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BOSS DEBUTS ITS SYNTH-EQUIPPED FIRST GUITAR

Effects pedal and guitar amp specialist Boss has unveiled its first-ever electric guitar: the Eurus GS-1. Described by Boss president Yoshi Ikegami as a tool to "take your musical vision where it's never gone before," the elegantly styled six-string boasts an array of premium hardware appointments, as well as a series of onboard digital effects for added oomph.

The magic, of course, happens under the guitar's Gloss Black hood. A polyphonic synth engine offers a range of analog-flavored sounds that line up alongside the guitar's more conventional tonal capabilities. Of the intelligent new guitar, Ikegami said, "Guitarists are forever chasing their signature tone, exploring all types of guitars, pedals and amps to discover that magical combination that fuels fresh inspiration and makes them stand out from the crowd."

Words by Matt Owen.

GIBSON SET TO LAUNCH ITS OWN LABEL WITH A NEW SLASH ALBUM

It's official: Slash is working on a new album with Myles Kennedy & the Conspirators, which will be released by Gibson's brand-new record label, Gibson Records. The label aims to serve as a conduit through which Gibson's signature artists can produce, record and promote their music. The nascent label has also struck up a deal with BMG to distribute the as-yet-untitled forthcoming effort from Slash and co.

"Launching a record label that is in service to our artists is the natural evolution of our 127 years of history," Gibson brand president Cesar Gueikian said in a statement. "Gibson Records will work with Gibson artists to capture, record and promote their music under an artist-friendly partnership. Gibson Records will keep all of us at Gibson focused on our artist-first culture that is engaged and connected to music."

Words by Jackson Maxwell.

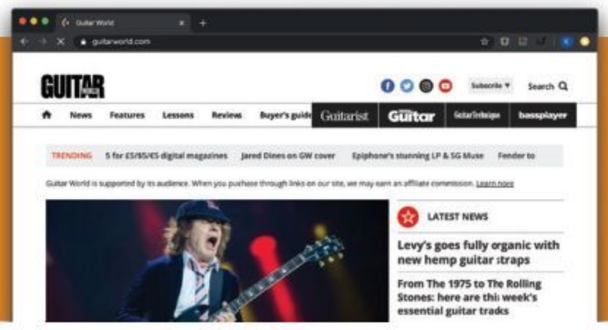
ELECTRO-HARMONIX TAPS INTO THE EARTH'S MAGNETIC ENERGY

Electro-Harmonix founder Mike Matthews wants to tap into the earth's magnetosphere in an effort to harness "a vast, continuously replenished source of energy". He's working with Robert Myer – best known as the designer of the Big Muff – to build a device that will help harvest the energy through "an oscillation that would begin in the magnetosphere, build, narrow down, then penetrate the ionosphere to be retrieved from almost a point source on Earth."

He puts out the call for partner organisations who can provide satellites in which they can house the equipment Myer has designed for building the required oscillation. "This would conceivably be an easier first step to getting the energy 1,000 miles up and provide many applications," Matthews said. "For example, spaceships launched from earth use most of their energy to get into orbit. With this energy, those spacecrafts can be refuelled. Additionally, there are numerous defence applications."

Words by Matt Parker.





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FUTURE

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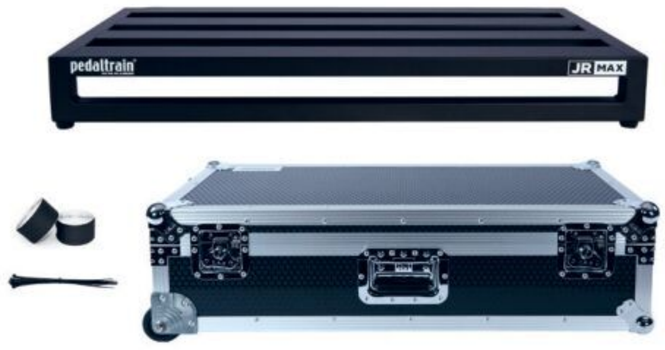
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ELLA & SIENNA

THEY ARE trailblazing youngins from the Adelaide Hills (aged 15 and 18, respectively) cranking out rivetingly impassioned slivers of sharp and summery folk. Acoustically inclined, the duo's performance wields a uniquely charged energy: the soundscape's core is always a dry, cleanly produced strum, fleshed out with crisp and thumping drums, subtle atmospherics and layered lead vocals jam-packed with character even in their most understated moments. Peter Noble, if you're reading this, get these girls on a Bluesfest lineup ASAP!

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Kasey Chambers, John Butler, and Missy Higgins.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Save Your Breath", an emphatic folk belter written in response to the ruinous bushfires that tore through the country in January of 2020. The sisters are also active on YouTube, where they regularly post live cuts and covers. We recommend checking out their takes on Redgum's "I Was Only 19" and Eminem's "Lose Yourself".



THE LAST MARTYR

THEY ARE a Melbourne-based quartet of metalcore maniacs with a keen ear for earwormish melodies, all tied together with Monica Strut's goosebump-inducing vocal runs tailor-made to soar over monolithic festival crowds. We'd believe it if you said axeman Ben Rogers was secretly a wizard – there's no way one man can fill a mix with fretwork so dextrous or destructive without the aide of magic. His riffs weaved enthrallingly around dark and driving basslines courtesy of Ricky Andes, the band reign with an infallibly potent chemistry.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Spiritbox, Halestorm and Make Them Suffer.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Hindsight", the band's first studio material to land since October '19. The lengthy wait paid off in spades, though, with The Last Martyr delivering some of the tightest, most punishingly powerful riffs we've heard all year. Especially given its world-class production, you'll need at least a dozen spins to fully appreciate every enchanting idiosyncrasy the band have laced this all-out rager with.



MUM FRIENDS

THEY ARE an Adelaidian pop-rock powerhouse wielding the perfect balance of wholesomeness and fury. With axe in hand, Katie Wright is a force to be reckoned with; her playing is punchy and prickly and delightfully intense, and the melodies she drives are so inescapably catchy, you could listen to their two tracks on repeat for hours at a time and not get bored. So too is bassist Mia Neale – she and Wright often sharing vocals – an absolutely stalwart player. We give it three years before they're the biggest live band in the country.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Cherry Glazerr, WAAX and Teenage Joans.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Woke F***boy", a scathing smackdown on sketchy dudes that feign progressive attitudes to prey on women. It is, naturally, an all-out stormer of a track, channeling palpably authentic and raw ferocity into a rousing and poignant – and explicitly timely – feminist anthem. Certainly one to crank the volume up for.



PORPOISE SPIT

THEY ARE a rockin' and rollin' four-piece from Melbourne whose intensely sharp and scintillating blend of strumming, shredding and storytelling made putting in this column one of the easiest calls we've ever had to make. They describe their sound as "equal parts rosé-rock and suburban punk-ballad" – and honestly, we couldn't have put it better ourselves.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Courtney Barnett, Midnight Oil and Joy Division.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Middle Of The Night", a cinematic scorcher that makes full use of every second in its tight and tempestuous five minutes. The focal point is certainly the track's mightily emotive, towering lead vocal (and rightfully so), but the polychromatic six-string interplay between Mill O'Sullivan and Elly Hewitt cannot be understated – especially in that breathtaking solo about three-and-a-half minutes in.



SESAME GIRL

THEY ARE a quadrant of Canberran dream-pop debonairs with songs as spirited as they are shadowy. There's a warbly, psych-esque bite to Yasmine Hosseini's tantalising leads, frontwoman Heather Duncan soaring over them with ambrosial vocals equally bold and buttery, and luscious rhythmic strumming that glues the whole mix together.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Soccer Mommy, Beach House and Julia Jacklin.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Get Up", our first taste of a debut EP set for release in the latter chunk of 2021, upon which (we're desperately hoping) the band will became a smash hit on festival stages everywhere. Per their Triple J Unearthed profile – which you should definitely go follow – Sesame Girl are inspired by the alt-rock greats of the '80s and '90s. That nostalgic flair is crystallised beautifully on "Get Up", with a slick of the glittery, melancholic radiance of acts like Mazzy Star and The Cure.



SNARK

THEY ARE the Melbourne-native mentees of Kisschasy frontman Darren Cordeaux, who follow boldly in the footsteps of those long-dissolved hitmakers, though with enough of their own snarling incandescence and zesty pop energy that it never feels like they're playing teacher's pet. The root of their sound lies in big, bold lead guitars and deep, driving basslines, Stefan Sepulveda's mighty lead vocals bouncing off them with striking finesse.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Kisschasy (duh), The Wonder Years and Placebo.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Pressure", a spine-ratting blast of calamitous, pseudo-nostalgic pop-punk with a hook stickier than caramel, and melodies just as sweet. If we weren't pining to get back into the pit before, we sure as hell are after a spin (or 12) of this absolute ripper. Ditto for their 2020 EP 'Imposter', meticulously crafted to make all hell break loose when Snark take to the stage like seagulls take to abandoned chips.



THE SPAGHETTI STAINS

THEY ARE a trio of Gippsland's finest surf-rockers who, despite having one of the dorkiest band names we've come across, sport a slate of wickedly tight and tireless tunes. Cuts like "No Wuckin' Fay" and "Trippin' At The Beach" lean wholeheartedly into the carefree, tongue-in-cheek blitheness their aesthetic teases, but there's also a wealth of sober emotion, poignancy and soul galvanised in their catalogue (see: "Summer" and "The Mountains").

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Spacey Jane, FIDLAR and Psychedelic Porn Crumpets.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS *Essential Ingredients,* a ten-track feast of feisty rock 'n' roll stuffed with sun-drenched spirit and jovial jammage. The record was fast-tracked with a 'Level Up' grant courtesy of Triple J Unearthed, and we're glad it was; there's a loose and lively rawness to the album – an unfalsifiable youthfulness – that likely would've bled out had it spent a few more years in gestation. It's a must-suss for any surf-, psych- or indie-rock fan.



THOSE WHO DREAM

THEY ARE Perthian brothers raised on a healthy diet of Fearless Records and Fueled By Ramen, hellbent on thrashing out bold and bombastic pop-punk anthems for a new generation of angsty teens. They're like Australia's answer to Waterparks, fusing influences spanning everything from Britney Spears to Nine Inch Nails with an impenetrable swagger and explosive indignation.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Waterparks, You Me At Six and Good Charlotte.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Bubblegum", which in just a shred over three minutes, paints Those Who Dream as the obvious choice to lead Australia's next wave of pop-rock revolutionaries. They also kicked the year off with the single "Tension Headache", which ended up going viral on TikTok and racking up over a million plays – and with its gnashing lead guitars, glitch-inflicted production and downright spicy beats, we can easily see why.



TOMORROW'S FORECAST

THEY ARE three resoundingly gifted high-schoolers from the Gold Coast who dole out jammy, animated indie-rock better than bands who've been in the scene for twice as long as they've been alive. Their sound shines with a breezy, leather-jacket cool that makes four minutes feel like a snap of the fingers. None of the band's members are old enough to drink, but their tracks feel perfectly suited to play in a hazy, dimly lit speakeasy.

THEY'RE FOR FANS OF Wolf Alice, Middle Kids and early San Cisco.

THEIR LATEST RELEASE IS "Room On My Shelf", a cruisy slow-burner that simmers and swells with rugged, reverb-slicked strumming, glassy plucks and bewitching strings, over which Olive McCagh's (goddamn angelic) lead vocal flows like custard over warm Christmas pudding. Last year's "Ur Baby" is also essential listening, thanks in no short part to its visceral and volcanic guitar solo.



YEN STRANGE

SHE IS an enigmatic alt-pop upstart from the rural town of Moruya, NSW. But although she comes from relatively lowkey origins, Annabelle Scobie's sound could not be more enormous, melding rich and dynamic guitars with shimmery atmospherics, crisp 808 beats and velvety synth leads. On her debut solo single "Donnie Darko" (Scobie also fronts the indie band Spit Chewy), she does a wondrous job exemplifying how the guitar can be used as a textural element, rather than what leads the track – it's subtle, but undeniably effective.

SHE'S FOR FANS OF PVRIS, Halsey and Billie Eilish.

HER LATEST RELEASE IS "Donnie Darko", a melancholic indie-pop bop with summery undertones and a emo-tinted hook that'll get stuck in your teeth like eggs to an old pan. Scobie's honeyed lead vocal gives the cut a drowsy, spectral edge – it's like the musical equivalent of a late-night drive down country roads drenched in fog. And it's phenomenal.


Photo: Tonje Thilesen

ELLA WILLIAMS

HAILS FROM BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS USA
PLAYS SOLO (AS SQUIRREL FLOWER)
SOUNDS LIKE POWERFULLY EMOTIVE, DRIVING FOLK
LATEST DROP *PLANET (I)* (LP OUT NOW VIA POLYVINYL)

What's your current go-to guitar?
I've been playing acoustic a lot more in my free time, and my go to is my Gibson Robert Johnson. It was the first guitar I ever bought for myself after saving up for three years, working at a bakery throughout high school. I walked into a shop in Massachusetts and saw it – I was first drawn to the colour, and as I tried it out I knew it was the guitar for me. It was so gentle but also resonant, the neck was so comfortable, and overall it just felt so full of character and dynamics. It also smells delicious, like vanilla wood or something.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
The first time I played guitar I was 14. My dad had an old Yamaha that was really busted, and one day in November I just picked it up and learned my favourite song by ear. I think it was a Bon Iver song. After that, I kept the guitar in my bedroom, and every night after school I'd play it for hours instead of doing my homework. My parents had actually bought me a mini electric guitar when I was nine, and my dad was going to teach me how to play, but I was too stubborn and lazy so I dropped it.

What inspires you as a player?
I owe my influences to everything, because I literally learned how to play guitar by learning songs by my favourite musicians as a teenager. Laura Marling, Joni Mitchell, Grouper – I think something all three of them have in common is their tendency to play in alternate tunings. To this day, I play mostly in open tunings – although with this new album I tried to experiment with standard tunings a bit more. I think the way I play now is a bit of a mix of the folky fingerpicking of Laura and Joni, and the ambient minimalism of Grouper. I'm also really influenced by heavier stuff like Pavement, Guided By Voices, and the looping beauty of Moses Sumney's playing.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I would say I'm a gear nerd in that I've found what works for me and I stick to it. I'm super picky, but also most of what I use, I use because I've just always used it, or it was a cheap option, or I just came across it, or I was gifted it. My main pedals are the Fulltone OCD and Source Audio Soundblox 2 Dimension Reverb. My main amp is a Fender Blues Junior, which is f***ing great because it's not super heavy and still sounds amazing. I think I've been able to develop a really unique sound with just a few simple bits.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
I'd really love any sort of vintage Rickenbacker.

What would your signature model look like?
It would be light, probably a short-neck, probably red, with humbuckers.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...
It would probably be Adrianne Lenker. We'd do a lot of improvising – I love what happens when two people sit down and play music together with no expectations, rules or restrictions. Improvising with someone else usually just feels like a musical conversation.


Photo: Jameel Majam

SAM SHEUMACK

HAILS FROM SYDNEY, NSW
PLAYS IN FANGZ
SOUNDS LIKE RIP-ROARING PUNK WITH HOOKS FOR DAYS
LATEST DROP "PROVE ME WRONG" (SINGLE OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

What's your current go-to guitar?
It'd have to be a tie between my white Duesenberg Starplayer TV and my Duesenberg Caribou. The Starplayer sustains for days, plays amazingly, oozes sex appeal, and looks great no matter what colour Adidas Tracksuit I wear on stage. The story behind the Caribou is a funny one. Jameel [Majam, bass] and I were driving to play a show in Adelaide, and if you've never done the drive before, there's some enormous canola fields along the way.

I decided to strip off naked with the Starplayer and get a photo rocking out in the field. The photo went somewhat viral, and shortly after I was in contact with Duesenberg's A&R rep. I've been endorsing their guitars since. The Caribou has been my go-to recording guitar since the conception of Fangz. I swapped the pickups out with Lollar P90's early on and never looked back.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
I was about 13, in year eight at high school. I was also heavily into cricket and skateboarding at the time, but realised soon after that it's a lot harder to break bones playing guitar, so the guitar became my main focus. My first guitar was an Ashton AG140 electric bought from River Music in Windsor. I've still got it somewhere. It was a heavy-as-hell, natural finished Strat-style guitar, and served me well through my early years of trying to play Metallica and System Of A Down songs terribly!

What inspires you as a player?
Guitarists like Tony Iommi, Dean Richardson, Josh Homme and Pat Davern have probably been the biggest influences on my sound. Early on in our career as Fangz, somebody reviewed one of our shows and described it as "a punk band trying to play Black Sabbath." I think that's an accurate depiction. Another huge influence that inspires me more than anything is going out and seeing some local bands at a pub nearby. Australia has so much great punk and heavy music coming out right now.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I definitely used to be a lot more of a gear nerd. These days if we were to leave the house for a recording session, I'd make sure I'm walking out the door with my Klon KTR Overdrive, Deep Trip Hellbender fuzz, 1965 Fender Bassman head, and one of my Eventide H9s.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
I'd absolutely love to get my hands on another vintage Fender Bassman – ideally a blonde 1962 with matching cab, or a 1959 tweed combo. While we're there, let's grab an original Klon Centaur. How dad rock am I right now?

What would your signature model look like?
I love the look of the new Duesenberg Falken, they're kind of like a dapper, modern Gibson Firebird. I love the Duesenberg trem, so that must be there. It'd have to be vintage white or black, I'd have some Lollar P90s in it, and I guess three stripes somewhere as a subtle Adidas reference.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...
Frank Zappa for sure. He's one of those unique artists who still is ahead of his time, even having died almost three decades ago. I grew up listening to my parents' Zappa records, and I've always been amazed by his approach to composition – and completely whacked phrasing. Furthermore, he was always one of the most spontaneous and exciting guitarists whilst improvising. I'd love to jam with him on his tune "Zoot Allures".


Photo: Daniel Hildebrand

SASKA BRITTAIN

HAILS FROM PERTH, WA
PLAYS IN DULCIE
SOUNDS LIKE BOLD, PSEUDO-BLUESY POP BELTERS
LATEST DROP *SAKE OF SOUND* (EP OUT NOW VIA LAPIS LAZULI)

What's your current go-to guitar?
My go-to guitar is definitely my surf green, California-made Fender Telecaster. This is one of three electrics I have and by far my favourite. My Tele gives off a warm, rich and bright sound, which I absolutely adore and think perfectly fits Dulcie's style and sound. I received this guitar as a birthday present from my mum and dad – best present ever! I am very thankful.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
I always knew I wanted to be a musician. From a very young age I'd watch the boyband Hanson and pretend I was one of them rocking out onstage. I cut my hair and would wear Dad's baggy clothes and jump around the room, just to have a glimpse of how it would feel to be playing live. I can still remember the feeling when my parents got me my first guitar – I was around the age of four. It was a very tiny nylon-string acoustic that I still have hanging on my wall to this very day. I would practice everyday in my room for hours on end, until my fingers were sore.

What inspires you as a player?
Growing up I've had many musical influences that in some way, shape or form have shaped how I play today. I absolutely adored the Red Hot Chili Peppers' guitarist, John Frusciante, the ladies from Heart, The Eagles, Neil Diamond, Fleetwood Mac, the Foo Fighters, and of course, every teenage girl's musical crush, Taylor Swift.

Recently I've been getting into different bands like Holy Holy, Ocean Alley, The Brian Jonestown Massacre, Donovan and Tame Impala. Even though all of these artists are so diverse in sound, I feel as though they all give me the exact same feeling: the feeling of determination and excitement. I also think that having diversity in what I listen to really helps with writing different guitar parts.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
Although I love the instrument to pieces, I've never really been interested in that side of it. I think this is because I only picked up my first electric when Dulcie started around two years ago. I knew nothing about pedals or electrics, what sounded nice and what didn't – so in the past few years, I've been trying my best to learn from muso mates and YouTube. Currently I only know the standards and basics of how my Tele and pedals work. It's only in the past year that I have decided to use pedals, and oh my gosh, they have been life changing! I use five pedals, my favourites being the Hall Of Fame reverb and my Soul Food drive.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
One day I'd love to get myself a brand new Fender Stratocaster! I've played a few Strats at shows, and the sound has always been so great – I think the sound of a Strat would really suit my playing style! I'd also like to do some more research and add some more pedals to my collection.

What would your signature model look like?
My dream guitar at this stage would definitely have to be a Fender Telecaster! I'm imagining a rustic orange and cream Tele with a matte finish, maybe a little pearl on the neck and frets. I wear lots of oranges and browns, so I think if I got a guitar to match my clothing style it would be epic.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...
If I could jam with any guitarist in the world, I'd jam with Nancy Wilson from Heart. That band was a massive inspiration to me growing up. Watching Nancy play "Crazy On You" blew my mind as a child – she was a great realisation that ladies can play instruments like a boss!


Photo: Taryn Segal

WALLICE WATANABE

HAILS FROM LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA USA
PLAYS SOLO (MONOMOUSLY)
SOUNDS LIKE HONEY-SWEET, TWEE INDIE-POP
LATEST DROP *OFF THE RAILS* (EP OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

What's your current go-to guitar?
My current go-to and only electric guitar I have is my Fender Stratocaster Eric Johnson Signature in vintage white. I absolutely love how it's semi-hollow and lightweight. I also love the way Strats play, and I got mine set up and it's so perfect for me to play. I really just love everything about it and it's also so cute.

How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?
My first guitar was a super entry-level black Squier Strat. My dad put me in some of those neighbourhood rock school vibe classes, and I learned "Put Your Records On" by Corrine Bailey Rae because that's what the teacher's favourite song, but I've always liked playing "Creep".

What inspires you as a player?
My favorite guitar player is Adrienne Lenker of Big Thief, but I simply cannot play as well as her yet. She experiments with different tunings and finger picking. My boyfriend Callaghan is also an amazing Jazz guitarist and teacher, and he has been giving me lessons, so hopefully I can get to Lenker's level one day.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
Slowly I am becoming slightly more of a gear nerd. I got my first big boy amp which is a Fender Deluxe reverb tone master, and I am so happy with it and its relatively lightweight so I can carry it around. The classic Tonemaster is too heavy for my scrawny arms. My friends are annoyed with how much I talk about how lightweight it is at this point. I also have been beefing up my guitar pedals more recently with a Big Muff and a new tuning pedal, but I have a list I'm slowly checking off.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
My friend sent me a picture of this vintage bass amp that was at a repair shop that was custom designed, and the face of the amp had cow print. I hadn't realized that was what I'm missing from my life until I saw it. I want to customize my band's amps to be like that. I also really want a telecaster and a POG pedal.

What would your signature model look like?
Currently I would like a Telecaster. I want it to be a matcha green color with a natural light wood neck, and gold and vintage white accents. It would be sick to design my own guitar. When it comes to electronics I'm not that knowledgeable yet, so as long as it sounds good then it's good with me.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...
I want to jam with Adrienne Lenker, but there's no way I could handle the heat. I'd be enamored and just listen to her play. I'd want to play some Big Thief songs with her, or hear how she sounds playing and singing Bossa nova because I haven't heard her do that and I'm curious.

ag TOP PICK



TURNSTILE

Glow On

ROADRUNNER / WARNER



Virtually anyone could whip themselves up a decent burrito, but it takes a true master of the culinary arts to make a *great* burrito. It's not just about all those ingredients snuggled up under a soft tortilla, but their quality, their source, how they're seasoned and prepared; the intermingling of textures and collision of flavours. When treated with the right care and cogitation, a concept so simple can become something so life-affirmingly beautiful.

In this analogy, the burrito is hardcore punk, and our culinary maestro is Baltimore outfit Turnstile. The band have always tackled their slate of scream 'n' shred with an outsider's perspective, spicing up their palate with summery grooves and kinetic percussion. But on LP3, it's like they've finally cracked the code to making an infallibly calamitous, uncompromisingly headstrong hardcore album sound genuinely *otherworldly*.

Glow On is cinematic, riveting and rhapsodic; the sheer depth and dynamism of its musicality cannot be understated, nor Turnstile's passion in sculpting it. It's a notably short record at 35 minutes, but they really make every second count. "Endless", for example, clocks in a few seconds off two minutes long, yet it takes it the listener on a full-fat adventure through a sonic forest of shimmery bass, effects-soaked vocals and a tearing breakdown.

Even ornamental quips like the empyrean synth intro on "Mystery" and the regal grand piano lick on "Fly Again" have their place, adding contextual basis to tracks like the silky, groove-oriented "Underwater Boi" and the hazy, stoner-friendly "Alien Love Call". Then because the funky, Prince-esque energy at play on the former let us know as much could be expected, the equally biting and breezy "New Heart Design" feels homely and natural, no matter how odd its composition may sound in description (it is at once raw, gritty and eruptive, romantic, groovy, sparse and fantastical).

For the more traditional hardcore fans that just wanna cut sick to some gloriously gory riffs and wall-rattling fills, don't worry – Turnstile still have you covered. Sharp and snarling cuts like "Holiday" and "Humanoid / Shake It Up" dot the record's top-end, while the sequent belters "Wild Wrld" and "Dance-Off" (not to mention what may just be the definitive Turnstile track, "T.L.C.") inject its second half with a blast of mosh-tailored intensity.

Again, Turnstile have always been innovators. They're one of the most interesting bands on the circuit – not even just in hardcore – but *Glow On* makes their previous efforts look embarrassing in comparison. This is the kind of record that makes us feel justified in spending $500 on a pair of headphones; a true masterclass in the art of heavy music. Come 2030, we'll be looking back on it as the record that sparked a whole new wave of rebellious genre-bending.

WORDS: MATT DORIA

ALICE SKYE

I Feel Better But I Don't Feel Good

BAD APPLES / UNIVERSAL



Equally pensive and punchy, Alice Skye's second LP is nothing short of breathtaking. Ebbing and flowing between deep, simmering melancholy and bright, captivating dreaminess, the Wergaia stalwart simply refuses to hold back; she's crafted a record perfect for those long, introspective late-night road trips. Guitars on the record are subtle and understated, but strikingly impactful when they do lead the fray – take for example the gravelly, distorted leads on "Everything Is Great" or the shimmery, '70s-channeling strums on "Grand Ideas". Less really *is* more throughout; the bold, attention-grabbing solo on "Browser History" feels so because it's underscored by a simple, cantering beat, Skye's warm, honeyed ruminations so easy to melt into on either side of it.

BLEACHERS

Take The Sadness Out Of Saturday Night

RCA / SONY



Though perhaps not as grandiose or eccentric as its predecessors, LP3 is certainly more ambitious, sprawling and considered. The instrumentation is downright luscious, with dazzling horns and delicate strings dancing over meticulous outlines of glassy keys and acoustic twiddling. The Springsteen cameo on "Chinatown" marks an early highlight – and it's well-earned, as his influence can be felt at many points throughout of the all-around cinematic, emotive and nostalgic affair. Although of course it's the big and bold pop belters that shine the brightest (see: "How Dare You Want More", "Stop Making This Hurt"), heartrending slow-burners like the silky "Secret Life" and smoky "Strange Behaviour" add to the record a wealth of depth and character.

THE BRONX

Bronx VI

COOKING VINYL



Perfectly suited for a particularly erratic time, *Bronx VI* is heavy, hard-hitting and headstrong. It's a step backwards in the band's sonic evolution – *Bronx V* stood out for its tasteful shift into a more summery, groove-inflected Britrock flavour, whereas *Bronx VI* is mostly cut-and-dried, no-frills punk – but that's not to say it isn't a wondrously well-crafted record. It's a rabid and unrelenting love letter to fans of the first three Bronx LPs; the riffs are venomous, the chugs walloping and the solos soaring, and the screams lacquered over them are enthralling and impassioned. Best is how it crystallises all the meteoric might and inimitable fury of the band's live show – especially so via the breakneck-paced intensity of "Breaking News" and the frenetic, fist-pumping grunt of "Curb Feelers".

COURTNEY BARNETT

Things Take Time, Take Time

MILK! / REMOTE CONTROL

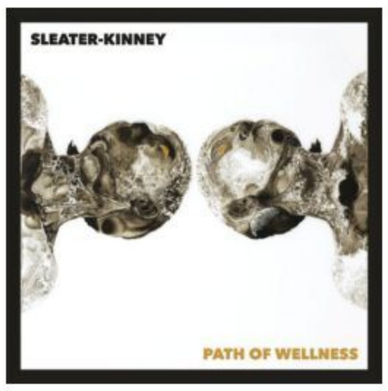


CB's 2015 debut was brisk, bright and lively, like a summer's day at the beach. Its follow-up was sharp, ripping and acerbic, like the storm that night. So, naturally, LP3 feels like the morning after: foggy and humid, debris from the wind scattered over the lawn. It's clear Barnett is much more comfortable in her storytelling these days – the songs are reflective, inspired, and distinctly *human*. Production is loose and experimental; percussive clicks and pops meld with raw, cerebral fretwork. The soundscape is overall very sparse and relaxed, letting tracks like the drowsy, pseudo-celestial "Here's The Thing" and the groovy, buoyant and punchy (if far too short) "Take It Day By Day" really shine. Though certainly not as immediate or memorable as Barnett's earlier work, *Things Take Time* is beautiful and brilliant in many ways.

SLEATER-KINNEY

Path Of Wellness

MILK! / REMOTE CONTROL



Fans of their grittier, more punk-centric work may be soured by the glossy production and stylistic quirkiness, but with a radiant, self-assured energy and a strikingly colourful palate of tones at their disposal, Sleater-Kinney knock it out of the park on album #10. Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker bounce off each other with dazzling aplomb, their interplay tight, twined and tantalising. Their playing here is the cleanest and most deliberate it's ever been, yet it still hits with a powerful impact. It's the riskiest tracks that stand out most: the cool, cantering "Method", the funky and frenetic "Favorite Neighbor", and the slick, solo-lacquered "Down The Line". More than anything, *Path Of Wellness* is inescapably catchy; head-bopping is non-negotiable.

WILLOW

Lately I Feel Everything

MSFTS / ROC NATION / POLYDOR



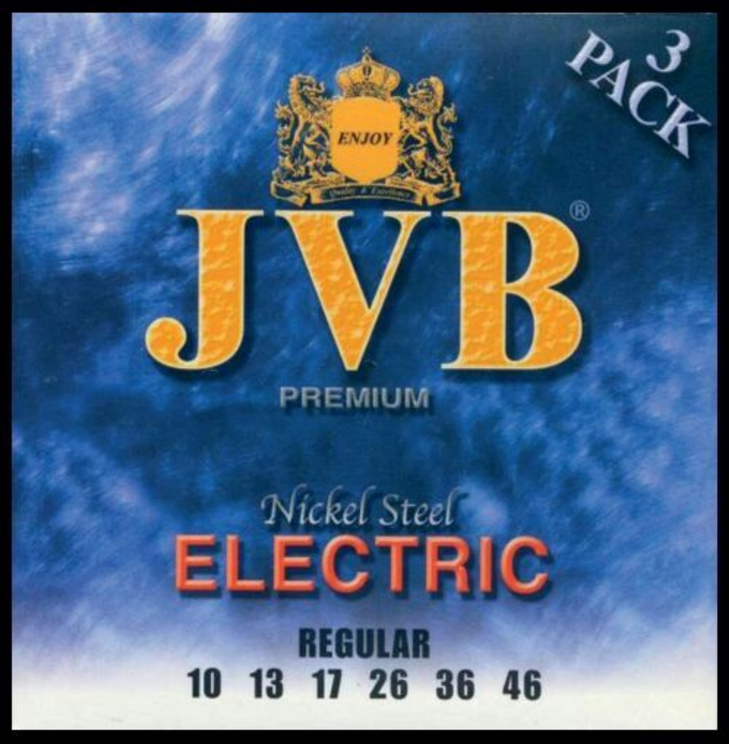
For the most of us, early adulthood is marked by its trickiness and turbulence. Willow encapsulates that perfectly on LP4, taking listeners on a sharp and stormy (and notably swift, at 26 minutes) rollercoaster ride through the euphoric ups and perilous downs of one's coming of age, projected through a scuffed and stained lens of soulful indie-rock, scuzzy grunge and explosive pop-punk. Willow's equally strained and silvery vocal carries the record, but its the vicious electric guitars – snarling, loose and slathered in distortion – that glue everything together. Highlights bookend the LP in the catchy and kinetic "Transparent Soul" and the one-two punch of riotous, sass-drenched energy in "Grow" and "Breakout", the journey between bold, biting, and all-around bewitching.

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AND THE CRADLE WILL ROCK...

HIS FATHER WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST GUITARISTS WHO EVER LIVED, AND NOW **WOLFGANG VAN HALEN** IS CARRYING THAT FAMOUS NAME FORWARD. IN THIS REVEALING INTERVIEW, HE DISCUSSES THE CREATION OF HIS NEW ALBUM, *MAMMOTH WVH*, ON WHICH HE PLAYED EVERYTHING. INCLUDING **EDDIE**'S ICONIC FRANKENSTEIN.

WORDS BY **JONNY SCARAMANGA**. PHOTO BY **BRYAN BEASLEY**.

Wolfgang Van Halen's solo debut began in 2015 when Eddie told *Guitar World*: "It's like AC/DC meets Van Halen meets aggressive pop... It's so powerful that I'm jealous." The project had to wait, as Wolf fulfilled his commitments as bassist in Van Halen and Tremonti, as well as drummer for Sevendust's Clint Lowery.

But following the devastating loss of Eddie on October 6th, 2020, Wolf released the tribute single "Distance". A moving video featuring childhood footage of Wolfgang with Eddie quickly racked up four million views, and the song debuted at #1 on the Billboard Rock chart.

With the album completed, Wolf told Twitter, "It's important I forge my own path." But that doesn't mean distancing himself from his father. His band name and album title, Mammoth WVH, is a nod to Van Halen's original moniker, and album opener "Mr. Ed" features a tapping lick to make any EVH fan grin. But on the preview singles, Wolf shows his own identity – whether it's the bruising slow groove of "You're To Blame" or the stomping shuffle on "Don't Back Down".

Speaking to us from his home in California, Wolf explains how he put the album together and reflects on how his father's influence has shaped him as a musician.

How do you feel about all the reaction there's been to *Mammoth WVH* so far?

I really didn't see it winning this many people over so soon, or at all, really. I just made the record for me. For it to resonate with a bunch of people has been really awesome.

It must be so hard performing "Distance" on TV when it's such an emotional tribute to your dad.

Yeah, performing it is a whole different thing. That was very difficult. In terms of releasing it, it just seemed like the right thing to do. I'd been working on my music for so long, and with somebody as important as that in my life not being around anymore, it just seemed right. It certainly wasn't the first song I was planning on releasing. It's a bit to the left of the core sound of the album, but I think it fits still.

It seemed the right thing to get that out there as a tribute for Pop and have it all go to his favourite [music education] charity, Mr. Holland's Opus. There was no ill intent behind it, that's for sure. I know there are some people who are like, "He's just using this," but I love my dad and I just wanted to show everybody. A bunch of Van Halen fans were like, "This was the closure I needed." You can relate the song to any type of loss anyone has ever experienced, so the comments on the video are beautiful and heartbreaking, like, "I just lost my dad and I heard the song on the radio and it really touched me." I didn't expect it to resonate with so many people.

The album has quite a few easter eggs for fans. Is the ending to "Don't Back Down" a quote from Van Halen's "So This Is Love"?

Yeah, except Dad does the little kink with the pick on the strings, and I do a little phaser pick slide. That's definitely the vibe I was going for. I'm surprised at how quickly people caught that. It's the same thing with the back cover of the album, people were like, "Oh my god, it's arranged like the first Van Halen album!" I didn't think people would notice that the second they saw it. They're kind of winks and nods. There's nothing bigger behind it.

You're not hiding from the Van Halen connection.

I'm just not milking off the legacy. I'm sure that's up for debate for some people that hate me, but I'm being myself. I'm not sitting there doing covers of "Panama" and going, "If you want Van Halen, come to me!" If you want Van Halen, go over there.

I was surprised to hear you tapping straight out of the gate on "Mr. Ed".

That's actually why I called it "Mr. Ed". That was the demo title because at the beginning of the riff I do a little harmonic tap. Then I just liked that name so much that I kept it.

There's a video online where Paul Gilbert says you've got "world-class vibrato, just like your dad." On this album your vibrato is nothing like Eddie's. What were your influences there?

Nothing in particular. I kind of just do it. I don't really have anything in mind while I'm doing it. I'm sure there's plenty of things that influenced me into doing it, but nothing actively in my mind. I never sat there and went, "I'm not going to sound like Van Halen." I'm going to make music I want to hear.

What were the main guitars you played on the album? There's a Fender Starcaster in the "Don't Back Down" video.

Yeah, I never tracked with a Starcaster, I just thought it just would be fun to have. I recorded a lot with the Gibson ES-335 that I play in the video. I have a black [EVH] Wolfgang Custom that was kind of all over it. It was such a free-for-all, really, that it's kind of hard to remember everything, but mostly it was that 335 and the black Wolfgang.

Did you play any of your dad's gear?

Yeah, a handful. I played the original Frankenstein on the solo on "Mammoth" and on "Feel".

What was that like?

You feel the history. It's kind of terrifying holding it, just because arguably it is the most famous guitar in musical history. It's definitely quite the thing to hold it. When we were pulling it out of its safe, Dad picked it up and he was just noodling with it for a second. He's like, "Yeah, feels about the same," and he tossed it onto the couch. Everyone just gasped when he did that. To Dad it's just a little piece of junk he built himself, but to us it's the most famous thing in the world.

What amps did you use?

That was probably the one area that we made a collective effort to not replicate Pop. We did use a bunch of 5150s mostly, but there were also Marshalls – a red early '70s 100-watt Superlead and a '72 Superlead metal-panel 1959 model. All the Marshall heads were modified with extra gain stages. We used a lot of cabinet variations, with Celestion G12H-30s, G12M-25s and G12-EVHs just to contrast the sound.

How about pedals?

If we ever used a pedal it was for an overdub or we plugged in for a certain moment. On "Don't Back Down" we did use a Foxx Tone Machine fuzz, but I can't think of any others.

What are your favourite guitar parts?

I used a talk box on the solo for "You'll Be The One". When we were tracking all the guitar solos, Elvis was like, "I got a talk box, you want to fit it somewhere?" It was fun to do but it was really tough because my nose kept exhaling too much so you couldn't really hear it. I had to tape my nose just for the tracking of it.

You've Tweeted that "Think It Over" is one of your favourite songs.

It's also Dad's favourite. It's definitely one of the poppier songs on the album. I thought it was important to show where the sound could go. My dad always said something I loved. He always called the solo my George Harrison solo: nothing flashy but perfect for the melody supporting the song. ag

MYLES AHEAD

MYLES KENNEDY IS BEST KNOWN AS A SINGER, FOR BOTH **ALTER BRIDGE** AND **GUNS N' ROSES** LEGEND **SLASH**. BUT ON HIS NEW SOLO ALBUM, HE'S TAKING THE SPOTLIGHT AS A GUITARIST.

WORDS BY **JONNY SCARAMANGA**.

He's one of the great rock voices of this generation, but Myles Kennedy sees himself primarily as a guitarist. With Slash and the Conspirators, he rarely picks up a guitar, leaving those duties to the Cat in the Hat himself, and to rhythm guitarist Frank Sidoris. Meanwhile, in Alter Bridge, Myles takes a decidedly secondary guitar role to Mark Tremonti.

But on his new solo album, *The Ides Of March*, Myles shows himself to be a gifted and versatile lead guitarist, firing off aggressive solos and memorable slide parts – as well as nods to his guitar hero, country legend Danny Gatton. He tells us about the crossover between playing guitar and singing, and his enviable vintage gear collection.

How was making this record different from working with Alter Bridge or Slash?

When I make a solo record I want it to truly be a solo record. I don't really collaborate with other songwriters or anything. You come up with a part and think, "Okay, is this any good? Should I spend hours and days or even months trying to watch it grow?" There were a few songs that definitely didn't make the record, where I listened to the demo like, "Well, that was a waste of time!" Which is the worst feeling in the world.

Was this one a challenge to make during the pandemic?

Well, with [2018's] *Year Of The Tiger*, the demos were essentially the acoustic guitar part and the vocal to give you all an idea of what the song is, and then we'll build the arrangement when we get in the studio together. With this, there wasn't any way we could get together, so I'd program the drums and play all the instruments, then present it to Elvis [producer Michael 'Elvis' Baskette] and Zia [Uddin, drums] and Tim [Tournier, bass]. It was extremely time consuming. Instead of making demos in a few days, it was six months of refining this stuff. That was great though because then when by the time we were in the studio we were just essentially trying to up the demos from a sonic standpoint.

What gear did you use?

The main guitars were a were my 1958 Gibson 335 which has those early PAFs, and then a Telecaster I call The Imposter, which has parts from a '52 Tele. When I bought it, I thought it was kind of a hodgepodge. The neck looks like it's from the '60s, but it sounds really good. We think the pickup is original. There's something about it that almost doesn't sound like a regular Fender single coil, it's almost like a P-90. Apparently Doug Fieger, the singer from The Knack, used to own it, so that's a little bit of history. It's a great guitar.

And what else did you use?

A lot of acoustic was done with a '65 Gibson J-50, my 1945 Martin 000-21, and my Gibson Banner J-45 from 1944. The slide parts were done on a '54 Fender lap steel. As far as amps go, a 1958 Fender Deluxe with the 5E3 circuit sound, that was very important. Then we used one of Elvis', I think it was a Marshall 1974 combo which really complemented the Fender. Amplified Nation makes a really great head that we used for the lap steel, that just has Dumble qualities. I think we used the Diezel Schmidt here and there, which is like an AC30 on steroids.



So most of the gear was older than anyone making the record.

Yeah, absolutely! With Alter Bridge it's all contemporary stuff, but this kind of record just needed those vintage tones.

Did you consciously try to make it sound different from your other bands?

I try to be aware of that. There were times, especially with the song "Ides Of March" where that could fit in in an Alter Bridge context if you treated the guitars a certain way. I remember Elvis saying, "What do you think if I turn the gain up a little bit?" I was like, "Let's hold off on that." Because if we keep it more organic, I feel like we're staying out of the Alter Bridge lane a little more.

Were you plugging the guitars straight into the amps?

We did use some pedals. The 5E3 circuits on those old Fender amps don't take pedals very well. I committed an absolute cardinal sin and I had my amp tech friend actually change one of the capacitors to allow it to take pedals. I've still got the cap, so we'll put it back, but I really felt like there were certain pedals that would work well and just push it just enough to create the sound I was hearing in my head. There was a Klon [Centaur] clone, a Fulltone Fulldrive we used on a lot of the record. I had never used one before but I just fell in love with it. The midrange did exactly what I needed it to do, especially with the leads.

You're known as the second best guitarist in two bands. How do you feel about that?

That's funny! I grew up on that on that tradition where you had the singer and then the attention shifted to a guitar player, so I'm cool with that. It got to the point where people who knew me as a guitar player kept saying, "When are you going to stop screwing around? You have a whole skill set that most people don't even know." Even Tremonti said to me once, "It's a shame, because I see all the time you've put into developing something and it just sits dormant." Solo records are just a chance to let that out and enjoy it, because there's very little that I enjoy as much as playing lead guitar. Singing is wonderful, but there's something very cathartic and zen about playing lead guitar.

Does being a singer influence how you approach your lead playing?

It definitely does. I come from more of the David Gilmour school of guitar playing, where it's all about the melody. It's about being able to sing it. I'm not into just cramming as many ideas into a 16-bar middle section as possible. There's a reason why in "Comfortably Numb" the guitar solo is every bit as important as the actual melody of the vocal, because it's so melodic it just transcends.

And do you vocalise what you're gonna play on the guitar?

If you had a mic on me when I'm tracking solos you would probably hear me singing what I'm playing as I'm going. I think that was from watching George Benson as a kid, and a piano player named Oscar Peterson. He's a jazz piano player, kind of a shredder. He was just so technical and so fast in that realm, but he would sing it all, which I thought was cool. It wasn't just like running a scale. That guy is hearing every single note he's playing. I always thought that was really badass. ag

ANGST FOR THE NEW GENERATION

NOWHERE GENERATION, THE NINTH ALBUM FROM CHICAGO PUNK MAINSTAYS **RISE AGAINST**, COMES AT A PARTICULARLY TOUCHY TIME IN THE WESTERN WORLD'S SOCIOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE – PARTICULARLY FOR ITS YOUNGER FOLK. BUT AS FRONTMAN **TIM MCILRATH** TELLS US, THAT'S EXACTLY THE POINT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **WYATT TROLL**.

As far as political punk bands go, the overwhelming trend seems to be that you either die an anarchist hero, or live long enough to see yourself become the villain that writes an album of pissweak, money-grabbing love songs. There are exceptions to the rule, of course – like Rise Against, whose ninth effort, *Nowhere Generation*, just so happens to be one of their most punchy, powerful and poignant to date. And it couldn't possibly have come at a more imperative time in our history.

Because let's face it: this is Gen Z's world now, and we're all living (and trying to wrap our heads around all the increasingly confusing technology) in it. As the age-old adage says, "the kids are the future" – and those kids need some fierce and fiery punk-rock to get them in the fascist-bashing spirit! All the old problems are new again: corrupt politicians, rampant queerphobia, state-sanctioned racism, climate change – shit, now we've got a global pandemic to wrangle, too!

So... Where does the music fit into that? How can three chords and a yell make any actual, *tangible* change in the world? That's one of the questions we posed to Rise Against frontman Tim McIlrath. And as it turns out, the answer is a lot more complicated than "kid hears song, song resonates with kid, kid changes the world". Because at its core, punk is a form of art, and art is resoundingly multifaceted even in its simplest forms. So let's take a look at how this piece of it aims to start a revolution.



I wanted to start by pointing to a line from the press release, where you say: "Our hope on this record is to jostle people awake, even it if makes you uncomfortable." How exactly does that work? How do you channel a battlecry into three-and-a-half minutes?

Therein lies the challenge, right? And you've got to make a catchy, too! As a lyricist, I try to paint a picture, tell a story and create an image that will stick with people – catch your attention. And then if I have your attention, maybe I can get this sugar-coated, bitter pill down. And maybe there'll be some message in there that speaks to you – if not on the first listen, then maybe on the second or third, or something like that. That's what it was like with literature for me: when I first read *1984*, it was just a sci-fi book. I was a 12-year-old kid, I didn't realise there were any political implications, or that George Orwell was inspired by a lot of different things. I think a Rise Against tune is a very similar thing.

I think it's telling that Rise Against not only still exist in the present day, but you still have such heavy-hitting themes 3 touch on and important messages to spread. What's the force that drives you? Is it your creativity as a songwriter, or is it that the world keeps burning, and there's still so much work do be done before anything gets fixed?

I always like to say that being in Rise Against is easy, because the world keeps creating an audience for our music. The world keeps creating people that are really frustrated. They have a lot of fears and anxieties about tomorrow, and they're looking for their music to reflect their questions. And I think that's important, too, because they're not looking for people to tell them the answers, or to claim they have the answers – and I'm not going to sit here and tell you that a Rise Against record has any answers to any of the world's problems. But they're at least looking for the music – the art they engage in – to be a mirror to what's going on in their own head. And that's the beauty of music: you write a song, and then maybe it connects with somebody. And then they feel like they're less alone.

What's your philosophy behind using tone as a way to tell a story independent from the lyrics? Do you see the sound as integral as what you're trying to say with a song?

Yeah, I do. And that goes back to the sugar-coated, bitter pill bit. At face value, we're just a band – we have instruments, we play guitars and bass and drums; we're creating three-chord songs and trying to get them on the radio. But then, deep down, we're people who grew up in the punk and hardcore world, where there's always been a message and the music has always been a vehicle for that message. And that vehicle is super important.

I think that the reason that I'm still here talking to you, and people are still talking about Rise Against, is because we've created this vehicle that has somehow navigated the trends of the last 20 years. And part of that is taking that vehicle seriously, using all of the tools in our belt to make that vehicle something dynamic. That's where something like an acoustic song comes in: we realised early on with our song "Swing Life Away" that we can do that and still be us. We can turn everything down – or off, even – and create a song that is still authentic to who we are.

That's the freeing thing about music: even the most formulaic band in the world can have a risky move pay off if it comes from a place of authenticity.

It is freeing – especially going in to our ninth album. There's a lot of freedom going into a ninth album, y'know? Going into our first record, no-one knew what Rise Against was. We didn't even know what it was! It's funny: our first album [2001's The Unraveling] just hit its 20th anniversary, and I found a bunch of old reviews for it. And they were interesting to me for nostalgic reasons, but they were also interesting because it was the last time you could read a review about Rise Against as a new band. It was before we had all the baggage of opinions.

Now people who are in our world, they already have an opinion – good or bad – of who we are. You have something you think about when you think about us. And so going into your ninth album, because everybody already has those opinions, I feel like we have lot of freedom to just be like, "We're going to do whatever we want." That's what makes me interested in a band's later albums. If you're listening to a band's tenth or 11th or 12th album, you're listening to a group of people who really don't give a f***.

What guitars were you shredding out on in the studio for this one?

I'm still a Gibson guy, through and through. I'm playing the Martin as an acoustic – for songs like "Forfeit", I have a D-35. My main guitar is a '68 SG reissue. My first guitar was actually an '84 SG – I got that in '93 as a kid, for like, 400 bucks. I just pulled it out of storage and had it redone, and I'm loving it. It was one of those things where it's like... It's been beat to shit. Honestly, I don't know if it's worth anything, but it became the most special guitar to me. I'm not a very material person – If something happened to any of my other guitars, I would get over it. But if something happened to that guitar, I feel like it would break my heart.

We still use the EverTune bridge on a couple of our guitars. As a working band, it's made things a lot easier. Technology doesn't really do anything to impress me, but when it makes me a more creative person, I'm all for it. Because if have more time to play instead of tuning, when I'm in the studio, I'm trying more things. You want to think you're going to try stuff regardless, but when you're on your 12th hour of tracking something, you're done trying shit. You're like, "Dude, let's just get this and go home. I'm over it." So I think of the EverTune as a really effective creative tool.

JET AGE JAMMING

AHEAD OF THEIR TOUR CELEBRATING 2000'S *JET AGE* THIS SEPTEMBER, **THE SUPERJESUS** RIFFER **JASON SLACK** GIVES US AN EXCLUSIVE TEASE OF THE HOMEMADE GUITAR HE'LL BE PLAYING ON IT, AND THE STORY OF HOW HE MADE HIS DIY DREAMS COME TRUE.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

When the beloved Adelaidian alt-rockers in The Superjesus head out on the (belated) 20th anniversary tour for their cracking debut, *Jet Age*, you might notice that lead guitarist Jason Slack – who joined the band a year after *Jet Age* hit shelves – is playing on a rather unique piece of kit. Before the 12-date run kicks off in September, Slack is building a bespoke, one-of-a-kind guitar themed around the LP, and he'll take it for its first spin onstage when The Superjesus play *Jet Age* in full.

After the tour, Slack will bid his *Jet Age* axe farewell. Don't worry, it's not being destroyed or anything – after it's signed by the whole band, Slack will auction the piece off to one lucky Superjesus diehard, with a portion of the proceeds being donated to the Cure Brain Cancer Foundation. Slack's father – who helped the lil' ragamuffin build his first guitar at age 15 – recently passed away from Glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer. In addition to celebrating The Superjesus' monolithic breakthrough album, the guitar is a loving tribute to him.

It's not the only guitar Slack has in the works, however – at the moment, he tells *Australian Guitar*, he's chipping away at two unique Tele-esque designs, a DC Junior type, a Superstrat, and a hybrid Jazzmaster/Mustang mash-up sure to drop jaws. And that's just what he's got in the pipeline to hone his chops. Though he's always had a knack for the DIY side of things, Slack only recently decided to dive headfirst into the world of lutherie.

Between the pandemic, a fractured marriage, and the simple decision that it was time to do something new, Slack is finally living out his dream life as both a guitarist and a guitar-maker, all of his own volition. No rules, no bosses, no limitations – the sky is the limit; the world is his humbucker.

Australian Guitar jumped on a video chat with Slack to chat about his origins, endeavours and ambitions as a home-set luthier. And though we unfortunately can't show you any of what he's working on right now, we assure you that what little we did catch a glimpse of looks goddamn wicked!

Of course, every great story starts with an origin – what can you tell us about your first endeavour into lutherie?

Okay so, I went to a place on Poultney Street to meet Warrant. It was a meet and greet, which was really exciting for me as a young kid. And unfortunately my guitar got stolen; I had a Cort guitar – y'know, my first sort of half-decent electric guitar – and it was stolen out of my dad's car. I had some friends lend me guitars for a while, and then because my dad was a carpenter, I asked him to get me some wood and we built a body together. I traced around an Ibanez RG Series guitar, and we went from there. And y'know, we had no experience and we used all the wrong tools, so some things took a really long time to do – like the sanding job, that was pretty gnarly... Man, it looked awful – but we got there in the end!

Do you still have that guitar?

I actually do! It's around here somewhere! I've got so many guitars, it's crazy [*laughs*].

So you taught yourself how to service your own guitars, with a little wisdom from people like Andrew White and (the late) Pep Belcaro. What was it like for you, learning all the intricacies of the guitar by getting your hands dirty?

Well for me, it was a case of having many guitars that it was becoming really expensive to get all of them serviced. A good fret job was about $400 a pop, so it was just getting out of control. So I bought some stuff from StewMac, this luthier supply shop overseas, and just started doing my own setups. I had a rough idea of what to do, but Pep actually worked at Fretco, and we used to teach together at the same school. He was in the room next to me, and I would always talk shop with him. He was really helpful and generous with his knowledge – it was great getting to know him.

The first thing I did was buy a bench, and that was a big milestone for me. And then I started doing my first fret job, and that was when I started asking a lot more questions. It was on my Gibson Goldtop, and it was quite a bad job – I remember Pep said, "Yeah, that's what we call a double-decker bus – it's quite flat." But Y'know, there are always mistakes to make on the journey.

What can you tell us about the first chunk of your pandemic experience, when you were really starting to dive down the guitar-building rabbithole?

Well I guess the first thing was time – I had lots of time. My marriage had also split at this point, so I had even more time because of that. Y'know, I just wanted to keep occupied. I just sort of went headfirst into it – I had no real plan from the start, I just wanted to make a guitar. I've always been a fan of Dan Erlewine, and I'm always watching guys like Steve Salvi, from Salvi Fine Instruments here in Adelaide – he's really great at doing up old guitars and restoring stuff.

But Dan Earlywine – those books were amazing. I've got this book called Guitar Player Repair Guide, and that's like the bible for guitar makers; if you're going to get started, that's what you should buy. So then I downloaded a bunch of plans from the internet, put them all together in Adobe Acrobat and print all out all the different sheets, then sticky-taped them all together – it was a mess, right? But anyway, I got them all together, and built my first DC Cutaway, like a Les Paul Junior.

I actually used that guitar at a Superjesus gig over in Queensland, at the Spring Loaded festival. It's got a bit of an S shape on that scratchplate so it's a bit unique, it's got my own little design that just says 'JS' and kind of looks a little bit like the Twisted Sister logo, and it's not bad for a first guitar, y'know? It actually plays really well – it's super comfortable, it's really light... I love it! I wound the pickups myself, too.

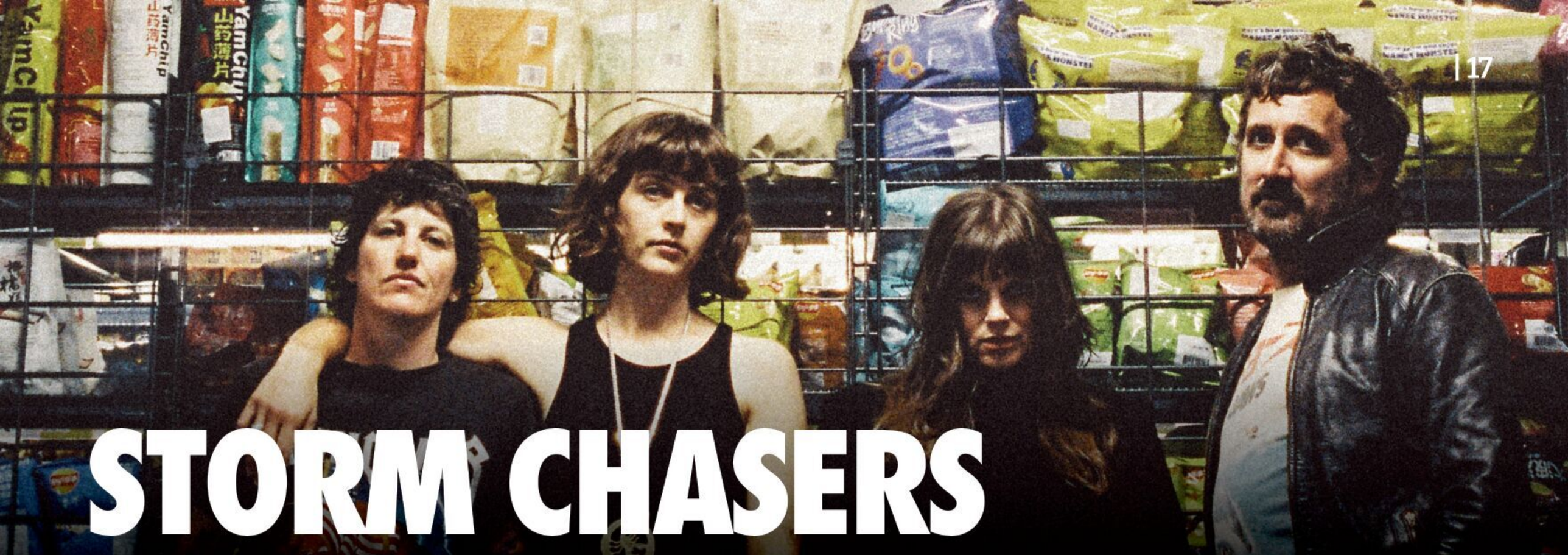
I'm really excited to see the *Jet Age* guitar that you're building for the anniversary tour. What kind of specs are we looking at?

I actually just finished the neck! I was working on the fret inlays today and yesterday, and they're all in the shape of different jets. They're concords, and they're made of actual aluminium. And the shape at the end of the headstock has this pointy bit that looks a little bit like a concord as well. So that's the vibe, and then it's going to be silver so it matches the colour of the album cover. I'm going to get some metallic silver and metallic blue in there – I haven't decided whether it's going to be racing stripes or some sort of burst from, say, metallic blue into metallic silver, or something like that. We're getting there!

What are we thinking tech-wise?

I'm going to wind my own pickups again for this one. Not super hot – I don't like really hot pickups. I like my clarity, so less winds; humbuckers all the way with this one. And I don't know if I'm going to split any of them yet. And then it'll definitely have two volume pots, and maybe one master tone. ag





STORM CHASERS

TROPICAL F* STORM** ARE BACK WITH ANOTHER ALBUM EQUALLY POWERFUL AND POLARISING. FRONTMAN **GARETH LIDDIARD** EXPLAINS WHY HE FEELS THE INESCAPABLE NEED TO EXPOSE THE DANGERS OF CONSPIRACY CULTURE, HOW HE OVERCAME A GNARLY CASE OF G.A.F.F. (GIVE A F*** FATIGUE) AND WHY THE ANALOGUE FAD SHOULD F*** RIGHT OFF. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

So it kind of goes without saying that none of you reading this came here for commentary on the Coronavirus pandemic. This is a guitar magazine – you came here to escape the world *outside* these glossy, artistically laid-out pages. And why wouldn't you? The world is pretty *f***ed* right now.

But therein lies the power of music: it can be an escape from the horrors of the real world, but it can also be a tool to help one navigate those horrors. By highlighting and pondering on, critiquing and appropriating those horrors, they can become easier to digest. Such is what makes the cerebral, polarising grit of Tropical F*** Storm so endearing – they're here to hold our hand throughout the apocalypse.

On album number three – the snarky and acerbic, yet simultaneously warm and saccharine *Deep States* – the band mine the throes of sociopolitical panic, environmental disarray and, yes, the pandemic we're *still* wading arse-deep through, trying to make sense of it all via blunt, furious energy, jazzy experimentalism and plenty of spine-ratting six-string chaos.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about *Deep States* is that even exists. For the first six months of the pandemic's eruption last year, ringleader Gareth Liddiard found himself in a notably perilous slump. He dubbed it G.A.F.F – give a f*** fatigue – the symptoms of which became the basis for one of the LP's standout tracks. In this interview, Liddiard tells us how he managed to overcome his bout of G.A.F.F, why it's impossible to escape the political slant of TFS' records, and why everyone rolls their eyes at you when you swear you can tell the difference between analogue and digital tones.

So before this album came to be, you had your own case of G.A.F.F. to deal with. What pulled you out of that?

I don't know. The first six months were kind of just a funk caused by not having any concrete plans. I think it was just necessity. Y'know, sooner or later we were going to *have* to make a new album, because sooner or later things are going to open back up and we'll have to start touring again. But I can't remember the exact thing that pulled me back into it. Things eventually came to the point where we *could* do it – where we could get together and make some music.

For a band like Tropical F* Storm, which is very politically and socially keyed-in, right now really is the best time for you to put a record out. Did you find that when you started writing songs again, you had plenty of creative inspiration to mine from, given everything going on?**

You've always gotta kind of try to seek it out. But once you start doing that, you realise there's plenty out there. I mean, with all the QAnon stuff... It's just weird that no-one else even mentions that shit. I just find it bizarre. Like, what the f*** is everybody doing? People go, "Oh, you're a political band," and it's like, okay, to a degree that's true, but at the same time, you've the Trump thing and the QAnon thing – everyone's into conspiracy theories and everyone trolls each other on the Internet – and that shit is so in-your-face, I'm just surprised there aren't more artists making anything more than a passing mention of it.

I don't know what the f*** other bands are even thinking about – it's like they're living on a different planet. There's a guy that runs a stall at the markets near where I live, and he had [far-right dogwhistle] Pepe The Frog drawn on his little blackboard. It's like, "F***ing hell, dude!" That shit is everywhere, and everyone just wants to pretend it just doesn't exist.

I think a lot of people have the mentality that if they ignore something, it doesn't exist. Ignorance is bliss.

People are probably worried about getting called out for shit themselves. I mean, *anything* is controversial these days, and people are so paranoid that they're going to be called out and shut down that they'd rather just shy away from anything remotely political or controversial. If you mention Nazis in a song these days, you run the risk of having some moron misconstruing you for being an actual Nazi. People are all shit-scared of each other – it's like *1984* or Nazi Germany where everyone is dobbing each other in.

For however avant-garde or unconventional it does sway, *Deep States* is probably the most refined TFS record thus far. Was there a deliberate intention to lean this album closer to your pop-centric inclinations, or did it just happen naturally?

You kind of go through phases, and phases are sometimes bigger than nine songs, or however many songs are on a standard record. I think we've been going through a phase that's about 20 or 30 songs long; it's been like an arc, I guess. And we've just refined that particular phase – that ark – on this third album.

I think that sort of TFS sound so far, we've gotten good at it. We've toured a lot, we've learned to play with each other and we all know what page we're each on – we're in a really comfy zone, in that sense – so now that we've reached this peak with the pop phase [on *Deep States*], I think we'll put a full stop on that. The next record will be another completely bizarre, experimental thing, and it'll become new again. So now we have to figure out what that thing is. So that would be why it seems a bit more refined, because we've grown into our shoes.

I can just imagine how mental a TFS jam sesh would be. How much of your creative process is just throwing shit at the wall and seeing what sticks?

I mean, sometimes we jam in the studio – y'know, the kind of 'classic' idea of a jam – but then sometimes it's all done in the computer, where we kind of just f*** with everything and edit it, and it's more like making a movie. You're always trying to figure out what [a song] is going to be – and that's as much fun as doing it live in the room as well. If you're in the room all the time, you tend to just come up with the same old shit, more or less, because it's the physical world – meatspace – and there's only so much you can do there. So we do a bit of everything, really.

What's your stance on the 'analogue vs. digital' argument?

[*Sighs*] when someone says they like tape or they like tubes, or they like transformers or whatever, they're basically just saying they like distortion. And by that, I don't mean a f***ing Boss Metal Zone pedal, I mean natural distortion. But the plugins nowadays – FabFilter stuff or Waves stuff – there's a lot of really cool saturation and distortion plugins that you can just run over everything and get what you love most about tape or tubes. I think people that think they prefer analogue – people that think they know analogue, and they can spot something that's analogue over something that's digital – I think they're full of shit.

I bought a new Line 6 Helix pedal, which models all of the distortion pedals I have, and it sounds exactly the f***ing same as the real ones! And they're better, because the ones in the Line 6 pedal have more EQ options. Digital has gotten so good that it can emulate the real pedals perfectly – and why wouldn't it be able to emulate what some little LED or transistor does? It's not rocket science.

Analogue is shit... Well, it's not shit, but it's definitely not worth it. You buy a tape machine and you spend half your life maintaining it and paying for it. I'd rather spend half my life maintaining and paying for busted harddrives and computers.

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RIGHT ON TIME

AFTER NINE YEARS (THAT FELT MORE LIKE 90), PSYCH-ROCK POWERHOUSE **CHILDREN COLLIDE** HAVE FINALLY MINTED THEIR FOURTH ALBUM – A FURIOUSLY FUN, RIVETINGLY RAUCOUS AFFAIR. WE RIFF WITH SINGER/SIX-STRINGER JOHNNY MACKAY ON HOW *TIME ITSELF* CAME TO BE. WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Though nine years have passed between drinks, Children Collide sound just as punchy, fun, and authentic as they did in their early days. After making waves with their 2012 record, *Monument*, the band split off explored other avenues; for ringleader Johnny Mackay, that meant shipping himself off to States and starting out from scratch, playing dives to bar staff and opening back-of-the-field festival stages all over again – this time with a new band called Fascinator.

Mackay loved the experience, but at a certain point in his overseas adventures, he realised the ideas piling up were more suited to Children Collide than anything else. So he reconvened with founding drummer Ryan Caesar, recruited new bassist Chelsea Wheatley, and got the wheels rolling once more. Less than a year after the band's new form was galvanised, they minted what might just be their best record yet: the sharp and spry, scorching hot *Time Itself*.

We sat down with Mackay to vibe on how the album's looseness came from the authenticity of the attitude they approached it with, and why old-school gear was essential in bringing it all together.

Was it always the plan to do that run of comeback shows in 2019, then jump straight into the studio and slam out a record?

The album was actually recorded at the end of 2019 – August, September, around then. The idea started forming towards the end of 2018 – Ryan and I had been talking about it for a few years, throwing the idea around. Jodie, our manager, was like, "You should do that, I'll get behind it." Then we started making plans. Ryan came up to Sydney when I was there, and we started writing. Then we ended up in upstate New York doing pre-production, then went to Queens to make the record, and now here we are. It wasn't really planned out, either – that's just how it happened. I don't think we're smart enough to sit down and be like, "This is the plan and these are the songs and this is how it's going to be popular."

What was that experience like, recording over in the States?

I'd been living there since 2012. I was with a friend of mine that I'd already done some recordings with – he helped me out with a bit of stuff on the Fascinator record, then I made another record with him that I haven't put out yet. So it was familiar for me, in a way – but then bringing Ryan in and doing this whole Children Collide thing, it was something else entirely. Because this band was like my real baptism into music, so bringing that to this whole other world I'd built in New York... It was actually really nice to bring it all together, and it's amazing how it all fit in together so well.

Did it feel a full-circle moment for you, bringing your old life into your new life?

Yeah, because what's weird is that I moved there thinking Children Collide would just keep going. It wasn't like, "This band's over, I'm leaving!" It was two years into living there that I was like, "Oh, I think the band's over" – it became apparent that it was over, at least. But it didn't *feel* over to me, because I still had the songs that we'd written, or that I'd written, that hadn't made it onto a record. And I'd been writing in that two-year period as well.

So when Ryan started coming over, we'd obviously been estranged, but we made friends again in New York – he brought his band Pearls over, and we were hanging out and being mates again.

How has the creative dynamic in Children Collide grown over the nine years since *Monument* came out?

Well, Heath is out for this one – we've got our friend Chelsea playing bass. He gave us his blessing. He's busy on the Central Coast running a store now. But the dynamic is amazing, actually. I think for Ryan to go away and do his own thing and front a band like Pearls – a band that's arguably had more success than Children Collide, anyway – and then me doing Fascinator as well, that all played into it.

I definitely had less success with Fascinator than I did with Children Collide. I've spent plenty of shows playing to two people with that band – and loving it. I think both of us brought some newfound humility to [Children Collide], and with that comes creativity. It's all about making what you love. There's no weird reason behind any creative decision other than, "Oh, we like this song. We like this part and we want to make a song like this, and we want to have this feeling on stage."

So heading into this new album, was there an MO, or was it just a case of racking up spontaneous ideas over time?

A bit of both. I think we've never really been good at planning a record out to the T. We weren't thinking about making an album for 2020, or what was going on around us in the music scene. I think one thing that could count as an MO was us asking: "How did the band feel at the start? What was it about that energy that we loved?" We tried to bring that feel to it. It was this raw, kind of rocky unpredictability and spontaneity, that I think we lost a little bit once things started to pick up for us. We started playing with a backing track towards the end – and I think that was cool to experiment with, but it's not what we are. We're a three-piece band that sometimes f***s up and makes things up on the spot.

What kind of guitars were you jamming out on in the studio for this record?

I do remember using a lot of '60s Jags and stuff like that. I own a '63 Jag that I used a bunch on the album. There's recording secrets I'm not supposed to tell, but look, this is a guitar magazine, so I'll tell you. Here's the secret: we use the acoustic guitar to do a lot of the heavy distortion. I think a lot of bands like The Breeders use that technique. We used that a bit, and that really made things sound great.

I think the other thing was that we used a lot of older gear. I think some of the bands that have that '90s thing going on right now, they'll use gear from the '90s onwards – but I don't think that's what '90s bands had to use. They had gear from before that. So we tried to make a record the way a lot of bands from that era would've done it. We weren't using Trace Elliots or anything, we were using old, shitty, tiny Fender amps. Tight lows, one amp...

What is it you find so alluring about old-school tech, as opposed to emulating classic sounds by virtue of technology?

I'm not against that style of production. I think it's all about your ear. I think it's all about whether you think it sounds good. I use a pad in Fascinator, and I love it. I used to use that same pad in Children Collide. The idea with this record, though, was thinking: "How do we feel like those bands we love from the '90s? How do we make it feel like Sonic Youth and Fugazi and The Jesus Lizard?" We were thinking about where they got their sound from and who they were listening to.

I think it would've been that late '60s and early '70s kind of rock – early Sabbath, early Stooges, when music was still... Is it psychedelic? We don't even know what punk is. But we were thinking about that era of music. I still think you can make an amazing sound with a shitty digital plugin or whatever, as long as you like it. I'm not a purist – I don't thing we have to record on tape and do all of that kind of stuff; but on this record, we did. ag

SCREAMING LOUDER THAN EVER

WITH 30 YEARS OF PRACTISE, WISDOM, AND HARD-AS-NAILS ROCKIN' UNDER THEIR BELTS, **THE SCREAMING JETS** HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR LANDMARK 1991 DEBUT, *ALL FOR ONE,* TO CELEBRATE IT WITH A NEW VISION. THE END RESULT IS A BOLDER, BRIGHTER AND ALL-AROUND BETTER VERSION OF THEIR CLASSIC LP, ABOUT WHICH *AUSTRALIAN GUITAR* CHATS WITH AXEMAN **SCOTT KINGMAN**.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **KANE HIBBERD**.

The year was 1991: the Adelaide Crows made their explosive debut in the AFL, *The Simpsons* had just begun to poison the morals of our youth, and heavy-hitting, floor-thumping pub-rock still ruled Australian stages with an iron fist (clenching, of course, an ice-cold schooner). And of the bands wreaking havoc in that scene, The Screaming Jets were impenetrable – they rocked hard, the rolled fast, and on their messiest nights, the energy was authentic and infectious.

Such energy was immortalised that April when their debut full-length, *All For One*, hit – and then subsequently flew off – shelves. Thanks in no short part to the clashing, calamitous shredding of players Richard Lara and Grant Walmsley, the record shone with all the might and meatiness of AC/DC and The Angels, with its own distinctly bright, earwormish flair.

Lara and Walmsley left the band in '93 and '07, respectively, paving the way for Jimi 'The Human' Hocking and Scott Kingman to keep the searing spirit and riotous riffage of The Screaming Jets alive. In their hands, the fretwork on *All For One* sounds even more eruptive, tighter and more turbulent – while keeping true to the original, they've reinvigorated it with their own uniquely rocking touches.

To celebrate the LP's 30th anniversary, the new and improved Screaming Jets endeavoured to whip up a new and improved version of *All For One*. COVID-19 meant the band were unable to link up in person, however, so they each recorded their parts from home, tasking Kingman and Steve James (the '91 record's OG producer) to surgically fuse it all together. You'd never be able to tell, though – the new mix is downright enthralling, breathing new life into a record that, in all honesty, didn't need it, but undoubtedly benefits greatly from it.

As Kingman tells *Australian Guitar*, there were a few key reasons why the Jets were able to work such mind-melting magic – it all comes down to authenticity, passion, and a ferocious DIY energy.

How does it feel to be looking back on this record today, three whole decades later?

I mean, it's fantastic to see that the music still stands up. And it does – certainly for all of us in the band, at least. We've really enjoyed re-recording it. I, of course, wasn't on the original recording, so I can't take full credit for the original album – or any credit, in fact – but having played the material now for almost 15 years, it feels very much a part of my world. It was a great experience to relive it all and breathe into it a bit of what we'd developed over the last 10 to 15 years of playing. But y'know, [*All For One*] still stands on its own as a great record, a great mix, and a great time in the landscape of Australian rock.

What were some of the things you'd learned that you wanted to bring to the album?

I think it's important to remember that, y'know, you could make a record on one day, then make the same record the next day and have it sound completely different. So if you insert 30 years between those two recordings, it's inevitable that you're going to bring something different to it. I think the true test of time lies in the quality of the song.

There was obviously a very collaborative process that existed back in those days, with regards to studio engineers, producers, techs, mastering engineers, artwork departments, A&R, publicity... There was a massive team of people that would go into making a record, and that has very much changed. So there was a grassroots, kind of home-built version of this record that we knocked up during a period of time in which we couldn't even get into a studio if we'd wanted to.

I guess you've gotta take into account all these elements that go into making the record, because they're always going to have an impact on how it sounds in the end. The original album is still such a beautiful piece of work for what it is, so our plan was just to try and bring a new spin on that – y'know, we never tried to improve on it.

The production on this redux sounds absolutely phenomenal. What was it like getting Steve James back in the mix?

We're very blessed to have had the experience of playing these songs so much over the years. I guess you could call that pre-production – we had 30 years of pre-production! So in that respect, a lot of that work had kind of been done. And y'know, most of us are savvy in regards to home recording; I've been a Pro Tools user for many, many years – in fact, that's how I hooked up with the band, producing one of their later records.



I did very much help with that process, delivering the sessions to everyone and then combining all the individual recordings into one big session, which we then went on to sent to Steve. It was kind of an interesting process on the production side, because of course we had to think very differently. But I guess that's what you do when you're forced to lock down – you don't look at all the things you can't do, you just try to discover a means of getting the job done. And no doubt, that will continue into our next recordings.

I think that speaks to the spirit of rock 'n' roll before the advent of technology – you've gotta make do with what you've got.

It would seem that way! It's certainly a different result than we would've had if we'd all been in the one room, and that absolutely is a process that I really enjoy – and to be honest, miss. But that will no doubt come about again. You've just gotta get creative, and you've gotta find a new angle on things. It can be done with today's technology, there's no doubt about that. It's all a means to an end, y'know? And if you've got that, you can always find a way to get it done. It's a strange time in the world, but y'know, I always walk offstage after a gig saying, "Well, there's another one they can't take away from us!"

I guess my mentality throughout this whole pandemic has been to not let the situation take away what it is that we feel connected to – which is, y'know, playing in a band, playing music, performing... But it needs to be said that the performance side of it really is just one element of it, y'know? It's this creative, collaborative, rock 'n' roll, being-in-a-band kind of thing that brings it all together, and I'll be f***ed if I'm going to let a pandemic take that away from us!

So what did the guitarsenal look like?

Strangely enough, I spent a lot of this time during lockdown filling my time building amplifiers. I had a couple of really great mates, like Warwicke Newman – who's a great stage and amp tech in his own right – and then a local fellow here in Melbourne, Jason Tong, who's got a company called Headfirst Amplification. He builds these beautiful PCBs that enabled me to build my dream JCM800s. The JCM800 was very much a part of that original recording – that big, beautiful Marshall tone is a signature on that album – so I was hellbent on building an amp that would enable me to do that from home. I did have a JCM800 back in the day, but I've been using Fender DeVilles live for the last five or six years, and I really wanted to capture that Marshall tone. So I spent a lot of my time throughout this lockdown period building amps.

In the way of guitars, I mostly used my Les Paul Goldtop, which is a staple for me, and a Junior made for me by Andy Allen at Maton. I even pulled a Tele out – I actually made that myself in the first couple months of last year's lockdown! So I had a very home-built tone, aside from the Goldtop, which I've had since 2000. I love this whole 'build your own' situation that we seem to have been forced into. It's another means of staying sane. That's how I'm getting through the pandemic – I'm building shit! ag

WELCOME (BACK) TO THE JUNGLE

ON THE BRISK AND BUBBLY NEW ALBUM FROM **THE JUNGLE GIANTS**, THE GUITAR PLAYS A VERY *INTERESTING* ROLE. FRONTMAN **SAM HALES** EXPLAINS EXACTLY WHAT THAT IS, AND WHY THE PANDEMIC ACTUALLY ALLOWED HIM TO SIGH A BREATH OF RELIEF.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Despite its inception being marked by isolation, insularity and introspection, *Love Signs* – the pastel-tinged fourth album by indie-pop superstars The Jungle Giants – is distinctly extroverted. It's a cinematic, scintillating ode to human connection, spun through a web of prickly, crystalline synths, snappy percussion, and all-over glossy, sugary production.

"But Matt," you shout! "Isn't this *Australian Guitar?* How did a story about a dance-pop record like this end up here!?" Okay, don't flip the page just yet – yes, the guitars on Love Signs are subtle, and in the case of some tracks altogether indiscernible. But the guitar is still a critical element in The Jungle Giants' repertoire – after all, the band's got two, count 'em, *two*, guitarists – and it was certainly critical in the album's creation.

As frontman Sam Hales explains it, the new record marked his first foray into the world of unassisted production, allowing him to explore far beyond the boundaries imposed on the soundscapes of his previous output. Every new idea came with an opportunity to experiment – with new sounds, new techniques, new styles... There was nobody there to tell him something shouldn't, let alone couldn't, be done.

That meant the guitar become more than *just* a guitar. Because the instrument is actually *everywhere* in *Love Signs* – it's just used in ways that makes it sound like anything except what we've come to know as "the sound of a guitar". It can be a bit of a polarising listen, if what you're expecting is the same incarnation of The Jungle Giants heard on 2015's *Speakerzoid*. But for those willing to open their minds and indulge in something a little more 'out there', *Love Signs* has a lot to offer.

Now, let's catch up with Hales and learn just how he brought this crazy lil' monster to life.

I was reading about how that first lockdown actually came at a pretty good time for you, because it meant you were able to fully knuckle down on songwriting.

It was a bit weird. When I'm recording, I'm a real focussed, kind of regimented person. I have a little routine that I stick by, so it's never an issue getting things done. One of the bigger benefits was that no touring came up, and over the last couple of years, that's really gotten in the way of me wanting to record and write without distraction. So when all the touring stopped, I was just like, "Woah, I can actually finish the record now!" Because when I was looking at my schedule for 2020, it was ridiculous.

My manager was like, "Okay, you've got this giant run of touring, and then we'll put the record out." And I was just like, "Dude, I don't know if there's any time to record." We tallied it up, and in the entire year, there was only three-and-a-half weeks where we had nothing going on. I was just so stressed out. And then when everything [with COVID] happened, I was just like, *"Oh my God."* It was like a sigh of relief. I mean, it was sad and weird, but it was definitely productive. So now I can reap the benefits of that, because I've finally got an album to listen to!

Were there any goals you wanted to hit, or was the operative just to make as many bangers as you could?

I definitely had some goals. I kind of wanted to go the opposite way of it all being just bangers. I wanted them all to have appeal, but I focussed on something different this time, rather than just that 'poppability' or, y'know, radio vibe. I wanted to build an album that felt really unique in and of itself, where all the songs were super connected, and they were dance-y, and they all had an overarching message.

I guess in my head I wanted to make a record where if you played one song, it sounded like it was *definitely* from that album. I think



I'd attempted that before, but I don't think I'd ever really nailed it. So with this record, I spent a bit more time getting it done. I'd been writing and recording in these little bouts over the last couple of years, and every now and then, a song would come through and I'd get really excited about it. I'd be like, "Okay, boom. That's at the top of the list now, and songs kind of have to sound like that." And then as I kept adding songs to this list, the album got a bit more complex, and it was all really sticking together.

I wanted that kind of fluidity to exist with this album. I wanted it all to flow together, and I wanted it to be self-referential. Once I was able to get, like, seven tracks together, I really felt like I had the direction and the energy of the record done. It was kind of fun at that point – I remember saying to friends, "I know what I'm doing now!" Y'know, it had finally kind of clicked.

Did it feel like you'd built up this sort of musical world you were then free to explore?

Yeah, exactly. And I felt like once I had a couple of songs going, this momentum kind of built up. I had a lot more confidence – some of the songs were really sassy, they were almost from a character's perspective. They were really lovey, really positive tracks, but they had a lot of sass to them. I had this newfound confidence, so it was a bit easier to keep going in that direction, to really follow through with what I was shooting for.

This is easily the most non-guitar-y record you've made, but did you still have the guitar with you in the writing process?

I did, yeah! This time I used a lot more piano, and my writing process changed a lot. With previous records, I would kind of sit with the guitar and use that as my crutch, but this is the first record where I played everything myself, so a big part of that process was starting off with the piano or the guitar, and then getting really deep into the session in Logic and building the track from there. It definitely became more of a production-driven process.

There was one sound that really stuck this record together – I've kind of hidden, really hard-panned to the right and really hard-panned to the left, these super thin guitars getting played into one of those tiny little micro-amps; y'know those little battery-powered things? That's just for a bit of attack and a bit of high-end. All the bass sounds are really heavy, maybe from a Minilogue or an M1, and then really quietly, there's these little thin guitar tracks over them.

When I found that sound, I was like, "Okay, cool, that's the whole record right there." So there's less guitar, yes, but the guitar is used more cleverly.

You're using the guitar as a tool to give the track colour or character, rather than just drive the song.

Exactly, yeah. And this time around, I wanted to be more mindful about what was actually in the track. I wanted a bit more control over what was going into the tracks so I could make everything sound good. So I locked a bit more of my focus onto what was happening – and if it is happening, for what reason. How can I make it sound good? I guess it was more that I was producing properly for the first time.

How do you see these songs translating to the stage in that full-band setup?

It's a funny thing because for like 50 percent of the record, I'm not playing guitar. I've kind of written myself out of an instrument for a bunch of the songs, but I really love that because like I was saying, a lot of these songs have a lot of sass to them, so I've found that I'm dancing a lot more when we play them. I'm kind of finding my feet onstage, and I don't really need something in my hands anymore. I used to rely on the guitar to get me through a show, but now I like to sass around and do a little strut. And then I feel more thankful when I do get the guitar back in my hands.

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IT'S ALL IN THE FEELING



STOCKHOLM-BASED SONGWRITER **ANNA LEONE** OPENS UP ON TACKLING STAGE FRIGHT AT FESTIVALS, HER BIGGEST FOLK INFLUENCES AND THE FORCES BEHIND HER DEBUT ALBUM, *I'VE FELT ALL THESE THINGS*.

WORDS BY **CHERI AMOUR**.
PHOTO BY **MARIE VINAY**.

Despite her tender years, Stockholm-native Anna Leone is full of conviction. For a start, she's doing the one thing we all told ourselves we'd commit to over the last 18 months: learning a new language. She's been determinedly studying Japanese, modestly joking it's the only thing she's stuck to. But that's not strictly true.

At the end of 2020, Leone shared the first taste of her songwriting material with *Wandered Away*. The EP racked up over 18 million streams and 'ones to watch' tips from Spotify AND YouTube. She also won at the Music Moves Europe Talent awards, alongside fellow Nordic inspiration Girl In Red.

Since then she's been committed to her first full-length record, heading over to Los Angeles to join Paul Butler in the studio to lay down her debut, *I've Felt All These Things*. She's even treated us to some stunning spoiler singles from the record, positioning herself and her guitar everywhere from the sunsets of Colorado Provençal to the vineyards of Marseille. More recently, she cropped up at the Azores with director Savannah Setten for her latest single, Still I Wait.

The perfect settings for such intimate songs, we find Leone exploring the endless boundaries of Mother Earth with her stripped-back sentiment to accompany the ride. So, ahead of her debut release this September and firmly planted back in the suburbs of Stockholm, we speak to the songwriter about stage fright at festivals, folk influences, and how the force is always with her.

Growing up, you had lots of siblings around. Was music always an escape for you, or did the guitar not feature until your teens?

I didn't start writing until I was in high school. Before, I'd been doing lots of covers trying to mimic other artists, but I didn't even think about having my own voice. I don't remember a clear starting point or an epiphany that made me start. It was more like a smooth transition. My mom played a lot of music. She introduced me to Cat Stevens and this whole folk acoustic guitar thing. That's what inspired me to attempt to play the guitar, because I've never seen myself as a guitarist per se. It's more like a tool that I use to write songs with.

Who were your influences when it came to chord structures and learning other artists' styles of songwriting on the guitar?

I've followed Laura Marling for a long time. I was inspired, and still am to this day, because she was one of the first women guitarists that I got to know. I felt she was like me in a way and it felt in reach somehow. I also listened a lot to Bob Dylan. The song survives on guitar and nothing else. I'm impressed by how it can be so stripped-down and still have so much emotion.

Your style is very rooted in tender fingerpicking. What is your choice guitar to play when writing those riffs?

The main one is the one that I've been playing live with, this softer-sounding semi-acoustic Cort. We used a lot of steel-string. I don't play a lot with nylon, actually. I've never been into the technical things with guitar and the instruments I use. It's mainly that I've had this for a while and it's worked for me. My manager is like, "You need to buy a new guitar," but this works for me. Also, my singing is so soft that sometimes I need a little bit extra, otherwise you won't hear what I'm playing, so we had to double the guitar to strengthen the sound.

The record came together in LA and was co-produced alongside Paul Butler. How different was that experience from your traditional Stockholm setting?

Oh yeah, very night and day. I wish that we had a bit more time to explore because we were nine-to-five. Well, more like nine-to-12 [*laughs*]! First, he had a studio in Santa Rosa and then we also recorded in Topanga and then North Hollywood. I really liked our environment. It was cool to get away from where I'd been writing the songs. It gave them a new light in a way. We took Route One, where you go from San Francisco to LA, and it gave me a lot of inspiration. All those grand views.

And it sounds like there was a wealth of new instruments brought into the mix by Butler, including some synthesisers (the contemporary OP-1 and the ARP 2600 from the 1970s used to voice R2-D2), which tapped into your *Star Wars* fandom?

I don't think it was the actual one – George Lucas probably has that one – but it was cool to know that it was the same model. We rented a studio and it was one of the big instruments in there. We were just going around looking at things that we could use and it stood out as this big synthesiser that we just had to try.

A force, some might say.

The force was strong [*laughs*].

Your humble goal of songwriting without ever releasing material is only enforced by the fact that you're still confronting stage fright. Have you developed any techniques to feel more comfortable performing live?

I'm definitely not over the stage fright thing. I think that's how it's always gonna be. I've done two tours and a lot of festivals and it's always been nerve-wracking. At the same time, it's a powerful thing when you connect with the audience. If I quit music today, I would still be fine because I already released these songs into the world and that would be enough, in a way. But I still have a lot of creativity in me and I'm strengthened by how people receive the songs. I can always benefit from them by writing them, but it's a beautiful thing if I release them and people are also able to benefit from them. ag



SHIHAD FIGHTS BACK

FOR ALBUM #10, THE KIWI ALT-METAL ANARCHISTS IN **SHIHAD** CRANK UP THE HEAVINESS – SONICALLY AND THEMATICALLY. LEAD SHREDDER **PHIL KNIGHT** TELLS US HOW THE BAND TAPPED INTO THEIR SAVAGE SIDE FOR *OLD GODS*, AND WHY THEY WANTED TO CAPTURE THE RAW, VISCERAL INTENSITY OF THEIR LIVE SHOW.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

If you're lucky enough to have had the unique privilege of watching Shihad perform live, you'll know it's an experience unlike any other. The raw, visceral passion with which the Kiwi rockers translate their tight, cerebral musicality – it's like watching Hollywood's version of the perfect metal gig, where it sounds intense and chaotic, but the performance itself isn't a beat off-step.

Shihad have always been a band whose live energy is palpable on record – at least in the case of the first stack of records – but with album ten, *Old Gods*, they've gone beyond just capturing that energy. Here, we see Shihad in their rawest, most authentic form. It's bare-bones, balls-to-the-wall volatility – four guys and their instruments, and a whole lot of pent-up rage to thrash out.

But not only is *Old Gods* the heaviest and most rugged Shihad LP in recent memory, it's also their most striking on a thematic wavelength. In the seven years since they released the *FVEY* album, the band have gone through a veritable lifetime of growth, both in musicality and in person. Particularly so for singer-shredder Jon Toogood, whose eyes have opened wider than ever to the worlds of oppression and inequity.

Before the band unleash *Old Gods* unto the world at the end of August, we got down to the wire with lead guitarist Phil Knight to find out how this crushing collection of ruminations and riffs came together.

I wanted to bring up a quote from Jon, where he said: "I don't think *FVEY* even compares with the anger I feel now with what's going on." As a band, how did you go about encapsulating that anger and translating that raw, visceral emotion into music?

I think the stuff that came out in the rehearsal room, where we were just jamming the riffs and working out the instrumentals, it was just naturally heavier. And I guess when we were selecting the songs we wanted to work on, we just decided we wanted to do a heavier album. Then through the way we recorded the album, sonically, it just turned out to be more heavy and in-your-face than the last one.

But the narrative of the lyrics, from Jon, that's probably one of the main aspects that really made the heaviness come across with a lot more anger. We were living through the Trump years when he was writing all of that stuff, and then there was all that crap going down in the States with Black people getting shot by the police... I know that had an effect on Jon because he's got relatives over there, and his kids are biracial.

I know for a fact that he's been present when his wife has endured some racist incidents – even just at the traffic lights, from people in the cars next to them. I think all of that has had quite an effect on him, y'know? He's got biracial kids and he's looking at the world they're going to grow up in. I know he's been quite lucky as a middle-class white male, but I guess he's looking at things from a slightly different perspective now because of his family.

For yourself as a guitarist, were you excited to really crank it up to 11 on this record?

Yeah, totally! I guess I'm not so much of a shredder these days, but we went up into the studio, [producer] Adam Spark was like, "Give me some albums that would show me a sonic reference point for the direction you want to go in," and *Evil Empire* by Rage Against The Machine was one that we were all pointing at. That had a big influence on us – the sound *and* the message, but mostly the sound.

We wanted something huge, but also very natural sounding, so we decided to go for an approach that involved less guitar overdubs. We wanted that Malcolm and Angus feel as well – y'know, we're huge AC/DC fans – so for most of the album, apart from some of the overdubs you can clearly pick up, it's Jon on the left speaker and me on the right, both of us playing in the room, with Karl [Kippenberger, bass] down the middle.

it's very band-in-the-room – especially compared to an album like *FVEY*, or even going back to *General Electric*, where there were a lot of overdubs and it was very produced. This is a bit more like that early AC/DC stuff where you can really pick out the four people and what they're playing.

Do you find that capturing your live sound in the studio helps to get the intensity and heaviness behind the song itself across?

Totally. It certainly helps to get the personally across. I mean, I won't name them, but we've had albums over the years where, y'know, people have heard the songs on the record and then they've heard them live, and they've gone, "Oh, this isn't the same song!" Y'know, you always want to capture that live energy on the album, not the other way around. We had a couple of fails there, where the energy and the personality – the musicianship – just didn't really translate onto the recording.

We've always talked about having an album that just really captured what we sound like when we're playing live. I mean, we did the *Pacifier: Live* album in 2003, and that delivers it to a certain extent – but y'know, I think we've done a really good job of doing an original studio album with that sort of Rage Against The Machine, AC/DC, band-in-the-room sound [with *Old Gods*].

What guitars were you tearing shit up on for this record?

We actually ended up leaving most of our gear in New Zealand. Jon left a guitar behind that he probably should have used on the album – a '59 Fender Tele Original – and instead for most of his overdubs and rhythm playing, he used Adam Sparks' '77 Tele. Apart from that, we borrowed a '59 Tele from our guitar tech, and that's famously what Jon uses live for the low-tuned stuff.

And then for the odd bit here and there, he used this guitar that he'd been gifted in New Zealand; it was like a Tele – it looks like a '59 Tele – but it's made out of swamp kauri wood. It's a native New Zealand wood, and [the body piece] would have been thousands of years old. A guy in New Zealand just came up to Jon after a show and said, "I made this for you." It's actually got a musket bullet lodged in the wood, from the colonial Maori wars. That's a pretty good sounding guitar!

I've got an older Jazzmaster that I like to play live, but during the recording, we got some more guitars from Fender. I got three more Jazzmasters – a Jazzmaster Pro II, a Vintera Jazzmaster and a plain Jazzmaster. For all of Jon's tracking, he used an Orange AD30 head into a Marshall BX quad, into 25-watt Greenbacks. And then for most of my rhythm overdubs, I used my '79 Gibson Les Paul Standard into Adam's Diezel VH4, into the same Marshall BX quad.

We made a point of not blending amplifiers, because we found when we'd done it in the past that you can get phasing issues when you blend various amps and speakers. So we just tried to keep it as simple as possible, like we'd be playing live or jamming out – one head, one quad, a couple of mics on the speaker, and that's it. And I think that worked out really well – we got some fat tones! ag

THE RIOT RAGES ON



PUNK ICON **KATHLEEN HANNA** WAXES LYRICAL ON HER LOVE OF "MORE AMATEUR-SOUNDING STUFF", HER ENDURING LEGACY, AND HOW **FUGAZI** OPENED HER EYES TO THE POWER OF MUSIC.

WORDS BY **JACOB UITTI**. PHOTO BY **BURAK CINGI**.

After we talk, famed feminist and political artist, Kathleen Hanna, is off to drop off some T-shirts to The Linda Lindas, the internet's newest and favourite punk-rock quartet. Hanna has worked with the band for years, mentoring their burgeoning, significant, youthful project. In a recent viral video, The Linda Lindas were seen wearing t-shirts from Hanna's Tees4Togo business, which helps to raise awareness and funds for young women in Togo to get their education.

But this work should come as no surprise to fans and followers of Hanna. She's long dedicated her life to empowering young voices, especially those belonging to young women. As a result, she's become known the world over for her music and her politics. Hanna is 20th century rock royalty – legend has it she came up with the name "Smells Like Teen Spirit".

When was the first moment you realised the power of art in your life and, perhaps, the power of music or guitar music?

Oh wow, that's a big one! I think a huge moment for me when a band that has a guitar player that I love made me be like, "Oh, this is important," was the first time I saw Fugazi play in the late '80s in Seattle. That was the first time I ever saw them. They played "Suggestion" and I'd never heard men singing lyrics about, you know, sexual harassment before. But also it sounded amazing!

And I love, love, love Ian [MacKaye's] guitar playing. But Guy Picciotto from Fugazi and Rites Of Spring is one of my all time favourite guitar players. For sure. I always call it the 'heavenly' guitar style. I don't mean Heavenly the band. But it sounds like you're ascending into heaven, or something.

How and when did you first decide to follow your internal drive? People have instincts but few act on them so fervently – how and when did you start to embrace that side of yourself?

You know, there are so many different moments. So, it's more about picking one. Because I know that there's a lot of times where, you know, I'm like, "I'm going to follow the breadcrumbs in my head and I don't care what anybody else is doing. I'm just going to do this."

I mean, I think it really happened when I moved to Olympia when I was 17 years old and I started college. I was surrounded by musicians who were making records on K Records. And I saw kids making culture in a small town. That meant rock stars weren't just Led Zeppelin or Van Halen. They weren't that far away from me. They were teenagers who went to the same coffee shop I did. That's how I met Tobi Vail, the drummer for Bikini Kill: she was in a band called the Go Team and I would just see her walking on the street and I'd be like, "Oh my god, I love her music and she's just a normal person."

That was a really big thing, living in a small town with a good local community. It really inspired me to think that I could do whatever I wanted. And that there was a lot of female participation. Even though there wasn't *that* much female participation, even just a tiny bit at that time in the late '80s, early '90s was a lot. That K Records supported all different kinds of sounding music, too. You didn't have to play really heavy guitars to be in a band. It favoured the amateur, the more sparse-sounding stuff. That's what I still like to this day.

In a way, at the time, people thought of it as more traditionally feminine music. That was something that I think invited a lot of people to be involved and not feel like this is just a straight white guy macho scene. It wasn't a straight white guy macho scene. It was much more inclusive. So, by example, I saw other people doing whatever they fucking wanted to do. So, I was like, "I can too."

Do you have a favourite guitar?

Yes! I have a guitar and a bass that are, like, my oldest buddies. My Gibson Melody Maker that's from the '60s and my husband bought himself a matching one! Then his broke. But I won't let him take mine – he took mine on tour for a minute. And I was like, "That's enough!" But yeah I was just playing mine a minute ago – not very well; I was just trying to get back into it!

I love it because it's tiny and it sounds great. It's like three-quarters the size of a regular guitar. So, if you're smaller, it is just way easier and why shouldn't it be? Why should all the guitars be made for people with massive hands? I also have a Hagstrom H-11 bass from the '60s. It's painted with house paint, so I have no idea how it was painted originally or what colour it was. It does not stay in tune, but it is just the thing I always write on and love to write with.

Do you think about your legacy at all?

Yeah, I mean, I totally think about legacy. I've seen a lot of really amazing, politically progressive bands disappear, especially feminist bands, especially bands with lesbians in them. Just, like, they were the hugest band at the time and then – I mean, I'm thinking of Babes In Toyland, Dickless or Lunachicks. These are all guitar-heavy bands with female guitar players, amazing singers, amazing songwriting and they were huge when I was first starting how to write music in the '90s.

And while indie people who are into records might know these bands, you know, people remember Mudhoney, people remember TAD or those kinds of bands more than they remember some of the female-fronted bands. And in seeing that, I knew, I didn't want my band to disappear. At first, it was Bikini Kill then it was Le Tigre and my stuff with Julie Ruin. But I realised I had to work if I wanted to be remembered because the system at large is fine if my work just disappeared.

So, I put all my stuff in an archive at NYU. I got all of the old footage of all my bands digitised by them so that it will be there if somebody ever wants to do something with it. Detailed notes of how I wrote music and all my old lyrics are all archived. Because I do give a shit about my legacy. And the same thing with riot grrrl, which was a young, feminist punk movement I was involved in. And it being criticised, rightly so, for centring on white people. I want that remembered so that people can build on what we did and make it better. That's why legacy is important.

It's not so much like, "I want everyone to remember my name for all time!" No, I want them to remember the work and hear the work and maybe see themselves in the work and to say, "I can do better." That's the goal of legacy. But I don't think, "Oh, I'm a legend!"

What do you love most about music?

Oh my god! I just want to name bands! I love listening to music loud in my car. I'm just like every other normal person. I love sparse guitar players. I love David Kilgore from The Clean, I love Ade Blackburn from Clinic, I love Laurent Brancowitz from Phoenix, Ricky Wilson, the early guitar player from The B-52's. Obviously, Charlotte Caffey from The Go-Go's. I love that really sparse guitar sound so much! That's how I write and that's what I want to hear.

I guess I love that music surrounds you. You can be anywhere. You can be in your shitty apartment where you share a bathroom in the hallway and you have pizza boxes and cigarettes everywhere and it smells terrible.

But you can put on a record and all of a sudden you're transported to anywhere you want to go. It's different than just looking at visual art. It's different from everything else in that it really can swallow you up or you can really kind of step inside of it. I think in that way it really has the power to change. To change someone's day or change someone's life.

WHERE THERE'S A WIL(SON), THERE'S A WAY

NANCY WILSON – THE ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC GUITAR ICON BEHIND **HEART** – DISCUSSES HER FIRST SOLO ALBUM, COVERING **PEARL JAM** AND **PAUL SIMON**, AND – OF COURSE – THAT **EVH** ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTAL.

WORDS BY **RICHARD BIENSTOCK**. PHOTO BY **JEREMY DANGER**.

As the stalwart acoustic and electric guitar player and co-songwriter in Heart, Nancy Wilson has been a part of our collective six-string consciousness for more than four decades. And while Wilson has also played with the Heart offshoot The Lovemongers, the R& B-drenched Roadcase Royale and scored a handful of feature films, it took until 2021 for the iconic musician and Rock And Roll Hall Of Famer to finally get around to releasing a solo album.

But that effort, the just-released *You And Me*, has been well worth the wait. Featuring a mix of Wilson originals, a handful of somewhat left-field covers and a set-closing tribute to Eddie Van Halen, the new effort sees the 67-year-old guitarist still working at a creative high. What's more, she also recently collaborated with Gibson on her second signature model, the Epiphone Fanatic, and is also, pandemic willing, looking forward to a major Heart tour in 2022.

There's always been a fair amount of acoustic guitar in your playing, but *You And Me* leans hard on that instrument, maybe more so than it does electric. Was that something you had in mind from the get-go?

Well, the acoustic has kind of been my main man since I was nine. And I've played a lot of electric, too – especially with Heart, where I can, you know, turn the volume to 11 [laughs]. I particularly love playing my blue '63 Tele that I've had for ages. But the acoustic is kind of where I live. When I joined Heart, I sort of brought the more acoustic element into the band, and then from there I expanded on to electric. And electric rhythm playing, mainly – not so much lead, necessarily. If you could make an analogy, I'd be more of a Neil Young as an acoustic guitar player and a Pete Townshend as an electric player.



So it was natural for you to grab an acoustic when it came to writing these songs.

It was. The first song I wrote for the album was the one called "We Meet Again"; I wanted to sort of channel my inner-Paul Simon on that one, as far as the guitar. And also lyrically, actually, in that I was trying to go to that place where you're taking a long look at the arc of your life, and also kind of professing love to someone in such a deep way where you're ready to go through sweet and sour and thick and thin with them, all the way through to the river's end.

In addition to trying to write in the style of Paul Simon, you also cover Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer". I don't know if Paul Simon gets the credit he deserves as a monster fingerpicker!

Oh my god, his playing is so genius! And yeah, I really learned my fingerstyle technique from him, the Travis [picking] kind of stuff. And stuff like "Anji", that's what I sort of modelled my "Silver Wheels" on, which is the instrumental intro thing that opens "Crazy On You". I've actually modelled a lot of my fingerstyle on Paul Simon.

Another great interpretation on the record is your version of Pearl Jam's "Daughter". You really take it in a different direction; where the original is, at least musically, somewhat breezy and light, your take is dark and somewhat ominous.

That one was recorded before my album was even a twinkle in my eye, actually. I did it for a film, a true story about human trafficking called *I Am All Girls*. I thought some of the words in that song were so appropriate to the subject matter, because there's that line that says, "She holds the hand that holds her down," and there's such anger and rage in that. And so I recorded that with [producer] David Rice at his place in Austin, the Clubhouse, with some incredible players, including Tony Levin on bass. We made a new arrangement that was more sinister and almost psychedelic, with a strange anger attached. Just coming from a female perspective, the anger is a little more charged, maybe.

I have to ask about the Eddie Van Halen tribute, "4 Edward". Can you talk about your interaction with him?

We were actually on the road with those guys a couple of times; they were just wild men. They were the wildest partiers I'd ever seen. But Eddie actually complimented me on my acoustic playing, and I said, "Oh, coming from you, you know, that's everything." And I asked him, "Why don't you play more acoustic?" And he goes, "Well, you know, I don't really have one." I told him, "I'm giving you this one right now!" I think we were backstage and I said, "Give that man a guitar!"

So then at the crack of dawn the next morning, the phone in my hotel room rings, and it's Eddie. It was obvious he had been up all night and he said, "Listen." And I listened to him play this gorgeous acoustic instrumental piece that started sort of classical, and had a lot of fiery kind of stuff in the middle, and then kind of finished up with a beautiful major chord thing. So when he left us recently, I thought, "Okay... I'm recording... I should do an instrumental... I should dedicate it to Eddie."

And I like how it turned out. I basically wrote it in my mind while I was falling asleep, and then when I woke up I lay there and pictured it and listened to it in my head. Then I went back to my phone and I found a little bit that I came up with a long time ago where, once in a while I would add it to the "Silver Wheels" intro for "Crazy On You" when we played it live, just as an extra bit I could toss in there. Then I figured that I could do that with a double drop-D tuning and I could use harmonics at the beginning and harmonics at the end to sort of echo the shape of the piece that he'd written on the guitar that I gave him. And having done some score music in the past, I figured maybe a minute, a minute-and-a-half tops, for reasons of attention span. Just long enough to not get boring.

What are your main acoustic and electric guitars on the new record?

For the acoustics I had my signature model that I cooked up with Martin, and I also used a 1920s "The Gibson" mandolin. And for electric I used my blue '63 Tele and also the new Fanatic I designed with Gibson and Epiphone. That's a real screamer – it's affordable, but kind of a classic-sounding rock guitar. It's got a good rock personality.

The Fanatic has such a unique body shape, which you also used on your earlier signature model, the Gibson Nighthawk. What about it appeals to you?

It echoes a lot of the cutaway shapes of classic Gibsons, I think, and allows more fretboard to be reachable. And it's also more like a female shape; to me it's like a woman's sideways silhouette. When I drew it, that's what I was kind of channeling. It's also a little more diminutive, and it's not too heavy. It's a piece of cake, that guitar. ag



WISDOM OF THE GURUS

HOODOO GURUS' MAINSTAY GUITARISTS **DAVE FAULKNER** AND **BRAD SHEPHERD** ADDRESS THE VENERABLE OZ-ROCK BAND'S HISTORY, GEAR CHOICES, AND HOW THEY KEEP THE FIRE BURNING AFTER 40 YEARS.

WORDS BY **BRUCE FAGERSTROM**.

Few bands have put out as many consistently interesting and entertaining albums as the Hoodoo Gurus. From their 1984 debut, *Stoneage Romeos*, up through 2010's *Purity Of Essence* and a slew of more recent recordings, including 2021's "World Of Pain", the band have cranked out perfect power-pop songs matched only by the "strum and drang" [sic] of their rave-up live shows.

The group's lineup has been mostly stable – with a few changes to the rhythm section over the years – but singer/guitarist Dave Faulkner and guitarist Brad Shepherd have been mainstays.

As a songwriter, Faulkner delights in intricate and clever wordplay with subject matter that veers from the comic to the cosmic, to heartfelt meditations on relationships gone sour. On 2020's "Get Out Of Dodge", Faulkner explores calcified thinking and the limits of tolerance with guest vocals supplied by old touring partner Vicki Peterson of the Bangles along with her husband John Cowsill of the Cowsills. On every recording, Shepherd's tastefully melodic riffs, fills and solos are a master class on how to avoid overplaying while still providing plenty of color to every tune.

We spoke with Faulkner and Shepherd about the band's history, guitar and amp preferences – and what keeps them going after 40 years in the biz.

Hoodoo Gurus' music encompasses many influences, from '60s garage punk to psychedelia to hard rock. Is that a reflection of a diverse listening appetite while you were growing up?

Dave Faulkner: Totally. You know, all of us had a foot in the '60s as kids, and that music really saturated us. And, of course, we learned more about that music subsequently. As you get older, you trace back the influences of the things that are more mainstream and you find the more obscure things. For us, that was glam rock and all that stuff and even heavy rock like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, but also T. Rex, Slade, Suzi Quatro, Alice Cooper. All that stuff was our teenage music, and then punk rock came along in our late teens. I was 17 or something when punk hit, and that was kind of like the crucible that shaped a lot of my attitude about music.

Brad, you've played a number of different guitars in your time with the group, such as a Gretsch Country Gentleman in the early '80s, Les Pauls and SGs. What attracts you to a particular guitar?

Brad Shepherd: It may've taken me 40 years to actually realise what I'm looking for out of a particular instrument. I like the warmth of Gibsons, generally. I have found within the context of the Gurus, because Dave often plays Telecaster that I try to steer away from that. I've found that if I'm playing a Gretsch or a Gibson, there's a tonal diversity there that allows everyone to speak clearly within the context of the band's unified voice. In a live context, it's almost always something with a loud articulation and some unique warm tone somewhere in the lower-mids, and that allows those upper-mids for Dave's Tele.

Faulkner: Yeah, I play Telecasters for that principal reason – just to stay out of Dave's way, because it's a little bit more sonically compact. We always have to finesse our sounds to make sure there is room for each other, and that's part of why I play the Tele, but also because I love that sound. I've been playing a Les Paul Junior more often lately, on recordings like on 2020's "Answered Prayers". So again, that's a sort of smaller guitar; it's not quite as fat a sound, so it leaves room for Brad to do more of the heavy lifting.

Brad, one of the most appealing things about your playing is that it's versatile, yet economical. How do you develop your riffs and fills?

Shepherd: That's what the band's about, making some kind of value contribution. Sometimes the valid contribution is just plowing through a handful of Ramones chords if that's exactly what's required. But I try to hear what's going on in the rest of the song. What Dave's singing. What his melody is and if there's room somewhere else where I might be able to make a contribution where it becomes a kind of tapestry. I do tend to compose solos before we go in to record.

Often, I can hear what my contribution should be, and then I work out the notes. I don't honestly know what I'm playing. Really, I'm just learning the shapes. There are certain positions that I'm familiar with up and down the neck, but more often than not, I don't really know what I'm doing. I've got an idea in my head of what should happen at that point in the song, and I try to find the notes.

I've mostly seen you playing with Fender amps behind you.

Shepherd: I love Fender amps. I've been playing the Bruce Zinky Tone Masters since they were available. I actually have the first one that landed in Australia that I still use to this day. They have never disappointed me, they've never let me down onstage, and I've played them almost every show. On the odd occasion if we have to fly to a gig and we have some kind of rented backline, I might just grab a couple of AC30s because I found them to be fairly reliable. But nine times out of 10, I've used the Tone Masters onstage.

I think I got mine in '94. I've got a couple of them, but they've never given me any trouble. That's my thing. I like a Gibson or a Gretsch into a Fender. It's very Neil Young.

You worked with producer Ed Stasium on '90s albums *Kinky* and *Crank*, and 2010's *Purity Of Essence* where he was involved in the mixing. Did you work with him on the songs you recorded in 2021?

Faulkner: We're really excited about the songs. We worked with Wayne Connolly, an engineer/producer. We always kind of produce ourselves, too. I do a lot of the heavy lifting on that side. But it's good to have someone there as a referee and an objective voice to say, "Try it this way." Ed Stasium mixed the tracks, and he mixed our 2020 singles like "Get Out Of Dodge". We found it a bit strange with COVID. When we did *Purity Of Essence*, I was able to fly over to where Ed was in Colorado. It was a bit harder this time, because we had to do it all by email and phone.

How do you stay fresh after 40 years?

Faulkner: It really comes down to quite a simple thing, which is it doesn't matter what influence we're drawing from. It sounds like us when we get it together, and the determining factor is, if it sounds real and exciting, we're good to go. The closest we've ever come to really having some kind of ethos from album to album is this sort of sine wave between two polarities with one side the more hard kind of brutal punk rock and the other the more pop side, and certainly I could see on every album it oscillates.

If we feel like a little bit of a palate cleanser after 12 months of just bashing this stuff out, we do some beautiful pop music, and then we say, "Let's get hardcore again." It's just us having a mood, but it takes about 12 months to happen.

We've always thought the Hoodoo Gurus were their own universe. There were people who thought we were from California, because we toured there so much and we were on U.S. college radio. But our world is self-contained; we absorb the zeitgeist, and it's all grist for our mill, but there's only one mill. There aren't 20 Hoodoo Gurus around the planet; there's only one. ag



A BLOODY GOOD ALBUM

VETERAN SINGER-SONGWRITER **JULIANA HATFIELD** DETAILS THE UNCONVENTIONAL RECORDING TECHNIQUES BEHIND HER 19TH SOLO ALBUM, *BLOOD*.

WORDS BY **GREGORY ADAMS**. PHOTO BY **DAVID DOOBININ**.

Since delivering her debut solo album, *Hey Babe*, back in 1992 – or, perhaps, since co-founding cult Massachusetts college rock unit the Blake Babies in the mid-'80s – Juliana Hatfield has built up one of the most impressively hooky, fuzz-forward catalogues in all of indie rock. At least from a technical standpoint, that consistency was challenged when the musician began working on her 19th solo full-length, *Blood*.

Following the untimely demise of a once-trusty digital eight-track, Hatfield spent the early months of the pandemic begrudgingly learning how to use GarageBand, on which she tracked much of *Blood's* guitars and synth work (overdubs eventually took place at Q Division Studios in Somerville, MA). Like Hatfield's work on recent efforts like 2019's *Weird* or that same year's Andy Summers-celebrating *Juliana Hatfield Sings The Police*, *Blood* tracks like "Mouthful Of Blood" run wild with jangle-heavy guitar hooks and synthetic mellotron.

From the jump, though, *Blood's* introductory "The Shame Of Love" takes a wild pivot from the template via "cruddy", ultra-compressed guitar textures recorded through laptop mics, and collaborator Jed Davis's almost EDM-like production touches that tear Hatfield's chords into ribbons of digital noise. That said, Hatfield's innate sense of melody remains unabated.

Hatfield got into the guts of *Blood*, the surprisingly big bite of a Fender Mini Twin, and how a recent run of livestream performances are bringing some bloody awesome deep cuts back in the spotlight.

In terms of tones and textures, there's quite a lot to unpack with the record's opening, "The Shame Of Love" – the fuzz, some electronic production touches. Even with the clink to that intro, it sounds like an unplugged electric, or a hard-gated acoustic. What's going with those first few moments of sound?

Well, for some of the songs I was working with a guy from Connecticut named Jed Davis. He was helping me troubleshoot GarageBand, which I'd never used before. I'd be texting him, and he'd walk me through it so I could figure it out. Then, I started sending him little snippets of music, just for him to mess around with. A lot of the songs started with me sending Jed chord progressions. They were not recorded for mass consumption, but he took these really cruddy-sounding things I gave him, treated them, and made them sound cool.

"The Shame Of Love" is me playing an acoustic guitar into the Photo Booth app, just playing into the camera that's built into my laptop. It's 20 seconds of music and video I taped so I could remember the phrasings, and that there's a capo on the second fret. He left it alone at the beginning, sounding crappy like it was, and then later in the outro I ended up repeating those intro chords with an electric guitar.

What was it like troubleshooting GarageBand while writing *Blood*?

It was hell. I'm so miserable with tech. I used to record into a digital eight-track machine that I had sitting on a table – it had eight faders, super-simple; I'd burn my mixes using its built-in CD burner. That machine broke, so when lockdown happened I decided I had to bite the bullet and figure out how to work on GarageBand. What overwhelms me is that I like to be able to grab onto things and make them move, so I can see with my hand that I'm [working] a machine. It's different when you have your finger on a cursor or a trackpad.

What really kills me [about GarageBand], is the fact that there's infinite possibilities. It's like a labyrinth, right? You get in there and you can go in millions of directions. That hurts my brain; I don't like it. It seems to make everything complicated. I know people think that it makes everything simpler, but for me... even looking at the screen, it's hard for me to take it all in. It's too much visual information, there's just too much to learn. I mean, I've basically figured it out, but I'm probably using one percent of its capacity.

What guitars and amps were you using?

Like I said, some of it started with me sending these crappy recordings to Jed. Some of that was on acoustic guitar, just playing into the built-in mic – I think on the song Torture I probably set up a mic to get a decent acoustic guitar sound. Some of it me was videos of me playing an electric guitar. I was mostly using my first First Act electric, a Delia LS.

[For tone,] I really pared it down, mostly using one sound from GarageBand, because I didn't really like the others. I'm not comfortable making noise in my apartment, because of my neighbours, so I started off using this GarageBand sound, but later on I went into the studio and started using amplifiers. There's this one sound, it's called 'World's Smallest Amp' on my version of GarageBand. It's kind of a cruddy sound, which I like. Not too clean, and not distorted in an icy way.

There's a lot of that on the album, but there's some choice, biting stuff on there, and for that I was using a tiny Fender Mini Twin. Smaller than a bread box, just a few inches across. It's cute, but it makes really great fuzz sounds. I think I plugged that into my [Z.Vex] Fuzz Factory for a couple things, too. You can hear it in certain spots, like the bridge of "The Shame Of Love".

On "Had A Dream", it sounds like there's a rotary effect of some sort going on there...

That was an acoustic guitar track that Jed f***ed with. I wrote the part to be plucked with fingers, because I wanted it to have that resonant bite. I tried playing it on electric guitar, but it didn't sound right. There's also an overdubbed guitar coming in on the intro, and that was done in an actual studio, an old Silvertone guitar going into the Neve preamp.

On "Chunks", it almost sounds like you've made a beat out of the sound of feedback, or a patch chord coming out of a jack. It's got that kind of crackle to it.

That's what it is: a split-second of noise between chords. This was a couple of years ago, but I was making an album at Q Division, sitting in the control room with a guitar plugged in, with a chorus effect on it. I was playing a little chord progression that I liked, and recorded it. When I started writing songs for the new album, I was going back and looking at all these little pieces of music I had recorded and found this one.

What was great about it wasn't the chord progression, but a split-second of chug noise when I stopped playing the chords. I sent it to Jed and said, "Can you somehow capture that noise, that chunk between the chords?" And he took that and built a loop for "Chunks".

Over the past few months you've been doing these solo livestream shows covering specific moments from across your catalogue. Has performing older albums in full – maybe some songs for the first time in years – given you any added insight on your career? Do you see the through line from then to now?

Before I started doing these livestreams I hardly ever went back and listened to any of my old recordings; as soon as I finish making an album I pretty much put it away. As I've been going back and listening to the old songs, though, I was happy to realise I've written a lot of great songs over the years. I mean, great is subjective, but I did some good work. I don't know if I really realised that until recently, that I don't have to be embarrassed by everything I've done. It's a solid body of work. I've [got] a knack for putting songs together – it's something I've had a handle on from the beginning, I guess. Lyrically, though, some of the old ones are hard to listen to! ag

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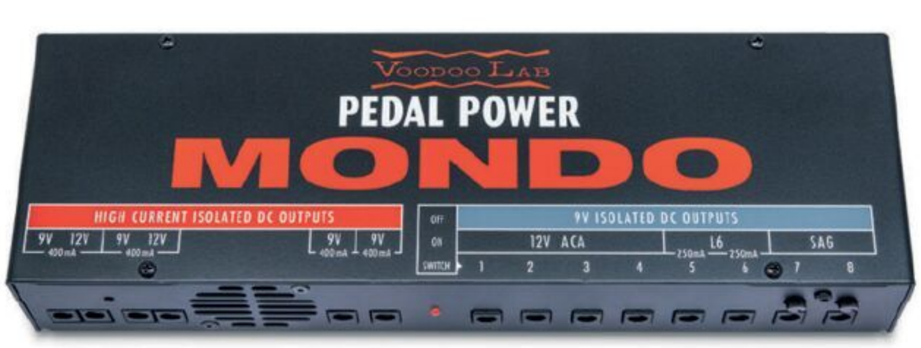
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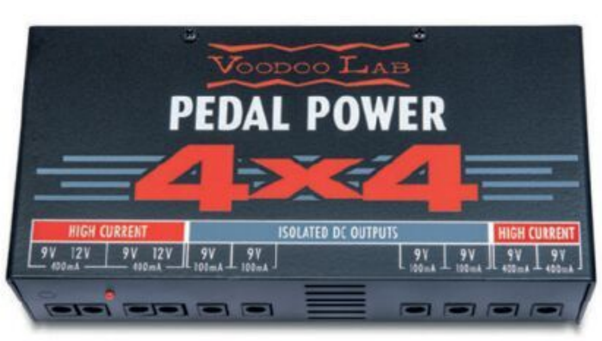
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BACK IN BLUE

It's been a long and bumpy ride to the next edition of the **Byron Bay Bluesfest** – especially after its attempt in April got nixed a day out from opening, with the site and its stages already built – but lo and behold, Bluesfest 2021 is finally *(finally!!!)* happening.

Taking the form of an exclusive special edition, sporting an all-Australian lineup, the four-day celebration of all things blues, roots, rock and beyond will take place at its established home of the Byron Events Farm (formerly Tyagarah Tea Tree Farm) across the long weekend of Friday, October 1st through Monday 4th.

And although the usual suite of international icons are sitting this one out – y'know, travel bans and all that fun stuff – the lineup couldn't be more enormous: headliners include Midnight Oil, Paul Kelly, Tash Sultana and Jimmy Barnes, with over 50 of Australia's biggest and best names set to raise the barn over four epic days.

To get ourselves prepped for what is undoubtedly going to be the most exciting weekend of the year for any Aussie music fan, we're catching up with handful of the acts we're *beyond* keen to see. Over the next few pages, you'll find exclusive, one-on-one interviews with **Tex Perkins**, **Hiatus Kaiyote**, **The Living End**, **Hussy Hicks**, **Ross Wilson**, **Jeff Lang** and **All Our Exes Live In Texas**.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Who are you excited to catch at Bluesfest 2021? Take a peek at the lineup, then start getting your schedules ready!

Tickets to the 2021 Byron Bay Bluesfest are on sale now – head to bluesfest.com.au for more info!

Midnight Oil
Paul Kelly
Tash Sultana
Jimmy Barnes
Ocean Alley
Ziggy Alberts
John Butler
Xavier Rudd
The Cat Empire
Pete Murray
Mark Seymour & The Undertow
Kate Ceberano
Kasey Chambers
The Waifs
The Church
Jon Stevens
Ian Moss

The Living End
The Angels
Ross Wilson And The Peaceniks
Russell Morris
Troy Cassar-Daley
Briggs
Tex Perkins The Man In Black
Hiatus Kaiyote
Kate Miller-Heidke
Weddings Parties Anything
The Black Sorrows
The Bamboos
Chain
Backsliders
Ash Grunwald
Melbourne Ska Orchestra
Vika & Linda
Jeff Lang
Nathan Cavaleri
Mick Thomas' Roving Commission

Kim Churchill
Henry Wagons
JK-47
Garrett Kato
Mama Kin Spender
Dami Im
Pierce Brothers
Emily Wurramara
The Buckleys
Fiona Boyes & The Fortune Tellers
Ray Beadle
Pacey, King & Doley
All Our Exes Live In Texas
Hussy Hicks
Roshani
Declan Kelly
Daniel Champagne
Little Georgia
Lambros.
Round Mountain Girls
The Regime
Electric Lemonade
Palm Valley
Byron Busking Competition

ROSS WILSON

So Ross, what are *you* looking forward to most at Bluesfest 2021?

Well I've been to Bluesfest a couple of times, so I know how it work. Y'know, a great thing about it is that you can see a whole lot of people all in one place – usually from all around the world, but this year is going to be very special because it's all-Aussie. There's a mega lineup there, and luckily I'm a part of that! When it got called off earlier this year, we were actually up there already – we could see something [to do with COVID-19] developing, though, so we stayed out of the Byron shire. As soon as they made the formal announcement, we went home without having to do any quarantine, because we hadn't actually made it there.

But y'know, Peter Noble is doing a gargantuan task trying to keep the thing going, and luckily he's got a bit of government support there. Let's just hope that COVID dies down by October, because Bluesfest is a part of my "Eagle Rock" 50th anniversary tour – that's one of the biggest dates I've got!

Is there anything in particular you and the band are excited to bust out onstage?

Yeah! It's not only the 50th anniversary of "Eagle Rock", it's also the 40th anniversary of [Mondo Rock's] *Chemistry* album – which won Best Australian Album [at the Countdown Australian Music Awards] in 1981. So being me, what I'm going to do is play more Daddy Cool songs than I usually do. You'll still hear things like "Cool World" and a few other songs from that album, and some solo things too. And some of those Daddy Cool songs might be ones you wouldn't expect.

I'm going to show where Daddy Cool came from; there's a song we're going to play that was in the Sons Of The Vegetal Mother repertoire... We might even do two from that band! There were things in the Daddy Cool repertoire that came from Sons Of The Vegetal Mother: for example, "Love In An F.J." was a Sons Of The Vegetal Mother song, which we did again on the second Daddy Cool album. So there's kind of a thread there that people mightn't be aware of, that I'm hopefully going to make them aware of.

Of course, you'll be taking to the Bluesfest stage with your latest band, The Peaceniks. From your perspective as the leading man, what's the secret to the magic that happens when the five of you get up there?

Well, there's going to be six of us this time – I'm adding an extra guitar! A lot of the time I have a guy named James Ryan on guitar, and he's a really great guitarist – in fact I'm wearing his t-shirt right now, his other band King Canyon – and so he's terrific, but he's not always available. So my other go-to guy is this young fellow named Aaron Schembri, who's also got his own albums and music out there – y'know, you can see him on the net – and he was mentored in his teens by Ross Hanford from Daddy Cool.

He said he sought out Ross – he likes all the old players and he seeks them out to make records with them – so he's got that sound, that Ross Hanford sound. He's got a very natural thing going there. So he's going to be in it as well, and I'm going to have another guitarist up there with him. And that means I won't have to play as much guitar myself [*laughs*]. But we're gonna get that sound you get when you have two really good guitarists grooving away with each other. I don't always have that luxury because I can't afford to have six people on the road all the time – five is much easier to handle.

Do you find that playing with a different group of people gives the performance – or the music itself – a different vibe?

Absolutely! You can play the same song twice and they'll come out completely different each time. But because they're all good musicians, both times sound great. And I'm quite experienced, y'know, so I tend to just go with that feeling. I'll go, "Oh, that guy's playing that a bit differently, that guy's got a bit of a different feel," and I'll follow that lead.

It's especially different when you play with different drummers. I've got a couple of go-to drummers, and y'know, it does change. It can affect your performance, but not in a bad way. You can be like, "Ah, this is different – it's refreshing!" Y'know, it doesn't have to be exactly the same as it sounds on the record. There's only one song that has to be the same live as it is on tape, and that's "Eagle Rock". If we change that one, it's just not as good.

Is it still fun to play after thousands and thousands of shows?

Yeah, it's a real thrill! I still love it. I just love when it locks into the right groove and it just... It's just got that *thing*, y'know? You've got those powerful rhythms going, and that kind of loose tension. It's hard to describe, really. And people move! They all get up en masse and they rock around! And that means that my mission is accomplished, y'know? The song's mission is accomplished. That's the foundation of it all – I wouldn't be here without "Eagle Rock". That's the foundation of the whole career I've built.

There was one period, when I first started Mondo Rock – which wasn't that long after Daddy Cool, in the mid to late '70s – where I wouldn't play "Eagle Rock". I took a vow against it. I said, "I'll make everybody listen to Mondo Rock! Until we get a hit, I'm not playing 'Eagle Rock'." And we did that – we had a minor hit with "The Fugitive Kind" – so I started playing "Eagle Rock" again as an encore. And from then on, I've played it all the time. People get real snarky if I don't play it [*laughs*]. But I like playing it, so it's fine!



THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
Ross Wilson is a rock 'n' roll diehard from Melbourne who, since the sunny days of '64, has slammed out hit after hit with acts like Daddy Cool, Mondo Rock and Mighty Kong, cutting his teeth in pop band The Pink Finks when he was still in school. He's also lent his talents to the likes of the Skyhooks and The Wiggles – a versatile muso indeed!

What would I know him from?
You'll know Wilson as the voice behind one of the most iconic Aussie songs in history – one every true-blue larrikin worth their stubbie should know by heart – "Eagle Rock". Which, we should add, celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2021. Wilson also delivered a few Top 10 gems with Mondo Rock throughout the '80s, and produced the Skyhooks' landmark 1974 debut, *Living In The 70's*.

Why should I see him?
Because with almost 60 years of nonstop rockin' and rollin' under his belt, it's without a doubt his Bluesfest '21 set will be stacked front-to-back with classics.

When is he playing?
Wilson will take to the stage with his newest band of musical misfits, The Peaceniks, on Saturday October 2nd.





THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
A cataclysmic coalescence of sprightly, earwormish rockabilly and blistering punk-rock – think along the lines of Green Day, but with a distinct Australian flair... And upright double-bass. More specifically speaking, the man we're talking to here is Chris Cheney, The Living End's lead vocalist and sole guitarist, synonymous with a beautiful snow-crest white Gretsch G5422TG.

What would I know them from?
The Melbourne-native trio have racked up a mammoth list of hits in their 23 years, like "Prisoner Of Society", "All Torn Down", "Roll On, "White Noise", "Raise The Alarm"... The list goes on! If you've ever spent more than an hour tuned in to Triple M, there's a good chance you've heard something from The Living End's eponymous '98 debut, at least.

Why should I see them?
How often do you get to see a band of pit-spurring punk-rockers tear shit up at Bluesfest? A Living End show is always a blast and a half, and no matter how many gray hairs the hellions might have nowadays, they still hit the stage like wide-eyed ragamuffins without a care in the world.

When are they playing?
The Living End will make their first ever appearance at a Bluesfest when the festival gates open on Friday October 1st.

THE LIVING END

So Chris, what are *you* looking forward to most at Bluesfest 2021?

I'm just looking forward to playing it! We'd never done it before, and I've never been. It's a festival I've always wanted to go to, but I just haven't gotten around to it. We've always been playing, or out of the country for whatever reason. And we've never been invited before. So I'm like, "Okay, it's only taken 25 years or so, but finally, we have an invite!" I'm really looking forward to it. I know it's not quintessentially a blues festival, but I think a lot of the bands on there definitely stem from roots music. And I feel like we're a perfect fit for that, because we also came from a very roots-driven sort of background.

A few people have asked whether we'll change our set around for that kind of gig – and we could, y'know? My response was, "Well, we could probably get up and just do a whole set of '50s rockabilly songs, back from when we first started." But we're not being employed as that. We're being employed as The Living End, so we'll just get up there and we'll do our thing. But yes, it will be a huge celebration. It'll be great just to be back on a stage, to be around other musos and to be in a festival environment – and I've heard nothing but good things about Bluesfest.

For those out there who might be going more strictly for the blues and roots acts, but want to check out something a bit different – like a rockabilly-punk fusion – what can they expect from The Living End's set?

We've had a little bit of criticism for our sound – early on we did, at least. Because we were very ingrained in that whole Melbourne rockabilly scene, where it was 80 percent covers and it was a very stylised kind of thing. And we decided early on that we didn't want to just be another one of those bands. We took influences from a pretty broad range of music, and we wanted to see whether we could throw those other influences into the mix as well.

What I will say is that I think we've retained the energy and the essence of what that early incarnation of The Living End was. And that's pretty high energy. There's a lot of notes in the solos – it's pretty flashy music, I suppose. So I think we've been able to retain that, even though we've had a few radio hits. I think we've managed to bridge the gap between that raw, energetic kind of rock 'n' roll music and those pop sensibilities. But when we get onstage, it's pretty ballsy and it's pretty aggressive. We definitely don't leave any fuel in the tank.

That just comes from that scene we came from, where it was just balls-to-the-wall kind of energy. And the AC/DC influence, being into bands like them and The Who, and all that sort of stuff. People that come to our shows tend to use them as an excuse to really let out their frustrations. And that's a great thing! That's what music's for. So I think I'm expecting it to be pretty loose, in the best possible way.

What does your live rig look like at the moment?

I have one of those ground control switches, which I initially got when we did this tour where we played nine records in full. We did this retrospective thing where we played multiple nights in different venues, and I had to play a different record each night. It was a bit of a mindf*** to begin with, to learn all those songs, but I really wanted to be able to recreate all the sounds from all the records. So I bought this switch and loaded it up with all the patches, so for example I could press loop #1 and engage a delay and an overdrive, and then patch #2 would be a shorter delay.

I still use that, because it's easier for me to be singing and not trying to hit multiple pedals at the same time. Amp-wise, I'm still using the Wizards – which I got way back in 2000 when we supported AC/DC – normally with an AC30.

Are you still all about that Gretsch life?

I am, yeah. I mean, I'm not very good when I get on a Les Paul or a Strat. I just can't... Well, firstly, it doesn't sound the same. But also, my hands are just too big. It's a perspective thing – I'm so used to that big hollowbody sound and feel, anything else just sort of feels weird to me. Same with the amp, really. I've never really strayed too far from getting that kind of crunch from the Wizard and the power of that 100-watt, driven sound. I'm running it clean these days, but just fully cranked. And I get that chimey sparkle from the AC30.

I've always tried to blend those two influences of AC/DC and the Stray Cats. To me, that's the ultimate guitar tone. If you get them in, you can run anything else on top of that, pedal-wise. I've never really heard it out the front, obviously – but from all reports, it's a pretty mammoth sound.

Oh, absolutely. I remember when I saw The Living End for the first time, I was just gobsmacked at how much tone was being produced by the one guitar.

It's definitely something I've worked on since back in '96, '97. I used to run a couple of the Fender Twins, and they were great. They did the job. But it's definitely something that I've searched for, and will continue to search for – y'know, *'the tone'*. But I've always tried to get that perfect combination the amps and the popping of the strings. I love the whole Stevie Ray Vaughan kind of twang and bite, but I also love that big, saturated, dirty rhythm sound as well. I don't think you can have it all – you've gotta find some middle ground.

HUSSY HICKS

Hussy Hicks are certainly no strangers to Bluesfest. Would this be your fourth time playing it? Fifth?

Fourth or fifth, yeah! We won the busking competition and got to play in 2010, and then we played 2011, 2016, 2018 and 2019 – so it'll actually be our sixth time playing!

***Sixth!* What is it about Bluesfest that keeps drawing you back?**

Well y'know, we do a lot of overseas touring – well, *used* to do a lot of overseas touring – so the fact that it gives us the ability to showcase what we do at the highest level, to our local crowd, is probably the biggest thing. It's like being able to show your friends and family what you can do when you're given that sort of world-class production at a world-class festival.

I've only been up a couple of times, but I've found that Bluesfest has such a unique atmosphere compared to a lot of other festivals. Do you feel that way as an artist?

Yeah! The people who go to Bluesfest, they're really dedicated music fans. Like, they'll all get in there at midday and have their programs sorted out, and they'll watch everything. And we'll see people come to shows all over the world, who'll come to watch us because they've seen us at Bluesfest. That's a big difference – the people who go to Bluesfest are just real diehard music lovers.

So how do you plan to make your set at Bluesfest 2021 stand out?

Depending on the set times, we might have a couple of special guests. We had a few guests lined up for April, but obviously that didn't happen. We've been playing as much as we can to try and still be a band that has the energy you'd expect to see at Bluesfest. We've booked so many gigs, and we've managed to pull some of them of, but... We're going to get up there and just play like a band that's wanted to get up on that stage for years.

You guys put a new single out earlier this year, and an album last year, so there's plenty of new material to jam out.

We were originally going to release *Gather Up The People* at Bluesfest 2020. We held back on it for a while, but then we just decided that, y'know, we'd rather put it out and celebrate it later. Normally by now we'd be celebrating it with a world tour, but we thought that while everyone was isolated and locked away, we'd give the people who already like our music something new to listen to. It'll be great to play those songs on a big stage, with a mix of old ones in there too. It'll be very emotional.

With the April edition, y'know, we tried very hard not to get too excited, and it got to, like, two days before the show, we were listening to that ABC special, and because so many of the people on the lineup were road warriors like us – they're like our festival family – we started getting a bit teary thinking we were finally going to see them all. And then it all got pulled out from under us. But when we're up there [in October], it's going to feel very much like we'll have reached to the top of the mountain.

What guitars are you playing on right now?

My main electric guitar is the '89 Strat Plus, which I've had since I was a teenager. I was very lucky, because I was just gonna buy a Magnum with the money I'd saved up, and my parents sort of kicked in the other half and said, "Well, now you can keep this guitar forever." And I have! So that's my main electric, and my main acoustic is an Andy Allen custom shop Maton, which he made for me back in 2009. That's been beaten up, and I think every panel has been smashed at least once, but it's still just a great guitar to play.

I split that with a Mi-Si magnetic pickup – I use the [Maton] AP5 for the acoustic sound, and I run the magnetic pickup through the amps. I usually like to use a Fender Twin. I never use my own amps at festivals because we'll just play through the backline gear, but I've got a Silverface Twin and one of the Music Man two-by-12 HDs. The Twin gives you all the beautiful, sparkly tops and big bottoms, and then the Music Man just sort of punches you in the mids.

What is it about that Fender Strat Plus that makes it such a special axe for you?

I guess just absolute familiarity. Y'know, I learned to play the guitar on that – I played all of my formative gigs on it, so it's just so familiar. I have lots of other guitars – I've got this Tokai SG that I've been playing a little bit, and I bought this old lap slide off Jeff Lang that we used on the "Mountain Peak" single. I'll probably bring that with me to Bluesfest since it's a local show, but I don't usually bother taking with me on the road. It's like a 1960s Teisco, and that's a lovely guitar. I've got a couple of Teles that I'll chuck in the rig, too, but the Strat's just... It's like an extension of my person.

Have you customised it much over the years, or are you adamant on keeping it all stock?

I probably would've kept it more stock, but y'know, over the years I've tinkered with it a bit. It had the Wilkinson roller nuts, which had the two rollers, and after playing the guitar for a while you kind of dig a groove into them, so I ended up with the ball bearing Wilkinsons instead. A guitar repairer changed the bridge to graphite saddles – I keep trying to change back to the originals, but I'm just waiting for the order to come. But that was just because I was breaking strings a lot.

Phil Emmanuel ripped the trem setter out when I was playing in his band as a 15-year-old; he was like, "Ah, you won't need that! That's rubbish! Rip it out!" So now I've got just normal springs in there. I've got all the original volume and tone pots. The pickups are still all Lace Sensors – I know they're sort of love-'em-or-hate-'em, but I've had some more standard Strats and I guess the Lace Sensors are not quite as twangy, but the Strat Plus is just such a solid gigging guitar, the output is there. If I want something super twangy, I've got my '66 Mustang.



THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
Hussy Hicks is one part soulful, tent-filling vocal prowess (courtesy of the dazzlingly dynamic Leesa Gentz) and one part bold, bewitching guitar that gets heads turning faster than a siren on a city street (courtesy of the virtuosic Julz Parker, championed by Phil Emmanuel as "Australia's top female guitar player").

What would I know them from?
The duo released their enthralling seventh album, *Gather Up The People*, just a little over a year ago. They followed it up with the standalone single "The Edge" back in April. If you don't know them from either of those records, you've probably seen them around at a Bluesfest in years past – after all, they've played six of them in the past decade!

Why should I see them?
There's a reason Parker joined BB King and Santana in Bluesfest's Guitar Hero fan poll – and why they've scored awards buzz everywhere from the Queensland Music Awards to the Golden Guitars. The performances are unlike anything you'll have ever seen before, loaded with character, charisma, and – of course – incredible tunes.

When are they playing?
Parker and Gentz will play an impressive *three* sets across the weekend, all of which are certain to be special for their own reasons, taking to the stage on Saturday October 2nd, Sunday 3rd and Monday 4th.





THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
All Our Exes Live In Texas are a four-piece folk troupe hailing from Sydney, with a uniquely eye-catching setup consisting of full-band vocal harmonies, guitar, mandolin, ukulele and accordion. Their critically acclaimed 2017 debut, *When We Fall*, scored them that year's ARIA Award for Best Blues And Roots Album – and rightfully so, if we may declare ourselves. Here, we're chatting with Elana Stone, the band's accordionist.

What would I know them from?
They've toured with everyone from Passenger to the Backstreet Boys, and a legion of this year's biggest players at Bluesfest (think the likes of Midnight Oil, Kate Miller-Heidke and Mama Kin). In addition to its #8 peak on the ARIA Charts, *When We Fall* spurred the beloved singles "Tell Me", "Sailboat" and "The Devil's Part".

Why should I see them?
Even if off-kilter folk isn't your typical jam, All Our Exes a certainly worth a look-see for the fact there's nobody else on the lineup like them. They are truly one-of-a-kind, and you're almost guaranteed to walk a way with a big ol' smile on your face.

When are they playing?
All Our Exes Live In Texas are scheduled to get the party started when Bluesfest kicks off on Friday October 1st. They'll also play on the Saturday (October 2nd), because just once definitely ain't enough!

ALL OUR EXES LIVE IN TEXAS

So Elana, what are *you* looking forward to most at Bluesfest 2021?

I mean, I'm just looking forward to it actually being on! That's the main thing. I'm so pressed by that, just the tenacity of going again – like, this is what? The third time it's been postponed? It might even be the fourth, I'm not even sure at this stage. As a human, you take so many knock-backs, and after a while you're like, "I'm just going to see what happens." Because I so badly want Bluesfest to go ahead. I feel like if Bluesfest can't go ahead, I don't know what can. Basically, all my hopes and dreams are pinned on Bluesfest. If Bluesfest doesn't happen, I don't know who I am anymore. So y'know, some casual, fairly low expectations.

I know you guys played the festival in 2018, was that the first time you played?

Yeah, in 2017 we won the ARIA for Best Blues & Roots Album, and we were like, "Yes! Finally, Bluesfest will have us!" We were just itching to play, and then they didn't get us 'til the next year, but we were like, "Okay, that's cool, they got us eventually." So that was nice.

What did you find so exciting about your Bluesfest debut that made you want to come back this year?

We had a real rushed situation last time, where we pretty much line-checked and ran out onto the stage and played – I think there was some kind of kerfuffle on the way there with transport or something... I'm looking forward to just soundchecking and having a nice, leisurely gig. But I remember we played twice – we played once on a mainstage and then once in a smaller tent, which was kind of like the 'alt-country' tent. And I met Lukas Nelson, Willie Nelson's son, and I felt like I'd come pretty close to country royalty. That was cool. But yeah, the whole event was amazing!

You always meet amazing people at Bluesfest, y'know? Even if you're in the audience, you tend to stumble across them all in the crowd, and that's exciting. I saw Questlove there one year – not when I was playing with All Our Exes, but when I was playing there with a different band.

Who are you keen to see this year?

Well, I mean, the royalty of Midnight Oil, Paul Kelly and Kasey Chambers – you can't really go past those guys. I'm really excited to see John Butler because he's a friend of mine, I toured with him for a year – it was just two years ago now, but it feels like a lifetime ago. I miss him! I miss Mama Kin – they're my friends, so I'm very excited to see them again! The Cat Empire are playing a different day to us, so I might not get to catch them, but I hope I do. The Waifs are very great friends too, I love them all very much.

Pretty much everyone on thhere is amazing. I'm very excited just to see a large gathering of people in one spot, to be honest.

Do you find that as a performer, there's a different sort of atmosphere you tend to embrace at a festival, compared to a bespoke All Our Exes show?

Well, I guess you're kind of spruiking a little harder than you might for your own crowd, y'know? You're also playing on a bigger stage, so you kind of have to fill that space with a giant crown of a huge dress, or some kind of pyrotechnic. But yeah, we just generally stand very still and play our instruments and sing, and hope that's enough to get us over the line. I feel like you're also trying to appeal to some people who may have other bands they're scheduled to go and see, so you try to keep them there for as long as possible.

My bandmate Katie [Wighton, vocals/guitar] has a good trick. I probably shouldn't tell you this, but when a bunch of our audience members are starting to walk away to go see another act, she gets everyone to cheer really loudly on the count of three. She says, "Okay, let's all pretend the best thing ever just happened," and it makes the people that just left feel like they've missed out on something. And it's worked! It's actually a brilliant idea. She's very sneaky.

It's been a hot minute since All Our Exes put out any music – we're coming up on five years since y'all dropped *When We Fall*. Have you been working on any new tunes?

Yeah! We've got heaps of new stuff, and a lot of it is recorded and ready to go – it's really just a matter of waiting for the right moment. I mean without touring, it's very hard to justify putting out any new music. Everyone's been doing their own thing for a little while – I have a baby, the other girls are doing solo music, I'm doing solo music – but y'know, I think once the wheels of the world start turning again, we'll get back into the swing of it. Some of the songs that we've recorded are some of my favourite Exes songs, so I'm excited to get them out.

Is it too early to say when we might get our ears around some of those?

Well, we were on the road for six years nonstop, and we kind of burnt out in terms of, like, road weariness and self-management. And since then, it's been very hard to get everyone in the same place. I'm in Wollongong, Georgia's in Sydney, Hannah and Katie are in Melbourne – and now with border closures, it's been very hard for us to all even be at the same gig, even if we're hired to play for something. So I feel like saying anything at the moment would be insane. Nothing can be predicted, y'know? We just have to see what happens – and in the meantime, we're all putting out our own music and looking after ourselves and our families. But I miss seeing those girls every single day. I love being close to them and being a little family.

JEFF LANG

So Jeff, what are *you* looking forward to most at Bluesfest 2021?

It'll be mighty to be playing at Bluesfest again! It's always a good event, but with all the delays and anticipation, there's this extra sense of, "Yes! We can do this!" It'll feel like I can say, "I've been good! I'm getting rewarded!" I mean, hats off to 'em for getting it to happen at all – y'know, running a festival of that size is a big effort normally, feels herculean now, in light of all the obstacles they've had to face.

You're obviously no stranger to Bluesfest, having playing it a decent few times since your debut in 1994. What is it about the festival that keeps drawing you back to it?

Well I mean, any event like that, where the event has a certain pull of its own aside from whoever is on the bill... Y'know, the big drawcard for the performer is that you've got a lot of people who just really want to see live music – you know that there's going to be a gathering of people who all know what you do, and they're all in one place together. So it's always got a good vibe to it. There's also likely to be people who haven't heard of you before, and are checking you out for the first time. And that's always a good thing, because the context is a positive one.

Do you remember much about that first time you took to the stage at Bluesfest?

I vaguely do! I remember it was at Belongil Fields, and I remember it for a couple of reasons. It was before the first album, *Ravenswood*. I recorded that in April of '94, so I think I was just about to head into the studio, and Bluesfest was my first outing for a few of the songs on it – songs that I still play to this day! The title track is one of those – I remember I played it for the first time ever at Bluesfest that year. I also remember that I didn't know it would be overcast all weekend, and I got sunstroke [*laughs*]. That one's not a great memory, but y'know, it tends to make things stick in your mind!

So being a veteran of the festival, how would you say Bluesfest has evolved over the years?

It's definitely grown in size with the change of venue, which I think has been a really good thing. Having their own purpose-built site has meant there's a little bit more separation between the stages, so you don't get the sonic clashes that used to happen a little bit. It never used to be anything horrendous or foul to the ears, but these days, y'know, you don't hear the mainstage's low-end washing over one of the smaller stages or anything like that. So there are certain things, logistically, that they've really thought through and gotten right with the venue as it is now.

It was probably a little bit more strictly blues-driven, initially. But then again, when I first played in '94, they had me on there, and I'm not strictly a blues act – so there's always been a little bit of an eye to broadening it beyond traditional blues and roots. That continues now, and I think it's a good thing, because it draws a wider audience into the event. They have people that might be more into the more mainstream artists on the bill, but they'll happen past a stage where someone is playing a more traditional form of the music, and they'll check it out and end up liking it. So it kind of broadens the appeal for that reason as well.

What can we expect to see from your set at Bluesfest 2021?

I haven't thought much about what I'm going to do! I mean, I tend to wing it a little bit.

Well, you do have over 30 albums worth of material to draw from.

That's right! That helps keep it a little bit more energetic, if I don't plan it too much in advance. There's always gotta be a little bit of improvisation in there. I'll be bringing a slide guitar with me to play some of that stuff, and there'll be some regular guitar stuff as well. But aside from that, it's unknown even to me!

What kind of guitars are you jamming out on these days?

For regular, non-slide guitar duties, I have a guitar made by a guy named David Churchill over in Ballarat. I also have an instrument made for lap-style playing, and the one I'm using right now is made by a fellow named Ross Coole, from Fremantle, and he also made the guitar that I'm using for the bottleneck playing. That's the most recent guitar I had made for me – I had it made with a flat fingerboard with no radius on it. Because I do a few solos in the set, and oftentimes they're played with a bottleneck slide and a capo, and what I was finding was that playing with a radius fingerboard, the middle strings would be prone to rattling against the fretboard.

Over time, I'd start noticing it at gigs and it would give me the shits. Eventually I thought, "Y'know, I've been playing slide guitar at gigs for decades now – maybe I should address this." I debated getting a hold of an electric guitar to see if it would actually work, but then the only guitars in electric land with flat fingerboards are usually real shredder machines, and those don't work for slide either. But then a friend of mine, Shannon Bourne – a great guitar player – he loaned me an old Harmony Stella 12-string, which happened to have a dead flat fingerboard.

So I experimented with that, and even though it was a 12-string, which has got a very different action to it, I was pretty confident that the idea would work. And it has! Finally, after decades, I did a simple thing that fixed an issue that was annoying me!



THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
A triple ARIA-winning folkster who takes to the fretboard with an inhuman level of skill. In addition to his mind-melting solo work, Jeff Lang is a collaborative superstar, whipping out riveting records with the likes of Bob Brozman and Angus Diggs, Chris Whitley, Mamadou Diabate and Bobby Singh, and Danny McKenna. Lang also soundtracked ABC's drama series *The Gods Of Wheat Street* in 2014.

What would I know him from?
Bluesfest, probably – Lang is an honoured veteran of the festival, making his first appearance there before he'd even put a record out. Since then, he's released over 30, so if you haven't managed to catch him onstage, there's a good chance you've heard him (vocally or via his guitar playing) somewhere down the line.

Why should I see him?
You should give Lang a shot for the inescapably wondrous twang and twinkle that rings out from his fretboard. He wrangles slide guitar like it's what he was born to do, and he wields a mighty voice to sing over it all with.

When is he playing?
Lang has two shows lined up for this year's jaunt – he'll be strumming 'n sliding up a storm on both the Saturday (October 2nd) and the Sunday (October 3rd).





THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
Tex Perkins is a living legend in Australia's blues, punk, country and rock scenes. He's played in at least a dozen bands since the early '80s – most notably The Beasts Of Bourbon, The Cruel Sea and Dark Horses – in addition to his solo act and collab efforts with the likes of Tim Rogers and Murray Paterson. At this year's Bluesfest, he'll be debuting a special edition of his Johnny Cash tribute, *The Man In Black*.

What would I know him from?
Even if you're new to the wild world of Tex Perkins, there's a solid 99 percent chance you'll have heard of one Mr. Johnny Cash. Perkins and his crew will be jamming out an hour of the Nashville numen's greatest tunes (and some choice cuts from deeper in the catalogue) in a somewhat reconfigured, Bluesfest-exclusive remix of Perkins' critically acclaimed theatre show, *The Man In Black*.

Why should I see him?
Because although any of Tex Perkins' projects are worth at least a casual suss, *The Man In Black* is something truly special – an incandescently authentic, one-of-a-kind tribute to a genuine rock 'n' roll legend, performed with the kind of power and passion that Cash himself would've applauded.

When is he playing?
Tex and co. will take *The Man In Black* for a spin on the festival's kick-off date: Friday October 1st.

TEX PERKINS

So Tex, what are *you* looking forward to most at Bluesfest 2021?

Well to tell you the truth, I just want it to happen! Not even for my sake – I just want it to happen, I want it to actually take place. Everything after that is cream on top, really. To tell you to truth, even that is a big ask in these times – to expect something to *actually* go ahead. In my experience, especially over the last month, you've just gotta forget everything that you thought was going to happen. It's worse this time around, too, because last year, as it was kind of Melbourne-centric, I worked quite a bit. I did a lot of COVID-safe gigs in Queensland and I played a lot in New South Wales. A lot of them were regional gigs – wherever I could drive to, I would head out to play. But this time, all my activities have ground to a halt. There's no wriggling out of this one.

From your perspective onstage, because of everything going on with COVID and the constant postponements and cancellations of live events, have you found that when you are able to get up there and rock out, people are appreciating it more?

The transition to COVID-style gigs wasn't huge for me because y'know, I do a lot of those more casual gigs anyway. My bread and butter is me and another guy – usually these days it's Matt Walker – we would go out as a duo and we'd play a selection of material in a seated venue, usually, to people our age. Y'know, people in their 40s and 50s – they're used to being seated anyway. A lot of the younger acts had trouble transitioning; "What!? People have gotta *sit down* when they watch us!? *Oh my God!*" A lot of acts chose not to play, rather than play in those conditions. So yeah, apart from the numbers, it wasn't a big change for me.

The solution was to do two gigs in one night, because you were only allowed a third of the venue's capacity in each show. So I would just try to squeeze more gigs into the same space of time. I think the thing I noticed the most was when I was involved in this Rolling Stones tribute act, a *Sticky Fingers* 50th anniversary set – we played in Brisbane and I noticed that there was actually a mosh pit, so to speak, and people sort of writhing around together. I hadn't actually seen that in years – even way before COVID! It was like something I'd forgotten even existed.

So maybe after having been distanced for a while, those people were kind of letting go and really connecting, physically, in a more excited way. I don't think that will happen at Bluesfest, though – it would have to be very strict, wouldn't it? I'm assuming there'll be all sorts of restrictions with seating and distancing and such.

With Bluesfest being a unique environment, specifically a festival, is there a difference to how you structure the Man In Black set for something like this, compared to how you would for a theatre show?

Absolutely. It's a completely different thing. It's not the theatre show – that's a two-hour spectacle with dialogue and an intermission, and none of that is going to happen at the festival. You've got an hour to smack it all out and f*** off, so it's very much just music-driven. We're used to playing a vast array of material when we play Johnny Cash, but this is a tight, one-hour set, just the songs and the atmosphere. I think people will be happy with it, too.

Are you just playing the hits, or are you keen to pepper in a few deep cuts from the Cash vault?

Oh yeah, absolutely. *Good* deep cuts, too! With the theatre show, we kind of restrict it to a narrative, y'know – certain songs from throughout the story of his life, all laid out to the way the narrative unfolds. But this way, because it's a festival, we can just play the songs that we love and the songs that really work in a live set, and we can put some newer songs in there as well. We do more songs from his latter period than we do in the theatre show; we do a fair amount of material from the Rick Rubin albums, which is pretty distinct.

So what made you want to bring this particular show to Bluesfest? Is that what got pitched to you, or was it something you brought to the table?

It was pitched to us. I don't know Peter Noble well, but I've known him for a long time – he always reminds me that he was the promotor of some very early gigs I was involved in, in the mid '80s. He brought out a band called The Anti-Nowhere League, which was a late-period punk band from England, and he put on this show – it was the last time I saw hundreds and hundreds of skinheads all gathered in one place – and I was one of the support acts. I was in a band called The Bush Oysters. I remember Peter was a fan of The Bush Oysters, so [when he was putting together the lineup for Bluesfest 2021] I think he said, "Okay, what's Tex doing?"

I've played Bluesfest a lot of times over the years – I've honestly lost count. Seriously. The Cruel Sea would've played three or four times. Tex, Don And Charlie have played there a couple of times. I've played there with the Dark Horses, I've played there with The Ape, I've played there with The Fat Rubber Band... So basically, Pete just came to me and asked for the *Man In Black* show. I mean career-wise, it would have been better for me to have The Fat Rubber Band play, but we played the last Bluesfest, so that was off the table. And also, being a local, I think I fill that token local spot.

HIATUS KAIYOTE

So Paul, what are *you* looking forward to most at Bluesfest 2021?

To be honest, man, I'm looking forward to actually playing a show again! That hasn't really been a thing we've been able to do for... Well, f***ing ages. Obviously the festival was pushed back, and our Melbourne shows were pushed back, and our Vivid shows got cancelled, and it's just like, "Oh wow, we've set a new record!" We haven't been able to play anywhere at all, and that's felt so f***ing weird. So I'm just excited to play a show, y'know? That's going to be pretty incredible.

Has it just been the one show you've played in 2021 so far?

Yeah, I think that was the Jungle Love festival up in Queensland. And that was great fun! It was heaps of fun. But that's the only thing that's managed to slip through the COVID chaos this year.

Did you guys play much of the new record at Jungle Love?

We played bits of it, but there's a lot of it we didn't play at that show just because the record wasn't out yet. We wanted to keep some parts of it close to our chests, because it's kind of tricky these days. You can't really keep secrets about your music anymore – as soon as you play a new song in front of some people, there's a very good chance someone's gonna record it on their phone and throw it up on YouTube, and then that's the first version of it that anyone hears. And the first time you play a song at a gig, it's not really... Y'know, that's not the best way to capture or portray its full potential. So it's really fun to play new material, but these days we have to hold ourselves back a little bit. But any show from now on, we're definitely going to be playing everything off the new album – which is exciting!

What are some of the tracks from *Mood Valiant* that you're keen to show off?

I guess it'll be interesting to see the reaction to all of them – to see what the energy is like all around, y'know? "Red Room" is obviously doing really well, and then it'll be interesting to play "Stone Or Lavender" because that one is an epic ballad – it'll be interesting to see how people react to that. I hope people get their lighters out for it. I think "Sparkle Tape Break Up" is going to be a really fun one to play live, too, just to see the energy of that – that's a real fun one to play, it's kind of simple but it's also got a lot of spirit.

Obviously between these two albums, you guys went through a whole lot of living, both as a band and individually. How did you want this record to reflect what Hiatus Kaiyote is as a band in 2021, and personify those six years of growth?

I guess there wasn't necessarily a thought process to that. Y'know, we worked on a bunch of music, which invariably was all fused with our own life experiences and whatnot. There's a bunch of different stuff that we worked on, and as soon as we had the title – which was about halfway through the process – that kind of steered things in a way. We were asking ourselves: "Which things here compliment each other? What has the right balance of energy and complexity and simplicity and emotion, sadness and joy and all that sort of stuff?"

I don't think it was necessarily about, like, "How do we want to represent the band?" It was more like, "What do we want this album to be? What do we want this particular body of work to feel like and say? What's the best selection of things, and the best sequence of those things, to really tell a story and take you on a journey?"

So it's more an encapsulation of what you were feeling as individuals, rather than what you wanted to project as a unit?

I mean, it kind of always is – you're always presenting an amalgamation of your own feelings and ideas. It definitely felt like this particular album was going to present a lot of different feelings and ideas than the other ones, just because of, y'know, time and life and all that sort of stuff. A lot of crazy things happened in-between the records, so it was natural that that would be the case. But we just wanted it to feel like everything belonged together – we wanted to cast a bit more of a broad net, but we also wanted that net to sink.

Choose Your Weapon was such an epic f***ing smorgasbord of different stuff – which was awesome, and I guess that's what that album was meant to be – but we were like, "Well, maybe this one doesn't have to be as everywhere-all-at-once. It can be a tighter story, with a more unified essence."

Was the way it would translate to the stage something you found crucial in the studio?

There's always a bunch of different ways that we approach a track, because every track is its own thing. Sometimes it really does start as a 'live band' sort of experience – sometimes that is the genesis, and we'll workshop it in that sense before we actually record it – but other times it might come from a more experimental angle, or be produced in a different way.

A lot of tracks will start off as jams or experiments in the studio, just because there's a particular set of sounds being played that push us in certain directions. There are times where we just go, "Yeah, we've played the shit out of this, let's just go in and record." And then there are other times where we actually finish producing and mixing a song and we have to go, "Oh f***, now we have to figure out how to play this!"



THE CHEAT SHEET

Okay, so who's this?
Hiatus Kaiyote are a frisky and funky four-piece from Melbourne doling out transcendental slivers of blue-eyed soul. They have a seal of approval of musical monoliths like Kendrick Lamar, Drake and Beyoncé, all of whom have sampled the band in the ten years since they broke out onto the scene.

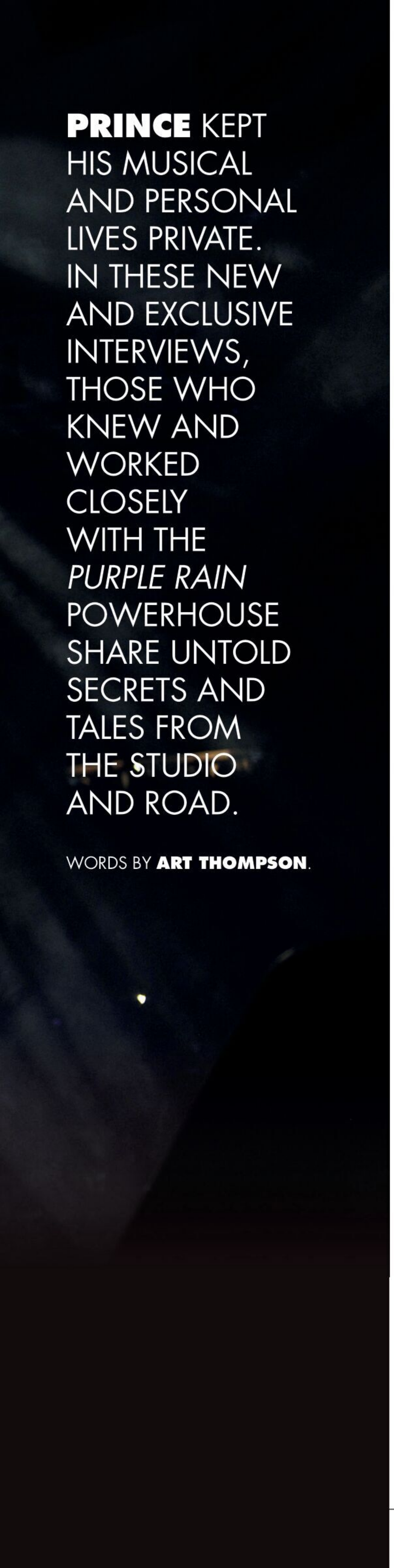
What would I know them from?
If you follow the Grammys, you might know them as the first Australian act to be nominated for one of the R&B categories, landing a nom for the Best R&B Performance award with their track "Nakamarra". They scored a second nom in 2016 for the same award, this time at the hands of "Breathing Underwater". If neither of those tracks ring a bell, maybe you've heard a cut or two from their trip-inducing third album, *Mood Valiant*, which the band minted back in June.

Why should I see them?
Well, you aren't allowed to bring drugs into Bluesfest (*nor should you be – don't do drugs, kids*), but if you are down to explore a new plane of euphoria – one far beyond the confines of our mere human existence – they'll happily take you there with a wondrous spate of silky strumming, kaleidoscopic basslines and angelic vocals.

When are they playing?
Hiatus Kaiyote will take Bluesfest punters on two soaring, soulful journeys through sound when they play on the Sunday (October 3rd) and Monday (October 4th).



ROYAL INTRIGUE



PRINCE KEPT HIS MUSICAL AND PERSONAL LIVES PRIVATE. IN THESE NEW AND EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS, THOSE WHO KNEW AND WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE *PURPLE RAIN* POWERHOUSE SHARE UNTOLD SECRETS AND TALES FROM THE STUDIO AND ROAD.

WORDS BY **ART THOMPSON**.

The phenomenal body of work Prince created during his 57 years on Earth testifies to his genius for songwriting, sheer musicality and awesome guitar skills. But Prince was unique in that he processed similarly high-level skills when it came to recording, producing, choreography... You name it.

Prince, who seemed born to become the high priest of pop-funk, drew the inevitable guitar and showmanship comparisons to Jimi Hendrix and James Brown – and he was certainly the funkiest dude around, even though he loved hard rock and psychedelic music and drew from influences wherever he found them. His work ethic was unstoppable, and he drove those around him to rise to their utmost abilities, and then take it a notch further.

The ultimate manifestation of his all-or-nothing approach to just about everything was, of course, Paisley Park, his Minneapolis-based headquarters, where he drilled his musicians relentlessly, recorded music practically nonstop, and basically inspired everyone to be all they could be. If you were invited to be in Prince's band – which in itself was a litmus test that hinged on one's musical skills and creativity – it was implicit that you were signing on to work at the same gruelling pace that Prince demanded of himself. That included rehearsals that lasted for hours, mandatory choreography for the stage show, and then the studio sessions that all band members were on call for virtually any time of the day or night.

Those who felt like they had earned the right to play alongside Prince might have been surprised by the sort of bootcamp mentality that existed within Paisley's confines, but with it came the lessons that Prince imparted to his players – lessons unavailable anywhere else – and the payoff for being brought into his world was a high-paying gig that practically guaranteed a musician would leave the band a better musician when the time came to move on.

"He single-handedly helped me become the guitar player that I am today," says Mike Scott, a blazingly skilled guitarist who had worked with the rap/R&B duo Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis (among many others) before joining Prince in 1996. Scott toured extensively with New Power Generation and contributed to the albums Emancipation, Crystal Ball, The Truth and Newpower Soul.

"As far as a lead player, I was a little more technical than Prince was because I was listening to Return to Forever, Al Di Meola, the Mahavishnu Orchestra and stuff like that," Scott says. "But when I would take solos with him onstage, he was like, 'Man, all those notes don't mean nothing because they don't translate in an arena. I'll hold a high note and have people screaming while you play 100 notes, and nobody's going to hear what you did.'

"That was one of the most important things he ever told me, and there were so many moments like that, and so many things he shared that made me a much better player. Prince was a great guitarist and he was a showman – he knew how to bring a crowd to their knees – so I would colour outside the lines. I would take solos that had more theory behind them as opposed to just doing crazy pentatonic stuff like he'd been doing forever."

How did you two work out what tones you would use for certain songs?

One day he called me out because I had taken a distortion solo. He said, "Hey, Mike, I just did a fast song and I took a distortion solo. What do you think I should use: distortion or clean?" And I said, "Well, if you just used distortion in the first solo, then I would go clean. And he goes, "That's right. Don't ever step on a distortion pedal after I've taken a solo. If I take a distortion solo, you take a clean solo.

So for the rest of the tour, distortion was bad. But one night, an opportunity came up during the "Purple Rain" chorus. He steps on his distortion pedal and he had nothing – his rig was out. So he points at me and shouts, "Take a solo," and I got to rip the shit out of that "Purple Rain" solo once in the whole time I was with him. At the end of the night, he said, "Did you enjoy that? You'll never get to take that solo again!"

Did he want you to play certain guitars?

He had me playing hollowbody guitars a lot. I was playing a PRS Hollowbody II Piezo the last time I was with him, and he told me, "I love that Hollowbody sound, and I love that you can go to acoustic." I run the magnetic and piezo pickups at the same time, and I blend them. I run a Dunlop Rotovibe on the clean Hollowbody sound, and I put the acoustic pickup straight through a Fishman or a Hughes & Kettner acoustic amp, and it's an amazing wall of guitar.

"IF YOU MADE A MISTAKE, HE WOULD LOOK AT YOU AND RUB HIS FINGERS TOGETHER, AND THAT MEANT YOU GOT DOCKED. ONE TIME HE FINED ME $1,000..."

One of the last times I was out with him, Prince wanted me to play the same guitar he was playing, a Vox HDC-77. I don't know if he thought I was going to be mad about it, but any advice he gave me, I would jump right on it. So I called Vox that same evening and had them send me two HDC-77s. That guitar is badass. It does single-coil, humbucker and P-90 in the same pickup. It's a very versatile guitar. It can sound very Strat- or Tele-like, and the humbucker is just balls to the wall. So I understood why he was playing that guitar. I started playing one, and I still do.

What are some things you did that you know impressed him?

Sometimes he'd play something and say, "Do a harmony to this." And it would blow his mind because I never had to practice that stuff. There's a live video of us playing in London, and he broke the band down and just had me play by myself, and I was playing this guitar part that was a combination of my part and his part – and then he changed keys and I was still doing it in two-part harmony. That impressed him. When I started working with him in '96, he had a studio tech named Hans Buff, and when I would go in and record, Hans would later tell me, "Man,

Prince raves about you. He solos your parts out and he loses his mind." But I never saw any of that.

I thought Prince hated my playing because he would always ride me and give me shit. But one day, he and I went for a limo ride to an after-show party, and we rode around town trying find a club to go to. That was the first time he and I talked just one on one. And he said, "Mike, you're a great player and a great musician. If you started believing in that, you would take over the world." That was the only time he gave me any kudos.

Did you ever have anything unusual happen on the road with him?

His rig blew up one night in London, just as he was pulling up in his limo, and it was because we were on British power and everything was on convertors. He had a buzz, and his tech, Takumi, was trying to get the buzz out, and his whole rig just went up in flames. He and I were both using four-foot racks at that time, and he had a Soldano SLO preamp with the auto faders, and that thing breathes fire. His lead tone was amazing, and he wasn't using pedals.

So his stuff went up in smoke, and he's now in the back of the venue asking why he can't come up and play. And we were panicking! I said, "Look, he only plays on the first song, so plug him into my rig and set me up with a Fender Twin, and then after the first song you all can figure it out while we're playing." So they plug him into my wireless system, and he comes up to the stage and grabs his guitar – and when Prince comes in a room, he's ready to play! He walked right onstage and we started jamming, and he walks over to me and says, "My guitar sounds amazing tonight." [*Laughs*] He never knew he was playing through my rig, and I never told him.

Were you expected to own a part the minute Prince showed it to you? Did he have any advice for memorising parts?

Yeah, he would show you something once, and he would not show you again. And he would know if you didn't play it exactly right. Sometimes he would show us stuff and we wouldn't remember it the next day. Like, you wouldn't remember this rhythm pattern that was bouncing off of the keyboard pattern that was bouncing off of the bass pattern. So he told the band to start taking ginkgo biloba [a tree species known to enhance brain function], because it's great for your memory. I started taking ginkgo, and it helped immensely. Prince would push you to the limits.

Like, if you came in today for a rehearsal, he'd go, "I've got a new song," and we'd learn it. But we probably wouldn't play it for six months, and he would still expect us to play it just like you learned it today. So besides all the drinking and ridiculousness going on on the tour bus, I would sit and go through his whole repertoire before the show, because you never knew what songs he was going to call, or even what the setlist was going to be each night. That made it a challenge and made you have to step up your game, because everything you did had to be on point.

And if you made a mistake, he would look at you and rub his fingers together, and that meant you got docked. One time he fined me $1,000. I said, "You'll never fine me again," and he never did. Although he did dock the whole band once, because he went to the bridge too early and we didn't follow him. He said, "I never make mistakes – you all made a mistake by not following me." So we all got fined.

"AT PAISLEY PARK, EVERYTHING WAS LIVE, AND HE COULD ALWAYS HEAR EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON IN ALL PLACES..."

That's an old-school way of running a band, like James Brown or something.

It doesn't happen anymore, because a lot of these shows have tracks playing in Pro Tools. I started playing with Justin Timberlake in 2008, and his show was based on choreography and lights, and nothing can change. It's the same show every night. With Prince, it was always a crap shoot. He used to say, "Real music played by real musicians." We may have played over a drum loop occasionally, but I don't think we ever played to Pro Tools. Prince was a learning experience, and God only made one of him. He was an amazing teacher and an amazing mentor. You definitely would leave there a better musician than you were when you came in.

DEZ DICKERSON

Dez Dickerson's rocket ride with Prince started when he answered a call for a touring musician in The Twin Cities Reader, a Minneapolis entertainment paper, in 1979. After a 15-minute audition behind a tire shop, he was chosen as guitarist for the group that would become Prince And The Revolution. Dickerson played the slinky guitar solo on "Little Red Corvette" and contributed vocals to it and the title track on the *1999* album. He appeared in the film *Purple Rain*, and wrote songs for Prince's side projects. His credits include writing "He's So Dull" by Vanity 6, and co-writing "Wild and Loose", "After Hi School" and "Cool" for the Time.

What did Prince dig about your playing?

I was a Grand Funk Railroad fan, and that band influenced me more than anyone else. That whole power-trio, "the guitar is king" aspect of it is something that Prince loved, and he found ways to incorporate it. There were Hendrix influences and Carlos Santana influences, but there was other stuff too, and Prince always found ways to marry it with the groove, because that's just who he was.

The first five Prince albums seemed to evolve in quantum leaps. How did that happen?

Yes, it was a quantum leap from *For You* to *1999*, and for the most part there was a practical process that expedited that development. One of the things that had a major impact was that, once the band was formed and we did the first couple of tours, Prince continued as he had from the beginning, where he went in and composed, performed, produced and recorded on his own. So the second record was a continuation of the first one in that sense. But the thing that changed is that, as we grew and kind of coalesced as an actual band, the rehearsing part – and I mean, like, six- to eight-hour rehearsals and jamming – began to have an impact on how he approached his process.

So he started to see himself more as a band guy than a solo artist?

One of the things he was very adamant about was us being a band, so over time he kind of absorbed and re-imagined his process. As we got into the later things, like *Dirty Mind* and *Controversy*, and definitely by the time we got to *1999*, in terms of what he and I did, he made space for me as a guitar player and this other set of influences and whatever else I brought. He made that part of what Prince And The Revolution became.

"PRINCE ALWAYS FOUND WAYS TO MARRY IT WITH THE GROOVE, BECAUSE THAT'S JUST WHO HE WAS..."

How did he develop his ideas?

A lot of those things developed in jams and rehearsals and soundchecks and the tour bus. In the studio, he was always the guy that would go in with ideas and then iterate those ideas. But when he got to the point of *Dirty Mind* and onward, he always had his own studio, and that empowered him to do whatever he wanted to do.

One of the most important developments in Prince's career was when he signed that initial recording contract, and his manager and attorney at the time negotiated a deal with Warner that was pretty impressive in that it gave him the unrestricted power to do what he wanted. So once the technology was in his hands and he didn't have to go in the studio with an engineer and the songs, it just became a continuous process, and it remained that way. Recording and creating was just what Prince did 24/7, and the songs reflected that. They would change in rehearsals and at soundcheck when we were touring. And they kept growing and changing.

Did you and Prince talk much about guitars and gear?

As he began to define what the elements of his sound were, there was a point on one of the tours when he asked me to play a Telecaster, because he had those Hohner [MadCat] Teles that he loved. There was a unique sound to those inexpensive guitars that became what you recognised as his sound. So for a couple of tours we had sort of duplicate rigs. He was playing through a Mesa/Boogie, and even though I had been using Marshalls to that point, I started playing through a Mesa/Boogie. But then it kind of morphed back.

Prince said, "I'm going to let you do what you do, and I'm going to do what I do," and he made space for the thing that I was bringing to it. We had a conversation after a show one night, and he said, "I'm going to start focusing on being more of the entertainer and the frontman, and I'm not going to play guitar – I'm going to leave more of that to you." But Prince wasn't a gear-head who talked about pickups and string gauges. It was more a matter of the sound, and to his credit he gave me the space to be who I was and do what I did with the gear that I loved using.

Prince knew what he liked and what got the sounds he wanted. It wasn't like he had a huge pedalboard – it was just certain things. There were Boss pedals that he liked, and that was what he used. And once he moved to the Mesa amps, that was it, because the clean tone was exactly what he wanted when he played the Hohner Tele through it. When Prince found what he wanted, he stuck with it. Although, after I left the band, he experimented more with other gear and other sounds.



How did the Linn Drum impact his sound?

He had one of the first ones off the line, and it instantly changed everything. He basically began to program single grooves and loop them and write around them, so there was a point in time – and obviously the *1999* album was the tipping point – where the Linn Drum became part of the sound. It wasn't at all surprising that he pulled it out of mothballs later and kind of went back to it. It's like somebody pulling out a guitar they used to play and coming back out with it. The Linn Drum had been a huge part of his process during that early period in time, and he basically used it as another voice in the music. So bringing it back made all the sense in the world to him.

How did it affect the live shows?

Prince was a fanatic about the pocket, and the Linn Drum created the perfect storm, where it played what you told it to play and would play it endlessly and not get tired and not talk back. So it was an important tool. When that era began, everything from that point forward was about playing to the click, because the Linn Drum demanded to be followed. Prince was a really good drummer himself, so he knew what he wanted the drummer to play, and once it was on record, that's what it was going to be. He could modify and change things, but the drums were kind of non-negotiable.

KAT DYSON

Guitarist Kat Dyson had expected to be auditioning for Sheila E. when Prince intervened and snapped-up the Montreal player for his own band, the New Power Generation. Dyson performed with Prince from 1996 to 1998 (rejoining again in 2005), and her spectacular guitar work graced the albums *Emancipation*, *The Truth* and *Newpower Soul*. Highlighting her versatility across a wide range of styles, Dyson has also worked with a cast of renowned artists including Cyndi Lauper, Natalie Cole, Sheila E., Ivan Neville, Donny Osmond, T.I., Seal, Joi, and George Clinton And The P-Funk All Stars.

How did Prince communicate his guitar ideas?

When I was standing next to him at a rehearsal, he would just play something once and say, "Got it?" And then he would go sit on piano and expect me to play it perfectly. But he knew that my ear was acute, and that I was a listener who knew a few things about him. Everybody plays guitar differently, because of the size of their hands and the width of their fingers, and all that. So my experiences with Prince did bring me forward in the sum total of my technical knowledge and the way he expanded it, because of how he played and what he used to get the sounds he felt comfortable with.

Do you remember your first live performance with Prince?

The first thing I did was *Late Night With David Letterman*, which I think was one of the last obligations he had with Warner. We did a song called "Dinner With Delores", and I played guitar and he played piano. So I played his parts and I played his solo, which was kind of a line-harmony thing he did with [horn player] Eric Leeds. I remember having to make my way back to Canada to do something for Canada Day, so I missed one of the TV show gigs, but the next one I made, and then we went back into rehearsals and worked on the show for months.

What can you tell us about your studio work at Paisley Park?

Well, other people know what I played more than me, because it was a constantly revolving thing. There was never any, "Okay, today is a studio day." It was just, "Let's go in. Let's stop here." We recorded just as Prince thought of it, and everybody was on call for everything all the time.

I remember, we were messing around once in a rehearsal, and I was playing something on acoustic guitar, and the next thing I know, I'm in the studio. He says, "I like that pattern you're playing. Can you put it on this song?" And it turned into "Dreamin' About U" [from *Emancipation*]. It was me just practicing something on acoustic guitar to stretch my hands out. Sometimes we would rehearse 10 to 15 or more hours a day, and the nylon-string Godin was good for stretching my fingers on.

Prince was always recording, although he didn't need me a lot, because he's a guitarist. One time, he called me in to put something on the song "The Love We Make". He had already done it as vocals and piano, and he said, "I like the way you voice that particular chord. Can you use that voicing on this?" But I would never know if it would make the cut as far as what he dug.

I'm not completely sure, but I'm of the opinion that Prince was recording our rehearsals all the time – even the breaks when we were just noodling around – and there was something going on where he could hear what we were doing, even if he might not actually be there and we were just running through stuff with the guys. At Paisley Park, everything was live, and he could always hear everything that was going on in all places.

Did you discuss gear with him very much?

Not really. When I first came there, he told me what he did not want us to play, and that was Fenders or Gibsons. I don't know what all that was about, because later he started playing them. I guess he had some situation, because he'd say, "They all want you to do something for nothing." At the time, Prince had

a lot of rack stuff, and I was using a Rocktron Taboo Twin combo. It was programmable, but it looked very simple.

I'd had all the Rocktron Intellifex stuff, so this was like taking the best parts of what they had and putting it into something small. Prince would look at my amp and then look at all his stuff, and he'd say to his tech, "Why can't I get that sound?" But I knew my gear, and I was already into sound modelling and pulling up tones, just learning on my own. I used my ears to shape whatever technical knowledge I could get, and I was always bugging amp makers and talking to people when I went to NAMM. I'm curious, so that's what I do. Prince would just say, "Go to NAMM and find something cool, and tell me about it!"

Did he ever express interest in any of the guitars you played?

Not directly, but at the time I had a nylon-string Godin Multiac, which was a great guitar that had MIDI capabilities. He got a big kick out of that. I would mess around with altered tunings, because I'm a big fan of Joni Mitchell, and I would often leave the guitar on a stand when I left for the night. But when I would come back, it would be tuned standard, and I was always telling the tech not to retune it.

One time, I got a call at three in the morning, and it was Prince's tech, and he asked if I had my guitar. I said, "Yeah, did somebody break into Paisley?" He said, "No, but can I come over and get it?" I asked what for, and he said, "Well, Prince has been using it when you're gone." So I asked Godin to send Prince a Multiac. But he still had trepidations and said, "Really, what do I have to do?" I told him to just play it: "I want to be able to take my guitar, so this is my gift to you!"



DONNA GRANTIS

After receiving an invitation to come to Paisley Park in 2012 to audition, Canadian session and touring guitarist Donna Grantis jammed a short list of tunes with Prince, bassist Ida Neilsen and drummer Hanna Welton for a project that would become the funk-rock trio 3rdEyegirl, After touring in the US, Europe and UK, Prince and 3rdEyeGirl released *Plectrumelectrum*. From 2013 until Prince's death in 2016, Grantis remained a member of his supergroup, the New Power Generation.

What are some of the most important things you learned from working with him?

I learned a lot from him about funk guitar playing. I'd watch and listen intently as he demonstrated funk riffs he wanted me to play. I compiled those musical gems into a score titled "Funklopedia" for reference and personal study. In addition to expanding my vocabulary in the genre, I learned a lot about funk phrasing from Prince – in particular, how he approached playing certain parts of a phrase in an extremely staccato manner. He taught me to approach those notes as if they had "no value" rhythmically. This, along with impeccable timing, tone and articulation contributes to how a musical idea can sound truly funky.

"THERE'S SOMETHING VERY HUMAN AND FEARLESS BEHIND THAT INTENT THAT TRANSLATES MUSICALLY..."

Did that experience have much of an effect on your equipment choices?

Performing an expanding repertoire of funk-infused music with New Power Generation definitely impacted my gear choices. Instead of rocking my PRS CE22 through custom-modded Traynor Bass Master amps from the '70s, as I did with 3rdEyeGirl, I switched to using a PRS Mira Semi-Hollow through PRS Archon amps. Prince liked the percussive quality of semi-hollow guitars for funk, and I love the playability of a PRS neck, so the Mira was a perfect fit.

In contrast to the fat, dark, vintage tone with buttery sustain that I enjoyed in 3rdEyeGirl, I needed a super crystal-clear clean tone to best complement our expanding repertoire of Prince hits. My pedals could shape the tone when needed, but most importantly, the clean tone had to sparkle. I dialled this in with the Archon by cranking the clean channel volume and adjusting the master volume to taste.

What were some of the highlights of recording Plectrumelectrum, and how did the experience impact your following solo release, *Diamonds & Dynamite*?

It was an amazing experience. Prince, bassist Ida Nielsen, drummer Hannah Welton and I were set up in a dance/choreography studio that also doubled as a basketball court in Paisley Park, with mics running to Studio A, where our performances were captured live to tape. We rehearsed there, performed for friends and recorded most of the album in that room. Some songs, like the title track, were recorded in one take.

During the recording of "Whitecaps" and "Anotherlove", I remember Prince saying, "Call me when you have it!" and he left Hannah, Ida and I to record as a rhythm section while he played ping-pong. Sometimes we jammed on a groove, like the one in "Stopthistrain", and then discovered days later that it had been arranged into a structured song. We worked fast – I don't think we even played "Wow" all the way through a single time before the tape was rolling.

This approach influenced how I produced my 2019 release, *Diamonds & Dynamite*. I recorded the album live to tape over two days in an effort to capture the authenticity and spirit of creative first instincts, a process I grew to appreciate during sessions with Prince. I value the challenge of striving for a collectively moving performance and the outcome created when a group of musicians freely interact in the moment. There's something very human and fearless behind that intent that I think translates musically in a special way. ag

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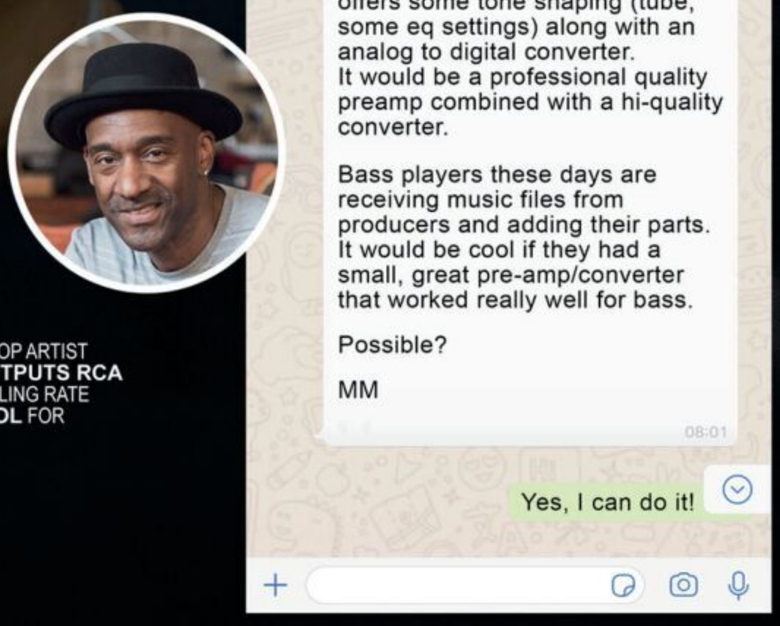
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JOHNNY CASH
"PERSONAL JESUS"
Let's break down the riff and chords for this late-career cover version from the Man In Black.

By the time he came to record *American IV: The Man Comes Around* in 2002, Johnny Cash had long since established a reputation for playing cover versions. Incredibly, this was Cash's 85th album in a career spanning almost 50 years, and covers had featured on his recordings since day one. However, this predominantly covers release would define the Man In Black's legacy, and it's considered a seminal work to this day.

Putting this all to one side, the track we're looking at this month is an unusual one. A cover of Depeche Mode's synth-rock number and featuring John Frusciante on acoustic guitar, "Personal Jesus" is all about that guitar riff. Depeche Mode's original recording follows a shuffle feel, but here Frusciante plays it dead straight and the track is in the friendlier key of E minor (compared to the original F# minor), which keeps you playing mainly in the open position.

CHORDS

The chords are simple open shapes – even the exotic sounding F#7add11 and Fmaj7#11 chords are pretty easy to play. You can also play the intro riff whenever you see the Em chord written in the chart, but if you're singing then you may find it easier to strum an Em chord.

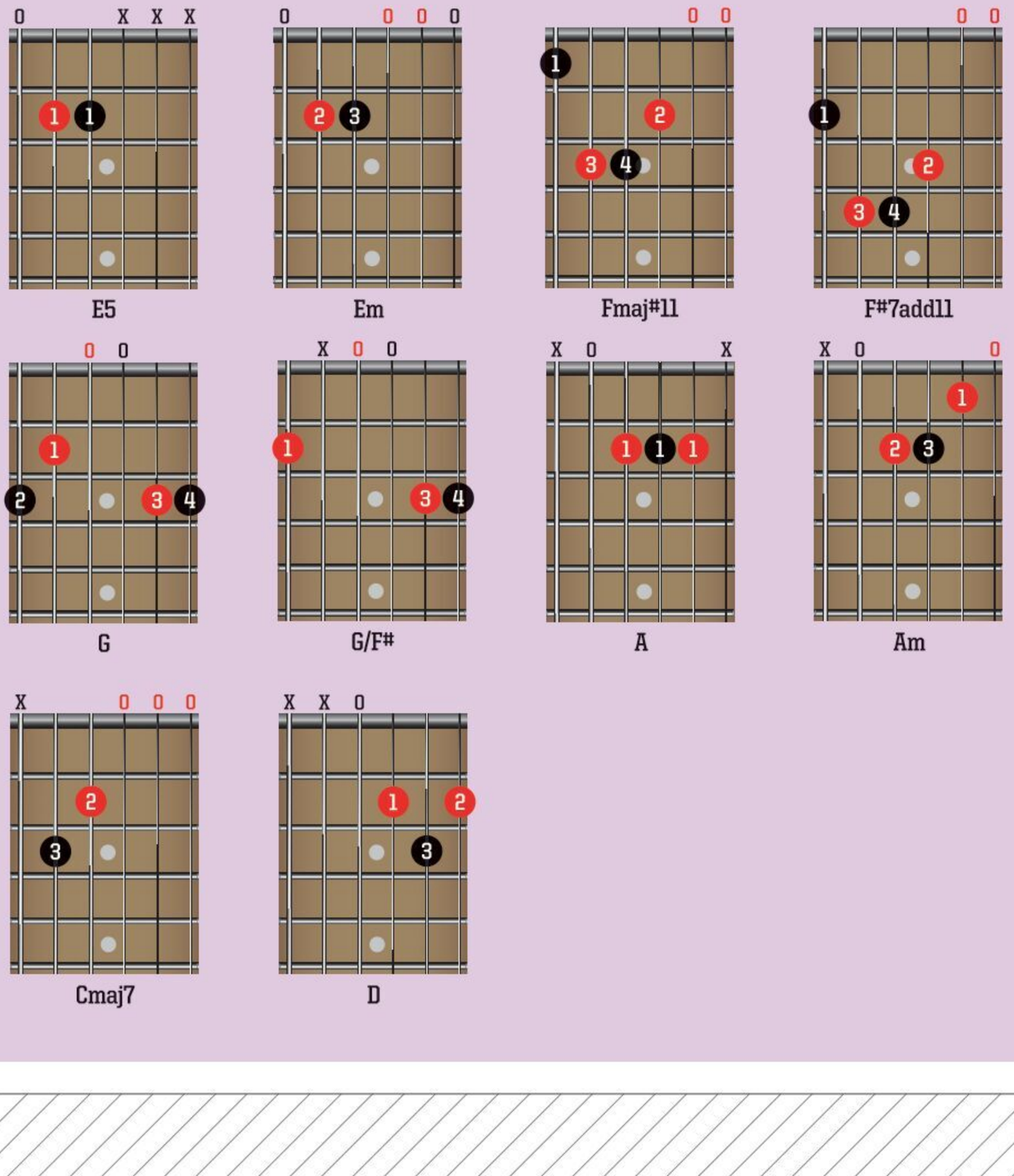


Photo: Getty Images

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Guitars and backing: Phil Capone

SONGSHEET

"PERSONAL JESUS"

Intro
E5 / / / / / / / x4

Chorus 1
Em
Your own, personal, Jesus

Someone to hear your prayers
A G G/F#
Someone who cares
Em
Your own, personal, Jesus

Someone to hear your prayers
A G G/F#
Someone who's there

Repeat intro (4 bars)

Verse 1
Em
Feeling unknown and you're all alone
G
Flesh and bone
D
By the telephone
Am
Lift up the receiver
Em Cmaj7
I'll make you a believer

Repeat intro (2 bars)

Verse 2
Em
Take second best, put me to the test
G
Things on your chest
D
You need to confess
Am
I will deliver
Em Cmaj7
You know I'm a forgiver

Em F#7add11

Fmaj7#11
Reach out and touch faith

Em F#7add11

Fmaj7#11
Reach out and touch faith

Repeat intro (2 bars)

Chorus 2
Em
Your own, personal, Jesus

Someone to hear your prayers
A G G/F#
Someone who cares
Em
Your own, personal, Jesus

Someone to hear your prayers
A G G/F#
Someone to care

Repeat intro (4 bars)

Verse 3
Em
Feeling unknown and you're all alone
G
Flesh and bone
D
By the telephone
Am
Lift up the receiver
Em Cmaj7
I'll make you a believer

Repeat intro (2 bars)

Am
I will deliver
Em Cmaj7
You know I'm a forgiver

Outro
Em F#7add11

Fmaj7#11
Reach out and touch faith

Em F#7add11

Fmaj7#11
Reach out and touch faith

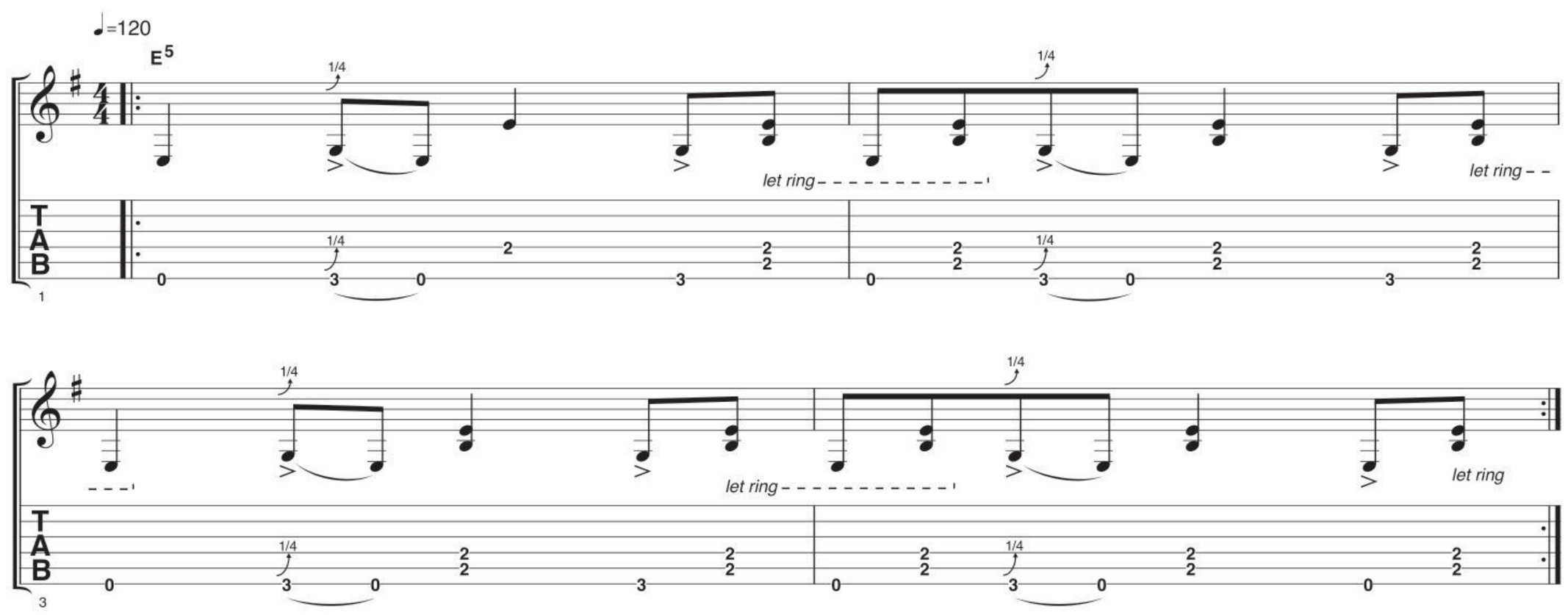
Em F#7add11

Fmaj7#11
Reach out and touch faith

Em F#7add11

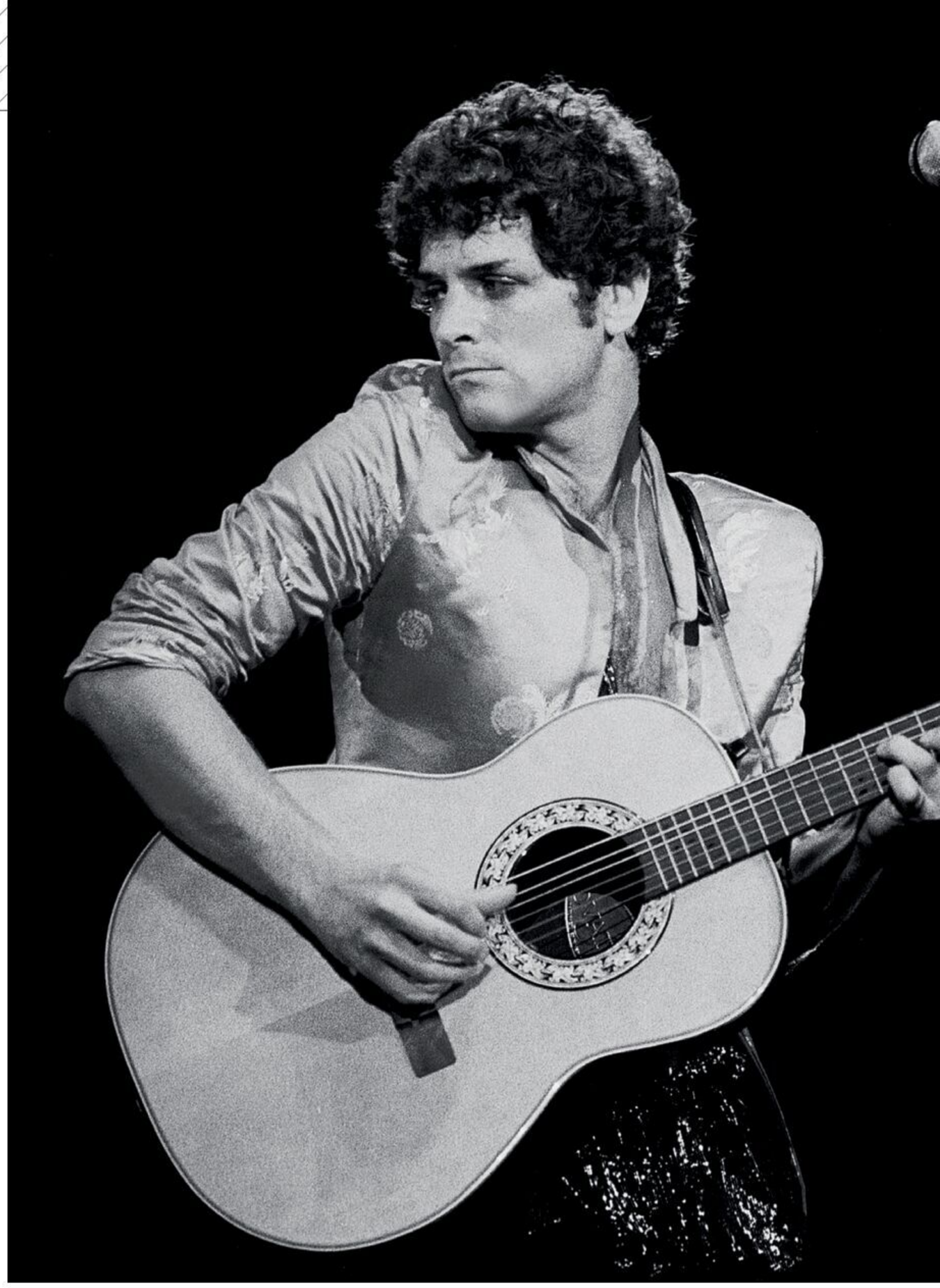
Fmaj7#11 Em
Reach out and touch faith

JOHNNY CASH - "PERSONAL JESUS" / **Intro**



Fret the E5 by barring across the second fret with your first finger. Keep this finger in position while adding the third fret G note with your second finger. This riff sounds best when played with a firm pick, digging in nice and hard to accent beats #3 and #4 to make it really groove. Accents are marked > in the tab.

FLEETWOOD MAC
"GO YOUR OWN WAY"



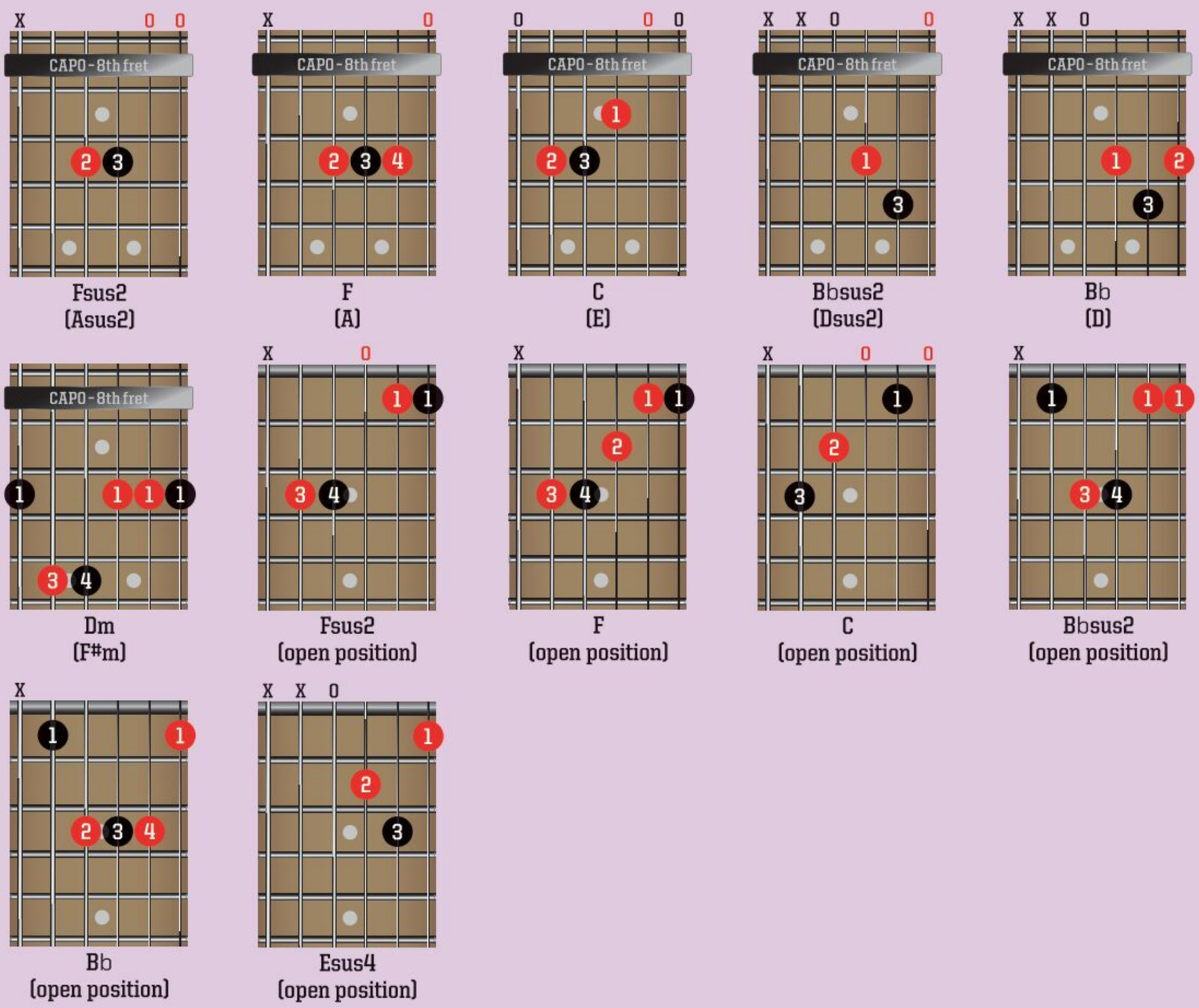
Dust off your 12-string acoustic and take a look at this huge hit from Fleetwood Mac's chart-topping *Rumours* album

This classic tune was a huge hit for Fleetwood Mac back in 1977, featuring on their mega-selling album *Rumours* of the same year. Lindsey Buckingham played all of the guitars here, but the part we're focusing on here is the bright, chimey 12-string acoustic that kicks in at bar #3. If you've not listened to Buckingham before, he's well worth further investigation – a classy player, equally adept at lead or rhythm.

You'll need to use a capo at the eighth fret to play the part exactly like the original. The pitches of the capo'd chords are F, C and Bb, but these are easy to play because the shapes are the same as open A, E and D; only a brief Dm chord requires you to play a barre. It can be a little cramped this high up the neck, so if you find it uncomfortable you may prefer to jam along without a capo using open chords.

CHORDS

The upper chord names here are the actual pitches of the chords used. The symbols in brackets denote the names of shapes that you'll recognise from open position. Notice that the A chord is played with the second, third and fourth fingers; this makes it easier to fret the chord when playing high up the neck. We've included some open-position chords if you want to join in without capo-ing up.



GO YOUR OWN WAY
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SONGSHEET

"GO YOUR OWN WAY"

Verse 1

F
Loving you
C
isn't the right thing to do
Bb
How can I ever change things
F
that I feel?

Verse 2

F
If I could
C
maybe I'd give you my world
Bb
How can I
F
when you won't take it from me?

Chorus 1 & 2

Dm Bb C
You can go your own way
Dm
Go your own wa - a - ay
Bb C
You can call it another lonely day
Dm Bb C
You can go your own way
F
Go your own way

Verse 3

F
Tell me why
C
everything turned around
Bb
Packing up
F
Shacking up's all you wanna do

Verse 4

F
If I could
C
baby, I'd give you my world
Bb
Open up
F
Everything's waiting for you

Repeat chorus

Instrumental verse x2

Chorus 3

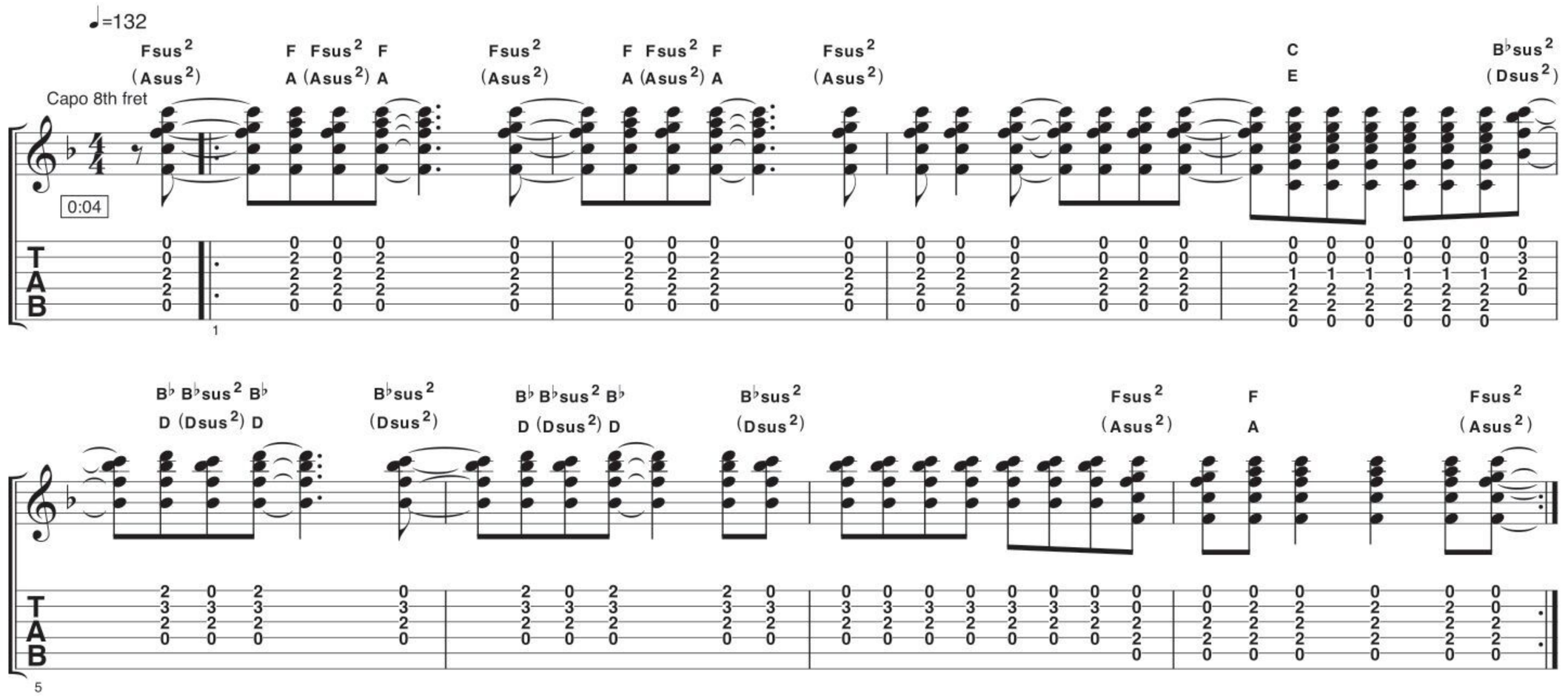
Dm Bb C
You can go your own way
Dm
Go your own wa - a - ay
Bb C
You can call it another lonely day
Dm Bb C
You can go your own way
Dm
Go your own wa - a - ay
Bb C
You can call it another lonely day

Guitar solo

Dm / / / Bb / / /
C / / / / / / / x5

Repeat chorus to fade

FLEETWOOD MAC - "GO YOUR OWN WAY" / Verse



Each chord change is 'pushed', ie, it comes on the last eighth note of each bar, instead of the simpler standard beat #1 change. It's particularly tricky because the bass and drums do change on beat #1, without this accent. Note that the songsheet doesn't include sus chords (we couldn't fit them in!), so make sure to practise the tab first.

PEARL JAM
"JUST BREATHE"

Learn the folky left turn from the Seattle grunge giants that took them to new heights in the 21st century



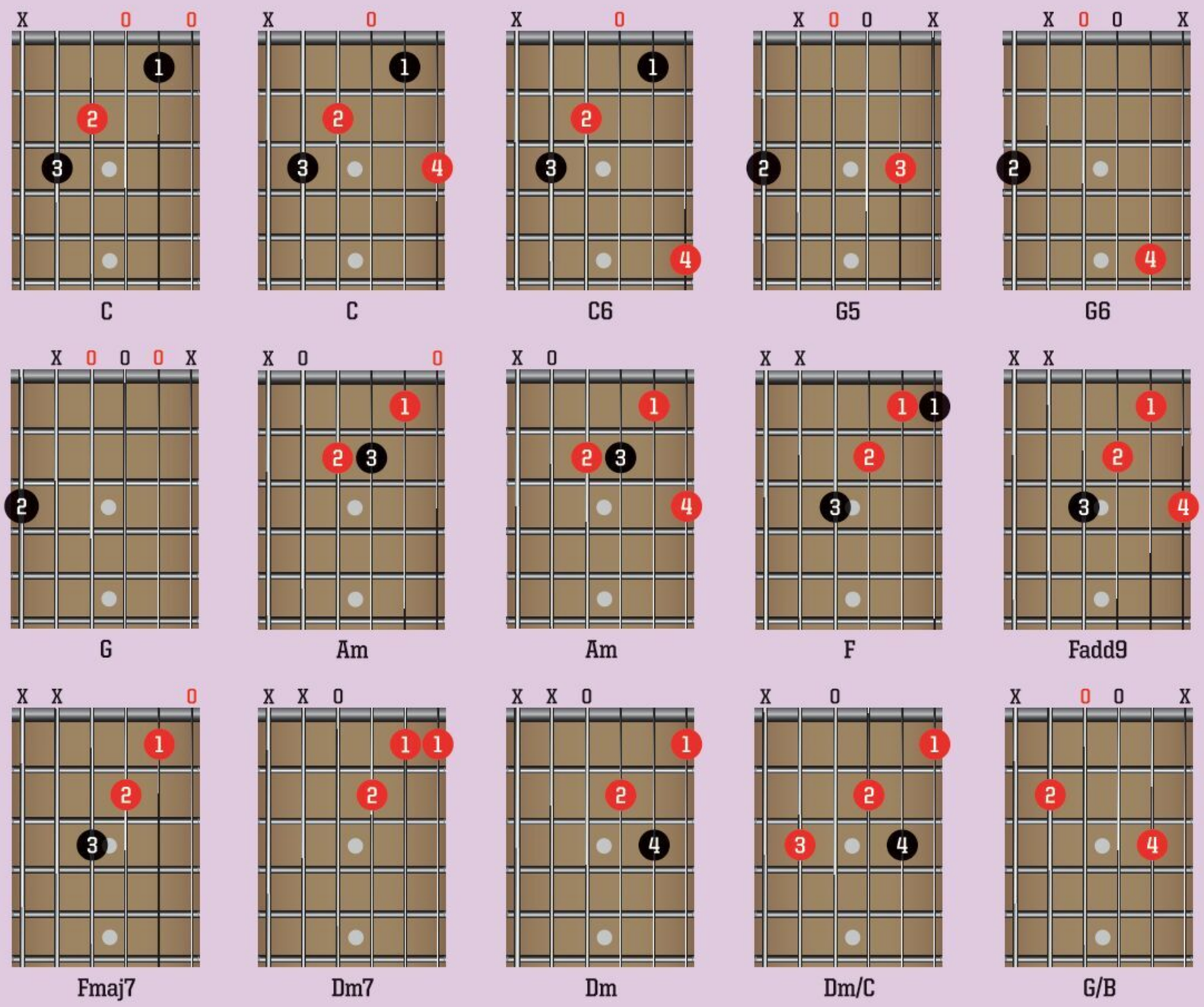
Some will say you need to look back to Pearl Jam's early output for their most iconic material. We'll let you make your own decision on that thorny subject, however "Just Breathe", the second single from 2009's *Backspacer* album, marked a massive Stateside success for the Seattle grunge pioneers, subsequently becoming their only US platinum-certified song to date. Not that we care too much about that.

More important than its commercial success, "Just Breathe" is simply a beautiful song, showcasing the emotive vocals and Travis picking talents of frontman Eddie Vedder.

Typically, this fingerstyle approach is characterised by a constant alternating bassline played with the thumb, while melody notes are dealt with by the first and second fingers. If you've never attempted the technique, we advise practising the thumb-picked line first (the arrangement of our notated section should help). From there, you can gradually introduce other notes, assembling the part piece by piece.

CHORDS

You'll need to get your fingers around quite a few shapes here. However, they're easy open chords in the main, which allows you to focus on Eddie Vedder's tricky fingerpicking pattern. The biggest challenge is that huge fourth-finger stretch on those C6 and G6 chords! If you can't manage the stretch on the C6, we recommend staying on the standard C chord – that's what Eddie does in the verses. On G6, try picking the open first string instead of stretching to the fifth fret.



JUST BREATHE
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SONGSHEET

"JUST BREATHE"

Intro
C / / / / / / / G / / / / / / / x2

Verse 1
C
Yes I understand that every life
G
must end, uh-huh
C
As we sit alone, I know someday we
G
must go, uh-huh
C
Oh, I'm a lucky man to count on both
G
hands the ones I love
C
Some folks just have one
G
Yeah, others they got none, uh-huh

Bridge
Am
Stay with me
F
Ah... Let's just breathe

Interlude
C / / / / / / / G / / / / / / /

Verse 2
C
Practised are my sins
G
Never gonna let me win, uh-huh
C
Under everything, just another human
G
being, uh-huh
C
Yeah, I don't want to hurt, there's so
G
much in this world to make me bleed

Bridge
Am
Stay with me
F
Ah... You're all I see

Chorus
G Dm7
Did I say that I need you?
G Dm7
Did I say that I want you?
F Am
Oh, if I didn't, I'm a fool you see
Dm Dm/C G/B
No one knows this more than me
G
As I come clean

Verse 3
C
I wonder everyday, as I look upon
G
your face, uh-huh
C
Everything you gave and nothing you
G
would take, uh-huh

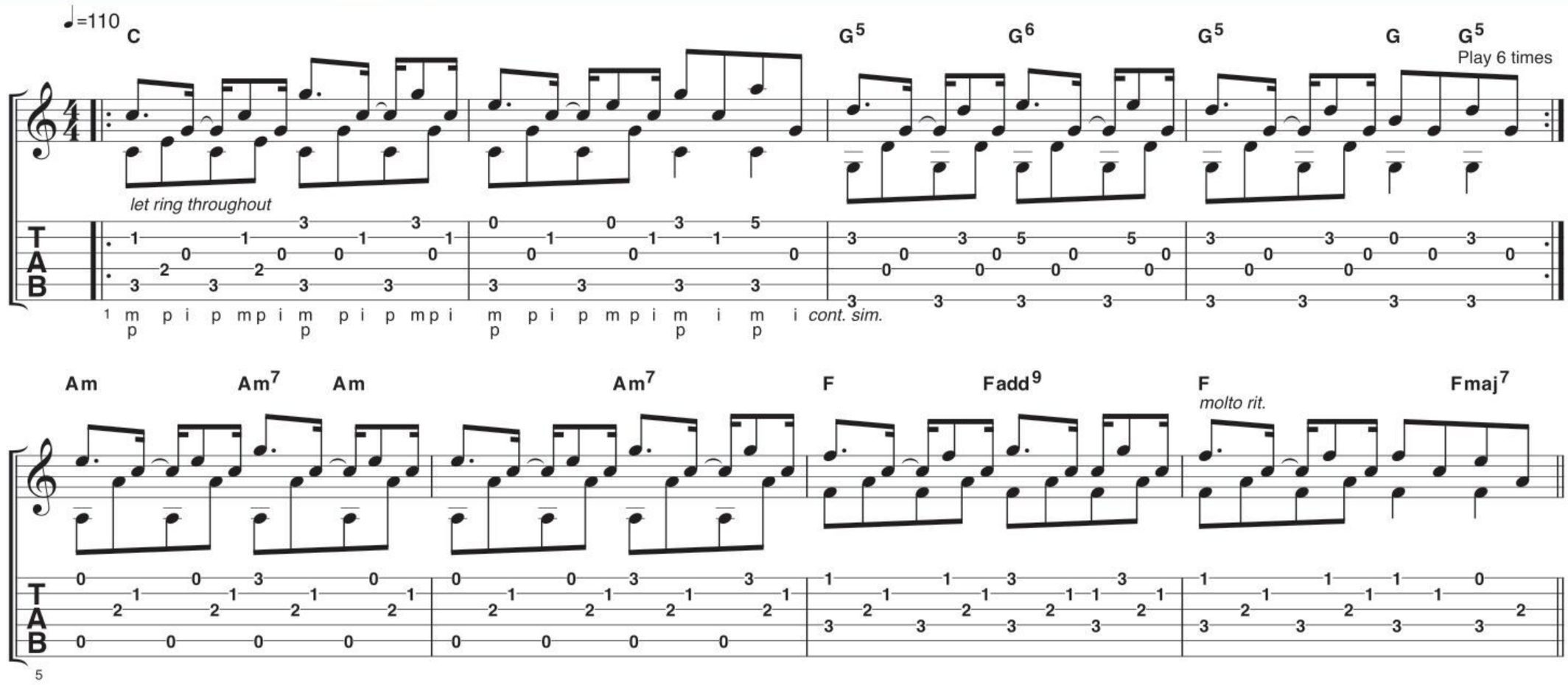
Bridge
Am
Nothing you would take
F
Every - thing you gave

Repeat chorus

Interlude
C / / / / / / / G / / / / / / / x2

Outro
Am
Nothing you would take
F
Every - thing you gave
Am
Hold me till I die
F
Meet you on the other side

PEARL JAM - "JUST BREATHE" / Intro and verse



The traditional notation can help you out here. 'Stems down' notes are thumb-picked and form the bassline. 'Stems up' notes represent the higher harmony and melody. Simply practise the bassline first. Reading the notation can take your eye away from the tab, but it's a great representation of how Travis picking works.



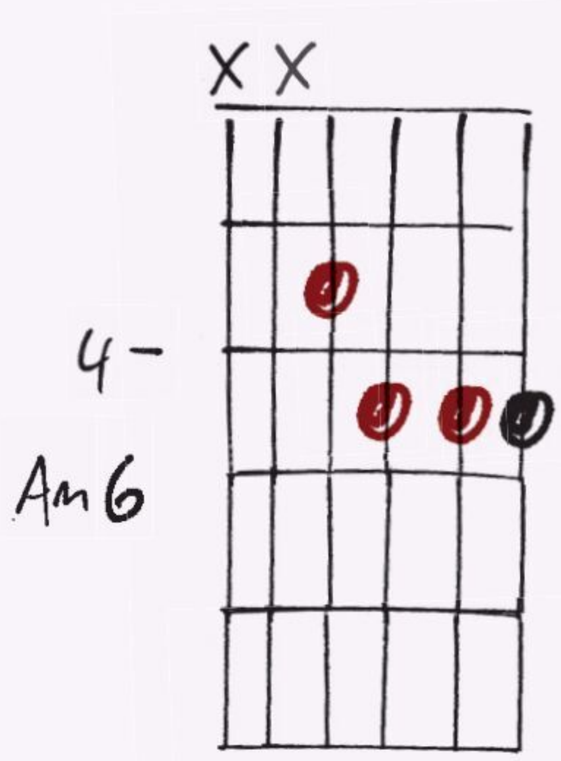
HARMONISED CHORD SCALES

AS WE COUNT DOWN THE WEEKS 'TIL SUMMER ROLLS BACK AROUND, LET'S LOOK AT A CLASSIC, SUMMERY SOUNDING TECHNIQUE.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **RICHARD BARRETT**.

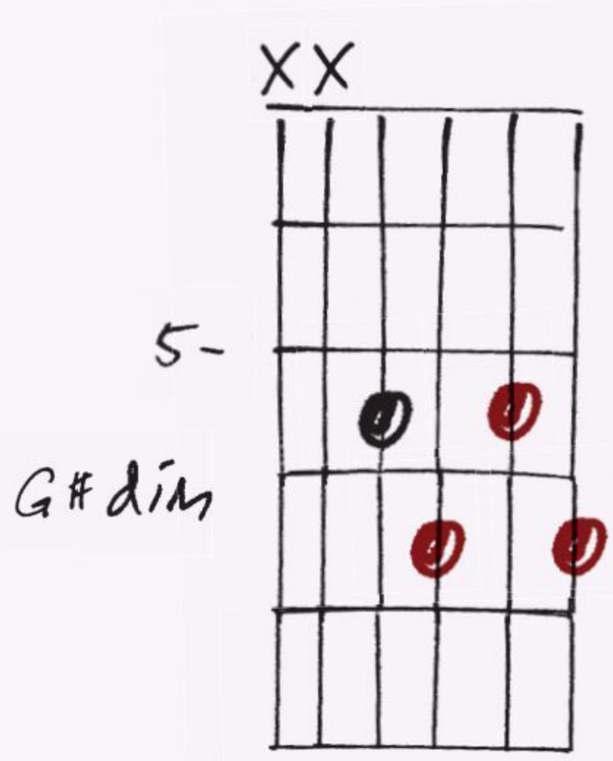
There's a definite jazzy, summery feel to the chords this issue – you'll get the hint when you play through these shapes and hear that they are part of a harmonised chord scale, from which you can make a fragment of The Sundays' classic "Summertime". The melody would appear on the first string. However, this isn't a lesson on how to play "Summertime". Instead, it's a demonstration of how small or fragmented chords can be moved around in order to create both harmony and melody.

Players such as Joe Pass, Barney Kessel and Martin Taylor manage to add bass lines in, too, but there isn't space to get into that here. In any case, we only need the open fifth string to give a root for the A-based chords and the open sixth for the rest. Though these are not included in the chord boxes, you can still hear how it would all fit together. Leave the bass notes to the bass player (or indeed your imagination) and you can play these suggestions in any key.



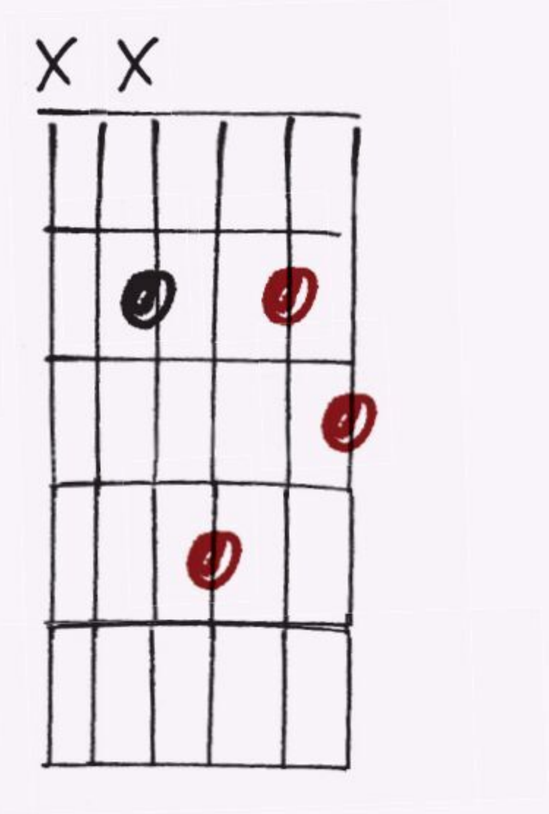
EXAMPLE #1

This Am6 omits the root (as do all these chords) and has the F# (the sixth) at the bottom. Jazz guitarists often produce harmonically dense chords with surprisingly minimal-looking chord shapes – here is one of them! Don't forget that this chord can be moved up or down to any key.



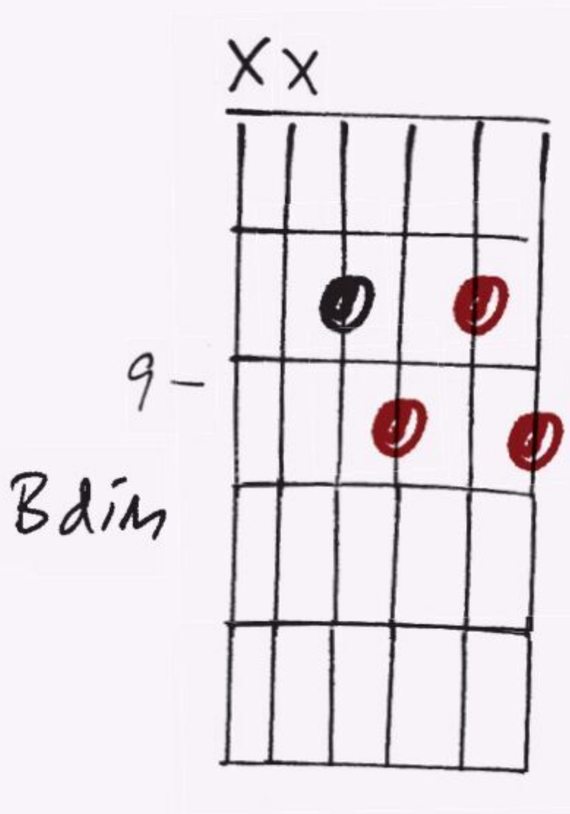
EXAMPLE #2

You can look at this chord as a G# diminished if you like, because the G# is at the bottom. Still, it works very nicely over an E bass note, in which case it would be more appropriate to call it E7b9... What matters, though, is that is works nicely with the other chords!



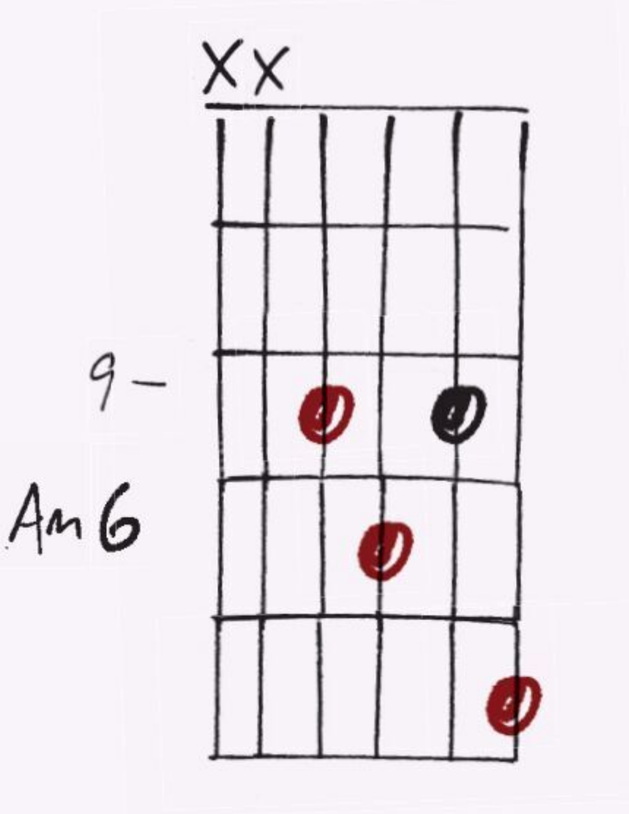
EXAMPLE #3

A second version of Am6 but with a different 'stacking' of notes: here, the root is on the bottom, followed by the fifth, sixth and minor third as we rake across the strings. This is all about being aware of the top note to find or create melodies.



EXAMPLE #4

We've seen this shape before, but in this position it becomes B diminished. Adding an E bass note shows it in a different light as an E7b9 – similar to the version featured earlier, but now in a different inversion with D as its top/melody note.



EXAMPLE #5

Shuffling the notes in Am6 around again, we arrive at this third version with the E (the fifth) on top at the 12th fret. Try playing the three Am6 chords in sequence and you'll hear the possibilities available by changing things up and featuring a different note on top – or at the bottom!



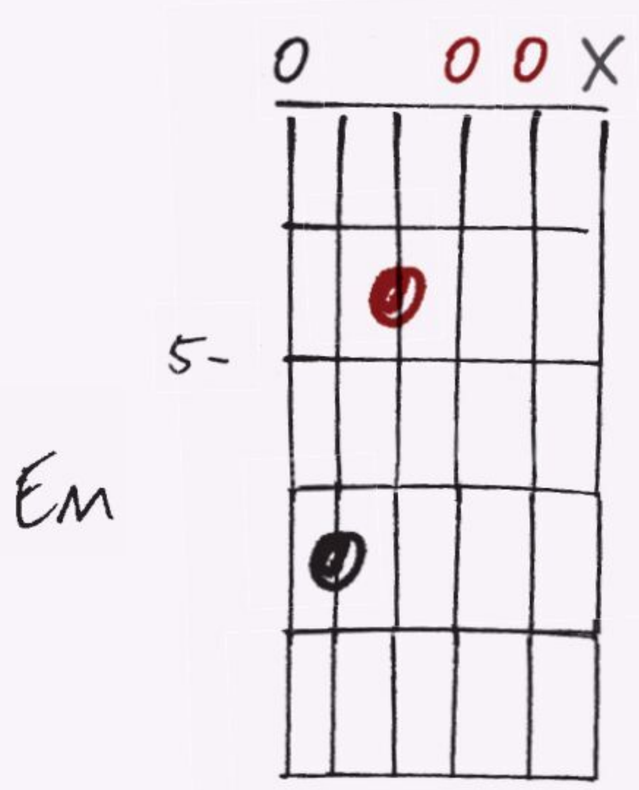
CHROMATIC MOVEMENT

AS UNUSUAL AS IT SEEMS, THIS TOOL CAN BE ESSENTIAL TO WHIPPING UP SOME BEAUTIFUL HARMONIES.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **RICHARD BARRETT**.

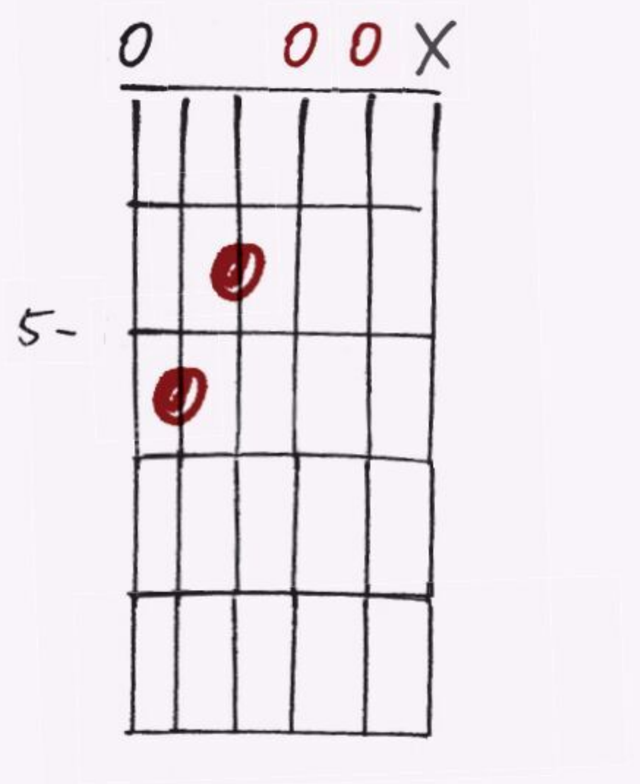
Although this sounds like a type of esoteric philosophy, it's actually a useful harmonic tool that allows us to create ascending or descending lines within a chord progression, graduating between different chords or creating a melody, depending on how you arrange them. As we're moving just one single note within the chord, we could make that note the top line and imply a melody (as we did previously with the "Summertime"-style chords), or work within the chord as these examples do here.

The example chords are all based in the context of E minor so are named in that context. For instance, as a separate entity, Example #4 (Emin6) could be seen as an A7/E but in this context it is the final variant on E minor, providing a nice set up for Cmaj7/E, the next chord in the sequence. The open strings available in E minor provide a nice tidy way of laying this idea out, but it is, of course, possible in all keys – if you can find the shapes to do so!



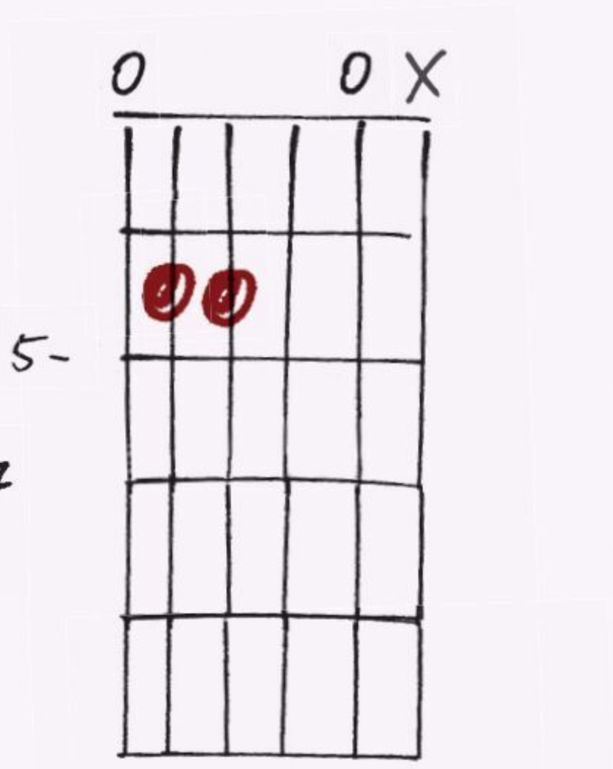
EXAMPLE #1

An unconventional way of playing E minor, this doubles the fifth (G) in the middle, which can give a nice 'chorused' effect, especially on a strummed acoustic guitar. It also paves the way for our descending pattern using similar shapes. John Lennon was certainly a big fan of this type of voicing on acoustic guitar.



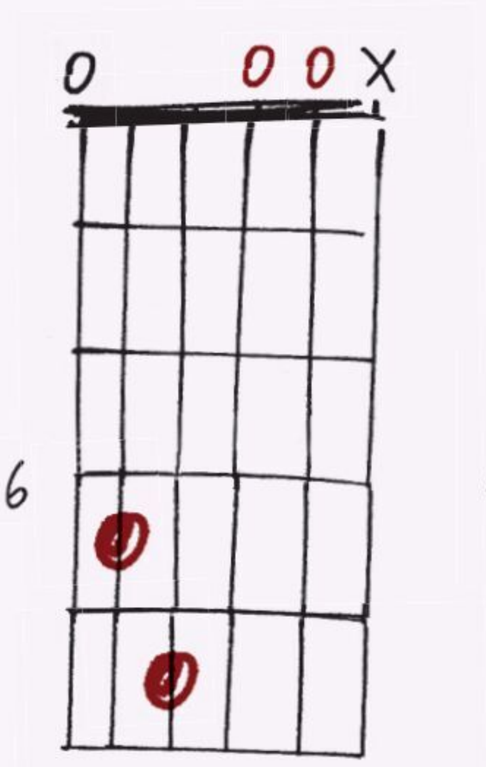
EXAMPLE #2

Like in Example #1, you could use the open first string for extra jangle, but this chord is probably served better here by leaving it out. You'll hear George Harrison playing an arpeggiated version of something similar on *Help!* This Emin/maj7 is all about the context rather than a 'standalone' chord.



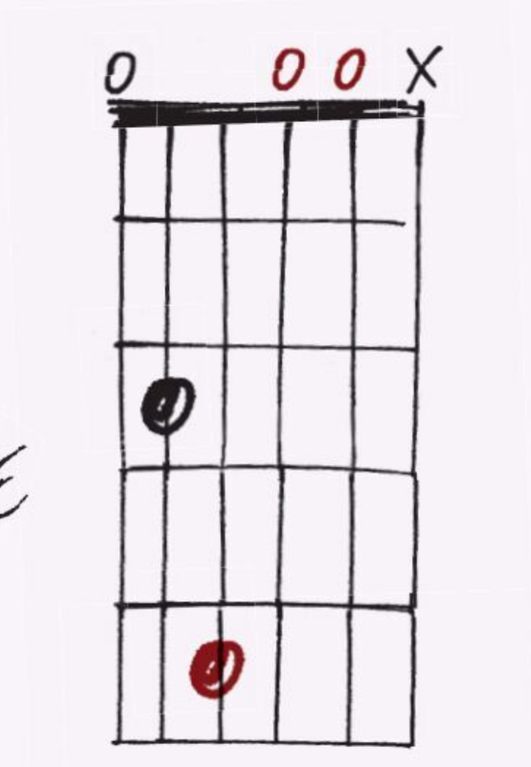
EXAMPLE #3

This Emin7 chord is unusual in that the seventh (flat/dominant seventh to be specific!) is featured in the lower register of the chord. This gives it a much darker sound and the feeling of a passing chord – a little like the previous example but without the dissonance!



EXAMPLE #4

This Emin6 chord is also very Beatles in feel and is great for fingerstyle/arpeggiated playing. The open first string offers a nice jangly extension at the high-end, also giving an extra root/melody note, which can come in handy in the context of a chord/melody arrangement.



EXAMPLE #5

This Cmaj7/E is interchangeable with the more conventional shape, but there is something about the continuity of staying with these voicings with the double G in the middle that fits well. It's also good to change the mood sometimes, but that is probably a decision for you as songwriter.



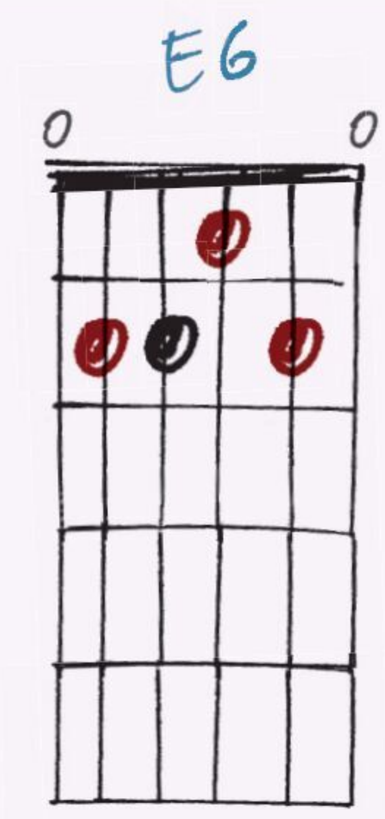
EXTENDED CHORDS: MAJOR

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT HOW ADDING NOTES TO MAJOR TRIADS CAN MAKE FOR INTERESTING HARMONIES – A SKILL TO ADD TO YOUR IMPROV TOOLKIT.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **RICHARD BARRETT**.

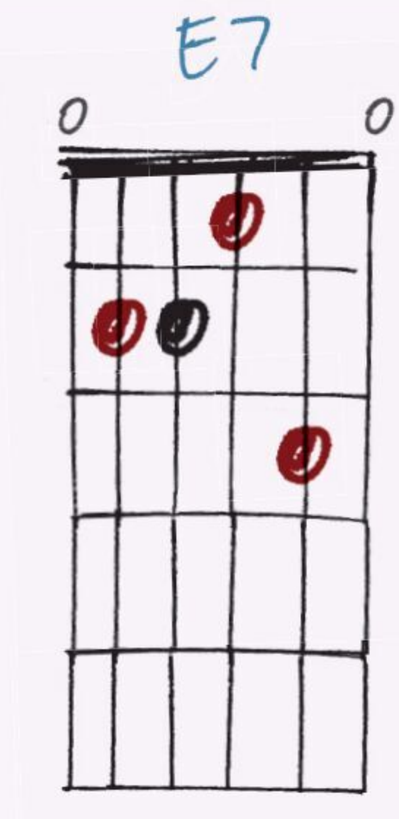
Taking the root, third and fifth from a major scale and playing them together gives us a major triad, or chord. The other extreme might be to play every note in the scale at the same time, but that would not be harmonious! However, by adding to or extending chords with further notes from the scale, we can create complex and detailed harmony.

Understanding this doesn't mean every chord has to be an unwieldy fistful of notes - it can also feed into melodic composition and note choice when improvising. As we'll see, extending the chord leads to numbers being added to the name, but not 1, 3 or 5 generally, as these are presumed to be present already. An E chord with the sixth note of the scale (C#) added makes an E6 chord. However, our main focus in this article is what happens when we add notes from the seventh on up, making ninth or 13th chords. I'll fill in a few of the gaps here such as 'add' and 11th chords next time!



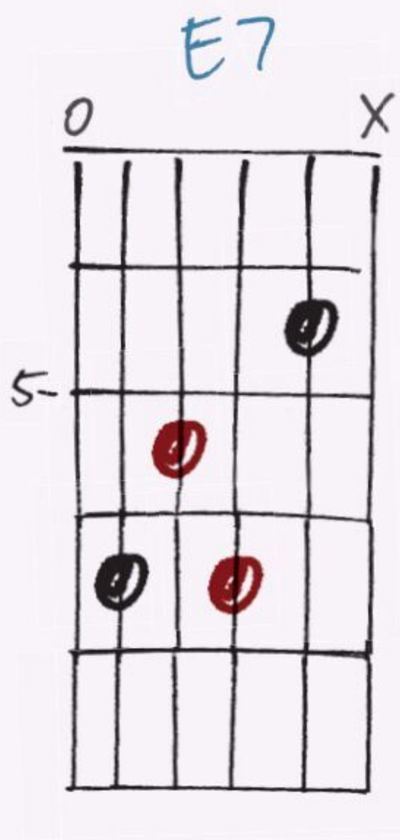
EXAMPLE #1

Theoretically speaking, this E6 chord is one of the simplest to understand. It really is just a standard E chord with a sixth (in this case, C#) added. Here, the sixth is on top, but you might find it works well nested inside the chord in other registers of the fretboard, so give this a try.



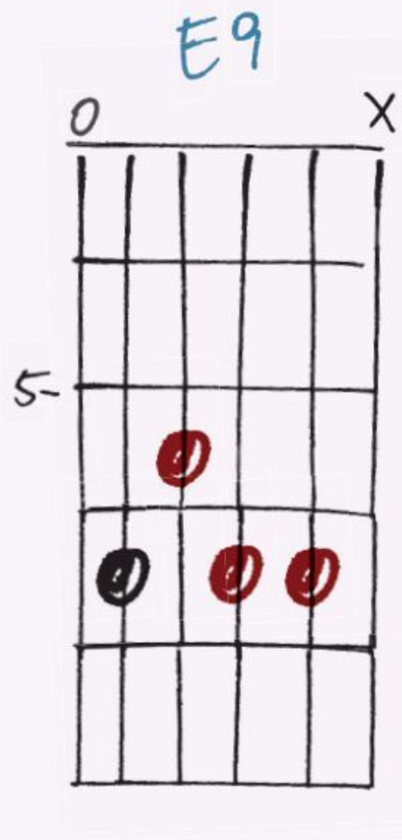
EXAMPLE #2

E7 is actually an E with a b7 (D), but calling it Eb7 would obviously be misleading. The solution? Sometimes this is called E dominant seventh, but mostly the issue is avoided completely. If the seventh is taken directly from the scale and not flattened (D#), you would have E major seventh - 'major' referring to the seventh, not the chord...



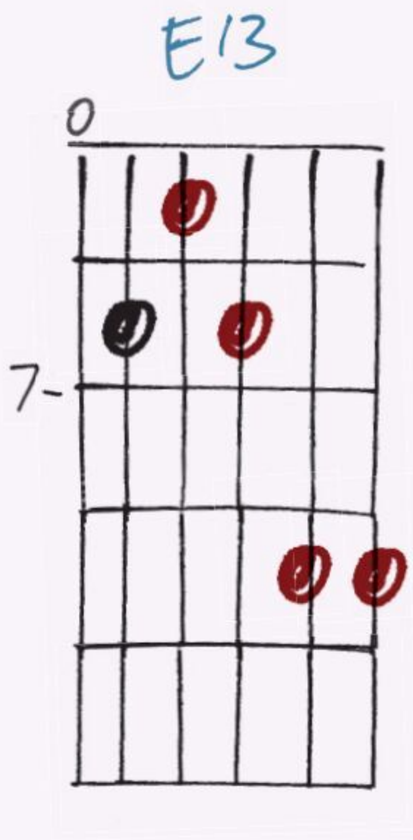
EXAMPLE #3

An alternative voicing of E7, this shape links nicely with the subsequent chords we'll look at here. The use of mostly fretted notes gives this a warmer sound great for jazz. It also makes this shape movable to any key if you omit the open sixth string.



EXAMPLE #4

E9 moves beyond the first octave of the major scale and begins to use notes from the octave above. Why do this? If we have used 1, 3, 5 and (b)7, it makes sense to visualise this as extending higher. Count through a two-octave E major scale and the ninth note will be F#. Ninth chords are based on the presumption that the seventh is also present somewhere, or you simply have an Add 9.



EXAMPLE #5

E13 adds a C#, like the sixth but this is added to a seventh chord It is this that distinguishes it from a regular sixth chord, rather than the octave the sixth is taken from. However, the system of extending or stacking notes on top of an existing chord can make things easier to visualise.



EXTENDED CHORDS: MINOR

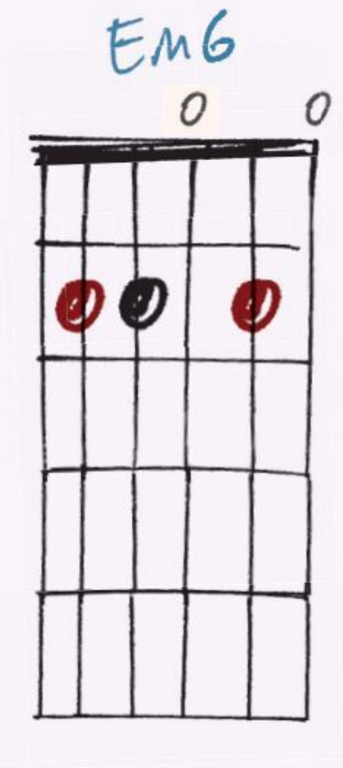
NOW THAT WE'VE EXPLORED THE WORLD OF EXTENDED MAJOR CHORDS, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE CONSTRUCTION OF DARKER, MORE COMPLEX MINOR CHORDS.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **RICHARD BARRETT**.

The conventions for creating and naming a minor chord are similar to those for major chords – but not the same, as we shall see. Nevertheless, the origin and point of reference remains the major scale, however counter-intuitive that may seem!

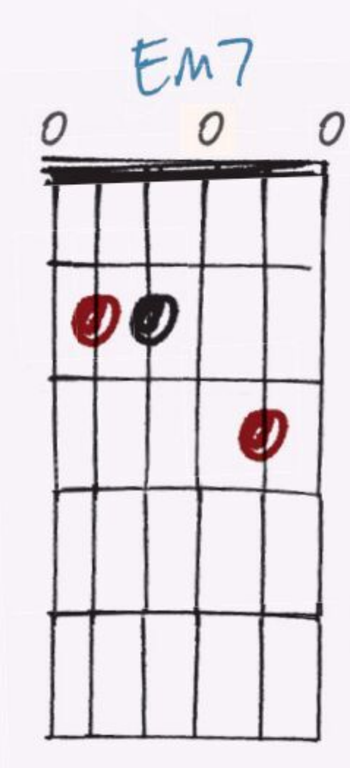
Minor chords are commonly described as having a 'b3rd'; this means the third is lowered by a semitone, rather than necessarily being a 'flat' note. For example, in E minor, the third is Gn rather than G#. Extending the chords, adding further notes than the root, (b)3rd and fifth, follows the same numerical system as major chords – though gives a darker, more complex sound.

Sevenths are also dealt with in the same way. Simply adding the seventh from the scale gives us a major seventh chord (which would result in a minor/major seventh as featured later), or a 'b7th' to give the more commonly heard 'dominant' seventh. Always remember, we are simply dealing with names for sounds here. Check out the examples, which will help explain further.



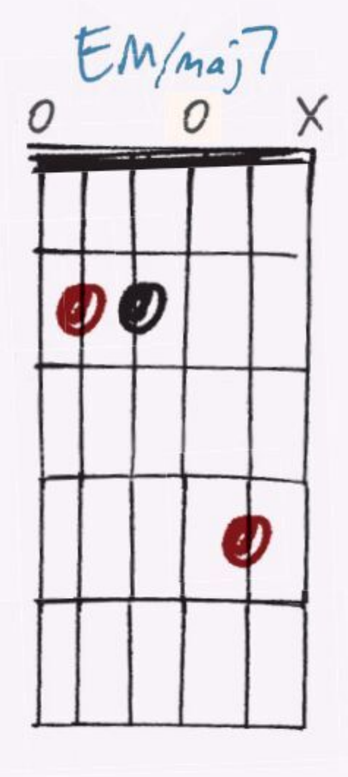
EXAMPLE #1

This Emin6 chord features the root (E), b3rd (G) and the fifth (B), though they appear out of scale sequence due to the guitar's non-linear nature. The '6' part of the name refers to the C# happening on the second string – the sixth note of the E major scale (not minor!) added to the existing chord. From low to high, we now have: E, B, E, G, C#, E.



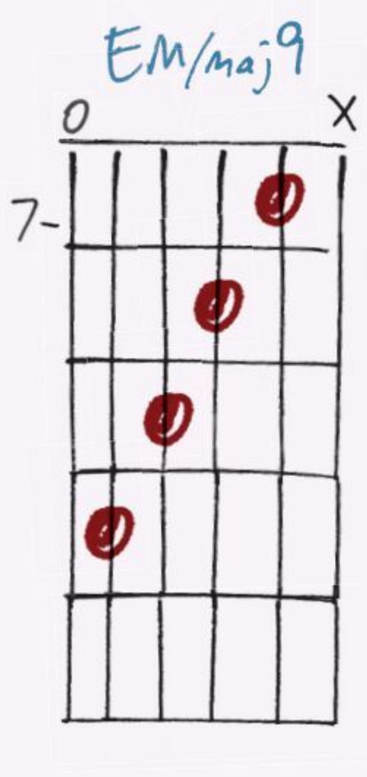
EXAMPLE #2

By raising the sixth a semitone/fret, we create an Emin7 chord. This is actually quite a simplistic name for what could be described as Emin/b7, which actually counts as an altered chord due to the b7th not being lifted straight from the major scale. Thankfully, b7ths (also called dominant) are usually referred to by default simply as 'seventh'.



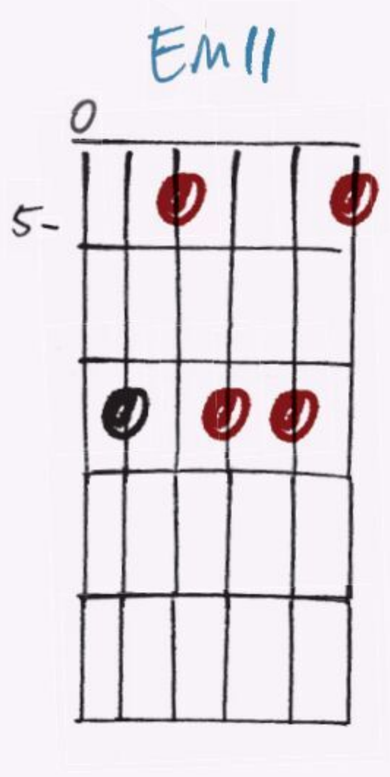
EXAMPLE #3

If we take a minor chord and add the major seventh (D#), it is no longer an altered chord, as this note has been taken straight from the major scale. But the name needs to specify that this is a major rather than b/dominant seventh, hence this initially contradictory sounding name, in which the term minor describes the chord and major describes the extension/added note!



EXAMPLE #4

Here is a take on the previous Emin/maj7, extending it further to add a ninth (F#). For this reason, we call it Emin/maj9. We're not ignoring the seventh – that is what the 'maj' is referring to – but we always name after the highest extension. Sometimes a ninth is added without the seventh, but this would be called 'add9'.



EXAMPLE #5

Extending beyond the ninth, we add the 11th (A), for an Emin11. You will find the root (E), b3rd (G) b7th (D) ninth (F#) and 11th (A). Where is the fifth, you may ask? It's not very practical to reach on the guitar, but you will also find it's pretty common to drop the fifth in extended chords like this. Why? Because it sounds prettier and less harmonically 'dense'.



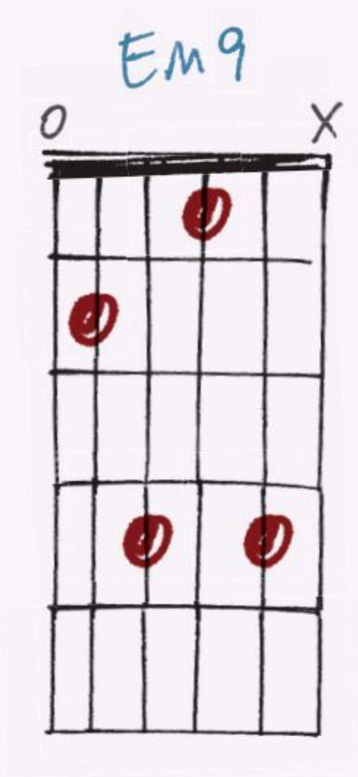
STRETCHES

IN THIS LESSON, YOU'LL SEE A WORKOUT FOR YOUR FINGERS WITH A PHYSICAL EXAMINATION OF EXTENDED CHORDS.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **RICHARD BARRETT**.

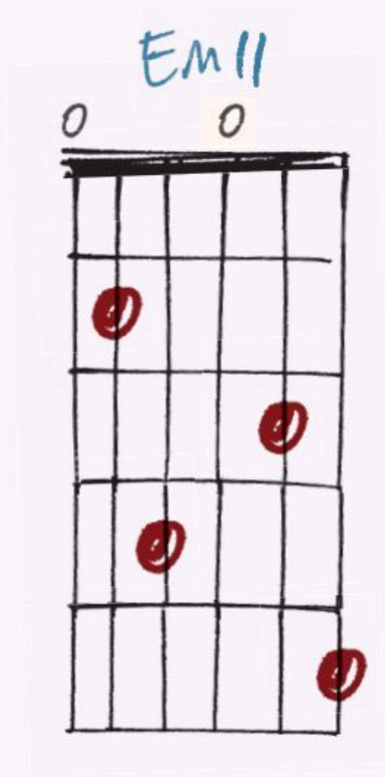
So we've taken a look at quite a few exercises based on extended chords. Now we're going to take a look at this in a physical – rather than theoretical – way, though the two approaches coincide, as we'll see. One of the challenges presented by the guitar is creating piano-style wide-interval chord voicings. Players such as Barney Kessel and Jimi Hendrix used the thumb of their fretting hands to expand the possibilities and reach notes or embellishments that were otherwise impossible.

Elsewhere, Allan Holdsworth and Tal Farlow were fortunate enough to have large hands and long fingers, though it's amazing what can be achieved with small to average hands by simply shifting to a more 'classical' grip with the fretting hand thumb more centred on the back of the neck for wider stretches. Tal Farlow would also add extended notes at the top of chords with his picking hand, so check out the examples for more on this. Finally, be sure to build up to bigger stretches gradually – and patiently!



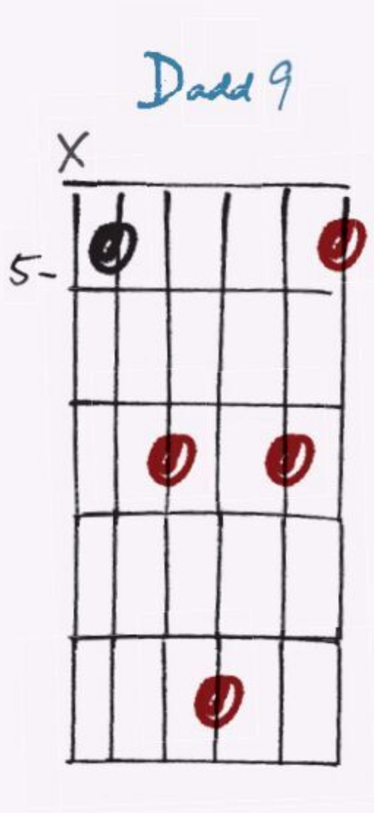
EXAMPLE #1

This Emaj9 chord requires careful fretting hand positioning – not only to reach the notes but to let all the notes ring. I've omitted the top E string here. Even though it fits from a theoretical standpoint, it isn't really needed and the focus really belongs on the D# (the major seventh) here.



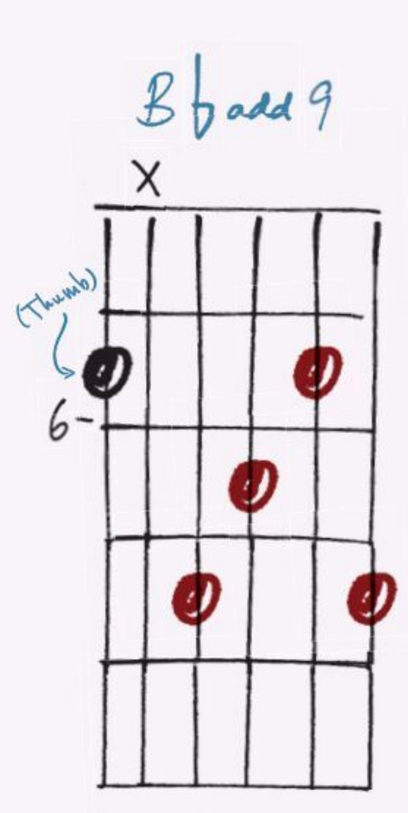
EXAMPLE #2

Stretching out a bit further, this Emin11 includes the open third string. Letting this ring clearly while stretching to the other notes is probably the most challenging aspect of playing this chord. Remember to move your fretting hand thumb downwards on the back of the neck like a classical player; this will help with the stretch required.



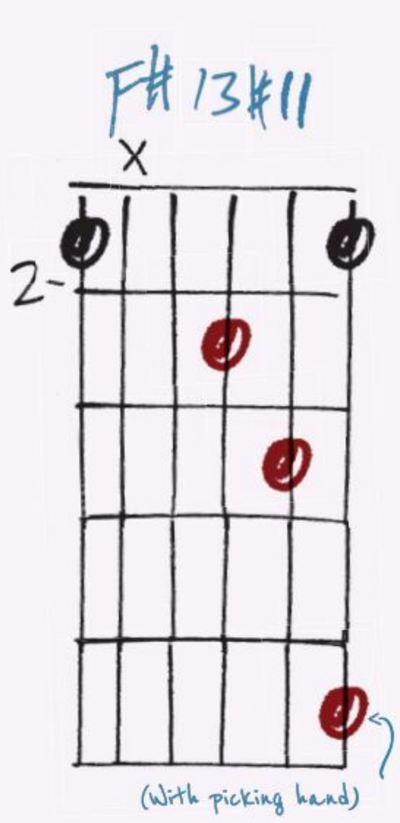
EXAMPLE #3

This Dadd9 can be a challenge to make sound perfectly in tune, because it's hard to stretch to the 9th (E) on the third string without adding downward pressure, too. This may seem unreasonably difficult at first, but it becomes easier over time. Not one for vamping through a whole song, though...



EXAMPLE #4

Not such a stretch, but this Bb add9 requires you to use your fretting hand thumb over the top of the neck to press that root note at the sixth fret of the low E, allowing the four-finger chord on top. The fifth string is also muted. I find fretting slightly off-centre on the fourth string to let your third finger rest against it is the easiest way.



EXAMPLE #5

Perhaps the ultimate way to extend a chord, Tal Farlow-style. This F#13#11 could not be played using conventional technique: the top note is fretted with the picking had, while the thumb of that same hand rakes across the chord over the fretboard, which gives a harp-like sound. The fifth string is muted with the third finger of the fretting hand – phew!

VOX Guitars

GIULIETTA

The VOX Giulietta guitars are compact sized single-cutaway archtop acoustic/ electric guitars. The **VGA-3PS**, featuring a specially-developed wood/aluminium Hybrid Bridge System, is equipped with a proprietary piezo system, coupled with the Super Capacitor Preamp System with pickguard-mounted volume and tone controls, active or passive operation, with a built in USB rechargeable battery.

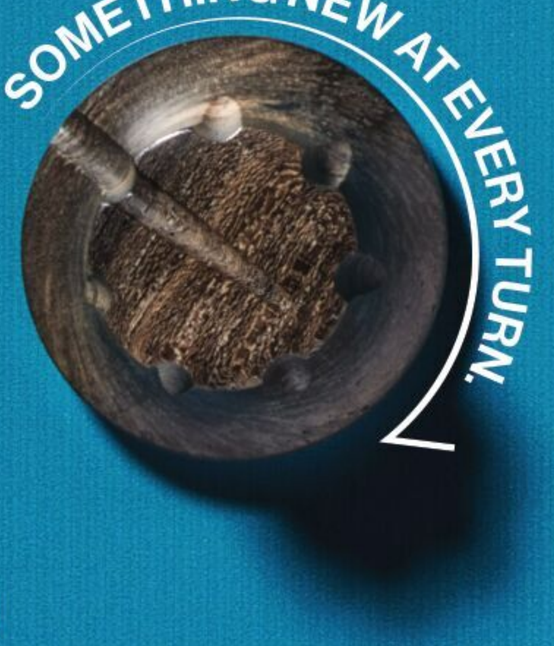
The **VGA-3D** features the AREOS-D Digital Modelling System — providing 18 acoustic and electric modelled sounds — plus effects and a piezo-equipped Tune-O-Matic style bridge system, that's combined with the VOX XLM humbucking pickup. Its unique design offers modern playability and state of the art sounds.



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CONTROL YOUR TONE

WHAT STARTED AS A NEED FOR AN OFFSET TURNED INTO A TONE MODIFYING SWITCH-FEST. **DAVE BURRLUCK** INVESTIGATES SOME SIMPLE TONE MODS, SOLDERING IRON AT THE READY...

For a considerable number of years, gigs and rehearsals have been the platform to inform my guitar reviews, unleashing a diverse array of instruments on my bandmates and whatever audience was in attendance. In recent months, like many of us, I've been recording to fill the void of those cancelled gigs, not to mention the endless task of learning new songs. Aside from putting my playing under the microscope, recording has shifted my own needs. Whereas with my gig-head on I'd be looking at an instrument to get me through a couple of sets of typically diverse covers, I'm now looking for a guitar, or guitars, that suit the song I've been asked to work on.

One example is the good ol' offset. Reviewing Nik Huber's Piet was a bit of a game-changer: I fell for its charms hook, line and sinker. I also made the foolish mistake of recording some guitar parts with that unique vibrato at the forefront. "Great," said the singer and MD. "Would you mind trying those sounds on the outro? Oh, and I think we might need to change the key." Normally, that's not a problem, but the Piet – actually, both of them – is long gone.

Then I remembered an offset that I'd got in for review a couple of years back but was still waiting to be returned. No, it wasn't a classy Fender or anything, instead a pretty lowly Hutchins Beachcomber. A what? With its "retro sexy" claim left to one side, it has plenty of boutique style: an altered and more compact offset body, three P-90s, an abundance of Jaguar-style chrome and, importantly for my aim, a Jazzmaster-style vibrato. Under the 'limited edition' red sparkle gloss finish the body wood is spec'd as alder, which contributes to a pretty standard weight of 3.19 kilograms.

INVESTIGATION

Like many of the numerous offset solidbodies that have appeared since the late 50s and early 60s, the Beachcomber ditches the dual rhythm/lead circuit concept of the original Fenders and, of course, adds a third middle pickup. In basic terms, then, we have standard Strat wiring but with a master tone control. If that was all we had, each pickup would pass to the five-way lever switch (unhelpfully) mounted on the large scratchplate and from there to the master volume and tone on the lower chromed metal plate.

But what does the upper chromed control plate, with its three slide switches, do? Well, each switch engages a pre-set treble cut for each pickup (plus we have that master tone that provides a progressive treble cut as usual). Why? Good question – and one I can't answer. What it does mean is that we have three mini-switches already mounted that we could potentially put to good use for a host of tone shaping and/or experimentation. And there's another plus: aside from that five-way lever switch, the controls and switches are on those chromed plates, which means we can access the wiring a lot more easily than on a Strat, for example.

Like any other modification, you really need to think about what the problem might be first and then consider the remedy. Although the Hubers are absent, I have plenty of tracks that I recorded with them to compare to the Beachcomber. And with a Helix LT providing the guitar sounds I effectively have the same signal chain. Listening to the Beachcomber I'm hearing a hotter voice with less clarity, or indeed high-end, and a thicker single-coil

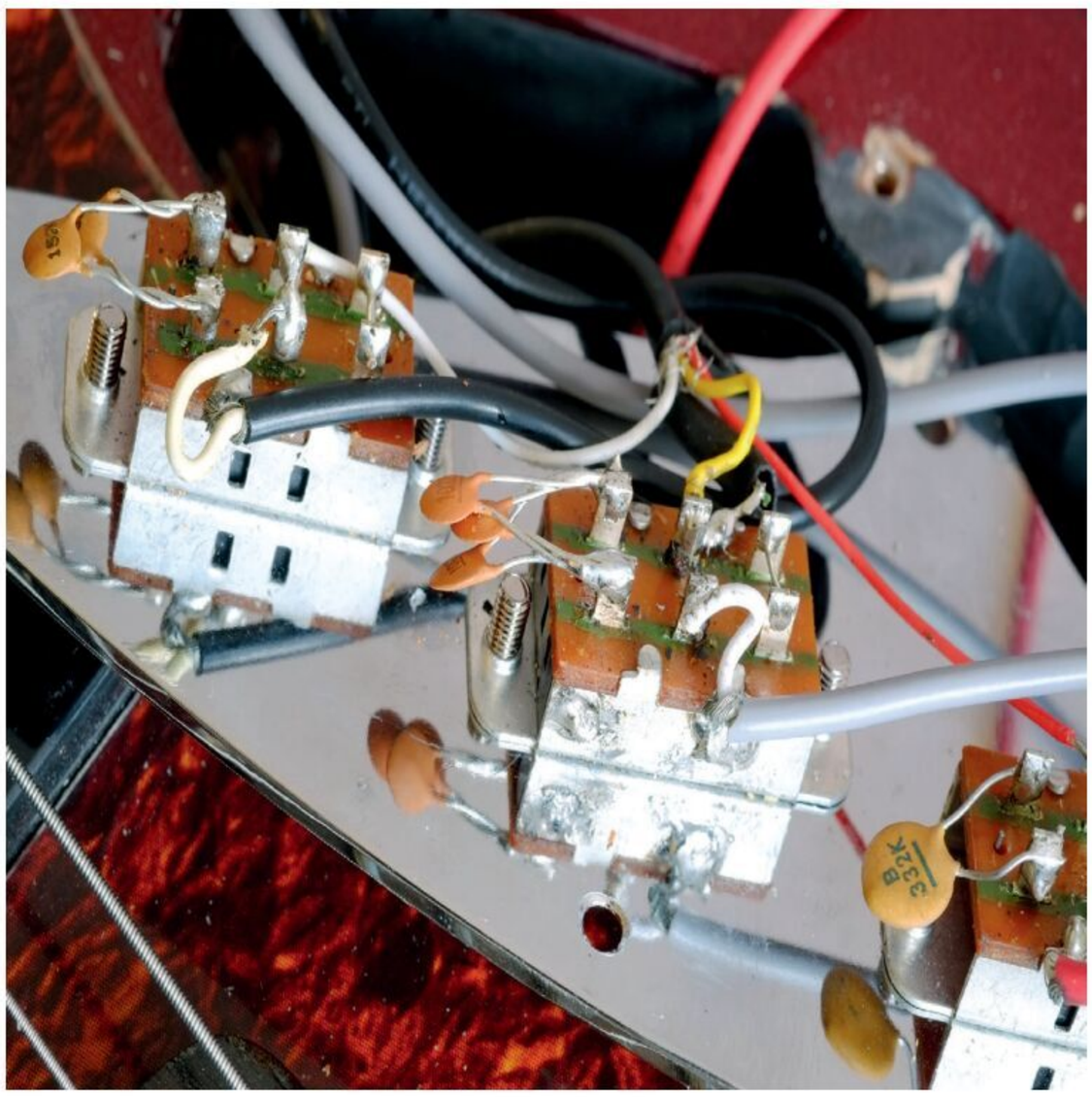
"REVIEWING NIK HUBER'S PIET WAS A BIT OF A GAME-CHANGER: I FELL FOR ITS CHARMS HOOK, LINE AND SINKER..."



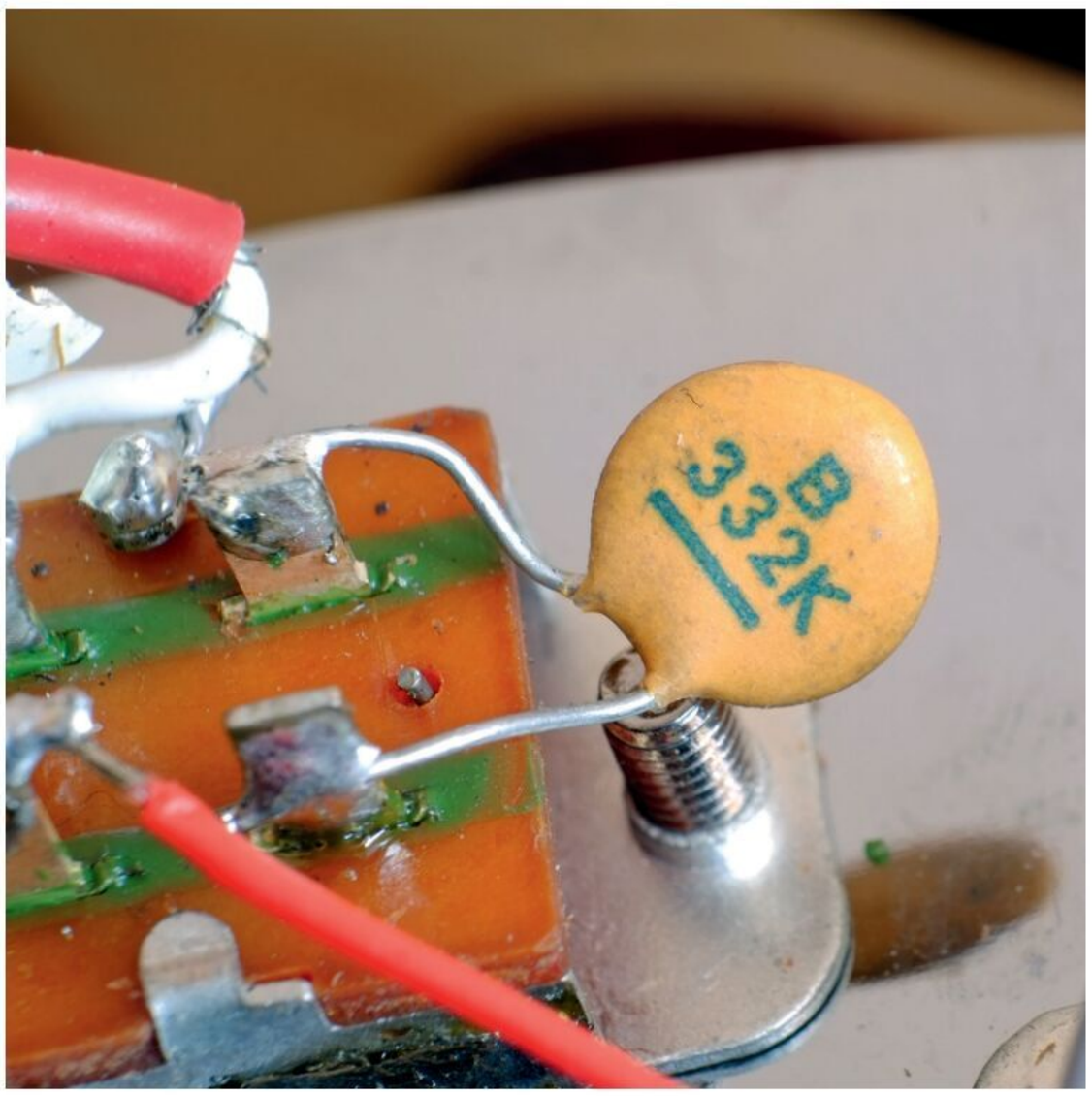
Three DPDT slide switches are perfect for our



Capacitors come in all shapes and sizes. The code that includes three numbers followed by a letter (102K) identifies its value and tolerance



Haven't got a .003 cap? You can stack three .001s in parallel. It's all a part of your sonic exploration



The Jaguar-style 'strangle' switch uses the .003-microfarad capacitor shown here



In removing the original tone control we pulled the pot's spline out, too, hence the wrong tone knob here



The Beachcomber's trio of single-coil soapbar pickups

voice. The measured DCRs of the three soapbars run from 9.43kohms at the bridge, 9.52k in the middle and 9.25k at the neck. Now, while DCR should never be used as an indication of sound, what I'm hearing certainly supports the hotter, less crisp P-90 voice. Those pre-set treble-cut switches aren't doing much for me, either, especially if I'm chasing the clarity and note separation of that Huber Piet.

Unscrewing the upper control plate you can see that the simple switching uses a 473 code (.047 microfarads) green polyester film capacitor on each DPDT slide switch. The pickups are wired to these switches first then onto that five-way pickup selector and finally to the master volume and tone. The same capacitor is used on the master tone control, too; both volume and tone pots measure a little under 500kohms.

CAPACITOR 101

Capacitors are primarily used in two ways within a guitar circuit: to cut higher frequencies as on a standard tone control or to retain higher frequencies when used on a volume control as a so-called 'treble bleed'. Put simply, a capacitor wired in series will favour those higher frequencies and that's how a treble bleed works on a volume control or the Jaguar's bass-cut switch.

Relatively small value capacitors are used from around 180 picofarads to around 1 nanofarad (.001 microfarads). The Jaguar and Yamaha's Dry Switch use a .003 microfarads cap for their bass-cut switches, the latter with a parallel resistor, also used by many in a treble bleed circuit. Maybe resistors are a subject for a future column...

But when a capacitor is wired in parallel (between the hot and ground, for example) those favoured high frequencies are shunted to ground creating our standard tone control with a pot,



Our Hutchins Beachcomber after its tone makeover is complete.

or – as with these Beachcomber's mini-switches – a pre-set instant higher-frequency roll-off.

The value of the capacitor affects what we hear. Again, in simple terms if you use a .047 microfarads cap on your standard tone control the darker the effect will be as the tone control is rolled back. A .033 will be less dark, followed by a .022, and if you use a .015 or .01 the roll-off is slight.

Now, with our three DPDT slide switches we have plenty of options, particularly if we want to experiment. At present, each switch is wired to its own pickup. The Jaguar's bass-cut, like the Yamaha Dry Switch, is a master switch that cuts bass on any of the pickup selections. So we could rewire the setup like a Strat, with the pickups going firstly to the five-way lever then the common output running to one or more of the mini-switches then onto the standard master volume and tone controls. We don't have to use the three switches as tone modifiers, however. We could have one acting as a master high-pass filter, another as a kill switch (on/off) and the third as the seven-sound mod, for example, where we get two extra sounds – all three pickups on and, like a Telecaster, neck and bridge together.

As my head begins to explode considering all these options, the real world kicks in and I realise I have deadlines to meet: one for this copy and the other for the track I'm halfway through recording. I'm not sure I have the time to completely disassemble the guitar so I can completely rewire it. Instead, I consider my options to hopefully narrow the gap. Basically, I have those three pickup-specific switches and the existing volume and tone to play with.

"WHATEVER THE ELECTRICAL THEORY MIGHT BE, EXPERIMENTING IN THIS FASHION ALLOWS YOU, THE MUSICIAN, TO CALL THE SHOTS..."

TUNING TIME

Aside from thinning out the sound from the Beachcomber's thick-sounding soapbars, I need to maximise the highs to try to match (or at least get closer to) the Huber. With a passive circuit you can't add, only subtract. Because the volume and tone load the pickup they effectively dampen the highs to a greater or lesser extent. Simply wiring the output from the pickup switch directly to the jack socket, bypassing the volume and tone, means I'm hearing the most high frequencies I can. Now we can look at thinning the sound of those P-90s.

I start with the Jaguar-standard cap (.003 microfarads) in series and it immediately cleans up the neck P-90, creating a thick/thin switch. Yamaha's Dry Switch uses the same capacitor along with a resistor placed in parallel with that cap, but its effect is much harder to evaluate, certainly in our recording project context. Despite mucking about with different values, and even a trim-pot, I'd offer that it seems to narrow the gap but not enough to be particularly useful here. Much more noticeable is a lower value cap, a .002 or .001 microfarads, which provides a progressively thinner sound.

Now, this is the point. Whatever the electrical theory might be, experimenting in this fashion allows you, the musician, to call the shots. Many, many people will tell you that a 250k pot is darker than a 500k pot. Try it. We're told cap A will do one thing; cap B will be different. Try it. If you can hear a difference in the context of the sound and environment in which you're working, all good. If not, well, you tried.

Did I manage to match the sound of that Huber? No. But with the combination of these minimal capacitor tuning tweaks and some track EQ, what's the saying? It's close enough for rock 'n' roll



THE TONE OF TEEN SPIRIT

HOW **KURT COBAIN** CHANGED POPULAR MUSIC FOREVER WITH A MODDED STRAT, A MESA/BOOGIE AND A COUPLE OF EVERYDAY STOMPBOXES.

WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

The effect that Nirvana's sophomore album *Nevermind* had upon popular music a few months after its release on September 24th, 1991 cannot be overstated. By January 11, 1992, it knocked Michael Jackson, 'the king of pop', out of the #1 spot on the Billboard 200 album chart, while simultaneously hammering a final nail in the coffin for hair metal's reign as grunge began to dominate hard rock in the early '90s.

However, Nevermind's influence reached well beyond the burgeoning Seattle grunge scene, ushering in mainstream acceptance of alternative rock and punk as well. "Smells Like Teen Spirit", Nirvana's first single from *Nevermind*, succeeded largely because it brought together diverse elements – the raw power of punk, the heavily distorted guitar sonics of thrash and surprisingly sophisticated pop melodies – into a cohesive whole that resonated with a large audience of listeners.

Judging from live performance videos shot directly before and after the *Nevermind* sessions, Cobain used a Fender Stratocaster with a Seymour Duncan JB humbucker installed at the bridge position to record the song. Cobain said that the song's arrangement was inspired by the contrasting "soft and quiet, then loud and hard" dynamics of the Pixies, and he effectively employed a palette of clean, chorused and distorted guitar tones to achieve that effect.

Before entering Sound City to record the album, Cobain put together a simple but effective rig consisting of a Mesa/Boogie Studio preamp, Crown Power Base 2 power amp and several Marshall four-by-12 cabinets, which provided the volume output he wanted onstage. Instead of using the Mesa preamp's two channels, he preferred to play through the rhythm channel on a clean setting and use a Boss DS-1 Distortion pedal as his dirty channel.

His only effect on the song was an Electro-Harmonix Small Clone chorus, played clean on the verses and in conjunction with the Boss distortion on the pre-choruses and solo. While the Studio preamp, Boss DS-1 and Small Clone provide the essence of Cobain's guitar tones on the song, several other production flourishes influence the finished recorded sound.

Most importantly, the distorted rhythm guitar tracks were overdubbed, layered and panned for a wider sonic imprint, and mixing engineer Andy Wallace (who Cobain chose from a list of candidates because he worked with Slayer) sculpted the EQ on those guitar tracks with an upper midrange boost around 2.5-3kHz and a lower midrange cut from 1kHz-500Hz.

ORIGINAL GEAR

GUITAR: Early-'90s Japanese Fender Stratocaster with rosewood neck and Seymour Duncan JB bridge humbucker (bridge pickup), Volume: 10

AMPS: Mesa/Boogie Studio preamp (Rhythm channel, Volume: 6, Master: 5, Treble: 6, Bass: 3, Middle: 8, Reverb: 0, Rhythm Bright: On, EQ: In, 80: +3, 240: -2, 750: 0, 2200: +5, 6600: +3), Crown Power Base 2 power amp, Marshall 1960B 4x12 cabinet with Celestion G12T-75 speakers

EFFECTS: Boss DS-1 (Tone: 4, Level: 10, Distortion: 7), Electro-Harmonix Small Clone (Rate: 5, Depth switch: Up)

STRINGS/TUNING: Dean Markley Nickel Steel .010-.052/Standard

PICK: Jim Dunlop Tortex standard .60mm

RIFFIN' LIKE CRAZY

HOW **PRINCE** GOT THOSE RAUCOUS ROCK SOUNDS ON A CLASSIC *PURPLE RAIN* CUT.

WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

The 1984 film *Purple Rain* turned Prince into a superstar, although the accompanying album and the strength of the material within also played a big role in his ascension to new heights of fame. One of the most enduring songs from that album is the opening track, "Let's Go Crazy", which blended heavy electric guitar riffs with new wave synths and drum machines and a dose of funk to deliver a massive hit with irresistible crossover appeal.

Prince recorded the basic tracks for "Let's Go Crazy" live with his band the Revolution in an industrial warehouse rehearsal space that was converted into a makeshift recording studio for the sessions. While the instruments were both miked and recorded direct, there isn't much separation between instruments, which, combined with a rather dense mix of two guitars, two keyboards, bass, drums *and* drum machine, makes it somewhat difficult to isolate Prince's rhythm parts and evaluate his precise guitar tone.

Fortunately, Prince played the song live frequently throughout his career and he even used essentially the same live rig consistently so he could perfectly duplicate his favourite classic sounds.

The core of his rig for this song was a Hohner/H.S. Anderson MadCat Telecaster copy, which varied from a traditional Tele design with its Strat-style single-coil pickups, Strat-style hardtail bridge and maple body. The bridge pickup is also placed closer to the bridge than the bridge pickups on traditional Strat and Tele designs, giving the MadCat a more aggressive treble bite.

Prince relied heavily on Boss pedals for many of his most distinctive guitar tones, played here through a Mesa/Boogie Mark IIB guitar amp set to a clean tone and plugged into a pair of custom Bag End four-by-12 cabinets loaded with JBL D120F speakers to maximise headroom and enhance midrange clarity and treble frequencies.

Prince's distorted tone comes from a Boss DS-1 Distortion pedal, and for the main rhythm riffs and the first solo he also used a Boss OC-2 Octaver to provide deeper bass with buzzing, fuzz-like overtones. For the second solo at the song's climax, he kicks on a Colorsound Wah and uses a Boss BF-2 Flanger at a few key moments for added drama.

ORIGINAL GEAR

GUITAR: Late-'70s Hohner/H.S. Anderson MadCat with maple neck, Strat-style pickups and Strat-style bridge (bridge pickup), Volume: 10, Tone: 10

AMP: 1981 Mesa/Boogie Mark IIB (Volume 1: 7 with Pull Bright, Treble: 7, Bass: 4, Middle: 5, Master 1: 8, Presence: 6, Full Power) into two Bag End Q12 4x12 cabinets with JBL D120F speakers

EFFECTS: Colorsound Wah, Boss DS-1 (Tone: 6, Level: 7, Distortion: 9), Boss OC-2 Octaver (Oct 2: 10, Direct Level: 7, Oct 1: 6.5), Boss BF-2 Flanger (Manual: 9, Depth: 9, Rate: 3, Res: 10)

STRINGS/TUNING: GHS Boomers Medium .011-.050/Standard

PICK/SLIDE: Regular celluloid Medium

TONE TIP: Set the ME-80's OD/DS section to Turbo DS, the Mod section to Flanger and the Pedal FX to Wah. An OC-3 set to classic OC-2 mode can be placed in front of the ME-80





ANARCHY ON A FRETBOARD

HOW THE **SEX PISTOLS' STEVE JONES** ACHIEVED HIS FIERY SOUND ON A RAUCOUS ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT ANTHEM.

WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

More than four decades after its initial release as a single in November 1976, "Anarchy In The UK" remains the definitive punk rock statement. Johnny Rotten's vicious snarl and biting lyrics had a lot to do with that, but what really makes the recording so effective is guitarist Steve Jones' violent and visceral playing, which still sounds as powerful and dangerous today as it did when it first disrupted the mainstream rock establishment during the mid '70s.

One of the key elements of Jones' distinctively raw tone was his use of a Fender Twin Reverb amp cranked up as loud as it could go. During April and May of 1976, Jones appeared on stage playing through either an HH IC100S head or a Marshall Model 1959 Super Lead (both through an Ampeg four-by-12), but the Twin became his amp of choice from late June of 1976 and onwards after he stole the combo from the back of a truck when Bob Marley and the Wailers completed a run of shows at London's Hammersmith Odeon a few weeks prior.

Equipped with heavy-duty Fender-branded Gauss speakers rated at 400 watts, this particular Twin delivered pure power-amp overdrive without preamp compression or speaker-generated distortion, generating violent crunch along with slashing treble, roaring midrange and tight, twangy bass. Jones played a stock 1974 Les Paul Custom electric guitar, which previously belonged to Syl Sylvain of the New York Dolls, for the recording, with its uncovered humbucking bridge pickup providing sufficient output to push the amp to overdrive.

However, producer Chris Thomas and engineer Bill Price also deserve credit for the guitar tone's filth and fury for blending numerous overdubs by Jones into a cohesive whole that sounds much bigger than the individual parts. Jones initially laid down a pair of identical rhythm guitar tracks with churning texture courtesy of an MXR Phase 90 (out of sync on each track), but Thomas also encouraged Jones to record various overdubs to emphasise rhythmic accents or fill in blank spaces with feedback. The end result was a massive wall of sound that matched the larger-than-life reputation of a band that was about to change the world.

ORIGINAL GEAR

GUITAR: 1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom with pickup covers removed (bridge pickup), Volume: 10, Tone: 10

AMP: 1972 Fender Twin Reverb combo with Fender P.S. 12 (rebranded Gauss 2841) 12-inch speakers (Vibrato channel, Input 1, Bright: On, Volume: 10, Treble: 9, Middle: 10, Bass: 8, Reverb: 0, Speed: 0, Intensity: 0, Master Volume: 10)

EFFECTS: MXR Phase 90 (Speed: 3)

STRINGS/TUNING: Unknown, most likely Fender, Gibson or Picato .010-.046/Standard

PICK/SLIDE: Unknown, most likely Fender Heavy

A JUNGLE OF TONE

HOW LEGENDARY HARD-ROCKER **SLASH** ACHIEVED HIS SOUND ON ONE OF **GUNS N' ROSES**' MOST ICONIC HITS.

WORDS BY **CHRIS GILL**.

With its gutter-punk attitude and the raunchiest dual-guitar attack since Aerosmith's "Rocks", "Welcome To The Jungle" was the perfect choice for the first U.S. single release by Guns N' Roses in 1987. The song made a potent first impression, mostly thanks to Slash's dramatic delay-driven intro, massive power chords and blues-infused solos, which made a perfect foil for Axl Rose's wailing vocals.

Slash's tone throughout the song comes courtesy of the timeless Les Paul and Marshall combination. While metal guitar tones of the time were all about scooping out the midrange, Slash's tone is predominantly mids. A Frank Levi-modified Marshall 1959 Super Lead head rented from LA's Studio Instrument Rentals provided boosted gain crunch and additional midrange honk. For the clean section in the middle, Slash simply rolled down the guitar's volume control (low/medium-output pickups and a non-master volume amp are key for this approach).

For most of Jungle Slash's tone is bone dry, but on the intro and for a few special stab and slide effects, producer Mike Clink employed a favourite secret weapon – the Roland SRV-2000 Digital Reverb. While the SRV offers outstanding reverb effects for guitar, it also can convert into a dedicated digital delay unit by holding down a 'secret' control button configuration when powering on, which Clink used for the intro. The SRV unit plays a crucial role in Slash's sound throughout Appetite, including the intro to "Sweet Child O' Mine". ag

ORIGINAL GEAR

GUITAR: Mid-'80s Kris Derrig '59 Les Paul Standard replica with Seymour Duncan Alnico II Pro humbucker (bridge pickup)

AMP: 1977 100-watt Marshall Super Lead model 1959 with "Superkill" modification by Frank Levi and Glenn Buckley (Presence: 8, Bass: 5, Middle: 8.5, Treble: 7, Volume 1: 10; guitar plugged into Channel 1 top input)

CABINET: Marshall 1960 4x12 with Celestion Vintage 30 speakers

EFFECTS: Roland SRV-2000 Digital Reverb (set to "secret" delay mode: hold down Reverb/Non Linear, Write and Room Simulate buttons while powering on; Delay Time: 318ms, Feedback: 30, Output: 50) —used on intro only; for "stabs" and slide part increase delay time to 425ms and pair with an additional SRV-2000 in plate A reverb setting.

STRINGS/TUNING: .010–.046 Ernie Ball Slinky/Eb Standard (i.e. tuned down half step to Eb Ab Db Gb Bb Eb)

PICK: Dunlop Tortex 2.0mm





STRUNG OUT

HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE DOES YOUR TASTE IN GUITAR STRINGS MAKE? SIMPLY PUT, STRING CHOICE IS A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT IN FINDING YOUR TONE AND PLAYING STYLE. HERE'S WHY.

WORDS BY **JONATHAN HORSLEY**.

In our 24/7 obsession for all things tone and technique, it's important not to overlook the importance of strings. Whether we're talking the best electric guitar strings or acoustic guitar strings, these are what holds this whole guitar-playing malarky together. So if you've ever asked yourself, what difference do guitar strings make? We have the answers right here.

In fact, choosing the right set of strings can make all the difference. So let's pop open a few packs, engage in some cork sniffing, and think about some of the ways strings affect our tone and playing style. Ultimately, let's discover how a new set of strings could enhance your entire playing experience.

DO GUITAR STRINGS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Regardless of whether you're rocking one of the best electric guitars or you have both feet placed firmly in acoustic guitar camp, strings are your immediate connection with your instrument. They send your message to the guitar, transmitting it to the pickups, sending vibrations through the body and out the soundhole. That signal, those vibrations... That's the music you play. Ultimately, how we manipulate the strings defines our playing style.

While there might be a certain commonality when it comes to how guitar strings are made – distinctions with few notable differences – all strings are not created equal, and neither are guitarists. Whether you play a beginner acoustic guitar or a metal guitar built for blazing speed, your string choice still matters.

The right set of guitar strings can complement your style, allowing you to lean into those bends a bit more, or hit your chords harder. The wrong strings – so ones that are too heavy, too old, too light, too anything – can really get in the way of your playing. As ever, it's a question of feel and tone, and with strings that invariably leads to a question of string gauge: how thick do you like 'em?

DOES GAUGE MATTER FOR ELECTRIC GUITARS?

String gauge is possibly the biggest consideration you'll have. Measured in 1/1000s of an inch, string gauge has profound implications for your guitar's feel, and can similarly have a dramatic impact on your instrument's setup and tone.

There is a general rule that can be applied across strings, on all guitars, and it's this: thicker strings tend to have a fuller sound, with a more pronounced low end, a little more volume and a little more sustain. Thinner or lighter strings will have a little less acoustic volume and low end, and a bit more sizzle on the top-end.

There are more variables with electrics to mitigate string gauge as a variable in your tone – there are your electric guitar pickups, effects and the guitar amp to adjust the EQ profile of your tone – but all things being equal, you should hear the difference. Think 'beefier' with thicker strings, and 'top-end shimmer' with lighter sets.

If you're going to make a big change in string gauges, be mindful of your instrument and its setup. Moving to a higher gauge of strings might require filing your guitar's nut, a task not to be undertaken lightly (if in doubt, drop it in at your local guitar store for a tech to fix), while stringing up with a set of nines after using 11s might require an adjustment of the truss rod to put more relief in the neck and reduce fret buzz.

GAUGES AND TONE FOR ACOUSTIC GUITARS

On the acoustic, your strings are doing all the heavy lifting. Sizing up and down string gauges can have a more noticeable effect on your tone. Will heavier strings always sound louder, boomier? They'd certainly be the sound option for strumming on a dreadnought or a jumbo, but it gets complicated on an instrument-to-instrument basis.

Some vintage instruments don't respond well to heavy gauge strings, as they place too much tension on the neck and bridge. Shorter-scale acoustics, such as parlour and travel-sized guitars, often perform better – that is to say, expressing more of the instrument's natural voice – with a lighter gauge of string.

With nylon-string classical guitars, the strings are typically generalised into three categories: light, medium and hard tension. Hard tension strings can often be too much for the hardware on vintage instruments, as they place too much tension on the bridge. With acoustics we can apply a general rule: thicker strings, 13s and upwards typically serve the flatpickin' strummers better, while lighter strings, so 12s and under, with their brighter top end and easier feel, are a more natural fit for fingerstyle players.

Classical players are not bending the strings as much, but string tension plays a big part in the feel of the instrument, with high-tension sets a little harder to fret than low-tension sets. That said, nylon is more forgiving to the fingertips than brass, bronze, steel or nickel, so it's nice to be able to rule out masochism as a factor in string choice.

GAUGES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

Over time, you might find a preference for a hybrid or custom gauge set in which thickness of each string

diverts from the generic gauges to perhaps go lighter on the top three strings, so you can make the most of the lower string tension and really bend them when soloing, and a heavier bottom three so you can dig into the chords more.

Finding your Goldilocks gauge can be an evolutionary process of trial and error. Other times, you'll know what you're looking for. Take Slash, for example. He was a guitar store veteran before he became a veritable rock icon, and his heavy-hitting style was leading to too many string breakages, so he sized up his top three and kept the bottom three relatively light. Slash plays Ernie Ball and his preferred gauge runs 0.011 to 0.046, which is like a typical set of Power Slinky Ernie Balls on the top three strings and Regular Slinky on the bottom.

Mitigating the effects of an industrial accident that took the tops of the fingers on his fretting hand, Tony Iommi, sized down his strings and tuned down, and invented an entire culture in the process. Necessity is often the mother of invention. He uses custom sets from La Bella, that run .008, .008, .011, .018, .024, .032 when he is tuned to D#, and 009, .010, .012, .020, .032, .042 when in C#. That said, if you tune down, you'll definitely want to consider thicker strings. Those tuned down to C# or lower could be looking at a set of 12s to get the right string tension and feel.

WHAT ARE GUITAR STRINGS MADE OF?

Electric guitar strings are always metal. They have to be in order for the magnetic coil of the pickups to process their vibrations into a signal that can be sent to your amplifier. Typically, wound strings will have a hexagonal or round steel core around which there will be a metal wrap. That is most likely going to be made of pure nickel or described as "nickel wound" or "nickel-plated steel", while the top three unwound strings will be plain steel.

Nickel is the vintage choice. It's a little warmer, a little softer sounding with a more rounded low end, and gentler on your frets. Nickel wound or nickel-plated steel strings simply wrap a steel core with nickel-steel alloy, and they sound suitably brighter. Manufacturers such as Ernie Ball have used cobalt in their string construction. Optima used 24K gold in the steel alloy wrap for their signature Brian May strings.

As with all aspects of guitar gear, debate smoulders around the benefits of a hexagonal vs a more old-school round core, in which nigh-on 100 percent of the wrap is in contact with the core. GHS, La Bella and Stringjoy use round cores. It's said to give the string 'boominess', a rather nebulous tonal quality for which GHS Boomers are named after.

Ernie Ball, D'Addario and other brands use hexagonal steel cores. They might not be as flexible as round core strings, but they're brighter and hold their tune better. If you were to look at the transition from pure nickel to nickel wound, from round core to hexagonal core, you could say string evolution is heading towards more brightness.

Acoustic strings have a similar steel core construction, but to generate that extra treble and oomph they need a brighter-sounding wrap, such as 80/20 bronze, aka brass, or phosphor bronze. This was pioneered in 1974 by D'Addario to give a warm, well-balanced tone – and crucially to last longer. Therein lies an issue that has consumed the R&D budget of every string manufacturer: how to make guitar strings last longer.

SHOULD YOU USE COATED OR UNCOATED STRINGS?

Coated strings have grown in popularity as manufacturers like Elixir found ways of literally coating the string with a protective material to prolong its lifespan. At first there was a debate as to whether the process worked – some people complained of flaking coating, or that – and there could be the power of suggestion at play here – the strings did not have the full frequency range as uncoated strings.

But the technology has evolved. Now it's a question of which coating you would like, and whether the extra outlay is worth it. A coated set might cost three times as much as an uncoated set, but if it lasts you longer – and many, such as Ernie Ball's Paradigm strings, come with a freshness guarantee – it represents good value. Elixir offers three different coated options, each with its own tone profile.

There's the original Polyweb, which has a warmer tone and slick feel. There's the Nanoweb, on which the coating is even thinner, leading to a brighter string, and then there's the Optiweb, available only for electrics but offering a naturalistic feel. These premium sets from Elixir, plus the likes of Ernie Ball's Paradigm and D'Addario's EXP series, are well worth investigating.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD STRINGS BE CHANGED?

Guitar strings are a repository for dead skin, dust and goodness knows what else, and all this gunk all serves to dampen the strings, taking some of that top-end off and making them feel dirty. Factor in the abuse from tuning and retuning, string bends and whatnot, and older strings tend not to hold their tune.

When you hear them going dead, or when they start to feel claggy, change them. Some players don't like super-fresh strings, which is when they're at their brightest. There can be a bit more string noise, a little squeak, and that can be difficult to record. But a little stretching and an hour or so of playing will dial back some of that tonal rambunctiousness.

On the other hand, some players insist on a fresh set before each show. The harmonics come easier, the strings feel quicker, and that extra articulation can make all the difference, especially to acoustic players. That's why Tommy Emmanuel changes his guitar strings before every show.

You'll have to change your guitar strings a lot less if you clean them after your play. The best way is to remember to keep a clean cloth handy to wipe them down and get all those deposits from your fingers off each string. Better still, invest in a string cleaner such as GHS's Fast Fret and you'll find your strings last just that little bit longer. ag





DON'T FRET THE FRETTIN' STUFF

COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHER GUITARISTS IS BAD NEWS FOR YOUR PLAYING, CREATIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH. SOCIAL MEDIA CAN MAKE AN ESPECIALLY HARSH DENT ON YOUR CONFIDENCE TOWARDS THE INSTRUMENT, TOO. HERE'S HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION IF THE STRUMMING SCENE HAS GOT YOU DOWN.

WORDS BY **MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN**.

For all the horrors of the pandemic, one of the silver linings has been a surge in collaboration. We've seen lockdown collabs between some of the biggest names in guitar – from Eric Johnson to Brian May – and a host of phenomenal all-star shred videos. A few months back, I was asked to take part in one of these solo jams. And I was pretty pleased with the lead I put together. It had a few flashy moments and, at least to my ears, it felt like my note choices told a story over the backing track provided.

I braced myself for the fact that my 20-second clip would be sandwiched between some ridiculously talented players. But when the video dropped, some all-too-familiar negative feelings reared their head nonetheless: that sensation of inadequacy, of having failed to live up to some intangible standard. My musician friends told me it was good. Other players in the video told me they dug it. The guitarist who organised the collaboration said he was impressed. So why did I feel so despondent?

It's a sinking feeling many musicians are familiar with. And, of course, it's far from a new phenomenon. When Eric Clapton invited Jimi Hendrix to jam with Cream, Slowhand famously stormed offstage after the show, lit a cigarette and complained to Hendrix manager Chas Chandler, "You never told me he was that f***ing good."

Over the decades, guitarists have been perceived as sensitive creatures who hate being outshined – an insecurity that has likely fuelled online hate surrounding the instrument. But the sheer volume of seemingly unsurpassable guitar playing at our fingertips can very quickly take this sense of self-doubt to new levels.

DOOM-SHREDDING

If you're already in a negative headspace, flicking through a feed full of 'perfect' guitar playing can be the guitar equivalent of another pandemic phenomenon: doom-scrolling – in this case, watching endless videos of players whose ability you perceive to be superior to your own, leading to a downward spiral of six-string inadequacy.

Guitarists aren't alone in this: a 2019 survey found that 73 percent of independent music makers suffered from symptoms of mental illness, with fear of failure and pressure to succeed among the primary drivers of negative emotions – and it's not hard to see how social media feeds into these feelings. In fact, one of the world's biggest guitar tutors, Justin Sandercoe (aka Justinguitar), observed that this sense of inadequacy is common even among his fellow instructors and top-tier players (and if learning a new technique is the source of your anxiety, his five-point plan for taking inspiration, rather than intimidation, from great guitarists is well worth a read).

Of course, this is where today's wealth of guitar talent can be a huge advantage: just as we have

access to all the music in the world via streaming services, we can be dazzled by any technique we can possibly imagine. Yet rather than developing six-string FOMO, it's important to remember that guitar is not something you can complete – and nailing every technique under the sun is not compulsory.

In fact, putting somebody else's technical ability on too high a pedestal can lead you to feel like you're not a 'good' guitarist at all. That's why some players find it valuable to measure success in a different way – just ask Yvette Young, one of the most innovative and gifted guitarists of the modern era.

"I never really felt like I got good on guitar," she told *Total Guitar*. "The way I spend my time is still very much based around improving. When I think about the term 'good guitar' I end up thinking about total virtuosic shredding. I admire that stuff a lot, but I can't do a lot of the things all these monster players do. "It's more about getting faster at conveying what I hear in my head and translating it to the fretboard. For me, that's when I feel like I'm good at guitar... When I can translate that vision instantaneously rather than sit around and dick around for a bunch of time!"

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE

Now, this article isn't intended as some kind of anti-social media diatribe – after all, Instagram, YouTube and now TikTok have shone a spotlight on countless inspiring players – and nor is it intended to discourage the quest for improvement that comes from learning new techniques and new skills.

Rather, it's a chance to assess how you perceive social media and the musicians you follow. We have an innate desire to compare ourselves to others – and on social media, that's likely to be because we feel they are superior in some way. Yet while feelings of inadequacy *can* motivate you to achieve, more often than not it isn't good for your mental health.

This is particularly salient given one of the biggest guitarists on Instagram, Mateus Asato, shut down his account this month, in part because he "got lost inside the boxes of the 15-60-[second] videos". Asato believes this short-form format is leading guitarists to "los[e] the essence of [musical] interaction, establishing patterns based on the same four-bar chord progressions to start the vibe".

In short, we're all striving to impress, all the time – and it's not a realistic goal for ourselves, or for our audiences. So, it's worth remembering that there are ways you can take charge of confidence in your own ability. For starters, remember that not every clip of mind-blowing playing took someone 30 seconds to perform and record. What social media hides is the hours, even days, of practice it took to nail that lick, and the 19 failed takes that weren't good enough. As Asato puts it, "Instagram helped musicians to get better at business, at making flawless performance videos (after uncountable takes)."

It sounds obvious, but when you're working on something, whether it be a technique or a new song, be patient with yourself: don't push yourself into a negative headspace if you can't master something right off the bat. Start slow and build up. It can take days, weeks, months, but you'll get there. And if you feel like spending time on socials is having a negative impact on your mindset, don't be afraid to take a break. You may be surprised by how much your productivity and confidence in your playing improves.

The same goes if you're panicking about the quantity of your own posts. If you yourself are trying to build momentum for your own account, you might feel like you don't have enough time to keep up with the volume of output from those you aspire to emulate. Even one of today's premier guitar personalities, Jared Dines, felt the need to take a step back, after observing the toll social media was taking on his mental health.

"I got to a point where I just said 'screw it,'" he told *Guitar World* last year. "I was so worried if I don't post this week, I'm going to be irrelevant. If you don't tweet every day people are going to forget about you. Now, I just don't care. I don't give a fuck. I just found I need to do the things that I feel inspired to do and motivated to do on any given day.

"I'm stepping away from that mentality of 'I need to post, I need to post, I need to post,' and just chilling out a little more and calming down and just being, 'You can relax, you can be a normal person, you can go to dinner with your girlfriend, you don't have to constantly be on your phone.'"

And if you're feeling terrible about your playing, one of the absolute best pieces of advice we can share comes from shred guru Angel Vivaldi, who has one simple trick to make you feel better: turn your guitar upside-down, and try playing left- (or right-) handed. That's how it would feel to be a complete beginner, and a reminder of how far you've come on the instrument. Rather than always focusing on what you've yet to master, take some time to show gratitude for the abilities you've already acquired.

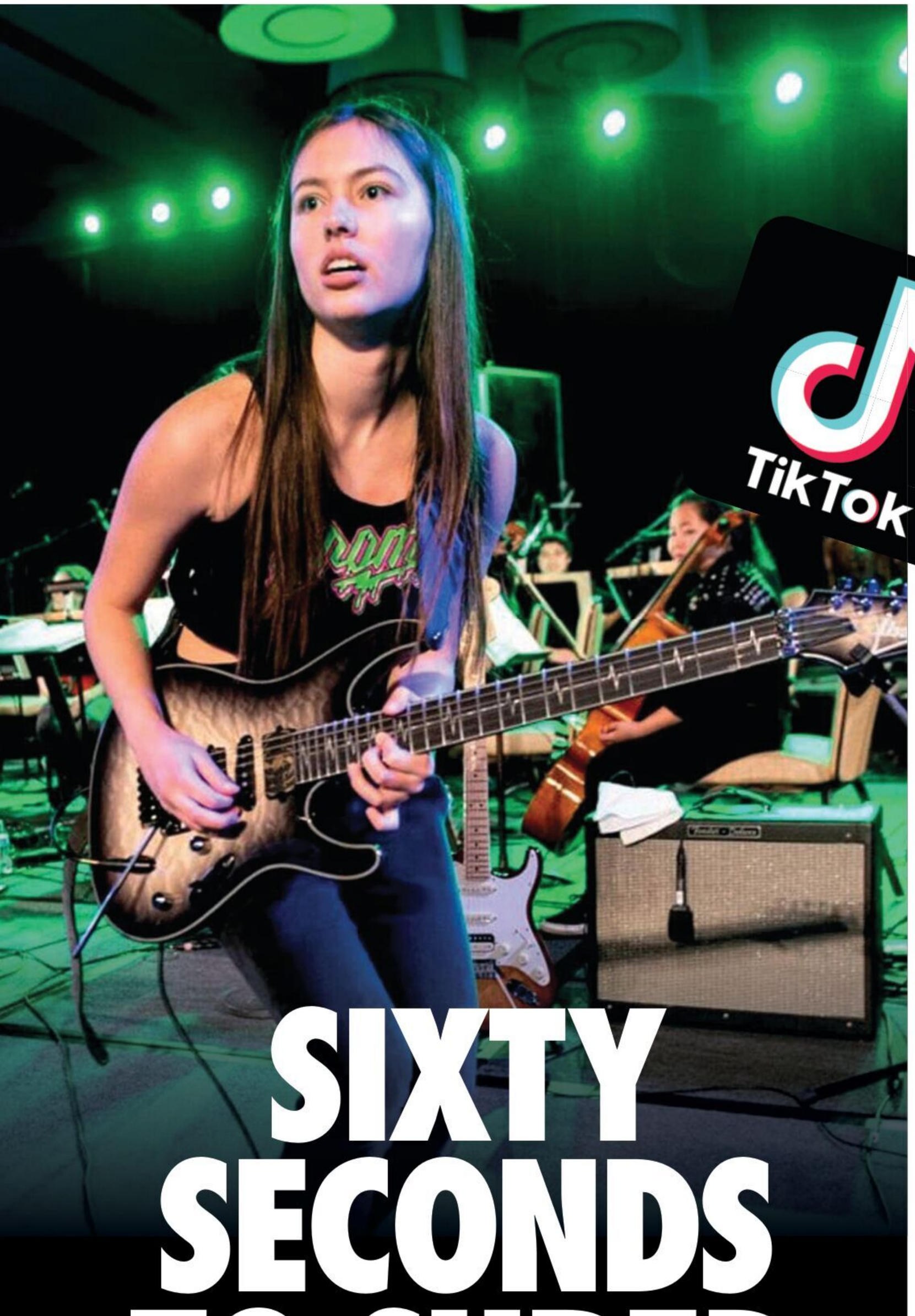


YOU DO YOU

Above all else, remember this: no matter what you feel on any particular day, at any individual moment, you are a guitarist. You have dedicated your time to learning an instrument that serves as a conduit for your emotions and should be a source of joy and satisfaction above all else. Those positive emotions come from creating, learning and improving your own ability – and that's something you can't enjoy if you're too busy focusing on others' successes, and not your own.

After all, the beauty of the guitar lies in its individuality: your vibrato is different from any other guitar player who ever lived. The combination of your pick attack and your gear means your tone is, too. No two guitarists are alike, and while there are core fundamentals that are useful to all musicians, it's OK to be different from the players that populate your feed. Don't fixate on whether there are enough notes, or whether other guitar players will be impressed. There are elements of your playing that nobody else can ever replicate.

Remember that, and invest in your uniqueness, rather than any perceived peer pressure of what you *think* your playing should be like – because individuality, not similarity, will always be the hallmark of any great guitarist. ag



SIXTY SECONDS TO SHRED

SHORT SONGS, NEW STRUCTURES, AND AN EMPHASIS ON 'VIBES' HAVE ALL PLAYED A PART IN RESHAPING THE ROLE OF THE SIX-STRING, AND AT THE CENTRE OF IT ALL IS AN UNLIKELY APP INITIALLY DESIGNED FOR TWEENS: **TIKTOK**.

WORDS BY **CHRIS SCHWARTEN**.

Whether you love it, hate it, or have simply gone out of your way to avoid it, there's no getting around the fact that TikTok is a big deal. In fact, it's fair to say TikTok is the most influential platform in music right now, with the success of most of today's mega-hits being attributed to trends on the app.

Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road", Megan Thee Stallion's "Savage", Doja Cat's "Say So", and most recently Olivia Rodrigo's "Driver License", have all received hundreds of millions of streams on the back of TikTok trends. But it's not just for new artists, as we saw with the resurgence of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" re-entering the charts more than 40 years after its initial release, thanks to a seemingly serendipitous video that tugs on those '90s nostalgia heartstrings.

It's no wonder TikTok has become the go to place for artists to promote their music, but what's more curious is the fact that many producers and songwriters are composing music with the ultimate aim of breaking it on TikTok. Olivia Rodrigo herself admitted that she had TikTok in mind when she wrote "Driver's License".

While there's no hard and fast rule as to what's going to translate on the app, you only need to look at some of the big hits or playlists showcasing the music of TikTok to see what's important for success at the moment. Smooth sounds, danceable beats, and emotional positivity are in abundance when it comes to the big hits of TikTok. What is also noticeable is the lack of guitar here.

While you can find guitar parts if you look for them, it's usually an acoustic guitar, and it's pretty low down in the mix. If it's distinct, it's usually the exception rather than rule. Riffs, overdriven or distorted tones, or even just prominent guitar sounds are, for the most part, missing from TikTok's big hits. That's not to say there's anything wrong with this type of production or songwriting, but with so many artists and industry folks taking their cues from what flies on this platform, does this mean guitars are going to take a backseat in popular music for the foreseeable future?

Jasmine Star doesn't think so, but she does think the role of guitar in popular music has changed as a direct result of the app's influence. As a guitarist who has found a large audience through TikTok, as well as being a lifelong student of music, Star has an almost academic understanding of today's musical climate.

"It's just the way music is written now," she explains. "It's less so in verse/chorus/verse/chorus/bridge/guitar solo/chorus form. It's shrinking down into two minute songs that are written hook one/hook two/hook three, back to hook one with a variation hook, to hook three. So it's all about how the guitar fits into the hooks. So I think that that's really where you see guitar.

"A lot of people are making music intending to break it on TikTok, and labels – a big part of their marketing strategies is to break music on TikTok right now. Your average person on TikTok is going to have 15 seconds to make the video, right? So you want to have as much of the song in that 15 seconds as possible. I think things naturally have gotten shrunk down from there."

The 17-year-old musical prodigy also believes a large part of where guitars sit in today's music has to do with modern production trends. "Instruments

are viewed even more so as where they lie on the frequencies spectrum," she says, "So I think that we'll see more riffs that are intentionally written to fill a certain gap in sound, and where it fits in the mix. And I think that that will change how riffs are being written. I think that riffs are probably going to become more melodic because of how songs are being written right now."

At the same time, Star has also been able to build a large following on the app by just showing off her musical chops and playing sick riffs and licks. Ultimately, she believes there is still a lot of interest in guitar music, it's just young people don't care about genres.

"I think it's just in different places than it used to be. I think that guitar is as relevant as ever. And because guitar isn't in every single song right now, I think it makes it in a way it makes it that much more special and that much more interesting to kids my age, that that's not all they listen to," she says. "Music is a vibe more than ever right now. And what's really rad is I've noticed with kids my age they're so open minded to all kinds of music. I'm like that as well. I love all kinds of music. I'm not like, 'Oh, I can only listen to this, or I can only listen to this.' As long as it's a vibe, then it will work."



Peach Tree Rascals, a five-piece from San Jose with first-hand experience of what it's like to have a massive TikTok hit, have their own perspective on how TikTok is shaping modern music. "Y'know the Akon, T-Pain era, or when Drake first started coming up a lot of the top 40 started sounding similar? That's definitely the case right now when it comes to TikTok songs," vocalist Issac Pech explains.

"If you look at Top 40, you're hearing songs that you can't really describe what genre it is, or it's an obvious genre. You hear the songs and it isn't like [traditional] Top 40, but then you're like, 'Oh shit, TikTok!' So it's literally a driving force in the music industry, which is why everyone in the industry is so obsessed with it. Everyone is in a bubble and once they hear about somebody else's bubble getting popped, everyone cares."

Peach Tree Rascals are a prime example of how the industry rulebook has changed; their song "Mariposa" has been shared in over 1.2 million videos on the app, has more than 183 million Spotify streams at time of writing, and has been praised by the likes of Billboard – all without ever playing a gig. Instead, they spent a few years "writing hundreds of songs" and honing their craft to the point that "it wouldn't stick out like a sore thumb on New Music Friday" before eventually dropping their first release in 2018.

While they started getting traction throughout 2018 and 19, it wasn't until "Mariposa" was picked up on TikTok that things really blew up for them. Fellow vocalist Tarrek Abdel-Khaliq says that by the very nature of being on social media, it's impossible to not notice trends and the influence they have – but ultimately, he warns against paying too much attention to them. Instead, he stresses the importance of making timeless music.

"We feel it a lot when we work with other producers and other writers. A lot of people have it more in their mind to TikTok influences or like other people's type of sounds, and they try to bring it up," Abdel-Khaliq says. "But we don't like to let things like that affect the way we work. We just try to like come up with good progressions and good melodies and like good music at the end of the day. And we think that'll break through no matter what.

"The song that blew up on TikTok that I think everyone agrees is timeless was 'Dreams'. A timeless, amazing melody. Amazing voice... just a great video that just complimented it to make the TikTok go viral; just the perfect combination of everything. Just great content all around."

While they believe that TikTok very much favours songs with a 'vibe' – something that's user friendly and could be used as a backing track for a gardening video or something that's easy to dance to – they don't think the door is closed on anything, even rock and metal. Asked if they could see something like Metallica getting a hit on TikTok, they wouldn't rule it out.

"We were watching the Metallica documentary [*Some Kind Of Monster*] the other day and there's

"I THINK WE'LL SEE MORE RIFFS THAT ARE INTENTIONALLY WRITTEN TO FILL A CERTAIN GAP IN SOUND, AND WHERE IT FITS IN THE MIX..."

that one song ['Frantic'] that goes, *'tick, tick, tick, tock'*. If there's one song that's gonna blow up on there for them, it's that. It just needs someone to make a really cool video for it," Abdel-Khaliq says.

Jasmine Star agrees. "Literally, anything can pick up on TikTok, as long as it's a vibe – regardless of what the vibe is. And I think that's amazing. So if someone happens to rediscover a song, no matter who the artist is, and people like that song, it will trend again. No one's really caring about when it was released. It's just, 'Do I like it? Is this a good song? Are these amazing artists?' I think that's super rad."



CLICK 'N' RIFF

TIRED OF THE SAME OLD GUITAR COLOURS, SHAPES AND SIZES? WHILE YOU'RE BUSY SOCIAL DISTANCING, GO ONLINE AND DISCOVER A COMPLETELY NEW UNIVERSE OF SIX-STRING DELIGHTS READY TO BE DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR. WORDS BY **BRAD TOLINSKI**.

Most of us pick up the guitar to make a personal statement. It's our way of saying, "Hey, man, I only know three chords and five recycled blues licks, but I'm special – I've got something to say. I am not an animal, *I AM HUMAN!*"

But if it's 'unique' we're after, why do so many of us settle for guitars that look the same? You know the ones – red, black, white or sunburst; two humbuckers or three single coils; a maple neck or maybe rosewood... *Yawn*. Okay, okay, one or two of you may have guitars with quilted tops, but that doesn't make you different. It only means you're a hedge fund manager with a few bucks. Regardless, all too often guitar players are drawn to a variation on the same theme.

We're not pointing fingers; we're often guilty of the same crime. But recently, thanks to COVID-19, we've had a little extra time to reflect on our lack of imagination and the error of our ways. It's also given us plenty of time to dig through the internet. And to our amazement, we've discovered a new and wonderful world of interesting – and surprisingly affordable – guitars. Instruments so different, they'll certainly make your pals sit up and say, "Amazeballs!"

The following are some of our favourite online guitar companies, each offering their own intriguing vision. And best of all, they'll send their six-string wares right to your home – virus free.

EASTWOOD GUITARS

Established in 2001, Eastwood's modus operandi is to create instruments that not only evoke or replicate rare classic looks and vintage sounds, but to offer them at reasonable prices. Founded by Michael Robinson, the company produces more than an astounding 250 models, and their regular customers include famous guitar super nerds like Jack White, Foo Fighters, Robyn Hitchcock, R.E.M.'s Peter Buck and John Fogerty.

"We've built up a large international following of like-minded people that desire something other than the Fender-Gibson sound, or perhaps never liked the Fender-Gibson sound in the first place," laughs Robinson. "They usually become loyal customers because of two things: Even though our guitars are weird, they exceed people's expectations, and we make the online buying experience easy."

Part of what makes Eastwood unique is that they sell all their guitars exclusively online. With so many different models, Robinson says it'd be impossible to do it any other way. "Even if Guitar Center carried 12 of our guitars, it would only scratch the surface of our inventory," he says.

Thankfully, shopping on their well-designed website is all part of the fun. Once you get comfortable with the fact that you can narrow down the specs, watch the videos, read the reviews and then pull the trigger and get the precise model you want in the mail, it's a bit difficult to settle for limited selection of brands and colours at a local store. If you buy one of their instruments and it's not love at first sight, Robinson assures they have a no-questions money-back return or swap policy. "We will do whatever we need to do to make somebody happy with their purchase, because it's easy for us to do that," he says. "But a surprisingly low number of people have been unhappy."

LEGION GUITARS

While Eastwood offers hundreds of makes and models, the mighty Legion Guitars offers just two. But don't laugh, both are extremely cool. Owner Chad Petit has carved out a special niche and pursued it with laser-like focus, much to the delight of his obsessed consumers.

"I noticed a gap in the marketplace for '80s-style B.C. Rich and Jackson guitars and decided to update the originals and make them better and cheaper," says the die-hard metal enthusiast. "That's why so many people are reaching out to online makers. They want to connect with someone that understands them and will give them exactly what they're looking for."

True to his word, his Legion instruments are beautifully constructed, reasonably priced and his vintage heavy metal body shapes are to die for.

"When I'm designing extreme body shapes, there are two things that are important," Petit says. "It has to look good and it has to be balanced. Once you start messing with the shape of the guitar and stretching one of the body wings, how the guitar sits on you can change very quickly. I grew up playing B.C. Rich guitars – I probably owned close to a thousand of them – and that was my biggest complaint. It's rare I would ever get one that was in balance. You won't find that with my guitars. No matter how extreme, I'm obsessed with making them sit perfectly."

While Petit has produced limited runs of different shapes, his current winner is the Nihlist, which comes in six- and seven-string models. The Nihlist 7 NT27 features a 27-inch scale in a Walnut/Maple seven-piece neck with an ebony fretboard in the neck-thru build with alder body wings and a classy oiled finish for a very reasonable $800. The Nihlist NTFR is a six-string guitar with a matte black polyurethane finish, 24 jumbo frets and a special binding – all for $875.

"I think the Nihlist just got a really good aesthetic to it," Petit says. "It's a timeless throwback to late '80s extreme shapes. It's not too big, it's not too small, it just falls right in that pocket. It's perfectly balanced, it plays well sitting down or standing up."







KIESEL GUITARS

If you really want to get freaky, then the Kiesel Guitars website is the place to go. For more than 70 years the company has been building exotic instruments to spec for extreme shredders like Allan Holdsworth, Jason Becker, Will Swan, Johnny Hiland, Al Joseph, Frank Gambale and thousands of other players. Their models include carved-top guitars, multi-scale fanned-fret models, headless guitars and basses, extended-scale baritone instruments and just about anything else you can think of.

Their guitars ain't cheap – their baseline price is somewhere around $1,200 – but because Kiesel has their production so streamlined and organised, they aren't nearly as pricey as many comparable boutique guitar makers.

"I think the thing that makes us special is that all of our instruments are built at our in-house factory in the U.S.A.," says Zak Kiesel, who oversees the company's marketing and social media. "We hold ourselves to the higher standard that comes with making quality instruments. We're always pushing the limits to make our guitars better and more durable."

While we found their website graphically unappealing (C'mon guys, this thing looks like it was built in freakin' 1997), it was easy to navigate and endlessly addicting once you start realising how many options are available to create your own dream guitar. But if you really want to get a sense of what Kiesel has to offer, we recommend checking out their far superior Instagram page. Unlike their website, it offers hundreds of great videos, photos and testimonials from satisfied customers.





DUNABLE GUITARS

If Legion and Eastwood push all those groovy nostalgia buttons, and Kiesel guitars are on the cutting edge, then Dunable represents the best of what's here-and-now. Designed to look classic with just enough 'pointiness' to feel heavy metal, one can imagine the company's guitars being valid now, and 50 years from now.

"I try to make my guitars look organic, but also like something heavy is going to come out of it," explains owner Sacha Dunable. "For lack of a better description, our aesthetic is pre-Floyd Rose era – before the hair metal guys got involved."

The key to their classic look are their stunning matte finishes – their Cyclops 2020 Metallic Purple Burst with gold hardware, for example, is almost too awesome to look at. "We like a nice thin finish because you can still feel the wood," Dunable says. "It's about appreciating the materials and not covering them up with a thick plastic coating."

In addition to the Cyclops, the Yeti and R2 models are their most popular. However, we were also attracted to their Cosmonaut, which is a tasteful but entirely original mashup of a Telecaster and a Rickenbacker.

Dunable speaks for all these companies when he explains why more independent makers have been sprouting up like mushrooms at a Grateful Dead show. "If you put your guitars online, it's just as easy for someone to find all of us as it is to access the bigger companies," he says. "It's levelled the playing field. We're all on the internet and you can email us directly and order from us directly. There's going to be a lot more direct-to-consumer things happening than brick-and-mortar stores opening, that's for sure."

KEITH RICHARDS

A LIFE IN GUITARS

MICAWBER, MALCOLM, SONNY… IN THE WORLD OF **KEITH RICHARDS**, EVEN HIS GUITARS ARE CHARACTERS. BUT THERE'S MORE TO HIS COLLECTION THAN THOSE FAMOUS TELES. THOUSANDS MORE…

WORDS BY **JONATHAN HORSLEY**.

All kinds of rare and special ingredients go into The Rolling Stones' sound. The rhythm is the backbone, Charlie Watts' touch and feel on the drum set binding it all together, tumbling between the sinewy and the edgy, the relaxed and the funky. On top there is Mick Jagger on the mic, that ageless supernova of charisma. Somewhere in the middle you've got the strings, where the mojo is cooked up live.

In 2021, that's Ronnie Wood and the ever-present survivor, Keith Richards, whose judicial taste in vintage guitars and amplification is augmented by an ear for alternate tunings and a playing style that summons ghosts from the Delta to shuttle around louche rhythms, layering melody on top, probing then retreating.

In the studio, an ever more byzantine recipe is followed; their sound is the room, the recording equipment, in the ancillary percussion and strings and how they work in concert. Richards is custodian of this recipe. He is both the hot sauce and the hand on the spoon, mixing everything.

As a guitar player, what is the first guitar you think of when you think of Richards? For many, it has to be the Fender Telecaster, maybe 'Micawber', Richards' number one, the 1953 Blackguard with five strings and a Frankenstein spec, a battered Butterscotch Blonde forever slung at a 45-degree angle from Richards' hip.

Or perhaps it is 'Malcolm', a '54 model in natural finish that has similarly been augmented, five-strings, left in open tunings. Then there is the black 1975 Fender Telecaster Custom, which made its debut – as did Keith's new foil, Ronnie Wood – on the Stones' Tour Of The Americas '75, or Sonny, the '67 Sunburst Tele.

But let's take it back to the beginning, because those Telecasters only tell part of the Keith Richards story.

THE EARLY DAYS: 1960-64

The population of Keith Richards' guitar collection is estimated to range between 1,000 and 3,000 – but just like the rest of us, he had to start somewhere. His mother got him a Rosetti acoustic when he was around 13. Ten quid was a bit of money in 1959 but it proved a shrewd investment.

Just like the rest of us, he was confronted with Malagueña early on; taught by his grandfather, it was the first song Richards learned. The acoustic would become key, not only to Richards' playing style but his entire guitar philosophy. He often speaks of the acoustic's purity. Learn to work it, and only then can you appreciate what it takes to use the electric.

As Richards says, "The electric guitar? All they did was put a phone in it. But it was the right phone at the right time." For a band with an electric pulse, it is remarkable that so many occasions have called for the acoustic guitar.

When The Rolling Stones parked themselves in Regent Street Studios, in January 1964, to record their debut album, Richards' electric of choice was a Harmony Meteor H70 that he had bought the year previous. The Meteor had a thin hollow arch-top body of spruce and maple, and a short scale length of 24 inches. A pair of gold-foil DeArmond pickups gave the Meteor a raw tone that would become part of the soundtrack to the 60s. Notably, The Kinks' Dave Davies playing one on "You Really Got Me".

The Stones' self-titled debut showcased the Meteor, but it was his 1963 Harmony H1270 12-string acoustic on stand-out track "Tell Me (You're Coming Back)" that suggested that the Stones were not just another beat combo. A 12-string jumbo, the H1270 was an early studio star for the Stones. Richards used it on the likes of "Not Fade Away", "Good Times, Bad Times" and "Play With Fire".

On "Tell Me", Richards let the 12-string and vocals bleed into the one mic. Using as little separation as possible would become a leitmotif of the Stones future recording sessions. As would the 12-string; its woozy, chorusing quality would jive just as well on the Stones' more psychedelic jams as it did on the bone-dry directness of "Not Fade Away".

In 2004, Richards' H1270 was sold at auction for $33,460, but if you scour the internet you could pick up a vintage 60s model with an aftermarket L.R. Baggs pickup for 600-odd bucks. Richards' Meteor was joined by a Kalamazoo-era 1962 Epiphone Casino as the Stones' career took off.

The double-cut archtop had a fully hollow build of laminate maple and birch, and featured pair of P-90s, plus a tune-o-matic bridge and trapeze tailpiece. If the first two albums were handled by hollow-bodies, Richards would turn to a heavyweight for the recording of *Out Of Our Heads*.

THE KEEF 'BURST, SATISFACTION AND THE ROAD TO '69

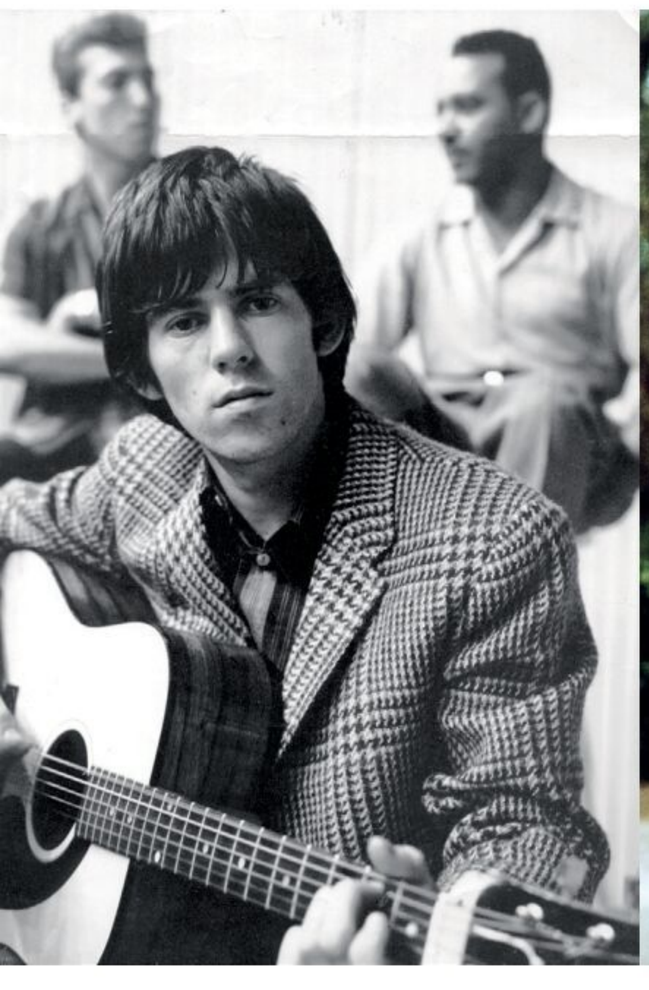
The Keef 'Burst ushered in a changing of the guard for Richards' recording guitars. It first made an appearance on the Stones' 1964 tour, popping up on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Richards leaned on it heavily for the *Out Of Our Heads* sessions, which assumed huge cultural significance as soon as Richards pressed one of Gibson's new-fangled Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone pedals into action for the "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" riff. He had always maintained that it was a horn part, and kismet played its part with arrival of the fuzz pedal.

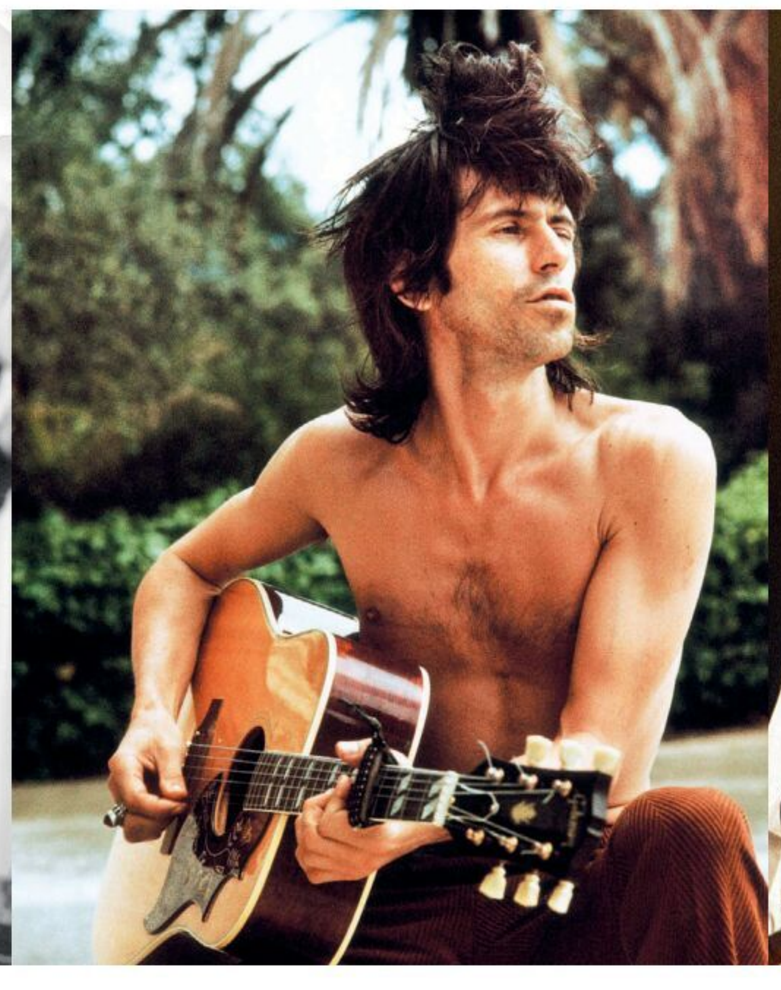
"The way Otis Redding ended up doing it is probably closer to my original conception for the song," he told *Guitar World*. "It's an obvious horn riff. And when this new Fuzz Tone pedal arrived in the studio from the local dealership or something, I said, "Oh, this is good. It's got a bit of sustain, so I can use it to sketch out the horn line."

If the band had hitherto mined American R&B, blues and early rock 'n' roll for inspiration – for songs to sing, more to the point – 1966 saw the release of *Aftermath*, the Stones' first album of all-original material. There was now a sense of danger about the Stones.

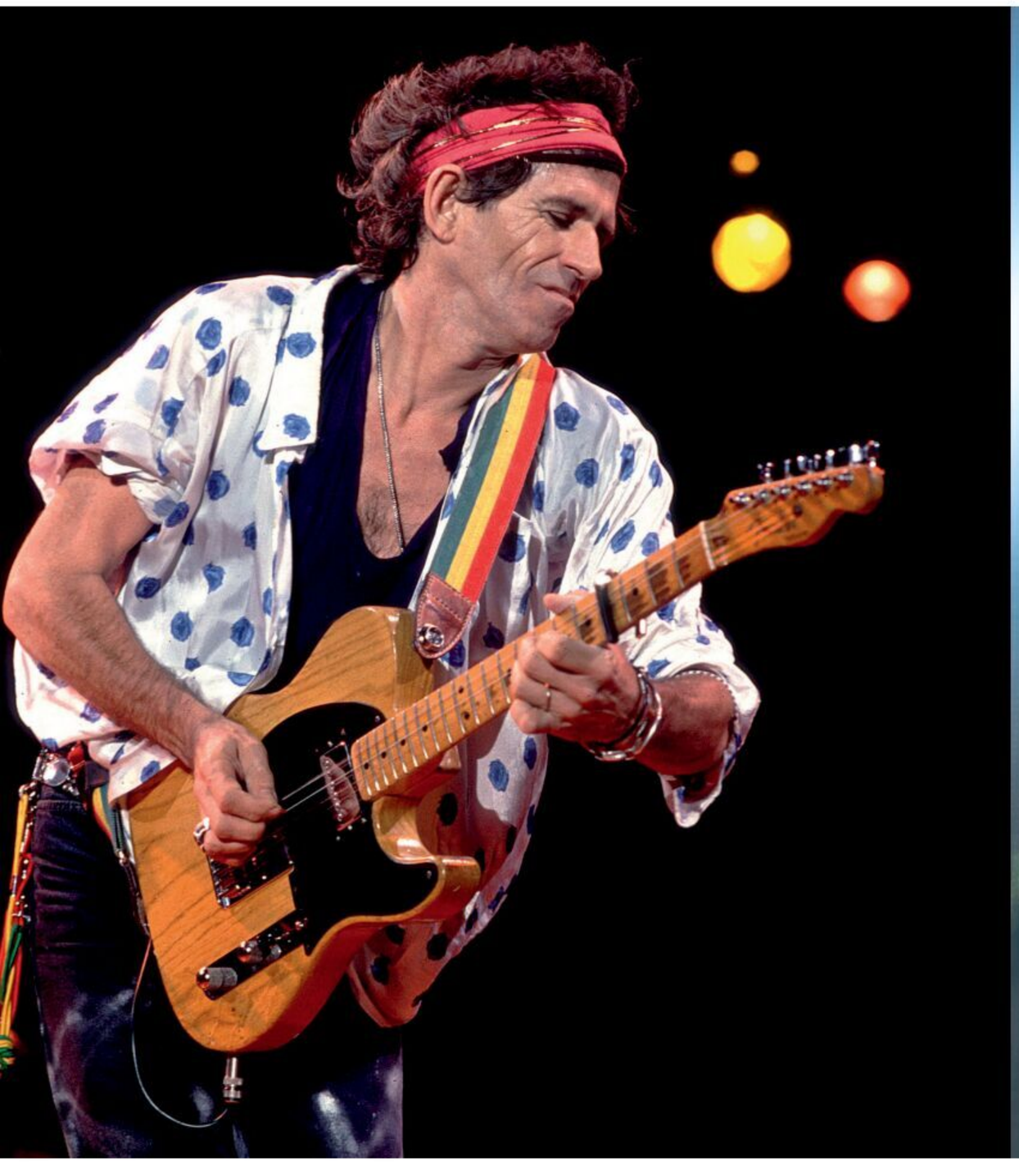
Richards was enjoying an open relationship with his guitars, pursuing new sounds. An electric 12-string appeared on Mother's Little Helper – "some gashed-up job" that he played slide on. Richards was pictured on the cover of the April 1966 issue of *Beat Instrumental* with a Guild M-65 Freshman, a lightweight hollowbody with a bound maple top and mahogany back and sides.

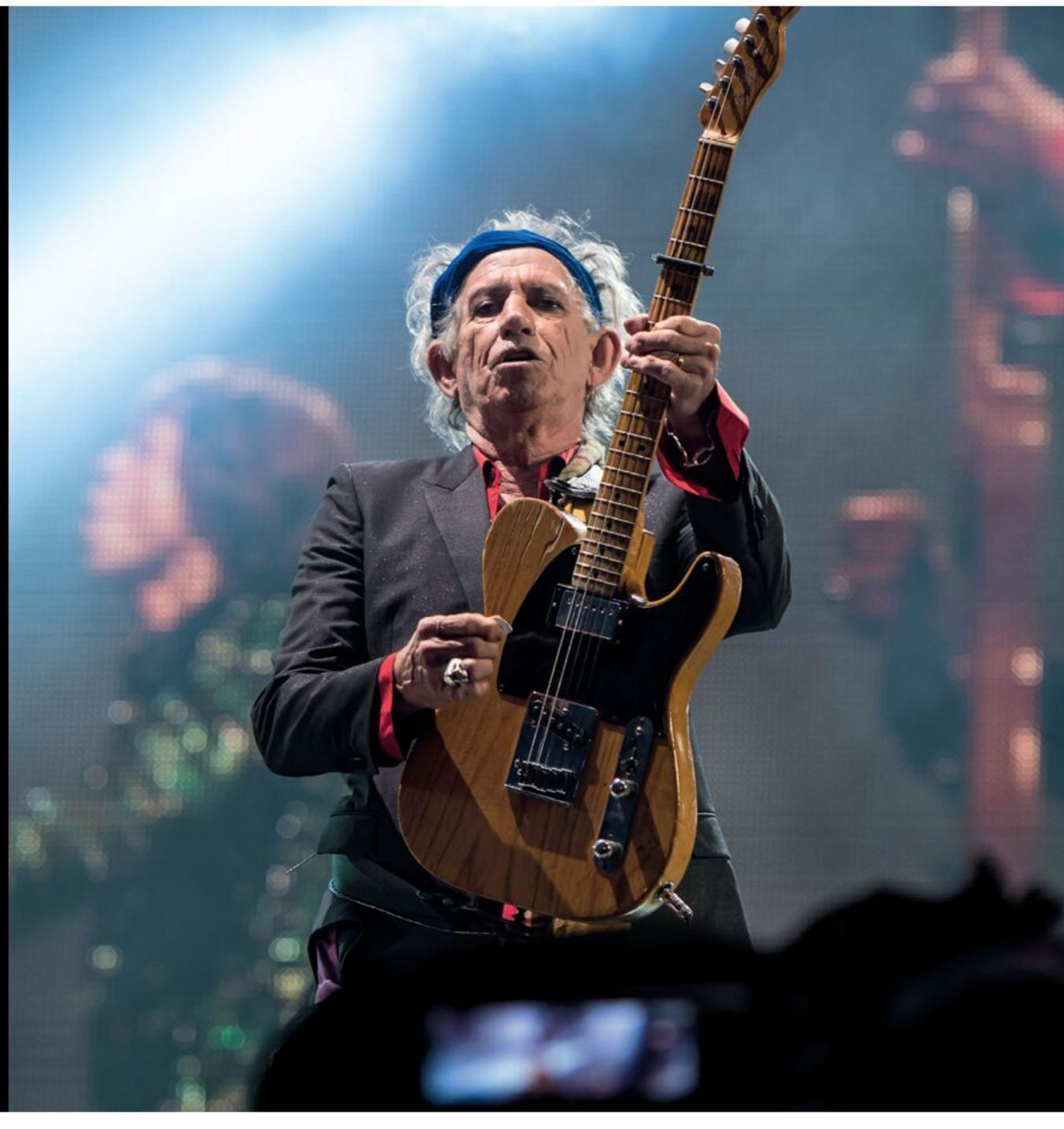
On occasion, he would play a Gibson Firebird and had started regularly playing a 1958 Les Paul Custom with a custom graphic. This, after all, was the '60s, and they were gathering pace. By the time the band were to hit the States for the notorious











1969 tour, which resulted in controversy, craziness, bloodshed at Altamont and one of the finest live recordings in rock history, Richards had a lot to choose from.

Live, the see-through but super-heavy Ampeg Dan Armstrong Plexi entered rotation, as did a newly acquired 1969 Gibson ES-355TD-SV stereo. Live, Richards used a 1930s National Style O resonator on "Prodigal Son" and "You Gotta Move", and a Martin D12-20 12-string with a DeArmond pickup in the soundhole. He would use a korina Gibson Flying V at the free Hyde Park show, but that would soon disappear.

In 1969, there was a sense that oblivion was on their trail but somehow they held it together. The guitars didn't always. When tracking "Gimme Shelter" during the *Let It Bleed* sessions, Richards used a borrowed a Maton Supreme Electric 777, an ES-150-style electric, and it would turn out to be the last act in its story.

"At the very last note of the take, the whole neck fell off," said Richards to *Guitar World*. "You can hear it on the original track. That guitar had just that one little quality for that specific thing. In a way, it was quite poetic that it died at the end of the track."

FENDER 'MICAWBER' TELECASTER: KEEF'S NUMBER ONE

Everyone would like to and many have tried but nobody plays the Telecaster like Keith Richards. He made the blackguard Tele the coolest guitar on the planet. No question. If the Telecaster is the ultimate rock 'n' roll guitar, perhaps it was inevitable that it would find its way into Richards' hands. It was the late 60s when he discovered the Telecaster.

"Around the same time I was getting into Telecasters I was experimenting with open tunings," he told *Guitar World* in 2002. "I don't know why. Maybe it was because around that time, '67, we started having time off that we didn't know what to do with. So I started to experiment with tunings. "Most people used open tuning basically just for slide. Nobody used it for anything else. But I wanted to use it for rhythm guitar... Of all the guitars, the Telecaster really lent itself well to a dry, rhythm, five-string drone thing. In a way that tuning kept me developing as a guitarist."

Micawber is his most-famous Telecaster. A 1950s Tele in Butterscotch Blonde, it was a 27th birthday present from Eric Clapton and soon found itself decamped to Nellcôte as the Stones took shelter from the UK taxman under the hot sun in the South of France. *Exile On Main St.* was brewing, and Micawber was there from the ground up. That's when the toolbox came out. The low E string was removed as Richards continued his exploration into open G tunings. Further modifications changed the menu.

A Gibson PAF humbucker was installed at the neck, a pedal-steel pickup at the bridge. Fundamentally, it's a '54 Tele with a '52 Esquire neck, Micawber (which takes its name from Dickens' David Copperfield) is a triumph of Richards' whatever works ethos, but it arguably kick-started the aftermarket for Fender modifications.

In the '80s, Richards' tech Alan Morgan sourced a brass bridge plate and saddles to make it more roadworthy. With no saddle for the sixth string, Richards' Telecaster is a specialist instrument tuned G D G B D for songs such as "Brown Sugar", "Honky-Tonk Woman" and "Can't You Hear Me Knocking".

THE 1970S AND THE ERA OF MODIFICATION

Turning 27, a cursed age for any musician of the era, deserved some celebration. It was Eric Clapton who did the honours, gifting Richards the 1953 Fender Telecaster that would be retooled and renamed as Micawber. Others soon followed. Richards sought out new ways of articulating rock 'n' roll in the electric guitar's most primitive dialects. Take the Gibson Les Paul Jr, aka 'Dice'.

Finished in TV Yellow, this primordial double-cut would become a regular onstage by the decade's end, using it notably on "Midnight Rambler" – a live highlight that was often performed with the Dan Armstrong before. He would layer play a Junior with a Tele when recording "Start Me Up" in 1981. Travis Bean guitars, with their aluminium necks, caught Richards' attention. If you don't suffer from motion sickness, you can check out the promo video for "She's So Cold" to see Richards with a black TB500 (one of 351 produced).

In 1974, he started using a single-cut Zemaitis with skull-and-bone graphic. As with the Telecasters, Richards nixed the low E. The Zemaitis, aka 'Macabre', housed a single PAF humbucker at the bridge and, again, offered Richards the simple pleasures of an electric guitar with nothing in the way.

The lesser-spotted Richards has never been a big Strat player, but he does own a Mary Kaye Strat, and through the '80s and '90s played the next best thing, a Music Man Silhouette. Some of Richards' guitars rarely see the light of day, such as his Gibson ES-350 – a big-boned jazz-box with a natural finish and with the all-important Chuck Berry connection.

"I'd be too afraid to take it onstage," he said during an Ask Keith Q&A from 2003. "I'd be afraid of breaking it by making a silly move, and it's a big guitar. I love it for the studio. I love it in the dressing room. It is such a beautiful all-round sound."

The ES-350 makes rare public appearances, and was used in 1990 to record "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atom Bomb On Me" with Watts, Bobby Keys, Bernard Fowler, Chuck Leavell and the Uptown Horns, a track that turned up on the Charles Mingus tribute, *Weird Nightmare*. Looking at Micawber, Malcolm and Sonny, and seeing the road miles on them, it's understandable that some of that good stuff is saved for the studio. A Rolling Stones show is not the place for tender mercies. ag

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WORDS BY **JAMES FARMER**.

Finding the best combo amp for you can be tough. When you've got the perfect guitar amp, even the worst guitars can sound amazing – but if you don't have the right amp for you, you'll never get that sound you've been looking for. The right electric guitar feels like an extension of your limbs, whereas finding a great combo amp can take a whole lot longer.

So what do we mean when we say 'combo amp'? A combo is an amp that contains both the amplifier and speaker in the same box – making it ideal for small spaces or where portability is a consideration. A lot of amps on the market are configured as a head and cabinet, meaning that the bit that actually amplifies your signal is separate from the speakers that your signal comes out of.

Some people prefer the versatility of a head and cab, but we feel that combos win on both points of consistency and convenience. With a good combo, you never have to worry about how terrible the house cab is when you're always bringing your own speakers with you!

It's worth thinking about what you like to play, and how you like to play it. Everyone's playing styles are different, and all amps respond differently. Do you want ultra clean tones to help you hone your jazz chops? Or do you want endless amounts of gain to downpick your way into oblivion? These are the questions you need to ask yourself. All we'd suggest is that as soon as you find something you love, never let it go – and that advice comes from painful experience.

In this guide, we've picked 15 of the best combo amps money can buy, and listed them in price order to make it easier for you to cut through the noise and find your dream combo. You'll find digital amp modellers that can recreate any amp tone you like, solid state amps that will give you ultimate reliability and a very precise sounding tone, or tube amps that will fight back a bit, and bring a whole new element to your sound.



BOSS KATANA 100 MKII

A jack of all trades, a master of some.

RRP: $679
Type: Modelling amp
Speakers: 12-inch Custom
Output: 100 watts (switchable)
No. of channels: Five amp characters
Tubes: N/A
Weight: 15 kilos

PROS

- Loads of features
- 100 watts is loud enough for anything
- Great value for nothing

CONS

- It's not the best looking amp in the world

The Katana series is known by many for being able to do pretty much anything. With versatility at its core, the five onboard amps will cover many – if not all – musical scenarios, with Clean, Crunch, Lead, Acoustic and Brown amp models. Boss has also sprinkled in a whole bunch of fantastic effects, making the Katana a dark horse for gigging and bedroom musicians.

The 12-inch custom speaker can shift some serious air, and it needs to. This Katana model is 100 watts – more than enough for any live performance. An onboard attenuator allows you to switch down to 50 watts, ideal for most rehearsals and smaller gigs, and 0.5 watts, which makes neighbour-friendly bedroom shredding entirely possible.



FENDER SUPER CHAMP X2

A hybrid masterpiece from Fender.

RRP: $849
Type: Tube/Digital hybrid
Speakers: Ten-inch Fender Special Design
Output: 15 watts
No. of channels: 16 amp types
Tubes: One 6V6, one 12AX7
Weight: 11 kilos

PROS

- Unsurprisingly stunning clean tones
- In-built effects are super tasteful

CONS

- Not the best high-gain sounds

Obviously, a full-tube Fender amp is going to be the pinnacle of warm, rich clean sounds – but Fender's Super Champ X2 blends that classic Fender tone with the 'practice amp' level of affordability we all appreciate. It does this by introducing digital elements to the tube signal chain, allowing for the use of different voices and onboard effects, making this an extremely versatile amp for playing different styles.

The specially designed ten-inch speaker accommodates a delightfully balanced tone, full of rich low end – something that a single ten-inch speaker usually struggles with. With a USB connection on the back panel, recording direct into your laptop or PC is simple – making this amp ideal for a home studio environment, or for when you need to silently practice.



FENDER MUSTANG GTX100

I'll have one of everything, thanks!

RRP: $999
Type: Modelling
Speakers: 12-inch Celestion G12P-80
Output: 100 watts
No. of channels: 40 amp models
Tubes: N/A
Weight: Ten kilos

PROS
- Capable of more tones than you can shake a stick at
- Lightweight considering power and size
- Menu easy to navigate

CONS
- Some models are a little ‘abstract’

Another entry from the big ‘F’, the Mustang amps have been Fender’s go-to amp for reliable, affordable modelling technology. Widely seen as a great practice amp for beginner to intermediate players, the GTX series takes the sheer convenience of having every tone at your fingertips to another level.

Creating your own presets is a breeze. The signal path on the GTX is entirely configurable, meaning you can reorder the blocks in your signal chain, all at the touch of a button – or change any settings you want from the Fender TONE 3.0 app. If you’re not keen on endlessly tweaking settings, then a massive collection of 200 artist-designed presets should be just right for you.

The specially designed 12-inch speaker boasts a pretty flat tonal response, so whether you’re replicating a Blues Junior, Deluxe Reverb, Bassman or using the Bluetooth connectivity to stream your favourite tracks, everything should sound just right. The included footswitch enables you to change presets on the fly, as well as access the onboard looper – making the GTX100 a pretty versatile amp, and one of the best combo amps you can buy.



BLACKSTAR HT5-R MKII

The perfect all-tube practice amp?

RRP: $1,069

Type: All-Tube

Speakers: 12-inch

Output: Five watts

No. of channels: 2

Tubes: One ECC83, one 12BH7

Weight: 14 kilos

PROS
- All-tube rarely comes this cheap
- Onboard reverb sounds awesome
- Super portable

CONS
- Not loud enough to play with a drummer

Simply put, Blackstar makes some brilliant amps. Their versatility and sheer ability has made a once fringe amp manufacturer one of the world’s most popular brands, and the small-but-mighty HT5-R MKII is proof of that. Designed to be a killer practice amp for those who want all-tube tone at affordable prices and sensible volumes, the HT5-R MKII emphatically fits the bill.

The layout is fairly simple – one clean channel, and one overdrive channel, and some reverb. Nothing crazy, nothing mental – just great tones. Each channel has a ‘voice’ switch which accentuates some of the high-mid and treble frequencies, giving a slight boost and an extra flavour to your playing. Blackstar’s legendary I.S.F (Infinite Shape Feature) control makes an appearance here too, taking your tone from ‘US’ to ‘UK’ in the twist of a dial.

Blackstar has also included a nice little treat or two for the home studio user, in the shape of a USB output and an emulated output. This means you can choose whether to use the HT5 through your interface, or as an interface. The emulated output can be used in live scenarios too, with one-by-12-inch and four-by-12-inch cab emulations to choose from.



FENDER BLUES JUNIOR IV

The iconic choice.

RRP: $1,149

Type: All-Tube

Speakers: 12-inch Celestion A-type

Output: 15 watts

No. of channels: One

Tubes: Three 12AX7, two EL84

Weight: 14 kilos

PROS
- It’s a Blues Junior
- Can do more than just blues
- 15 watts is just enough for most settings

CONS
- Not capable of ‘modern’ tones

The Fender Blues Junior has been one of the most iconic small combo amps of the last few decades, and to be honest, we can understand why. The amp we’re talking about here is the most recent version, so let’s see what Fender has going on under the hood here.

One speaker, one channel – the Blues Junior IV is truly simple and straightforward to use, and with that simplicity comes great joy. This mark IV variant adds both modified preamp circuitry and a smoother sounding spring reverb – delivering that timeless Fender tone that we all know and love. The 12-inch A-type Celestion is well balanced and sweet sounding, delivering crisp highs, a full, warm bass response and laid back midrange. It sounds delightful.

Now, it’s not a 100-watter like some of the amps we’ve seen so far, but don’t be fooled by the lower output. This thing can get loud, and do it very tastefully too. Either ride the input and master volume controls and set it as clean as you can, or dime the input volume, engage the ‘fat’ switch and bathe in the harmonic glow of those ECC83’s. Your call – but it’ll sound pretty good either way.



LANEY CUB-SUPER12

Boutique style for a slightly more sensible budget.

RRP: $979

Type: All-Tube

Speakers: 12-inch Celestion Seventy-80

Output: 15 watts (dedicated one-watt input)

No. of channels: One

Tubes: Two 12AX7, two EL84

Weight: 12 kilos

PROS
- Lightweight and easily portable
- Looks awesome
- One watt input great for quieter practice

CONS
- Only one channel

As the company who helped heavy metal find its sound, you’d be forgiven for overlooking Laney’s cleaner, more boutique-sounding amps. That doesn’t mean you should though – and in the case of the Cub-Super12, you really should pay attention.

Laney has stuck to the magic formula here – a 15-watt, all-tube, single channel beauty – and we’re so glad they did. It’s a basic amp, but capable of some fantastic tones. A three-band EQ allows for plenty of tweakability and tone-sculpting, and a footswitchable boost allows this single channel beast to essentially become a killer two--channel amp, capable in practice and even small gig scenarios. Especially useful for practice is the additional 1W input, as you can get those stunning saturated tones without your neighbours kicking the door down.

The footswitchable onboard reverb is another talking point for the Cub-Super12, using the highly acclaimed algorithm from the Black Country Secret Path reverb pedal. It’s more than just a basic spring reverb, and it’s here where this Laney comes into its own. With an external speaker output and FX loop, there’s not a lot this little thing can’t do. Yes, it’s only really got one channel, and yes, that’s a bit of a shame – but it’s one channel of super cool, boutique-inspired tone – and we like that very much.

BLACKSTAR HT CLUB 40 MKII 6L6

The best combo amp for value.

RRP: $1,799

Type: All-Tube



Speakers: 12-inch Celestion Seventy-80

Output: 40 watts

No. of channels: Two

Tubes: Two 12AX7, two 6L6

Weight: 24 kilos

PROS
- Will do just about any style you want
- USB output great for recording
- Dark/Bright reverb switch is handy

CONS
- None

The HT range from Blackstar has been a firm favourite since its release in 2010, with the Club 40 one of the shining stars of the series. After years of R&D, Blackstar has delivered the hotly anticipated Club 40 MKII. But was it worth the wait?

Bluntly, yes. Still capable of virtually anything you throw at it, the Club 40 MKII is seemingly a perfect blend of power, tweakability, simplicity and fancy added extras, all while remaining super easy to use. 40 watts of all-tube power provides bags of clean headroom, meaning you won't have to look any further for that pedal platform amp you always wanted. That being said, it'd be a shame just to set this clean and let your pedals do all the work.

The overdrive channel on this amp is another hive of capability, with more than enough gain to satiate the majority of players. Pair this with Blackstar's I.S.F (Infinite Shape Feature) calling card and you'll go from Petrucci and EVH territory all the way across the Atlantic, to channel your inner Brian May. Power switching functionality allows you to bring the wattage down from 40 watts to four, so you can keep your tubes glowing without too much blood pouring from your ears.



ORANGE ROCKER 15

Vintage style and vintage tone, without the vintage price.

RRP: $1,559
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: Ten-inch 'Voice Of The World' Gold Label
Output: 15 watt (switchable)
No. of channels: Two
Tubes: Three 12AX7, one 12AT7, two EL84
Weight: 13.5 kilos

PROS

- Compact and portable
- Looks the part
- Headroom/Bedroom switch is a lifesaver
- 'Natural' channel sounds... Well, natural

CONS

- Ten-inch speaker can sound a little boxy

You can always spot an Orange amp from a mile off. They're, well, bright orange for a start, but they also come accompanied by that signature tone. Orange amps always do things a little differently, and the Rocker 15 is no exception to that rule.

Behind the iconic basket-weave grill cloth lies a ten-inch 'Voice of The World' speaker, and 15 watts' worth of assorted glass. Together, they create a harmonious racket that you'd be hard pressed to dislike. The 'natural' channel is exactly what it sounds like – completely natural. With just a volume control, it's one for the purists in the building. Where the Rocker 15 really flexes its muscles though is the 'dirty' channel. Delivering swathes of traditional, old-school Orange mojo, this is the channel where we'll be spending most of our time.

Thankfully, Orange has included many power switching options in the Rocker 15. With a cleverly named 'Headroom/Bedroom' switch to take the whole amp down to one watt, as well as a half power option, you can get those iconic driven tones at sensible volumes. The ten-inch speaker and small cabinet can combine to sound a little boxy at times, but for certain bluesy, vintage-inspired tones, that can work wonders.



MARSHALL DSL40CR

The best Marshall combo under $2K.

RRP: $1,549
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: 12-inch Celestion V-type
Output: 40 watts (with low output settings)
No. of channels: Two
Tubes: Four 12AX7, two EL34
Weight: 22.5 kilos

PROS

- It's a Marshall
- 40 watts is loud enough for most settings
- Surprisingly impressive emulated output

CONS

- FX loop isn't the best

If you're a fan of Marshall, you'll definitely be familiar with the DSL range. A near perfect blend of quality and value for money, the DSL40CR is one of the best combo amps we can find for less than $2,000.

With 'classic gain' and 'ultra gain' channels p resent, it won't shock you to hear that this amp truly sings when overdriven – but while Marshalls are not especially known for their clean tones, this DSL really pulls something special out of the bag. The three-way EQ is powerful and exceptionally intuitive, and onboard reverb helps give your playing a bit of breathing room. Dirty, this amp comes to life – and the low output setting provides access to these tones much more easily. 40W of all-tube power is monumental, after all.

Independent presence and resonance controls allow some pretty in-depth tone tweaking, perfect for studio use. This thing sounds great mic'd up, but when that's just not possible the emulated output comes to the rescue. Marshall has teamed up with Softube to provide an exceptional emulation of the 1960 cabinet – meaning that you needn't make any noise at all while laying down your guitar parts. All in all, the DSL40CR is a much welcomed update to the DSL line, and definitely worth looking at.



FENDER '68 CUSTOM PRINCETON REVERB

The sweetest of clean tones for just over $2,000.

RRP: $2,099
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: Ten-inch Celestion TEN 30
Output: 12 watts
No. of channels: One
Tubes: Three 12AX7, one 12AT7, two 6V6, one 5AR4 (Rectifier)
Weight: 15.5 kilos

PROS

- Looks amazing
- An iconic amp in Fender's history
- Portable

CONS

- Not got as much headroom as the '65

The Princeton Reverb has been a staple of Fender's amp repertoire since 1964, and few amps sum up the 'Fender' sound quite like it. This '68 Custom iteration of the Princeton Reverb pays homage to the iconic look, sound and performance of the 'silverface' Fender amps of the late '60s, but with a little twist for the modern player. This comes in the shape of a modified tone circuit, which provides you with an earlier onset of overdrive, as well as loads more flexibility with pedals.

Equipped with a ten-inch Celestion speaker, the tone you'll get from the '68 Custom is a little more modern and punchy than others. For a single ten-inch speaker in a small cabinet, this Princeton really outdoes itself, pumping some serious air and serious volume. It's perfect for Fender fans, with the traditional reverb and tremolo onboard, but be warned – the circuitry involved here is not that of the more traditional 'blackface' amps, but more of a modernisation. A more modern interpretation of the Princeton, if you will.



ROLAND JC-120

Cleaner than a clean thing that you just cleaned.

RRP: $1,999
Type: Solid State
Speakers: Two classic silver cone
Output: 120 watts
No. of channels: Two
Tubes: N/A
Weight: 28 kilos

PROS

- One of the industry's 'go-to' clean amps
- Properly iconic
- Enough true stereo chorus to bathe in

CONS

- Distortion channel is worth ignoring

The Jazz Chorus line is Roland's claim to fame in the world of guitar. This amp has been on seemingly infinite amounts of era-defining records since its introduction in 1975, and it continues to enjoy cult status over 45 years later.

The JC-120 is so-named due to its all-encompassing chorus and humongous 120 watt output – and it's this fantastic stereo chorus and masses of headroom that makes this amp so desirable. Essentially the JC-120 has two 60-watt amps inside, which allows for a 'true stereo' chorus. Makes you feel like you've traveled back to the '80s, doesn't it?

It's a fantastic pedal platform amp – as it's super clean and super loud. The second channel features an onboard distortion effect, but in all honesty we much prefer using a dedicated drive pedal. Chances are though, you're not buying this amp for the gain.



VOX AC30C2 CUSTOM

If it's good enough for Brian May...

RRP: $1,999
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: Two Celestion G12M Greenback
Output: 30 watts
No. of channels: Two
Tubes: Three 12AX7, four EL84
Weight: 32 kilos

PROS

- Another icon of British rock
- Looks gorgeous
- Celestion Greenbacks rarely sound bad

CONS

- Not the most versatile

Vox amps have been part of the foundation of rock 'n' roll for decades, with the AC30 being their most iconic offering to date. Favoured by guitarists like Brian May and The Edge, there's a certain personality to the AC30 that keeps us coming back for more and more.

Pumping a fairly meaty 30 watts through two Celestion Greenbacks, there aren't many situations this amp can't handle. If vintage-style British tones are your thing, then the AC30's Normal and Top Boost channels will be right up your street. A delectable onboard spring reverb and tremolo top off this iconic piece of rock architecture. The AC30C2 can also be employed as a fantastic pedal platform. Clean headroom aplenty, you'll be able to utilise the true-bypass effects loop to its full potential and populate your signal chain with whatever you fancy.



FENDER '65 DELUXE REVERB

Some pretty deluxe tones are coming your way

RRP: $2,499
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: 12-inch Jensen C-12K
Output: 22 watts
No. of channels: Two
Tubes: Four 12AX7, two 12AT7, two 6V6, one 5AR4 (Rectifier)
Weight: 19 kilos

PROS

- Traditional 'Blackface' tone is gorgeous
- Onboard Vibrato and Reverb will make you cry happy tears
- Classic look

CONS

- High gain and the DRRI are not friends

22 watts of pure all-tube Fender tone is enough to make anyone weak at the knees. All we know is that there's nothing quite like a Deluxe Reverb.

With enough power to see you through in the vast majority of live and studio settings, the '65 Deluxe delivers warm, soothing cleans – all the way through to bright, old-school grit that has become synonymous with the 'Blackface' era of amps. Pair that with the frankly stunning onboard reverb and vibrato, and you've got yourself one heck of a tone.

Unfortunately, the DRRI is not for everyone. Modern players may find the lack of versatility a little limiting, and although it's no slouch, it doesn't quite have the tightness of most modern amps. Saying that, it's a faithful reissue of an amp from 1965 – so what do you expect?



SUPRO 1696 BLACK MAGICK REVERB

This amp is definitely going to go your way.

RRP: $3,699
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: 12-inch Supro BD12
Output: 25 watts
No. of channels: Two
Tubes: Four 12AX7, one 21AT7, two 6973
Weight: 18 kilos

PROS

- Developed in conjunction with Lenny Kravitz
- Bags of vintage mojo
- Onboard reverb a huge bonus

CONS

- Vintage tones might not be everyone's cup of tea

Supro's Black Magick Reverb beautifully captures all that is so delectable about old-school Supro amps, while adding in some super useful features for the modern guitarist.

The 1696 Black Magick Reverb is an update on the award-winning recreation of the vintage Supro amp that Jimmy Page loaned to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum. Developed in collaboration with the one and only Lenny Kravitz, this modernised Black Magick delivers that same iconic tone, but with added extras like all-tube reverb, a two-band EQ and a master volume knob.

With two independent channels that can be linked together using the 1&2 input, you can obtain some seriously fat tones from this amp. Supro has also upped the gain for this model, so you'll notice a fair bit of breakup earlier on in your volume sweep. The speaker, among other things, is a faithful recreation of the original – as to keep the original vibe alive. It's a vintage inspired amp, for those who live for the classic tones of yesteryear – and it does a good job.



MARSHALL JVM410C

The most versatile amp around?

RRP: $3,999
Type: All-Tube
Speakers: Two-by-12-inch Celestion
Output: 100 watts
No. of channels: Four
Tubes: 5x ECC83, 2x EL34
Weight: 34.5 kilos

PROS

- What can't it do?
- A true beast
- Incredibly versatile

CONS

- Add 'sell kidney' to your to-do list

Want an amp that can do virtually anything? The JVM410C only stops short of making your dinner. Made in England, the JVM410C is Marshall's flagship combo – and it's one heck of an amp.

An all-tube, 100-watt, two-by-12-inch combo seems pretty excessive, and we'll be honest, it is for most scenarios. Equipped with 4 different channels, each with three gain stages, the JVM410C essentially becomes a 12 channel amplifier. The gain stages, as well as the channels, are all footswitchable. This functionality allows ultimate tweaking power, but also allows the opportunity to play virtually any style. With 2 footswitchable master volume controls too, the possibilities are endless.

Ah, yes – reverb, reverb, reverb. The JVM has plenty. Each channel has its own reverb level control in order to keep things a little easier and more straightforward. One thing you'll notice about the channels is that they are all the same – making the overwhelming amount of dials and knobs a little easier to get your head around. With a series/parallel footswitchable FX loop and a great emulated line out, the JVM410C is a beast on the road and in the studio. Yep, it might cost you an arm and a leg, but we think it's worth it.



For more expert insight on all the latest and greatest combo amps – like this extra sweet Blackstar HT Venue MkII Club 40 6L6, which we just gave an in-depth review – including reviews, round-ups and news, head to guitarworld.com

HOT GEAR



GIBSON LES PAUL ORIGINAL HARDSHELL CASE

RRP: $499 • australismusic.com.au

The Gibson Original Series hardshell case for Les Paul is designed to protect your Gibson instrument in style. Featuring the highest quality materials and hardware, they meet Gibson's stringent factory specifications and are available in a variety of sizes so they'll fit your cherished Gibson like a glove.



FENDER CORY WONG SIGNATURE STRATOCASTER

RRP: $3,699 • fender.com

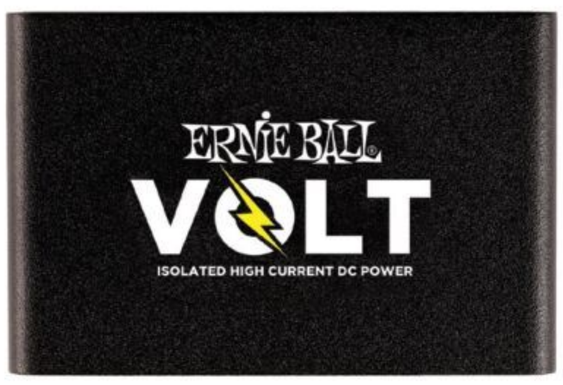
The Cory Wong Stratocaster is a tribute to Cory's favourite Fender guitar, thoughtfully modified to meet the funk master's needs. The Sapphire Blue transparent satin lacquer finish recreates the look and feel of Cory's beloved original Strat guitar, while the scaled-down alder body – slightly smaller than a typical Stratocaster – combined with a modern 'D' neck and sculpted body contours deliver a sublimely comfortable playing experience.



FISHMAN LOUDBOX MINI CHARGE

RRP: $1,099 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The Loudbox Mini Charge is a portable, battery-powered amplifier designed to faithfully reproduce the sound of acoustic instruments and a diverse assortment of vocal or recorded accompaniments. A powerful, rechargeable battery, combined with unique power management circuitry, is specifically designed to maximise output levels and playing time.



ERNIE BALL VOLT

RRP: $215 • cmcmusic.com.au

With multiple isolated, high-current DC power outputs, the Volt supplies clean, regulated power to almost any digital or analog effects pedals. If you need low noise and reliable power for any gig, the Ernie Ball Volt is perfect for your rig! Practical and flexible, the Ernie Ball Volt keeps up with even the hardest-touring modern musician. This ultra-compact power supply is smaller than a pack of Slinkys, so it fits almost anywhere on even the busiest pedalboard.



ZOOM MS-50G GUITAR MULTISTOMP

RRP: $259 • dynamicmusic.com.au

With the size and weight of a typical single stompbox, the MS-50G includes a thorough lineup of high-quality effects types. It features 47 stompbox effects and eight amp models. Along with distortion, reverb, modulation and other classic effects, its amp models simulate some of the most prized pieces of live and studio gear.



YAMAHA SILENT GUITAR SLG200NW

RRP: $1,199 • au.yamaha.com

The SLG200NW offers real classical guitar experience with conventional classical guitar neck construction. Warm and rich plugged-in sound by the SRT Powered system, ebony fingerboard for tight and clear acoustic sound, gold baseplates on the tuning machines for the taste of high-end... Both its sound and appearance tops the series.



SQUIER AFFINITY SERIES

RRP: $549+ • fender.com

A superb gateway into the time-honoured Fender family, the Squier Affinity Series delivers legendary design and quintessential tone for today's aspiring guitar hero. This new lineup features player-friendly refinements such as a thin, lightweight body and a slim, comfortable 'C'-shaped neck profile. Each model sports Squier pickups and sealed die-cast tuning machines with split shaft (guitars only) tuning machines for smooth, accurate tuning and easy restringing.



YAMAHA THR100H AMP HEAD

RRP: $1,049 • au.yamaha.com

Featuring the incredible tone and flexibility of the THR100H Dual in a compact, lightweight single-channel body, the THR100H has got your back whether you're on-stage, rehearsing with the band or practicing at home. With a big sound from a tiny package, the power to dial in the details of your sound and the connectivity to plug you in wherever you're playing, the THR100H bridges all the gaps.



PEDALTRAIN CLASSIC 3

RRP: $469 (w/ Soft Case) • $799 (w/ Tour Case) • egm.net.au

The cult favourite PT-3 is reborn and improved. Pedaltrain Classic 3 offers a 24-by-16-inch pedalboard with five rails, traditional spacing, and an elevated mounting surface. You'll be surprised at the new and interesting pedal configurations you can achieve with this model. Classic 3 is compatible with Pedaltrain's VDL-MK and True Fit Universal Brackets. There is plenty of room underneath for organising cables, mounting power supplies, direct boxes and other accessories.

VOODOO LAB PEDAL POWER 3

RRP: $499 • egm.net.au

The Pedal Power 3 series is the first lightweight, high-current, international voltage power supply to deliver zero-noise performance. Its innovative Hybrid DC transformer design integrates exotic components, linear regulation, and computer-optimised filtering to establish industry-leading, audiophile-quality power that unveils the hidden sonic potential of any rig.





BODEVA TWO-WAY HUMIDITY CONTROL SYSTEM

RRP: $29.95+ • cmcmusic.com.au

Wooden instruments shrink and swell depending on the humidity of their environment. If that environment is more or less humid than the environment in which the instrument was built by too great an amount, the instrument will perform poorly – or even worse, can be damaged. Boveda's patented two-way humidity control effortlessly maintains the ideal humidity level in your instrument case, helping to prevent warping or cracking, and eliminating downtime for service.



SEYMOUR DUNCAN VAPOR TRAIL DELUXE ANALOG DELAY

RRP: $599 • australismusic.com.au

The Vapor Trail Deluxe builds on the proud legacy of our original Vapor Trail analog delay pedal. Its warm Bucket Brigade repeats and three-dimensional modulation continues to inspire guitarists around the world. But its expanded control, new sonic modes, and storable preset locations make the Vapor Trail Deluxe analog delay one of a kind.

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Rock icon **Mick Jones** looks back at producing **Van Halen**'s legendary 1986 album

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BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

5150 WAS A GAME-CHANGER FOR **EDDIE VAN HALEN**, AS HE DEVELOPED NEW TONES WITH NEW GEAR. THE ALBUM'S CO-PRODUCER, **FOREIGNER GUITARIST MICK JONES**, RECALLS THE "CRAZY" AND "FUNKY" VIBE IN THE STUDIO – AND REMEMBERS EDDIE AS A GENIUS ON A PAR WITH **HENDRIX**...

WORDS BY **PAUL ELLIOTT**.

In 1985, when Van Halen singer David Lee Roth quit the band, Eddie Van Halen was left facing the toughest challenge of his career. He was the most famous guitar player on the planet – the guy who had revolutionised the art of rock guitar in the late '70s, and got the call from Michael Jackson to play the solo on his mega-hit "Beat It", from *Thriller*, the biggest selling album of all time. But with Diamond Dave gone, Eddie had to replace the seemingly irreplaceable, and reinvent the band that had defined American hard rock in the early '80s.

I Eddie's brilliance as a guitarist, Roth had been his equal in Van Halen – a frontman whose good looks and larger-than-life persona were instrumental in elevating the band to superstar status. When the news of Roth's departure was announced – on April 1st, of all days – there were many, fans and media alike, who believed that the band was finished. But by the summer, Van Halen had found a new singer in Sammy Hagar.

Hagar proved a perfect fit for Van Halen. As a big hitter in his own right, he had more than enough self-assurance to replace Roth – and most importantly, as a singer, he had a better range and a more melodic sensibility. As a result, a new Van Halen was born on the album *5150*, named after Eddie's studio at his home in LA's Coldwater Canyon ('5150' was the Californian law code for detention of mentally ill persons). And for Eddie, this album marked a major turning point.

Along with the new voice in Van Halen came a new approach to guitar – different tones, different gear. Out was the pin-point positioned mixing style of old, and in came huge stereo-panned rhythm guitars courtesy of an Eventide H3000. And while his trusty Frankenstein guitar and Marshall amps still saw studio action, Eddie was trying out a new six-string: the active EMG-loaded Steinberger GL-2T (in Stripe finish, naturally), which would appear on "Get Up" and "Summer Nights".

Englishman Mick Jones, the leader of multi-million selling rock act Foreigner, was enlisted as co-producer on *5150*. When looking back on the making of *5150*, what Jones heard in Eddie Van Halen was genius comparable not only to Hendrix, but to Bach and Beethoven...

Firstly, how did you get the job of co-producing Van Halen?

It came through Sammy Hagar. He and I went back a long way, and we had maintained a friendship over the years. I'd also met Eddie socially several times, but it was Sammy who put my name forward, and then Eddie decided he'd like to work with me.

You were brought in because the band's regular producer, Ted Templeman, had defected to work on David Lee Roth's solo album *Eat 'Em And Smile*. But Templeman's right hand man, engineer Donn Landee, remained loyal to Van Halen.

Yes, Donn had engineered all of their albums up to *5150*, so I was the new boy. There was some concern from Donn, and that took a little bit of... Massaging, let's say. But it all worked out, and by the end of the recording we were the best of friends. Donn is a great engineer and it was an honour to work with him.

How did you see your role as co-producer?

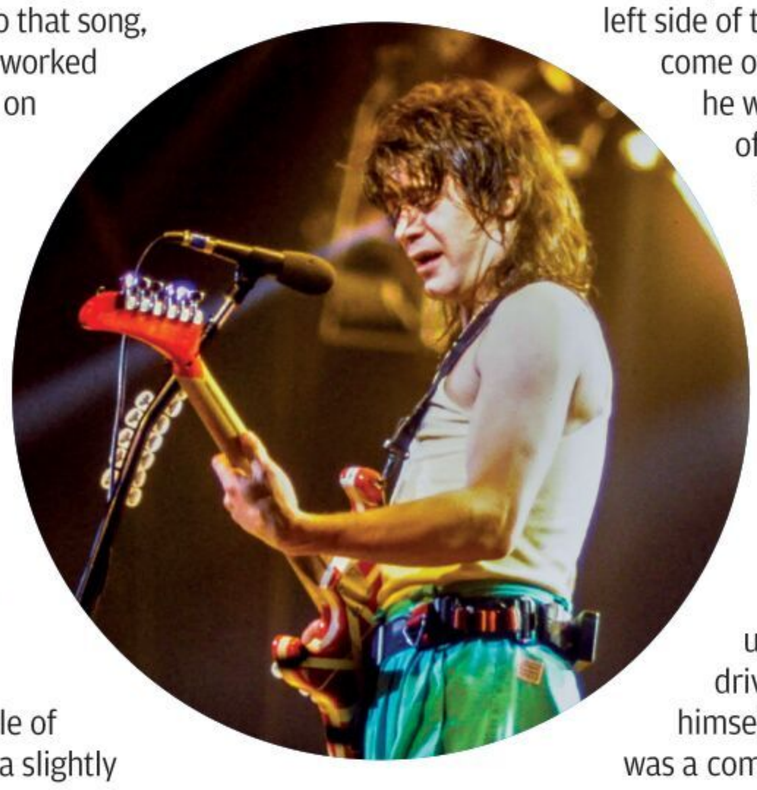
At the time I was taking a break from Foreigner and I wanted to branch out a bit. So with Van Halen, it was a new challenge to see what I could pull out of them and see if I could change a few things here and there. Not to mess with their identity by any means, but just try to enhance the sound and the arrangements...

What do you remember about your first day?

Sammy picked me up from the airport and he gave me a rundown of what to expect. It was a little scary! He said, "Mick, we've been through the wars, we've been through a lot of stuff. But this goes a little bit higher and a little crazier. So buckle your seatbelt!" But when we arrived at Eddie's place, all of the guys were very cordial, very chatty and 'up' and cracking David Lee Roth jokes. So it was a nice warm welcome. And I was a little nervous, but I think that tends to bring out the best in me.

What did they have ready at that stage?

They had demos of all the tracks that made the final cut, pretty much. The only one that wasn't demoed was "Dreams", and I would say that was the one I had the most involvement in arranging. I think I really brought something to that song, especially Sammy's vocals. I worked very long and hard with him on that, and he told me it was one of his all-time favourite performances. He was singing so high that he was hyperventilating. He almost passed out! I really pushed him. But we got it.



With "Dreams" and other songs such as "Love Walks In", Eddie played the riffs on synthesisers...

He developed his own style of keyboard synth stuff. It was a slightly different direction, but it was still rock. It really felt good when I first heard the songs. And they made it pretty easy for me. They gave me a great drawing board. Gradually as we got to know each other, things really gelled.

Eddie was also experimenting with a few different guitars.

Of course he was playing that famous red Strat with the cream gaffer tape around it, but also a Steinberger. I used a Steinberger for a while at that time.

Did you hear this as Eddie reaching for something beyond the classic Van Halen 'brown sound'?

I didn't really dissect what it sounded like. I just knew that it was powerful. And I felt that we captured the spirit of what was going on. I think they really wanted to show David Lee Roth that he wasn't indispensable – let's put it that way.

Certainly there was a different tone in "Get Up", a really fast and furious track.

I'd never heard anything like it in my life. It sounded like four guys fighting inside the speaker cabinets, beating the shit out of each other!

Presumably you didn't feel the need to coach him as one guitar player to another?

He was so talented, so there wasn't a lot I could add or suggest from a performance point of view. And he had a unique style, obviously. I didn't want to say things for the sake of it. I thought seriously about what I was saying, what I was contributing. I think he respected my songwriting. He knew I could write songs, and that was a plus for me. Some of the songs needed a bit of tailoring, and I think I provided that, as well as feedback. I wasn't afraid to speak up about how I felt, which was a little risky, I guess.

It seems strange to ask, but were there moments when you said, "Sorry Edward, I don't think that solo is good enough"?

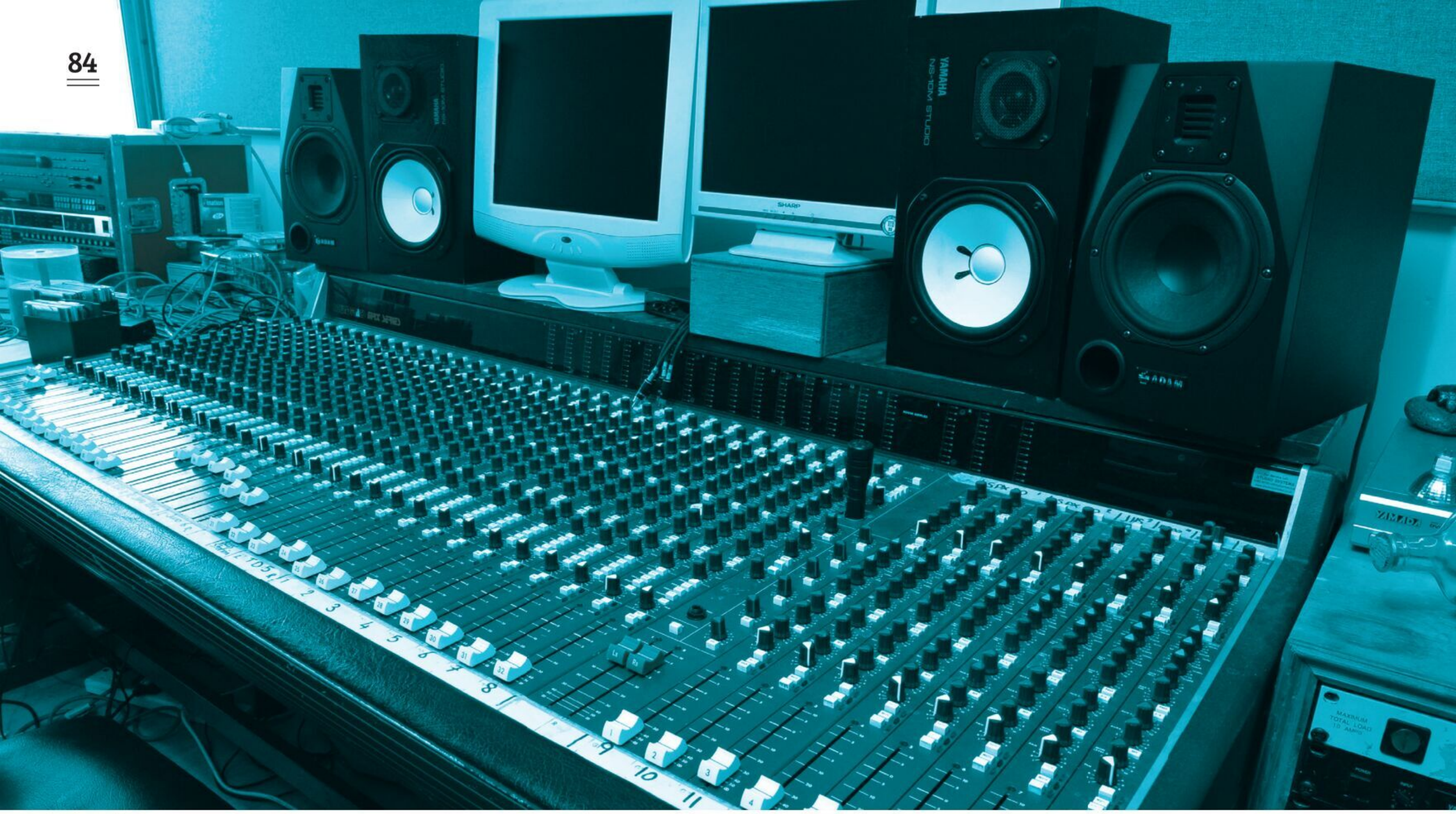
There were several times that happened – and then I would sprint out of the door and run into the forest at the back of the studio! But I think we respected each other, and we both had the experience to be able to sensibly exchange opinions.

So did you and Eddie have a strong connection?

We got very close, especially when we were doing guitar overdubs and solos. He was completely out there – not drug-wise, he just went into this trance state as he played. I'd be sitting there on the left side of the console and he would come over and lean on me while he was playing. And it was kind of weird – it was like it was coming through me. It was coming down, let's say, from above, and we really got very close in those moments. He was a very musical person, always picking up new things, and very aware of the art of it all. You could perhaps compare him to Bach or Beethoven – uncannily talented and driven by a need to express himself in a dazzling way. So he was a complete musician.

And as someone who witnessed Jimi Hendrix performing at his peak, did you view Eddie as a genius comparable to Jimi?

Yes, I think there are some individuals that are kind of chosen to be the carriers of the feeling and the spiritual side of things. I've always tried to fathom where and how that comes through. It happens with guitar players, it happens with singers... It does separate people. It separates the men from the boys. It's a gift. And it's such a powerful gift that sometimes it destroys the messenger. But I remember them both as very sweet guys, so charming, radiant and so super-talented. au



BECOME A MASTERING MASTER

A GREAT SONG IS NOTHING WITHOUT A GREAT MASTER TRACK. HERE ARE EIGHT TIPS TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THE BEST TRACK POSSIBLE.

Mastering might have a reputation as something of a dark art, but with today's amazing plugin effects putting pro-quality mastering EQ, dynamics and reverb processing in the hands of every computer-based producer, there's never been a better time to give it a go.

NAIL YOUR GAIN STRUCTURE

Getting the gain structure right is absolutely essential when mastering. There's no point investing in great monitors, awesome plugins and an expensive audio interface if your audio gets distorted at the final hurdle. Luckily, getting this right isn't rocket science and even novice mastering engineers should be able to get their heads around it.

The key is to check the signal level at every input and output stage every time you add a plugin, then check the level going into the entire chain at the end. Follow this simple process, add headroom all the way, and a great sounding master is well within your grasp.

PERFORMING PARALLEL COMPRESSION

There are a few ways you can create parallel compression effects in your masters. The easiest is to find a plug-in that has a built-in mix control, so you can mix in a small amount of wet signal without any complex routing. These plug-ins are few and far between though. A simple send/return routing is probably your best friend here.

Start off as if you were setting up a mix reverb return. Once you have this in place, simply place your compressor (or any other processor) on the return channel. Now send your full master to this return. You should then be able to mix in your compression effect to taste.

RUN YOUR PROJECT AT THE HIGHEST RESOLUTION POSSIBLE

If your mix was recorded at 24-bit, stay at that resolution until the master is completed. This gives you more headroom and ensures greater clarity throughout the process.

CASCADING COMPRESSORS

'Cascading compressors' is just a fancy phrase to describe chaining more than one compressor. Place a compressor at the start of the mastering chain, apply EQ, enhancement and any other processes you like, then add another compressor.

The second compressor not only shares the load but can go some way to controlling any wayward transients introduced by the other effects. Using different flavours and types of EQ will also add contrast to the final sound. You can inject different tones and reduce dynamic range more efficiently.

DON'T OVER-PROCESS THE MIX

Compressing the hell out of a drum group or vocal chain may sound good moving towards the end of your mix but, unless it is intrinsic to the final sound, try to go easy.

USE REVERB TO OPEN THE SOUNDSTAGE

Numerous plug-ins promise to open up the stereo image in a master without colouring the sound, but the results are often disappointing. Using reverb instead might sound a little strange but it's actually a tried and tested mastering technique that can work well in the right scenario.

Choose the best reverb you can lay your hands on – iZotope's Ozone has a great mastering grade reverb included and is the perfect place to start. The choice of algorithm and room size really depend on the program material, but a good rule of thumb is to start small and increase the intensity until you hit the sweet spot.

DON'T USE TOO MANY PLUGINS

Don't make the mistake of piling on plugins that aren't really required, just because you think you should – not every mix needs master compression, for example. And if you get even the vaguest impression that your master sounds over-processed when you listen back to it the next day, you're probably right and should return to the project to dial some or all effects back a bit – or a lot!

AND FINALLY... DITHERING

When your chain is built and you have hit that final brickwall limiter, you might think you are done – but there are a few things left to consider. Dithering and editing are important and, although they rarely affect the sound of the master you have worked so hard on, you should spend a little time to get this stage right.

Dithering is a process that is used when moving to a lower bit depth. For example, if your current mastering project is running at 24-bit and you want to end up at 16-bit, dithering is needed. This process uses some pretty smart algorithms, some of which inject tiny pieces of noise into the gaps created by the loss of resolution.

The end result is technically imperceptible and when a decent algorithm is used this is literally the case. The important thing here is that dithering is only ever performed once in the whole mastering process, preferably at the very end. ag

PUT YOUR REVERB IN ITS PLACE

HERE ARE A FEW TONAL TRICKS YOU CAN ACHIEVE WITH EARLY-CHAIN AND END-OF-CHAIN REVERBS.

WORDS BY **STEFAN FAST**.

Hey everybody! My name is Stefan Fast and I'm a total pedalholic. Over the past 15 years, there hasn't been a single day where I haven't messed around with pedals or thought about interesting pedal combinations. My addiction actually runs so deep that I've been displaying it to the world for almost five years on my YouTube channel, ThePedalZone. There are infinite magical possibilities present when you start to combine pedals and it's those creative doorways that I want to help open for you guys through this new Tonal Teamwork series.

I'm dedicating this feature to reverb – my favourite effect of all time – and the cool tones you can conjure when you begin to acknowledge the existence of two different, broad types of reverb: end-of-chain reverb and early chain reverb. With the explosion of affordable and easily programmable DSP chips within the past 10 years, we've seen a true tidal wave of reverb pedals wash over us.

Some take the classic path, delivering iconic amp-like spring 'verbs and atmospheric studio plates, while others take the path less travelled, sporting everything from infinite sustaining reverb drones, pitch-shifted pads to mad and magical modulation.

It's those latter 'verbs that often make people scratch their heads, since they merge effects that would typically go in different places in a signal chain. So, where should you place a sonic enigma like that and how do you use it most effectively? That's what we'll be exploring today. Technically, every reverb pedal out there can be an end-of-chain reverb or early chain reverb, but personally I do see some specific characteristics that make a pedal better suited for one or other task. Let's dive into the differences between the two types and how I like to use them.

END-OF-CHAIN REVERB

An end-of-chain reverb is, as you might have guessed, a reverb type you place at the very end of your signal chain, and the task of this reverb is to act as a master ambience effect for your entire rig. High diffusion, a hint of modulation, the ability for both short and ultra-long decays as well as circuitry that doesn't alter your core tone are all pivotal features for a good end-of-chain reverb.

I also like it to have stereo ins and outs. It's not a must, but it's really nice to have that option when you're recording in the studio. It also adds a nice spatial contrast to the early chain reverb that tends to be mono. My go-to end-of-chain reverbs are the Meris Mercury7 and Neunaber Immerse Mk II, since they can both offer lush airy ambience à la plates, halls and sci-fi shimmers, as well as more mellow and organic 'verbs. That way I can perfectly fine-tune the final space for my tone to sit in.

EARLY CHAIN REVERB

Early chain reverb is an effect you would use near the beginning of your effects chain and is aimed at more than just ambience. Here, I actually see three different types of devices: the Sustainer, the Shoegazer and the Transformer.

1. Sustainer

The Sustainer is a reverb type that I like to put in front of modulation devices such as phasers, flangers and tremolos in order to make those effects sustain and shimmer for longer. It's kind of inspired by the routing of old Fender amps, where the reverb tank would sit before the tremolo circuit – but with modern-day reverb technology you can really push that concept to new intergalactic heights.

For this job you'll need a reverb pedal that's able to produce a really long, clear and consistent reverb decay. If you feed that into a fast, choppy tremolo and slow phaser, for instance, you can create some really cool percussive synth-like pads that keep going, even when you're not playing. My most used pedal for this particular job is 100 per cent the EarthQuaker Devices Afterneath, but any reverb pedal with a bright and long decay will do.

2. Shoegazer

This type of reverb is great before fuzz and distortion for classic walls of shoegaze sound. I typically go for spring-like reverbs here as they're often brighter, less diffused and have a short decay. The audible cascading short delays that make up the reverb take really well to a dense onslaught of distortion, imparting depth and an almost granular-like effect on the trails.

The Shoegazer reverb is also great for just adding a lively texture to your sound; the bouncy splashy character really makes the attack of your notes pop out more and stand out as a lovely percussive contrast to the airy and diffused end-of-chain reverb. Belton Brick pedals such as EarthQuaker Devices' Levitation or SolidGoldFX Counter Current are great for this task. For that truly hypnotic attack-less shoegaze sound in the vein of My Bloody Valentine, go for a reverse reverb instead.

3. Transformer

Finally, we have the Transformer. The core task of this early chain reverb is to, well, transform your guitar into something else completely. Therefore it's essential that this reverb is dark, diffused and able to go 100 per cent wet in order to entirely remove your dry sound and alter your attack. Preferably, it should also have extra built-in effects such as modulation, filtering or pitch shifting.

My go-tos are the Old Blood Noise Endeavors Dark Star, Chase Bliss Audio Dark World and KMA Machines Cirrus. The Dark Star set to a bit-crushed octave down and then run into a slow vibrato can create some otherworldly lo-fi cello-like sounds, while the KMA Cirrus, with its dynamically modulated low-pass filtered reverb, will create swelling and gritty fluctuating tape-like textures when run into a low-gain overdrive pedal. ag

IK MULTIMEDIA IRIG MIC HD 2

THE VERSATILE, USER-FRIENDLY USB MIC IS BACK FOR A SECOND ROUND. REVIEW BY **CHRIS CORFIELD**.

RRP: $299.99

As the successor to one of the first portable microphones designed for use specifically with mobile devices, the IK Multimedia iRig Mic HD 2 has a lot to live up to. The original was loved for the fact it was geared almost entirely towards being an on-the-go content creation powerhouse, allowing podcasters, broadcasters, vloggers and more to use their phones and tablets to record high-quality audio without any fuss or extra equipment required.

This pairs nicely with the fact IK has created a suite of apps which complement the mic and mean you can, if required, produce everything from within your phone or tablet. All of which is great, but IK felt it could do better. Which leads us onto this IK Multimedia iRig Mic HD 2.

Where the original had a plastic casing, IK has opted for a metal design for this new model, which increases its rigidity and gives it that extra 'pro' feel. Fundamentally it's the same premise though; a USB connected condenser mic, with a simple cardioid pickup pattern, which plays well with iOS and Android devices and makes it as easy as possible to get great recorded sounds whatever you're doing.

Cost-wise, it sits in the same ballpark as mics like the Blue Yeti or Rode NT-USB, with each offering similar functionality, so which should you choose?



While there are USB mics that appear to resemble anything other than a microphone – we're looking at you, Blue Snowball – the IK Multimedia iRig Mic HD 2 has a simple and sleek appearance which leaves you in no doubt as to what it is. The all-metal housing gave us confidence it would survive a lifetime of being thrown in and out of a case or backpack without flinching, while the extra weight (over its plastic-housed predecessor) also gives it a degree of stability on your desktop.

On the housing you'll find controls for your input gain and headphone volume levels; these are recessed into the body, and we totally get why, but it can be fiddly to adjust on the fly if you don't have long enough fingernails. A minor gripe though. At the base of the mic, you'll find input connections for your USB cable and a 3.5 millimetre jack for headphones, but otherwise that's it. It is an exercise in simplicity, and all the better for it.

The mic itself is a cardioid pattern condenser, with – for the price – superb audio fidelity and a wide frequency response. You get a 24-bit A/D converter with sample rates up to 96kHz, meaning your recordings will have depth and clarity, while the preamp allows plenty of headroom without a noticeable leap in noise levels.

We tested the iRig Mic HD 2 with speech, vocals, acoustic guitar and a cajon, and found it to deliver superb results across the board. Our recordings all had clarity and punch, regardless of whether we recorded onto a smartphone or directly into our PC editing software.

Connection-wise, IK has opted for Micro USB as the on-mic connection, with the input recessed slightly into the body to create a more snug fit. While a more forward-looking option might have been to use USB-C, which in our experience has a more robust physical connection with less wobble, the iRig Mic HD 2 wouldn't require the extra data transfer capabilities you get from that connection so we do understand why it's stuck with the legacy connector.

In the box you'll find a standard Micro USB cable and a Lightning connector for Apple devices, along with a desktop tripod stand, an adapter to use it with a regular mic stand and a neat carry pouch. Including a hard case would have strengthened the iRig MIC HD 2's outdoor credentials even further but would have also added to the cost.

Overall, there is plenty of competition in this price band but the iRig Mic HD 2 has the edge over other similarly-priced models in our eyes. We liked the design, and felt confident it would be reliable in a variety of situations, while the quality of the audio you get is second to none in the entry-level bracket. ag

▶ VERDICT

The IK Multimedia iRig HD 2 is a classy performer, delivering superb audio quality and simple operation which makes it ideal for a variety of uses.

▶ PROS

- Bundled software package is genuinely useful.
- Suited to a variety of applications.

▶ CONS

- Micro USB not the most rigid of connectors.

▶ CONTACT

Sound And Music
Ph: (03) 9555 8081
Web: sound-music.com

ROLAND VERSELAB MV-1

THE MV-1 PRIORITISES VOCALS, BUT IT STILL COVERS YOU FOR SAMPLES AND INSTRUMENTS. REVIEW BY **MARTIN DELANEY**.



Unusually for a hardware sequencer, the Roland Verselab MV-1 is all about vocals. It's a sequencer, sampler, and software instrument host that uses all that as a support network for your voice. Whether processing your vocals in real-time, or recording them, or importing from another source: the Verselab is good for it all.

The MV-1 features a small LCD display, and various well-labelled knobs and buttons, all of which have some chance of being readable on stage, being either black-on-white or white-on-black. There are 16 sequencer step buttons arrayed along the lower edge, and there are 16 square pads in the centre of the unit for playing beats and other functions.

At the back, there's a mains power input and on/off switch, a USB-B port, full-size MIDI in/out, SD card slot, Kensington lock slot, quarter-inch left and right line inputs, an XLR mic input, and finally, quarter-inch left and right line outputs. The front panel features both quarter-inch and eighth-inch headphone jacks, and a small grille covers a built-in mic.

The Verselab can be powered from the included mains adaptor, or kept portable with a USB-style power bank. Roland provides project templates if you need backing in a hurry, otherwise, it's not such a leap to create your own. Press the drum track/kick button, then navigate to your chosen kit or sound – you can play it on the 16 large pads. Then enter record or step record mode, and add your chosen kick to the required steps in the bar using the lower pads.

The Verselab MV-1 is fairly unique in terms of the way it incorporates the human voice into the world of sequencing and grooveboxes. On one level, it's not really so different from Roland's own MC-707, but that machine is also squarely aimed at exploiting the ZEN-Core sounds, with a bit of sampling, sequencing, and enough controls for live interaction. The MV-1 keeps those elements, but bumps them to one side, to accommodate the vocal capture, import, and processing.

There are plenty of hardware tools that deal with vocal processing – Roland itself has the VT-1 and VT-3 Voice Transformers, and Boss (a division of Roland) offers the VE-500 Vocal Performer, a pedal aimed at performers who also need real-time vocal effects. TC Helicon is a big name in this field, with the VoiceLive range of pedals and tabletop devices.

There's a suite of vocal-oriented effects available, which can be applied during or after recording – these are fairly restrained, and Roland have probably done the right thing by avoiding excessively heavy or cheesy sound processing. There are very obvious controls for vocal processor on/off, tone, and mic on/off, gain – keeping menu diving to a minimum. Use a large pad to select a take slot and record your part, then set the start and endpoints, and place in the sequencer timeline by using the lower row of buttons.

Not everybody wants to master a DAW before they feel qualified. The MV-1 is a 21st-century take on the cassette multi trackers that were once used to create home demos. The marketing is dead-on – targeted at somebody who perhaps has a small amount of outboard, and likes the convenience of social media for sharing resources and mixes, but who gets a kick out of working against the limitations of hardware. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Verselab is a workable solution for computer-averse producers while integrating with the computer when you need it to.

▶ PROS

- SBeautifully organised user interface.
- Built-in mic for spontaneous vocals.
- Covers production from beat to mastering tasks.

▶ CONS

- The plastic body casing feels cheap, and transmits handling noise through to the mic.
- A larger display would be helpful.

▶ CONTACT

Roland
Ph: (02) 9982 8266
Web: roland.com/au

RRP: $1,099

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CORT GOLD-A6

AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR THAT SOUNDS JUST AS GORGEOUS AS IT LOOKS. REVIEW BY **CHRIS GILL**.

RRP: $1,599

If you've ever played a vintage acoustic alongside a new acoustic with the same construction and materials, you probably noticed that the vintage guitar sounded a lot more lively, dynamic and sweeter. Some players claim that the reason is because older guitars are "broken in", but the simple explanation is that the natural ageing process of the wood has enhanced its performance. Fresh cut wood retains vibration-damping moisture, oils and resins that regular kiln drying can't eliminate entirely, whereas aged wood that has dried naturally makes the material stiffer and lighter, which results in more efficient vibration characteristics.

A process called "torrefaction" where wood is heated to a specific temperature range in a humidity-free environment replicates the cell-structure of vintage-aged material. Until recently, torrefied spruce tops were only available on expensive boutique instruments, but Cort has broken the price barrier with its new Gold series acoustics, which feature the company's "Aged to Vintage" treatment. We took a look at Cort's Gold-A6 cutaway Grand Auditorium acoustic-electric model to see if its accelerated ageing process lived up to its promise.

The Cort Gold-A6 is made from all-solid materials, including a torrefied Sitka spruce top and Okoume (African mahogany) back and sides. The neck is palaquium (a mahogany equivalent, also known as nato or nyatoh) and features a Macassar ebony fretboard, 20 medium frets, 25.3-inch scale length and a slim C-shape profile. The neck, which is reinforced with walnut inserts, is attached to the body with a DoubleLock neck joint employing a dovetail joint supported by a bolt, which maximises tone transference and simplifies future neck resets.

The bridge is also Macassar ebony. Decoration is conservatively understated and includes small mother-of-pearl fretboard dots with a scroll pattern at the 12th fret echoed by similar figures on the bridge, a ring of abalone encircling the soundhole and black binding with triple-ply purfling surrounding the top, back and fretboard. Gold-plated open-gear tuners with butterbean buttons enhance the Gold-A6's vintage aesthetics.

The built-in electronic system is a Fishman Flex Blend with chromatic tuner and internal electret-condenser cardioid microphone. The controls (tone with phase button, blend and volume with tuner button) and LED tuner display are side-mounted.

Cort did an astonishing job in all aspects of the construction of the Gold-A6 model we examined. All of the woods are gorgeous, with the back and sides possessing straight grain patterns and the top having the straight, narrow grain of slow-growth spruce as well as a warm, tan hue courtesy of the torrefaction treatment. The fretwork is silky smooth, with rounded edges that enhance playing comfort.



The materials and overall attention to detail are simply stunning for an instrument in the sub-$2,000 price range and comparable to acoustics costing four to five times as much.

The tone of the Cort Gold-A6 is majestic. The torrefaction treatment combined with an ultra thin UV finish truly deliver the tone and dynamics of an aged vintage instrument, possessing a complexity that is unheard of for an instrument in this price range. The resonance has a rich, sustaining "tail" that's similar to a studio reverb effect, and the tone is well-balanced, with warm, full-bodied midrange, assertive but not overbearing bass and sparkling treble. The guitar is satisfyingly responsive when played fingerstyle, but it can also be strummed quite aggressively without overdriving the top.

The Fishman Flex Blend is an inspired pairing for an acoustic guitar like this that provides such excellent natural tone. I preferred to adjust the Blend control with a touch more microphone to capture that luscious resonance and the guitar's harmonically complex overtones. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Cort Gold-A6, with its torrefied top, provides the rich, dynamically responsive tone of a vintage-aged acoustic without requiring a huge investment or the patience of waiting for decades.

▶ PROS

- The torrefied Sitka spruce top provides the dynamics, projection and tonal complexity of naturally aged and dried wood.
- Hand-rolled fret edge treatment enhances playing comfort thanks to the smoothly polished, rounded surfaces at the edges of every fret.

▶ CONS

- None

▶ CONTACT

Dynamic Music
Ph: (02) 9939 1299
Web: dynamicmusic.com.au

CORT CORE-OC BLACKWOOD

RRP: $1,099

HUGE FEATURES, TINY PRICE – A VERY *SOLID* DEAL… GET IT? REVIEW BY **ROB LIANG**.

There was once a time when an electro-acoustic with solid back and sides for just over $1,000 would seem the stuff of guitar dreams, an ambition never to be spoken out loud. But here we are. Nevertheless, the price range this China-made Cort finds itself in is hotly contested with strong showings from a number of key brands, and solid woods don't guarantee a winning formula for an acoustic. Okay, spoiler ahead: Cort has gone and delivered it here.

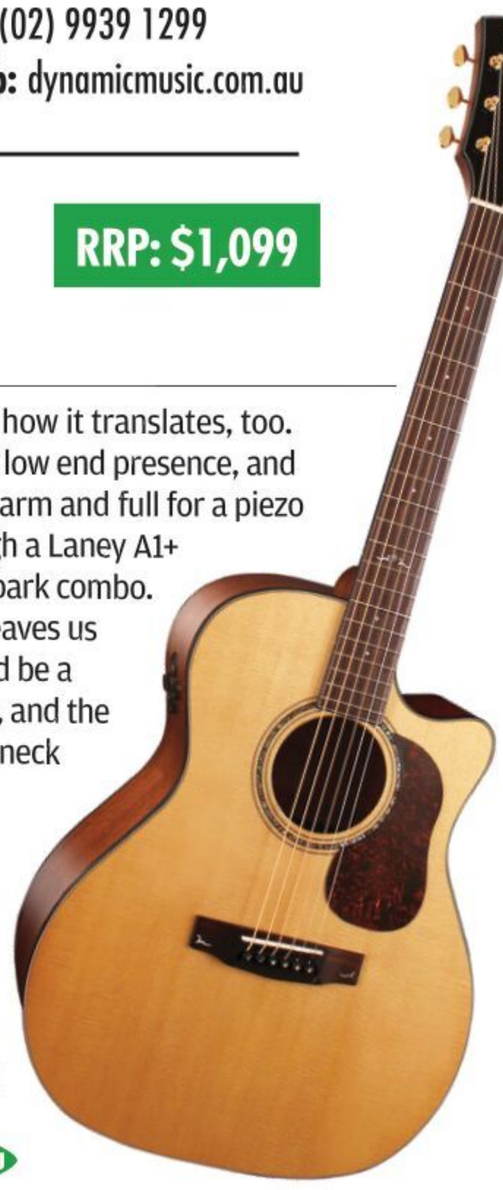
Our test model is the closest thing to a wildcard in this new three-model series; all solid blackwood isn't a tonewood we see a lot of. Cort's selling it as a best of all-world's scenario; a combination combining the "rich low-end of mahogany, the brightness of maple and the ideal overtone of rosewood". That's ambitious.

The Open Pore Light Burst Finish is deep in grain on top and rich in flame on the back, giving this guitar a warm, earthy and traditional look for a cutaway. It's light too, at four pounds, and the OM size is a good option for smaller players without compromising on dreadnought jack-of-all-trades performance much, as we'll discover.

When Cort say this guitar is designed with simplicity in mind, we can't argue, but that doesn't mean cheap. The OC knows what it's about and the die-cast black tuner buttons add a touch of premium class. This is not a hi-fi-sounding acoustic guitar; it's woody, percussive and warm with great sustain. We'd say the looks reflect the tonality here and it makes for an inviting proposition.

Chords have mid muscle and single notes ring with strong projection. We actually end up preferring fingerstyle with our test OC as it offers an added sensitivity and responds really well to touch. Bass isn't boomy, and we wouldn't expect it from an OM, but it sits just right with the folky finesse here. Plugged in, we're pleased with how it translates, too.

There's plenty of low end presence, and it feels pleasingly warm and full for a piezo when tested through a Laney A1+ and Positive Grid Spark combo. The performance leaves us confident this would be a quality stage guitar, and the comfort of its satin neck will pay dividends.



So it's another acoustic winner from Cort after last year's impressive Little CJ. Add in the quality gig bag and we think this is a very… *Solid* deal. ag

▶ VERDICT

The performance leaves us confident this would be a quality stage guitar and the comfort of its satin neck will pay dividends over a set.

▶ PROS

- The 112-millimetre body depth and Venetian cutaway make this an accessible electro-acoustic for the stage.

▶ CONS

- None

▶ CONTACT

Dynamic Music
Ph: (02) 9939 1299
Web: dynamicmusic.com.au

VOX MINI GO 50 COMBO

RRP: $649.99

VOX'S LATEST AMP IS PERFECT FOR AL FRESCO PERFORMANCE, WITH MAINS OR BATTERY POWER AND A HOST OF ONBOARD EXTRAS FOR PRACTICALLY ENDLESS FUN AND INSPIRATION.

REVIEW BY **NICK GUPPY**.



We all know Vox's classic valve amplifiers go right back to the beginnings of pop and rock over 60 years ago, but it might come as a surprise for some that the company's digital modelling products have been with us for around 20 years now, writing a significant chapter in Vox's long and colourful history.

Unlike valves, digital guitar amplification methods are still being developed, and Vox's current modelling products use VET or Virtual Element Technology, an evolution of the original REMS engine used on early Valvetronix amps and effects, both of which were developed by Vox's parent company, synth giant Korg. In keeping with Vox's reputation for innovation, VET incorporates many cutting-edge refinements and captures traditional valve circuits in unprecedented digital detail, as we found out last year on Vox's Cambridge50. Vox's new portable Mini Go range of amps is the latest to benefit from this exciting technology and here we're looking at the largest of the trio, the feature-laden Mini Go 50.

This is a compact and portable combo with a single eight-inch custom loudspeaker, housed in a smartly finished cabinet with a rear port to enhance bass frequencies. A diamond-patterned speaker grille echoes the famous cloth used on classic AC amps, and a prominent silver Vox badge shines in the top left corner. There's no carry handle; instead, the amp comes with a shoulder strap that hooks on to a pair of side-mounted studs. There's also a small pair of tilt feet, which allow the Mini Go to be safely angled backwards for better monitoring.

Around the back there are two power sockets, one for the laptop-style mains adaptor and a USB-C for standard mobile five-volt power supplies, which means the Mini Go 50 can be used anywhere. There's a third socket for the optional VFS3 programmable footswitch, which remotely controls all the amp's essential functions.

The control panel has separate inputs for guitar and microphone, with a level Trim and aux Send control for the latter, feeding the Mini Go's delay and reverb effects. There are nine amp models in total, including seven well-known favourites from Vox's Cambridge50, together with a new Vocoder effect and a Line input for amplifying electro-acoustic guitars or keyboards. The amp controls include gain, bass, treble and master volume, which become bass, mid, treble and volume when the line input is selected.

A three-way power switch lets you select from either full power, 1/10th or 1/100th output, for stage, quiet practice or recording, and you can store and recall up to three patch settings.

Below the amp controls, the Mini Go 50 has two effects sections: three modulations and an octaver on section one, and delays and reverbs on section two. Next to the effects we find the Mini Go 50's drum machine, featuring 33 patterns grouped into distinct genres, with tempo and level controls. And there's still more to come in the shape of a looper with a handy maximum recording time of around 45 seconds, together with a tuner function, an aux in and a headphone output, both on 3.5mm jacks. The headphones output disables the speaker and can be used for silent recording when needed.

Overall, the Mini Go 50 is well built to typically high Vox standards, looking smart and ready to rock with an impressive range of features.

The Mini Go 50's amp voices use the same VET engine as the Cambridge50 and sound impressively authentic. The classic AC30 Normal and Top Boost channels both provide a wide range of excellent tones, from shimmering cleans and chiming rhythms to highly responsive classic rock and blues. Beside these two gems, there's a tempting choice of Brit- and American-influenced cleans and overdrives, including the D-style Boutique Cl and Boutique OD, which both sound remarkably authentic, while gain fiends will enjoy the Double Rec and SL-OD simulations, which make even the weediest single coils sing with practically endless sustain and fat, chugging bass.

The new Vocoder voice is a strong special effect and perhaps best used sparingly. Used with a microphone it adds vowel sounds to single notes or chords as you speak or sing, or you can use it without a microphone, in which case the vowels are triggered by picking, which is another useful sound.

The Line input has enough clean headroom to take most keyboards without distorting, and the EQ will suit most electro-acoustics without too much fiddling around; it's a good, usable tone. The other onboard effects don't disappoint, either, with lush chorus and phaser modulations, an authentically vintage-sounding tremolo and a fat octaver that turns into a mono synth bass at the end of the control knob's travel. Effects section two rounds things off with analogue and digital delays softened by spring or hall reverbs. While the guitar can access both effects sections, the microphone input is sensibly limited to delay and reverb.

The Mini Go 50's drum machine sounds aren't quite up to the same standard as its amp voices, but still more than adequate for live use, with a wide range of variations on each genre. The looper is easy to use and great fun, automatically quantising to a rhythm pattern, while the drum machine works vice versa, automatically adjusting tempo to recorded loops. As well as making the Mini Go 50 a powerful practice tool, these two features will spice up any solo live performance.

If you're planning on using the Mini Go 50 live then the optional VFS3 footswitch becomes more of a necessity as you can assign a variety of different functions to the three buttons: for example, operating the looper, switching effects on and off, or accessing the three saved patch settings.

We barely scratched the surface of the Mini Go 50's potential in the short time we had it, but it's clear that if you're a serious solo performer on the street/busking circuit, this is an amp you really need to become acquainted with. Combined with the rhythm machine and looper, there's plenty of inspiration on tap for original music or pro-standard covers, while the authentic amp sounds are first class, with plenty of power to make yourself heard and impressive lows from the ported cabinet. For non-buskers, this is still an inspiring practice and recording tool – the great tones will sit happily in any pro-standard recording. ag

▶ VERDICT

As an overall package, it's amazing value for money. If you don't need the preset storage or the high power output, the Mini Go 10 is equally impressive, while the Mini Go 3 does away with the looper but retains those great amp sounds and the drum machine.

▶ PROS

- Built-in rhythm machine and looper, amp sounds and effects.
- Foot-switchable.
- Can run on batteries.

▶ CONS

- We'd be inclined to swap the Vocoder effect for another good amp voice.
- We wish the looper had an extra 15 seconds of recording time.

▶ CONTACT

Yamaha Australia
Ph: (03) 9693 5111
Web: au.yamaha.com

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES ASTRAL DESTINY REVERB

RRP: $399.99

AN INSPIRING EFFECT FOR ANY GUITARIST LOOKING FOR A WIDE RANGE OF SONIC-STRETCHING CAPABILITIES. REVIEW BY **CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI**.

EarthQuaker Devices' new Astral Destiny pedal serves up eight types of ambience, some with, and some without, octave effects. As you might guess from the name, these are big-sounding reverbs, with chorus modulation that can make them sound ethereal or haunting.

The eight varieties, selected with the rotary mode control, include Abyss, a large reverb with no octave effect, which is the most "normal" variety of ambience here. The ever-popular Shimmer adds reverb one octave higher to the tail, Sub puts it one octave lower, and Sub Shimmer appends upper and lower octaves. Astral adds upper and lower octaves, combined with a regenerating tail for reverbs of extended length.

Ascend produces upward pitch bending, Descend creates downward pitch bending, and Cosmos adds a regenerating reverb pitched a fifth above the original note. As explained in the manual, these last three reverbs work best on sustained notes and chords. The length knob sets the tail's duration, and the preset control lets you select from eight included presets, all of which can be edited or overwritten.

Four smaller rotary controls govern the chorus effect's depth and rate, the treble setting (boost to the right, cut to the left) and the dry-to-wet mix. In addition to the Activate foot switch, Astral Destiny has a Stretch foot switch that doubles the length of decay and adds a temporary change in pitch. Tapping it creates an immediate pitch change, and holding it produces an upward or downward pitch-bend effect whose speed can be adjusted by holding down Stretch while turning the length control.



So far, so good, but EQD has also included an expression input that gives you pedal control over the length, depth, rate, tone or mix settings, and each preset can be saved with a different expression assignment. Swapping between Tails and Full Bypass modes is achieved with a simple manoeuvre using the power cable and the Activate switch.

Working left to right through the mode control, the reverbs start with the octave-less Abyss setting – a pleasant and all-around useful reverb – and get progressively otherworldly. Shimmer does the familiar upper-octave thing, while Sub adds a bit of warm, shadowy heft one octave below. Sub Shimmer and Astral are both great for wide, sky-and-Earth-cracking reverbs, and the Astral Destiny's long, slithery tail gave single notes a symphonic-like sustain.

I especially liked the lush Cosmos setting, with its regenerating fifth, which imparted a glimmering, celestial effect to sustained notes and chords. For expansive, heavenly reverbs, this is hands down one of my favourites. With any of these modes, the chorus modulation can add everything from subtle richness to cyclonic undulations.

I'll admit, I was initially at a loss to make good use of the Ascend and Descend modes, as the reverbs are pitched, respectively, about a semitone above and below that of your original signal. However, once I connected an expression pedal and assigned it to the mix control, I was able to bring the effect in and out at will, adding clouds of sonic menace that made sustained chords more interesting.

Similarly, the pitch-bending effect available on the Stretch foot switch delivers a fun vintage video arcade-style effect that's perfect for punctuating solos or adding out-of-this-world sonic flourishes. ag

▶ VERDICT

Overall, Astral Destiny is a welcome new flavour in EarthQuaker's lineup, and an inspiring effect for any guitarist looking for modulated octave reverbs combined with a wide range of sonic-stretching capabilities.

▶ PROS

- Large and lush modulated octave reverbs.
- Fun and unusual effects.
- Expression pedal input with assignable control.

▶ CONS

- None

▶ CONTACT

Yamaha Australia
Ph: (03) 9693 5111
Web: au.yamaha.com

YAMAHA PACIFICA PAC612VIIFMX

RRP: $1,099

A STANDOUT PICK IN YAMAHA'S DO-IT-ALL WORKHORSE RANGE. REVIEW BY **STUART WILLIAMS**.

Electric guitars tend to fall into one of two main camps. In one corner there's the infinitely cool, and in the other there's the perfectly functional. If a hot-rodded mojo machine is the guitar equivalent of the weathered drifter who hangs around the bar at your local, encourages you to take up smoking and shows you how to cheat at sweep picking, then a Yamaha Pacifica is the respectable guitar teacher in your town. Perhaps not bursting with danger on the exterior, but it'll see you right for years.

It's been three decades since Yamaha unleashed its answer to the west coast mod shop boom of the late '80s and early '90s, and the PAC612VIIFMX is the new flagship version of one of the most popular electrics out there. Granted, you won't find pre-aged finishes. There's no retro-inspired quirks or clunky period-correct hardware. What you do get, though, is a cocktail of everything you need to cover as much musical ground as possible.

There's the medium-weight, double-cut alder body, 25.5-inch, 22-fret neck and a versatile HSS pickup configuration. It's backed up by a barrage of third party features, too, including Seymour Duncan pickups, Grover locking tuners, Wilkinson vibrato and a Graph Tech TUSQ nut and string trees.

All of that means very little, of course, if it doesn't float your boat when you pick it up to play. Straight away, there's a familiarity. The 13.75-inch radius maple neck has a comfortable 'all-rounder' feel which is as suited to rhythm work as it is big bends. The tension on the strings is slinky without becoming too loosey-goosey, and our review model comes perfectly intonated with a low-but-not-buzzy action. Meanwhile, that Wilkinson vibrato reacts smoothly, returning to pitch without any problems under general use. The Pacifica's everyman approach has paid off.



This continues with the types of tones it produces as standard. Those single coils are Seymour Duncan SSL-1s, and they produce a very nice balance of punchy bass and spiky top end. The neck and neck/middle positions in particular are where we found ourselves a lot of the time – funky and tight when clean, round and bluesy with a bit of drive.

Moving to the Custom 5 TB-14 bridge humbucker is almost like having another guitar at your disposal. Here, you're into fat, smooth, mid-heavy rock territory with a voice that contrasts from the other positions brilliantly. As a bonus, you can split the humbucker's coils via the push-pull tone pot giving you even more versatility. Speaking of which, we love the fast response of the volume control, coupled with the higher friction of the tone pot, which both allow for quick changes/stay where you park it respectively. ag

▶ VERDICT

If the Pacifica needed more evidence as to why it's become such a standard, this is it. It's an unashamedly shiny, contemporary guitar that can tackle a wide range of styles.

▶ PROS

- Everything you need to cover as much musical ground as possible.

▶ CONS

- None

▶ CONTACT

Yamaha Australia
Ph: (03) 9693 5111
Web: au.yamaha.com

UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX ASTRA MODULATION MACHINE

RRP: $779

A SPECIAL KIND OF ENSEMBLE. REVIEW BY **ROB LAING**.

Universal Audio's first foray into pedal hardware comes from years of building a formidable reputation for industry standard recording plugins. Like Neural DSP, it's an interesting angle to approach the effects market, but you're already frowning at the price here, aren't you? Yes, we're now above the snow line of pedal price mountain when it comes to a modulation pedal. But, you're getting a lot of modulation pedal here.

We've chosen to focus on the Astra Modulation Machine here rather than the reverb and delay pedals in the UAFX launch trio because we think it offers the most distinct proposition in the market; a comprehensive modelling of classic top-drawer modulation pedals in a rugged and very attractive compact chassis.

We love the aesthetic here – and yes, that logo is a bit SEGA isn't it. The Astra balances sleek brushed metal with a graphical approach that comes on like a UA plugin printed in 3D. The tonal palette draws its influence from the '70s and '80s here; if you're looking for left-field, progressive approaches there are other modulation units that will serve you better.



The lack of MIDI functionality is also puzzling – seemingly justified by UA to focus players on the hands-on old school pedal approach to the controls. For the price we're not so convinced, but the collection of classics is really the source of the appeal here – so do the tones deliver?

Very much so. If you're on the fence about modulation this could knock you over into a sea of shimmer and oscillation. The menu serves Bucket Brigade chorus (inspired by the coveted Boss Chorus Ensemble), flanger/doubler that recreates MXR's 80s rack unit); there's vibrato, tube tremolo and more. A bonus phase X90 based on the classic MXR Phase 90 alongside a Fender Brownface-inspired Dharma Trem '61 harmonic tremolo can be downloaded via UA's Control app. And we'd advise you do – they're great. ag

▶ VERDICT

With so many gorgeous musical sounds we'd have liked to see more than one preset to store a favourite, but this is still a benchmark modelling pedal.

▶ PROS

- Tones that deliver.
- Comprehensive modelling of classic top-drawer modulation pedals.

▶ CONS

- The lack of MIDI functionality is puzzling.
- Only one preset to store a favourite.

▶ CONTACT

CMI Music & Audio
Ph: (03) 9315 2244
Web: cmi.com.au

AMPEG BA-108 V2 COMBO

COMPACT, PORTABLE, LIGHTWEIGHT, FULLY FEATURED – JUST HOW WE LIKE OUR BASS COMBOS... REVIEW BY **MIKE BROOKS**.

RRP: $269.99

Combos for home and studio use have seen some refinements in recent times, just as gig amplification has done. As dimensions and weights have decreased, the demands of the home player have grown – tone, features, and flexibility are all paramount considerations. This affordable Ampeg is the second version of their popular BA-108 combo: At this price, can it transcend the limits of its dimensions?

Fitted with a custom Ampeg-designed eight-inch speaker, this combo is covered in a rugged double-thickness Tolex covering with impact-resistant metal corners, and a mesh-style speaker grille. Rubber feet have been fitted to two sides of the unit; one side for standard positioning and the other to allow the combo to be tilted like a monitor.

A handle sits on top of the combo, which makes carrying it very easy indeed. The front control panel is simple to navigate, offering everything the home player could need – aside from a built-in tuner, perhaps.



Both active and passive basses are accommodated, with a -15dB pad switch, followed by a single Volume control, a three-band EQ, an Aux-In pot to control the volume mix of an external sound source, 3.5-millimetre and quarter-inch jack inputs, and finally a 3.5-millimetre headphones out. Simple but neat.

Small it may be, but the BA-108 is a powerful beast, and its EQ permits considerable tonal variation. With the EQ set flat at the center point, the delivery is strong and clear, but with no obvious bias. Thankfully, the bottom-end is rounded and smooth, the midrange avoids grit, and the treble response is clear without any indication that boosting it will simply result in unwanted clank.

A pair of passive basses with split and single-coil pickups sound just as they should with the EQ flat. Warming the signal up with the Bass control results in more power, as you might expect – but as this combo has an eight-inch speaker, the low end isn't exactly booming.

Place the combo in the corner of a room, or against a wall if you want to increase that effect. The Mid and Treble controls give both basses an expected dose of extra presence and projection, with the overall delivery remaining focused and tight. The EQ is geared towards the familiar Ampeg thud, so high-definition glassiness when slapping will almost certainly elude you.

Switch to an active instrument, and the pad selector effectively tames the input signal, which is a relief. Again, with a cabinet and speaker of these dimensions, keeping a tight grasp on the input is necessary if you want to look after your speaker. As for the tones, it quickly becomes apparent that the combo's EQ requires a little less tweaking than with a passive bass: The combo basically reinforces what is already being sent to it by the instrument. Full low-end EQ on both the bass and the combo will be overkill, as this amp hasn't been designed with live performance in mind, although it would certainly perform well in an acoustic-style band.

Slappers and pick players may find they want some extra clarity, and boosting the treble EQ will offer the extra bite they require. Again, there are obvious limitations in the high and low frequencies due to the physical nature of the unit. Having said that, some of the slap tones are ideal, and pushing the combo hard doesn't degrade the signal too much. If you want gritty, slightly distorted tones, you can find them by pushing the volume, but use the EQ in moderation so the speaker doesn't leave the combo's housing.

Considering its price tag and dimensions, this is an impressive home-use combo. Expect too much of it live, and you'll obviously push it beyond its intended parameters. Used correctly, though, I can't see many players being disappointed with it, and with plenty of warmth and clarity on offer, it does exactly what it needs to do. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Ampeg B1-108 V2 Combo is a pocket-friendly combo with decent tones and a solid build.

▶ PROS

- Fully featured.
- Portable.
- Bassist-friendly price.

▶ CONS

- Limited performance capabilities, for obvious reasons.

▶ CONTACT

Yamaha Australia
Ph: (03) 9693 5111
Web: au.yamaha.com

ORANGE ACOUSTIC PEDAL

A PSYCHEDELIC-LOOKING OUTLIER WITH DOWNRIGHT AMP-LIKE TONE. REVIEW BY **JIMMY LESLIE**.

RRP: $289

Orange is renowned for its robust British tube-amp sound, and the iconic UK-based manufacturer continues to make inroads into the acoustic electronics market with the Orange Acoustic Pedal. This design basically takes what Orange accomplished with its complex and compound Acoustic Pre TC preamp and Crush Acoustic 30 amplifier, and boils the essentials down to a straightforward stomp box. The Acoustic Pedal is a single-ended Class A preamp featuring a parametric midrange with notch filter, a balanced XLR output and a buffered effects loop.

The Acoustic Pedal looks quite different from its competition. While most acoustic electronics manufacturers go for a brown, wooden aesthetic, Orange displays its signature colour in the form of a psychedelic swirl surrounding six jet-black knobs on a cream-coloured box. Traditionalists may scoff, but acoustic rockers will surely like it, as I did.

I also appreciated the simple setup. The manual is literally a folded pamphlet, and reading isn't crucial unless you've never worked a parametric EQ with a notch filter and a controllable Q. Those are offered for the midrange, which is the money zone for a quality acoustic-electric tone. The notch selects the frequencies affected by the middle control in the range of 68Hz to 1.2kHz.

The Q factor controls the width of the band. Set narrow, it's super handy for homing in on a specific frequency range for a sharp boost, or to mitigate a nagging feedback issue. When widened, it's ideal for shaping the mids. The control knobs are user friendly – that is, they don't work too dramatically. For example, the increase or decrease in volume is subtle as the knob turns smoothly, making it easy to dial in the desired amount.



However, I found it rather weird not to have an on/off or bypass. In fact, I can't remember any similar pedal not having a foot switch. That made A/B comparisons to the original signal cumbersome. I suppose Orange figures the player is simply going to have it on all the time. Given that logic, it should have a mute button for when you take breaks or change guitars. I wound up using a mutable Boss Chromatic Tuner pedal for that function.

The Acoustic Pedal's core tone is downright amp-like. It sounds and feels almost like playing through an acoustic-friendly tube head and a cabinet. That means it does indeed "colour" the tone, and to my ears in a good way. Why should electric guitar players have all the fun? The Acoustic Pedal brings out harmonic content and adds gusto, gain and sustain.

My favourite thing was to crank up the bass a bit, leave the treble pretty much alone and dial in the middle range using the parametric equaliser to jazz up a given guitar in just the right frequency range. My main test guitar was a Taylor 514ce, and I ran it through the Acoustic Pedal with a series of L.R. Baggs Align pedals in the effects loop and the amp output feeding a Fender Acoustic Junior GO, plus an XLR out running to a Baggs Synapse Personal P.A.

The Acoustic pedal gave the amp more bravado, and the effects loop worked well and didn't add noise. The balanced signal feeding the P.A. was nice and hot, so I hit the pad on the Synapse to rein in the level. Headroom was sky high, thanks to the 18-volt power supply. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Orange Acoustic Pedal is a convenient control unit aimed squarely at the acoustic rocker, and it hits the bullseye as an all-in-one floor unit with a relatively small footprint and an agreeable price.

▶ PROS

- Bold amp-like tone with flexible EQ and I/O in a relatively compact pedal.

▶ CONS

- No bypass or mute.

▶ CONTACT

Australis Music Group
Ph: (02) 9698 4444
Web: australismusic.com.au

EPIPHONE ALEX LIFESON LES PAUL AXCESS STANDARD

ROLL THE TONES! REVIEW BY **ROB LAING**.

RRP: $2,199

Alex Lifeson's Les Paul finally coming at a more affordable price-point opens up one of the boldest takes on an LP to new players. Ten years ago, Alex told *Total Guitar* how his Gibson signature was, based on the Axcess model and its thinner body but with caveats. "We went with a very heavy [non chambered] mahogany so it still has weight and resonance," he explained. "There's a lot [of electronics] in the guitar so it was important to have a good solid block as a starting point."

There's plenty of talking points here; including those electronics, in addition to enhanced fret access and the locking tremolo that will immediately divide opinion between purists and progressives. Our Les Paul expectations could be challenged here.

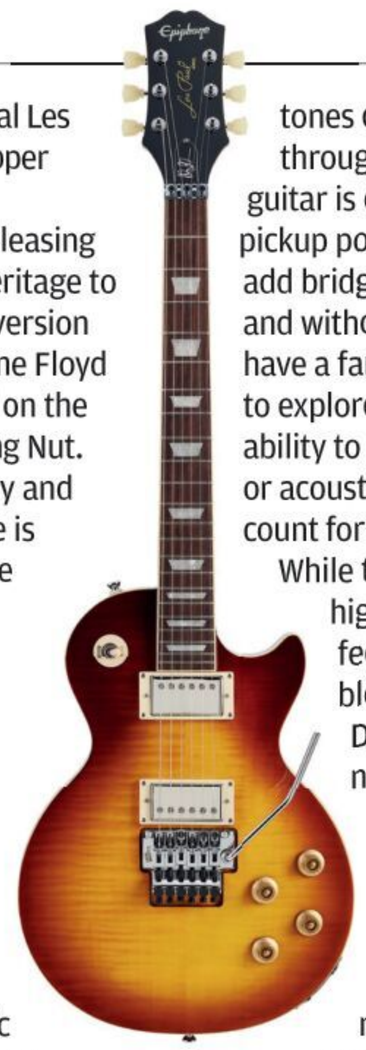
When Lifeson said "very heavy", he was talking about his own early serial Gibson signatures. While the standard Axcess shares key features and is known for being a lighter Les Paul, the Rush man consciously went for a non-chambered, weightier option. That equates to a substantial nine pounds here.

And this is despite the reduced body thickness over a standard Les Paul, here one-and-three-quarter inches at its thickest compared to a Standard's one-and-seven-eighth inches. A Comfort-Carve belly scarf enhances the closeness we feel with this guitar over a usual Les Paul and the reduced neck heel improves upper fret access too – hence the name.

The Viceroy Brown Lifeson favours is a pleasing sunburst that brings the classic Les Paul heritage to bring balance to the impact of the great diversion here; a double-locking tremolo and the same Floyd Rose licensed Graph Tech Ghost unit found on the Gibson version with a Floyd Rose R4 Locking Nut.

Alongside the traditional body mahogany and maple cap combo, the fretboard wood here is Indian Laurel, a more affordable alternative to rosewood and visually similar. A fine aesthetic, but the five cavity covers at the back suggest there's more than the scope of vibrato unit spicing up the recipe for expansion here.

The man himself told us exactly what that meant back for his own guitar back in 2011. "We have coil taps on the pickups, a Floyd Rose and the piezo is the second jack - the Life-O-Sound - that we run independently or you can mix both magnetic pickups and the piezo through the main output.



The versatility of Les Pauls is often unsung – myriad tones can be accessed via shaping gain and EQ through the volume and tone controls. But this guitar is on a whole other level; factor in the three pickup positions for humbucker and coil-splits. Now add bridge and middle positions for piezo, with and without coil-split from the bridge. Oh, and you have a fantastically expressive tremolo system to explore, that keeps tuning rock solid. Plus the ability to send that piezo signal separately to a PA or acoustic amp for layers. But all this wouldn't count for much without the foundations in place.

While the action on our test guitar is a little high for us, the humbucker choices here feel right; the bridge rich and fat, the neck blooming and throaty, with definition. Dialling in the piezo adds air between notes with low end that's great for gentler, strummy tones and folkier places than you might expect. Then the coil-splits take out some low end if you wish (coil-splits always take away low end in our experience). Split alone, we're certainly not talking Strat or Tele twang but some useful chiming mids with some high sizzle and cut à la P-90. ag

▶ VERDICT

It's quite simply a stunningly versatile Les Paul – and now more people can enjoy Lifeson's combinations, and bring their own creative ideas to the table. Axcessibility indeed.

▶ PROS

- Feature-packed.
- Excellent value for money

▶ CONS

- None

▶ CONTACT

Australis Music Group
Ph: (02) 9698 4444
Web: australismusic.com.au

EPIPHONE EMILY WOLFE SIGNATURE SHERATON

A WOLFE IN STEALTH CLOTHING. REVIEW BY **ROB LAING**.

RRP: $1,999

The support guitar brands show rising playing talent is vital, and it also sends a message. Seeing Epiphone go from the endorsement of Emily Wolfe to a full signature model here is a statement that it not only believes in her obvious talents as an inspiring musician, but also that it's open to the design input of contemporary players.

It's worked with Lee Malia, Matt Heafy and Jared James Nichols before, and the two parties here have created a truly stunning looking Sheraton. We've long cast envious glances at the Gibson Memphis satin range of 339s and 335s, but this is a black aged gloss that lies somewhere in between, taking on the look of a well played nitro without any of the relic'ing. The idea of pairing it with gold hardware risks going too showy for a guitar billing itself as 'stealth', but the 'lightly aged' gold stays classy and consistent with the aged binding.

The unique features continue with diamond holes inspired by the Trini Lopez model and lighting bolt inlays that give the aesthetic a subtle rock 'n' roll edginess. Wolfe's own signature touches strike a careful balance – her signature on the back of the headstock is literally stealth-like as it's only visible at certain angles in the light.

The tattoo-style gold wolf's head below it is more conspicuous, but we're not complaining. This is undoubtedly one of the most badass-looking Epiphones we've seen, and there's been some strong output lately on that front with the Prophecy series. Wolfe has described it as "elegant and aggressive". We like that. And if Darth Vader had become a BB King cover act, he'd have liked it too.

It's also a heavy guitar – nine pounds give it a solid heft for a semi. It feels very comfortable to play, though, with a spot-on setup that really sells the Indian laurel 'board; it's fast and coupled with the '60s slim taper profile neck here we've got a very positive first impression plugged in. The string slack is in the goldilocks zone for us – springly for expressive bends but firm enough for heavy rhythm.



The neck humbucker really sings with sustain, and drenched in fuzz and reverb it's a treat. The bridge is warm too and it's comfortably voiced for blues and classic rock, with the volume controls proving sensitive for cleaning up. But like Wolfe's music, this will confidently stride between the world's of Albert King and Josh Homme: when things get gainy there's broad low string heft complemented by open higher end articulation for chords that wins semis so many fans. As this guitar deserves to do, too.

▶ VERDICT

Like Wolfe's music, this will confidently stride between the world's of Albert King and Josh Homme.

▶ PROS

- Wicked design.
- A-plus build quality.
- Super playable.

▶ CONS

- None

▶ CONTACT

Australis Music Group
Ph: (02) 9698 4444
Web: australismusic.com.au

MARKBASS MARCUS MILLER CMD 101 MICRO 60

CAN USABLE BASS COMBOS GET ANY SMALLER? WE TAKE A LOOK AT A COMPACT POWERHOUSE THAT DEFIES ALL EXPECTATIONS. REVIEW BY **MIKE BROOKS**.

RRP: $1,150



This unit from the Marcus Miller range of amplification from Markbass is small, portable, and compact, and although its output rating is limited at 45 watts – or 60 watts with an extension cabinet – it comes equipped with all the necessary features required of a home practice combo.

Finished in a black felt covering and furnished with plastic protective corners, metal grille, and a top-mounted carry handle, the Micro 60 bears all the hallmarks of a Markbass combo, and can easily be stacked atop other similarly sized Markbass cabinets.

The familiar yellow ten-inch speaker is supported by a piezo tweeter, with the obvious intention being that clarity and definition are not compromised. To ensure a solid low-end response, the rear of the cab has extensive rear reflex porting.

In terms of features, the control set is limited but gives you everything most of us will need: Gain and Master volume controls, a three-band EQ, an auxiliary input for adding a music source, headphone and XLR DI outputs, and an additional speaker out enabling the addition of an extra cabinet. A clip indicator LED shows the player when the bass signal is a little too hot, safeguarding the speaker's performance.

As it weighs in at 25 pounds, portability has been addressed, assisted by some effective unit dimensions. Not only can the unit be carried with ease, it will take up very little room at home or on stage – very useful for those small club gigs where space is at a premium.

We tested the combo with a variety of basses, concluding that the Micro 60 is capable of delivering a surprisingly full low-end performance. Whether presented with a passive, active, four-string, five-string, fretless or acoustic instrument, the individual tonal characteristics are conveyed with a fair degree of power and finesse.

Slapped and tapped passages benefit greatly from the addition of the tweeter, making subtle playing stand out without getting lost. Obviously, as the unit is fitted with a ten-inch speaker, the probability of concocting a truly bass-drenched signal is fairly low.

The simple but effective control layout makes dialing in your tonal requirements easy. It may lack frills, but on a unit such as this, which has been designed to do a simple thing well, why would you want frills? A great, usable tone is the order of the day and the Micro 60 certainly delivers that.

Fingerstyle and pick applications are conveyed with authority, although once you start digging in and pushing the unit, you may find that its limitations start to become obvious. This is where attaching an additional cabinet comes into play, and shows sensible forethought from the Markbass team.

60 watts may not sound like much, but with an additional eight-ohm cabinet, the low end is further reinforced, making the setup more efficient when it comes to conveying the spread of frequencies. This will definitely appeal to five-string bassists, who want the notes to jump off the B string, not merely thud.

In use, the tweeter makes a lot of difference to the overall performance and gives the combo versatility, creating a full tonal display with articulation and detail. Thankfully, increasing the Treble control doesn't result in a thin response, but rather a sweeter high end. Using the combo with basses equipped with active EQ showed no limitations as such; adjusting the onboard preamps merely highlighted how capable this combo actually is.

Markbass combos are popular for their portable nature and useful control set, and this example certainly carries on in that tradition. Its simplicity is apparent, but that is the ace up its sleeve.

▶ VERDICT

A very impressive combo, well worthy of investigation, the Micro 60 stacks well with other Markbass cabinets for an easily expandable rig with impressive performance for five-string players. But on its own it's a formidable little amp for its size.

▶ PROS

- Simple, effective, versatile.
- Good design.
- Portable.

▶ CONS

- Limited output, but this can be addressed with an extra cab.

▶ CONTACT

CMC Music
Ph: (02) 9905 2511
Web: cmcmusic.com.au

RRP: $449

WAY HUGE ATREIDIS ANALOG WEIRDING MODULE

A SYNTH-STYLE PEDAL READY TO GIVE YOUR MUSIC A SCI-FI FLAVOUR. REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

Way Huge designer Jeorge Tripps has been responsible for some weirdly named pedals in his time – this is the man behind the Swollen Pickle, the Camel Toe and the Purple Platypus, among others. This time, though, it's the pedal itself that's genuinely weird: the Atreides Analog Weirding Module offers a combination of envelope filter, fuzz, phaser and sub octave.

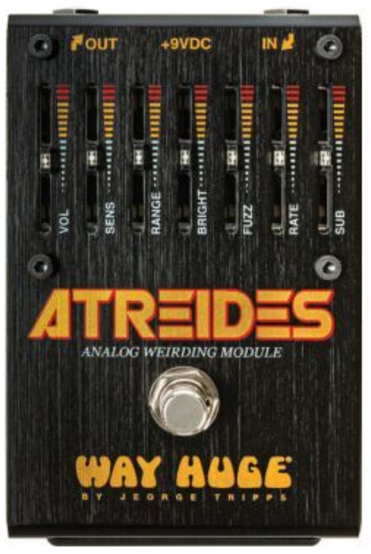
The pedal actually takes its name from David Lynch's 1984 film adaptation of the Frank Herbert Dune novel where the Weirding Module is a sonic beam weapon that translates sounds into attacks, and Paul Atreides is the protagonist. The pedal itself is said to take inspiration from the battery-powered Electro-Harmonix Mini Synth from the '80s, which is notable for its array of sliders.

Consequently, the control surface of the Atreides here consists of a set of seven sliders, all with a detente notch at their central travel position and all lighting up blue when the pedal is active. Setting up your sound requires a juxtaposition of the sliders to bring in the overall effect you require.

We thought that getting a fix on what each slider did would be advisable before diving straight in and arranging them in nice patterns, but, to be fair, plenty of happy accidents can result in playable sounds just by messing around with them. Of course, it's also possible to dial in an unholy row!

The first effect to dial in is an envelope filter that's controlled by the second and third sliders, which offer filter sensitivity and filter range respectively for some synth-style quackiness. If you want to add a bit of dirt to the stew, the fifth fader brings in a gnarly fuzz.

Modulation in the form of a phaser is also present with its rate controlled by the sixth slider. Should you want a more intense or maybe subdued effect, there's an internal trimmer to adjust the fader's feedback. The final slider in the array blends in a sub octave effect that can be set to be either one or two octaves down via an internal slide switch.



The thing with this pedal is that there's no null position of the sliders where there's no effect – if you only have the volume slider up and switch it out of bypass, you'll still get a basic distorted sound, which you can use as a starting point to bring the other sliders in and layer things together. Pushing up the Bright slider immediately gives you a snarky distortion that you can use for chords as well as single notes, but generally the pedal is monophonic.

Like just about every other guitar synth, you have to adjust your playing technique to get the best out of it without glitches, and maybe pay more attention to your fretboard position and pickup choice. With certain sounds, we found it behaved best with playing further up the fretboard when using the neck pickup.

There's a certain dynamic response so you can dig in and 'play' the pedal, but there's also gating built in so you can roll guitar volume back for staccato notes. As for the sounds, we quite liked the tone with just the sub octave with a little of the fuzz and phaser mixed in for a fat fusion lead tone.

Elsewhere, there's some robust riffing sounds to be extracted, plus plenty of warbly, growly and spiky nastiness that's possibly anathema to classic rock and blues purists, but may be exactly what's need for off-the-wall onstage impact. ag

▶ VERDICT

Is this for you? Well, ask yourself: do I want to get weird? If the answer is no, walk away now. Otherwise, this pedal could be the gateway to a whole new range of guitar tones and textures.

▶ PROS

- It's definitely weird.
- Nice control array in a compact size.
- Easy battery access.

▶ CONS

- Can require careful technique to play without glitches on some settings.

▶ CONTACT

Australian Music Supplies
Ph: (03) 9549 1500
Web: austmusic.com.au

RRP: $1,495 (CUTLASS CT50HSS) • $1,650 (MARIPOSA)

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN MARIPOSA AND CUTLASS CT50HSS

TWO STUNNING NEW STERLINGS THAT SHOW JUST HOW MUCH THE GAP BETWEEN ENTRY LEVEL AND FLAGSHIP GUITARS HAVE NARROWED. REVIEW BY **CHRIS GILL**.

Two new models recently introduced by Sterling by Music Man – the Mariposa and Cutlass CT50HSS – show just how much the gap between entry level and flagship guitars have narrowed in recent years. Both instruments are close enough to their Music Man equivalents to fool most audiences and players.

The Sterling by Music Man Mariposa features the same compact, angular body style of the Music Man model designed by Omar Rodriguez-Lopez, and the Sterling Cutlass CT50HSS is the equivalent of the Music Man Cutlass RS HSS, featuring a humbucker/single/single pickup configuration and Strat-like asymmetrical double-cutaway shape.

The necks are crafted from roasted maple and provide a 25.5-inch scale, 12-inch radius, 22 medium frets and 1.65-inch nut width. The necks are solidly attached to the body with five bolts at a smoothly sculpted heel, and the oversized Four-by-two headstocks are equipped with locking tuners.

The main differences are that the Mariposa's neck has a rosewood fingerboard with white pearloid block inlays and the headstock is painted to match the body, while the Cutlass CT50HSS has either a rosewood or roasted maple fingerboard both with dot markers and the headstock is not painted. Both models also include a vintage-style tremolo.

The Cutlass has a poplar body. The neck and middle single-coil pickups and bridge humbucker are Sterling by Music Man's own designs, wired to master volume and master tone controls and a five-position blade pickup selector switch that provides bridge, bridge/middle, middle, neck/middle and neck settings.

The Mariposa's body is crafted from nyatoh. The pair of custom artist humbuckers have chrome-plated covers, and the electronic circuit features individual volume controls for each pickup and a three-way toggle pickup switch. Although the Sterling versions here may not look quite as fancy as their Music Man counterparts to the trained eye, most players would not be able to tell the difference in feel and playability in a blindfolded comparison. Both have a smooth, fast playability and solid feel, and the attention to detail throughout the entire construction is impressive.



Both models have traditional nuts instead of the compensated nuts found on their Music Man counterparts, so the intonation, while excellent, isn't quite as meticulously dialled in. While they're made from different tonewoods than their Music Man equivalents, which are built from okoume and alder, respectively, they sound surprisingly similar as well. The Sterling Mariposa is slightly more aggressive and raw. The midrange is remarkably clear, providing outstanding clarity and definition whether played clean or with highly saturated distortion.

The Cutlass provides an attractive balance between harmonically rich humbucker and spanky, percussive single-coil tones with a sparkly-but-full-bodied treble. Both instruments have a ton of distinctive character, standing far above most competing solidbodies in their class. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Sterling Mariposa and Cutlass CT50HSS are outstanding, versatile instruments that far outperform their surprising affordability.

▶ PROS

- Both models feature necks crafted from roasted maple that provides the lively tone and strength of a vintage, aged neck.

▶ CONS

- None.

▶ CONTACT

CMC Music
Ph: (02) 9905 2511
Web: cmcmusic.com.au

FENDER DHANI HARRISON SIGNATURE UKULELE

RRP: $549

AN ARTICULATE ACOUSTIC-ELECTRIC FOR UKE PLAYERS OF ALL SORTS AND SKILL LEVELS. REVIEW BY **JIMMY LESLIE**.

Fender continues to expand its line of unique ukes for the Artist Signature Series, and this time they got a little help from a fab friend. Dhani Harrison has worked with an expansive range of artists, from Wu-Tang to Jeff Lynne (who did a bit of Traveling with Harrison's Wilbury papa, who was himself in an influential band from Liverpool). Dhani Harrison has impressive ukulele chops, and, like a lot of guitar players, he finds the uke is a handy writing tool. He enlisted Fender to develop a signature model well-suited to the stage. Harrison drew inspiration from Kamaka Ukulele of Hawaii, saying, "No two are the same, and each handmade individual is off the charts. My model is mass produced, so we asked ourselves, What is the highest level of mass production we can achieve?" The result is a tenor of three-quarter depth, with a solid top, onboard electronics and one-of-a-kind aesthetics.

Well, actually two of a kind. The Dhani Harrison Signature comes in two cool hues: Sapphire Blue Transparent and Turquoise. Each has distinctive fretboard inlays – moon phases on the Turquoise, and what looks like a puff of smoke for the Sapphire's main inlay – and Shiva Yantra engravings on the back. I love turquoise and anything celestial, so I was about to request the Turquoise model when I noticed the mystical engraving on the Sapphire's back and went that way. To me, it resembles the distinctive Harrison brow, with wide eyes and bushy eyebrows, plus a cosmic third eye and a snake-like nose. Regarding the Shiva designs, Harrison remarks, "I just tried to think of something that I would want to look at every day for the rest of my life."

This ukulele has a full, bound neck that feels familiar in hands accustomed to acoustic guitars. The build is light but sturdy, with detailed craftsmanship. Playability is smooth and easy across the walnut fretboard, which offers plenty of space for fingerpicking and forming chords. Linear licks flow freely with strong note definition. The intonation is great until about the ninth fret, when it starts to fall flat, like a lot of ukes. Having an onboard tuner is handy. Playability is practical until the neck meets the body at the 14th fret. The fretboard seems to go on longer than one expects, and I suppose there are two reasons: First, the instrument's thinner body makes it seem smaller than it actually is. The tenor is the third largest of the four main ukulele body types. "It's the ukulele by which the standard is set," Harrison says. Second, the scale length on his signature model is 17 inches, compared to, say, the 15-inch scale of Fender's concert-sized Fullerton Jazzmaster, which by contrast seems larger because of its unique body shape.



The Dhani Harrison Signature's particular characteristics combine to create a unique tone. Its solid ovangkol top, combined with laminated ovangkol back and sides at three-quarter depth on a tenor platform, add up to a sound that has the presence of a concert or soprano and the greater string energy of a tenor. This uke has plenty of pop, projection and volume. Harrison says, "Ovangkol is a fantastic wood that was the nearest thing we could get to Hawaiian koa, which is too scarce for mass production." The tone is clear, with a quick attack and a rather sharp decay as well. This uke's dry acoustic tone is a little plinky compared to its more resonant amplified tone, which sounded surprisingly powerful, if not perfectly pristine, through an Acoustic Junior GO. Asked about its "upgraded electronics," Harrison says, "I just kept telling them to upgrade: make it better, smaller and better and lighter. We pushed the limits of how big it could be for the best acoustic sound, but not too thick like a lot of others that would just feedback onstage." ag

▶ VERDICT

Those on the hunt for a warm, fuzzy-sounding acoustic uke to take to the beach might want to check out one of Fender's many full-bodied models, but the articulate acoustic-electric Dhani Harrison Signature, with its fabulous look, smooth playability and powerful amplified tone, earns bonus points for being super stageworthy at an accessible price.

▶ PROS

- Looks fabulous and plays well.
- Sounds particularly powerful amplified.
- Good gig bag.

▶ CONS

- None.

▶ CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

FENDER MUSTANG MICRO

FENDER'S TINY NEW HEADPHONE AMP IS BRIMMING WITH VIBEY AMP MODELS AND EFFECTS FOR A CRAZY GOOD PRICE. WHERE DO THEY PUT IT ALL?. REVIEW BY **JAMIE DICKSON**.

Though it's smaller than a credit card (albeit thicker) the Mustang Micro can do a lot. It can serve as everything from a silent practice tool to a recording interface, with 12 classic amp models and an equal number of effects onboard, ranging from slapback delay to harmonic tremolo. Fender wanted the Mustang Micro to offer a feature-rich but intuitive user experience and, largely speaking, it achieves it – with one or two caveats.

To get going, fold out the quarter-inch jack built into the unit, plug that into your guitar then plug your headphones into the Micro. A sliding on-off switch turns it on, whereupon four coloured lights fire up, each mounted above a plus/minus rocker switch on the opposite edge of the device.

These switches select (from left to right): the amp model in use; the EQ mode; the effect applied to the selected amp model; and a Modify function that alters a key parameter of that effect, whether it be Delay Level or the Rate of a flanger. There's a single dial on the front of the Mustang Micro for volume, plus a Bluetooth-pairing function that's engaged by sliding the on-off switch left, allowing you to jam to music streamed from a mobile device.

The first amp model, by default, is a '65 Twin with added compression, while further clicks of the Amp + button takes you on through the famous names of Fender history, including a '57 Twin model and some more eclectic stuff, such as an AC30. The amps are arranged in groups of four, with the first group being Clean, the next Crunch and the last High-Gain; plus a Direct mode that just gives a preamp'd signal but no modelling.

Sounds are very decent, if bright, but you can tone that down with the EQ switch, which shifts through five preset EQ settings from extra-dark to brighter than Einstein. The high-gain tones, inspired by Bogner, EVH and Friedman classics, are especially impressive, being girthy and articulate. The model of a 2290 Delay is also nice, and it was easy to dial in vibey cleans with reverb and trem. ag



▶ VERDICT

The tones might not be quite up to Kemper standard, but they ain't light-years away either, making the Micro a very handy tool for silent practice sessions, demo recordings and writing songs on the go.

▶ PROS

- Wide range of surprisingly usable tones and handy functions.
- Simple controls and small size.

▶ CONS

- Feels just a little flimsy and vulnerable to damage.
- The 12 hues of light indicating mode are confusing without the manual to hand.

▶ CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

RRP: $259

FENDER '68 CUSTOM VIBRO CHAMP REVERB AMP

IF YOU'VE NEVER GOTTEN YOUR VIBE ON WITH A CHAMP, THIS IS A GREAT WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE MAGIC. REVIEW BY **ART THOMPSON**.

RRP: $1,499

In fall 1964, Fender introduced the blackface Champ and Vibro Champ models. Both retained the single 6V6 power tube running in single-ended Class A but added bass and treble controls and a three-knob tone stack, as well as a "vibrato" circuit with speed and intensity controls on the Vibro Champ. Equipped with an eight-inch speaker, the new Champs were favoured for their warm, clear tones and mild overdrive when cranked.



Debuting in 2021, the '68 Custom Vibro Champ Reverb is a modified version of the old classic that is decked out in late-'60s drip-edged garb, with a silver control panel and a silver/turquoise grille with aluminium trim. On the inside it features a ten-inch Celestion Ten 30 speaker and a foot-switchable DSP hall reverb with a level control. The amp has a modern-style PCB that grips most of the smaller components, however, the output and power transformers (both from Schumacher, as per original spec), AC switch, receptacle for the detachable AC cord, and hand-wired ceramic socket for the 6V6 are mounted to the steel chassis. The plywood cabinet is neatly covered in black Tolex, and the amp weighs in at just over 22 pounds.

I tested the Vibro Champ Reverb with a Reverend Greg Koch signature Gristlemaster, and a Gibson Historic '59 Les Paul and '63 Les Paul Junior, all of which sounded terrific through this little dynamo. The Class A circuit delivers a rich tone, with clarity and sparkle to spare, and the two-band EQ facilitates getting great sounds from humbuckers and single-coils in clean and distorted modes. The amp produces smooth grind that starts at around four on the volume knob and becomes progressively more saturated and sustaining as you turn up. With the volume at around eight, the Vibro Champ Reverb is fun to pummel with a humbucker or P-90, producing a fat, crisp tone that's very responsive to the guitar volume and cleans up beautifully when you roll down.

The sounds have good balance and presence, and the low-end delivery and volume are impressive for the size. It's bigger sounding than I expected and has more of everything – including gain – than my stock 1965 Vibro Champ. Of course, a lot of the credit goes to the ceramic-magnet Celestion Ten 30, which is an excellent speaker choice thanks to its focused delivery at all levels and detailed presentation when driving it hard.

The reverb also sounds surprisingly sweet and natural. Turning it up to a shade under three was perfect for a classic blackface response that sounded cool with a little grit added from either a Fulltone OCD or a Hermida Zen Drive. And you can wick up the 'verb for a splashier, more reflective sound and the DSP stays clear and noise-free. Add some juicy pulse of the unique (at least for Fender) tremolo, which uses preamp-tube bias shifting to create a distinctly deep sound over a wide range of speed and intensity levels, and you've got a righteous combination that makes this amp so fun and inspiring to play. ag

▶ VERDICT

The '68 Custom Vibro Champ Reverb could be the most flexible single-ended, true Class-A amp Fender has ever produced, and kudos to them for keeping the old-school charm of this little classic alive. If you've never gotten your vibe on with a Champ, this is a great way to experience the magic.

▶ PROS

- A great-sounding, updated version of the tremolo-equipped tube combo from 1968.

▶ CONS

- Two-button reverb/vibrato foot switch not included.

▶ CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

GRETSCH G2627T STREAMLINER

FENDER BRINGS FORWARD THE LEGACY OF NEIL YOUNG'S SLASHING SOLOS AND THE CHUNKY ROCK RHYTHMS OF BILLY DUFFY AND MALCOM YOUNG. WORDS BY **MICHAEL ROSS**.

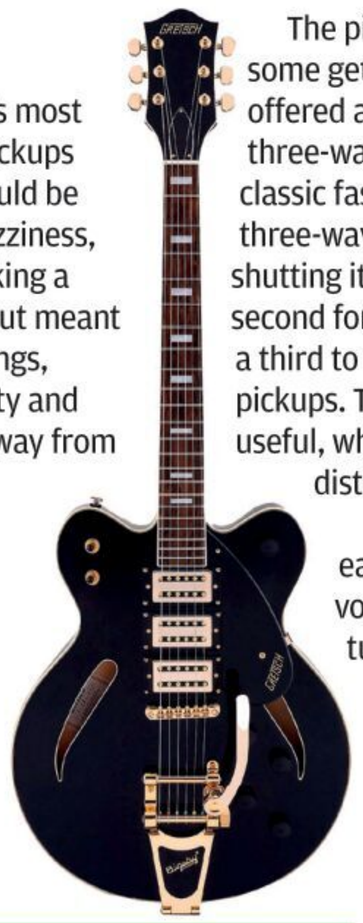
RRP: $1,399

Gretsch has been peppering the market with a plethora of models in the past few years. The Streamliner series offers a centre-block version for players who desire some acoustic attitude but also want to crank the volume and/or distortion level without uncontrollable feedback. To that end, the G2627T sports a semi-hollow maple body with a spruce centre block running the length of the body to reinforce the top while preventing nasty howling.

Finished in gloss black with white binding and gold hardware, the test model presented a classy appearance. Cat's-eye sound holes and a Bigsby tailpiece conspired to add some vintage Gretsch style to this otherwise modern update. Constructed of sustainable woods, the nato neck provides a sound similar to mahogany, while the laurel fingerboard could be mistaken for attractive rosewood. A thin U-shape neck profile, medium jumbo frets, a 12-inch radius and a solid setup made for superb playability, easy bending and a comfortable action level, with no buzzing or fretting out.

The G2627T is touted as a rock beast, and to that end it comes equipped with three Broad'Tron humbucking pickups, Gretsch's most powerful. While not lacking top end, the pickups are noticeably boosted in the bass. This could be a plus in high-gain situations, mitigating fizziness, though it might be less ideal for those seeking a twang machine. That said, their extra output meant I could lower them well away from the strings, which simultaneously increased their clarity and moved them (especially the middle one) away from my picking hand.

While still not in Filter'Tron territory, I was able to eke out some rich, rootsy, if slightly dark tones through both a Supro Comet and a Fender Blues Junior. Once distortion entered the picture, courtesy of a Jetter Jetdrive or added amp volume, the Broad'Trons came into their own, easily driving both pedals and amps, and sounding full, but not muddy.



The pickup switching system and controls took some getting used to, but once mastered they offered an extensive variety of tones. One of the three-way toggles handles the neck and bridge in classic fashion: neck, bridge or both. The second three-way controls the middle pickup, one position shutting it off for standard two-pickup operation; a second for combining with neck, bridge or both; and a third to turn it on while shutting off the other two pickups. This last setting proved to be surprisingly useful, whether for slide or paired with mild distortion for some atmospheric ambience.

The knobs offer individual volumes for each pickup, a master tone and a master volume. The G2627T is wired such that turning any pickup all the way off shuts down all sound, even when combined with another pickup. This allows classic stutter effects, but it also means you have to be careful when making fine adjustments to multi-pickup configurations. ag

▶ VERDICT

For much of its history, Gretsch meant mostly Chet Atkins fingerstyle, Cliff Gallup rockabilly or Duane Eddy twang. These days, the company is bringing the legacy of Neil Young's slashing solos and the chunky rock rhythms of Billy Duffy and Malcom Young to the fore. Though the G2627T emphasises the latter, it may still be worth checking out even if you are into the former.

▶ PROS

- Easy to play.
- Wide range of sounds.
- Bang for your buck.

▶ CONS

- Pickups a little dark sounding.

▶ CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

RRP: $2,849

FENDER JASON ISBELL CUSTOM TELECASTER

A POTENT NEW COUNTRY-ROCK WEAPON THAT LOOKS AS COOL AS IT SOUNDS. REVIEW BY **ART THOMPSON**.

Telecasters with customised hardware, tech, finishes and so on have been a big part of Fender's product line for years. The Jason Isbell Custom Telecaster is the latest model to be hybridised by mixing components from different eras, while also bringing all-new elements into the mix when deemed necessary by Isbell and the Fender design team.

"I went with a few different Teles I really like and sort of put together my favourite features of each one for this guitar," says the guitarist/singer/songwriter and beacon of the Americana scene. "I liked the look of the double-bound body on my Tele Custom from '59 or '60, and I have a Custom Shop version of it that I put a black pickguard on. We went with those things purely for the look.

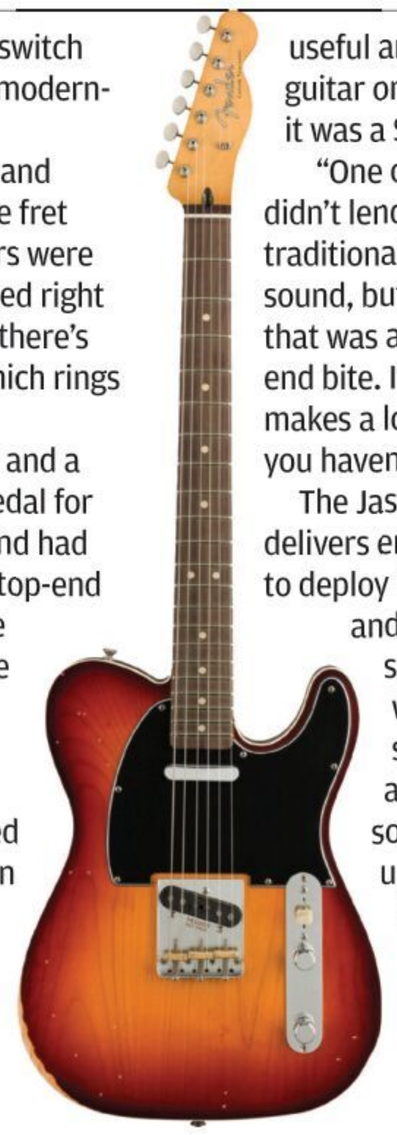
"We also used a traditional bridge with brass saddles, but the edges of the bridge are cut away to make it easier to mute with your right hand and play that much closer to the saddles. We also put a truss-rod access on the headstock to make it easier to adjust the neck, because you don't have to take it apart."

The Jason Isbell Custom Telecaster features a Road Worn Chocolate sunburst lacquer finish and aged hardware. For the most part, it resembles a well-used vintage Tele, except for the engraved neck plate and aforementioned headstock rout. Although not readily visible unless you take off the chromed switch plate, the wiring in the control cavity is modern-style vinyl insulated, not cloth-covered.

The JICT came set up with low action and sweet-sounding intonation, however, the fret ends were a little ragged, the nut corners were sharp, and the zipper on the gig bag failed right off the bat. Otherwise, it plays well and there's plenty to like about its acoustic tone, which rings out clearly and has good sustain.

Plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Vox AC10 C1, and with a Fulltone OCD pedal for grind, the JICT sounded deep and rich and had a balanced presentation of fatness and top-end bite. The brightness and presence of the neck pickup was immediately noticeable for how it stands on its own and how it combines with the bridge pickup to deliver an open and articulate sound.

"The neck pickup is basically a Twisted Tele, but it breaks up a little quicker than they have in the past," Isbell explains. "Tim Shaw [Fender's chief engineer] has been working on that pickup design, and it sounds a little more like a Strat pickup, which makes it more useful and musical to me. In fact, I could play this guitar on the neck pickup and convince people that it was a Stratocaster.



"One of the things about a Telecaster that didn't lend itself to my style of playing was that the traditional neck pickup is much darker. I like that sound, but it wasn't as useful to me as something that was a little more scooped and had more high-end bite. It handles the fuzz pedal well and just makes a lot of sense, because it gives you an option you haven't typically had with a Telecaster."

The Jason Isbell Custom Telecaster certainly delivers enough clarity and punch in the neck setting to deploy it as an alternate texture for rhythm and lead work, and it brings more girth and sparkle to the dual-pickup position. Coupled with the excellent bridge pickup, this new signature Telecaster gives country-rockers a potent new weapon that looks as cool as it sounds. It's great that Fender is still coming up with ways to improve one of the greatest electric guitars ever made, and the fact that the JICT is priced within reach of working players should make Jason Isbell feel pretty stoked about his new signature Tele. ag

▶ VERDICT

The Jason Isbell Custom Telecaster certainly delivers enough clarity and punch in the neck setting to deploy it as an alternate texture for rhythm and lead work, and it brings more girth and sparkle to the dual-pickup position.

▶ PROS

- A great-sounding Tele, with a distinctive look.

▶ CONS

- Selector button slips off easily when flicking the switch.

▶ CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

EVH 5150 SERIES STANDARD

RRP: $1,799

AN IRRESISTIBLY EXCITING GUITAR MADE TO SCREAM FOR YOU. REVIEW BY **PAUL RIARIO**.

The stripped-down appeal of the EVH Striped Series of guitars will most likely never lose its enduring popularity for Van Halen fans and players alike. Even the many iterations of the Wolfgang series adopted by numerous artists continues to grow by leaps and bounds. But if you ask me, I've been digging the EVH 5150 Series Standard guitar, which combines the very best attributes of Eddie Van Halen's famed "5150" guitar along with the refined tones of Eddie's innovatively designed Wolfgang guitars.

As much as I loved my first VH-approved guitar when I was a youngster (a 1984 Kramer Baretta), having just one pickup and a volume control severely limited my tonal possibilities – because, hey, I'm no Eddie Van Halen. Thankfully, the new EVH 5150 Series Standard guitar expands upon the EVH Superstrat theme with some extras and updated tweaks that turn this guitar into more than just a one-trick pony.

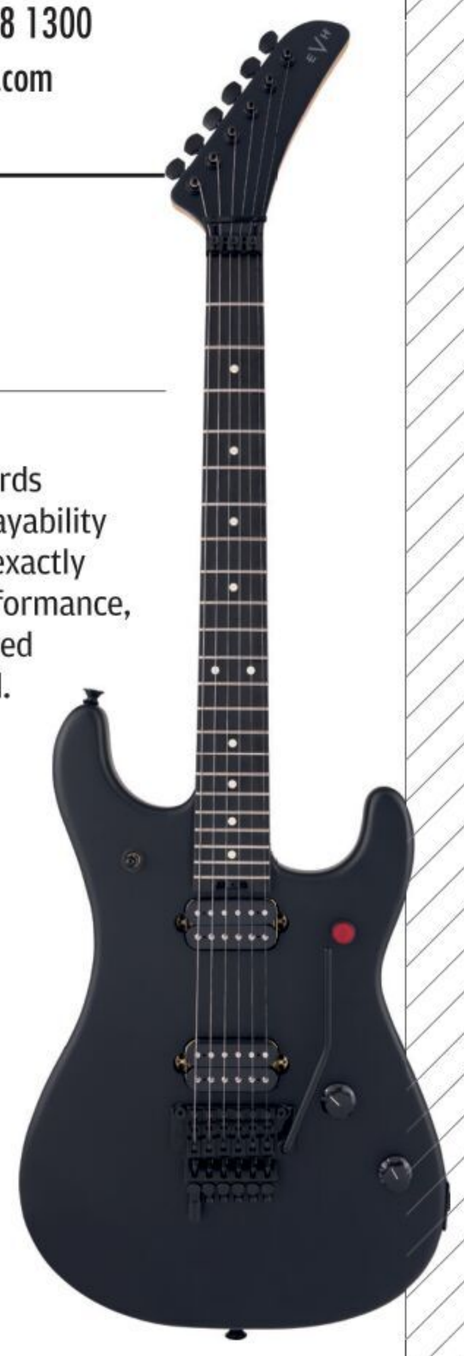
The 5150 Standard is about as feature-packed as you can get in a stripped-down design. Pressed against your belly you'll notice its slightly modified Strat-style basswood body possesses a deeper upper-body curve for close comfort. The bolt-on quarter-sawn maple neck is graphite-reinforced and features a modified 'C' profile that's comfortably slim and flat, with a hand-rubbed satin urethane back finish, and a 12-to-16-inch compound radius ebony fingerboard with 22 jumbo frets and cream dot inlays.

What's nice to see is the addition of a heel-mount truss rod wheel for ease in making quick neck adjustments, and of course, the iconic "hockey stick" headstock that's colour-matched to the body. What's new is the HH pickup configuration of two custom-designed EVH Wolfgang Alnico 2 humbucking pickups controlled by low-friction volume and tone knobs, along with a three-way toggle switch, now found on the upper bout rather than the bottom cutaway.

Where the old toggle switch used to be is now a lower bout kill switch button, great for replicating Van Halen's on/off stutter effect on "You Really Got Me". Of course, the guitar isn't complete without an EVH-branded top-mount Floyd Rose locking tremolo with EVH D-Tuna and EVH-branded Gotoh tuning machines.

I don't need to mince words to describe the feel and playability of the 5150 Standard – it's exactly as it looks, a total high-performance, hot-rodded guitar engineered for you to play at top speed. The pickups are boldfaced but remain intensely focused under the most punishing distortion pumped through them, and are seriously some of the best pickups for articulating amps with high-gain preamps.

In short, with all its fully loaded features and affordability, the 5150 Standard is an irresistibly exciting guitar made to scream for you. ag



▶ VERDICT

The new EVH 5150 Series Standard guitar expands upon the EVH Superstrat theme with some extras and updated tweaks that turn this guitar into more than just a one-trick pony.

▶ PROS

- About as feature-packed as you can get in a stripped-down design.
- Heel-mount truss rod wheel.

▶ CONS

- None.

▶ CONTACT

Fender
Ph: (02) 8198 1300
Web: fender.com

A SHORTAGE OF SHRED

THE GUITAR'S SURGE IN POPULARITY OVER THE PANDEMIC IS CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION – BUT IT HAS LEFT MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP WITH DEMAND.

WORDS BY **SIMON CHANDLER**.

If you've tried to buy a new electric guitar over the past six months or so, you may have noticed something fairly strange: guitar stores don't have much stock. While retailers are very far from completely running out of new electrics, popular ranges seem to be selling out in a few weeks or even days, leaving those who want a particular model from a major brand – such as Fender and Gibson – with little option but to join a waiting list.

I know this from experience, having been lucky enough to buy two new Fenders since Covid-19 put life on hold. The first was an American Ultra HSS RW Stratocaster, which I originally wanted in Cobra Blue, but had to 'settle' for in Ultraburst after being told by my local store that I'd be waiting at least two months for another shipment. The second was an American Professional II Jazzmaster RW Mercury, the only colour and fretboard option left in the recently launched Pro II Jazzmaster line.

However, it's not only personal experience which reveals stock issues, but multiple conversations with guitar manufacturers and retailers. Across the board, makers and stores report that a combination of record demand and the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an electric guitar shortage in many parts of the world.

MANUFACTURING CONTRACTION MEETS A SPIKE IN INTEREST

While some manufacturers would shy away from specifically using the word "shortage," all acknowledge that demand is currently outstripping supply. As Fender Product's EVP Justin Norvell explains, there are two main reasons for this.

"The challenge we are currently working through is that there was an initial contraction when global lockdowns occurred, and companies had to react by either ceasing or reducing output. That was then immediately followed by a sustained spike in interest, and the two extremes were very close together, so as a result there is some catch-up that's currently taking place industry wide," he says.

Fender actually enjoyed its best year of sales in 2020, with CEO Andy Mooney telling the New York Times in September that 2020 would be "the biggest year of sales volume in Fender history." He also reported that the company witnessed "record days of double-digit growth, e-commerce sales and beginner gear sales," as people –including a growing proportion of women – sought to fill days at home with creative pursuits.

Gibson CEO James Curleigh reported a similar story to the Times. "We literally couldn't deliver enough [guitars]," he said. "Everything we were making, we could sell."

But when you take a surge in interest and add disruption to production, you end up with a situation that has prevailed since at least the second half of last year: a relative lack of electric guitars in stores. "It backs up all the way through the supply chain of components and raw materials, however it's important to note that we realise we are in a better circumstance than other industries like the automotive sector, which has been hit hard by the current chip shortage," Justin Norvell says.

DEMAND IS "50 PERCENT HIGHER" THAN SUPPLY

Fender itself doesn't provide a breakdown of how far supply is currently falling short of demand. However, retailers are a little more forthcoming with figures. "We're more than 50 percent over last year with the slope of demand remaining consistent. In many instances, as soon as we receive guitars, allow them to acclimate for 24 hours, and complete our best-in-class 55-point inspection, they ship right back out to customers," says Shep Shepherd, the VP of merchandising at Sweetwater.

The problem appears to be even more acute in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. Andertons – one of the biggest guitar stores in the UK – says that the supply of many guitar-related products has been a problem for the retailer over the past 12 months. "An increase in demand coupled with factory closures and supply chain disruption has meant that in some months demand has been up to 50 percent higher than we're able to supply," says MD Lee Anderton.

Anderton also notes that this issue is affecting North American electrics more than Asian-made alternatives. "It seems that the South Asian manufacturers were quicker to get over the supply problems than the western brands were. Even now we still have significant shortages on American-made products," he says.

Even in the United States, imports of non-American electrics declined in 2020, resulting in a supply shortage for anyone who wanted a more affordable model. According to Music Trades' latest Import Tracker report, imports into the U.S. declined by 15.8 percent in 2020 compared to 2019, with guitars from China making up the bulk of incoming stock.

A NEW NORMAL

As difficult as it may be right now to buy your first-choice electric guitar in your first-choice colour, manufacturers report that their situation is improving constantly. "We are making progress every day and the great news is that demand remains high, so it's not indicative of a temporary spike. It appears to be a movement and a new normal, which we are adapting the business to meet," says Justin Norvell.

Stores also confirm a steady increase in stock, with Sweetwater expecting things to return to normal in the second half of the year. "We're confident that our in-stock position will progressively improve each week for the next several months and stabilise late this year as our vendor partners do their very best to supply instruments to help us grow more players and help people pursue their musical dreams," says Shep Shepherd.

Across the pond, the situation seems a little less sanguine, even if retailers are hardly complaining about the explosion in demand. "Some major brands are suggesting that by March/April 2021 they will have taken orders for everything they can produce in 2021!" reports Lee Anderton. "It means we're having to forecast orders up to 12 months in advance in order to secure the stock we want."

This obviously makes things difficult for stores, but looking at the longer term picture, the rise in interest is extremely encouraging for the guitar industry and music in general. As Justin Norvell concludes, "This renaissance is a positive for the music community. It may lead to a music boom in the near-future and some new genre, style, or movement, which is exciting." ag



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