery." Born on March 31st, 1955 in Glasgow, the youngest of eight children, Angus was just eight years old when his family emigrated to Australia, and it was in Sydney, in 1973, that he and his older brother Malcolm, rhythm guitarist, formed AC/DC.

The band went on to sell more than 200 million albums worldwide, including 50 million of *Back In Black*. The death of Malcolm Young on November 18, 2017 left Angus as the last remaining founder member of AC/DC. But it was Malcolm's wish that the band carried on, banging out loud, raw rock 'n' roll, just as they always did. And as Angus said: "I enjoy playing. That's what keeps me going."

What first turned you on to rock 'n' roll?

The sound of Chuck Berry's guitar. It's everything rolled into one: it's blues, it's rock and roll, and it's got that hard edge to it. To me, that's pure rock 'n' roll. It's not clean – it's nasty.

Did playing guitar come easily to you?

As a kid, I was never one for the tennis racket. I was more interested in getting my fingers round the guitar neck, because when I was little – I'm little now, but I was 'little' little – getting a hand around the neck was a big thing. That was the hardest part.

What do you remember of those early days, when you were just a regular schoolboy like all the others?

I didn't go to school much. I was prize truant. When I went in it was like, "Welcome, Mr. Young! A year is a long holiday, you know?" The first day I went to that school, we all went to assembly and the headmaster dragged all the boys who'd been caught smoking up on the stage in front of the whole school. Of course Malcolm was one of them.

So, you were always a naughty boy then?

I got into a lot of trouble when I was young. I wouldn't say I was a budding bank-robber or anything, but I was a bit of a juvenile delinquent.

You also got into blues music at an early age. What did you love about it?

It's the emotion in those old blues records. I've never really been into the depression stuff. I've always liked the happy sort of blues music, like Muddy Waters. Even though he might have been singing about his woman running off with a

nineteen year-old bus driver from Florida, there would be an element of humour in it, and that's what I've always loved.

I've never been a great lover of the real sad element of the blues. There are some great sad songs, but I prefer the happier side. And the grammar in blues music is fantastic. Some of the things that Muddy would sing: "I just love them pretty womens, I'll kill for them young pretty things." They'd sing 'whummen' instead of 'women', and 'choo' instead of 'you'. But you get what they mean.

When you and Malcolm formed AC/DC with Dave Evans as the singer, did you have rather big ambitions for it?

Early on, we always thought we'd be lucky if we got past the first week!

There was a defining moment in April 1974 when AC/DC appeared at an open-air concert in Sydney's Victoria Park, and you wore your old school uniform on stage for the first time...

That was the most frightened I've ever been on stage, but thank God, I had no time to think. I just went straight out there. The crowd's first reaction to the shorts and stuff was like a bunch of fish at feeding time – all mouths open. I had just one thing on my mind: I didn't want to be a target for blokes throwing bottles. I thought if I stand still I'm a target. So I never stopped moving. I reckoned if I stood still I'd be dead.

The band played on the Aussie pub circuit, where audiences were notoriously tough. How scary was it?

Some of the places we played were worse than toilets, let me tell you, and there was that much scrapping going on, you were behind the amps! When I was at school and there was a dance with a band, it was always a band like Van Halen, with the guy with the long blonde hair wiggling his hips.

In the pubs we played in, in front of that hot, sweaty, beer-swilling crowd, you couldn't even hope to do that. This was the kind of audience you couldn't even tune your guitar to. If you bust a string, that was it. Sometimes you finished with just two strings, because there was no way they were going to put up with a couple of minutes of you fixing the guitar.

I remember one night I said to the rest of the band, "I'm not going out there." The police couldn't get in the place. There was some madman running around inside the hall with a meat cleaver, chopping into the people! And the front row was all bikers. I said, "They

just want blood!" You looked out and it was just like murderers' row, and the look on their faces is like, "Send us the little guy in the shorts!"

Is it true that Malcolm once had to 'assist' you in getting on stage?

Yeah. Suddenly I just felt a boot and I was on. And there's this deathly silence. All you can do is play – and pray! You put your head down and hope a bottle doesn't come your way. That became part of my stage act. I learnt to duck and keep moving.

When Bon Scott became AC/DC's singer in 1974, he'd already been around the block a few times with various bands, and had a taste for the rock 'n' roll lifestyle. What did you make of him back then?

Bon joined us pretty late in his life, but that guy had more youth in him than people half his age. That was how he thought, and I learned from him. Bon used to say to me, "Whatever I do, you don't." Oh, I had a few wild nights over the years, but most of the time everyone else was having them for me. Because of the schoolboy uniform, some women have tried to mother me – they think I'm cute because I'm so short. But playing has always been the thing for me.

I never really looked beyond the next gig. In the early days, all my mates used to say to me, "You must be meeting loads of girls..." Well yeah, I used to meet plenty of girls, but none of them used to want to go home with me. Some women would come up and make, er, bold statements, but I don't know why. There's nothing sexy about a schoolboy, is there?

In the summer of 1976, when the band first played in the UK, it was during a performance at the Reading Festival that you first treated an audience to something that would become a tradition – a little on-stage striptease. What prompted you to do this at Reading?

Some blonde girl walked real slow across the photo pit right in front of the stage and thirty thousand eyes went with her. It was a real showstopper. Malcolm said to me, "You gotta do something to get the crowd's attention back!" So, I dropped my trousers.

And ever since, you've had AC/DC audiences singing "Get 'em off!"

I always thought they were singing, "Get 'im off!"

Malcolm said that it was Bon's voice, and his witty lyrics, that gave the band its 'flavour'.

Bon called himself a 'toilet wall graffitist'. He was full of compliments about himself! But he could conjure a story from anything. She's Got Balls was about his first wife. And he did say he wrote Problem Child for me, but you now, I never owned a knife like it says in the song. My dad took my knife off me when I was four. Just having a guitar was bad enough, I suppose. But yeah, Bon summed me up in two words!

He could have used one word...

That's right [*laughs*]. With four letters!

On April 30th, 1978, AC/DC played at the Apollo theatre in Glasgow, the city where you and Malcolm were born. And from that came one of the greatest live albums ever made: *If You Want Blood You've Got It*.

It was the magic show. One night, guitars out of tune, feedback, singer farting, whatever...

In 1979, the band had its first million selling



album with *Highway To Hell*.

That was the album that broke us in America.

But the album's title provoked outrage among America's so-called 'moral majority' – as did the cover, on which you were pictured with devil horns and a forked tail. What did you make of the controversy?

As soon as we called the album *Highway To Hell*, the American record company immediately went into a panic. With religious things, I thought everywhere was like Australia. There, they call them Bible-thumpers, and it's a limited species, very limited!

Christianity was never a popular movement. It's that convict background! But in America, you had guys in bed sheets and placards with prayers on, picketing the gigs. I said, "Who are they here for?" And they said, "You!" And we had that thing – that if you play the record backwards you get these Satanic messages.

F***ing hell, why play it backwards? It says it right up front: *Highway To Hell!*

After the *Highway To Hell* tour, you, Malcolm and Bon got together in London to begin working on the album that would become *Back In Black*. How much of it was written with Bon?

Bon wrote a little of the stuff, a week before he died. We started writing the music with Bon on drums. He was a drummer originally. He'd bang away while me and Malcolm worked out the riffs.

When Bon died in February 1980, after one too many drunken nights, had you feared that his life might end that way?

As a person, Bon stared death in the face a lot. The way he said it was, "One day you gotta go. You gotta be a stiff."

Did you feel, as most AC/DC fans did, that

Bon was irreplaceable?

Well, when we auditioned singers, they'd say, "How am I supposed to sing over all this volume?" We said, "We don't want you to sing – we want you to scream!"

You certainly found the right man for the job in Brian Johnson.

Yeah. I always said he sounds like somebody dropped a truck on his foot. And, like Bon, Brian had a good sense of humour.

On the simplest level, *Back In Black* was a great rock 'n' roll record. But on a deeper level it was, as you described it, a memorial.

The whole *Back In Black* album was our dedication to Bon. That's why the album cover was pure black, and why the album starts with a bell ringing, something sombre and different to anything else we'd done.

Was this album also Brian's finest hour?

Brian has recorded a lot of strong stuff with the band – the *Back In Black* album especially, and *For Those About To Rock*, which still gives me goosebumps.

After all that this band has been through, can you explain its longevity?

People have said we've hung around long enough! But some bands fade when they try to adapt to what's current. We play rock music. It's a little bit late for us to do a ballad. Rock is what we do best. Sometimes I'm asked if I want to play music other than AC/DC. Sure, at home I play a little blues, but after five minutes I'm like, "Sod this!" And I'm playing hard rock again.

From the start, you've played it simple, straight-up hard rock 'n' roll, nothing fancy...

It's a challenge to keep coming up with songs of the calibre of "Let There Be Rock", "Highway To

Hell" and "Back In Black". Every song we write has got to stand up. Most of our stuff is just about sex, as is most rock music. It's pretty hard to write a song about your dog.

But I've never really found a sexual thing in music. I've never found anything sexy that was meant to be sexy. Now, that's a good Freudian thing. But if you go back to the blues, that's the standard tempo in most of the strip joints, and that's what we rely on too. It has to be earthy."

Have you kept up with modern music?

Nah. When I get in a car, the first thing that goes in is a Muddy Waters tape, even though I've played in four hundred times. I love that and Chuck Berry. Nowadays everything sounds so nice – buzz-free, hiss-free. I like that hiss! I like to hear the valves on the amplifier warming up. It's pure energy.

I still spend hours sitting and listening to the sound Chuck Berry's guitar makes. There's not a day that goes by when I don't pick up a guitar. And I'm getting there – I've got two fingers going now!

What you learnt the hard way in the early '70s – to go on stage and keep moving – is something you've done ever since. How do you keep it up?

After a show I just wind down for a couple of hours. I try to hide, just in case somebody grabs me and says, "Hey, you didn't play this song tonight!" I need time to relax. I wouldn't like to be the 'Angus Young on stage' all the time. I'd be burnt out inside a week. On one American tour my weight went down to 94 pounds, and I was a hundred and nine pounds when we started.

Do you still get nervous before a show?

Sometimes it is frightening. But you've got to psych yourself up a bit, give yourself a good kick up the ass. Usually, once I've got the uniform on, I'm okay. I'm on edge, nervous, but I'm not in a panic. At least I don't have to put on make-up. I sport my own pimples. And some nights I'm in stitches when I'm trying to be The Schoolboy.

But because of nerves, I've tripped over and even forgotten to do my zipper up a few times. I go for a pee and forget. Last thing before I go on stage, I always go for a piss and then have a cigarette. If you ever see my shorts smoking, you know I didn't put it out right!

How do you feel when you're up there onstage in front of a crowd?

I'm on my own little cloud. Adrenaline takes over. It's like when you take off in an airplane. It's exhilarating. When you're firing well, it's the best feeling in the world. And when it goes wrong, it's like someone's shoved a red-hot poker up your backside.

But for me, the shows go so quick. You're on and you're off, and then you have to go back to how you are as a person. That's the hard part, because once you go into being The Schoolboy it's pretty hard to come off it. I'm like two different people – sometimes three!

Who's the third?

That's what I'm trying to figure out! I've been up there playing and thinking, what are those feet doing? I'm watching them to see which way they want to go. That's all I ever do, follow the feet and the guitar. The duckwalk comes naturally.

And it's still the best feeling in the world?

Yeah. When I put the uniform on, and the legs start shaking... I'm ready. 🎸

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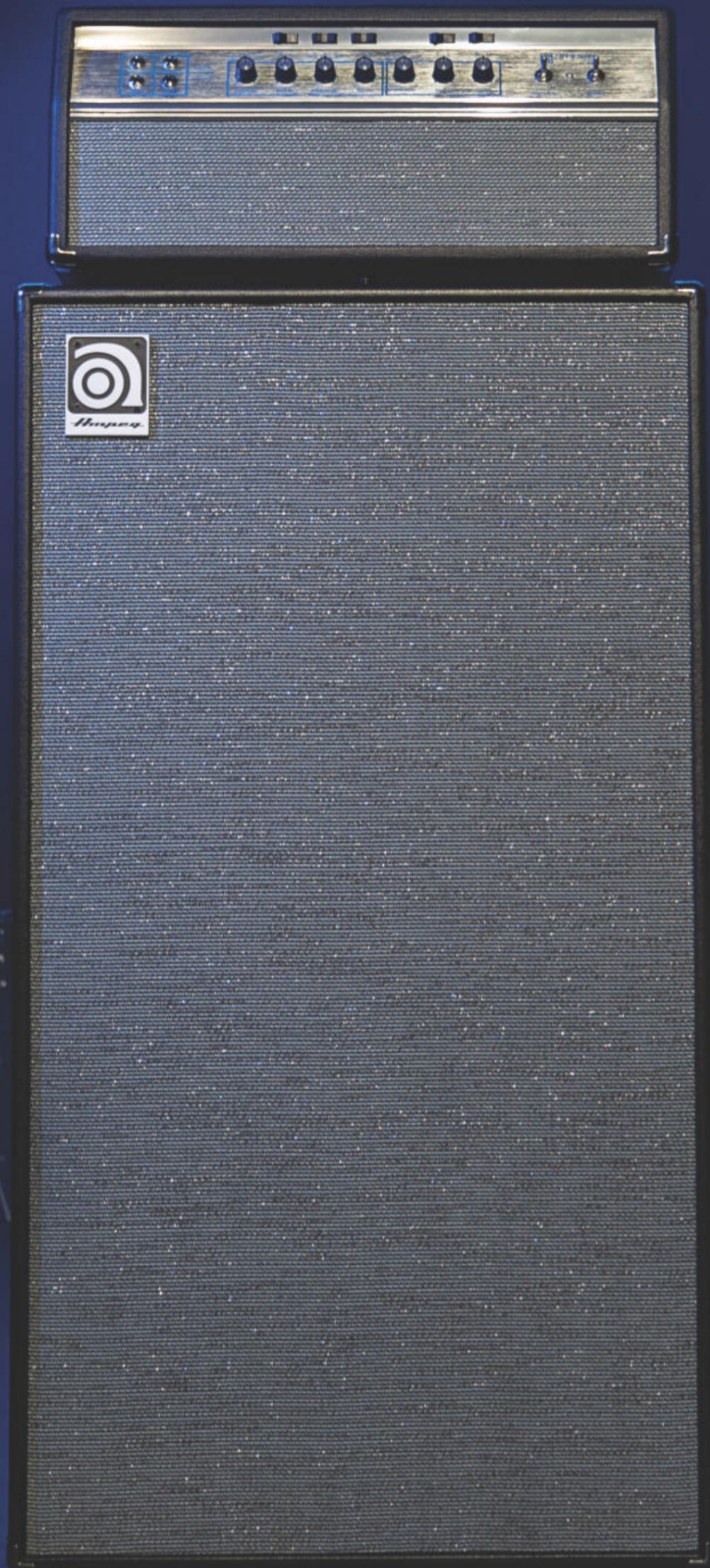
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Whether it's fingerpicking or sweep picking, fretting focus or strumming stamina, we'd all like to be a bit more consistent and confident with our playing, right? So, as we enter the new decade, what better time than now to work on some of the everyday techniques us guitar players try to stay on top of as we work towards mastering this fine instrument? For many of you, a number of these lessons will be well-trodden ground, but sometimes revisiting even the simplest of exercises helps us notice shortcuts and inconsistencies in our playing that can be improved. Follow each lesson slowly, example by example, and see if you notice a difference over time.



02 ARPEGGIOS FOR RHYTHM GUITAR...

Aim for shimmering cleans and tighter picking with these arpeggio exercises

You probably know what arpeggios are - it's when you play chords one note at a time instead of strumming. Simple right? Well, yes, at least in

theory. In practice, arpeggios can be fiercely difficult to play due to rapid-fire string-jumping - you'll often play just one note on a string before having to move to another... over and again.

Take a listen to Radiohead's "Street Spirit (Fade Out)" or Tool's "Invincible" and you'll hear how relentless it can be. Follow our tab exercises and hone your skills.

LEVEL #1: SWEEPING STATEMENT

♩ = 80

Cadd⁹ **C** Play 4 times

let ring throughout

For a flowing arpeggio, hold each shape and play three downstrokes then three upstrokes in a smooth sweeping motion. It takes time to learn to pick like this but your control will improve.

LEVEL #2: EVERY PICK YOU TAKE

♩ = 110

Aadd⁹ Play 4 times

PM throughout

An all-downstrokes approach here makes it easier to settle into the rhythm - but take care to place your pick hand near the bridge for this Andy Summers style dry-sounding palm-mute effect.



CHORD BREAK
Use arpeggios to write riffs around the chords you already know



60-90 BPM

One note at a time!

Practise the chord changes first, then take a look at picking the relevant strings.

90-120 BPM

Mid-Riffer

A medium tempo might reveal errors in your picking technique. Slow down again if so.

120-150 BPM

Arpeggio Artists

If this speed isn't testing you, switch to down-up style alternate picking for an extra challenge.

This Mikael Akerfeldt-style riff is a step up compared to our shorter examples. We've notated a picking approach that takes the shortest route from string to string. A pure 'down-up' style may feel easier and it may even make your timing more regimented. However, the notated picking approach (known as economy picking) is a more efficient way to tackle passages like this.

♩ = 120

Aadd⁹ **Adim/E^b** **Dsus⁴** **G⁵/C[#]** **Bm⁷/G[#]** **E** Play 4 times

let ring throughout

03 ARPEGGIOS FOR SOLOS...

Take your technique to the next level with our lead guitar workout

Wait, more arpeggios? Well, yes! Arpeggios aren't just for chord-based rhythm parts - you can solo with them too. Generally, you'll be

aiming for a melodic vibe with a tight delivery, whereby the strings don't ring out. And, because you're moving beyond basic chords, you'll be covering more of the fretboard. This is good news

as far as creativity and blazing solos are concerned, but it does also represent a bit of a challenge. Our licks will take you through essential shapes which you can apply to your own solos.



PICK ME...

When playing arpeggios, your picking technique is just as important as your fretting shapes

LEVEL #1: BEN'S SON

♩=100
Cmaj7

These notes come from a Cmaj7 chord. So what? Well, solo with the notes of the chord you're playing over and you're guaranteed to be in key. It's an idea you can apply to any chord progression you play over.

LEVEL #2: SKIP THE PICK

♩=120

This string-skipped arpeggio shape is much-used by shred legend Paul Gilbert. Slowly practise the hammer-ons with your first and fourth fingers and focus on the three-notes-per-beat timing.

CHALLENGE
KNIGHTS OF
ARPEGGIA

60-90 BPM

Slow And Steady

At this tempo it's pretty easy to pick up on the shapes we've used.

90-120 BPM

Level Up!

It's starting to get serious now! Try your best not to let any notes ring out together.

120-150 BPM

Melody Master

Our lick tests both picking and fretting, so expect slow, gradual progress to reach these speeds.

This Matt Bellamy-style part uses arpeggios to outline the chord sequence. Practise by playing the shapes first as chords, then as arpeggios. Major and minor sounds are essential for all music, so try to memorise the Am and C arpeggios. Diminished shapes aren't so commonplace. Either use alternate picking or follow the directions below the tab.

♩=120

Am Bdim C Fdim G#dim Play 4 times

04 STRUMMED RHYTHMS...

Strum down. Strum up. Can there really be any more to this basic technique?

Well, yes, as it turns out! While alternating between down- and upstrokes is obviously the core of the technique, there is still a craft to

be mastered with strumming. The idea is to synchronise your downstrokes with the strongest rhythmic pulse of the music - your upstrokes should fall in between. Of course, most of you out

there will be familiar with strumming, but even the most experienced players have to practise. Take a look at the basics and build up to our challenge riff.

LEVEL #1: STRUM-DER WALL

♩=80

Em⁷ A⁷sus⁴ Play 4 times

Famously used in Oasis' '90s Britpop banger "Wonderwall", this rhythm showcases 16th-note strumming. That means there are theoretically up to four strums in every beat (though only three are played in our riff).

LEVEL #2: UP, UP AND AWAY

♩=120

D E/D Play 4 times

This rhythm starts on the downbeat, then focuses on offbeats. For a consistent strumming technique, simply match your downstrokes with downbeats and upstrokes with offbeats.



JOE STRUMMER
Strumming movements should come mainly from your wrist



60-90 BPM

Ups and Downs

Focus on each one-beat grouping so that you understand the underlying rhythms.

90-120 BPM

Strummer Of 69

Increase your tempo and things should start to sound more musical than a slow run-through.

120-150 BPM

Rhythm King

The chord changes are easy, so you can really push the tempo high for a serious strumming challenge.

With some basics covered, take a look at this challenging Pete Townshend-inspired part which combines the strumming patterns of the previous examples with a couple of other rhythms. Had a go at our Oasis riff? Bar #1 mixes up those rhythms, opening on a 'down-down-up' instead of a 'down-up-down'.

♩=120

Dsus⁴ D Dsus² D Dsus⁴ D C G C D Play 4 times

05 LEGATO LEAD...

You know the basics, now take your technique to new heights

Hammer-ons and pull-offs, some of the first techniques beginner lead guitarists learn, are among the easiest. For the uninitiated, the idea is to sound a note

with a fretting finger *without* picking the string - it's done by either 'hammering' down hard on the string or 'pulling off' to essentially re-pick it. Simple! Here we're looking at ways to take these

ideas a step further by using a technique known as legato - when you use a mixture of hammer-ons and pull-offs one after the other. Try out these exercises and hone your skills.



ONE BY ONE

Align your fingers one-per-fret to nail those legato leads

LEVEL #1: SPINAL HAMMER

♩=125
B⁵ Play 4 times

Kick off your legato workout with this triplet lick. If you struggle, just focus on each three-note grouping one at a time - on their own, these groupings are great beginner level legato licks.

LEVEL #2: GETCHA PULL-OFF

♩=120
Am Play 4 times

This Dimebag Darrell-style lick features pull-offs using the first, third and fourth fingers. Flick out and down from the string with your fretting fingers to effectively re-pick the string.



**60-90 BPM
Novice Noodler**

It's a weaving, windy lick, so, at this gentle tempo, make it your aim to memorise the notes.

**90-120 BPM
Level Up! Hammer Time!**

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are actually easier played at some speed. Find a moderate sweet spot.

**120-150 BPM
Melody Master, Legato Legend**

When playing at such fearsome speeds just make sure not to let your accuracy slip.

This smooth Allan Holdsworth-inspired line uses both hammer-ons and pull-offs to create a seamless flow of notes. It looks pretty scary, but there's a shortcut! Learn the first eight notes, then shift up a semitone and repeat the same pattern again. This repeats all the way up to the third string, before the final first-string lick.

♩=110
Adim Play 4 times



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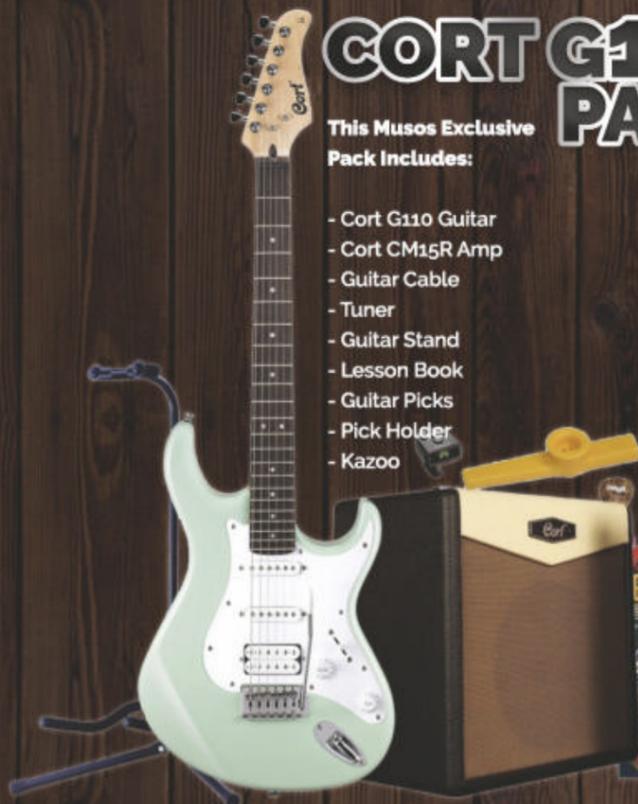
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OG ALTERNATE PICKING...

Master this and watch your playing become faster and more effortless

Just like strumming, alternate picking has down- and upstrokes at its core. Unlike strumming, this is more of a lead guitar technique, so we're talking mainly about

playing one string at a time. Okay, this might not sound overly exciting but bear with. How you pick massively affects your playing; get it right and your solos will soar! In truth, it's much like

strumming - synchronise your downstrokes with the musical pulse and place your upstrokes in between. Follow our exercises to see improvements in both speed and timing.

LEVEL #1: PICKERSLAVE

♩=120 Play 4 times

Em

TAB: 14 16 17 14 17 16 14 16 17 14 16 17

□ ▽ □ ▽ □ ▽ cont. sim.

Here we have two different six-note patterns on the middle two strings, each played with a sequence of alternating down- and upstrokes. Notice how the second grouping begins on an upstroke.

LEVEL #2: PICK LABEL

♩=120 Play 4 times

F#m

TAB: 17 14 16 14 16 14 17 14 16 14 16 14 16 14

□ ▽ □ ▽ cont. sim.

This Zakk Wylde-style lick has a two-note-per-string picking pattern. It's quicker than the previous lick but each grouping begins on a downstroke, which can make it feel more natural.



CLOSE TO ME
Aid your alt picking by keeping your picking hand close to the bridge

CHALLENGE FLATTS PICKING

60-90 BPM

Raw Recruit

Just remember: 'down-up, down-up'. Don't veer from these picking directions.

90-120 BPM

Keen Picks-man

The middle tempos are important. You should start to 'feel' the music now.

120-150 BPM

Prince Of Picking

If you're alternate picking cleanly at this tempo, well, let's just say we're envious!

This bluegrass-style lick will have you moving about from string to string - quite the challenge when you're using strict alternate picking. Practise slowly and learn four or eight notes at a time, keeping your pick moving 'down-up' throughout. Try flicking your pick away from the strings on the upstrokes to lessen the chance of hitting the wrong string on the downstroke.

♩=120

C Play 4 times G C

TAB: 3 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 1 3 1 0 2 0 1 2 4 0 1 2 3 1 0 3 1 2 3 1 3 0 1 2 1 0 2 3

□ ▽ □ ▽ cont. sim.

08 FINGERSTYLE...

Using a pick isn't the only way to hone your chops

Whether you're a regular steel string strummer or an occasional acoustic maestro, every guitarist should have at least a few fingerstyle

chops down. It's a great way to reinvent tired chord progressions with depth and detail. Here you can take a look at some basics or level up with our more challenging part. If it's easy, try

challenging yourself by playing faster or by reworking the fingerstyle pattern for some new chords. If you struggle, take it slowly and work on one short phrase at a time.

LEVEL #1: LEN AND CO

♩ = 70

C Am Play 4 times

let ring throughout

TAB

p i m a p i m a

Start with this easy line and pick: thumb (p), index (i), middle (m) then ring finger (a). Already a seasoned fingerstylist? Use the riff as a speed test by gradually increasing the tempo you play at.

LEVEL #2: RULE OF THUMB

♩ = 70

Csus² G⁵/D Play 4 times

let ring throughout

TAB

m i p i m i p i

Step up your workout with this more challenging line which requires you to move your thumb from string to string. Break it down into bite-sized phrases if you struggle.



FEELIN' PLUCKY, PUNK!?

Get to know which finger should pluck which string for more efficient playing

CHALLENGE
PLUCKING
OUT LOUD

60-90 BPM

Fingers And Thumbs

There's a lot to learn, so keep it slow and practise the chord changes first.

90-120 BPM

Easy As PIMA

Start to apply the fingerpicking patterns and gradually increase your tempo.

120-150 BPM

Finger-pickin' Good!

At these tempos, you're a fingerpicker extraordinaire!

This Ed Sheeran-style riff uses a combination of single-note fingerstyle playing and two-note shapes. You can experiment with which fingers feel comfortable for you, but remember to check the notation for the downward stems, as these are played with the thumb.

♩ = 90

Gsus² D⁵/A D Dsus² Bm¹¹ Gsus² D⁵/A D Play 4 times

TAB

p i a m p i a m p i a m p i a m p i a m m i p i a m

09 STRING BENDING...

Channel your inner guitar hero with this easy soloing tip

From BB to Bonamassa, Slash to Slayer, pretty much every rock, metal and blues guitarist who ever played a solo uses string bends - you don't need us to tell

you that! A humble technique it may be, but it's also a tricky one. Even something as simple as replacing your strings with a lighter- or heavier-gauge set can be enough to affect how you bend.

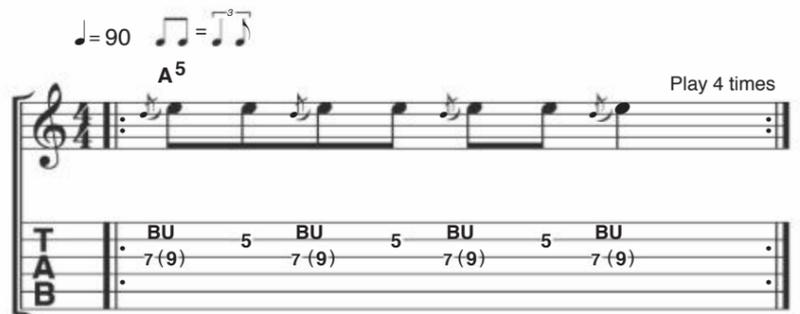
Basically, it's a matter of developing a feel for how far to bend, all the while keeping your ear attuned to tell you when you hit the sweet spot.



PITCH-SHIFTER

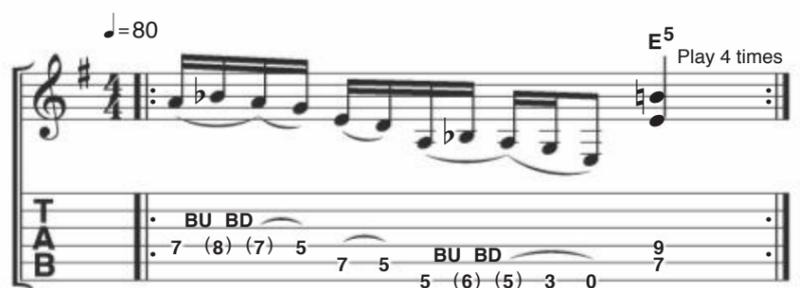
Three fingers are better than one when it comes to string bends!

LEVEL #1: BEND IT LIKE BERRY

♩ = 90 

This blues-tinged rock 'n' roll lick is a great way to hone your bends - simply bend the third string up by two frets. It should be the same pitch as the fretted note on the second string.

LEVEL #2: NOISEGARDEN

♩ = 80 

This sludgy rock riff uses semitone bends in a 'pull-down' motion. Fret the fourth string and turn your wrist to lever the string towards the floor. It's much the same when you reach the sixth string.

CHALLENGE
SYNYSTER
BENDS

60-90 BPM

Round The Bend

Keep the tempo slow and practise each short phrase on its own.

90-120 BPM

Steady String Slinger

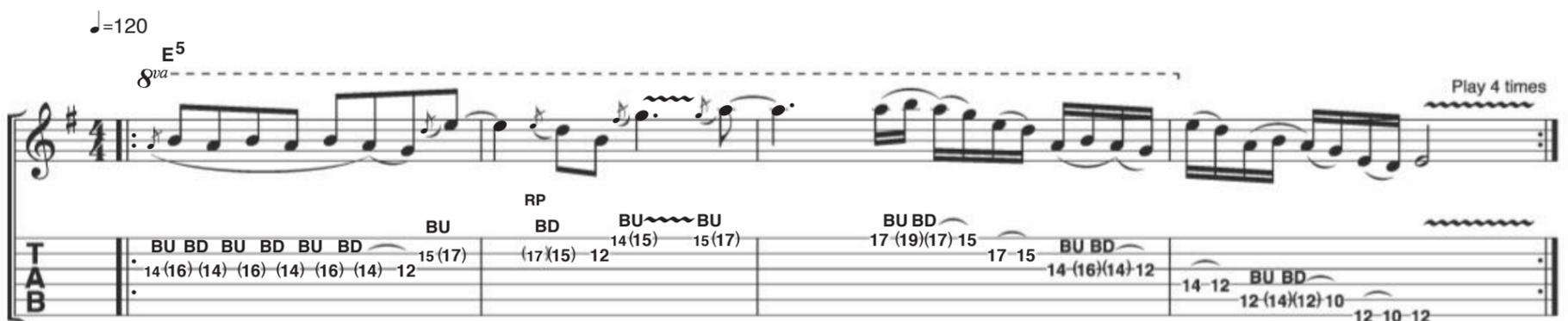
Start to piece the lick together and build speed as you gain confidence.

120-150 BPM

Pitch Perfect!

Once you've mastered the lick, try playing just a little bit faster to challenge yourself.

Build up your bending skills with a mix of techniques here in our Avenged Sevenfold-inspired lick. In the opening bar, aim to time your bends strictly with an eighth-note pulse. Bar #2 is more vocal and expressive, while Bars #3 and #4 feature similar phrasing to our second tab - just remember not to bend downwards every time!

♩ = 120 

10 WHAMMY BAR...

Let's end our workout with a look at the techniques of Steve Vai, EVH and more

If your guitar's equipped with a whammy bar, you sure as hell should learn to use it - and crikey can it be tricky! A little vibrato here and there is simple, but there are

three other techniques, too. First, the scoop: quickly dip the bar down and release it back to pitch as you play a note. Doops are similar, but you dip the bar *after* you play the note. Finally,

there's the more challenging note-change technique where you use your bar to target specific notes. Once again, break our riffs down phrase by phrase and you'll see improvements.

LEVEL #1: SCOOPERMAN

♩=70

E⁵ Scoop Scoop Scoop Scoop Scoop Scoop Scoop Play 4 times Scoop

TAB

Use hammer-ons and pull-offs to alternate between the fifth and seventh frets, and dip your whammy bar before each note in order to scoop in from below. You don't need to bend to a specific pitch here, just do whatever sounds good.

LEVEL #2: HAN VALEN

♩=100

E⁵ *8va* Doop Scoop Doop Scoop w/bar Play 4 times

TAB

This one's not hard, as such... It's just tough to remember exactly where to scoop or doop. Practise super slowly one note (or whammy bar move) at a time until you get a feel for it.



TIME AT THE BAR!
Whammy bar techniques are hard, but can be a lot of fun when mastered



60-90 BPM

Trem Trembler

Work on the basics and don't worry too much about small errors.

90-120 BPM

Van scalin' up

You should be getting an ear for it. Now nail those note changes.

120-150 BPM

Whammy Bar Whizz

Push the tempo higher and try to stay accurate with every dip of the bar.

We're stepping up the difficulty level here - aside from the doop in Bar #2, every whammy bar bend is targeting a specific note. That means you need to check the tab for the relevant notes and listen closely as you adjust the bar. If your whammy bar only lowers the pitch (doesn't bend upwards), try targeting the 16th, 14th and 12th frets in Bars #1 and #2.

♩=80

Badd^{#11} *8va* w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar Doop NH Badd^{#11} Bmaj^{7#11} w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar w/bar Play 4 times

TAB

OUTSIDE THE BOX

INNOVATION, ARTISTRY AND ELBOW GREASE – HOW WOMEN IN LUTHERIE ARE REWRITING THE RULEBOOK. WORDS BY **ADAM BRADBURY**.

What connects Paul Simon, Carlos Santana and Milton Nascimento? Answer: they all own guitars made by the same pair of hands. Well into her fifth decade building guitars, Linda Manzer is one of the most esteemed luthiers of modern times.

A pioneer and inspiration to generations of other guitar makers, she creates instruments that command ardent fans, decent money and the occasional museum plinth. Convention-defying flat-tops, archtops, sopranos, baritones, sitar guitars and jaw-dropping one-

offs such as the 42-string Picasso for Pat Metheny – Manzer’s oeuvre and impact are all the more remarkable when you consider she’s done what she’s done in a business that might at times appear to have operated a ‘no girls’ rule.

So, what makes Manzer – and other luthiers who chose to ignore that rule – tick? Boutique builders from North America and Europe reveal their inspirations, signature models, choice of materials and thoughts on working in a world where women are still outnumbered, though not outdone.





LINDA MANZER MANZER GUITARS

It all started when...

I went to the Mariposa Folk Festival, late '60s, and saw Joni Mitchell playing a dulcimer and went to buy one at the local folklore centre in Toronto - and it was too expensive. The fellow there suggested I buy a kit for half the price and make one myself, which I did. That's when the bug bit. I continued to art college in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where I kept finding myself making dulcimers. I realised that making musical instruments - specifically guitars - combined my love of art, woodworking and music. I heard about Jean-Claude Larrivée in Toronto. After spending a couple of months trying to persuade him to hire me, he eventually did.

I learned how to make steel-string and classical guitars with Larrivée from 1974 to 1978. During my apprenticeship we made over 1,500 guitars. As his small company grew, I realised I preferred to work in a more solo environment. I felt it served the resulting guitar better as it would have one set of hands guiding its path. I studied with James D'Aquisto in 1983 to '84 in his shop in Long Island, New York; I learned how to build archtop guitars from him. He had studied with John D'Angelico, so I was immersed in a workshop rich in history and tradition. It was a huge honour to work alongside him. From him I learned to trust my intuition.

What do you hope other guitar makers will learn from you?

I have been told that people like my design

sensibilities and, more importantly, the sound and feel of the guitars I make. The secret sauce is the passion you put into it.

I think those who 'get' my guitars sense a 'feel' I try to get into each guitar. Each guitar has a little bit of me in it. Technically, I match the woods as best I can so they work as a team. For me, the most important aspects are: how the instrument sounds, how it feels to play, and finally how it looks - in that order. It's also really important to listen to the person you are building for. Ultimately, it's their guitar, so I try to listen and bring their musical dream to life.

How did you work out how to make extraordinary instruments such as the Picasso you made for Pat Metheny?

Through experimentation and boldly going where no guitar maker had gone before? [Laughs] Luckily, I was a bit naïve about the complexity of what I was undertaking and therefore undaunted. I had an incredibly willing partner to work with in Pat Metheny. I am forever grateful for his inspiration and support.

What are your main considerations when choosing tonewoods?

I listen to each piece of wood with my eyes closed - tapping it. I'm looking for sensitivity and responsiveness. And stability. I know the woods are going to be thinned and then have braces added. You have to intuit what it can and will become. I read that Michelangelo said he was just chipping away stone to reveal the statue inside, and I sometimes feel I'm doing something similar with the wood.

When I began building guitars there were no endangered wood species. I have enough aged wood to last a lifetime, but I am very concerned about what the future holds for next generations of builders. I am glad for CITES [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species] designations of woods. And it's great to see people using locally sourced woods, recycled materials and windfall. But I think there will have to be controlled forestation of musical-instrument wood. And the

time to start that would be right now, as the best woods are 100-plus years old.

What challenges, if any, have you faced as a woman in lutherie?

When I began building guitars there were no women in the field at all to my knowledge. Being the only one meant I was the icebreaker at the front of the ship. It was exhilarating and tiring. I cut my own path in a very welcoming field.

I still occasionally have to prove myself when I go into an unknown hardware store and have to convince them I know what I'm talking about. But at the last hardware store I went into there were more women working there than men. That kind of blew my mind in a good way.

The challenges can be subtle, though. When I started out there were many bumps in the road and they potentially added up to say: "You're not welcome." Luckily, I had two older brothers. The big eye-opener was when I was about eight and I wasn't allowed in the tree fort because my brothers had a 'no girl' rule. I fought my way up the ladder and once I was in the tree fort I realised they actually liked having me there. That's when I realised 'girls' could do anything. Yes, there would be issues in front of me - for instance, I don't have the strength most men have, but I work smart. I discovered a thing called 'leverage'. Very handy for lifting heavy shit. Problems usually have solutions.

There are definitely fewer women than men in this field, but the numbers of women grow each year. I think it's less intimidating than when I started. For years I was the only woman working at Larrivée. But the men I worked with in the mid-'70s never made an issue of my gender and, in fact, probably became slightly protective about me, because they saw some of the stuff I was experiencing. These same fellows, the original six apprentices of Jean-Claude Larrivée and Larrivée himself, are my dearest friends and inspiration.

We are better if everyone can enter the field they excel at or have passion in. This works both ways. Society should also welcome men doing traditional female jobs. We are all stronger if these artificial walls come down.



KEY CHANGE How the gender-balance tide is turning in the music world

It's no secret that women are under-represented, numerically, in all corners of the music industry. From audio production to leadership, studies repeatedly find that women can face barriers to getting in and on that men don't. One estimate puts the number of female luthiers as low as 50 to 100

worldwide. Scroll through trade association websites and luthier podcasts, and you sense that perhaps three in every 100 luthiers are women.

This may all be changing. Certainly, there are women working as designers and builders within majors such as Gibson and Taylor, there are female directors such as Maton's Linda Kitchen in Australia, and there are teams of female staff running things at the likes of PRS. And with the example of pioneers such as Linda Manzer rolling on, there's a sense that more women are picking

up the pencil and power tools.

For guitar buyers, greater diversity at the workbench could mean greater design variety. The American Kathy Wingert has said she got into guitar making because she couldn't find a big-sounding guitar that suited her relatively small stature. Models and data sets behind most product design - think crash-test dummies and smartphones - take an average man as the norm. Change the designer and your data set, and you start to change more than the mood music.



KATHY WINGERT WINGERT GUITARS

It all started when...

I needed a life change and a career direction. I loved playing guitar, but I was a terrible performer. A few life events ended with me standing in the middle of the library wondering what I was going to do. Some soul-searching and a card catalogue lead to books on guitar making and repair. The book was pretty awful, but it planted a good seed.

The journey to my first guitar meandered through the search for suppliers and tools, a class at a junior college and a job at a workshop that specialised in high-level instrument restoration and repair. The owner was an expert in violin family instruments. He didn't teach me methods but how to see and how to listen, how to do a really good setup, and a handful

of things in construction. And how to be really, really snooty about wood.

If you count the first instrument that I built, though, it was in high school. If you count all the years I bought, fixed and flipped guitars, that was all through my 20s. As for when I hung a shingle and started selling guitars as a career choice? That was 1996.

What sets your guitars apart?

It's hard to stand out for fit, finish, aesthetics and originality, because there are so many truly fine builders doing perfect work. There are a lot of us who stand shoulder to shoulder about the things that mean the buyer will get a guitar that is worth what they pay.

What sets mine apart, I believe, is the time I take to voice the tops, and the voice I'm going for - as dark as possible while being fully articulate. I've been

accused of getting cello-like tones. My necks and setups are very good.

Why so few women in lutherie?

Women with children usually do most of the care. Guitar making takes a tremendous amount of time: there aren't enough hours in the day for one of those things, certainly not both. Family roles are changing and there is a better division of childcare. I don't know if that is playing out yet in guitar world, but it will.

I suppose you were expecting me to say girls are less likely to hang out with their dads at the workbench, but most of the great guitar makers I know were more driven by music, guitar and art than by exposure to woodworking. And guitar has tended to be more popular with men than with women. At the dawn of the guitar, after it began to supplant the lute, it was very much a woman's instrument. Over time, guitars got bigger - whether because men got interested, or if the fashion for larger instruments made it less appealing to women, I don't know.

Will more women in lutherie change the norm of 'designed by men for men'?

I assume so. But there's a funny thing about girls with guitars. Have you ever noticed that when a woman takes the stage with a guitar, it's likely to be big and well worn? I think women often feel that if they show up with a 'girly-looking' guitar, they have just increased the barrier to credibility.

For years I would go to concerts and search the backup band for a woman 'sideman'. Women could be stars, or they could be an all-girl band, but outside of orchestras it appeared a woman couldn't just have a job playing guitar. Then I chained myself to the workbench and didn't come up for air. When I finally did, I found the world had finally changed.



ROSIE HEYDENRYCH TURNSTONE GUITAR COMPANY

Finding out about Linda Manzer, among other female luthiers, encouraged Rosie Heydenrych, in her mid-20s, to sign up for a guitar-making class at London Metropolitan University. She followed up with a two-year internship with a local maker, and volunteered with repairer Celine Camerlynck in London's Denmark Street, before starting the Turnstone Guitar Company in 2015.

What sets your guitars apart?

I'd like to say tone and playability, but that is for the player to identify. It's exciting to use new woods, feel their differences in my hands and anticipate the contribution they will make to a finished instrument. I like to

use different woods for bracing to emphasise tonal characteristics that a species excels at - walnut for warmth, padauk for clear treble, mahogany for crispness. I have become very interested in the use of English timbers.

Does it matter that there are so few women in lutherie?

Lack of diversity in any industry is a shame. Things are changing, but when I was at school I was the only girl in my year to take woodworking. I think to this day it still breeds an undercurrent of insecurity. I worried about what friends and family might think when I told them I was interested in working with hand tools, machines and glues. One of the first things I did was research if there were any female guitar makers, and I found out about Kathy Wingert, Linda Manzer and Judy Threet. It gave me the courage to walk through the door of that evening class.

I see so many small women who are swamped by a dreadnought-size guitar. I don't think women [guitar players] want anything that's aesthetically different, but they do sometimes have different physical requirements. It comes down to wanting a better playing experience, so for women I think in terms of smaller guitar bodies, less weight in the instrument and easy playability on the neck.

Being a custom maker I can help spec a guitar that caters physically to a person's requirements. That goes for men and women.



CLAUDIA PAGELLI PAGELLI GUITARS

Claudia Pagelli designs guitars and husband Claudio builds them. Together, the Pagellis have been described as not so much top of their league but in a league of their own. Asymmetrical acoustics, open headstocks, even a stone soundboard - the wife-and-husband team long ago threw the rulebook out of the window.

"My apprenticeship as a decorative designer and graphic artist, my time at art school, and my various jobs in the creative field were an advantage when it came to guitar design," says Claudia, a co-founder of the Luthiers Beyond Limits group. "I wasn't

committed to guitar history, and I didn't know how a guitar was constructed. So I have no limits when drawing or thinking of the end product. There is really no reason why a woman can't work as a luthier. Their work has to be good and authentic, of course. Our experience is that women are very welcome in lutherie. A new male luthier has a harder time gaining a foothold."

MARTINA BARTKOVA & ZUZANA JARJABKOVA DOWINA

My grandad was a carpenter and as a kid I spent a lot of time in his workshop, so I always liked manual work, being creative and making something of great utility," says Martina Bartkova who has worked on binding, sanding, frets, dovetails and laser-cutting for Dowina in Slovakia. "This is dirty work. There is a lot of glue, wood dust. I like my work, but I think not a lot of women are inclined to do this. Guys didn't believe in me; I needed to show them each day I was capable."

Currently working on necks and backplate design, Martina's colleague Zuzana Jarjabkova aims to move on to design complete guitars. "Guitar making is still considered a man's work. I don't know if that is changing. But my colleagues changed, for sure."

Would more women in guitar making have an impact on design? Jarjabkova is sceptical: "I don't think design depends on gender." But Bartkova thinks so: "Women have a different aesthetic sense," she offers.





JOSHIA DE JONGE JOSHIA DE JONGE GUITARS

When I first started, I think I knew less than five female builders. That's beginning to change, but we're still in the minority. People would assume my father was the builder, and later my husband."

Celebrated classical guitar maker Joshia de Jonge has been steeped in lutherie since childhood. Her father, and teacher, is the luthier Sergei de Jonge, and sibling rivalry spurred her on, aged 13: "My younger brother started building a guitar and I was jealous and wanted to build one as well, so I did."

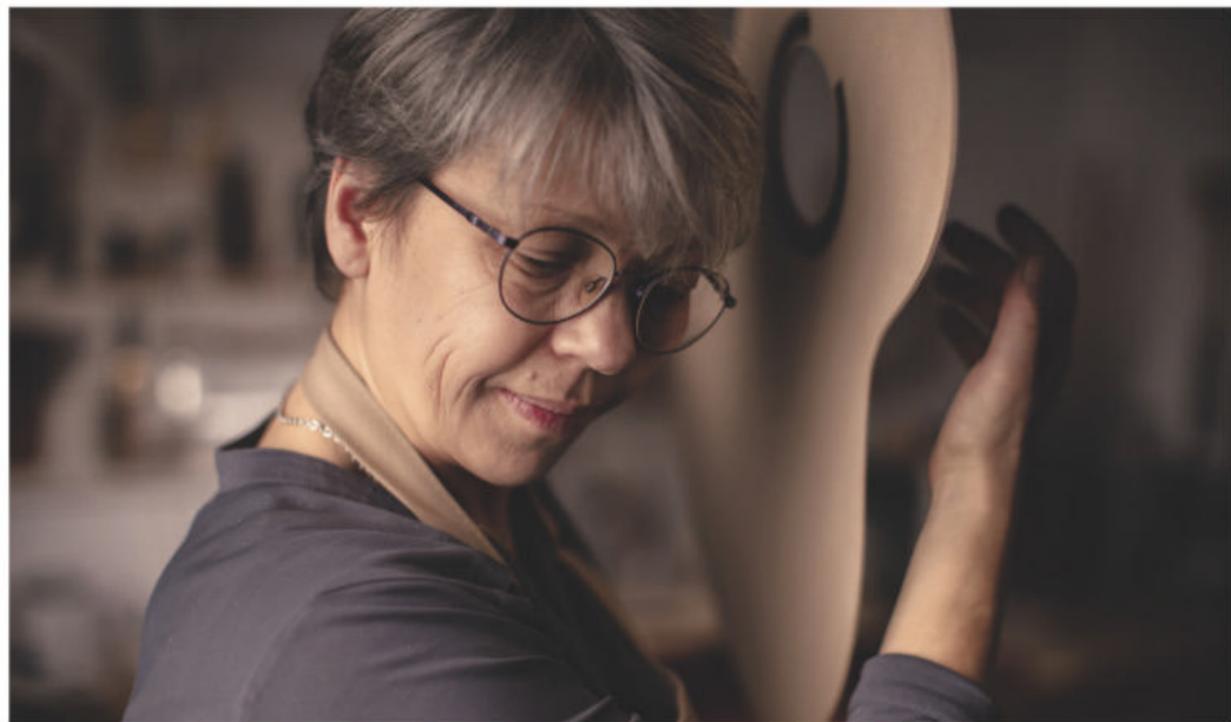
She cites Linda Manzer and Grit Laskin among her inspirations, and credits renowned American luthier Eric Sahlin for the subtle twist she likes to plane into the neck for a comfortable playing position. "All in all, the guitar making-world has been a really positive atmosphere for me," says de Jonge. Her handmade instruments, also notable for her mosaic rosette, top bracing pattern and French polish, attract international stars such as Otto Tolonen from Finland and Welsh composer Stephen Goss.



SHELLEY D PARK SHELLEY D PARK GUITARS

Boutique builder Shelley Park describes her take on Gypsy jazz guitars as "a thoughtful modern interpretation of a classic design. It is my intention to provide the fit and finish expected by today's acoustic player while respecting the work of Selmer-Maccaferri. I think my instruments offer playability and a sweet, nuanced tone while maintaining the responsiveness and projection these guitars are expected to have in a Hot Club swing context."

Park worked at Larrivée then for fellow Canadian David Webber before setting up on her own 'shop in Vancouver, British Columbia, "a province where I have access to local materials, both softwoods for soundboards and hardwoods for backs and sides. I am always glad to work with local spruce, maple and walnut. I'm excited about some of the composite replacements for ebony and rosewood components and suspect they'll start to show up in the instruments I build." She says: "I've never attributed my successes and disappointments in the guitar-making world to my sex."



ANGELAWALTNER WALTNER GUITARS

When I started, I was very exotic as a woman building guitars," Angela Waltner, whose classical instruments sell worldwide, tells us from her base in Berlin.

"Today, it is more common. The classical guitar world is still dominated by men, but there are signs that future generations will be female. The instrument will benefit. But when it comes to the soul of an instrument, of music, it doesn't matter whether I am a man or woman.

"I can't list all the great people who taught or supported me and I'm very grateful. To name one: from the late Benno Streu, a restorer of old Spanish guitars, I learned sound adjustment on the finished instrument, which is my specialism besides building guitars. Sonority, clarity and sound colours are attributes that characterise my instruments.

"Sustainability is very important to me. Classical guitarists are often conservative and expect rosewood in their guitars. Nowadays, several suppliers offer beautiful local woods that work very well."



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The Great Blues Boom

LET'S TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE MUSIC THAT LAUNCHED THE BLUES TO POPULARITY, AND THE ICONIC BLUES GUITARISTS WHO BIRTHED THE ORIGINAL ROCKSTAR PERSONA.



Robert Johnson, Son House, Lead Belly, Memphis Minnie, Charley Patton, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf... History has a way of deifying names such as these, ensuring that they're spoken about in awed, reverent tones because of their innovative musical inspiration. In one respect, this reverence is completely justified. These blues guitarists are among the founders of rock 'n' roll, and of popular music as a whole. Without them there would be no Chuck Berry, Keith Richards, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Duane Allman, Samantha Fish or Gary Clark Jr, to name a few of the guitarists influenced by their music.

And so they are revered, not only for their music, guitar talents or songwriting abilities, but

also for the hard lives they led, which were more often than not painted into their music. These legends of blues plied their craft during one of the ugliest periods of racial strife and economic disparity in America. Alcohol, drugs, crime and poverty were among the hardships that informed their music. Lead Belly was a convicted murderer, Robert Johnson a serial womaniser. Son House was a hard-drinking ex-con, and boozy Memphis Minnie was known to hold her own in a fight. Only a fool would mess with any of them.

The music itself often gets the hagiography treatment too, in a way that smooths its legacy and ignores the circumstances that bred it. The likes of Lead Belly have been embraced as folk heroes by artists such as Bob Dylan, and by the most recent crop of new blues-rock bands, who have favoured

these older figures over the classic blues-rock explosion crowd of the 1960s, because they're more authentic and raw. Nirvana effectively turned the MTV generation on to Delta blues with their cover of Lead Belly's "In the Pines"/"Where Did You Sleep Last Night?"

But an artist like Lead Belly wasn't trying to be restrained or virtuous. He was just working with the tools he had - that sparser sound he and his peers honed in the days before Marshall stacks and Fender Strats. If Robert Johnson or Blind Lemon Jefferson had had access to an electric guitar, there's every chance he would have cranked it all the way to 11, like the rock 'n' roll stars who were to come. And that's what the men and women on the next few pages were: the pioneers of blues and rock 'n' roll, yes - but also the first rockstars.



Lead Belly

Lead Belly was born Huddie Ledbetter in 1885 in Mooringsport, Louisiana, close to Caddo Lake, a tranquil spot far removed from the bright city lights of Shreveport, the nearest big town. His parents were farmers, and by all accounts Huddie was a tough kid who was able to pick more cotton than anyone else.

He quickly came to like women, corn liquor and trouble in about equal proportions. He liked hanging out in Shreveport's red-light district, and by the age of 16 had not only gained an enviable reputation for his sexual prowess, but also heard the barrel-house piano players, whose walking-bass figures would become a trademark of his own powerful rhythmic style.

By the age of 33, Lead Belly had mastered the 12-string guitar, met up with Blind Lemon Jefferson and become a regular performer at local dances and fish fries. But he soon ran into serious trouble. After an assault conviction, he spent a year on a chain gang, from which he escaped. He subsequently adopted the name Walter Boyd.

At about the same time that the United States entered the First World War, Walter Boyd was with two friends on his way to a dance. After an altercation over a girl, one of the men drew a pistol, but Boyd shot him in the head before he could use it. Six months later, in 1918, he was sent to Shaw State Prison with a 30-year sentence.

In a remarkable streak of luck – something that seemed to characterise his entire life – Lead Belly, as he was now known, charmed his way out of prison after serving only seven years by writing a song about the prison governor, Pat Neff.

But Lead Belly's temper soon got the better of him again, and by 1930 he was behind bars once more, this time in Louisiana's Angola prison, for attempted murder. Incredibly, history would quickly repeat itself. In 1933, John Lomax arrived at Angola looking to record the songs of the inmates for the Library of Congress. Once again, Lead Belly sang a suitably ingratiating song he'd composed about the governor, and the next year he was released.

He lived a colourful life, but Lead Belly's real claim to a place in rock history is his repertoire of songs, from cowboy ballads like "Out on the Western Plain" (covered by Rory Gallagher) to his takes on the old English ballad "Gallows Pole" (immortalised by Led Zeppelin), "Where Did You Sleep Last Night?" (covered by Nirvana) and "Black Betty" (adopted by Ram Jam). His final performance was a concert at Carnegie Hall in 1949. He died that year, aged 61.

TOP TRACK: "IN THE PINES"



Sister Rosetta Tharpe

The annals of guitar-hero history are dominated by familiar names like Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Chuck Berry, but Sister Rosetta Tharpe – the godmother of rock 'n' roll – was tearing up the live circuit before any of them. And yet she was scarcely recognised as a guitarist until years after her death, aged 58, from a stroke, in 1973. Her New York Times obituary called her a "Top Gospel Singer" but the newspaper made scant reference to her guitar playing.

As a gospel singer, Sister Rosetta inspired the virtuoso likes of Aretha Franklin, but as a six-stringer her legacy is just as profound. She was one of the first players to intentionally distort her electric guitar, and Clapton, Beck and Page have all acknowledged the impact of her 1963 performance on Blues and Gospel Train, a 1964 concert presented and broadcast in Britain.

Born in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, in 1915, Tharpe began performing as a four-year-old under the name Little Rosetta Nubin. Her mother, an evangelist preacher and musician, was a great source of encouragement, and by the time Tharpe was six, the two were on the church-based Gospel Highway touring circuit together. In her 20s, Tharpe moved to New York City and signed to Decca Records, where the increasingly secular nature of her music – and especially her guitar playing – would cause her to fall out of favour with the gospel audience.

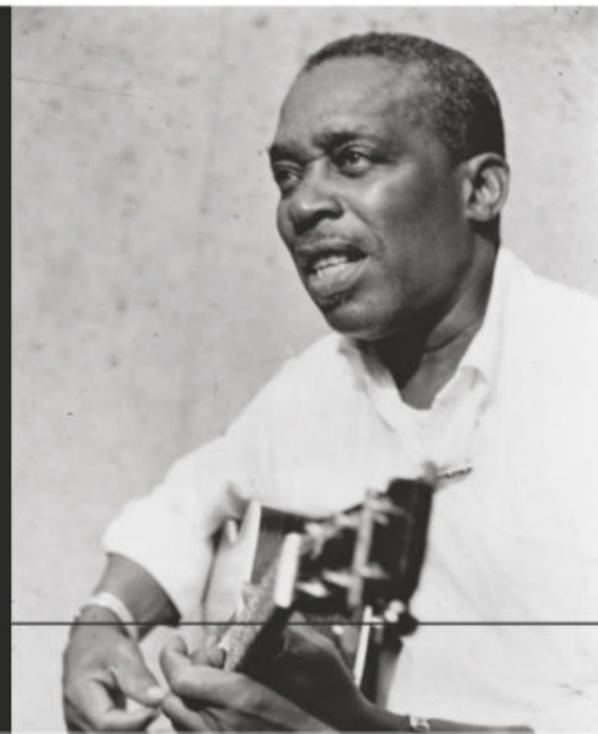
Without Sister Rosetta Tharpe, rock music as we know it today may never have happened. Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Little Richard and other stars of the first wave of rock 'n' roll were all indebted to her. Those figures were subsequently hero-worshipped by the kids who would go on to form the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Queen, the Who, the Rolling Stones and basically every major act in 1960s rock 'n' roll.

"It was at the Home of the Blues record shop where I bought my first recording of Sister Rosetta Tharpe singing those great gospel songs," Johnny Cash said when he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1992. "Some of the earlier songs I wrote were influenced by people like Sister Rosetta Tharpe." Tharpe herself wouldn't be inducted until 2007, 34 years after her death.

Skip James

Skip James' first recordings were released just as the Great Depression hit. Had it not been for unfortunate timing, the singer/guitarist and early pioneer of haunting open-D-minor guitar tuning might have become known to record buyers much sooner. As it was, he remained under the radar until the 1960s, when his music, along with that of fellow Delta trailblazer Son House, was unearthed by blues enthusiasts, arguably kick-starting the decade's blues music revival. Over time, James has become a popular name to drop in blues and rock circles.

TOP TRACK: "DEVIL GOT MY WOMAN"



Robert Johnson

Robert Johnson's masterful guitar technique is the stuff of legend, and his haunting vocal delivery was once described by Eric Clapton as "the most powerful cry that I think you can find in the human voice."

"I Believe I'll Dust My Broom", "Sweet Home Chicago", "Terraplane Blues", "Love In Vain Blues", "Hellhound On My Trail" and "Traveling Riverside Blues" are just a few of his songs that have become classic rock standards, covered by Led Zeppelin, Fleetwood Mac, the Rolling Stones, Clapton, Lucinda Williams and Larkin Poe, to name a few.

Such covers would receive far more attention than their creator did in his short lifetime - he was born in 1911 and died at age 27 - but Johnson's originals are conserved in the seminal 1990 compilation *The Complete Recordings*, the ground zero of recorded Delta blues.

"Robert Johnson was an incredible guitar player and singer," blues guitarist Walter Trout says. "On these songs, he sounds like three guys, because he's playing a bass line, a rhythm and slide leads, all at the same time. There are guys who can nail it note for note, but it's lacking the spark of creativity.

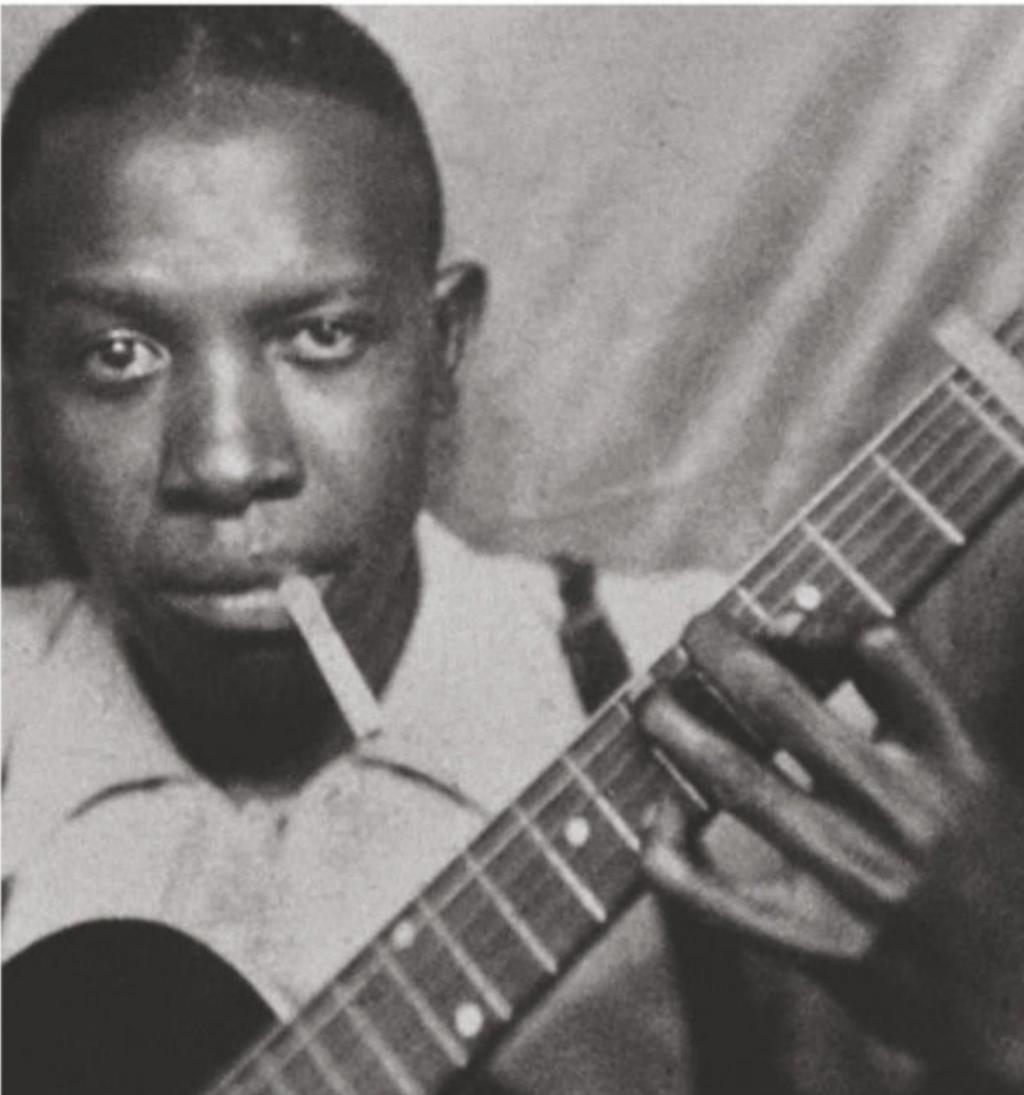
"But to me, the reason he's considered in a league of his own - among all those other guys like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie McTell, Charley Patton and Blind Willie Johnson - is because of his songs. They're universal and they're lasting and they're classic.

"In the canon of the blues, his songs are really top of the heap. My favourite is 'Love in Vain Blues.' That one makes me weep. It tears me up. 'Cross Road Blues' is incredible too - the guitar playing and the singing. That whole thing about going to the crossroads and selling your soul to the devil. If you ever talked to B.B. King, he'd say, 'No, that's bullshit. The blues is beautiful, and beauty doesn't come from the devil.'

"These songs were unknowingly instrumental in the creation of rock 'n' roll. But one thing that's kind of mind blowing when you hear Clapton and the Stones and all these people doing these unbelievable songs, is that the guy never made a dime. He was paid a total of 38 dollars. That's what he made off these songs. Hopefully his family is receiving royalties. He's another in a long line of originators of blues music who died basically penniless." [Johnson allegedly died after being poisoned by the husband of one of his sexual conquests].

"So that's a real travesty about this music. Its impact worldwide is monumental, but the guys who originated it never, ever received what they were due. And they died having no idea that their music was going to become immortal."

TOP TRACK: "CROSS ROAD BLUES"



Willie Dixon

Ever browsed through Willie Dixon's songwriting credits? It's a sobering experience, a Rosetta Stone of popular music crammed with hits that anyone with half a grasp of blues, soul, rock, pop and even punk will recognize: "You Shook Me", "I Just Want to Make Love to You", "Hoochie Coochie Man", "Bring It On Home", "Talk To Me Baby", "You Need Love" (which Jimmy Page adapted for Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love"), "I Can't Quit You Baby", "Evil", "Back Door Man"... They are songs that have been immortalised by Zeppelin, Fleetwood Mac, Muddy Waters, Etta James, the Doors, Canned Heat, UFO, Grateful Dead, Johnny Thunders, Tom Petty, New York Dolls and many others.

Arguably, it was the Rolling Stones who turned the wider world on to Dixon's most pivotal song. On November 20, 1964, the Stones appeared on the British TV pop music show *Ready Steady Go!* to perform their ninth single, "Little Red Rooster". In what has since become an iconic clip, Mick Jagger stalks the stage, alternately mouthing lyrics and blowing his harp while Brian Jones minces a sideways glance into the camera as he hits the song's slide lick on his teardrop-shaped Vox Mark III guitar.

A bassist, producer and the blues' most prolific songwriter, Dixon was accustomed to his songs achieving a higher profile than him. For years he'd been spinning gold for Chicago blues artists like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Bo Diddley and others. He'd also played bass on many of the Chicago blues sides we now cherish. And in an electric-blues obsessed 1960s Britain, his tunes would fatten up the set lists of just about every R&B band.

You might suppose that the Stones and other English groups lifted Dixon songs from imported Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Little Walter 45s. That did happen, but as Dixon revealed in his essential 1990 biography, *I Am the Blues*, he made tapes of his music to help players like Brian, Mick and Keith in their studios. "Kids would come and say they liked our music and want to sing our music," Dixon said. "Sometimes I'd write it out for 'em. Sometimes I'd put it on a tape. That's how the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds got their songs."

The great man died of heart failure in California on January 29, 1992. He never did become as recognisable as the artists he helped to break through, but everyone knows his songs.

TOP TRACK: "EVIL"



Memphis Minnie

You can't talk about the leading lights of blues without mentioning Memphis Minnie. An extremely prolific, confessional recording artist and a no-bullshit character, Minnie had a tough life, which she skilfully poured into her music. Noted American blues guitar slide master Homesick James, "She chewed tobacco all the time, even while singing or playing the guitar, and always had a cup at hand in case she wanted to spit."

Born Lizzie Douglas, in Louisiana in 1897, she ran away while in her teens to Memphis, where she played guitar and sang on street corners, supplementing her income with prostitution when she had to. For a stint from 1916 to 1920, she toured the South with the Ringling Brothers Circus. But it was when she started performing with her first husband, Joe McCoy, in 1929, that her career took off. Columbia Records snapped the couple up and renamed them Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, which is how they performed until their divorce in 1935. By then, Minnie was an established figure on the tour scene, one who could comfortably hold her own, and so she began experimenting with different styles.

Minnie was 32 when she made her first recordings with McCoy. She was a contemporary of Delta blues guitarist Tommy Johnson and just a few years older than Son House and Skip James. More than 20 years later, when all

those men were largely forgotten, Minnie was still drawing audiences in clubs and still making records. Her professional career in blues is matched by no other female musician, and by very few men.

How she managed that is clear on the 2016 compilation *Keep On Going: 1930-1953*. Listen to her intricate guitar duets with McCoy from the early '30s; the small-band tracks from the later part of that decade; her plugged-in 1941 recordings with next-husband Ernest 'Little Son Joe' Lawlars, such as her hit "Me And My Chauffeur Blues"; and the still punchy music she made in the '50s such as "Kissing In The Dark" and "Broken Heart".

What Minnie had was adaptability. Like Big Bill Broonzy - who recalled her beating him in a cutting contest in a Chicago nightclub in 1933 - she heard how the sounds and themes of the blues were changing with the times and she kept pace with them. Johnson, House and James were greats, but this kind of musical re-invention would have been beyond them.

During the '60s, Minnie reaped the benefits of the young generation's renewed interest in blues, with the new wave of players and enthusiasts recognising her role in laying crucial foundations of the genre. In 1971, Led Zeppelin reworked her song "When The Levee Breaks" into a bigger and bolder version thanks in no small part to John Bonham's huge drum sound. But the grounding hoodoo at the heart of it was all Minnie.

TOP TRACK: "BUMBLE BEE"



Blind Lemon Jefferson

Born lemon Henry to sharecroppers in the 1880s, the father of Texas Blues started out as a street musician, recognisable for his shrill, clear voice and distinctive guitar style. Jefferson was blind, but that didn't stop him from gambling and drinking heavily with Lead Belly as they toured the barrel-house circuit of saloons and gin mills in the 1900s. After years of performing on street corners, he became one of the first black musicians to enjoy a successful recording career.

TOP TRACK: "MATCHBOX BLUES"

Muddy Waters

Muddy was a kingpin of Chicago in the 1950s. Born McKinley Morganfield in Mississippi, the young bluesman was recorded for the first time in 1941 and rode the confidence from that pressing into a move north, to Chicago. Brought aboard the nascent Chess Records label, and backed by a band that included blues harp player Little Walter and piano man Otis Spann, in the early '50s Muddy fired off the songs that remain standards, including "Mannish Boy" and "Got My Mojo Workin'".

TOP TRACK: "MANNISH BOY"



Howlin' Wolf

With his booming voice, towering stature and commanding presence, Howlin' Wolf fired up generations of blues and rock frontmen. Although he passed away in 1976 at age 65, it's impossible to overstate his importance as one of the most influential figures in the evolution of the blues and also in the whole of 20th century popular music.

"If you think of the way Howlin' Wolf made records, you get the feeling there wasn't a production manager onsite, or a publicist having his say on how he should sing the songs," folk and blues guitarist M. Ward says. "When you listen to his records, you feel like you're tapping into his voice."

And as the late New York City rock guitarist Robert Quine once noted of Wolf's music, "Once you arrive at the point that you understand it, the emotional factor is darker than some of the saddest blues stuff."

In Wolf's case it's not hard to see the source of that darkness. Born 110 years ago, Chester Arthur Burnett of White Station, Mississippi, earned the moniker Wolf from his grandfather, who would tell him that the big, bad wolf would get him if he misbehaved. Wolf's mother threw him out when he was still a child, forcing him to hike barefoot over frozen ground to the home of his great uncle, a man he once described as "the meanest man between here and hell."

Wolf eventually ran away to his father's home, where life was much happier. In his early 20s, Sonny Boy Williamson II taught him how to play the harmonica, and through the 1930s, alongside farm work, Wolf befriended an enviable cast of Delta blues heroes, playing juke joints with Son House, Johnny Shines, Honeyboy Edwards and Willie Brown. Many bluesmen claimed to have known and played with Robert Johnson. But Howlin' Wolf actually did.

Not until his father's death in 1949 did he focus on music, and by 1951 he'd met guitarist Ike Turner, his link to Sam Philips at Sun Records. In 1952, Wolf relocated to Chicago, where his from-the-depths howls and vein-popping expressions saw him find favour with white youths discovering the blues, and become one of the scene's biggest stars.

TOP TRACK: "SMOKESTACK LIGHTNING"



Son House

Of all the characters that feature in tales of blues from the early 1900s, singer and guitarist Son House is one of those most regularly cited by present-day enthusiasts. In some ways he's not an obvious choice. He wasn't the most skilled purveyor of this music, or even the first, but he remains a quietly popular touchstone. Jack White even named House's sparse, bewitching acapella number "Grinnin' In Your Face" as his favourite song.

"By the time I was 18, somebody played me Son House," White said in the 2008 rock music documentary *It Might Get Loud*. "That was it for me. This spoke to me in a thousand different ways. I didn't know that you could do that, just singing and clapping. It meant everything about rock 'n' roll, expression, creativity and art. One man against the world, and one song. It didn't matter that he was clapping off-time, it didn't matter that it was no instruments being played. All that mattered was the attitude of the song."

To a degree, Son House simply had longevity on his side. Indeed one of the things that separates him from so many of his peers is the fact that he didn't die young. Passing away in October 1988, at the ripe old age of 86, he lived on to commit his memory to tape when so many other blues players didn't.

He was not a guitarist of great technical ability, or even an original pioneer of Delta blues. That accolade sits more comfortably

with the earlier likes of Charley Patton, who became something of a travel companion to House, having seen him busking at a station in Mississippi. But House was a remarkable performer, with one of the most harrowing voices in Mississippi. And he lived to document his legacy on record, setting a precedent for what blues - and, in turn, rock 'n' roll - could be.

Eddie James 'Son' House Jr. was born in Mississippi in 1902. His father was a musician who played the tuba in a band. As a young man, Eddie worked as a manual labourer and preached on the side. At one point he briefly became a full-time church pastor but continued to be lured by whisky and women. It was a tension that would last throughout much of his life: preaching and liquor, God and the devil, gospel and blues. Around 1927, he heard a slide guitar for the first time and decided to devote his life to blues music.

Like many other blues artists of the day, he suffered during the Great Depression, during which time record sales plummeted and he fell into relative obscurity. Son House was not rediscovered until the 1960s. "Grinnin' In Your Face" was recorded and released in 1965, around the same time as his signature song "Death Letter Blues". The latter track was built on House's earlier recording "My Black Mama, Part 2" from 1930. Thanks to televised and audio appearances in the 1970s, his legacy was propelled into the next generation, and beyond.

TOP TRACK: "DEATH LETTER BLUES"

THE BOARD BASICS

IN THIS DEEP-DIVING SPECIAL FEATURE, WE'LL TEACH YOU WHAT A GREAT PEDALBOARD NEEDS, THE BEST KIT YOU COULD START WITH, HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT, AND HOW TO WHACK IT ALL TOGETHER. FIRST OFF, LET'S LOOK AT THE BASIC COMPONENTS NEEDED TO BUILD THE ULTIMATE PEDALBOARD.

WORDS BY **CHRIS CORFIELD.**

For guitarists, a well-stocked pedalboard is a source of great pride. Each individual pedal has been chosen specifically to elevate your sound, helping create your own bespoke tone machine. Yet there's more to a pedalboard than pedals, right? In this guide, we'll show you everything you need to make the most of your setup. From those small-but-important tools that make your life easier, right through to gear that will allow you to play free from your amp, we've got the lot. Let's take a look.

PEDALBOARDS



The grimy floor of your rehearsal room is no place to store your prized pedals. Investing in a dedicated pedalboard elevates your

stompboxes, and gives them a place to call home. From simple-but-rugged metal boards to three tier platform stands, a decent pedalboard is a worthwhile investment for any player. Look for neat touches like integrated wire and cable routing, and space to expand as your pedal collection grows. Which it inevitably will. It's quite common to see pedalboards that double up as cases too, which makes them doubly appealing for touring musicians.

PATCH CABLES

Setting up a pedalboard can be not dissimilar to a game of *Tetris*, as you try to balance the needs of your signal chain with the space available to you. Using regular guitar leads to connect pedals is fine at a pinch, but for serious pedal fans you'll want to switch to using dedicated patch cables. These miniaturised cables - usually around six inches in length - allow you to place pedals closer together without having annoying loose cables everywhere. Look for 'pancake' headers too, which reduce the footprint even further.



DAISY CHAINS



The vast majority of guitar pedals operate using a nine-volt DC power supply unit (PSU), yet as your collection grows, you'll find locating multiple power sources for more pedals is a chore. You could use large extension cables or, if you're clever, you'll switch to using nine-volt daisy chain cabling. The premise is simple; you connect the first pedal in your chain to the PSU, and then each subsequent pedal connects to that same PSU using a special cable. Typically, you can run up to five separate pedals using this method, which further reduces the amount of equipment (and hassle) if you're out on the road.

PEDAL TUNERS

As perhaps the most unappreciated component of a guitarist's rig, the humble tuner is arguably one of the most important. Sure, you can opt to use a headstock-mounted tuner, but for simplicity and convenience we'd recommend investing in a pedal tuner. There are some great options out there, from brands like Korg and TC Electronic, and they'll quite happily sit at the start of your signal chain, giving you confidence the audience is hearing exactly what you want them to hear.



BATTERY LIGHTS

While it won't have any effect on your tone, or your playing, a small battery powered light is a super-helpful addition to any pedalboard. This is particularly useful when playing live, as stages can be dark places so having a little help to make sure you're tweaking the right settings is always a good thing. Look for something small and unobtrusive, ideally with a gooseneck so you can angle the light exactly where it needs to be. It might not be particularly glamorous, but you can bet you'll be glad you've got one.



LOOP PEDALS

Adding a loop pedal to your rig opens up a whole new world of creative potential. As a practice tool, loop pedals help you keep your timing sharp and build up your improvisational chops. For the more experimental players, the ability to layer sounds on top of one another, while retaining control over each layer, offers up some wonderful possibilities. At the entry-level end, you'll find basic loop pedals which allow you to record, play and overdub music, while at the top end you'll find loopers with multiple channels and the ability to sync with certain external gear using MIDI.



CASES

If you perform music regularly, you'll know the hassle involved with packing up your pedal collection and all its cables,

transporting everything to the venue and then having to reinstall it all. Pedals get scuffed, cables get lost along the way and when the show's done you have to repeat that entire process to get them home again. A pedalboard case is the perfect answer, if all of that sounds familiar. Cases range from simple, soft versions right up to heavy-duty flight cases which could withstand all manner of abuse. It's another unglamorous suggestion, but your pedals will thank you for it.



PEDAL TAPE

If you've ever gone down the route of using a dedicated pedalboard in the past, you'll know that one of the biggest parts of the battle is keeping the pedals from moving all over the place. Most have some form of rubber on the

bottom to help, but for a more permanent solution that will hold them in place you should consider using pedal tape. Pedal tape is simple, inexpensive and allows you to secure your stomps onto the board with ease. As a hook and loop style of tape, you also gain the freedom to move your pedals around at will to accommodate those new additions to the rig.



PEDAL AMPS



For certain shows, you might not require the use of your large tube amp. Step forward, pedal amps. These tiny stompbox-sized amps pack enough punch to power small speaker cabinets while some can output straight to the venue's PA system. Pedal amps work well if your board already includes amp modellers, while their tonally clean nature means they allow your pedals to shine. There are plenty of options out there, including superb models from Electro-Harmonix and Orange, which will significantly reduce the size of your performance rig.

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MULTI-EFFECTS UNITS



For the signature parts of your tone, you'll likely have found the perfect single pedal, but adding a small multi effects pedal to your arsenal gives you access to a world of tones which could be the missing pieces of the jigsaw. Most multi-effects units also double as a tuner, while many modern units also offer looping functionality and the ability to connect up to a computer via USB. Multi-effects units are perfect for practice and experimentation, and they also offer up a reliable backup in case you have problems with your main 'board.

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REACH YOUR PEDAL POTENTIAL

JUST LIKE EVERY GUITARIST IS UNIQUE IN HOW THEY EACH APPROACH THE FRETBOARD, NO TWO PEDALBOARDS ARE EVER REALLY THE SAME. HERE, WE'LL TEACH YOU SIX WAYS TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR PEDALBOARD, SO YOU CAN TRULY MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NEW TOYBOX.

WORDS BY **CHRIS SCHWARTEN**.

With the lack of live music and limited rehearsal opportunities right now, guitar players are stuck at home getting to grips with projects that have probably been put off for too long. For some that might be intonating a guitar or two - for others, it might mean finally getting that pedalboard in order.

Whether you're upgrading, expanding or simplifying, taking the time to get your 'board functioning more optimally and reliably will pay

dividends once the venues re-open their doors. Regardless of whether it's your 50th or very first attempt, here are some essential tweaks and upgrades you should consider to take your pedalboard to the next level.

Some of the options require a little financial outlay, while others here are completely free. Try one of them, or all of them; it will only improve the performance of your pedalboard.

1 INVEST IN YOUR POWER SUPPLY

High-quality pedalboard power supplies can be a bit of a hard sell. It's not the sexiest purchase compared with some of the cool boutique effects you could buy with the same cash. And surely if your \$20 power supply from Wish is doing the job, then who cares? Power is power, right? Not really. If you're trying to take control of your tone and keep it as consistent as possible between home, rehearsals, and the stage, investing in a quality isolated power supply is one of the best things you can do.

If your power supply isn't isolated, you leave the door open to uninvited visitors like buzz, hum, and hiss - or the noise from one pedal can enter the signal path of another. If you use more than, say, five or six pedals - especially if they are particularly noisy - this can really build up to intolerable levels of hiss. Using an isolated power supply will reduce this unwanted noise dramatically.

Secondly, most high-quality power supplies

have different voltage options outside the standard nine-volt DC, which gives you the opportunity to really optimise your pedals. Some overdrives can operate at 12, 14 and even 18 volts for increased headroom. Conversely, a lot of fuzz pedals benefit from voltage sag and running those as low as four volts can be a way to get some interesting results. Running certain pedals at different voltages is definitely one way you can enhance your sound, but you should always read your pedal's manual and understand its capabilities before attempting anything of the sort.

2 ADD A BUFFER PEDAL

Again, nobody is getting excited at the prospect of buying a buffer pedal, but this often-overlooked box can really help you get a handle on your tone. After running a bunch of pedals and cables from your guitar to your amp, your signal is going to suffer in some way. The longer your chain, the more your higher frequencies are being cut before completing the circuit.

Essentially, buffer pedals help preserve the signal and overall frequencies going into the amp. How a buffer pedal is used, and where it is placed is really down to your own board and what your needs are, but one thing to keep in mind is that your signal will be effectively restored following a buffer pedal, so placing it towards the end of your circuit is often a good place to start.

Buffer pedals also vary greatly in terms of sophistication (and price), going from incredibly advanced with a range of controls and functions, to some which have no controls at all. So finding the right buffer pedal for you may require a little bit of research.

3 GET YOUR CHAIN ORDER IN THE RIGHT... ORDER

This is probably the most important and obvious one that comes with no extra cost. There are countless threads dedicated to this subject, and regardless of what anybody says there's no right or wrong way to order your pedals. Having said that,

there's a rule of thumb that works for many players and is a good place to start if you are getting to grips with your tone. **A standard order from your guitar to your amp is:**

- Tuner
- Wah
- Compressor
- Distortion/overdrive/fuzz
- Modulation (chorus, flanger, phaser)
- Delay
- Reverb

By sticking to this order you should be able to keep a clear and consistent sound throughout your chain. It is all down to personal preference though. For example, some guitarists swear by running a wah pedal after their gain effects like distortion and fuzz because they like the fatter sound this can create, while others find this too abrasive and less expressive. Volume pedals and pitch shifters can also slot in towards the end or start of your chain, depending on what you are going for. Don't be afraid to experiment to find the best order for your sound.

4 MANAGE YOUR CABLES

Whether you're a touring musician or a bedroom strummer, there are many benefits (both technical and functional) that come with effective cable management. If you are a gigging musician or travelling to rehearsals, having a well-laid out pedalboard will help you get your gear together in a shorter amount of time. Ensuring that every pedal is well mounted to your board, and has a clear path for all its associated cables will go a long way to doing that.

One of the most important elements of proper cable management is ensuring you don't have extra cables where you don't need them, so using cut-to-length cables is a great solution to this problem. Doing this means you are getting the cleanest possible layout - which will help you avoid tangles - and the cleanest possible sound if you lay your board to limit the crossover between your patch cables and your power cables.

On that note, invest in the best possible guitar

cables you can for your board and your guitar. It probably doesn't need to be said, but there's no point going to the effort of giving yourself the perfect layout if you are just going to use unreliable or cheap cables.

5 PLAY AROUND WITH PEDAL SWITCHERS

If you are somebody who uses multiple effect combinations (say, two or more pedals used simultaneously) and aren't using a pedal switcher, then you really are missing out. Pedal switchers are basically like the footswitch you might use with your guitar amp, but instead, it's connected to some or all your pedals.

They give you total control over your effects and are one of the greatest additions you can make to your board. For example, with just one click you can turn *on* your distortion, delay, and compressor, and turn *off* your reverb, chorus and flanger - so there is no more crazy tap dancing and fear of falling over. While you will need to spend a little bit of time programming a footswitch to optimise it for your needs, the return you get from ease of use will make it well worth spending the time.

6 SPEND TIME WITH YOUR INDIVIDUAL PEDALS

When you buy a new pedal, one of the most exciting things to do is to get it on the board and see how your brand new set up works. While you can still do that, it really does pay to spend some time with each of your pedals on their own, going through their settings. If you're only using your pedals in a combination, you're only really experiencing a fraction of their capabilities. Getting to know what each pedal is capable of individually will help you get the most out of them when they're used together.

Your board is an extension of you as a player, so it should be set up to meet all your playing needs. While every guitarist has different requirements, having a functional and reliable board should be the main priority and taking the time to implement a good cable and power system will go a long way to achieving that.

THE ESSENTIAL SOUNDS

NOW THAT YOU KNOW WHAT MAKES THE PERFECT PEDALBOARD, LET'S LOOK AT THE ABSOLUTE MOST CRUCIAL PART OF IT: THE PEDALS THEMSELVES. THESE ARE THE BEST ALL-ROUNDER PEDALS ANY GUITARIST SHOULD BE PROUD TO OWN.

WORDS BY **ALEX LYNHAM**.

Even before the boutique pedal explosion of the last few years, there was already a dizzying array of options for guitar players to explore and use. As a newcomer to the instrument, this can be nothing short of overwhelming. What are they? Why do I need them? What are the best guitar pedals for beginners?

Well, first off, it's possible you might not even need them. It's worth reminding yourself that although it's easy to feel like a kid in a candy store with all the options available, that pedals are just tools. Just like guitars, they aren't really anything until the player - you - makes them into something.

Just as different guitars have different timbres and tones, so do pedals - and using them effectively is a

way for you as a player to make an idea or riff really stand out. Some players become experts at sound design using pedals, and it's an excellent half-way-house between the immediacy of a guitar and having the knowledge required to do sound design in a studio setting.

All of that said, while it's nice to have a brace of cool FX on your pedalboard and loads of nice gear, some of the best music ever recorded was made with cheap gear and few-to-no pedals, so always keep in mind that the song comes first.

WHERE TO START

Sorry to do this, but our first recommendation has to be a boring one - get a guitar tuner. We're

fans of the TC Electronic Polytune 3 Mini or the Boss TU-3, but we also have to be honest and say that our first two pedals were a Boss Metal Zone and a Boss DD-6. We didn't get a tuner until our bandmates started complaining.

So assuming you, like us, want to go for cool sounds first, then our two recommendations are simple. The first step is to get a drive or distortion. If we could have our time again, we'd probably go for a Big Muff or a ProCo RAT as we've always played in heavier bands, aiming for the guitar sounds of grunge bands like The Smashing Pumpkins, or progressive metal groups like Tool or Porcupine Tree. If we were in a more low-gain, indie or blues group, we'd go for the Tube Screamer - though it's worth saying that the RAT works really well at lower gain settings too, especially if you have a good amp.

Second, you'll want a delay. Check out some clips of the Ibanez Analogue Delay Mini and the Boss DD-3T and decide which one suits your playing style better. We tend to think that the versatility of a digital delay is better for a beginner as it gives you more options while you're finding your feet and your sound. Then again, perhaps you're somebody who thrives when dealing with creative constraints, in which case maybe the straightforwardness of an analogue delay would be right up your street.

TYPES OF PEDALS

BROADLY SPEAKING, THERE ARE FOUR MAIN TYPES OF EFFECTS TO FOCUS ON, ALTHOUGH THERE'S A LOT OF SUBTYPES THAT YOU CAN DELVE INTO AS YOUR TASTES AND NEEDS DEVELOP.

FUZZ

Generated by pushing transistors into clipping, this abrasive type of signal mangling defined the tones of early rock and psychedelia, becoming synonymous with players like Jimi Hendrix. Over time, more refined pedals came out, like the Big Muff, a pedal that promised smooth, 'violin-like' sustain that was a far cry from the less-controlled sound of pedals like the Superfuzz, Fuzz Face and Tonebender. Ironically for a fuzz, the Big Muff has more in common with most overdrives than fuzzes in terms of its circuit.

OVERDRIVE

Ushered in by the ground-breaking Ibanez Tube Screamer, the goal of overdrives was simple - to emulate the distinctive sound of clipping or saturation of the guitar signal caused by a tube amp. To some degree, this was achieved, but something else incredibly useful happened - by boosting the guitar signal so that it drove a tube amp into distortion earlier, as well as making the signal more mid-forward, the Tube Screamer also made tube amps sound better too.

DISTORTION

Essentially a more aggressive overdrive, distortion pedals clipped the guitar signal more heavily. Where overdrives like the Tube Screamer or Boss Blues Driver employed 'soft clipping' diodes to clip the guitar signal, distortion pedals tend to employ 'hard clipping' after their amplification circuits, which chops up guitar signals into something that much more closely resembles a square wave.

DELAY

This effect which covers a deceptively large spread of pedals. At its core, delay is echo, and the first units in this area did just that, using tape loops. Pedals using bucket-brigade compact chips followed, and then eventually a jump to digital chips occurred.

The thing is, many other types of effects were created by time-based manipulation of signals; flanging was achieved in the early days by running two tape machines and slowing one down; chorus was the same concept but with alternating speed.

The more that engineers experimented, the more effect types they created. Digital delays were the real game changer, as they simply recorded and looped a buffer of audio - this in turn led to not only the guitar looper pedal, but also the pitch shifter. Today even the wildest, most out-there delay, glitch and looping pedals, from the Red Panda Particle to the Montreal Assembly Count to Five can trace their origins back to being able to digitally record and replay a buffer of audio.



From these categories you get distortion, delay, modulation and pitch shifting; what remains are mainly utility pedals - EQs, line switchers, noise gates and tuners. For shaping your tone, you're likely to always be relying on some combination of distortion, modulation or delay and amp tone to zero in on the sound that's in your head.

THE CREAM OF THE CROP



ELECTRO-HARMONIX BIG MUFF NANO FUZZ

RRP: \$209

Type: Fuzz

Bypass: True

PROS

- Unmistakable sound
- Relatively affordable

CONS

- Doesn't do low-gain well
- Scoops the guitar mids

Memorably described to us by one guitarist as a 'hoover', the Big Muff has been modded, cloned, reissued, rebuilt, and redesigned more than almost any other pedal in existence. With a distinctive 'scoop' in the guitar mids, the Muff can mean that you get lost in a band mix - it's like the anti-Tube Screamer in terms of EQ profile - but when it works, there's little else that has the same visceral impact.

Very broadly speaking, there's about five main versions - although, in total there are over thirty versions by our count, with passionate fans of each - and it's on these that the current crop of EHX Big Muffs are based.

The most common is the NYC Muff, which is available as the Nano Big Muff, while there's also several others; the Ram's Head, Triangle, Op Amp, and Russian. We could go on about them for days, but the lowdown is this - the Russian is more 'woolly', think Sonic

Youth's "100%"; the Op Amp is more compressed, and the version that The Smashing Pumpkins used on their classic *Siamese Dream* LP; the Ram's Head is closer to a Dinosaur Jr., type tone; the Triangle is more old-school, a bit smoother and more articulate than the NYC to our ear.

IBANEZ TUBE SCREAMER TS9

RRP: \$199

Type: Overdrive

Bypass: Buffered

PROS

- Classic sounds
- EQ profile

CONS

- Not true bypass
- Overdrive isn't to everyone's taste

The original overdrive pedal, the Tube Screamer and its descendants still represent a significant percentage of the worldwide pedal market just on their own.

There's a reason for this, of course -



not just that it's a versatile drive with a wide range of operation that allows it to be used for everything from blues to metal. Its other strength is its EQ profile, which emphasises the guitar's midrange around one kilohertz, meaning it suddenly 'pops' in a band mix, either live or in the studio.

Moreover, if you turn the drive control down and the level up, it functions as a boost, and it's for

this function that many guitarists acquire one. If you're lucky enough to have a decent tube amp, or access to one, boosting a tube amp with a Tube Screamer is likely to be better than almost any overdrive pedal on the market.

There's a difference between this, the TS9, and the original TS808, but for all the essays that have been written on the subject they're similar enough that a recommendation for one can be a recommendation for the other, nine times out of ten. If you're looking to save some cash, the Ibanez TS Mini Tube Screamer is worth looking at too.



PROCO RAT

RRP: \$219

Type: Distortion

Bypass: True

PROS

- Powerful, punchy distortion
- Good at low- and high-gain settings
- Very affordable

CONS

- If you don't like the timbre of the distortion

One of the first, and still most recognisable distortions, the ProCo RAT got its unique distortion sound from its LM308 op-amp internally clipping the signal into a triangular shape.

Though that's the secret of the RAT's tone, most distortions that followed emulated another part of the RAT's circuit - its two so-called 'hard clipping' diodes, which also distinguished the harder, more punchy distortion pedals from softer overdrives like the Ibanez Tube Screamer.

Rightly a classic, RATs are nevertheless not that expensive, and remain accessible to beginners that want a huge, punchy distortion sound. More than that, the RAT also works well at lower gain settings, especially into tube amps that already have a bit of dirt on the go. They're a surprisingly versatile distortion pedal and it's hard to go too wrong.



BOSS DD-3T

RRP: \$259

Type: Digital delay

Bypass: Buffered

PROS

- Sounds fantastic
- Versatile

CONS

- Quite expensive

The Boss DD-3 has been the gold standard for digital delays ever since its introduction in 1986, and members of the DD series have been used on records by bands as diverse as The Cult, Melt Banana, Tool and Radiohead. So many players have made the white-and-blue box their own that it's probably quicker to list the players that haven't owned a DD-series delay at some point.

For a digital delay, the DD-3 has a very pleasant character, bedding down well into a band mix while retaining enough of that pristine, digital feel that it 'chimes' in a way that analogue delays don't, cutting through the top end of a mix.

The DD-3T is the most modern incarnation of this classic pedal, adding tap tempo to an already formidable platform.

DUNLOP CRY BABY

RRP: \$179

Type: Wah

Bypass: Buffered

PROS

- Classic wah tones
- Comparatively inexpensive

CONS

- Wah used badly can be cliché
- Some tone suck

The Cry Baby has become synonymous with 'wah pedal' to the extent that most new players are probably best served by checking out this wah before any others, as it's more than likely the pedal that's been used on all your favourite records.



That said, it's not without its problems. It's notorious for 'tone suck' and the design is very long in the tooth. Granted, there's not a huge amount of innovation possible in terms of core wah sounds other than frequency ranges, but there are wah pedals with more options and flexibility.



IBANEZ ANALOGUE DELAY MINI

RRP: \$229

Type: Analogue delay

Bypass: True

PROS

- Great analogue delay tones
- Tiny form factor

CONS

- Not as versatile as a digital delay

Digital delays are reliable and produce pristine, accurate delays, but that might not be desirable. For some types of music, a bit of darkness and dirt can add character, and this is why the technologies that preceded the digital delay have never quite gone out of fashion.

One of these was the tape delay, exemplified by the Echoplex and Roland Space Echo, but these vintage units are expensive and difficult to maintain. The other technology was analogue delay. This relied on arrays of capacitors to delay the sound, and came with its own artefacts - a certain degree of grit, and roll-off of higher frequencies. Not only do these qualities have some aesthetic value, but they're also reasons that analogue delays often bed better into a mix.

However, because of the chips used being comparatively expensive, analogue delays were for a while out of the reach of budget-conscious players, whereas now there's a variety of options, like this great mini unit from Ibanez, or other pedals like the EHX Memory Toy. We've chosen this for the warm character of its repeats and great form factor.



DIGITECH RHAMMY RICOCHET

RRP: \$349

Type: Pitch shifter

Bypass: True

PROS

- Pitch shifting is the coolest
- Relatively affordable

CONS

- Doesn't work for every genre



BUILDING YOUR BEST BOARD

WE'VE MADE IT TO THE HOME STRETCH: ACTUALLY PUTTING YOUR PEDALBOARD TOGETHER. HERE'S HOW TO MAKE THE ULTIMATE WORKSTATION FOR YOUR SHREDDING DREAMS TO COME TRUE!

WORDS BY **CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI** AND **PAUL RIARIO**.

The Digitech Whammy was the original pitch shifter, and to our minds it's still the best. This small, powerful unit boasts most of the features of its bigger brother, just without the rocking footswitch. In exchange, you get a ballistic control for the rise and fall speed that it hits the target interval and then returns to the fundamental, with the bonus of both momentary and latching options. It's inexpensive, endlessly inspiring and will completely change the way you play guitar. Can't say fairer than that.

EHX Electric Mistress, that can also cover off a number of chorus-type sounds, making it a pretty versatile first modulation. The reason we're specifically recommending this is twofold - its low price, and its tiny form factor. There's other excellent budget flanger pedals available, but very few are as compact or well-built.



MOOER E-LADY

RRP: \$129

Type: Flanger

Bypass: True

PROS

- Great flanger sounds
- Tiny size

CONS

- Not as versatile as digital units

There's no love lost between Electro-Harmonix and Moer, especially after the former successfully sued Moer for cloning their POG pedal. That's probably why the Moer ElecLady was rebranded to the still-rather-obvious E-Lady model name.

It's a flanger, inspired by the classic



ELECTRO-HARMONIX NANO SMALL STONE

RRP: \$205

Type: Phaser

Bypass: True

PROS

- Tiny size
- Classic sound

CONS

- None

They might not be quite as small as some of the tiny offerings from Moer and the like, but EHX's Nano range are certainly a far cry from the sometimes comically large big-box versions that were knocking around when we were youngsters.

Luckily, they're still the same great sounds, and the EHX Small Stone is the phaser against which we tend to benchmark all others. Once upon a time it had so-called 'tone sucking' issues, but the modern versions have resolved that, so you've got rock solid sounds and true bypass too. Stick a Big Muff in front of it, and take off for another world.

The more effect pedals you use, the more you need a pedalboard. Even the most basic unpowered board can provide a useful platform to hold your pedals securely, provide cable management and keep everything from sliding around onstage.

Powered 'boards have the added function of supplying electrical connections to all your pedals, thereby eliminating the need for power strips and multiple wall warts that can take up space and create a nest of dangerous wires around your performance area.

For more complex or specialised rigs, a custom pedalboard can meet your specific switching requirements and make performance headaches a thing of the past. Unfortunately for those who have never had a pedalboard, the prospect of building or buying one can be overwhelming. You have to determine not only what size you'll need for your setup, but also make sure it matches the power requirements of your pedals, some of which might take require, 12, 16, 18 or 24 volts.

There's also the matter of cables, of which you'll need many, each cut to the minimum length to ensure signal integrity and keep your layout tidy. The confusion only gets worse once you go online and see the plethora of pedalboard models and options available to you.

We wrote up this guide to make selecting and setting up a pedalboard easier. In this tutorial, we'll walk you through every step of the process, from choosing the pedalboard, power supply and cables to laying out your pedals in the order that works for you and making it all work to meet your needs.

WHAT SIZE?

The choice of a small, medium or large pedalboard comes down to one thing: the number and size of the pedals you'll need to use. If you use five or fewer standard-size pedals and don't plan to add to your setup, a small pedalboard should suit your long-term needs. If you have more than five pedals

but fewer than ten, you'll want to consider a medium board. More than ten and you should choose a large board.

If you have only five pedals now but plan to add another few in the near future, it's better to plan ahead and go for a larger board today. Remember, too, that pedals with large footprints take up more real estate, and even a small set-up consisting of a few oversized pedals may require a larger pedalboard to prevent overcrowding. When planning, remember to leave enough space between the pedals to facilitate cabling and create a clean, uncluttered and easily accessible layout.

WHICH PEDALBOARD?

Pedalboards can be purchased off the shelf, custom-built to your specs, or even built at home using readily available building materials, cables and power supplies. Music stores carry a range of boards, including bare unpowered platforms and boards with built-in power supplies and power strips.

Other possible features include cable compartments, wheels, cases, heavy-duty corners and raised or pitched surfaces that make it easier to reach the pedals furthest away from you. Need something special? Many companies are available to build custom pedalboards to your specs, using the materials, power supply, hardware, wire and cables of your choice. If you have specialised switching, looping or MIDI requirements, a custom pedalboard can meet your specific needs, though at a greater cost than an off-the-shelf unit.

For this demonstration, I'm using medium and large Pedaltrain boards: the Pedaltrain 2 and Pedaltrain Pro, respectively. I like Pedaltrain boards for their lightweight frames and strong construction. The 'boards are slotted for easy management of cables and power supplies, all of which can fit under the board and out of sight.

Slotted boards are especially nice in clubs, where spilled drinks can

make a mess of your pedalboard; with a slotted board, spilled liquids drip off, unlike a solid board, which will allow liquids to pool. The Pedaltrain boards are also angled, which makes it easy to reach pedals that are furthest away from you without accidentally stepping on other pedals or knocking their control settings with your foot.

WHAT POWER SUPPLY?

Whether you're buying a 'board with a power supply or choosing a pedalboard power supply for an existing setup, be sure that it meets your voltage requirements. Most pedals operate on nine volts of power, but many require 12, 16, 18 and even 24 volts. Before purchasing a power supply, check the power requirements of every pedal you'll be using.

Then, choose a power supply robust enough to deliver the voltages you require and a sufficient number of outputs for as many pedals as you'll use. Also be sure to choose a supply that has isolated output sections to eliminate ground loops, hum and undesirable interactions between your pedals. Some examples of power supplies include Voodoo Lab's Pedal Power series, T-Rex Engineering's Fuel Tank offerings, the MXR DC Brick power supply, the Modtone Power plant, and the Pedaltrain Powertrain 1250 multi-output power supply.

For this example, I'm using Truetone/Visual Sound's 1 Spot power supply. The 1 Spot is a nine-volt adaptor that takes up just one power strip outlet, yet it can accommodate up to 20 guitar pedals. It works with more than 90 percent of the effect pedals on the market, including those that use popular adapters from Boss, Danelectro, Dunlop, Korg and others. In addition, as you add more pedals to any setup, it's possible to introduce noise and hum by having too many effects on the same power source.

The 1 Spot makes it easy and affordable to expand your system and isolate noisier effects by placing them on their own separate power supply.

WHAT CABLES?

There are two rules here: always use cables with right-angle plugs, which are more compact than straight plugs, and keep your cable lengths to a minimum in order to cut down on clutter and ensure the shortest and quietest signal path. For these reasons, I prefer to make my own cables, as this lets me choose the exact hardware and lengths that I need.

Planet Waves' Cable Station pedalboard kit is ideally suited for this. It features ten feet of low-capacitance cable for signal transparency and ten 24k gold-plated right-angle plugs - pretty much everything you need for the average pedalboard setup. The plugs are solderless, so you can create a cable in seconds, anywhere, to the

exact length, and the kit even includes a cable cutter.

LAYOUT

Before you start Velcro-ing pedals to your pedalboard, take some time to think about the most efficient and easy-to-navigate way in which to arrange them. As a rule, you should lay them out left to right in order of how they connect together (more on this below). But pedalboards are typically deep enough, from front to back, to accommodate two and sometimes three rows of pedals, giving you yet another dimension to consider when planning your layout.

It's best to keep your most-used pedals nearest to you, where they'll be easiest to adjust and reach with your foot. Staggering the pedals between the front and back edges of the pedalboard will also make it easier to navigate your set up and avoid confusion in the heat of performance.

WHAT ORDER?

There's an ideal way to lay out effect pedals, and then there's an individual way to do it. The ideal way is based on practical considerations, like placing a reverb pedal last in the chain rather than in front of the distortion pedal, where it will muddy up your sound.

The individual way is all about how you make things work for you. Some guitarists like to place their wah before the distortion, while others put it after for a more pronounced and dirty tone. While there is no right or wrong way to order your pedals, it helps to understand the basic guidelines. In this section, I'll show you the most logical, efficient and least noisy way to chain together your pedals. In the most general sense, pedals that amplify should go near the front of the signal chain.

This includes filters (which can boost and cut frequencies), compressors (which reduce dynamic levels but can also boost the overall signal), and all types of distortion and overdrive pedals. Tone modifiers such as chorus, phase and flangers go next, followed by ambience effects, such as reverb, delay and echo. The effects in a signal chain can be arranged and grouped into four general categories:

- Filters, pitch shifters, harmonisers and dynamic pedals (such as compressors)
- Distortion, overdrive, fuzz, boost and EQ pedals
- Modulation pedals (phaser, chorus and flangers)
- Time-based effects (echo, delay, tremolo and reverb)

For example, if your pedalboard consists of a distortion, a wah, a compressor and a reverb pedal, you would probably connect them as follows: Wah > Compressor > Distortion > Reverb In the next section, I'll explain the rationale behind the

ordering of these categories to help guide you along.

FILTERS, PITCH SHIFTERS, HARMONISERS AND DYNAMIC PEDALS

These pedals typically work best at the front of the signal chain, where they act upon the pure signal from your guitar.

Filters include pedals such as wahs and low-pass filters. Pitch shifters and harmonisers also include the ever-popular Whammy pedal, all of which benefit from having a strong and unaffected signal from your guitar so that they can track your notes cleanly and accurately. Dynamic pedals include compressors, which "squeeze" a signal's dynamic range - its quietest to loudest values - by reducing signal peaks as they occur.

Compressors typically feature volume or make-up gain controls that let you boost the overall signal to compensate for the lower volume that results from compressing. For that matter, auto-wahs/envelope filters are actually dynamic filters that allow a filter's frequency cutoff to respond to changes in signal response due to variances in pick attack and volume.

Bear in mind that you should be careful of the effect order within these categories. For example, a compressor placed after an EQ pedal will be more responsive to the frequencies that the EQ is boosting, because the compressor seeks out the loudest part of the signal and reduces its volume.

It's probably better to place the compressor before the EQ, where it can respond to your guitar's signal rather than the frequencies boosted by the EQ pedal. Conversely, placing a compressor before an auto-wah will reduce the guitar signal's dynamic range of the and thereby impede the auto-wah's expressiveness (auto-wahs thrive on dynamics).

On the other hand, placing a compressor before a wah pedal can help you control some of the guitar signal's inherent brightness that can make some wahs sound shrill and piercing at the top end of their range.

Of course, some of these considerations change if you raise your compressor's make-up gain to the point that it's actually increasing the signal like a gain boost (see the next section on distortion and overdrive).

On the subject of wah pedals, it's worth noting that some guitarists prefer to place wahs after distortion pedals, where they can be driven hard for a funkier sound. Again, none of this is carved in stone. Set up your effects as they work best for you, but try to be aware of the interactions that result from the order of pedal placement.

DISTORTION, FUZZ, OVERDRIVE, BOOST AND EQ

Distortion, overdrive and fuzz

pedals affect harmonic content by enhancing overtones and compressing peaks in the signal. Their purpose is to simulate the sound of a cranked amp through a speaker cabinet. In the natural order of things, these pedals go after filters and EQ, just like your amp's output and speakers.

They also follow the compression pedal, whose purpose is to flatten peaks and ensure the entire signal is "hotter." Which brings us to another reason why you shouldn't put a compressor after a distortion pedal: they can add volume to everything that comes before them, including noise generated by effects like - you guessed it - distortion, overdrive and fuzz pedals.

Most modern fuzz pedals work very well after wah pedals, but the same isn't true of some vintage fuzz units. If you have an older fuzz pedal that doesn't sound good when placed after the wah, try moving it before the wah and see if it improves things. If you use boost or EQ pedals to give your tone a kick for solos, try placing them after the distortion, overdrive and fuzz pedals. This will help to raise your overall level without having an undue impact on the sound. As always, experiment to see what works best for the pedals in your setup.

MODULATION EFFECTS

These are tone modifiers and sweeteners, and they include effects like chorus, phase, flange and vibrato. Traditionally, these can be noisy effects, and placing them before gain-increasing pedals like distortion or compression will tend to intensify their noise.

In addition, chorus, phasing and flanging all introduce time delays and pitch fluctuations that create a sense of spatial movement similar to what happens in the physical world. Placing them after amplification-style effects like distortions and overdrives produces results that are in keeping with naturally occurring sound.

Plus, the extra boost a signal gets from an overdrive pedal can help emphasise the oscillation of modulation effects. Of course, plenty of players like to put modulation effects like Uni-Vibes and phasers before distortion. Think Jimi Hendrix (Uni-Vibe) and Eddie Van Halen (MXR Phase 90). Doing this delivers more harmonic content to the distortion box and can result in more dramatic and animated effects.

TIME-BASED EFFECTS

This one is pretty obvious. Reverb, delay and echo are ambience effects that imitate how sounds are affected within room environments. Naturally, they go at the end of the chain. Tremolo, for that matter, is amplitude modulation - amp on, amp off - and therefore goes at the end of the signal chain. 

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NEED TO COME UP WITH A SOLO? PUT DOWN THE GUITAR! SOMETIMES THE KEY TO SWINGING OUT THE SEXIEST, MOST SEARING GUITAR SOLO LIES WITHIN – RATHER THAN WORRY ABOUT THE STRINGS THEMSELVES, STEP BACK AND FOCUS ON THE MENTAL SIDE OF IT. BANGERS START IN THE BRAIN!

WORDS BY **RON ZABROCKI**.

Some sessions require me to be a mind reader. I am often asked to improvise a solo or fills in a song. Various types of directions are usually given: “Play like Joe Walsh or Brent Mason,” or, “Make it melodic.” Sometimes the directions are more vague: “Make it sound orange,” or, “Keep it organic.”

I’m not a mind reader, so it’s important for me to be able to not only be flexible but to have an endless amount of creativity. It’s not unusual for me to give clients several solos from which to choose. I know we all have our stock licks in our vocabulary, and I like to believe these make up our style. However, I don’t want to be a one-trick pony, so I have a cool way to tap into an endless source of ideas.

Put down the guitar and use your brain. In other words, take the tool out of the equation! Many of us are guilty of playing the same pentatonic licks all the time. They might have a certain amount of emotion but very little in terms of creativity.

Hear me out! When we just play, we are able to put a ton of feeling in that typical whole-step bend from a G to an A on the B string, but how much thought goes into it? None. You are simply letting your fingers do the playing from muscle memory. Repetition. The last time I checked, there wasn’t one iota of brain matter in our fingers! Our brain tells our fingers what to play. So let’s allow that to happen.

The next time you’re trying to figure out a solo, or are asked to take a solo, put the guitar down and do this: Sing a solo. Even if you can’t sing. Picture the solo you really want to take. Then, and only

RON ZABROCKI ON RON ZABROCKI

I’m a session guitarist from New York, now living in Connecticut. I started playing at age 6, sight reading right off the bat. That’s how I was taught, so I just believed everyone started that way! I could pretty much sight read anything within a few years, and that aided me in becoming a session guy later in life. I took lessons from anyone I could and was fortunate enough to have some wonderful instructors, including John Scofield, Joe Pass and Alan DeMausse. I’ve played many jingle sessions, and even now I not only play them but have written a few. I’ve “ghosted” for a few people that shall remain nameless, but they get the credit and I got the money! I’ve played sessions in every style, from pop to jazz.

then, figure out how to play it! Maybe you will find yourself imagining yourself playing a variation in rhythms or syncopation that you wouldn’t have tried. Perhaps a sweep arpeggio is pictured into a slide. Maybe just a series of long, simple perfect notes creating a new melody. But I can guarantee you one thing: It will not be what you would have played by just “going for it.” And you will keep these licks as part of your new arsenal.

Here’s another way to look at it. Most of us have seen *School Of Rock*. Think Jack Black! WWJBD: What Would Jack Black Do? Pretty funny image, right? Well, it’s supposed to be.

You also can imagine yourself adding a completely different emotion into the solo that may just add something cohesive to the song! Is it a love song? Play with a deep-felt emotion and long notes. A sad song? Make that solo cry like a baby. A funny song? Be ridiculous! Notes that have emotion behind them are always going to touch the listener more than a stock, pentatonic-based “fingers doing the thinking” solo! Always!

And don’t stop here. Use your brain and the power of imagination for your rhythm parts and chord voicings and counter lines and your tone and overdrive and effects and... Okay, I think you get the point.

FIVE WAYS TO MAKE YOUR GUITAR SOLOS STAND OUT

We all want our guitar solos to stand out, to capture the attention of the listener, to bring the song to a new level. However, most solos disappoint and merely make a song seem longer. The problem is not the notes you play, it’s what you are soloing over. How many times have you taken a solo over a verse or a chorus? This is a common practice – and it needs to stop now. The basic problem is compositional. You’re playing a bunch of notes over a part that has already been repeated. Where’s the excitement?

It’s time to add some ear candy. Use the following steps and write a new part to solo over. If you do,

your next solo will enhance the song, your playing and, quite possibly, your career. I’ve given this same advice to many of my students and bands that have come to me for production advice. Every one of them suggested I share them.

These tips work in every style. They work individually or all at once. But remember: no matter what you play, it must be appropriate. You want to lift, you want to wake up, you want to compliment and transcend – but you don’t want to alienate.

1. CHANGE KEYS

This is the Number One tip – the big one. Nothing will make a solo stand out like changing to a higher key. Even if you play the same chords from the verse, it will sound like a new part in a new key and make a solo jump out. Interval of choice? A minor third. That’s three frets higher. If you’re in E, go to G. Try it.

2. CHANGE THE ATMOSPHERE

Most of today’s pop, rock, blues or prog songs are heavily produced. It’s time to add some space, some room. Lose the rhythm guitars. The heavy ones. Play over a keyboard, an acoustic guitar or just drums and bass. We’re talking about giving your solo some room to be heard.

3. CHANGE THE FEEL

Break it down to half time. Or move to a funk groove from a straight rock groove. It’ll still be in time at the same tempo. Of course, you can dramatically shift to a new tempo and a new groove like 6/8 from 4/4. But this might hurt the song’s commercial appeal – proceed with caution.

4. CHANGE MODES

Major to minor or vice versa is common. How about taking your song from a minor rock to a major Lydian? Sharp that fourth note – instant Steve Vai! Or go to a harmonic minor – instant Yngwie!

5. CHANGE THE AMOUNT OF NOTES

Fast song? Play long, slow emotional notes. Slow song? Play short, fast bursts of notes. Think bluesy. It works quite well when executed with taste and emotion. 



RECORDING TECHNIQUES WITH KIAH GOSSNER

SPLITTING HIS TIME BETWEEN ADELAIDE AND SYDNEY, PRODUCER, ENGINEER AND SINGER-SONGWRITER EXTRAORDINAIRE **KIAH GOSSNER** IS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S LEADING FORCES DRIVING THE INDIE-ROCK REVOLUTION. WE CAUGHT UP WITH HIM TO VIBE ON EVERYTHING FROM HIS RECENT NOMINATION BY THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MUSIC AWARDS TO THE UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF TRACKING WITH LOW-FI ANALOGUE GEAR.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA.**

Australia's indie-rock scene has never shone so brightly - with artists like Didirri, Timberwolf, Lilac Cove and Oh Deliah constantly making waves with their bewitching beats and heart-melting hooks, it's undeniable that now is the best time to be a fan of all things vibey. One thing all four of those artists have in common? They've all had their visions brought to life by Kiah Gossner, a multi-award winning producer, engineer, mixer, songwriter, bassist, conductor... The Adelaiddian maestro basically does everything - and he does it all pretty damn well, if we may say so ourselves.

Splitting his time between Mixmasters Studio in Adelaide and Studios 301 in Sydney, Gossner is fast becoming one of the most sought-after

names in Australian music. So before his schedule becomes truly chaotic with every last rocker in the country desperate to get their tunes in his hands, *Australian Guitar* sat down with Gossner for a chat about how he makes his magic happen.

Congratulations on being nominated for Best Studio Engineer by the South Australian Music Awards! How does it feel to be recognised for such an honour?

It's a funny one. It's really nice to be acknowledged for the work you do, but I don't know - I know *heaps* of great producers and engineers doing a lot of cool things, and they aren't any less talented or worthy of acclaim because they weren't

nominated for an award. I find awards in general a little bit of a weird thing. But it is really nice to be acknowledged for the stuff that I've been working on, totally!

Is there a pressure that comes with having the "award-nominated" or "award-winning" distinction under your belt?

I'm just going to keep doing what I do, and if people like it, that's wonderful! I don't feel any extra pressure from the normal day-to-day. It's nice to get some kudos for the stuff that I do - that gives me some confidence that I can keep doing what I do, and hopefully people keep liking it!

On top of everything you do

behind the console, you're a pretty seasoned musician yourself. Do you find that your creative skills as a songwriter help to inform your role as a producer when you're working with other artists?

Totally, man! I feel like I really came into this role as a producer and engineer from being a session musician first, coming up and being on tours with different acts and being exposed to a heap of different styles of music. I went to the Conservatorium and studied jazz, and that was kind of like my foundation, but I was also brought up playing in folk bands and indie bands and all that kind of stuff. And then I ended up working as a session player for just about every kind of genre

you could think of, and as a producer, that's a been a huge gift.

My education started with being a big music nerd, and I'm so grateful that I've been able to follow that as I go deeper into my career. The other big thing is all the people you meet in music - I've met a bunch of really wonderful, interesting, creative human beings, whether they've been collaborators or mentors or friends, people to get beers with or people to get cups of coffee with... That pathway and that experience, I guess, has been such a wonderful thing.

Especially in recent times, you've worked on everything from electro-pop to acoustic rock. Do you feel comfortable working in basically any genre?

If you asked me that question a year or two ago, I would've said, "Yeah, I feel pretty comfortable in any genre!" And that's still somewhat true, but I just feel like my tastes are refining a bit more and more. I guess it is still quite varied - I mean, I recently wrapped up a work that's, like, contemporary classical *and* avant-garde jazz, and I also wrapped up a work with Didirri, who's an folk-indie artist, and Timberwolf, who's doing this slacker-rock/psyche thing - so it's still varied, but I feel like I can definitely hear my own sounds shining through within those different genres.

I guess when you first start producing, it's this funny thing

where everyone's like, "Oh, you've gotta find your voice!" But I think that coming from a really diverse background, my voice is kind of this weird amalgamation of heaps of different things. I don't want to come across as egotistical or anything, but it's quite versatile, because there's just been heaps of different music in my life, ever since I was young. And sometimes it's a curse! I'll find myself hitting my head against the wall over a record, going, "Why can't I make this work!?" And then I'll just have to take a step back and go, "Okay, I'm being too broad, I need to focus in on this particular thing and really make *that* come out in the music."

If there's one thing that stands out about your catalogue, it's how you build up these really spacious, sprawling soundscapes where there can be four or five instruments all taking up equal space, but never overcrowding the mix. How do you go about creating that feeling of roominess in your recordings?

Well firstly, thank you, because that's something I do really try to achieve. I hate things getting too busy, but I also love having lots of layers in a song. It's a fine line to walk, and you can very easily tip it over the edge. As a producer, I love exploring *all* the ideas. I'm always like, "You've got an idea? Cool, let's take that in every direction we can!" Because that

could be the thing that really *makes* a song. And so you end up with a session that's *full* of ideas, and then it's about going, "Okay, which of these ideas are driving the narrative? What's supporting the story, and what's the best way to communicate that story?"

The question we always come back to is, "What's the song's best life?" And there are more questions within that. What supports the song the most? Is it the vocal, or is it not the vocal? Is it the guitar that's doing all the work here? Maybe it's a string part - do we need to get some more strings in to make it this really epic Hollywood thing? What are we trying to achieve with all these parts? What does the song *need*? For me, the process is to find those *key* things, and then mix around them.

Lilac Cove is a good example - that track ["Through The Walls"] has heaps and heaps of layers, and especially towards the end of the track, there's heaps of automation going on to kind of move things out of the way and then bring them up. But when you listen to it, it doesn't sound like all those things are moving, it's just that your attention shifts slightly. It's kind of like the camera moving around on a set - when it pans out, you get a broader image, and then it will narrow in on something. I'm a very visual person like that, so I think having that perspective in an audio sense is very important. Microphones are cameras, and they're capturing the scene that

the song is trying to portray.

Do you have any secret weapons in the studio?

I'm a big analogue nerd - which can be, like, dangerously expensive [*laughs*]. I work between two studios - if I'm in SA I'll be working out of Mixmasters, and if I'm in Sydney I'll be working out of 301. They're kind of like my two homes, and I'm very lucky because they're both very well-equipped. But secret weapons... Anything that breaks up and gets distorted or saturated, or saturates things. I'm a big fan of doing weird things with tape, like running drums through a cassette or recording guitars with a tape deck at 15 ips and getting things all smushed up.

Anything that's saturating something or taming transience, or giving some colour to a mix - that's my entire vibe right there. I'm a big fan of distortion and all that kind of stuff, too. A lot of my catalogue is pretty pop, indie and folk-heavy, which is funny because you don't really think about distortion on pop songs - but y'know, I don't think I've ever put a bass down without distorting the heck out of it. Snares, kicks, vocals... With a lot of vocals that I put down, to get them to sit in front of the mix I'll saturate them and push them forward and do all that kind of stuff. I like to freak things out a bit and really push a piece of gear to its limits, if I can. 🎧





READY, SET, CAST!

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO LAUNCHING YOUR FIRST PODCAST – FROM PODCASTING EQUIPMENT AND HOW TO RECORD, TO WHERE TO HOST YOUR POD. WORDS BY **CHRIS CORFIELD**.

The phenomenal growth of podcasting has largely gone under the radar. Yet recent news that music-streaming platform Spotify has signed Joe Rogan, the comedian, MMA commentator and podcaster, to an exclusive deal which – depending on which figures you read – makes him the highest paid broadcaster in the world. This shows that podcasting is now a very serious business. You’re probably familiar with podcasting already, but do you

know how to start a podcast?

The oft-used line is that it takes ten years to become an overnight success. Thankfully, the relative simplicity of creating podcasts means with the right ideas, techniques and gear, anybody can do it. In this guide we’ll show you the steps to take, and offer some advice on how to start a podcast for yourself. Best of all? It’s actually much easier than you might think...

GETTING STARTED

CHOOSING A PODCAST TOPIC

The first, and most important, part of starting a podcast doesn’t involve microphones, or catchy jingles. Before you even draft your first script, you need to start with one question; what is the big idea? Podcasting is a speech-driven platform so, as with any form of creative output, be that music, film, television or writing, you need to have a clear grasp on what it is you’ll talk about. We all have our own specialist knowledge areas, so choose something you know inside out. It could be Ukrainian folk music from the 1960s, or obscure wood carving techniques, or even a place to read out that murder mystery novel you’ve been writing since college.

Ask anybody in the media and they’ll tell you the importance of knowing your audience. This means knowing the topics they want to explore, the questions they’d ask, the language they’d use and jokes they’d find funny. Starting off with a vague notion of appealing to everybody is a sure-fire way

to fall flat. If anything, a podcast is the perfect place to go super niche. Pick a subject you know and are enthusiastic about and everything else is just technical detail, which can be learned along the way.

CREATIVE ELEMENTS FOR YOUR PODCAST

With your topic sorted, and a clear idea of the types of content you’re going to produce, you can start to think about the finer details. For the more creative among us, this is the fun part. After all, a good podcast is about more than just the talking. You’ll need to think about what music you’ll use throughout, for example. This will tend to fall into two main parts; jingles and beds. Jingles are the short, recurring musical ‘stabs’ that indicate different elements of the podcast. You could have a main jingle you play at the start of the show, and then another when you move between the different segments. Regular features might require different introductory signals, and jingles offer the perfect way to set the tone.

Music beds, on the other hand, are those passages of audio that play quietly underneath the speech, often when the presenter is introducing

what will be covered. These need to be relevant to the show and its audience, and are mixed to be quiet enough so they don’t distract from the speech. In practice, music beds add a sense of rhythm and movement to the proceedings.

You’ll also want to consider the visual identity of your podcast. Although podcasting is a speech and audio platform, your channel will be seen in a visual sense before anybody hears a word of it, so you will want to stand out. This takes the form of logos, graphics, colours and fonts, so a degree of aptitude with Photoshop will come in handy. Again, keep things on brand with your topic and audience, and try to visualise how it’ll appear in your social media feeds.

MAKING YOUR PODCAST SLICK

So, you’ve got your topic, and know roughly where the conversation will go. It’s time now to nail down the smaller details. For this, we’d recommend creating a plan of sorts, or at least a basic format for your show. A great place to start is some kind of running order, listing out the topics you want to discuss and the amount of

EQUIPMENT

If reading this has convinced you to give podcasting a go, you're likely wondering what kind of podcasting equipment you'll need to get started. Clearly, the style of pod you're aiming for will dictate the types of gear you'll need, but there are some sure-fire must-haves that everybody, from the total beginners right up to the professionals, will have. Let's take a look at some great options for podcasting equipment.

PODCASTING MICROPHONES

Clearly, for a speech-driven form of media, you're going to need a microphone. Mics come in all different shapes and sizes, all offering slightly different possibilities. For podcasting, however, we'd point you in the direction of a good quality, well-made condenser mic. A popular option is to use USB condensers, on account of their simplicity, but professionals might prefer the flexibility of dedicated broadcast microphones.

For beginners, we recommend the Blue Yeti.

Famous in online video streaming circles, the Blue Yeti microphone offers the ultimate in USB plug-and-play simplicity, combined with a surprising amount of functionality like multiple pickup patterns which make it useful in a number of situations. We also liked the way it comes either with a desk stand, or a desk-mounted arm, giving it that professional vibe.



Shure SM7B Microphone

For professionals, we recommend the Shure SM7B.

Larger setups involving multiple guests will be better served with better quality studio microphones. For us, it's hard to look beyond the Shure SM7B which, despite

being a dynamic mic, has an amazingly rich, warm sound which is perfect for speech. Look at many pro-level podcasters and you'll see Shure SM7Bs leading the way.

MIC SCREENS

If you're recording in your kitchen or bedroom, you are at the mercy of all those extra sounds a typical house will make. That could be doors shutting, or the reverberation of a large room, or simply cars driving past while you're recording. While noises of this type can't be completely mitigated against, you can protect your sound by employing a portable vocal booth. These shut off the area around the microphone and make sure your recordings are clean and ready for processing.



sE Electronics Reflexion Filter X

For beginners, we recommend the sE Electronics Reflexion Filter X.

It's a cost-effective, lightweight tool designed specifically for isolating a vocal source from its environment. We liked the portable nature of it, and we've always found sE gear to be well-made and reliable.

For professionals, we recommend the Aston Microphones Halo.

The British brand is building a great reputation for creating some of the best sounding condenser mics to reach the market in ages. The Aston Halo continues this progress, with its unique shell-shaped designed and felt surface doing a tremendous job at directing speech to the right place while filtering out anything that's not desired.

MIXERS

If you're using multiple audio sources, be that microphones or music players, then you'll need a way to balance the audio to ensure it sounds the way you want it to. If you're recording four mic sources, and one of them is noticeably louder than the others, then unfortunately that is all your listeners will hear. A mixer solves this problem by acting as the central hub in the studio. You feed all your different sources into it, mix them together so the sound is balanced, and then output it to your recording software.

For beginners, we recommend the Alexis

into your delivery, which listeners will notice.

Having guests is a great way to add variety and flavour to your show. Perhaps you invite people on to be interviewed, or maybe you have regular co-presenters. This makes for a more enjoyable listen, as presenters will bounce off each other and take the conversation in different directions. Having relevant in-jokes or recurring punchlines pays off in the long term too, as the community will come to recognise them and associate them with your show but again, don't make them too staged.

If you've invited someone on to be interviewed, be sure to do your preparation beforehand. A list of suggested questions, with follow-ups, will bring the best out of both sides although it's a good idea to run through the questions with your interviewee beforehand so they aren't put on the spot. Unless, of course, that's what you're going for...

Finally, the frequency you publish new episodes is important. Aiming to publish a new podcast every week is great, but requires a certain level of commitment, and your audience will expect you to keep to it. That said, keeping a regular flow of new content is a sure-fire way to build a community.

Multimix 8. It features four XLR microphone inputs, and a further four standard jack inputs for other audio sources, and also boasts USB connectivity for recording direct to PC.



Rode Rodecaster Pro

For professionals, we recommend the Rode Rodecaster Pro.

For more advanced podcasters, the Rode Rodecaster Pro is a superb tool, combining a number of podcast-specific features like programmable one-shot pads and onboard recording, with enough mic inputs and faders to ensure your finished pods sound great.

RECORDING SOFTWARE

If you're recording into a PC, you're going to need a software tool to help you piece together the finished recordings. It's also through software that you can add effects, or polish your audio to make it more professional. If you're already the user of a digital audio workstation (DAW) like Ableton Live or Cubase, then you'll be familiar with the process. Different software options will offer different tools, but the fundamentals are generally transferable from one to another.

Audacity



For beginners, we recommend Audacity.

As a free, open-source audio production tool, it's hard to look beyond Audacity for beginners to learn their craft.

Audacity contains all the

tools you'll need, and is intuitive enough that you can pick up the basics in no time at all.

For professionals, we recommend Adobe Audition.

While home studio users may be more familiar firing up their existing DAW, as a tool for editing broadcast-ready audio, Adobe Audition is the clear winner. It offers plenty of specialist tools that allow you to clean up noisy recordings, and its multi-track environment makes producing your shows a doddle.

time you want to allocate to each. You may or may not want to script certain sections; this has the benefit of meaning you don't lose your way, but if you rely on scripts too much the audience may find it slightly wooden. Writing down a set of bullet points offers a good balance between two extremes, keeping you on point but also allowing you to adlib when the situation calls for it.

The length you decide on is purely personal, and would be linked to your overall plan. Different subjects require differing levels of detail, so certain topics would warrant a fast-paced 20-minute show while other, more complex areas, may warrant a deeper exploration.

The way in which you speak has a huge impact on your podcast too. Listen to any professional broadcaster, newsreader or presenter and you'll notice there are certain techniques they use to ensure they are heard clearly, and that the audience understands them. The pace, or cadence, of your speech is crucial, as is your intonation. Clearly, some people have speaking voices which are better suited to broadcasting than others, but with a bit of practice you can inject character and expression

Be realistic about how much you can do; better to under-promise and over-deliver here.

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

While a good podcast will allow the presenter relative freedom to explore a subject the way they want to, it does help to have some guidelines in place. Rather than restricting the presenters, they offer some direction of certain things you don't do. This could be something as simple as whether you permit swearing or cursing on the show, or any specific subject areas you want to steer clear of for legal (or other) reasons. True crime podcasts, for example, may find themselves limited over things they can and can't talk about. Ongoing legal cases are a strict no-go; you don't want to find yourself in front of a judge charged with contempt of court for jeopardising an active case, after all...

Another area to keep in mind is around the use of copyrighted music; the simple advice is don't, unless you have an army of lawyers on hand to clear samples. There's plenty of high quality, royalty-free audio available on the net. Audiojungle is a good place to start here.

HOSTING

WHERE TO HOST YOUR PODCAST

The cover the actual process of recording your podcast in greater detail below, but once you have your finished audio file, you'll need to find a way to get it live on the airwaves. Unfortunately, it's not as simple as saving your finished file and it appearing magically on Spotify or iTunes. While those services, and others like them, are the tools your audience will use to listen to the show, you'll first need to find a place to host them.

It's worth exploring which hosting platform is right for you. There are plenty of options here, ranging in price and capability. For beginners, a simple free service would offer you the ability to host your audio file, create an RSS link so people can subscribe, and offer enough bandwidth so listeners can stream without any audio problems.

Once you start looking to paid hosting platforms, your options increase significantly, along with the capabilities.



- Buzzsprout is one of the best known, offering a free service (with a few caveats, notably that your files are deleted after 90 days) along with various tiers offering extra functionality or the ability to store more audio files.
- Platforms like Captivate, PodBean and Libsyn are all trusted alternatives, and manage the entire process of publishing your shows on the big platforms so it's worth exploring the one that suits your needs best.
- Alternatively, the Spotify-owned Anchor promises unlimited storage and a tonne of premium features like one-click distribution, monetisation and analytics for free.

Finally, as your podcast empire grows, monetisation will become important. It figures that if you're creating this amazing content, then you should take a slice of the advertising revenue that comes with it, right? Each of the hosting platforms suggested above offer support for this process, either through advertising revenue or through premium options - like paid-for, subscription modelling.

INSPIRATIONS

THE BEST MUSIC PODCASTS AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW

Fans of music production, recording and performing aren't short of options when it comes to podcasts. From gear reviews and interviews, through to weekly shows from high profile professionals, there is plenty out there to get the creative juices flowing. Here's some of our favourites.



Song Exploder: As far as podcasts go, Song Exploder has to be one of the best uses of the medium. Each episode sees an established name take apart a track of theirs, bit by bit, explaining the stories of how they were conceived, crafted and produced. A bit like having to stand up in the front of the class and explain yourself, only with the biggest names in music talking about their best-known tracks. Genuinely fascinating for any music fan to hear.



Pensado's Place: Dave Pensado is a Grammy-winning mix engineer who's worked with the likes of Michael Jackson, Beyonce and Elton John, so his words carry some weight. His weekly show, co-hosted with Herb Trawick,

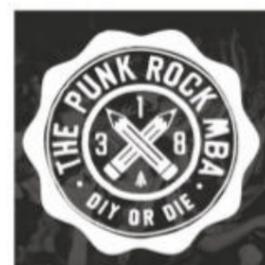
covers what happens in the studios of the world's best-known performers. From the types of equipment favoured at the top, through to hints and tips to achieving great sounds, Pensado's Place is a must for producers of all levels.



Unstoppable Recording Machine: We love the Unstoppable Recording Machine pod, presented by Eyal Levi, because of the depth it goes into. Eyal is a candid host, blending the right amount of questioning and curiosity with a desire to keep things interesting for listeners.



Home Studio Corner: This one is a more specialist podcast, offering specific help and tips to improve your capability as a producer. From breaking down individual techniques and skills, to explaining step-by-step how to achieve certain results, Home Studio Corner should be a mandatory subscription for home producers.



Punk Rock MBA: Our final recommendation isn't related to the actual production of music, as such, but it does offer superb analysis and thoughts on the business side of the music industry. Presenter Finn McKenty offers great insight into

the inner-workings of being in a band, and his style and format is perfectly suited to his audience. Pro tip; Finn's LinkedIn profile regularly breaks down the process of making his pods, from choosing the right artwork for your social posts to avoiding certain common pitfalls. Well worth investigating.

RECORDING GUIDE

HOW TO RECORD A PODCAST

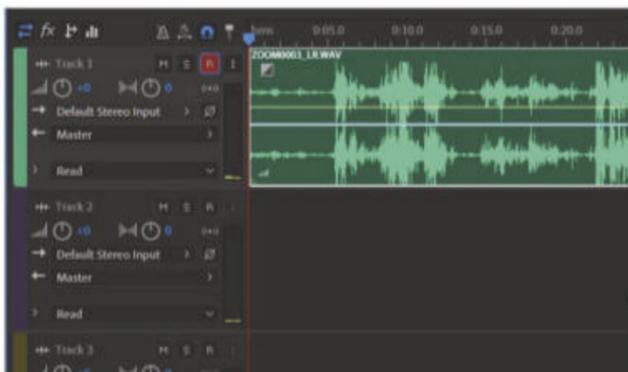
So you've got your big idea. You've planned it all out, have your running order locked down and have a pile of shiny new recording equipment all ready to go. What now? Well, it's time to start recording. Here, we've detailed out the steps you should take to take your ideas from the sketchpad and out of your head, and turn them into cold, hard audio files you can share with the world in our guide to recording your first podcast.

2. Setting The Software

With your hardware all set up, you'll need to carry out the same housekeeping within your software. Using Adobe Audition as the example, make sure you have your audio routing set the way your mixer, USB microphones or audio interface require.



In the example above, we've set Audition to use our Presonus Studio audio interface, and have inputs one and two receiving signals from two microphones connected to the interface. For monitoring - listening back to our recordings - we have the two outputs set to send the audio to our studio monitors, and our headphones for live monitoring when recording.



Now the audio routing is set up, you can 'arm' the individual tracks to record. Recording in most audio software applications is a two-step process; you tell the software which tracks are receiving the audio by arming them. Look for the little 'R' button to choose

1. Setting The Scene

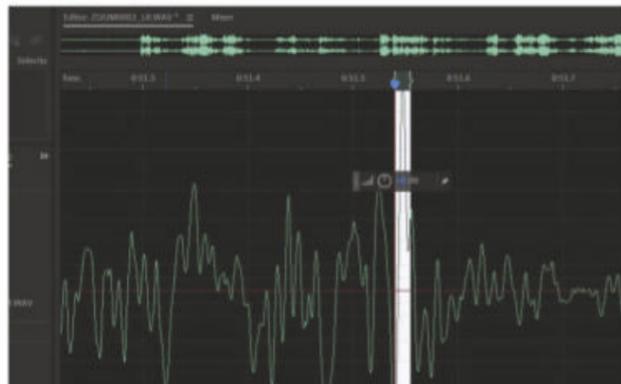
The first task is to arrange the area that will act as your studio so you have everything you need within arm's reach. That means setting up your laptop or recording device within eyeline, and then arranging your microphones so they are in front of anyone who will be talking. Hook your mics up to your mixer, and fire up the software you'll be using to capture the audio.

Now, it's a case of fine-tuning. Have anybody who will be talking speak in their normal voice; a good trick here is to ease them in by starting a completely unrelated conversation, and covertly using their responses to tweak levels. Some people naturally talk louder than others, so be sure to balance out levels and be mindful of clipping, where the sound is louder than the microphone can handle, as this will result in recordings which are nigh-on unusable.

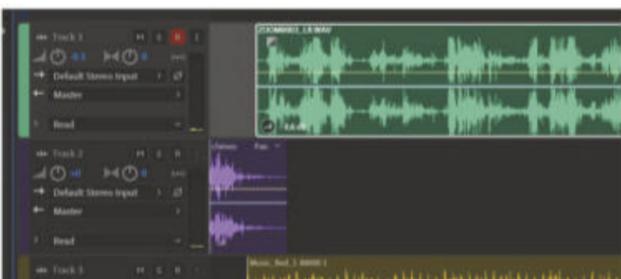
which tracks you want to record, then hit the master record button to start the process. Congratulations! You're now recording...

3. Editing Your Podcast

With your audio hopefully now residing nicely within the software arrangement window, you can start the process of editing. Editing is the process of cleaning, or enhancing, audio using the tools available within the software. If your recording features multiple voices, it's good practice to either lower the volume - or remove completely - parts where a specific person isn't talking as this removes any background noise and allows the listener to focus entirely on the subject.



Look for peaks in the wave file too; in the example above the audio clips slightly in the part we highlighted. In Audition, you can lower the volume of parts like this quickly and easily using the Clip Gain function, making it ideal for doctoring plosives or sibilance. Be careful using this too liberally though; the human voice is a dynamic thing and is naturally quieter or louder depending on the context. Attacking your audio file with too broad a brush can make for a harrowing listening experience afterwards...



Now you can start to import the other elements. In the last example, you'll see we have a short jingle on the second row, and then a music bed on the third row. The music bed has had its levels reduced in the mixer, so it doesn't compete with the main speech track. Think of this part as musical building blocks; you simply drag the audio files into the arrangement window, and move them where you need them. You can also chop, slice and rearrange here to your heart's content.



To add a final coat of polish to the sound, we add compression and normalisation. In Audition, this is called Dynamics Processing, and the 'Classic Soft Knee' preset does the job we're after perfectly. Be careful though; overusing compression makes your voice sound like it's coming from a goldfish bowl. The final step is normalisation, which attempts to level the sound across the whole track. Again, this can prove quite drastic so it's always worth checking your entire mix once you've completed the normalisation.

4. Exporting Your Podcast

So the audio is recorded, arranged and polished, and you're ready to export. This part is simple enough; first tell the software to create a mixdown of your multitrack session - as seen above - which 'bounces' all the individual files into one master file. Then simply hit export in the File menu and you're good to go.

Congratulations, you now have your very own podcast and are ready to take the world by storm! Good luck!

IK MULTIMEDIA Z-TONE BUFFER BOOST + Z-TONE DI

STAGE AND STUDIO WIDGETS OFFERING VARIABLE PICKUP LOADING FOR BETTER TONE. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Last year, IK Multimedia - maker of the AmpliTube amp and effects software - released the AXE I/O, a USB audio interface specifically designed for guitar players. The unique aspect of that unit is that rather than just having a bog-standard hi-Z (high impedance) input as provided for guitar use on many interfaces, it offers a range of options. You can set it for either active or passive pickups, choose optional JFET circuitry for the preamp and set the impedance to best suit your pickups using the variable Z-Tone knob.

The AXE I/O has now spawned two smaller utility units - the Z-Tone Buffer Boost and Z-Tone DI - which may be ideal for guitarists who wish to take advantage of the enhanced gain-staging and tonal adjustment offered by those three aforementioned features but don't need the USB audio capability of the AXE I/O.

With features suitable for live work and recording, the Z-Tone Buffer Boost's stompbox form and footswitching should see it slip easily into a pedalboard slot, while the Z-Tone DI is a DI box with extra sauce.

The Z-Tone Buffer Boost will always function as a buffer for your pedalboard but its footswitch offers the preamp tonal shaping of the AXE I/O. Set it to Pure and you get the unadulterated signal. Meanwhile, JFET will give you a subtly different tone, nicely enhanced with a little extra top-end. It's the Z-Tone knob that makes the most tonal difference here, though, because it changes the impedance at the input. Fully left you get the most treble but advancing the knob subdues the top-end and thickens things up.

The pedal could be used for 'always on' tonal shaping but as a footswitchable 'effect' it can offer an instant alternative tone, with or without a boost, via the Gain knob and/or the second footswitch, which can bring in up to 10dB of clean boost. Alternatively, set up a neutral sound and just use it as a boost. Extra outputs endow real versatility - the Link to create a parallel signal path and the balanced XLR for direct clean guitar recording.

Dull, perhaps, but necessary, the humble DI box is



PRICE: CHECK RETAILER

mainly used as an interface that takes the sound from an instrument and outputs it via an XLR cable in a form suitable for the balanced mic inputs on a mixing desk or audio interface.

While anyone who gigs regularly with an electro-acoustic guitar will be aware that it's the thing they have to plug into to get the sound into the PA, it's also a useful tool for recording electric guitar, especially as a cleanly recorded direct signal is an asset that you can later mould with amp sims.

With the facilities here you can tailor that clean sound just so. The sensible belt-and-braces approach of recording both a clean dry signal as well as your mic'd amp is easily carried out with this box first in the chain, with its Link output feeding your amp.

► VERDICT

The Z-Tone has enhancements that would really benefit a guitarist's studio while the Z-Tone Buffer Boost packs a massive amount of utility in one pedal. It's an asset for your pedalboard with practical recording capabilities, too.

► PROS

- Practical tools for studio and the stage.
- Z-Tone DI has sensible routing for belt-and-braces recording.
- Decent array of outputs.

► CONS

- The Z-Tone Buffer Boost has the outputs; do you need the DI?

► CONTACT

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OVERLOUD TH-U

FULLY FEATURED AMP, CAB, MIC AND EFFECTS SOFTWARE WITH ALL KINDS OF CLEVER TRICKS!. REVIEW BY **CHRIS GILL**.

With the introduction of its TH-U software, Overloud has delivered a product that rivals the most sophisticated (and expensive) hardware units available today. In addition to providing a vast selection of guitar rigs comprising the most-coveted classic, modern boutique and obscure cult amps, a wide variety of speaker cabinet options and a comprehensive selection of effects, TH-U provides powerful modification capabilities that include the ability to swap preamp and power tubes and adjust voltage with a virtual Variac.

With the addition of the new Rig Player feature, which reproduces rig models profiled from real-world setups, TH-U is one of the most powerful amp/effects modelling software packages available today. While TH-U is available in genre-specific Metal, Rock and Funk/R&B packages that each contain 16 amps, 15 speaker cabs and 16 effects focused on their respective musical styles, the TH-U Full package delivers considerably more bang for the buck by providing 89 guitar amps, four bass amps, 52 cabinets, 77 pedal and rack effects, 18 microphones

and more than 1,000 presets.

Amp models include the usual suspects (Fenders, Marshalls and Mesa-Boogies, Hiwatt DR103, Roland JC-120, Vox AC30, Dumble Overdrive Special and so on) as well as authorised models of various Brunetti, DV Mark, Randall and THD amps - plus uncommon, but totally cool selections like the Mesa-Boogies .50 Caliber, Orange "Graphic" 120, Lab Series L5 and Polytone Mini Brute. Optional Rig Libraries allow users to load hundreds to thousands of additional amp rigs via the software's Rig Player feature, too. Users can modify any of TH-U's 89 amp models with the Amp Tweaks feature. Preamp options include 12AX7/12AT7 tubes or silicon/germanium diodes, and power amp options include 6L6, 6V6, EL34, EL84, KT88 or 5881 tubes, solid-state and Class A or AB. The Amp Tweaks window also provides a virtual Variac for adjusting the voltage from 60 to 110 volts.

The sound quality of TH-U's amp models is stunning, capturing the entire tonal range of their real-world counterparts and delivering



authentic amp feel and response. Overdriven tones will even clean up when the guitar's volume control is backed down. The clean, slightly overdriven tones had rich body and a three-dimensional quality often lacking from digital models.

Programming new presets is very simple thanks to the graphic display and drag-and-drop functionality. Zoom in/out functions (25, 50, 75, 100, 150 and 200) make it easy to view the entire setup or tweak individual settings in detail.

The presets comprise a wide variety of genres as well as specific well-known songs, which make a great starting point for users to find tones close to what they're looking for and further tweak to their preferences. The selection of speaker cabinets and effects cover all the bases as well as a few lesser-traveled paths for more adventurous sound designers.

► VERDICT

Between the provided models, the modification capabilities of the Amp Tweaks feature and the impressive library of tones in the optional Rig Library, it's hard to think of an amp tone that TH-U Full can't replicate.

► PROS

- Comprehensive choice of classic and forgotten classic amps.
- Superlative rendering of tube amp dynamics.
- Amp Tweaks feature allows you to mod the amps.

► CONS

- None

► CONTACT

Overloud
Web: overloud.com



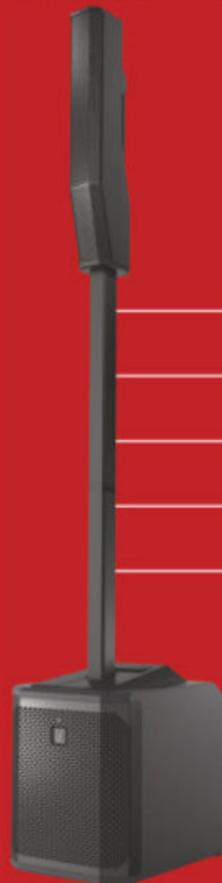
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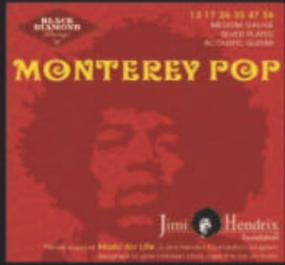
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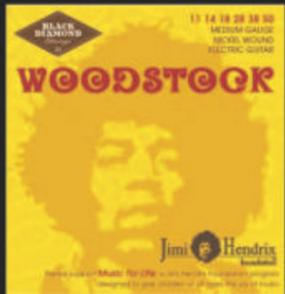
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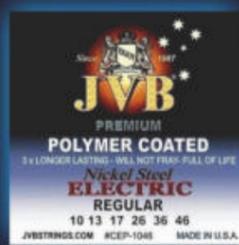
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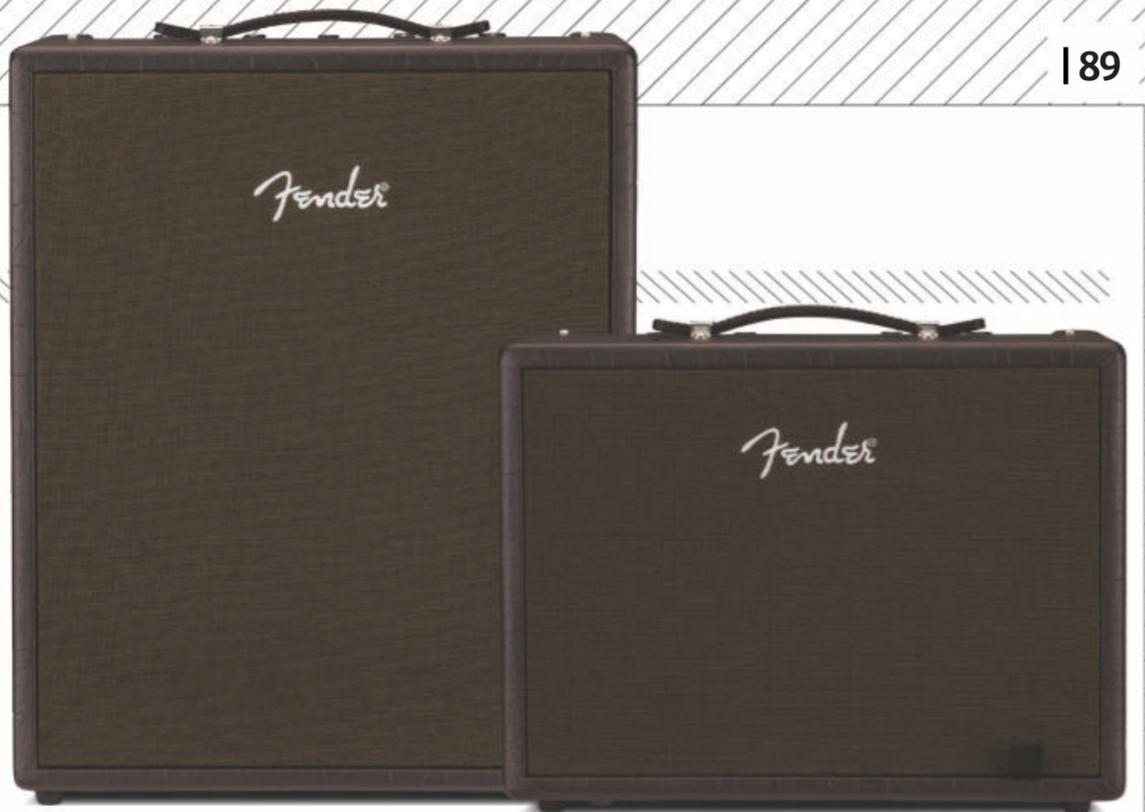
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FENDER ACOUSTIC SFX-II + ACOUSTIC JUNIOR AMPLIFIERS

FENDER UPDATE THEIR CLASSIC LINE OF ACOUSTIC AMPS WITH SOME ACE NEW TECH AND PRACTICAL FEATURES. REVIEW BY **ALEX WILSON**.



These recently announced amps are hot off the presses and fresh off the factory floor, right in rim for the post-Christmas shopping season. In a slick promo video a Fender rep says that they spoke with real acoustic guitarists and asked them what their ideal amplifier would be. In response to the feedback, the company has delivered three models that are stylishly presented, heavy on digital processing and mixing capability and pretty damn light to boot. Spoiler warning: these are good amps that deserve a serious look from the guitar community's strummers and pluckers. Let's investigate why.

The two amps in question are two-thirds of the full product line. The Acoustic Junior GO is the same as the Acoustic Junior we have here, but it is a little heavier due to the inclusion of a portable, rechargeable battery that delivers juice for five hours of full-volume playing. The differences between the SFX-II and the Junior are confined to the chassis and speakers - the signal flow and channels are identical (as far as this reviewer could tell). Anyway, the Junior delivers 100 watts out of one eight-inch driver and weighs about 6.5 kilograms. Built into the base is a little kickstand to prop the amp up. The bigger SFX-II includes a tweeter and then a 6.5-inch side-radiating speaker, weighing in at just under ten kilograms. Both speakers are 100 watts. It's the side speaker that makes the big difference, allowing the SFX-II to output a stereo image. This really gives extra mojo to the onboard effects.

I want to commend Fender for differentiating the models based only on weight and chassis - and not foolishly nerfing any of the sound mixing or DSP capabilities on the smaller Junior model. "Smaller" need not also mean "simpler", "streamlined" or "limited" just so the bigger amp can look more impressive by comparison. Fender have wisely chosen to give all players the full benefit of the technology they have developed while allowing them to choose an amp with the physical dimensions that suit them. It's a great move that shows respect for the player and payer.

SOUND JUDGEMENT

So much for the differences between the amps.

The Acoustic line amps have two channels, either of which can be fed via an instrument cable or XLR cable. Both channels have matching controls: a three-band EQ, a volume knob, and two other knobs to select and control the level of the various effects. Both the SFX-II and the Junior sound good with an acoustic plugged in. Obviously, the former has a bit more gain on tap, and size due to the stereo speakers. Yet both amps share the ability to transparently reproduce an acoustic's sound with generous headroom and volume ample for busking and small gigs. The EQ is more functional than finicky, more suited for broad differentiations between instruments than detailed tone-shaping.

Effects-wise, you can select between the following presets: hall reverb, room reverb, slapback echo, longer delay, chorus, vibe, delay and chorus, delay and reverb. None of the effects are going to blow your mind like a boutique pedal might. Fender has chosen "neutral and unobtrusive" over "arresting and unique". However, I rarely wanted to turn them off! Even in small amounts, they add the extra sense of depth and space that a DI acoustic sound usually needs, ultimately making performances feel more musical and polished. The reverbs particularly stand out in their versatility.

Let's come back to the two channels and talk about performance situations. A busker with nary but an acoustic guitar and a voice full o' feelings can really get some mileage out of these amps. Playing around with the two channels, I really got a sense of the potential in these amps. Depending on the musical situation you can definitely get away with plugging a bass, a mono keyboard line or a percussion mic into these channels in a pinch. Obviously electric guitars don't sound too bad either. What I'm getting at is that I think that while these amps are voiced for acoustics, there's lots of potential here for many DIY duos to harness the onboard mixing capabilities with their specific instruments.

PERK YOURSELF UP

With the two independent channels and the cool DSP options, the Acoustic line is already looking pretty good. But on top of that, there's still the back panel options and a few other sweet touches to

discuss. I love the phase-flip switch for the channels. It's a really great and simple way to avoid nasty sonic issues running close-proximity sources together (say and acoustic and vocal mic). I also really like how both the channels have their own balanced outputs built into the back of the amp. This means that any sound mixer or recordist can get your instruments with the effects you choose on them. This leaves you to either mic the amp for some extra mix possibilities, or just use it for monitoring. Other features shared by the amps include two XLR outputs, a headphone output, an auxiliary input for external audio, a USB jack for audio recording. There's even Bluetooth connectivity built in so you can run your backing tracks off a phone or any other suitable device. Love that.

The final big pluses for me are the footswitch and the onboard looper. Let's take each in turn. The footswitch is sold separately, but the way Fender have implemented it is pretty slick. Using their basic four-button generic controller, you can overlay a magnetic strip that marks out the switches for their correct function. It's great for adding that extra level of control when using the digital effects or the looper. The looper itself can record for up to 90 seconds. It has plenty of a headroom, and doesn't start clipping and crushing even when several tracks are built up. Cleverly, the effects are printed into the looper's recording channels. So this means you can record, for example, chords with chorus on them, and then solo over the top using delay but no chorus. For some musicians who rely on loopers as part of their performance, having one built into the amp will be a huge benefit. For the rest of us, loopers are just a great feature to have. They're fun, for starters, and a great tool for creative and songwriting purposes.

At the end of the day, these are certainly not the cheapest acoustic amps out there. However, if they are within your budget then they really do deliver plenty of great-sounding and practical features. In that sense, they are arguably good value for money, and could ultimately be a better choice than a cheaper amp with inferior sound and fewer features. Everything about these designs comes across as well-considered and favourable to the player. 

► VERDICT

While these amps are an update on previous acoustic amps that Fender have released, they both have enough in terms of new and modern functionality to justify their presence in the guitar market of 2021 and beyond.

► PROS

- ▲ Great tools for creative and songwriting purposes.
- ▲ Effects are printed into the looper's recording channels.
- ▲ Both amps sound impeccable.

► CONS

- ▲ Some players might be priced out.

► CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com



RRP: \$3,199 (STRAT HSS) • \$3,099 (TELE)

FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II TELECASTER & STRATOCASTER HSS

IT'S BARELY FOUR YEARS AGO THAT FENDER REPLACED ITS LONG-RUNNING AMERICAN STANDARD RANGE WITH THE AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL. NOW IT'S BEEN REFRESHED. SO, WHAT'S NEW? REVIEW BY **DAVE BURRLUCK**. PHOTOS BY **NEIL GODWIN**.

Time flies, and it only seems like yesterday we were writing about the new American Professional guitars, a reimagined overhaul of the previous long-running American Standard that produced some of the best playing and sounding Fender guitars - which we'd not hesitate to recommend to readers and friends alike. In some ways, then, it's a bit of a surprise that Fender has now replaced that line with these Mk II versions.

If you're expecting a completely new operating system, you'll be disappointed: the American

Professional II is more like a firmware upgrade. Perhaps that's a little harsh, though, because there are numerous features that differentiate II from I. Obviously, there are different colours, some of which might be quite polarising, particularly to those of us who've grown up with the classic and custom colour hues. More fundamentally, lightweight ash is now hard to source - certainly in the quantities that Fender consumes - and is replaced by roasted pine as used right back at the start of the Fender story (although it wasn't

roasted back then) and for various limited runs over the years. Fender is playing catch-up a little here because pine is quite popular in the modding and DIY partscaster world, not to mention among some elevated boutique makers. Fender tells us that the timber offers a very focused bright tone and that the roasting stabilises the wood and can make it a little lighter.

We then get a raft of refinements to continue the already refined Am Pro vibe. The contoured heel, for example, is hardly new, but it knocks the old square edge off the treble side of the heel, something Leo would have probably done back in the day had he realised there was money to be made noodling around in those high-fret positions. Fender has sensibly retained the Micro-Tilt neck pitch adjustment here, too.

The other subtler changes are to the necks. Along with a 'smoother' satin back finish - coined 'Super-Natural' - and a rich but not overdone amber tint, there's a heavier rolling to the fingerboard edges. The deep C profile of the Am Pro I is retained, but all in, along with the narrow/tall wire on that everyman 241 millimetre (9.5-inch) radius, it's hard to think how Fender could have improved things further.

The range of models, at least the initial releases, tick all the best-selling boxes, too: Strat, Tele, Strat HSS, Tele Deluxe (now with a larger '70s Strat-style headstock) and Jazzmaster. There's no Strat HH this time around; the launch range here seems very focused on the big-hitters. And why not?

AMERICAN PRO II STRATOCASTER HSS

As with ash, which was only used on specific colours, here pine is employed for the Sienna Sunburst and Roasted Pine, which most of us would simply call natural because Fender tells us the finish here is basically just clear coats over a sanding sealer. The roasting process clearly deepens the colour, creating a very rustic furniture vibe that was all the rage in some homes back in the '70s. We're suckers for heavier contours that enhance the sculptural beauty of the best guitar design ever. Here, that top body edge is a little thick.

As for hardware, it's pretty much only the staggered-height modern tuners that remain completely untouched. The two-post bridge now boasts a cold-rolled steel block that, says Fender, "increases sustain, clarity and high-end sparkle". Fender's Justin Norvell elaborates: "The previous blocks were cast. These are usually resin impregnated, which makes it musically less like a bell when you hit it. It's got mass but doesn't have the same resonance or musicality. We were actually using an improved style of cast block that was copper-infused instead of resin, so it was homogenous metal all the way through, but it was still a sintered block. Here, we still have the chamfering for extra travel, but it's milled out of cold rolled steel, which has long been what the aftermarket people with their upgraded hardware use. It's what we do on American Original and in the Custom Shop: it's the original recipe that Leo was using. So, again, it's just another tweak that adds musicality and enhances tone."

A major part of the first Am Pros were the mixed-magnet V-Mod pickups (see *Mods For Rockers*, later in this feature). Here we have V-Mod IIs: the "Stratocaster single-coil pickups are more articulate than ever while retaining bell-like chime and warmth", says Fender. The DoubleTap humbucker - again upgraded to II status - first appeared on the American Performer range and the bridge facing cream coil cleverly helps to ape the classic

three-single-coil look, at least from a distance. Each Am Pro II also has a new-to-Fender push-push switch on the tone control. Again, far from new, it switches the full humbucker to its single-coil mode, although it's actually a little trickier than that.

AMERICAN PRO II TELECASTER

One of the new colours, Mercury, is shown off here on this muted-down Silver Burst Tele over its alder body - which pulls back the usual black edge to a dark grey pewter hue. It certainly looks very stage-aimed and showy. Again, this refresh also includes a smattering of new hardware and electronics. Most notably we have an updated bridge that uses a bridge plate with cut-down side walls. It can be top-loaded as well as through-strung, while the outer two saddles are slightly longer and have domed 'bullet' ends. The height adjustment screws are nicely buried - a great advantage of the Micro-Tilt - and the saddles are compensated as before.

So, again, we have V-Mod II pickups. The bridge has flush mount poles, while the push-push switch on the tone control voices both pickups in series when it is pushed up and when the three-way selector is in middle position. Like the Strat we get the string tree from the Ultra (a pretty minor point) and we have dome-topped knurled knobs, not the flat-tops of the previous series.

FEELS AND SOUNDS

Both guitars come in pretty similar weight wise, neither feather-light nor far from heavy. The necks' 'deep C' profile is retained from the previous series, spec'd at 0.820 inches (20.8mm) at the first fret and 0.920 inches (23.4mm) by the 12th - pretty much the exact depths we measured. For the record, the Tele's neck is slab-sawn; the Strat's one-piece maple neck/fingerboard is rift-sawn. It's a very everyman shape, not too thin, not too thick, and along with that standard radius and narrow/tall frets there's little change over the previous models.

However, that increased fingerboard edge rolling is welcome and the radiusing seems slightly more on the maple fingerboard face of the Strat than the separate rosewood fingerboard of the Tele. Is this 'Super-Natural' finish to the neck back a game-changer or even noticeably different from the original American Professional? No, but it does feel super smooth - this is good craft. As is the setup, which pairs 0.009s with string heights on both treble and bass sides at the 12th fret of a shade over 1.5mm.

First impressions of the Strat played clean is that there's plenty of breathy crispness. There's no doubt what you're listening to, but we're reaching for the tones to pull them back whereas our reference Strats remain fully open. Not for the first time both tones here act like a 'decade' control: fully open there's that almost post-EQ zing; backed off we get to more of those classic 'analogue' sounds. As you'd expect, there's no shortage of fast attack and the voice is pretty vibrant.

The push-push switch voices the screw coil of the bridge humbucker, which matches the response from the single coils rather well. In full 'bucker



mode it's well balanced and certainly not over thick, a welcome gear change with a little more power. Again, pulling back the tone here smooths out the quite strident attack and while the treble bleed circuits really keep things pristine, as you pull the volume back, many of us like that softening of a non-treble bleed. Like so many guitars, the key here is to use those tone controls.

Keeping things pretty clean, the Tele works its magic, more strident and steely. The neck pickup is far from rounded or muted, though; it really isn't a million miles away from the Strat's neck in terms of voicing just with a subtler smoother attack. The highs do seem a little more rounded here and there's no shortage of midrange bite, which really pushes the Tele-ness to the fore on the bridge pickup. The series sound is certainly thicker - the biggest sound here - and humbucker-like, with the well-voiced treble bleed on the volume. Pulling it back retains clarity but cleans things up, a sort of 'home' sound we'd suspect for many who need a deeper, wider voice than you'll usually find on a Tele. Again, using both volume and tone really pull out the guitar's potential, even though, oddly, it took a while to settle, despite some pretty heavy string stretching.

The well tried-and-tested Strat vibrato has a light, responsive feel with a pretty standard range of around a semitone up-bend on the high E and just over a tone on the G. Stability for light use is excellent, although as with any brand-new guitar there's a sense that it all needs to settle in a little. The push-fit arm is a very snug fit, making subtle shimmers very responsive. The more we played this Strat, the more we liked it - and the Tele, too.

Complaints? For all the effort that's gone into the new Tele bridge, at setup or even post-purchase,



notching the saddles wouldn't go amiss as the strings can drift making the string spacing slightly uneven. Mind you, we've put up with that for years. There's very little not to like here. 🟢

► VERDICT

We're big fans of the first American Pros and these II versions are simply nicely polished, very everyman instruments with colossal appeal to players everywhere. A superb job.

► PROS

- The Tele has a very neat new bridge.
- The push-push switch series pickup link is very welcome.
- The Strat has superb neck feel and very dialled-in setup.

► CONS

- Notching those saddles on the Tele wouldn't go amiss.

► CONTACT

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FAITH LYRA CUTAWAY NYLON-STRING ACOUSTIC

NYLON-STRINGED ACOUSTIC/ELECTRIC GUITARS JUST GOT SERIOUS. REVIEW BY **STEVE HENDERSON**.

The folks at Faith Guitars make steel-string guitars. They make all kinds of steel-string guitars: dreadnoughts, OMs, jumbos, parlours... Even a 12-fret, sloped-shoulder dreadnought! They make steel-string guitars really, really well - they each have their own unique feature that sets them apart from the crowd, and they are all great performing guitars. So when Faith releases a nylon-string model, it's worth taking a serious look to find out what makes this new guitar worthy of our attention. The Lyra Cutaway is the company's first ever shot at a nylon-stringed instrument, and it seems they are terribly serious about it.

The Faith Lyra Cutaway certainly has its own thing happening. From a distance, it looks like a glossy version of other "serious" classical guitars. Up close, it becomes apparent that some serious thought and experience has been involved in the design and manufacture of the Lyra. The materials are first class: a perfectly book-matched solid Red Cedar top, Solid

open geared tuners, but gold plated with pearloid buttons. All this is wrapped up in a faultless high gloss lacquer for the body and a very smooth satin finish for the neck.

The Lyra has an understated but classy soundhole rosette of Rosewood and Abalone. The neck joins the body at the 12th fret and, in keeping with contemporary thinking, that joint is a bolt-on design. If you ever wondered how effective a bolt-on acoustic neck can be, here's the evidence. The fretboard is dot-free on the face but there are dots on the side at frets five, seven and nine. To simplify the gig, the Lyra has a Fishman Sonitone system: a dedicated nylon-string under-saddle pickup with a two-control preamp hidden away inside the soundhole. Through my Fishman Loudbox Artist, it sounded mighty. Fishman gear is brilliant, so the Sonitone system is a great choice for this guitar.

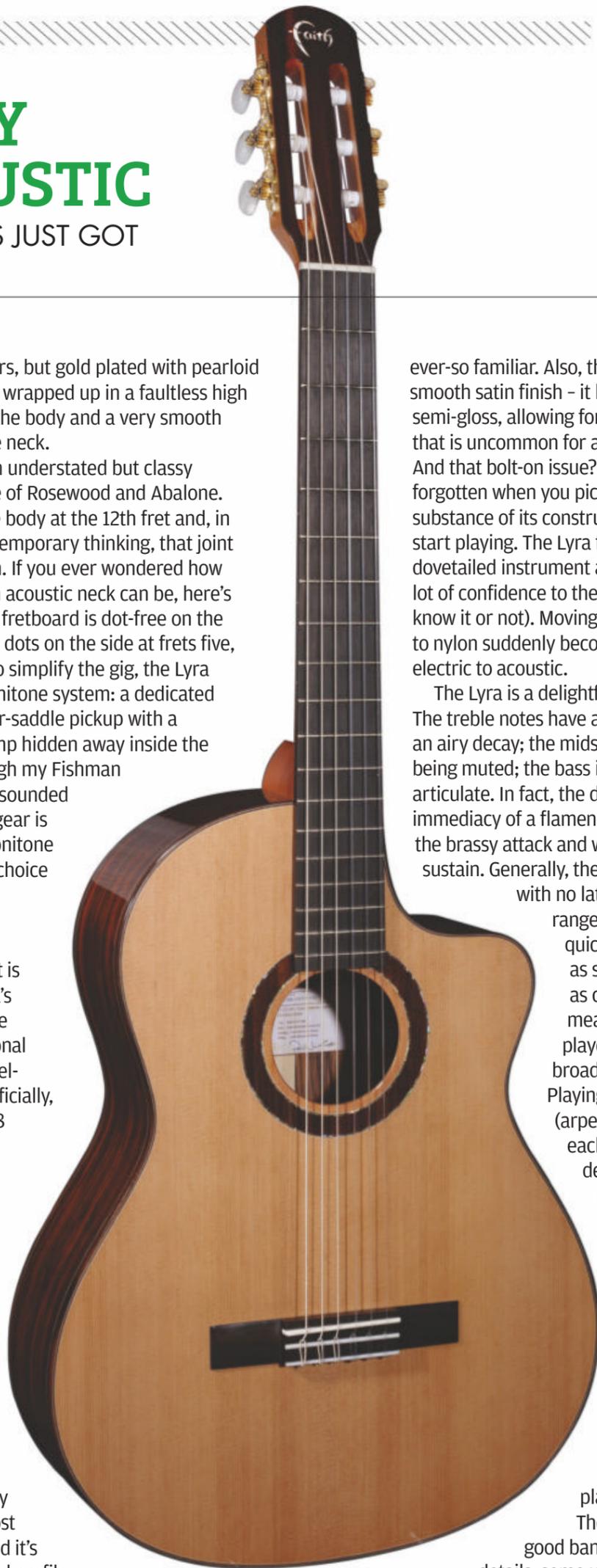
But what really makes the Lyra Cutaway stand out is the neck. The Lyra's neck is somewhere between a traditional classical and a steel-string acoustic. Officially, the nut width is 48 millimetres (that's three or four narrower than a standard classical) but that one dimension doesn't tell the whole story. It's the shape of the neck that is so inviting. It's not deep and doesn't have heavy shoulders that most classical have, and it's a smooth D-shaped profile and feels more like a slightly wider steel-string neck. In fact, it's very similar to my old Martin D-12-20 (which is a touch wider still). Basically, there's no girth to negotiate and the 25.5-inch scale is

ever-so familiar. Also, there's that buttery-smooth satin finish - it looks satin but feels semi-gloss, allowing for an ease of movement that is uncommon for a nylon-string guitar. And that bolt-on issue? It's immediately forgotten when you pick it up and feel the substance of its construction, and then start playing. The Lyra feels as solid as any dovetailed instrument and this provides a lot of confidence to the player (whether they know it or not). Moving from steel strings to nylon suddenly becomes as easy as from electric to acoustic.

The Lyra is a delightful fingerstyle guitar. The treble notes have a snappy delivery and an airy decay; the mids are warm without being muted; the bass is defined and articulate. In fact, the delivery is more like the immediacy of a flamenco guitar, but without the brassy attack and with much more sustain. Generally, the tone is round and full,

with no latency in any frequency range. Notes bloom very quickly, whether played as single note lines or as chord clusters. This means that, whether played fast or slow, that broad tone is always there. Playing chords fingerstyle (arpeggiated) or strummed, each string is clearly defined right along the neck. Even above the seventh fret, there's more sustain than expected and the treble notes don't become muted through lack of mass. The impeccable fretwork enables much of this and, of course, adds to the playing experience.

The Lyra Cutaway offers good bang-for-buck. The little details, some unseen, also contribute to the value: a two-way truss rod, scalloped bracing, the neck joint integrity, the deep cutaway. It all adds up to a considered approach to designing what is, essentially, a new take on a traditional instrument. 🎸



Rosewood back and sides, a Mahogany neck topped with a lightly figured Macassar Ebony fretboard and a Rosewood headstock overlay, a nicely figured Macassar Ebony bridge, Macassar Ebony body binding (front and back!), and an environmentally friendly Tusq nut and saddle set. The machine heads are traditional

▶ VERDICT

The Lyra Cutaway is both beautiful to look at and a pleasure to play. It seems that someone has finally built a versatile nylon-string guitar for the modern player.

▶ PROS

- ▲ Quality tones.
- ▲ Super playable.
- ▲ Exceptional build values.
- ▲ Beautifully presented.

▶ CONS

- ▲ None.

▶ CONTACT

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DV MARK ERIC GALES 'RAW DAWG' 60W AMP COMBO

OLD-SCHOOL SIMPLICITY MEETS MODERN TECHNOLOGY.
REVIEW BY **STEVE HENDERSON.**

DV Mark has a reputation for punchy, fully-tricked out heads and combos that serve a player's creative needs no matter what those needs might entail. The range has at times been extensive, with a model for just about any situation imaginable. So it's interesting to look at their website and see that these options have been pared back to just seven electric guitar combos and none of them have a confusing battery of knobs and switches. I guess the folks at DV Mark have recognised (before many others) that the whole "pedal thing" has returned with a vengeance, and doesn't look like easing up any time soon, and their 50-watt Raw Dawg is a superb platform for our favourite gadgets.

The Raw Dawg 60 is Eric Gales signature combo, and Gales loves pedals. With an obvious "simple is better" philosophy, the Raw Dawg offers a 50-watt, single 12-by-12 combo with an absolute minimum of knobs but plenty of what counts. This amp harkens back Fender's glory days, when the amps were simply, straight foreword power packs: think Deluxe/Bassman/Princeton/Vibrolux combos - amps that produced big, clean tones. But the Raw Dawg isn't even that complicated. It has just

five knobs (vol, low, mid, high, and reverb) and an on/off switch. How cool is that? There's no clever switching or chained circuitry or cascaded anything to confuse or distract. You just turn it on, dial up your sound, and get to the business.

Having said that, the Raw Dawg has features that those early, much loved Fender amps never had. There's a highly efficient neodymium speaker - 150 watts of power handling, highly efficient, and super lightweight. And it sounds great. I plugged my 1963 Vibrolux into it and there it was - that sweet, vintage tone. The Raw Dawg has an effects loop, which is great for chorus, delay, reverb, etc.

But it's the Raw Dawg's delivery that'll really grab you. There's a punchy roundness to the tone, and a sonic breadth that doesn't emphasise any particular frequency range. The "secret ingredient" is, of course, the tube in the preamp stage: a 6205 vacuum pentode,

RRP: \$1,595

originally designed for tube radios (the ancestor of most guitar amps). This is a sub-miniature tube that adds a lot of warmth to the tone and vibrancy to the feel. Flavouring up the tone at the preamp stage leaves the solid-state power amp to add the required weight to the delivery.

The test gear included a custom Anderson Strat (EMGs), a '62 Strat, a Godin Summit, a mid-'60s Tele, a Godin 5th Ave, and a White Falcon. Each guitar has an inherent tone quality and these were never disguised or masked by the Raw Dawg. The front pickup sound of the Strat was woody and warm, and positions 2 and 4 are absolutely superb; the Summit displayed that LP-style front pickup roundness and rear pickup bite and drive; the Tele's bridge twang was surprisingly traditional (given that we're using some solid-state technology here); and the Falcon had all the chime and back pickup "grrrang" that you could want. If you're a jazzer, the Raw Dawg reproduced the sweet roundness of the 5th Ave (an ES-175-ish guitar) with gloriously detailed articulation - the most complex of chords had definition and body. It was quite surprising that the Raw Dawg was so adaptable to the various guitars because, with most other amps, there's usually a compromise - which means some degree of knob tweaking for each guitar. Not this time.

The Raw Dawg is super pedal-friendly. In fact, that's really the point of this amp. Its function is to create a great clean tone and allow the player to dress it up with a choice of effects. I used an old TS-9, an old DS-1, a Mesa Flux-Five, a Zendrive, and a Suhr Riot. Every pedal has its own "thing" and the Raw Dawg handled each without a hiccup, never compressing the response or colouring the basic character of each effector. This amp has a HiFi-style attitude without the clinical top-end, so the clarity is exceptional. And not just gain-based effects. DDLs have a crisp and clearly defined echo and even my long-suffering CE-2, which just turned 40, sounds young again.

The Raw Dawg is a superbly built amp and a super easy lug at around ten kilograms. The controls are straightforward, the tone stack has plenty of scope, and the built-in reverb is excellent. There's even a headphone jack and an aux input for those still working on their COVID lockdown blues. 🎸



► VERDICT

DV Mark have delivered a great, tube-driven combo for all the pedal tragics (like me) out there. But, even by itself, it's an impressive amp: easy to use, plenty of power, and tone for days. Best of all, the Raw Dawg presents a clarity that is both surprisingly refreshing and musically satisfying.

► PROS

- ▲ Big sound.
- ▲ Plenty of power.
- ▲ Super simple layout.
- ▲ High-quality build.

► CONS

- ▲ Only available in black.

► CONTACT

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RRP: \$1,699 – \$2,799

KRAMER ORIGINAL COLLECTION (2020 LINEUP)

THE '80S SHRED MACHINES MADE FAMOUS BY **EDDIE VAN HALEN** AND **RICHIE SAMBORA** ARE BROUGHT INTO THE MODERN AGE UNDER GIBSON OWNERSHIP. REVIEW BY **AMIT SHARMA**.

Though the company dates back to the mid-'70s when it was mainly specialising in aluminium neck basses, it was a chance encounter between co-founder Dennis Berardi and Eddie Van Halen's management on a flight in 1981 that led to the virtuoso teaming up with Kramer.

It is rumoured that the guitarist promised to make them the biggest name in the trade - if he didn't succeed, he certainly came close. The following decade led to some fruitful partnerships and a host of high-quality instruments renowned for uncompromising playability.

By signing up the guitar players in bands like Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe and Whitesnake, in addition to Eddie's endorsement for his first mass-produced signature, Kramer became the go-to brand for loud

guitars with equally loud looks.

It all came to an end in 1991 - flannel was in, spandex was out. By the turn of the millennium, the brand had been sold out of bankruptcy to Gibson, who have now once again revamped the range to ensure their 'Made To Rock Hard' legacy remains intact at a more affordable, Indonesian-produced price point.

While the Modern collection explores Kramer-style interpretations of traditional Gibson body shapes, such as the Les Paul and Flying V, the Originals are a bold resurrection of the '80s Superstrats that typified an era of thrilling guitar acrobatics.

First up is the emphatically bold Pacer Vintage model. You certainly won't go unnoticed with this hanging around your neck, decorated with the

same kind of stripes seen on George Lynch's 1986 signature. There is also a Pure White version for those wanting something less outrageous.

In terms of pickups, this model rocks the classic Seymour Duncan JB/JN set. Turns out they're still hard to beat for rock tones, and better still, each volume control doubles up as series/parallel switch for its pickup, and there's a 002mf capacitor bleed circuit to retain treble frequencies when volumes are down. There's certainly a lot of tonal ground covered.

The pickup selector is a three-way mini-toggle found beneath the bridge volume knob. For most, this will function well enough and makes for a tidy front, but if you're the kind of guitarist who constantly switches back and forth, this particular design makes the control slightly less accessible.

Then again, it's worth remembering this is an instrument aimed at rock players who mainly live on the bridge, except for clean sections and solos high up the neck.

Next up is the Jersey Star. This one is Richie Sambora's old signature model, and it continues to be one of the best-selling Kramers out there. It's easy to see why, this is a Superstrat that feels more like an actual Strat - the elliptical C-profile neck feels meatier, there's a five-way selector and the body is made out of alder, which is more rounded than the maple-bodied Pacers. The option to split two of the humbuckers allows for true single-coil sizzle, whereas options to tap into parallel usually result in a sound somewhere in between.

While the other instruments in this round-up have a flat 14-inch fingerboard radius, this particular model is even flatter still at 16 inches - which makes it incredibly playable. The addition of gold hardware also works especially well against this Alpine White finish.

The middle humbucker does tend to get in the way, but to be fair, three humbuckers can often feel a bit excessive - both visually and tonally. Here, however it's a most welcome addition. Dialling in more cleans and crunches than other 80s rock guitarists, clearly Sambora needed something that could handle it all...

Moving on, we get the shred-worthy SM-1 model. It's the most metal axe in the Original Collection - hell, it even comes in a finish called Maximum Steel. The tremolo is recessed which means you can pull more in pitch - you can get close by tilting the bridge on a non-recessed guitar, but having less physical space to play with will always result in less range. And while we're on the subject of range, you might have noticed 24 frets instead of 22.

Introduced in 1986 when Kramer were upping production, the pointy headstock is among their most classic - also appearing in the form of pearloid inlays. The 14-degree angle is said to provide more pressure at the nut for sustain, which - when you factor in the all-mahogany neck-through body - makes this the thickest-sounding guitar of the collection.

While it's a JB once again in the bridge, the two Cool Rails bring a lot of power in the middle and neck positions - arguably some of the most deceptive humbuckers ever made thanks to their single-coil size. It also features a coil-split switch and a five-way selector.

Last up is the Baretta Vintage model. It features another striking headstock - very similar to the pointy headstock on the SM-1 but rounded at the end, originally introduced in 1984 and commonly known as the banana or hockey stick headstock. Hey, if it was good enough for Eddie...

Then there's the one-angled humbucker, which is also quite the statement. You may have already guessed what it is. As with the Pacer Vintage, pulling out the volume control offers a coil tap on the JB, so there is some tonal variety. Again, the Van Halen connection is strong here - much like the single-pickup 5150 guitar he himself assembled



at the Kramer factory and his original homemade Frankenstrat with the angled Gibson PAF - it's a thunderously uncomplicated workhorse.

What are the advantages of a slanted bridge pickup, then? Well, in most cases, clearer highs and more power from the thinner strings while retaining the right kind of warmth for the higher gauges - effectively giving you more note articulation across the board. Typical for Strats and Teles though less common for humbuckers, the idea goes all the way back to Leo Fender himself.

So, we've glanced over four guitars each fantastic in their own respects, but with some key differences between each. When it comes to picking the one you should check out first, it comes down to a question of preference rather than value.

As far as build quality goes, there is very little in difference between these models. They all feel rugged and reliable, with the same dependable double-locking Floyd Rose system to ensure tuning is held no matter how much use or abuse it receives. All of these guitars are fitted with an allen key holder on the back of the headstock and come with Seymour Duncans - so really it just boils down to which best suits your needs. Anyone needing a neck pickup will naturally rule out the Baretta Vintage, but there are plenty of rock players out there that will appreciate the simplicity of one angled humbucker in the bridge. It's also worth noting that for only a couple hundred more, the Pacer Vintage benefits from two humbuckers fitted with the treble-bleed mod.

Interestingly, both of these models are made entirely out of maple - which, in conjunction with Seymours, makes for bright tones with no shortage of attack to cut through. The mahogany body and neck through of the SM-1, however, is aimed at a more of a darker-sounding metallic shredder - with higher output in the neck and a trem cavity. As we expected, it is also considerably lighter - maple is a much denser and harder tonewood by comparison.

Its deep warmth is offset by the snappiness of the ebony fingerboard.

The Jersey Star is the most expensive offering in this line-up and with any group test we have to ask ourselves, is it worth the extra money? In this case, very much so. The alder body is noticeably louder unplugged and sounds fuller plugged in, with no shortage of tonal options thanks to two independent coil split switches for the neck and bridge pickups. This model also features no less than 13 stars and, thanks to the JS truss rod cover, will leave your friends mistakenly wondering how you got your hands on an incredibly rare Joe Satriani prototype!

It's interesting how Kramer - a company that took a sizeable chunk out of Les Paul sales over the '80s - now find themselves being brought back to life by Gibson. This latest collection is certainly worthy of the brand's heritage, with wild finishes and no options for fixed bridges. It is, after all, what Kramer were famous for - and they still are, looking how much the American-made originals go for secondhand.

Perhaps it's the sheer affordability of the Pacer Vintage that makes it such an enticing instrument. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better Floyd-equipped Superstrat at such an inviting entry point, especially considering the custom aesthetics of the tiger striped Orange Burst and the inclusion of real Seymours instead of anything outsourced or 'Duncan Designed'.

But the old Sambora signature really does trump this round-up on sheer class alone, boasting versatility and effortless playability. The Baretta Vintage would be a great choice for rhythm players, particularly those who deal in rock, punk and thrash. There's an elegance to its simplicity and aesthetic - the Ruby Red finish is very easy on the eye. The SM-1 is, in many ways, the opposite - less attention-seeking and more suited to soloists and instrumental ultra-shredders, with tones galore thanks to the unbranded Cool Rails and JB. All in all, this relaunch of the Kramer brand is a great move from Gibson. 

VERDICT

With exceptional build quality, striking finishes and state-of-the-art tech across the board - not to mention the lowball price points, which are very beginner-friendly given the pro specs offered - Gibson have done a 10/10 job of revitalising the Kramer brand.

PROS

- The SM-1 is perfect for metal tones.
- The Pacer Vintage is a stunning Superstrat that offers extreme value for money.
- They all feel rugged and reliable.
- The double-locking Floyd Rose system is fantastic.

CONS

- ♥ They might not look as cool to newbies as they did in the '80s.

DISTRIBUTOR

Australis Music Group
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ZOOM G11 MULTI-EFFECTS PROCESSOR RRP: \$1,799

THIS NEW FLAGSHIP FLOORBOARD IS THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE FROM MULTI-EFFECTS PIONEER ZOOM. BUT IS IT STILL VALID IN TODAY'S MARKET. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Zoom was one of the pioneers of the floorboard multi-effects processor, but it's been several years since the company released a new one. Now, building on what the previous G5n offered, it's back with this brand-new G11, which is certainly feature-packed.

It comes equipped with an intuitive touchscreen display, two banks of footswitches and a pedal treadle. It has a stereo or dual mono effects loop for adding external pedals or for four-cable connection, and an input for an expression pedal. A USB connection allows operation as four-in/four-out 24-bit audio interface as well as providing access to computer-based editing via the free Zoom Guitar Lab software, also accessible with an iOS/iPadOS device by connecting a Zoom BTA-1 wireless adaptor.

A looper that records up to five minutes in stereo can be synchronised to the 68 onboard rhythm patterns, which are handy for playing along to for a bit of silent practice using the headphone output. There's also a degree of MIDI capability with Program Changes and Clock synchronisation supported.

As for its sounds, the G11 offers 240 onboard patch memories in 60 banks of four, each preset having a signal chain built from a linear array of ten blocks (DSP permitting). An amplifier can be assigned to one of the effect blocks as can a cabinet model or IR. There are 24 cabinets matching the 24 modelled amps as well as 70 matching IRs, but there are also 130 memory locations where you can load your own and third parties' impulse responses using a USB flash drive. The range of effects is pretty comprehensive, with the everyday nestling next to the esoteric.

The G11 is slim and weighs only 2.8 kilograms, so it's easy to move around. That light weight is no doubt due to extensive use of plastic, but there's nothing flimsy about it.

Where some amp and effects modellers these days seem to have a minimal amount of footswitches and mode-switching to use them, this Zoom floorboard offers 11 in an ergonomic layout that's presented for a very logical way of working, which will make immediate sense to anyone used to an amp and effects setup.

In fact, the unit is laid out in three distinct sections from top to bottom. To the right of the touchscreen you get your amp section with a standard six-knob array: Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence and Volume. The middle section is set out like a row of five stompboxes, each with a chromed footswitch, a window to show the name of the effect and four parameter knobs for each effect - you just switch effects in and out and tweak them at will. The final section has six red footswitches for more general tasks. There's an up/down pair for selecting patches, a similar pair for selecting banks, and a pair for horizontal scrolling whose main purpose is to move the colour-coded effects chain left or right so you can access them all. In addition, these footswitches can call up the tuner, operate tap tempo and take care of looper functions.

Running through the 100 factory programmed presets, our first impressions weren't exactly positive. Many of them are not really ready for any practical musical use straight out of the box as they're laden with exaggerated use of effects, odd EQ, inappropriate ambiences and so on. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean the component sounds are bad. There's plenty of good stuff among the individual models; you simply need to get tweaking or create your own from scratch.

Fortunately, touchscreen editing is a breeze. Swiping to change effects order and adding effects to the chain is easy. The amps are a mixture of vintage classics, more contemporary designs and

Zoom's own creations, including some specifically voiced for seven- and eight-string guitars and dropped tunings, which may give a clue to where Zoom's target audience lies.

A careful choice of the onboard IRs added to the amp can add a useful touch of mic'd amp flavour, although the ability to load third-party IRs means that you can really tailor the degree of realism. A full patch with amp and speaker simulation plus effects will give you a wide range of options for recording or direct into a PA or FRFR speaker system. Alternatively, you can set up patches that purely contain up to 10 effects, providing a range of fully loaded pedalboards for use with your own amp.

To this end, the range of effects is impressively extensive. There are plenty of different types of dynamic and filter effects, modulations, delays and reverbs. There are also some much-welcomed special effects to explore, such as the 'hot spice' sitar simulation, and 28 effects in the drive category including models of well-known drive pedals and even a decent-sounding acoustic simulator.

We also get some pedal effects, although assigned to a footswitch like the rest, these can make use of the treadle to adjust one specific fixed parameter. There's the obvious volume pedal, wah or whammy-style pitch shifters, but you also get options such as drive with pedal-adjustable gain, or a rotary speaker with speed change via the treadle. A second added expression pedal can be assigned to another pedal effect.

All of this works well as a closed effects system, but for increased flexibility you can integrate your own pedals: the two mono or one stereo effects loop can be anywhere in the signal chain, footswitchable from the G11, with positioning saved with the patch. 

► VERDICT

Get beyond the pretty naff presets and the G11 provides a comprehensive set of facilities for home recording, practice and onstage use, where it can supply perhaps all the effects you'd need in a very practical format.

► PROS

- Lightweight.
- Good ergonomic footswitching arrangement.
- Instant amp and effect tweaks.
- USB recording facility.
- Rhythms for practice/songwriting.

► CONS

- Could have better factory presets.
- No parallel signal paths.

► CONTACT

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RRP: \$2,599

VOX BOBCAT V90 + S66

VOX REVIVES AN OLD DESIGN FROM THE 1960S BUT WITH PLAYABILITY AND FEEDBACK CONTROL IMPROVEMENTS FOR TODAY'S PLAYERS. CAN THIS HIPPIE-ERA HOLDOVER HANG WITH THE COOL KIDS? REVIEW BY **PETER HODGSON**.

They may have the amp market stitched up but Vox isn't the first name you think of when you ponder great guitar brands. This despite Vox guitars being used on some pretty damn iconic recordings over the years. The company taps into that legacy with its new Bobcat guitars, inspired by a pair of 1960s models (the Bobcat and Lynx) built for Vox by Italian company Eko. Each guitar is very reminiscent of their 20th-century inspirado but they come with playability and construction improvements.

GETTING A SEMI

The semi-acoustic Bobcat's two variants - the S66 and the V90 - are essentially the same guitar, with the exception of the pickups and electronics. And the original guitars needed an update: early Bobcats were well known for their uncontrollable feedback, and the pickups weren't exactly the cream of the crop. The new version is built around a weight-relieved spruce centre block with a maple ply body (and remember, 'plywood body' doesn't mean the same thing in acoustic-style instruments as the plywood used in cheapie solidbodies in days past). The neck is made of mahogany with an Indonesian ebony fingerboard.

Hardware includes a set of open-gear tuners made by Grover, a Tune-O-Matic style bridge and trapeze tailpiece, and a pickguard with a definite '60s vibe. Vox has used the same plastic hue as the originals, and this attention to detail is also carried over to the reproduction aluminium control knobs. The controls themselves appear the same on both models but they're not: the V90 has a pair of P-90-style single

coil pickups and the two volume/two tone setup we all know from eight decades of electric guitar manufacture. The S66 takes a different approach though: its pickups are a trio of Stratocaster-like single coils, and although both guitars only offer a three-way pickup selector switch, the S66 has a dedicated volume control for the always-on middle pickup. That way you can select pickups as you would on a two-pickup guitar but then blend in as much or as little of the middle pickup as you need, giving this guitar a huge amount of range when you include the individual volume controls for the bridge and neck pickups and the master tone control.

On the construction side these guitars are almost flawless. There seems to be a stain applied to the Indonesian ebony fingerboard on both guitars if the residue left on my fingertips is any indication, but this is pretty common on new guitars with ebony or rosewood fingerboards and the phenomenon usually disappears after a few days of playing.

HOLLOW THERE

Plugging into various amps including a Marshall DSL50 and a Marshall CODE 25, the two guitars revealed their strengths immediately. These are no 'fish around for your tone' guitars. The V90 has that classic P-90 edge and warmth, where clean tones sound almost acoustic-like but distorted ones sound both fat and edgy. And the feedback issues of the past are nowhere to be found with the Bobcat: I threw some pretty high levels of distortion at the guitar and was rewarded with some beautifully vocal lead tones,

instead of punished with high-pitched squealing.

The S66 may, by design, miss some of the V90's fatness - but it makes up for it with versatility and character. While the V90's pickup settings sound like variations on the same basic tone, the S66 offers a lot more malleability across its voices. The bridge pickup has a dry, tight tone with a snappy attack while the neck pickup is nice and juicy in that '60s Strat kind of way. Add in the middle pickup and you can introduce a bit more detail to the neck pickup or more body to the bridge. Turn the outer pickups all the way down and turn up only the middle one, and you'll get a great all-round rhythm sound that is also handy for single-note lines when you don't need the full bark of the bridge pickup. At one point during testing I played both guitars along with a bunch of The Cure tracks and I found it was easy to dial in workable versions of all sorts of Cure eras and guitar tones. Then I put on some blues and found some killer overdriven solo tones for that genre. Both guitars love fuzz pedals too. And again, the resistance to feedback is a godsend for those who are into this type of vintage styling but with a more modern approach to gain and effects.

The playability is very easy, although the string spacing at the nut is more forgiving of simple chords than complicated fingerpicking. Bends have a series of satisfying harmonic overtones that sound great with some overdrive, and the neck shape is unobtrusive without being too thin. Overall it's a very pleasant playing experience that shouldn't tax your shoulder or wrist over long periods. 🎸

► VERDICT

These feel like very high quality guitars, with the sound quality to match. Their sheer lightness is great news for players with sensitive backs, and their sonic versatility makes some other guitars seem practically one-use. If you're after something familiar yet different, either of these Bobcats can get you there.

► PROS

- ▲ Versatile controls.
- ▲ Great playability.
- ▲ Flawless paint work.

► CONS

- ▲ Close string spacing at nut.

► CONTACT

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WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU START LEARNING THE GUITAR

FROM CALLOUSED FINGERS TO FINALLY NAILING THAT FIRST SONG, PLAYING THE GUITAR IS ONE OF THE GREATEST JOURNEYS OF YOUR LIFE.

WORDS BY **CHRIS CORFIELD.**



You've decided to learn the guitar. Congratulations! You've taken the first step on a journey that will provide you a lifetime of enjoyment. Providing you stick to it, that is. Which you should!

When you start anything new, be that a hobby or a job, there are bound to be questions you'll have about how things will pan out, and what you can expect. Here we'll pool together some thoughts we've had, and outline some of the things you can expect when you start learning the guitar.

1. PROGRESS WILL BE SLOW

Unless you're some kind of prodigious talent, the chances are that progress will be - at the start, at least - painfully slow. Painful being the operative word. More on that later. Put simply, there is no easy way to learn the guitar. There are no shortcuts. Not only that, if you find something which does appear to be a shortcut, there's every chance it will sow the seeds of poor technique which will hamper you later down the line.

The best advice here is to go easy on yourself. Allow yourself to be a bit rubbish at the start. Film yourself playing now, and then in a year's time record yourself again. You'll be surprised how quickly things do start to fall in place once you've got over the first few hurdles.

2. YOU WON'T SOUND LIKE YOUR HEROES

Maybe you've chosen the guitar because you like the sound of it. Or maybe some of your musical heroes were, or are, guitarists. If that's the case, great! Only you should be aware it will be a long, long time before you play at their level. There's an old theory that to master anything, you need to do it for 10,000 hours. A guitarist playing at the highest level will likely have lapped that particular number many times over, so keep that in mind. If the guitar was easy, everybody would play it right?

What you might find, however, is that as you progress you spend less time wanting to emulate your guitar heroes and more time trying to find your own style, sound and techniques. This, you'll find, is a much more fulfilling road in the long term.

3. YOUR FINGERS MIGHT HURT AT THE START

It's true, at the start at least you may experience some discomfort. Particularly if you are playing a

cheap acoustic guitar with strings that sit an inch from the fretboard. You've got two options here; get a new guitar that is easier to play or - our preferred one - battle through the pain.

If you choose the latter, you'll develop hardened fingertips that will make a mockery of puny guitar strings. As you progress, you'll also find these newly calloused fingers will mean you don't need to press down so hard on the strings too, making it quicker to move around the fretboard. Pain now, progress later.

4. IT IS NOT AN INEXPENSIVE HOBBY

Getting seriously into any hobby or pastime can prove costly eventually, but guitar-playing can be seriously wallet-draining. It's not just the guitars, either. Factor in amplifiers, pedals, accessories, more guitars, more effects, recording, and playing live, and you can see how it starts to add up. That's before you change musical direction completely in five years and need an entirely new rig.

It is possible - indeed, advisable - to be thrifty, at least at the start. While you might want to dive straight in with an American-made Fender Stratocaster, there's benefits to be had in working your way up to that level. As you progress with your playing, you'll upgrade your gear over time so that when you do unlock those top-tier items, you'll feel like you can fully get the most out of them. Basically, your first few guitars don't have to be the only guitars you ever own so don't fret too much about it. Pun intended.

5. THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PRACTISE

It's that old '10,000 hours' thing again. Unfortunately, it's true. The only way you will improve on the guitar is if you actually play the thing. A lot. That doesn't mean watching YouTube videos, or lusting over obscure pedals. No. If you want to get good, you need to put the hours in. That means nights sat with a metronome playing the same tricky lead lines over and over again until you get them right. And then playing them over and over again some more until you can't get them wrong. There's no secret to being a good guitarist. You'll get out of it whatever you put in.

6. YOU MIGHT START LISTENING TO MUSIC IN A DIFFERENT WAY

Interesting one, this. In the same way a car

mechanic might watch motorsport looking for different things than a regular fan, a musician tends to listen to music differently to someone who doesn't play. If you're a guitarist, that means examining the players' techniques, and looking at the equipment they use.

The benefit you'll get from all of this comes in the form of inspiration. You'll also develop the ability to critically listen to music, so instead of just asking "do I like this music", you'll start appraising the technical proficiency, and the production values, and the craft of writing memorable songs. Music will take on another level of detail, all of which will benefit you in the future.

7. BEING IN A BAND IS THE GREATEST FUN YOU'LL EVER HAVE

There are many reasons people take up the guitar, but whatever led you to the instrument, you can be sure one of the greatest rewards you'll get comes from playing in a band. For us, the simple act of getting a few friends and joining forces musically to play songs together is one of the purest forms of joy there is.

From having like-minded people to talk about your craft with, to that moment when you're all jamming and you stumble on a chord progression you all like. Playing solo is great, don't get us wrong, but that shared experience of playing with other people is a truly wonderful thing indeed.

8. A GUITAR IS A FRIEND FOR LIFE

Learning the guitar gives you many benefits. From developing a skill, to inspiring you creatively, to giving you common ground with other guitar fans; it's an amazing way to pass the time. It's a long-term venture too though. Put the hours in at the start, and you'll have a skill for life.

Your musical tastes might change, and the time you get to dedicate to it may dwindle as life takes hold, but nobody will ever be able to take away your ability to take that wooden machine with the shiny metal strings, plug it into a guitar amp and make it sing. And each and every time you do that, you'll be glad you did. Glad you spent all those hours learning pentatonic scales. Glad you tried all those weird and wonderful amp and pedal combinations. And glad you took those first baby steps. 



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