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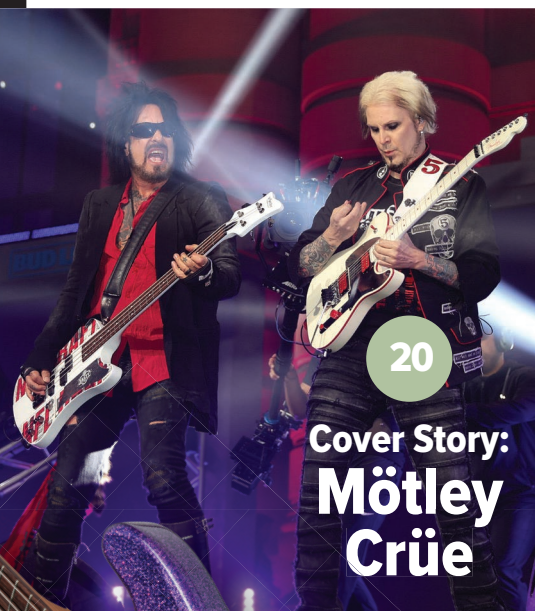
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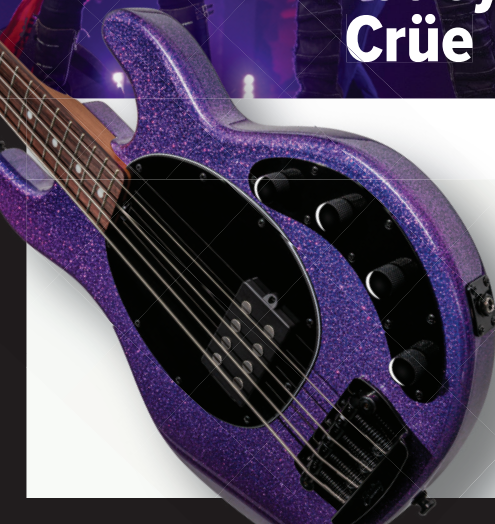
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BRIAN MAY WARNS OF AI THREAT TO MUSICIANS

Brian May has joined the chorus of musicians who have raised concerns over generative AI and the future of the music industry, with the Queen guitarist warning that the technology will have transformed society within the year.

AI might not have the imagination nor the wherewithal to construct a homemade electric guitar out of a fireplace, as May and his father did with the Red Special, but its capability to replicate the sound of established artists and create new music in that style has the potential to disrupt the music business as we know it.

In a recent interview with *Guitar Player*, May admitted he was “apprehensive” about how the issue of authorship will play out in the era of generative AI.

“My major concern with it now is in the artistic area. I think by this time next year the landscape will be completely different. We won’t know which way is up,” he said. “We won’t know what’s been created by AI and what’s been created by humans. Everything is going to get very blurred and very confusing.”

May is no luddite. He is a man of science, with a PhD in astrophysics from Imperial College London. May acknowledges that there will be great benefits from AI, specifically its capacity for problem solving. But there are dangers, and May believes we will soon see what implications generative AI has for the music industry.

“I think we might look back on 2023 as the last year when humans really dominated the music scene,” he said. “I really think it could be that serious, and that doesn’t fill me with joy. It makes me feel apprehensive, and I’m preparing to feel sad about this.”

Words by Jonathan Horsley,

Photo credit: Classic Rock Magazine



KEVIN SHIELDS’ SIGNATURE FENDER SHIELDS BLENDER SOLD OUT INSTANTLY, BUT NOW IT’S BACK – AND CHEAPER

Back in June, Fender announced a signature product for My Bloody Valentine’s sonic architect, Kevin Shields – and while it wasn’t the Jazzmaster we were all quietly hoping for, the Shields Blender was a genuinely exciting release: not only was it Fender’s first-ever signature fuzz pedal, it also revived the bonkers ’70s classic with a wealth of Shields-approved tweaks.

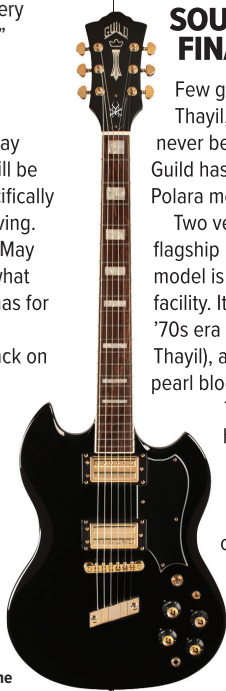
Despite a US \$499 price point, the pedal’s initial 700 units sold out within days (and to their surprise, early purchasers found themselves with new music from Kevin Shields hidden on a USB stick inside the stompbox).

Suffice to say, a lot of players were left wanting. But thankfully, Fender has seen fit to release the Shields Blender as a non-limited, production-line pedal – and with a sizeable discount, to boot.

Sonically and practically, the new version of the Shields Blender appears to be the same. But these won’t be numbered, limited-edition units built in the USA. Rather, these are made-in-China, production-line pedals, and the \$549 price tag – yep, those are Australian dollars – reflects that.

That buys you a lot of retro-flavored fuzz. The Shields Blender starts with a Fender Blender circuit based around Kevin Shields’ original pedal, but adds an octave-up footswitch for increased flexibility.

Two footswitchable channels offer choice of the fuzz voice blended with the clean signal, or the fuzz blended with a monophonic sub octave fuzz. The feature Shields is most excited about, however, is the sag circuit, which adjusts the pedal’s fuzz to your playing dynamics by starving transistors of power. It’s a unique effect quite unlike anything else. Words by Michael Astley-Brown Photo credit: Fender



SOUNDGARDEN GUITARIST KIM THAYIL FINALLY HAS A SIGNATURE GUILD S-100

Few guitarists are as synonymous with Guild Guitars as Kim Thayil, yet owing to a series of twists of fate, a signature guitar never became a reality for the Soundgarden hero. Now, finally, Guild has announced the Thayil x Guild range of signature S-100 Polara models.

Two versions of the S-100 Polara Kim Thayil will be available: a flagship USA Artist Edition and a production-line guitar. The USA model is a limited run of 30 guitars master-built in Guild’s California facility. It features a Honduran mahogany body and neck, Guild’s ’70s era enlarged headstock with slim neck shape (as specified by Thayil), and a bound Indian rosewood fingerboard with mother-of-pearl block inlays, plus Grover Original Rotomatic tuners.

This USA incarnation features custom Guild USA HB-1 humbuckers hand-wound by Jason Lollar, complete with phase switch, as well as a reproduction Guild/Mueller style bridge and compensated stopbar tailpiece.

Each guitar features a white nitrocellulose finish and comes in a custom case with a certificate of authenticity, and will be hand-signed by Kim Thayil. Accordingly, there’s a serious price tag attached: \$6,999 US dollars.

The regular production run is less pricey of course: you should be able to nab one for less than two grand in Australia. Words by Michael Astley-Brown, Photo credit: Guild

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#155

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GATHERING NO MOSS

FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF HIS EIGHTH SOLO ALBUM, COLD CHISEL FOUNDING MEMBER AND SOLO ARTIST **IAN MOSS** REFLECTS ON THE UPLIFTING CREATION OF THE GENRE-DIVERSE *RIVERS RUN DRY*.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTOS BY **ROBERT HAMBLING**.

In the early '70s, before Cold Chisel became Australia's most popular rock band, a much-younger Ian Moss was described by bandmate Jimmy Barnes as "a boy from the bush who didn't wear shoes...but played fantastic". Now approaching his 50th year as a successful recording artist, both as a solo talent and with Cold Chisel, 'Mossy' has received multiple accolades for a musical life of projects and endeavours that keep him traveling across Australia.

Before his 1989 ARIA chart-topping solo debut *Matchbook* in 1989, Moss lent his creative and vocal talents to many popular Chisel songs, including *East's* 'Never Before', and *Circus Animals'* 'Bow River'. In tour mode, he continues his travels through capital cities while also performing in rural towns similar to those of his formative years. When he's not on the road, Moss resides with his family in Sydney's Inner West, where he stays busy with the writing and recording of his original songs. His current discography spans many styles, which are woven into a rich tapestry of rock and blues to R&B and acoustic works.

As his latest full-length release in five years, *Rivers Run Dry* finds Moss sharing new slices of rock power alongside tender pieces of songwriting, which are enhanced by his stellar six-string soloing, his band's seasoned chemistry, and fresh collaborations with notable Australian talents. The completion of *Rivers Run Dry* now sees Moss premiering songs from the record live in two national tours.

Following in the long-traveling footsteps of his dad, Moss' son Julian is taking part in the band tour, complimenting his appearances on *Rivers Run Dry*. The first of these tours included a full-band lineup and was aimed at capital cities, while the second is a solo-acoustic (ad)venture that will last until December, with a more regional reach. The skillful members of Moss's handpicked live band include former players for the likes of Paul Kelly, Neil Finn, Joe Bonnamassa,

and Missy Higgins. Happy to be escaping the cramped streets of Sydney with a new solo album under his belt, on the way to clearer skies and wider pastures, Ian Moss joined us for a chat about inspiration, writing, and his time making *Rivers Run Dry*, along with some cracking yarns and wisdom.

One of your signature songs is 'Bow River' from Cold Chisel's *Circus Animals* [1982], about the same type of water that you reference in the title of *Rivers Run Dry*. What is it about rivers that invites lyrical inspiration for you?

When you think of a river, you're out there, you're out in the open. I like evoking these kinds of images. Having been born and raised in Alice Springs, we had lots of things that we called rivers, but they were dry creek beds really. When they flooded, it was such a massive event. The whole town would stop, and we'd drop everything. I must confess to not knowing what the Aboriginal name for the river [I had in mind for 'Rivers Run Dry'] is, but the white name is the Todd River. For 'Bow River', I was writing while imagining that place. I found Bow River on a map. It's near the Northern Territory, just inside the Western Australian border.

Are most of these songs new compositions or have you been holding on to some of them for a while?

Some go back ten or 15 years. With 'I'm Going Back' and 'What Can I Do', the music was mostly written, but the songs ended up lying around waiting for lyrics. 'Rivers Run Dry', the title track, is pretty much brand new. I've always maintained friendships with childhood mates, so ['Rivers Run Dry' was inspired by] a guy I've known since the age of three, who suffered a big stroke a few years ago, at around the time I had commenced writing 'Rivers Run Dry'. They were pretty sure he wouldn't pull through at all. Thankfully he has; he's somewhat worse for wear, of course, but he's

dealing with it. There's also a song from Mark Lizotte [AKA Diesel] called 'Open Your Eyes'. He wrote it with his daughter Lily. [Dragon drummer] Kerry Jacobson's 'The Wish' was a new song. There's also a song by Don Walker [from Cold Chisel], called 'Miss You In The Night' [along with 'What Can I Do', another Moss/Walker composition].

The album's lead single 'Nullarbor Plain' was co-written with Troy Cassar-Daley. How did that come about?

My association with Troy probably began somewhere around 2010. I didn't realise Troy was a fan of mine. He was recording an album that was stepping away from the country thing for a bit, into blues and soul songs. I got the call, and he invited me to come up and do a duet. I was a bit hesitant at first, but then I heard him sing and I was quite surprised at how bluesy he sounded. We then connected with Don [Walker]. Troy's quite a car nut, he loves tinkering with cars and he knows everything about them. Don was writing a song for Cold Chisel's *No Plans* album [with the working title] 'Big Ol' Car', so Troy got involved in that and the association kept going from there. 'I'm Going Back' is another track on *Rivers Run Dry* that I'd had sitting around for a long time, waiting for lyrics, and Troy was the perfect dude to hit up for some lyrics. For 'Nullarbor Plain', we were looking for a rocker, we both messed around, and pretty soon it didn't take as long to come up with that one. Its lyrics revolved around a great story from Troy, about a muscle car, the 351 Shaker. I'm not showing my age too much: anyone who's into cars is going to know about the 351 Shaker.

Have you driven across the Nullarbor Plain yourself?

A couple of times. The first time was way back in 1976. Cold Chisel had been together for three years

and we had a bunch of gigs in Perth, and we were still living in Adelaide at the time. Back then it was 300kms of unsealed, corrugated road across the Nullarbor Plain. We struggled to get a hire car back in those days, due to being a rock 'n' roll band, but we finally got one from one company. Looking at the tires on it, you'd sue the shit out of a company these days if they gave you a car like that. They're like those tires you're given as a spare. Well, we had four of those to travel to Perth on. On the way back our tires started to blow out. At one point we were flying along with the back laid down, three guys in the back and three guys in the front. I was just drifting off to sleep, when I felt two tyres leave the road as the car did this big 360-degree spin and stayed in a straight line, going straight back to where it's headed. That was one way to cross the Nullarbor in style. I did it again ten years ago, it was just something that I wanted to do. I do love my driving.

Another notable collaboration on this album is with Kasey Chambers, on the track 'Bury Me'. Have you known Kasey for a while, or was this a recent connection?

I've only met Kasey two or three times over the years. The song was penned in 2019 by an Australian couple, Jay and Mark O'Shea, who live in Nashville. It was definitely meant to be a duet. When it came time to record *Rivers Run Dry*, my first priority was to see if Kasey would be interested [in the song], because it definitely is from that bluegrass, country style. She accepted, and I'm really happy with the result.

How's your current working relationship with your old Cold Chisel bandmate Don Walker?

We haven't been in a studio for a while, but I've got a really strong connection with Don. I feel at home whenever we get a chance to get in the studio and write together. He's a master lyricist, so I feel fortunate and blessed that I can call on him to help me out when I need help with lyrics. He's the kind of guy where if I give him some music, he has to be into it and enjoy it, too, before he puts the effort into it.

So which of these 12 tracks rank as some of your personal favourites on the album?

'Rivers Run Dry' is really important. It's almost a bit



of a family song. My partner, [jazz singer] Margeaux Rolleston, wrote a pretty important line for it - "so many ways that a man can drown". It's a reference to a classic lifestyle. It certainly was like that when I was growing up [in Alice Springs]. Drinking on the weekends had a big reputation, in amongst all that heat. But it's sort of a double entendre. 'Miss You In The Night' is a classic rock song. 'State Of My Emotion' has more of a Latin rock feel. That's something pretty dear to Kerry [Jacobson] and I, as we started writing that a long time ago. Lucy DeSoto, the widow of the late Pete Wells from Rose Tattoo, wrote most of the lyrics for 'State Of My Emotion'.

You've been known to play larger hollow-body guitars on stage, but you're mainly a fan of the Stratocaster. What is it about the humble Strat that

you love so much?

The tone. It's the sound that you hear when you first hear Hank Marvin, Hendrix, or [Deep Purple's Richie] Blackmore. That mellow front pickup. Plus, the whammy bar is a lot of fun. Then again, there's something that I really love about hollow-bodies too. 90% of *Rivers Run Dry* was recorded with three different Stratocasters. The pickups in those are an Australian product, called Sliders. I've put Callahan bridges in all my Strats, with Eric Johnson's signature maple necks.

The backing group on your latest album are a stellar bunch of Australian musicians, with some notable group names in their CVs. Do you handpick new musical lineups for each album and tour?

I generally try to show a bit of loyalty to the people I've found, if I can. When you find the players you want, you definitely want to hang on to them. [On the album, the core group includes drummer] Kerry Jacobson [Dragon, Mondo Rock], who has been working with me since about 1993. Zoe Hauptmann [Neil Finn, Paul Kelly], is on bass. [She's] fairly new to the lineup. Clayton Doley [also recorded with me, on keys].

You're performing in some more remote and regional towns for the album's upcoming solo-acoustic tour [21 October to 16 December]. Are you the main person who suggests or chooses these places?

It's a coordinated effort. Coming from an outback town myself, I like to take music to country areas as much as I can. I feel very comfortable and at home in country towns. You just have to pick the right place. As you go around the place, you find that some places work time and time again. I can feel pretty claustrophobic living in Sydney. I can't wait for these tours to come up so we can get out to the country and feel free. 

Ian Moss' *River Runs Dry* is out now. See www.ianmoss.com.au/tour for tour information.





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IN SEARCH OF SOUL GRIT

HANNAH CAMERON'S UNIQUE MUSICAL VISION AND GUITAR SKILLS HAVE SEEN HER EMERGE AS AN INDIE ARTIST TO KEEP AN EYE ON. AHEAD OF THE RELEASE OF HER THIRD LP *HOLDING PATTERN* SHE SPOKE TO AUSTRALIAN GUITAR FROM PARIS.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PICS BY **NICK MCKK**.

Hannah Cameron has been captivating audiences with her spellbinding voice and powerful guitar playing for nearly ten years. Born in Brisbane, before spending her formative teen years in Melbourne, Cameron made her presence known as a solo performer with the release of her 2015 debut album, *Blow My House Down*. In 2018 she released her second LP *I Lay Where You Lie* between touring as an in-demand guitarist for the likes of Missy Higgins, Grand Salvo, and On Diamond.

Cameron now has a third LP on the way called *Holding Pattern*, due on September 22. After becoming a convert to the instrument in 2018, Cameron wrote her new album on a Gretsch baritone guitar: the six-string's longer and deeper-sounding cousin. Cementing *Holding Pattern* as another album of firsts, the recording sessions for the album were done live to tape in a band setting at Woodstock Studios, and at the studio of producer Matt Redlich (Ball Park Music, Emma Louise). Through this undertaking, Cameron's music now shares more traits with her favourite styles, which she describes as having "a bit of roughness around the edges".

Conceptually, the lyrics of *Holding Pattern* deal with the idea of stasis - the feeling of being stuck between action and apathy. Before her trio with bassist Luke Hodgson and drummer Lee Fisher perform at Brisbane's BIGSOUND gathering this month, Cameron will be performing some of the beloved songs of the 1960s America's Laurel Canyon music scene in her 'Songs From The Canyon' live dates. Her *Holding Pattern* tour commences in November.

Half of your current discography wasn't recorded with a baritone guitar. Why were you so drawn to it in 2018?

I think I got to the point where I was running out of language on [the] acoustic guitar. I wanted to write something that felt a bit more powerful. I've had the baritone guitar for years, and I started playing it in a band I'm still in called On Diamond. It just sat in my guitar rack for most of the year, except for when I would pull it out for On Diamond gigs or rehearsals. One day in 2018 I went to write a song, [and] nothing original was coming out of my acoustic, so I reached for the baritone and gave it a crack. I treated it as though I was writing a bass line for that song. I think 'Backsliding' was the first song I wrote on baritone. On baritone, I felt like I could tap into this different feeling. The other thing I really love is that the female voice with the baritone feels really nice, as I find that standard acoustic guitars occupy the same type of sonic territory [as our voices]. [The baritone] is like a bass and a guitar in one, which is nice for playing solo, because it sort of makes it feel like there's a bit more going on. The baritone sits underneath my voice in a nice way. The whole album was pretty much all written on baritone.

Why did you choose Matt Redlich as producer for *Holding Pattern*?

He had worked with some friends of mine. The Paper Kites recommended him and I met with him. I think it was back in 2018. We just hit it off, and I feel like we had a lot of shared love for a lot of the

same music. We [then] did 'Backsliding' at the end of 2018 in the living room of the house that Husky and Gideon [Preiss] from Husky used to live in. I recorded it with my drummer Lee Fisher, bassist Luke Hodgson, and guitarist Mike Penn. [Mike] is a great guitarist who plays in Quivers, and a bunch of other bands. [That session] was the first time that I had tracked something live in a room. We did it to tape as well. It was a really nice experience, so I decided to do the whole album with Lee and Luke. There were a lot of COVID interruptions, but we got there.

Apart from having a different producer, how did the recording of *Holding Pattern* differ from your last album, *I Lay Where You Lie*?

The main difference was that all of the band beds were tracked live [on *Holding Pattern*], at Woodstock [Studios in Melbourne]. We did the first half of the album at the end of 2020, then there were a bunch of interruptions. We did the second half of the album at the beginning of last year, over a few days at Woodstock. We'd do pre-production with Matt and the band, to get the songs feeling really good. We didn't want to overcook it, so we'd get it to a place where everyone felt like they knew what they were doing. The live tracking thing was really nice for me, because I'm a bit of a perfectionist. With the process of overdubbing, I can [lose] focus on the overall take, so I felt like this was a nice way to just be like, 'okay, that clearly is the take that feels the best'. Even if a few notes are not quite where I would have chosen to put them, the vibe is the the main thing. I love listening to things [that have a] bit of roughness around the edges, but I've always found it really hard to let myself make a mistake in a recording. So I found this process really helpful in trying to squash that.

Now that you're a convert to live tracking, do you think you might approach your next album in the same way?

I think this is definitely how I want to do it. A lot of it is about budget as well, though. With live tracking, it's not the cheapest way to make a record, in terms of finding a room that sounds good and getting everyone in the room together. There are great albums that have been tracked with overdubs, but maybe just not doing something to a click track (metronome) is the other thing that made a big difference to this album. It makes you pay attention to the feeling of a take. I definitely hope that I get to do my next album in the same sort of way.

How do you approach the process of balancing your own recordings with being a touring member in a handful of different groups?

I think that playing with other people gives me [more] creative energy than anything else [does], in terms of me wanting to be more creative and write more songs. A lot of the language that I have on the guitar and in my writing in general is definitely a direct result of the people that I've played with. Their language entered my DNA somehow. It's pretty inspiring.

Will you be fronting a band at BIGSOUND?

I'm doing it with my trio, with Lee and Luke. The trio is the core of all of the songs but sometimes there's a lot of backing vocals and some extra guitars, so I love it when I can get them all in the room. That's the dream.

Hannah Cameron's *Holding Patterns* is out now.



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SCORCHING STRINGS FOR SOCIETY

BACK IN EUROPEAN TOUR MODE IN SUPPORT OF **CABLE TIES'** THIRD ALBUM, *ALL HER PLANS*, FRONTWOMAN-GUITARIST JENNY MCKECHNIE UNCOVERS FURTHER DEPTH IN THE PERSONAL THEMES OF THEIR LATEST GUT-PUNCHING PUNK WORK.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **KALINDY WILLIAMS**.

For a trio who formed eight years ago with the humble intention of playing shows for friends in their home city of Melbourne, Cable Ties has gone a remarkably long way. Channeling their ferocity through a hatred of toxic capitalism and social inequality, the statements that arise in many of their tracks have ignited a collective energy from new converts across the globe. Among these new Cable Ties admirers—a group named in reference to their firm-but-flexible tightness—are Iggy Pop, Henry Rollins, and Keith Morris (Black Flag, Circle Jerks), with the latter taking them on a European tour at the start of this year with his latest full-time group OFF!

Some of Cable Ties' other achievements include sharing lineups with the likes of Mudhoney, Pavement, and The Chats. Despite these leaps and bounds, band members Jenny McKechnie, drummer Shauna Boyle, and bassist Nick Brown stayed faithful to the true soul and spirit of their group. While their addictive songs use minimal effects and are built around dynamic and economical songwriting, McKechnie's instantly recognisable wail channels the urgency and energy of a woman who has been pushed to the brink.

Through Cable Ties' two previous studio albums, one blistering live album, and a string of singles and eye-catching music videos, the group have thrived on a raw sound propelled by forceful statements for the fed-up and the pissed-off. On their latest album *All Her Plans*, released through Merge Records and Poison City, McKechnie balances disdain for unfair corporate systems with song about family experiences and her loved ones. We sat down with her to chat about the beginnings of Cable Ties, the meanings behind some of her recent songs, and how *All Her Plans* was recorded.

I recently discovered that your career began with folk music. How did you realise that you had a brilliant voice for punk rock?

I had no idea that I had a voice for punk rock until I started playing in Cable Ties. We were [once] in a rehearsal studio where the PA wasn't very loud. Nick, our bass player really enjoys playing loud, so there wasn't a lot of room for my voice. I just began wailing, because it was the only thing that would get over the volume of the guitars. It wasn't until we went to a rehearsal studio with a decent PA that I realised what I was doing. I had no idea that this wail was in me.

From songs like 'Say What You Mean' to 'Perfect

Client', it looks like you guys love to stick your middle fingers up at the corporate world. What significance does that hold for you?

'Say What You Mean' was definitely sticking a finger up at the corporate working world. I once worked for a university, where at one stage, I had to mark project management assignments. Project management is full of this language, I think I call it 'corporate doublespeak' in the song, that I just found really infuriating. It seemed to be a way of obscuring meaning, in order for people to either do nothing or to sanitise the ways in which they were talking about doing terrible things for their companies. So that's what that song is about. 'Perfect Client' is a bit different. That one is about a close family member of mine who has experienced the mental health care system. Because that system isn't adequately funded, that person has gone between detox centres into rehabilitation centres that have not been adequately set up to deal with complex mental health issues. Everything is so siloed and underfunded that only a certain type of client can be accepted. This leaves a huge swathe of people who don't fit perfectly into the type of care that they can provide there.

Why are social and political expressions such an important part of the Cable Ties experience?

I like to write about things that I feel strongly about. I guess it was the same when I was doing folk music. It's differed from album to album by what I'm thinking about at the time. With this new album, song themes have arisen from family experiences. It's what I needed to write about at the time.

What songs on the album hold the most personal significance for you?

Definitely 'Mum's Caravan'. 'Silos' and 'Perfect Client' are also about my family, so I feel pretty strongly about them too. There's quite a lot [of significant songs] on there, I guess. It's pretty personal.

How did drummer Shauna Boyle's singing debut come about, for the track 'Thoughts Back'?

Shauna had been doing backing vocals with Cable Ties that gradually increased with every album. She loves a challenge. She's had to learn how to play the drums through the process of being in the band. I also throw backing vocals at her, and I scream pretty high, which means she has to do the same thing. She just

kept taking on everything that I had thrown her and running with it. So by this album, I was like, 'Shauna, I don't really know what to do with the song, can you give me a hand writing lyrics?' I knew she was writing songs. She went away with the song. I expected her to come back and have some vague ideas that we could work on together. But she had written the whole song and it was amazing. So, the next Cable Ties album will have to be half Shauna, or all Shauna, maybe, depending on how I feel.

What guitars did you play on this record?

The main one that I used is an early '90s Fender Telecaster. I really love that guitar. It's a '52 reissue. The person who records our albums, Paul Maybury, has all sorts of guitars in his studio. He has a Fernandes Telecaster that he's modified a bit. It's also an early '90s one. I really loved the sound of that guitar, so when I decided to go and buy a new guitar, I knew I wanted one from that era.

Did you use any guitar effects or did you just plug in and play?

When I record it's mainly just clean with amps turned up as loud as possible to get natural distortion. When I play gigs I have a box of pedals that I use for that instead. But on the album, it's just natural distortion with layered guitar in the choruses. On a few songs, I have this pedal called When The Sun Explodes by Beautiful Noise Effects. It's a reverb feedback pedal. A lot of [the album's sound] is just layering and natural distortion, then we try to do that live without blowing everyone's ears out.

Looking back on the history of Cable Ties, you've shared bills with Dinosaur Jr. and Spiderbait, you've toured with Sleaford Mods and OFF!, and you were even played on the radio by Iggy Pop. How far were you expecting to take this band when the project was first assembled in 2015?

Definitely not this far. Like in every band I played in and started in Melbourne, the idea was just to play shows with mates and that was pretty much it. Everything else has been a bonus. It's been the main focus of my life for a while. I never expected it. It's taken me to a lot of exciting places, so it's been good fun. **AB**

Cable Ties' *All Her Plans* is out now.



INNER EAR MYSTERIES

GLOBE-TROTTING GUITAR GOD **STEVE VAI** RECENTLY TREATED HIS FANS WITH THE RELEASE OF TWO THRILLING STUDIO ALBUMS AND ONE EXTRAORDINARY NEW INSTRUMENT. BEFORE HIS NATIONWIDE INVIOLENT TOUR HITS OUR SHORES IN NOVEMBER, HE CHECKED IN WITH US TO EXPLAIN HIS LATEST CREATIVE ENDEAVOURS.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PICTURES BY **LARRY DIMARZIO**.

Still surprising his audiences with new styles of stringed exploration after half a century, Steve Vai remains at the forefront of futuristic guitar wizardry. His fans have had much to absorb lately, after his last two studio albums broke a period of sonic gestation in the wake of 2016's *Modern Primitive*. Released last January, *Inviolate* not only delighted fans with its cover image of a mighty triple-necked invention, but revealed a new style of playing from the platinum-selling artist.

At the age of 63, Vai has played some bizarre guitars in his career, including the alien-looking 'Ultrazone', the triple-necked, heart-shaped 'Vanity', and the 'DNA' guitar, whose psychedelic body paint

was blended with vials of his own blood. Arguably his most extraordinary guitar yet, the Hydra arrived at Vai's Harmony Hut after seven years of meticulous tinkering from a group of Japanese luthiers for Ibanez, owners of Vai's signature model the JEM77. This is the guitar featured on the cover of *Inviolate*, which contains six playable guitar types in its steampunk-inspired build.

Vai's subsequent 2023 release, *Vai/Gash*, features lead vocals and was originally recorded in 1990 (see our feature on this record in AG #153). *Inviolate* and *Vai/Gash* couldn't be more different. While the former is a vibrant, genre-diverse voyage through new realms of instrumental expression, the latter is a straight-up

rock tribute to a departed friend. During an immersion in biker culture at the turn of the '90s, Vai met Johnny 'Gash' Sombretto. Through their resulting friendship, Vai encouraged Gash to sing lead vocals over his newly-written rock songs, and was blown away by the power of his friend's voice in the process. Eight years after its lively recording sessions, the planned release of *Vai/Gash* was to be shelved for the next three decades upon Gash's accidental riding death in 1998. It now sees the light of day as a tribute to a departed powerhouse vocalist who was killed while doing what he loved.

Decades after he impressed his earliest mentors Joe Satriani and Frank Zappa, and long before

recording and touring with the likes of David Lee Roth and Whitesnake, Vai now inspires and collaborates with younger players like Polyphia's Tim Henson and Scott LePage, as well as Aussie shred queen Orianthi. He also helps to educate emerging players at his long-running Vai Academy events. While relentlessly pursuing new sources of excitement for his own creative development, Steve Vai still loves a challenge. In our interview, he revealed his inspiration for The Hydra, (and the world's first commercially-available seven-string), before addressing the very core of his creative philosophy.

Apart from its rich variety of playing styles and grooves, The Hydra is a prominent part of *Inviolate*. What inspired this incredible instrument?

I wanted to create an instrument that could carry an entire piece of music. I knew I needed a bass neck and a seven string neck, as I was gonna tune it down to make it very heavy, with 12 string and harp strings, but I also wanted a guitar synthesiser and all this technical stuff. It really didn't take me long to write the email [to Ibanez], but I didn't know what the guitar was going to look like. So I waited to send the email, because I wanted to give them some direction on what it might look like. That inspiration came a couple of years later in the form of a Mad Max movie [2015's *Mad Max: Fury Road*]. When they're racing through the desert, there's a guy on the front of a truck who's playing a guitar that's shooting out flames. I thought 'there it is'. It was steampunk fashion. So I did a little research, pulled out some steampunk ideas, threw them in the email, and sent it to Ibanez. As soon as they [passed the email] on to Japan, they sharpened their knives and went to work. We have a creative team of young, brilliant luthiers over there. They started sending me illustrations, and they looked wild. So for a couple of years we went back and forth with illustrations. Then they came to my house with a cardboard cutout of The Hydra. This was important because I knew I had to play a good piece of music on it. I knew that I could do it, I just didn't know when I was going to be able to. Following this, they brought a prototype to the house, which helped me to determine where things were going to be. Then, four or five years after I sent the original email, The Hydra showed up at my house.

How did you figure out how to play The Hydra, and write music for it?

When I first opened the case and looked at it, I was like, 'oh my god, what have I done?' Those thoughts only lasted about ten seconds, because the other voice came in and said 'shut up, you've got this'. So I blocked out about six weeks of undisturbed time, got behind The Hydra, and started trying to figure it out. It was sort of like a Rubik's Cube, because I had to break my conditioning from 50 years of being a guitar player. Usually when you hit a note, you hit a note, you know, but with The Hydra, you have to navigate all these other brain muscles. It was so much fun, because it was like a puzzle. I had to retain the integrity of the melody, while providing all the other supporting instruments. I knew it needed to be something I could perform live. Every time I came across a section that I had to figure out, I just took it really slow and used my attention and instincts to the best of my ability. When ['Teeth Of The Hydra'] was finished, I thought that it was a good song with a sultry melody. I knew it needed an intense chorus section, so all the pieces started to come together. Then I recorded it.

Tell me about the recording of the music video for

'Teeth Of The Hydra'.

It took me quite a while to be able to stand up and hold The Hydra on a waist strap. It doesn't move like a regular guitar, and it's very heavy. All through this time, my shoulder was falling apart because of an accident I had. The video was done in a ten hour shoot, where I had to stand and play over and over for ten hours. After we shot the video, I knew we captured it, but I needed somebody to help me walk for two days, because my legs were shot. They got so burned out. Then three days after we shot it, I went in for shoulder surgery, then edited it. [When] I released the video and couldn't change anything [about it], I watched it on YouTube. I was thinking, 'how did I do that', but then I remembered that I just went very slowly. That's how you can accomplish things - take it one step at a time. The melody is king. A funny guitar is nice and fascinating, but if the music isn't compelling, then you've just got a gimmick.

A lot of people might be surprised to hear that you played one of the world's first seven-string guitars back in the early '90s. Did Ibanez make this for you so you could write music with lower tunings, or thicker strings?

At that time, as far as we knew, there were no seven strings that were commercially available. Only a few people I had heard of even played one, so I don't think anything was in production. I just instinctually felt that if I had a seventh string, I could tune it down to get some air moving. It was a very short conversation. I asked Ibanez if they could make me a JEM with a low seventh string. Next thing you know, I got it: the first production model seven-string. Everything blew up from there.

Another impetus was that I had also just joined Whitesnake and I was trying to bring something unique to their next record [1989's *Slip Of The Tongue*]. So I thought, 'yeah, I'm gonna record this whole record on a seven string'. The guitar started as more of a novelty. When we released it, it sold for a while, but then it started to decrease. I just felt that there was so much potential in them for young players who might consider [using them for] something that I wasn't doing, you know, like, really heavy music. Sure enough, a few years later, I was driving down the street and I heard this music playing on the radio. I couldn't believe it. I said, 'that's a seven string'. I pulled over. It was incredibly powerful, intense music.

It was Korn. They created a whole underground movement.

What helps to inspire you when you're trying to solve creative problems?

Well, there's very many different ways to receive inspiration. I try not to block any of them. They can come from something somebody says, something you read, or something you hear in another style of music. But ultimately, the best stuff comes from listening to your unique inner ear.

Everybody has a unique inner ear, you just have to know how to listen. It's a deliberate intent that stops the thinking process [while you] listen inside and allow melodies to come. Another great thing that I highly recommend experimenting with is to write a recipe of what you want. That's the best way for me to compose - entering into a frame of mind for what you want. Think about it, feel it, imagine it. It must come out unless you block it, which a lot of people do. The most destructive blocks to your creative expansion are the thoughts in your own mind.

Do lessons from the mentors of your past still linger when you're trying to write new music? People like Joe Satriani, or Frank Zappa?

It's funny you mentioned those guys, because they are the two that I think about. When I was 12-years-old, I started lessons with Joe, and he was a mentor, I loved him. When I went to my lessons, the most important thing for me was to be able to accomplish my lesson and get Joe's approval. That's what you want from your teacher, so that stuck with me. [When I'm writing new music], I now think: 'Am I performing this?' 'Would it pass my lesson?' I don't really care what anybody thinks or what the notes are - the notes [are what] I have to approve. With Frank, when you played his music, you had to play it correctly and it had to sound like music. Not just, 'the part'. So I always think: 'Does this sound like music?' 'Would this get past Frank?' Now, Frank [might have said], 'I don't like that piece of music', but I don't care about that. What I care about is [making a] performance approvable for my mentor. It's a knee jerk reaction that I've had since I was a kid. It's served me very well. 🎸

Steve Vai's *Inviolate* tour hits Australia in November. See livenation.com.au for details.



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LIVING ON THE EDGE

AFTER STEERING THE CREATION OF TWO WELL-RECEIVED **CYHRA** ALBUMS, SWEDEN'S JAKE E CHATS ABOUT THE MAKING OF *THE VERTIGO TRIGGER*, THE FIVE-PIECE'S DARKEST AND HEAVIEST ALBUM YET.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON.**

Cyhra's *The Vertigo Trigger* is the result of three years of DIY experimentation for five European friends across three different countries. Their third album in six years, it proves Cyhra's continued search for melodic and progressive songwriting as a 'supergroup' who found their own sound.

Due to more than half of the band being comprised of former members of Amaranthe, In Flames, Shining, and The Crown, Cyhra's main audience naturally consists of fans of Scandinavian metal. Still, the radio-ready hooks of new tracks like lead single 'Ready To Rumble' and crowd favourite 'Ashlight' have the potential to expand Cyhra's reach to all fans of dramatic hard rock. Meanwhile, through the punchy opening riffs of tracks like 'Buried Alive' and 'If I', elements of a traditional sort of heaviness have remained, and as a result, *The Vertigo Trigger* is being praised as Cyhra's darkest and most immediate album yet.

While writing the album's lyrics, vocalist Jake E confronted anxieties about death that have lingered in his mind since he was a child, which were further exacerbated by the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which most of the new album was written. In order to have full control over its creation, Cyhra self-recorded *The Vertigo Trigger* at their own home studios between 2020-2022. The final album was mixed by Euge Valovirta (ex-Shining), and mastered by Jacob Hansen, who produced the group's last two albums.

Jake E joined us from his home in Stockholm to discuss the creation of the album, Cyhra's Japanese tour in January, and how they threw off the shackles of being a 'supergroup'.

How did the songwriting for *The Vertigo Trigger* begin?

They all began in my home studio, where I often start working on songs at around 8AM. I never have a plan, I'm just like, 'hmm, what shall I record...what can I start on today?'. I'll then pick up the guitar, go to the piano, or play a beat on the drums. It always depends on which kind of mood you're in. It's pretty cool to layer a lot of stuff and get a specific sound. [After that, I'll] put the vocals on, and remove all the music. [I'll then] start from scratch, because I know what the vocal is going to be like.

Are you the main songwriter for the group?

I am. I would call myself the captain of the ship, and I'm always the guy with the scissors. If some other guy comes in with a riff or a song, I'm the guy [who tweaks and edits it]. I'm very happy that I have trust from the other guys. At the end of the day, it's a collaborative effort where everyone has their say. What I usually love to do is sit with Jesper [Strömblad, ex-In Flames] and write with him, because he's an idea machine. He's crazy. You always know that when you sit down with him, you're gonna have a finished song by the end of the day.

Do you think that being defined as a 'supergroup' pushes you guys harder?

I guess it was like that in the beginning. When we first got together [in 2017], we never had the intention of being a supergroup, we just wanted to have our friends in the band. At that point in time, all of our musical friends had already been in other bands. So we never intended to be a supergroup, but we all had different careers before this. When we released our first album, we hoped that the fans of our old bands would like what we were doing. Sometimes people compare us [to our old groups] of course, but this is our third album. We have our own sound now.

What drove the decision to self-produce *The Vertigo Trigger*?

Well, my [home] studio is a full blown music production studio. I've produced albums for other bands, but I never had the self-belief to do something for myself. I have all the gear, I have a studio worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, but I've always rented myself into someone else's [studio], to have that 'grandma' or 'grandpa' sitting next to me. [These people] always have the best ideas. In our case, it had always been Jacob Hansen [metal producer and engineer, collaborator with The Black Dahlia Murder, Volbeat]. Because the pandemic came, we didn't want to stop everything, wait for it to be over, and then go to a studio. We were doing demos in [our] real studios, so we thought 'why don't we just put in that 10% extra and do it ourselves?' It just took more time than it would have done if we were renting out a studio.

How did you find the rehearsal process for your recent Japanese tour?

Here's the thing. We live in three different

countries, across five different cities. During our time as a band, I think we've only rehearsed twice. So even though we went to Japan for nine shows in January, we all rehearsed on our own, met up in Japan, and played the songs together at soundcheck. Playing nine Japanese shows in January in a ten-day span was crazy.

Did you write the majority of *The Vertigo Trigger*'s lyrics?

I wrote all the lyrics, the vocal melodies, and a big chunk of the music, together with the others, but lyrics have always been my strongpoint. The lyrics on this album took me to a pretty dark place, as I brought up a lot of my anxiety about death that has lingered over me since I was a kid. Sometimes I have it hanging over me all the time, but sometimes it just disappears. Then it comes back. I have an ADHD-like personality, so I always need to do 500 things all the time to keep my brain occupied. However, during the pandemic, we were sitting on couches. My brain started to think about things like 'why do we die', so I used the whole writing process to be my own psychiatrist, writing about my personal feelings, and that felt really good.

How many years has it taken you to get your singing voice to the astonishing level that it's at now? Did you receive any formal singing training?

I started singing when I was 15 years old. I never took any classes or anything like that. I was just in rehearsal rooms singing with bands through PAs, which destroyed my voice. I would say that it probably took me ten years to really find my own voice. The cool thing is that that I'm still finding it. I always like to evolve.

Which of these new songs got the best responses from your fans when you played them live?

'Ready To Rumble' was a song that people had already heard, so that was a real banger. 'Ashlight' worked fantastic. 'Live A Little' was an opener and a crowd pleaser. 'Life Is A Hurricane' was a crowd pleaser too. All the songs worked, [so] that's why we played the whole album from start to finish. It's really good to know that we have an album we can pick just about any song from to throw into the live set. **all**

Cyhra's *The Vertigo Trigger* is out now via Nuclear Blast.



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THE POETRY OF VIOLENCE

AHEAD OF THE UPCOMING RELEASE OF **THY ART IS MURDER**'S SIXTH ALBUM **GODLIKE**, GUITARIST ANDY MARSH DESCRIBES HIS BAND'S CONTINUED SEARCH FOR NEW REALMS OF BRUTALITY.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTOS BY **THIRD EYE VISUALS**.

Formed in 2006, Sydney deathcore five-piece Thy Art Is Murder has pushed boundaries with each of their five studio albums. Their sixth album, *Godlike*, is a masterclass in sonic innovation through a refined style of uncompromising death metal; it's set to solidify their reputation as one of our countries most successful heavy acts.

After 2012's sophomore effort *Hate* saw the group become the first extreme metal act on the ARIA charts, their next two albums crossed international divides to land on the US Billboard 200. They've since toured with the likes of Slayer, Cannibal Corpse, and Lamb Of God, and appeared at festivals such as Wacken and Download.

With lead singles 'Keres', 'Blood Throne' and 'Join Me In Armageddon' having all landed on their fans' speakers with the impact of a sledgehammer, the rest of *Godlike* upholds Thy Art's trademark approach, with songs inspired by news media's constant proliferation of chaos. Psychological themes of isolation, regret and introspection are also examined, propelled through the monstrous vocals of frontman CJ McMahon. Back from a hiatus away from the guitar, longtime six-string slinger Andy Marsh joined us to discuss the songwriting and recording of *Godlike*.

Before sitting down to write *Godlike*, where did the idea of putting the guitars down for two years come from?

On one hand, you could say that it was out of laziness. On the other, you could say that we were trying to come back to this album with a fresh approach. I think we sort of achieved that, and that was a by-product of not playing Thy Art Is Murder songs 200 times a year on tour, as your fingers fall into familiar shapes, scales, chords, and progressions. Not playing for two years kind of freed our hands up a little bit.

Did it feel strange when you and Sean Delander picked up your guitars again?

I usually only play guitar on tour, but if I don't play guitar, then I wonder if I even know how to play when we're back on tour. The one thing that was interesting to come back to was not so much the musicality, but the physicality. The music is challenging to play, so getting our hands, wrists, forearms, and shoulders in shape to perform the material was a challenge.

The sheer speed is also a challenge. Even your blood pressure factors into being able to perform the material.

How long did it take for the riffs for *Godlike* to start flowing?

About five minutes. A little over a year ago we got together and started noodling around on our guitars. Thy Art had started doing shows towards the start of last year, like many bands that were coming back to life were doing. We had plans for tours, but we needed to start working on a new record. So we sat down together weekly and jammed on riffs before we'd go home to do stuff individually. Around a year ago, we entered the studio for the first time for about a week or two, to start documenting some of those ideas before expanding upon them. Then we took another break for about two or three months to sit on those recordings and make up more riffs. Then we entered the studio again last year, at the end of September, and we were there through to the end of November. We probably spent the first two or three weeks refining songwriting. Then it took us about four to five weeks to actually record it, before [CJ McMahon] finished his vocals. We finished the vocals after our tour in the US this February-March.

It seems like a lot of Thy Art's music is built on tension, release and unpredictability - what are you guys hoping to achieve by using these elements in your songs?

I think one thing that sets us apart from a lot of bands in our sub-genre, or in the wider death metal community, is that we really focus on songwriting. We spend time analysing songs, going, 'this riff isn't necessary' [and asking ourselves] 'which one's the best one?'. I think it just delivers a more streamlined song for the fan, where everything's been built on purpose, and nothing's just there by accident or mistake. We guide the listener to where we want to take them. We now hope that [this new approach] makes [our songs] more impactful, so we can deliver something that's memorable. I think contrast helps to drive the song into the listener with a little bit more force. More riffs means there's more to remember. Now it's easier for people to remember our songs because we've whittled them down to what we think is essential.

Where did some of the ideas for *Godlike*'s lyrics come from?

Literally just a bunch of us sitting around on our phones, Googling different ideas and history books, and reading articles. All the lyrics to every song are written specifically for that song. We don't sit down and write lyrics, and then put them over different songs. Every word is exactly where it's supposed to be. We spend a lot of time thinking about that, and we tackle one song at a time. The words are designed for the riffs.

What type of guitars did you use for the recording of the album?

We used three different tunings on this album. It's the first time we've ever done that. We had a seven string tuned to drop A, with a G sharp and a drop G. You'd be surprised at how annoying it is to tune your guitar over time when you're just writing and jamming. So having an EverTune guitar saved us from that; we could keep being creative. So we just wrote songs in whatever tunings the guitars were in. We had a bunch of different tunings that we [matched to] the different styles of songs. On faster songs we maybe chose to use a guitar tuned in A, but if it felt too fast we'd tune it down to G or G sharp and then record it that way. We find that the pitch alters the feel of songs. When it came time to start tracking, I used my Jackson Juggernaut. We used that for everything in G and G sharp, and then the A-tuned guitar may have been an Ibanez RGD.

CJ McMahon's vocals are monstrous on this album, especially on songs like 'Everything Unwanted' and 'Bermuda' - where do you think he's able to channel such power from?

I think some people are just born that way. He hasn't practiced for as long as I've known him, so it's just something that he's got. He's able to push his voice in a way that most people can't. He takes direction very well, from [producer] Will Putney and myself, about how to deliver certain lines. CJ will often bring his own flair to the way that he wants to deliver particular lines or enunciate them. They're always pretty sick. **AM**

*Thy Art is Murder's **Godlike** is out now.*

A RUMBLE FROM THE JUNGLE

AFTER FIVE YEARS AWAY FROM OUR SHORES, METAL TITANS **SEPULTURA** RETURN TO AUSTRALIA IN DECEMBER. AS A TREAT TO FANS OF THEIR ATTITUDE-FILLED APPROACH, LONGTIME GUITARIST ANDREAS KISSER WILL BE UNLEASHING THEIR LIVE RIFFS ON HIS NEW SIGNATURE GUITAR FROM JACKSON. HE CHECKED IN WITH AUSTRALIAN GUITAR FROM HIS BAND'S TOUR BUS IN GERMANY.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **RODRIGO SIMAS**.

Having spent the last forty years as a key creator of the iron-clad metal riffs that put his native Brazil on the global metal map, Sepultura's longtime guitarist Andreas Kisser has one hell of a backstory. After joining the now-legendary group at the age of nineteen, Kisser contributed his mighty axe chops to every Sepultura album apart from their 1986 debut full-length *Morbid Visions*. The seminal thrash epics *Beneath The Remains* and *Arise* were propelled by Kisser's guitar work, who spent seven years studying classical guitar before crossing over to the dark side. In the early-to-mid 90s, Kisser was there to help steer the group through the percussive tribal bounce of *Chaos A.D.* and *Roots* before co-founding member Max Cavalera left in 1996. Since 1997, after enlisting new vocalist Derrick Green, Kisser became Sepultura's third longest remaining member alongside co-founding drummer Igor Cavalera (who departed in 2006), and bassist Paulo Jr. Their current fourth drummer Eloy Casagrande would join in 2011 to form the current lineup of Sepultura, who are returning to Australia for December's Good Things festival.

Before two years of COVID-19 affected the livelihood of every professional touring musician on the planet, Sepultura released their latest studio album *Quadra* in February 2020. They persisted through the pandemic's uncertainty with their unique musical vision, and recorded *SepulQuarta*, which featured of cameo-filled re-workings of definitive Sepultura songs. Now back on the road, Kisser has announced his own guitar line, the Jackson Pro Series Signature Andreas Kisser Soloist. Kisser sat down with us to discuss current touring, his new guitar, and Sepultura's formidable legacy.

How do you find the energy to play at three festivals in one week?

It's our normal rhythm. We have one or two days off each week, but if we have too many days off, we start complaining as there's nothing to do. So I'd rather be onstage playing. Of course the band gets better, because we play better [and] we get more connected as we're doing this every night. That's why we're recording every show in the *Quadra* tour, and in our current live run [until December 3]. Our idea is to put out a live album next year to celebrate 40 years of Sepultura, so we'd like to pick songs from our history, to record 40 songs in 40 cities [across] the world.

Does it feel a bit strange to constantly hop from country to country, across different continents?

That's the story of our life. Sepultura visited around 80 countries in almost 40 years, and we are on the 39th year of our history. I think heavy metal is the most popular music style in the world. You see a black shirt anywhere in the world, regardless of religion, regardless of politics. We played in Armenia once, and a band from Iran came all the way from Iran to Armenia to play because they are forbidden from playing in their own country. Heavy metal is not allowed in Iran, but that doesn't stop them. I think

metal represents [the] freedom to be what you want to be, and do what you want to do. It's great that it reaches everywhere, regardless of censorship, politics, or religion. We don't depend on charts, Billboard, or anything like that. We have a faithful following of fans that keep this band alive, and the



genre alive. When these fans don't buy bootleg stuff, but official stuff, like albums and shirts, the money goes to the right place. This keeps the whole system alive. It's a very special world, the metal world.

Absolutely! Have you been touring with your new signature guitar, The Pro Series Signature Soloist?

Yes, I had two of them made in the USA. I use my original one on the road. The Signature Series has EMG 81 [pickups], [with] a Floyd Rose [bridge and whammy bar], [so] it's a very powerful, comfortable guitar. To now have a signature guitar with Jackson is more than a dream come true. I love the brand because of Randy Rhoads. He was my first idol and he was very creative. I've been playing [his Jackson Rhoads guitar] for many years, but I was very happy to

have this opportunity to help create a Soloist. It was made for heavy riffs. [Its whammy bar is one of] the basic elements for making heavy music, alongside EMG 81 pickups, which are the sound of thrash metal, and the Floyd Rose [bridge]. It only has one pick up, which is the Sepultura sound. I use a lot of acoustics in Sepultura as well, so its clean sound is also amazing. I'm so happy with the quality of the instrument. It's a special guitar that players can grow with as musicians.

Do you still think of Sepultura as a thrash band, or is it something else now?

Sepultura is Sepultura metal. Of course I'm influenced by traditional metal, [and] I love the blues [and] classical music. There's a little bit of everything in Sepultura. We use a lot of Brazilian rhythms and sounds, that put us in a special place through mixing Brazilian rhythms with heavy music, especially on *Chaos A.D.* and *Roots*. Samba and other carnival music in Brazil is heavy as well. Its percussion is very powerful. To see 200-300 people playing [together] is very inspirational. We take influences from prog rock as well. Thrash metal is still a big part of our characteristic sound - punk and hardcore as well. But Brazilian music, classical music, and blues are in there too. I think our last album, *Quadra*, is an album that really does have all those elements, because it was influenced by our history.

What is it that you most enjoy about your busy songwriting partnership with drummer Eloy Casagrande, the youngest member of Sepultura?

He's a very creative drummer, and a fantastic musician, so that brought a lot of new possibilities for my guitar-based writing. To see all the great drummers that we play with, even [Metallica's] Lars Ulrich and [Slayer's] Dave Lombardo, leave their dressing rooms to go and take a peek at [Eloy's] playing is really great. I think he's really taking drumming to a new level while inspiring a new generation to improve even further. Experience is unique in each one of us. What matters is what we're doing now with what we have in our hands.

What details can you reveal about Sepultura's special 40th anniversary tour?

So far we have the [Good Things] festivals that we'll do [in Australia] in December. I think we've got a few extra dates for ourselves during the festival run. Our intention is to go everywhere. We're going to be recording the shows in Australia as we collect material to build this live album. Some time next year, we're going to put it together and put it out. I would like to go back to Australia to celebrate 40 years [of Sepultura], because Australia is one of the most important places for us, historically. We have great memories and great friends here, so we're going to be back for sure. **AD**

Sepultura will appear at Good Things festival in December. The Jackson Pro Series Signature Andreas Kisser Soloist is available from fender.com/au/.



SUMMONING THE STONE AGE

DESCRIBED BY THE GROUP AS AN EMPOWERING CREATION, *STONE* IS THE SIXTH ALBUM FROM SLUDGY PROG TITANS **BARONESS**. AG CAUGHT UP WITH ONE OF THEIR TWO GUITARISTS, GINA GLEASON, TO DETERMINE THE SOURCE OF ITS POWER.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON. PHOTO BY EBRU YILDIZ.

Arising from Georgia's punk and hardcore scene, Baroness is led by the creative talents of sole remaining original member, John Dyer Baizley. Since 2003 they've toured with the likes of Metallica, Lamb Of God, and Mastodon, and have released five critically acclaimed LPs culminating in this year's *Stone*, which marks the finalisation of the Baroness colour palette. "It's all about the willingness to take risks", Baizley notes.

The open-ended symbolism of the word 'stone' itself can signify many things, from the stately permanence of the skills of Baroness as songwriters, to the hard-edged details in their ever-evolving sound. To Baizley, it represents permanence. After *Stone*'s lyrical themes were first conceptualised on the 'Your Baroness' tour, the band escaped from subsequent months of global COVID-19 isolation to jam and record the album's bulk in a remote Airbnb in New York State, where musical fragments were transformed into ten new songs. Final touches were applied in Baizley's Philadelphia basement, before the album was mixed by Joe Barresi (Alice In Chains, Kyuss), and mastered by Bob Ludwig (Led Zeppelin, Nirvana).

It's also the second Baroness album to feature their newest member, guitarist Gina Gleason, who followed a surprising path to the group. Before joining Baroness, Gleason spent five years playing for Cirque Du Soleil, in addition to appearances onstage with the likes of Carlos Santana and the Smashing Pumpkins. Now wielding her Telecaster to ignite the riffs of punchy new Baroness singles like 'Beneath The Rose' and 'Last Word', Gleason joined us to discuss the

excitement of making the album, and the collective consciousness of Baroness.

After you first got into metal, how did you hear about Baroness?

I first heard about Baroness through my older brother, who's also a music fan. He discovered Baroness when their *Yellow & Green* record came out [in 2012]. He showed it to me, saying that it was heavy, but with something a little harder to pin down. They became my new favourite band. I loved the harmonies. I immediately heard a Queen or a Thin Lizzy kind of thing. I loved the vocals, and I thought [John Baizley's cover illustrations] were so beautiful. I had never heard of a band whose visuals matched their music in such a cool way. It reminded me of a classic album like [Metallica's] *Master Of Puppets*.

What parts of the making of *Stone* were the most exciting for you?

Well, the last record was a really intense writing and recording experience. I think between that record and this record, we've had time to grow as a band. We've had a lot of time on the road together, and we've had the experience of creating the previous record, being in the studio, on tour, and in the rehearsal room. We've had these years to grow and meld together. It feels like a family. After those years together, it's fun to go into a studio or writing scenario and just be like, 'let's see where we're at now', y'know. So, that was kind of the most exciting aspect of this record for me. We self-engineered and produced the entire record in

an Airbnb rental home in Barryville, in the middle of nowhere - a remote wooded area on the border of New York and Pennsylvania.

When you were recording in the Airbnb, did you get any surprised reactions from anyone nearby, or could you be as loud as you wanted to be?

It was so out of the way, I don't think we even saw another person. It's such a dream to have the space to do that; to have a house, move all of your equipment in and live there for a month, waking up to have coffee and start working right away. You work into the wee hours of the morning and do it all over again. It's a really beautiful thing. We're really fortunate that we were able to figure that out. Doing the record ourselves made us really rely on each other. Having trust in each other to see outside of ourselves was a cool part of the process.

What were the main guitars that you and John used on *Stone*?

My main guitar is my American Pro I Fender Telecaster. I have a couple others: a few Player Series Telecasters, and the Player Series Strat is pretty cool - it's added some unique layers. I use a Martin SC special for a couple of acoustic things, it's a newer acoustic-electric. It's good for rippin' on. John has a vintage Gibson 335 that we used for a lot of layers. He uses an American Pro Fender Stratocaster. He also used a Rickenbacker that he ordered one record back, which actually got delivered to the Barryville house. *Stone* is like our 'new guitar record'.

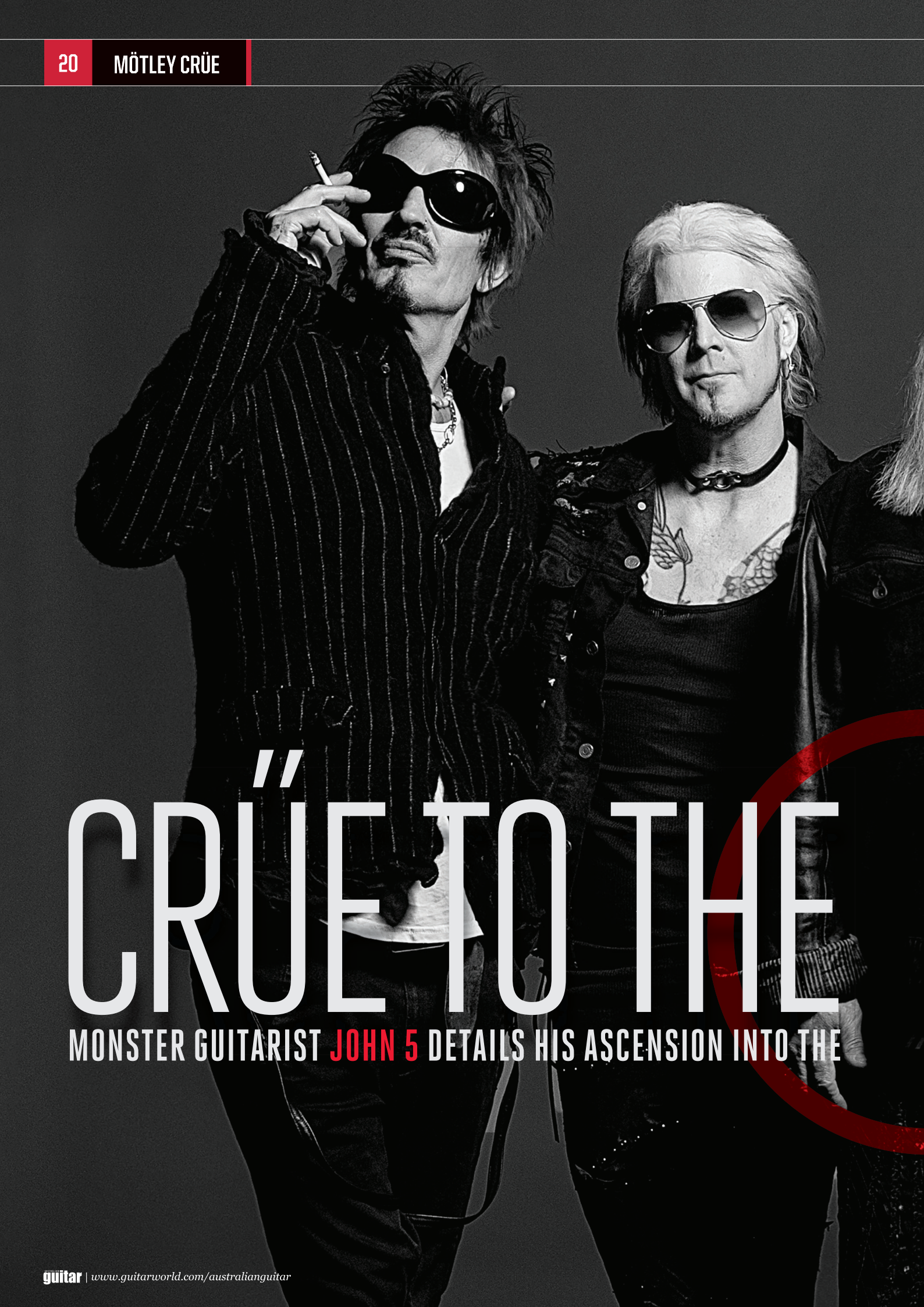
What were some of the most interesting venues to play in on the 'Your Baroness' tour?

We played in a lot of venues that we also played in with our other [past] bands, along with a lot of venues that Baroness played in more in the early days, before the other three of us were a part of it. It was cool to go back to those venues. I'll always [remember] this one show we played in Florida, at a place called Will's Pub. We had been in the south of America for four or five days without showering. We all work out on tour, we go running and we lift weights and it helps us sustain tour life. So we're working out, and playing two-and-a-half to three hour long sets every night, with no shower in sight. Once we got to Will's, we finished the show as disgusting as ever. We're like, 'do you guys have a hose or something out back?' The owner was like 'yeah, we have a hose, it's behind the building'. It's where they would wash the bar rags and rinse off whatever gross stuff you need to run a bar with, so we're like, 'well, I guess this is what we're doing'. So we individually took turns taking outdoor hose showers.

Has John's guitar playing been influential to you in the six years you've been in Baroness? Do you think you've influenced him in turn?

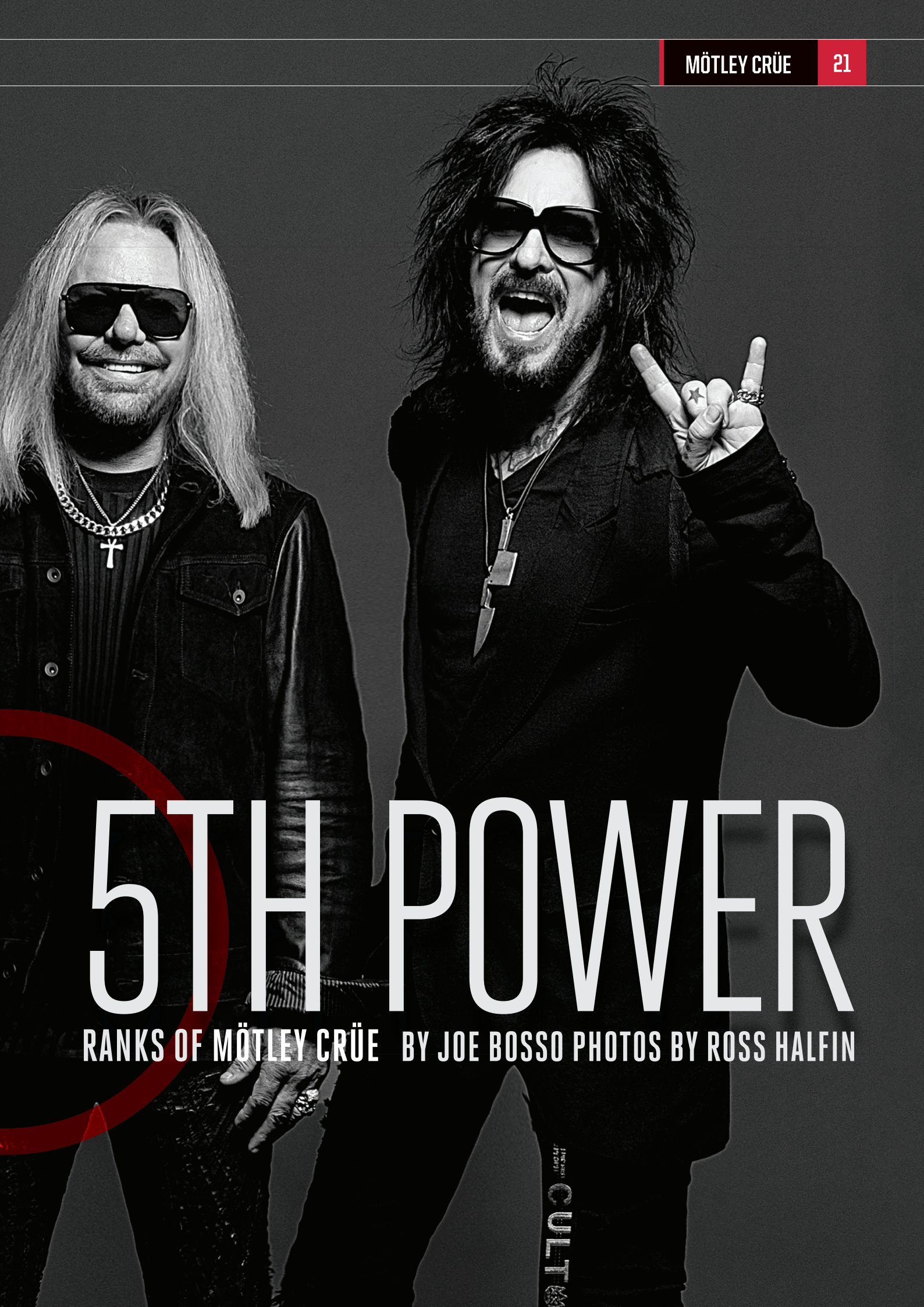
As a fan of the band before I joined, I was definitely highly influenced by John and Pete [Adams, their former lead guitarist from 2008 to 2017]. They took a lot of approaches that I had never heard in heavy music, which I love. I heard little hints of bluegrass and country influences in earlier Baroness stuff. That was a big inspiration on me as a listener. I think the guitar playing of John and I influences each of us. We have a playing language. It's a funny thing that we've developed, I feel like he's really capable of finishing a lot of my musical sentences and vice versa. We're constantly trading ideas, and things that are exciting to us as guitar players. 

Baroness' *Stone* is out now.



// CRÜE TO THE

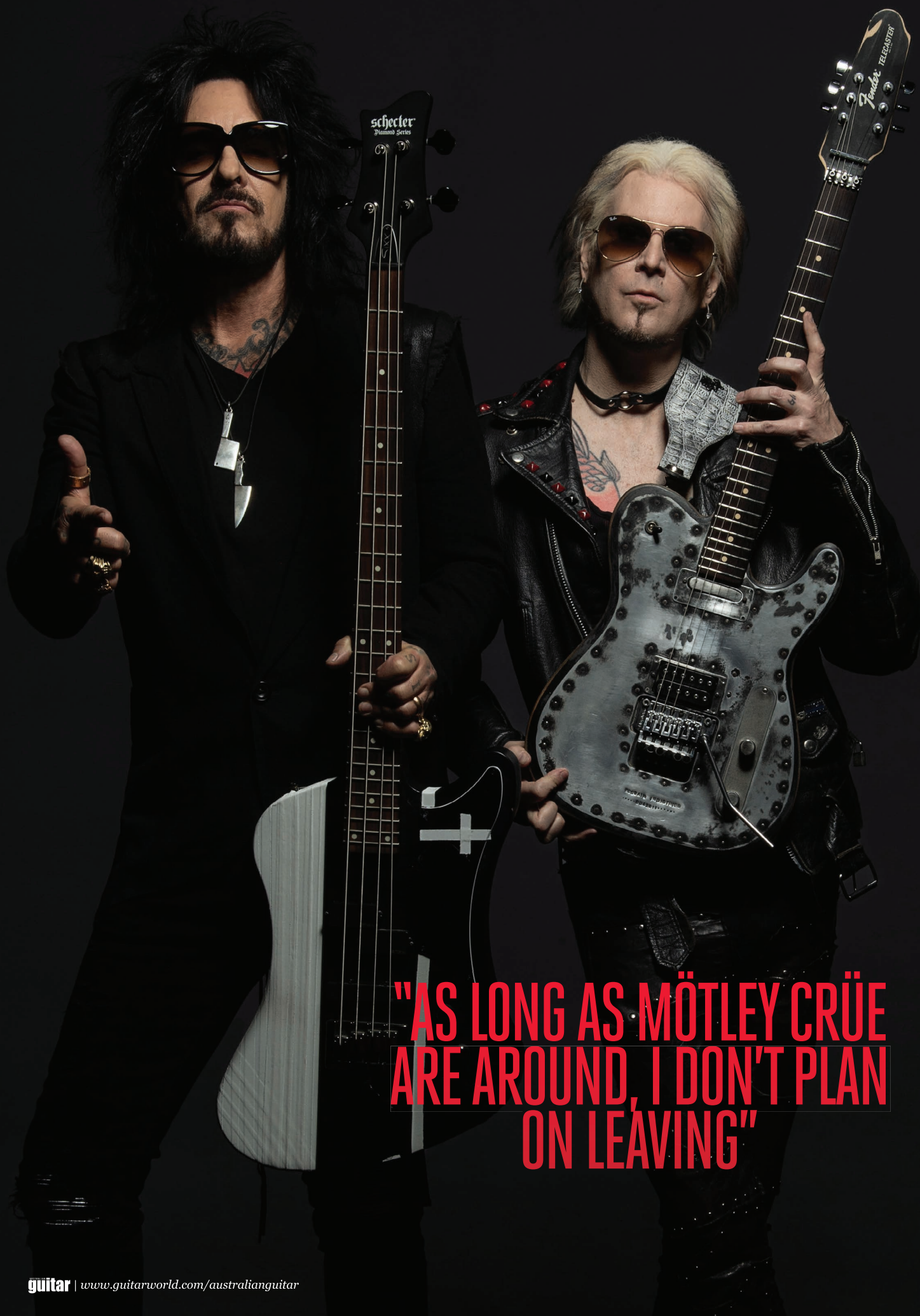
MONSTER GUITARIST **JOHN 5** DETAILS HIS ASCENSION INTO THE



5TH POWER

RANKS OF MÖTLEY CRÜE BY JOE BOSSO PHOTOS BY ROSS HALFIN

THE
CULTURE



"AS LONG AS MÖTLEY CRÜE
ARE AROUND, I DON'T PLAN
ON LEAVING"

EARLIER THIS YEAR, JOHN 5 WOKE UP

from a dead sleep and had no idea where he was. He looked around, disoriented, blinking his bleary eyes. “Oh, my God. I’m on an airplane,” he said to himself. Still not fully awake, he scanned his surroundings some more — the massive aircraft was a chartered affair, plush and roomy. All of the other passengers were stretched out, sound asleep. Then he started to scrutinize their faces. “Who are these people?” he thought. After a few seconds, he recognized guitarist Vivian Campbell, and soon he realized that all of the members of Def Leppard were on board. Not only that, but so were Vince Neil, Tommy Lee and Nikki Sixx of Mötley Crüe.

“I started freaking out,” John 5 says. “I got up and went to the back of the plane to wake myself up.” What at first seemed like an out-of-body experience soon became very real. The guitarist was winging his way from the U.S. to South America in spare-no-expense rock-star style as both bands, Mötley Crüe and Def Leppard, were about to begin their 2023 co-headline world tour.

But the guitarist was no mere guest on the flight; a couple of nights earlier, he had made his official debut as Mick Mars’ replacement with a pair of warm-up shows in Atlantic City. Dispensing with the elaborate costumes and horror-goth makeup he famously donned during his years as Rob Zombie’s lead axeman, John 5 adopted a stripped-down, modern Mötley look; wearing a black leather jacket and with his medium-length blond hair neatly slicked back, he resembled a badass biker as he expertly peeled off familiar riffs and solos during the Crüe’s 15-song, hit-filled show. Grinning a wide, exuberant grin, he seemed to be having a high, heady time — as if he were living out one of his wildest teenage dreams.

Which, in a very real sense, he was. “These things are so strange to me,” he says. “I’ll be on stage with them, and I’ll be like, ‘I still can’t believe

this.’ I’ll start laughing when we’re playing a song. The guys will say, ‘What’s so funny?’ And I’ll be like, ‘This is just so weird.’ We’ll play ‘Same Old Situation,’ and it’s so cool. Or we’ll play ‘Home Sweet Home’ in front of 60,000 people, and I’ll look at Vince and say, ‘This is just like the video!’” He pauses, then adds, “This is where it’s going to sound funny, because it sounds like a dream. I’m so worried that I’ll wake up and tell my wife, ‘Whoa... I had this dream that I was in Mötley Crüe.’”

MAKING THE (CRÜE) CUT

John 5 comes to the Crüe as something of a name brand. As a solo artist, he’s released a series of albums that highlighted his accomplished and inventive instrumental skills while reflecting his wildly eclectic tastes (everything from bluegrass to molten metal). During much of that time, the guitarist (born John Lowery in Grosse Pointe, Michigan) also enjoyed an enviable run as one of L.A.’s most in-demand musicians. Before his 17-year stint with Zombie, he served as a key member of Marilyn Manson’s band. In addition, he collaborated with David Lee Roth and has contributed to projects by a dizzying and diverse array of artists — Rod Stewart, Garbage, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Lita Ford, Rick Springfield, Paul Stanley, Ricky Martin, Steve Perry and Alice Cooper, among others. One of his first pro gigs after he arrived in Los Angeles was playing guitar for pop-country singer k.d. lang on her 1996-97 world tour.

“I had to put this weird contraption on my guitar — it’s called a Floyd Rose,” John 5 says. “I was a Van Halen nut, so I had Floyds, and I know everything about them”

“To me, any similarities between any of the people I’ve worked with, whether it’s k.d. lang or Mötley Crüe, it all comes down to one thing: I just love music,” John 5 says. “Ever since I was a kid, I’ve loved music. It didn’t have to be rock or a certain kind of thing. As a lot of people know, I watched *Hee-Haw* on TV. There were amazing players on that

show. Anybody who could do anything very well — if you were good at your craft — I was excited about.”

THE CRÜECIBLE

JOHN 5’S ASCENSION to the Crüe fold comes at what could be a problematic time for the veteran band. When it was announced last October that Mick Mars was leaving the group as a touring member, a representative for the musician issued a statement to *Variety* that cited the guitarist’s long struggle with Ankylosing Spondylitis (a form of arthritis that, over time, can cause some of the bones in the spine to fuse) as the reason for his departure. In the statement, it was said that Mars would “continue as a member of the band, but can no longer handle the rigors of the road.” There was no firm word at the time as to a replacement for Mars, though it was widely assumed that John 5 would step in.

This was confirmed the next day when Neil, Lee and Sixx issued their own statement, saying, “No doubt it will take an absolutely outstanding musician to fill Mick’s shoes, so we are grateful that our good friend John 5 has agreed to come on board and join us moving forward.” Notable in their statement was a line that read, “While change is never easy, we accept Mick’s decision to retire from the band due to the challenges with his health.”

And then all hell broke loose. In April, Mars filed a lawsuit against Mötley Crüe, alleging that the band had attempted to divest him as a major stakeholder in the group’s corporation and business holdings. What’s more, Mars alleged that the band had engaged in a pattern of “gaslighting” him, belittling his musical and cognitive abilities, in an effort to oust him entirely. While an attorney for the band maintained that Mars’ decision to cease touring equaled quitting the band outright, Mars fired back in an interview with *Variety*, saying, “Those guys have been hammering on me since ’87, trying to replace me.”

How this situation will be resolved remains to be seen, and it should be stressed that none of these issues were broached during *our* interview with



TIME TO CHANGE YER STRINGS!

10 TIMES A BAND SWAPPED
OUT THEIR FAMOUS GUITARIST
WITH A FRESH FACE

BY ANDREW DALY

WOULDN'T IT BE nice if we lived in a world where the original lineups of the bands we love oh-so-dearly stuck it out and stayed together for the kids?

It's a nice thought, but it's nothing more than a pipe dream. The grizzled reality is we live in a world where some of the most famous acts still take to the stage and have one, or even none, of their original members among their ranks.

This demands the question: how much are original lineups worth? While we can hope and pray that if our favorite bands lose a member, it's not anyone "important," history dictates that even keeping the essential members can be too much to ask. Still, we've also seen that replacing even the most seemingly integral cog in the wheel isn't impossible. And don't look now, but

John 5 (our discussion took place before Mars' lawsuit was made public). In the meantime, as the guitarist acclimates to his new gig, he remains the ultimate Mötley Crüe fanboy. He recalls how, as a budding young picker in the early Eighties, he missed out on one of his earliest opportunities at seeing his heroes live: "When they came to Detroit, they were opening for Ozzy. I was going to go — I really wanted to see the Crüe — but it was on a school night so I couldn't go. I remember sitting in my friend's kitchen, and I said, 'Mötley Crüe is on stage right now.' I remember that vividly because

I wanted to go *so bad*."

Putting a fine point on his unbridled admiration for the band, he says, "It sounds kind of cheesy, but they're the soundtrack of our lives. Just like the Beatles were for a lot of people, or the Stones or anyone else — these songs have been in my head for as long as I can remember."

Before you joined Mötley Crüe, you rubbed shoulders with the guys quite a bit. You and Nikki even formed a side band called L.A. Rats, which includes Rob Zombie, funnily enough.

Oh yeah. I've known Nikki for a very, very long time. We've been best friends — literally best friends, like we know everything we could possibly know about each other. We've done a lot of work together. I worked with him on "The Monster Is Loose," which was the title track to Meat Loaf's



[center and right] Two views of Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx and John 5 in action on the band's current tour

[left] Mick Mars in Tokyo in July 1985



album [*Bat Out of Hell III: The Monster Is Loose*]. That was amazing. We did "Lies of the Beautiful People" for Sixx: AM. We did *The Dirt* together and so many other things — L.A. Rats, of course. Nikki and I talk every day, like, 30 times a day. We're like two kids. We go to the mall and do stupid stuff. We run around and have fun. I've known Tommy forever, but I didn't know Vince.

Take me inside how you were asked to take over guitar duties from Mick Mars.

There was never really any talk about

it. It's funny because we didn't talk about business a lot. It was so much in our lives, so we didn't talk about it. We talked about music and bands and records we love, movies and things like that, but I wouldn't say, "Oh, Zombie, John 5 and the Creatures..." I mean, Nikki would say, "We're getting ready for the tour, and the tour's huge," and things like that. I don't even know how it all came about.

But at a certain point, Nikki must have said to you — I assume it was Nikki — "Mick is thinking of leaving. What do you think? Are you interested?"

I was on the road, and they were finishing up their tour. We were actually missing each other a few times. Mötley were still touring, and I went right out with my band, the Creatures. There were times when I was playing a show in the exact same city as Mötley. I'd be three miles away in

some of these replacement players have become fan favorites.

So the next time you gripe and complain about your favorite band featuring a new face, take a step back and remember — for better or worse, that band might not be here otherwise. What follows is a guide to 10 memorable replacement guitar players.

JOHN 5

John 5's big break came when he joined David Lee Roth's band for the recording of 1998's *DLR Band*. But his first true turn as a replacement guitarist came when he replaced Zim Zum in Marilyn Manson's band in 1998. While John 5's time in Manson's band ended in



2004, he's remained busy through his solo work and his membership in Rob Zombie's band. But most recently, the Telecaster-toting shredder has made headlines as Mick Mars' replacement in Mötley Crüe. With new music on the way and an ongoing tour, fans must accept that John 5's polarizing presence as a member of Mötley Crüe has only just begun.

MICK MARS

While Mick Mars was present for Mötley Crüe's early hours, Greg Leon and Tommy Lee formed the sleaze titans. And there's no denying that the addition of Mars proved pivotal, as his fire-breathing antics defined the band's early sound. Furthermore, as the group's finest and most experienced musician and dedicated showman, Mars was also essential live, too. One listen shows that Mars' fingerprints are all over records such as *Too Fast for Love* (1981), *Shout*

at the Devil (1983), Theater of Pain (1985), Girls, Girls, Girls (1987) and Dr. Feelgood (1989), making Mötley Crüe worldbeaters. And so, it's a crying shame that a combination of failing health, infighting and nasty legal proceedings saw to it that Mars' 2022 departure came with heaping doses of finality.

KANE ROBERTS

Finding himself amid a commercial nadir that came about through massive bouts of substance abuse, by the mid Eighties, Alice Cooper was at an impasse. Sure, Dick Wagner had served Cooper well throughout the Seventies, but 1983's DaDa still plays as one of Cooper's worst records. Thankfully, with his megaburly stature, aggressive nature and melodic-meets-metal style, Kane Roberts came along, making Cooper's following two offerings, Constrictor (1986) and Raise Your Fist and Yell (1987), his finest in years. Roberts didn't stick around much longer, going solo in 1989, but he did return in the fall of 2022 when Nita Strauss took a respite from Cooper's band.

KELLEY DEAL

It's hard to imagine the Breeders without the presence of Kim and Kelley Deal. But if we dial back to the group's inception, Kelley was nowhere to be found. Truth be told, the Breeders' critically acclaimed debut, Pod (1990), featured Throwing Muses six-stringer Tanya Donnelly. As for Deal, she came along after Donnelly cleared off to form Belly. And it's a good thing considering the Breeders somehow managed to best Pod, releasing one of the Nineties' finest indie rock affairs in 1993's Last Splash to critical and commercial acclaim.

LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM

Starting with Peter Green and Jeremy Spencer, Fleetwood Mac had run through several guitarists by the time Bob Welch occupied the position. But by 1974, Welch's time in the seat was also coming to an end, leaving the Mac without a guitarist. Luckily, Mick Fleetwood ran into Lindsey Buckingham (along with Stevie Nicks) at Sound City Studios, leading to the duo joining the band. The rest, as they say, is history. Albums such as Fleetwood Mac (1975), Rumors (1977), Tusk (1979) and Mirage (1982) are stone-cold classics. These days, Buckingham is away from Fleetwood Mac once more. Only time will tell if he'll weave his way back for a third act.

this large club while they were in a stadium.

At the end of the tour, Nikki was like, "You know, I think Mick's going to retire. A tour's coming up. We're gonna go to Europe and South America and do all this touring." He said, "Is this something you'd be interested in?" To be honest with you, I look at this as 'life is very short, and I want to experience as much as I can.' I was like, "Well, of course."

You know, this is my best friend. I know every single song. That's the other thing — I didn't have to learn any songs. I know them all. To get a new chapter, a new beginning in your life — what a gift it is. It's hard to explain. It's such an epiphany to receive a gift like this, to go, "OK, here we go."

You didn't have to think about it for a few days? Right away, you said you were interested?

I said, "I'm interested" right away. This is how to say it: I'm still very, very hungry. I'm not ready to go, "Boy, what a great life." I was like, "Yeah, I'm very interested and I want to do this."

At the time this was going down, were you thinking of leaving Rob Zombie?

That's a great question. No. We're friends. We're buddies. We love each other. He's the best guy ever.

Still, I imagine it was a hard decision, because as you said, Rob Zombie is a friend.

It was a hard decision, yes. I thought I could do both. Even Nikki was like, "Well, maybe you can do both." Me, Rob, Nikki, Tommy — we're all friends. But life is short.

Was Rob understanding about everything?

He was understanding. He understood because he's professional. It was hard because I never wanted him to be sad. That was tough, of course, because we were so close. But I had to look out for myself this time. I had to take this opportunity.

Do you know Mick? Did you talk to him at all before you made your decision?

I know Mick. We're good friends and things like that. But I didn't talk to him beforehand.

Despite your strong relationships with Nikki and Tommy, was there anything like an audition? Did you have to get in a room and jam — just to make sure?

Not really. Nikki and I have played so many times before. We've worked together in the studio, and we've even played live together. He played "Helter Skelter" with Zombie; he played "Shout at the Devil" with me at one of my solo shows. I've worked on Tommy's records. They know how I play. I didn't have to audition, but I'll tell you this: When we got into the first day of rehearsal, it was so smooth. We ran through the whole set, with intros, outros, medleys — everything in one take. It was amazing. We got into the room and they said, "What do you want to start with?" I said, "Let's start at the top." We just went through every song — bam, bam, bam. It gave me chills.

You were meeting Vince pretty much cold. Was there any kind of getting-to-know-you period?

Good question. OK, Tommy was having his birthday party, and Vince was coming. We were all there. Tommy introduced us, and Vince said, "Hey man, we're gonna have such a great time." I was so excited to meet him, and I got emotional. I told him, "You have a birthday coming up, and I think it's when we're going to be rehearsing. I'm gonna get you a really cool gift." He said, "You're the best gift I could have ever gotten." I was like, "Oh, my God." It was amazing.

We have such a good time together. We laugh all the time.

On tour, we have these different cars to take us to the venue, but we wind up getting into the same car. We all want to hang together and laugh and chit-chat. I think that's why we all got sick recently — because we're in each other's faces all the time.

Even though you knew the band's music, did you do a little homework before that first rehearsal?

I would go through the set every day. I prepare myself for everything because I never want to feel nervous. I don't like that feeling. I would study their stadium tour concerts — what Vince is going to say, where I should go during this, where I should go during that — and I mean really *study*. In rehearsal, Nikki would say, "At the end of the song, we're going to do 10 hits here." I knew all of these endings. I knew the different ending of "Live Wire," going down from A to A^b, G, F[#], F and then ending in E, which segues into "Looks That Kill." They looked at me like I had the memory of a crazy elephant. I knew their show so well because I didn't want to be nervous.

Did you have to pull out any of their CDs, just to make sure you had the licks and solos down?

That's what I'm saying. I did it every day for months. I wanted to play those solos exactly as they were written. Those solos are so important to me as a fan, and they're so important to the audience. The squeals in "Looks That Kill" or the harmonics in "Dr. Feelgood" — these are very important to me and the world. It's like you're looking at some sheet music; you're looking at Mozart, and you're like, "Well, I'm gonna improvise over this part." No. That's how those songs were written, how they were recorded, and how they should be performed. I wanted to give those songs respect.

I'm just trying to get the picture here. So there wasn't even one song by the band that you didn't already know very well?

Honestly, I really did know all the Crüe songs. The only thing I had to learn was the arrangement of the medley that's in the middle of the band's live setlist. I've known all the songs for as long as I can remember.

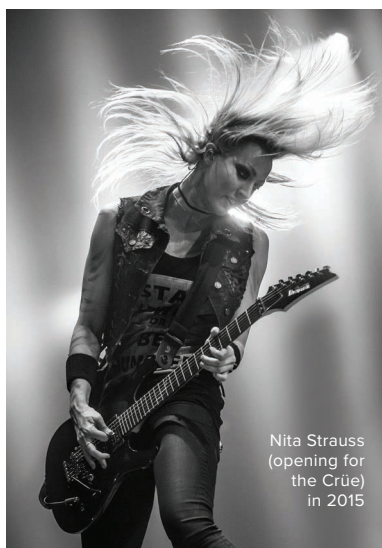
Did the guys say you were free to take the songs outside and "John 5" them a bit?

I checked with the guys and said, "I'm going to play them as they are on the records." They said, "OK, well, you can have a solo." And that's when I go completely berserk. It's kind of a perfect situation.

Mötley Crüe in early 2023;
[from left] Nikki Sixx, John 5,
Vince Neil and Tommy Lee

"THEY KNOW
HOW I PLAY.
I DIDN'T HAVE
TO AUDITION"





Nita Strauss
(opening for
the Crüe)
in 2015

NITA STRAUSS

There was a time when Nita Strauss was the sort of player who'd never say "no" to a gig. It's hard to believe now, given her stature as a superstar, but it's true. Early in her career, Strauss made a name for herself with the all-women tribute to Iron Maiden, the Iron Maidens. And she even featured as the in-house guitarist for the Los Angeles Kiss (Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons' arena football team). But Strauss' signature moment came when she replaced another powerhouse player, Orianthi, in Alice Cooper's band. In the year since, Strauss' legend has grown to the point that these days, as a member of Cooper and Demi Lovato's band, she's earned the right to say "no."

BRUCE KULICK

By the time Bruce Kulick entered the picture for Kiss, the band had run through two guitarists in two years after the departure of Ace Frehley in 1982. While Vinnie Vincent proved too enigmatic and Mark St. John's physical issues limited him, Kulick was a breath of fresh air. His crisp solos and affable personality made him a perfect foil to the huger-than-huge personas of Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley. So it's sad that Kulick lost his spot to a returning Frehley in '96. And while Tommy Thayer now holds the distinction of Kiss' longest-tenured axman, make no mistake: Kiss probably wouldn't exist today without Kulick. Oh, and for those keeping score, Kulick accomplished the feat again when he replaced Mark Farner in Grand Funk Railroad in 2000.

MICK TAYLOR

If Mick Taylor's only example of replacement guitar heroics came when he replaced Peter Green, who

Do you think you might suggest to the guys the idea of playing some deep cuts?

Oh, of course. At rehearsal, I'm that guy. They'll say, "Can you check the guitar really quick?" And I'll play "Louder Than Hell" or "Bastard." I'll play "Ten Seconds to Love" — any of these deep cuts. They'll say, "Oh, kick ass!" Whenever they suggest something, it's like, "You know all these songs." It's like you were in the Beatles, and they said, "Hey, let's try 'Hey Bulldog.'" Who knows what we'll do in the future? I'm ready and prepared.

Let's talk about your first show with the band. Were you nervous about Crüe fans accepting you? There's always that thing — "He's not Mick."

I wasn't nervous about the show. I was like, "Yay, let's do this!" Everybody was like, "Are you nervous?" And I was like, "No." Because I was prepared. If somebody said, "Give me bar 22 of 'Shout at the Devil,'" I would say, "OK." That's how prepared I was. But of the people wanting to accept me? If they said, "He's not Mick Mars," it's like, "I'm not Mick Mars. I'm John 5."

It would be silly if I came out with a long black wig and a hat, you know? I'm my own person.

For instance, I love Kiss, right? I love Kiss. But I would never put on Ace's makeup. Never. I'd create my own character, and if they said I couldn't do that, I'd say, "Then I'm not the guy."

Have you had to change anything about your own personal guitars or gear for the Crüe gig? You're still playing the Teles...

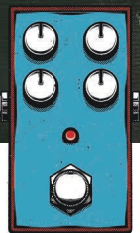
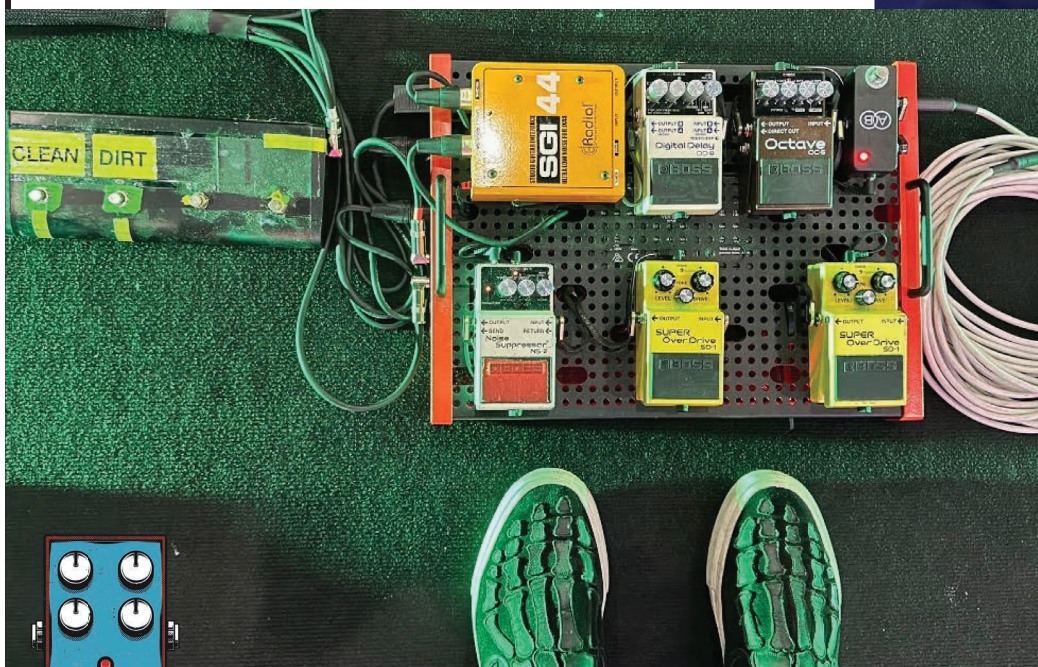
I'll tell you, I had to put this weird contraption on my guitar — it's called a Floyd Rose.

Oh, I've heard of those. They're new. [Laughs]

Yeah, it's weird. This thing's got a bar on it, and it makes the strings go up and down. Again, I'm who I am — I've always played Teles. Actually, Mick played Teles a lot throughout his career.

Now that you mention it, in some of the clips I've seen of you with the Crüe, I noticed you were using a whammy bar.

Yeah, I had to put Floyds on all of my



MY PEDALBOARD JOHN 5

MY RIG IS VERY SIMPLE: I have a Boss Noise Suppressor, two Boss SD-1 Super Overdrives, a Boss Digital Delay and a Boss OC-5 Octave pedal. I have Marshall JCM900s and a bunch of Teles. That's it. Everything's the same — except for the Floyd Rose. — John 5



"I LOVE MICK
MARS"

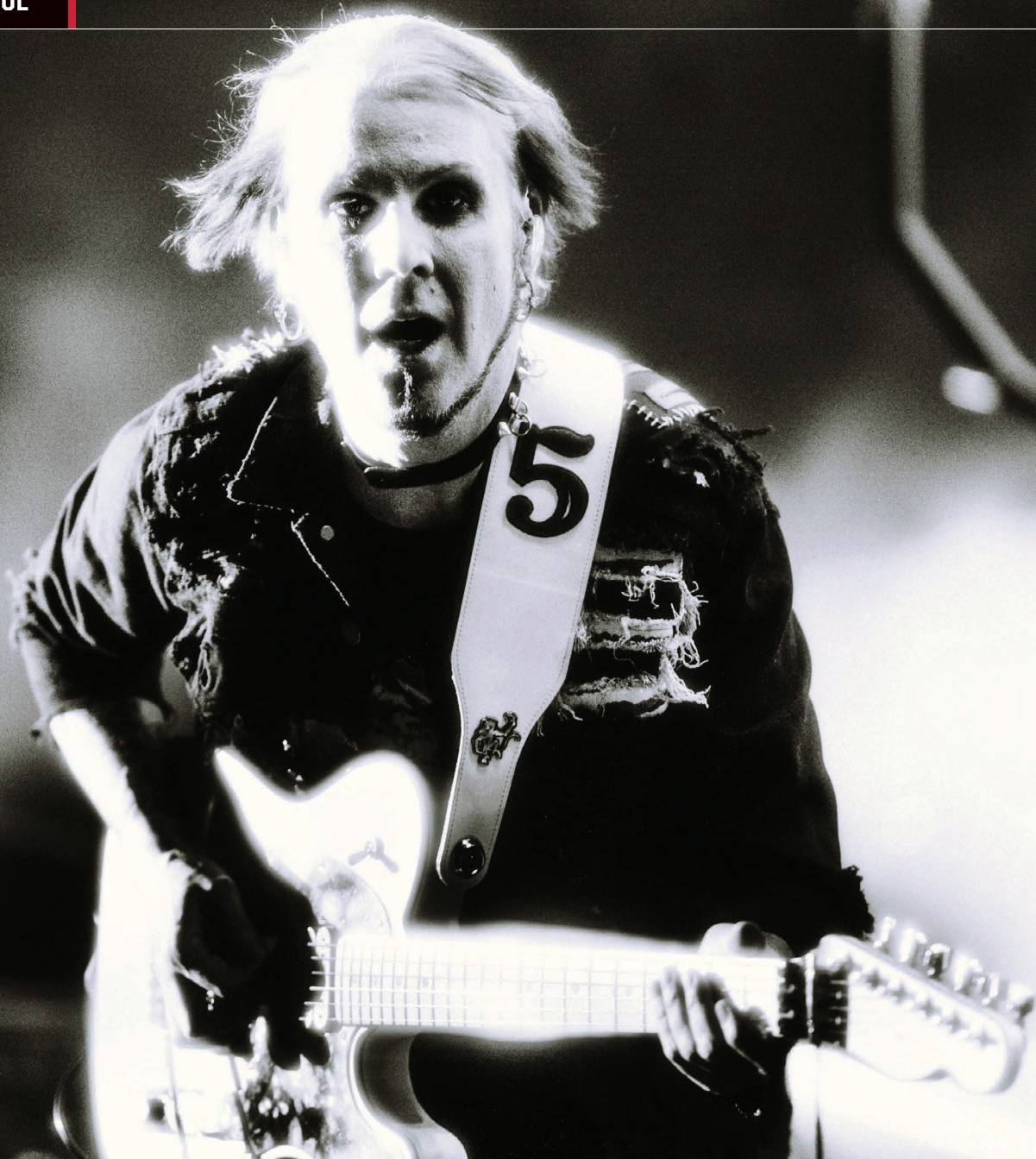
had replaced Eric Clapton, in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, his legend would be cemented. But no, Taylor replaced Brian Jones in the Rolling Stones, leading to some of the group's most celebrated recordings. The only real issue with Taylor's time as a Rolling Stone was that it didn't last long enough. There's just something about Taylor's time in the band that scratches the guitar-related itch. But considering he co-authored albums like *Let It Bleed* (1969), *Sticky Fingers* (1971), *Exile on Main St.* (1972), *Goats Head Soup* (1973) and *It's Only Rock 'n Roll* (1974), it's not hard to see why.

MARTY FRIEDMAN

Megadeth has featured 11 different players on lead guitar over a 40-year career. Staggering as that is, it's true. And it goes without saying that given the demanding nature of Dave Mustaine and the complexity of the music he creates, those 11 players were damn talented. Still, Marty Friedman, who came in as a replacement for Jeff Young in 1989, remains a fan favorite. There's no denying that the tormented solos and riffs heard across the likes of *Rust in Peace* (1990), *Countdown to Extinction* (1992) and *Youthanasia* (1994) are unrelenting in their beauty. Friedman's playing was so inspiring, and so well-loved that to this day, no Megadeth six-stringer carries his level of cache.

KIRK HAMMETT

Kirk Hammett's entryway into Metallica is a tale as old as time. But for the uninitiated, the abridged version goes like this: Dave Mustaine was Metallica's original lead guitarist. And depending on who you ask, Dave wrote much of Metallica's early material. But Mustaine's gruff personality and alcohol-induced fits of rage saw to it that he was fired from Metallica. From there, Hammett — who had founded Exodus — entered the fold, never to relinquish the spot. Now 11 albums deep, the Bay Area legends have never made an album without Hammett. So, considering Metallica continues to dominate the globe, along with the fact that Hammett is a hell of a nice guy and a damn good player, it seems that the right call was made.



Teles. Listen, I was a Van Halen nut, so I had Floyds, and I know everything about them. I just haven't played with a Floyd in a while, because I would do all that stuff behind the nut. So when I got the guitars with Floyds, it wasn't any kind of crazy thing. It was fine.

Are there any significant tonal adjustments you've had to make to suit the Mötley Crüe sound?

I did have to make my sound more distorted at some points. I'm using the two distortion pedals to have the harmonics and the squeals both come out just perfect every time.

But you know, I wanted to say something because you mentioned the fans. The fans have been so happy and accepting. They know I'm one of them. I love these guys so much, and the fans have been so kind. I'm just playing the songs the way they've

heard them. It's not like I'm trying to do anything crazy.

I read all the comments, and of course, you're always going to have the people who say, "He's not Mick Mars." And it's like, "Yeah, I'm not *trying* to be Mick Mars." If they say, "He shouldn't be playing a Tele," it's like, "But Mars played a Tele for so many years." For "Girls, Girls, Girls," he played a Tele. When the band went to Russia, he played a Tele the entire time. He loves Telecasters. But the fans have been very accepting. I'll go down to the lobby and I'll sign all the stuff. It's just wonderful. Of course, it's concerning, but it's been such a smooth transition.

Has being in the band given you a different or renewed appreciation for Mick Mars' work?

"We've been in the studio with Bob Rock, having a great time just like we do on tour, laughing and playing music," John 5 says. "It's coming along really quickly"

Oh, no, no, no. I've had a beyond appreciation for Mick Mars ever since I was a little kid. I love Mick Mars. Nothing has changed. Knowing these songs as a kid is how I know them now. I used to play Harpo's and the Ritz and all these clubs, and we'd play Mötley Crüe songs. I have such a high appreciation for Mars, of course. I always have and I always will. I just want to play these songs

to where the guys are proud.

Has there been any talk of recording new material with the band?

We've been in the studio with Bob Rock, and we've been having a great time just like we do on tour, laughing and playing music. It's coming along really quickly. The songs are super heavy and everybody's excited.

In your mind, how long do you envision staying part of the Crüe lineup?

I envision staying with Mötley Crüe... As long as Mötley Crüe are around, I don't plan on leaving — and I hope I never get fired. It's such a wonderful band to be in. It really is a dream to be playing with your friends. It's something I never envisioned, but I'm so thankful it's happened. 

Mötley Crüe will tour Australia with Def Leppard this November.

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IN THE NAME OF LOVE

When it came to remaking 40 classic U2 tracks for *Songs Of Surrender*, The Edge was guided by his heart and one grand idea – “to make intimacy the new version of punk rock”

Words Joe Bosso



During the course of their four-decade-plus career, U2 have been a daringly stubborn, forward-thinking lot, rarely repeating a proven formula, and constantly searching for the next big idea. Indeed, their momentum seems to have always been fuelled by an almost Bowie-esque need for experimentation. Sometimes the gambits paid off spectacularly (the rich Americana textures of *The Joshua Tree* were traded for *Achtung Baby*'s postmodern European art-rock); other times, not so much (the techno dance-heavy *Pop* ranks as their most under-appreciated effort). But in each case, the band made it clear they weren't running to stand still, and whether they delighted their fans or occasionally mystified them, their true measure of success was guided by their indefatigable quest for change.

And now they've really gone and done it. U2's latest project – *Songs Of Surrender*, a whopping collection of 40 “reimagined” songs from their back catalogue – is one that will invariably provoke intense reactions, both good and bad, from their fans, many of whom regard the band's original recordings as sacrosanct. For The Edge, the driving force behind the four-disc set (he's credited as producer, and he created much of the instrumentation), the notion of merely tweaking musical themes was one he rejected out of hand. Simply put, revisiting the past meant throwing a whole lot of it out the window.

“We're not just treading lightly on hallowed ground. We're going in with jack boots,” he says

with a laugh. “That was our early decision: ‘Are we going to suspend reverence here and just go for it?’ And we decided to go for it because we thought we'd get into more interesting territory if we gave ourselves that freedom.” He pauses, then smiles mischievously. “But we also had an overriding idea, which was to make intimacy the new version of punk rock for us.”

Punk rock in 2023, at least in The Edge's world, is bathed in the lush sound of acoustics (for those thirsting for the guitarist's ringing, soaring, effects-treated electric six-strings, adjust your expectations immediately). This is a softer, quieter, laid-back version of punk rock (and U2) and, admittedly, it takes the ears a while to adjust. The once anthemic *Pride (In The Name Of Love)* is now stripped down, slowed down and sung by Bono in a lower register. It doesn't so much confront you as it gradually seeps into your senses. Likewise, the youthful harmonic urgency of *11 O'Clock Tick Tock* now moves at a more mature pace, with The Edge performing a delicately plucked nylon-string solo in place of the original's jarring electric lead.

On some tracks, he dispenses with guitars altogether. The chiming electric rhythm of *Where The Streets Have No Name* is nowhere to be found on what is now a haunting hymn framed by synths and strings. Similarly, *Stories For Boys*, sung by The Edge and devoid of the guitarist's cavernous leads, has been transformed from a surging rocker into an absorbing piano elegy. Throughout most of the album, however, over minimal and sometimes no percussion at all, he's briskly strumming

and chugging away (and on a few songs, notably *Ordinary Love*, he demonstrates he's an artful and creative fingerpicker), breaking down chordal and lead arrangements to their bare essentials. On cuts like *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and *Until The End Of The World*, he performs virtual note-for-note versions of his famous solos, while on *The Fly*, now a slinky and sultry mood piece, he splashes twangy licks over a booming bed of bass guitars.

Not everything gets a drastic makeover. *Vertigo* and *Desire* (here with heavily treated acoustics) still rock and swing as hard as ever, and in their new spare forms, they're the best damn campfire songs around. For the most part, though, the emphasis is on reinvention, and each track brings with it a new surprise. The biggest revelation perhaps comes in the form of a question – why would a band so revered for its sense of grandeur want to reel it all in?

The Edge takes it on directly and thoughtfully. "It's not something we're famous for – because we grew up on stage in little sweaty clubs in America and Europe," he says. "Our challenge was always to get to that [person] at the back of the room, somebody who isn't really a fan or isn't paying attention. There was always an intense pitch to our music early on. So my thought here was, 'Let's take minimalism to the nth degree, if it's appropriate.' And on a lot of these songs, it worked. We left

just the bare skeletons of the original arrangements in terms of themes and hooks, taking things down to a really light touch."

He's keenly aware that "going in with jack boots" was going to be met with varying responses – and, if anything, that appears to be the overarching point. "For this to be meaningful, we didn't want to recreate something that was already out there and was well-recognised," he says. "It was, 'What happens when you take the band away and you remove from the mix everything we're famous for?' You allow the songs to stand on their own."

You're one of the most distinctive and copied players of the past 40 years. Usually we talk about some new wild sound you've come up with or a new pedal you've discovered. You're not doing that here. [Edge laughs] Was that scary? Exciting? Both?

"It was both. I mean, not scary, really. When we started this project, there was no expectation. We could have done a couple of weeks on it, and if we weren't excited by the results, it never would have seen the light of day. As it happened, the more I got into it, the more excited I got. I thought, 'There really is something to this.' For me, the pivot was *Stories For Boys*, from the first album [1980's *Boy*]. I hit on this piano approach that's so different from the original. I sang a demo vocal of it

"We're not just treading lightly on hallowed ground. We're going in with jack boots... We thought we'd get into more interesting territory"

and presented it to Bono, assuming he would do his own lead vocal. He said, 'Edge, I love this! You should sing it, and let's work on the lyrics to update it and give it a different twist.'

"Because there was no pressure or expectation, and just through the sheer thrill of doing this, I think the whole collection has a kind of freedom to it, a lightness. I don't think U2 fans have ever heard the band like this."

There is that old saying, 'A good song is one you can play on an acoustic guitar...'

"Yeah. Some of our producers have stressed that to us over the years, almost as an appeal. Steve Lillywhite would say, 'Would you just play the song on an acoustic guitar? That's how we'll see what we really have.' Of course, that's something we rarely did, but when we did it was useful. This collection sort of proves that if songs hold together, they really are indestructible. You can take huge liberties with that, and they'll hold up."

There is some precedent for this with you guys. You and Bono played *Ordinary Love* and *Stuck In A Moment You Can't Get Out Of* acoustically on TV shows.

"We have. It's interesting that some of those arrangements became the more iconic versions. *Ordinary Love* is a good example. *Every Breaking Wave* became a very big live song, and it was stripped right down to just piano and voice. That was really encouraging, learning that paring it back can be good for the song."

For this collection, can you pinpoint the moment when you said, "Let's try this"? Was it literally you sitting at home playing a song on an acoustic that you had only played on an electric guitar?

"There were actually a couple of moments. The great fun of this project was also trying to take some of the deep catalogue songs that never became particularly well known and giving them a chance to shine. One of the moments of realisation was *If God Will Send His Angels*, from the *Pop* album. It was a single, but we always felt as if

The Edge performs an acoustic set with Bono in a Kyiv subway station/bomb shelter, May 2022. The setlist featured U2 classics *With Or Without You*, *One and Angel Of Harlem*, as well as a cover of Ben E King's *Stand By Me*



PHOTO BY SERGEI SUPINSKY/AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



PHOTO BY VIRGINIA TURBET/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

we'd missed it. The problem wasn't the lyric or melody; the flow of chords didn't do justice to what Bono had done. So I completely rearranged the chordal progressions, and now I feel like it's a new song. It's a better song. That was greatly encouraging.

"With some of other more obscure songs, I tested that idea. *Dirty Day* was one of the first songs I played on acoustic, and that's a pretty nasty guitar-based tune on *Zooropa* – not a particularly well-known song. I always liked its essence, and then playing it very simply on acoustic guitar, it really held up.

"Some of the last things we did were the big classic songs. But even in that process, say, with *Pride (In The Name Of Love)*, I realised that the solo didn't really make sense by stripping it back, so I kind of wrote an orchestral middle section to add some light and shade to the arrangement. There was a lot of fun there."

Was there a particular acoustic guitar that really guided your approach throughout the project?

"I've been buying some vintage guitars, and some of them are absolutely amazing. Like these guitars from the 40s are so pure and small sounding, but they're so musical. That was a big revelation. Being so used to these big dreadnought guitars, I thought these smaller guitars had so much personality. There was a particular guitar that was my go-to, a 1947 Martin 0-18, and it's a beauty. I was with my son, Levi, in McCabe's in Santa Monica. He was buying a pedal, and I was staring at this guitar in a case. I was like, 'Mmm, do you mind if I try this guitar?' I instantly fell in love with it.

"Also, I was trying to find ways to add other slightly more percussive sounds, so I dug an old hammered dulcimer out of the back of a closet. I'd never played it, so I was learning how to play this thing. That was a lot of fun."

In the early days, U2's goal was to be so intense, audiences in clubs had to pay attention. The new album celebrates the unvarnished song beneath the sound and fury

I was talking with Melissa Manchester, who also re-recorded some songs from her catalogue. She told me that one of her reasons for doing so was, after singing these songs for almost 50 years, she felt like she had grown into them. Did you have a similar feeling about your own songs?

"Yes, I think that did happen. I also think that gave us the inspiration, in some cases, for new lyrics. The essence of the song felt more relevant from this perspective. Like with *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, when we got to the last verse, Bono said, 'I think there's a better verse here.' So now that song has a new final verse. With the benefit of a bit of time from when that song was first inspired, from the safety of the peace that we now enjoy in Ireland, we could afford to be a little more direct. Without being overt, that lyric now addresses some of the history and incidents that inspired that song, which we probably wouldn't have felt comfortable addressing at the time."

You once said that if you were having a problem writing a song, you'd crank up the effects and see where they might take you. Was it a challenge reapproaching the songs without those effects?

"In most cases, I think I was able to use the musical themes from the original recordings, but I would abstract them. In the initial instance, we were probably struggling to find something with thematic power that would drive the song and support the vocals. Here, it's the opposite. It's like, 'How much can we take away?' It was less pressure, in a way. We were still being creative, but there was no sense that we hadn't arrived with a song that couldn't stand on its own.

"I think we were maybe inspired by what we were all going through with the lockdown, where your entire life was reduced to the bare minimum [laughs]. It's what we were doing with our song arrangements."

Obviously, you've played acoustic in the past, but here you're laser-focused on it. As a player, did that present some new challenges from a technique standpoint?

"Definitely. I was playing six-string, and I did some 12-string and some Spanish guitar. I played a beautiful old flamenco guitar that was made for me by Lowden. Yeah, I really had to stretch. But what it also did for me was, it gave me a real appreciation for the great acoustic guitar players, along with some of the techniques that I haven't mastered. Certain picking techniques – I'm going to relish being a student again and becoming better versed in that. It's a fascinating world. I don't profess to be a master in these areas, but I'm such a fan."

I was struck by the songs you covered but also some that you didn't, like *Bullet The Blue Sky* and *The Electric Co.* Did you try them but you weren't happy with where they went?

"We didn't do *Bullet The Blue Sky*, no. There were a few that, for one reason or another, we weren't sure we found a new place. *Running To Stand Still* – I thought that it was already in a minimal form, so I didn't know if we would find a new angle there. With *Bullet*, I don't think we got around to it. I think maybe we felt that we'd already done so much from that album. We'd already gotten a few from *The Joshua Tree*. That was a dilemma, as well, not to overly concentrate on one or two albums.

"Some were a challenge in a good



Songs Of Surrender allowed The Edge to expand his guitar skills beyond the electric, giving him "real appreciation for the great acoustic guitar players, along with some techniques I haven't mastered. I'm going to relish being a student again"

way. *Beautiful Day* and *With Or Without You*, we tried them multiple ways; we tried them very organic, and then, particularly *With Or Without You*, we thought that we should go very abstract. That was a fun process."

When I heard about the project but hadn't seen the track list, I thought, 'No way will they do *The Fly*.' The original is such a gonzo, psychedelic electric guitar song.
 "[Laughs] It is."

But you ended up doing it, and you turned it into a much darker piece.
 "The breakthrough with that song was, we decided we wouldn't have a lead guitar; we'd just have two basses, so Adam [Clayton] and I both played. The two bass performances come together to make this a very different version of *The Fly*. As you say, it's kind of psychedelic, but it's got a dark quality. I love it. Again, with the solos, it's like, 'What do you do with that?' The dulcimer came in very handy."

On some other solos, like on *Till The End Of The World* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, you stick pretty close to how you originally played them.
 "Yep."

Did you try them another way first?
 "I don't know. In those cases, I just felt that they were some of the key

thematic ideas. Take *City Of Blinding Lights*: we kept some of those big guitar hooks, but they're now played in a different form. With some, I was happy to maintain the original ideas, but with others, it was obvious that something new had to happen. On *Out Of Control*, a whole new solo idea spontaneously happened.

"There were no rules with this project – that was the great thing. Bono kicked up a pretty serious media furore recently when he admitted that some of his early vocal recordings were a source of a certain amount of embarrassment for him. You can hear the strain in his voice. Mind you, it never even occurred to us in those days to lower the key to better fit his range.

"Today, with each arrangement, we were able to go, 'Where do you want to pitch this one?' I've got a similar vocal range to Bono, so I was able to take some good guesses for what would work for him. It was like tailoring the songs to suit him as a singer. At this point in his life, I think he's a better interpreter of songs than he's ever been. That was the ultimate goal – to serve the song by serving the singer."

You're something of the ultimate gear guy. On this project, did you learn anything new about mic'ing acoustic guitars?

"Very often, I would do a quick initial acoustic demo at home. If I was in



Dublin, I would be by the piano. And to my surprise, the engineers on occasion would go, 'Whoa, that's amazing. How did you get that sound?' I think it was because I had some really nice microphones. I found this one by Aston, an English mic that's currently in production. It's a very warm-sounding mic for acoustic guitars.

"Some of those recordings I made ended up on the album. It was that kind of project. Some of it was done in a proper recording studio in London, but a few were literally recorded in my bedroom."

Now that you've spent a considerable amount of time focused on the acoustic guitar, do you think you might go back to exploring new sounds on the electric with a fresh attitude?

"I know the answer to that [laughs]. I've been working a lot on new guitar music, and I'm very excited about it. It's at that prototype stage where... who knows? But the answer to the question is 'yes'. I'm finding myself, for the first time in a little while, getting very excited about the electric guitar again. Maybe it's something to do with the lockdown, having the time to not

The Edge: "This collection proves that if songs hold together [on acoustic guitar], they really are indestructible"

do very much. For me, that was such a creative opportunity."

Were it not for the lockdown, would you have done this massive acoustic project?

"We'll never know, will we? [Laughs] We were due for some time off. We finished our last show in India in December of 2019. We came home, and almost immediately the world was turned upside down. That time would have been spent working on ideas and early stage new songs. And we are. We have great material in the pipeline." 

WITH A NEW SOLO
ALBUM SHAKING UP
THE AIRWAVES,
NITA STRAUSS DISCUSSES
THE IMPORTANCE
OF TAKING RISKS, STEPPING
OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE
AND NEVER SETTLING

by **Andrew Daly**
Photo by **Jen Rosenstein**

IF YOU VENTURED over to Nita Strauss' Twitter account, below the image of the leather-clad gunslinger hoisting a radioactive green Ibanez JIVA over her shoulders, you'd find a Tweet that's been pinned in place since July 23, 2018. For five years, said pinned Tweet has been the very definition of the intrepid six-stringer, seemingly guiding her every musical move. But at the time, it was merely an answer to a simple question: "How did you get your start in the hired scene as a guitarist?"

"I played guitar for anyone who would have me," Strauss wrote in her 2018 Tweet. "Rock, pop, funk, metal, covers, originals... sometimes two shows a night with different bands. Went on tour for next to nothing. Built a reputation for being on time, professional and a strong performer... better gigs came with time."

When Strauss first penned that Tweet, she was 31. At the time, she was mere months out from a successful April 2018 Kickstarter campaign — which raised eight times its initial goal in two hours — that ultimately funded her first solo record, *Controlled Chaos*, released in September 2018. Her resume already included stints with Alice Cooper, the Iron Maidens, Femme Fatale and even as the house guitarist for the Los Angeles Kiss (Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons' arena football team). So at the time of *Controlled Chaos*' release, Strauss was undoubtedly a star on the rise, but no one could have imagined the shift into hyperdrive that came next.

"Someone recently brought up my pinned Tweet," Strauss tells us. "It came from someone asking me how I got my start. And I basically said, 'I played guitar for whoever would have me.' And that really was the mentality. I'd do funk, death metal, punk and folk gigs; it didn't matter.

In the
eye of the
Hurricane



I built my reputation by playing different gigs with different bands. I had to do that because I knew that's what it took. And that's what it still takes; you can't just do the same thing forever. All you see me do is part of working to encourage that mindset."

Fast forward to the middle of 2023. Strauss is now 36. As has been the case for years, she affectionately goes by "Hurricane Nita." And most importantly, she's one of the most pre-eminent guitarists in the world. Still a member of Alice Cooper's band — though never to be thought of as just "Alice Cooper's guitarist" — Strauss' immense chops have forcefully been matched by her blistering work ethic and a boundless need for exploration that has seen her join the ranks of mega star Demi Lovato.

And so, in conversation with us in support of her second solo offering, *The Call of the Void*, when asked if she still sees herself as she did in 2018, Strauss pauses, clearly deep in



"FOR A LONG TIME, NO MATTER WHAT I DID, I WAS SEEN AS 'ALICE COOPER'S GUITAR PLAYER'"

thought, before saying, "I think that for a while now, I've been at a point where I get to choose what I do. But I was that other person for a long time where I would jump in with anybody that needed a guitar player. If I was available, I was there. But now, I can be more selective with what I do. I don't want to turn down gigs that inspire me because I don't have time. So I'm careful about what I choose to take on. I'm thankful for being in a position to do that now."

Considering how busy you've been between Demi [Lovato] and Alice [Cooper], where did you find time to record *The Call of the Void*?

I actually recorded the bulk of the music during the pandemic in 2021 and early '22. Since then, I've been tackling the task of finding different vocalists, making sure we can record on their schedules and that my album doesn't conflict with any releases they have coming out. That's been the major delay between finishing what I had to do, which was just playing guitar, and this record coming out.

Did the delays lead to overthinking what you had in the can?

I mean... I just naturally overthink everything. [Laughs] So it was probably a blessing that I



kept thinking the record was about to come out because I didn't have the opportunity to pick apart my playing and performances. Because once I was finished, I was out of the studio and on to the next thing, you know? So as much as I would have liked to listen back and be like, "Well, maybe I'll change that; maybe I'll fix this and redo that," I couldn't because it was done, and I was off to the races. I could only wait for the vocalists to do their thing. The lag ended up being a blessing in disguise in that way.

The first thing I noticed was how aggressive this record is. "Summer Storm" feels like a statement of intent.

That's exactly why I have it as the first song on the record. It really does encapsulate who I am and where I'm at as a player now. On my first record [Controlled Chaos], "Our Most Desperate Hour" was that song. And I'd say that "Summer Storm" is *that* song for this record. If someone were to say, "Hey, Nita, I'd like to hear what you sound like as an artist," "Summer Storm" is what I'd play them. I'm glad I chose to have it be the first song on *The Call of the Void* because it really does come out of the gate hot, saying, "Here it is. This is what we came here to do."

Tell me about your experience working with Lzzy Hale on "Through the Noise."

Lzzy is obviously at the top of everybody's wish list. She's a powerhouse performer and an incredible vocalist. Anybody who has ever been around Lzzy will tell you she's an absolute gem of a human being. And being able to work with Lzzy ended up being one of the beautiful benefits of this album taking so fucking long. [Laughs] I reached out to her in 2021 while I was recording, asking if she would like

to be on my album. Her response was, "I would love to, but Halestorm has an album coming out, so it's not the right time. Thank you so much for asking; I would love to do something in the future." But because we had so much time between Halestorm's album cycle and the delayed release of my album, I could ask her again a year later. So I'm glad my album was delayed because Lzzy knocked it out of the park. Her voice is on another level.

Lzzy aside, how did you decide which vocalists you wanted to work with?

I wanted to have a good mix of generations and styles. I didn't want it only to have one field throughout. And it was cool to get to work with legacy artists like David Draiman and my longtime boss Alice [Cooper]. And there's Anders Fridén from the mighty In Flames, along with a group of up-and-coming talent and people from the current generation like Dorothy and Chris Motionless. The result is a wide range of styles — some radio-friendly tracks and some heavier songs. Overall, this record says a lot about who I am as a player.

A lot of people have boxed you in as "just a shredder" or "a hired gun." Can you elaborate on the player you are outside of those labels?

I think I'm a versatile player. If you look at the arc of my career as far back as my touring with Jermaine Jackson and the Iron Maidens to last year when I toured with Alice Cooper, Demi Lovato and my solo band in the same year, I've always wanted to be a guitar player who didn't fit into only one mold. I'm excited that I've gotten to break out of that throughout my professional life. And I'm excited that I also broke out of that on this record.



I'd venture to guess that with versatility comes continued growth. How do you feel you've grown as a player?

I'm literally going to write that down and hang it in my studio: "With versatility comes continuous growth." I love that! But for a long time — and this had often been the case leading into 2022 — no matter what I did, I was seen as "Alice Cooper's guitar player." It was always, "Oh, Alice Cooper's guitar player did this" or "Alice Cooper's guitar player did that." Don't get me wrong, I'm proud beyond belief to be Alice's guitar player. But I also do my own thing. So if every headline says, "Alice Cooper's guitar player has a song that went to number 1 on rock radio," to me, that meant I had to do something to break the mold. So the last year was about me proving that even after successfully touring with Alice for years, I can still go out and re-establish myself and take risks.

Hopping on tour with Demi accomplished that goal. How did it change you as a player, if at all?

In terms of songwriting, touring with Demi gave me a fresh perspective on what makes a song a massive hit. I've been playing these massive Alice Cooper songs for almost a decade, and that's one side of how it's done. But going out and working with Demi, where you have songs like "Cool for the Summer," which is in the billions — with a *B* — in streams on Spotify, I've got a renewed sense that simplicity often makes these massive songs. And that's something I want to carry into my playing as I write my next record. I plan to incorporate all these different experiences to develop my sound further.

So working with Demi has allowed you to fearlessly tap into the mainstream pop side of things, whereas Alice keeps you grounded in rock.

I think that's a great way of putting it. And then, on the flip side, even though Demi is at the top of her game and one of the biggest stars in the world, to work with someone as seasoned as me during a time when she's having a true

expression of self for the first time, maybe ever, has been important, too. We have to remember that Demi made this incredibly raw, authentic, hard rock, pop punk album [2022's *Holy Fvck*], which she's never done before. Bringing that to life with her on stage for six months was so cool. It's so rare that you get to be beside someone while they're experiencing a truly authentic experience after being in a spot where things were very manufactured. It was special to be with her as she went through that.

Your mindset reminds me of Marty Friedman in many ways, which is interesting because he's also on *The Call of the Void*. Has his trajectory factored into your thinking during your own career?

Not explicitly, but that's an interesting point.

I love Marty. The first metal song I heard was "Trust" by Megadeth. That was my introduction to that style of music that we all love so much. The first time I heard Marty's searing solo in "Trust," I was like, "Whoa, what is this?" It really was my musical awakening

[left] Nita Strauss performs with Demi Lovato in Wheatland, California, September 22, 2022

[above] Strauss with Alice Cooper in Birmingham, England, May 30, 2022

to heavy music. So your comparison of me to Marty is very kind, as I've always been a massive Marty fan; I've always admired his fearless nature. A lot of people said there was no market for him in Japan, but just look at what he's done on his own. He's an inspiration in that, as an artist, there has to be a time when you draw a line in the sand and say, "I'm gonna do this because I want to, I'm excited about it and I like it." That is something that has to be okay. And even if fans don't follow you down that path, you still have to do it now and again.

What was your experience like working with Marty on "Surfacing?"

Working with Marty was unique compared to the other guest features. In most cases, I wrote a song and then handed it over to the guest to put their stamp on it. But with Marty, we sent a lot of riffs back and forth and worked on it together. I'd send Marty a concept, and he'd say, "Okay, I like it, but I don't know if it's exactly what we should run with. Send me some more stuff." So I just sent him a ton of demos and riffs and said, "How about you pick from these? Let me know what you think." And we ended up crafting this amalgam of different ideas that I had, which became "Surfacing." And I really appreciated the process because it was so cool not just to send him a song and say, "Hey, throw a quick solo on this." We got to create something together.

Did you deploy your signature Ibanez JIVA while recording *The Call of the Void*?

I used the JIVA for around 85 percent of the record. I also have a seven-string that was used on the Alice track "Winner Takes All"; I did that because I wanted to shake up the Alice Cooper track. A lot of people know Alice for what he's done, and the sound associated with that. So I said, "Let's put a seven-string on this track and have Alice sing over something super heavy that you wouldn't normally associate him with." Then I also have an Ibanez RG equipped with an EverTune bridge, which is a great guitar for laying down rhythms in the studio.

As I recall, you'd hit the pause button on your signature line earlier in 2023. Any change there?

It's insane, but there are five guitars in the JIVA line now. There's the original JIVA, the JIVA10 and the JIVAJR, which is the more affordable one. And then there are the two Japanese models — the JIVAX2, which is black, and the JIVAX2-GH Ghost, which came out in April [2023]. The Ghost is a favorite of mine, and I'm very excited about it. And it's so cool because John 5 just came out with his [Fender] Ghost Tele [See page 74], and we're gonna play some shows together when Mötley Crüe tours with Alice. So you'll see my Ghost JIVAX2 and John 5's Ghost Tele.

What was your methodology while designing the JIVA?



I was definitely *that* guitar player who would bring three or four guitars to the studio. I'd be in a session and be like, "I'm gonna use this guitar for rhythms, this guitar for the solo and this guitar for the cleans." I didn't have that *one* guitar I could do *everything* with. I really wanted that. When I was making the JIVA, I was like, "I want a guitar that can shred, be heavy, fast and super easy to play." But I also wanted the JIVA to be my guitar for rhythms, cleans and all the rest, you know? So, Ibanez and I chose the tonewoods [*black quilted maple over African mahogany*] and designed the pickups [*DiMarzio Pandemonium for neck/bridge and DiMarzio True Velvet for middle*] with Larry DiMarzio to make the JIVA the most versatile instrument it could be. With the JIVA, you can do breakdowns and chugs without much feedback. And with the neck pickup, you can do beautiful soaring leads with almost a vocal quality. But you can also do pretty cleans, split the pickups, and even have a sort of Strat sound. It really does do it all.

A versatile guitarist needs a versatile guitar.

Bam! Tagline. [Laughs]

What combination of amps did you use on *The Call of the Void*?

We recorded everything direct, just for the ease of it. I was always traveling in and out, still playing [*Los Angeles*] Rams games and doing all kinds of different stuff, so that made life easier. I recorded everything direct and then re-amped later. Even on stage, I haven't used a real tube amp in several years. With Alice, we have our Marshall settings programmed into

our Kempers. But I have to say, there's a punch that you get from a real amp that is very hard to replicate with a plug-in or a pedal. But if it makes the sound I like, then I'd say it's good.

As far as pedals, have you added anything noteworthy to your signal chain?

The only pedals that I operated on the record were a wah and a DigiTech Whammy; everything else was done in preamp and post. But I do like a lot of effects; it was easier to take a DI and then re-amp later with the effects we wanted rather than print the effects into the session. Because if we did it that way and I wanted to change a delay or whatever later, it would be more difficult on the fly.

It goes without saying that the last year or so for you has been nothing short of interesting. What are your most important takeaways now that you're on the other side of it all?

It definitely has been interesting. But I think the most important lesson I've learned goes full circle back to what we talked about. Like I said earlier, you have to take risks as an artist. It's just so important to constantly be pushing yourself. Because if you stay in the same place forever, things will get stagnant. You can't just do the same thing forever. And so, a massive part of what I try to do is encourage young and seasoned musicians to keep stepping out of their comfort zones, take risks and never settle. If more artists do that, the scene will only be better for it. 

Nita Strauss' *The Call of the Void* is out now.

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Photo Olly Curtis

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BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TONE

Get the basics of your rig sorted with these fundamental tone-shaping tips



EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT STRINGS

The material your strings are made of fundamentally affects your guitar tone. Of course, electric guitars require metal strings in order for the magnetic pickups to work, however, string manufacturers offer a range of alloys, each with different tonal properties. Plain steel and nickel-wound steel are most common for unwound/wound strings respectively. Rotosound's Ultramags are a 'highly magnetic' string which they say gives more power and sustain. Ernie Ball's Cobalt series 'maximises output and clarity'. You can judge their claims for yourself, but our experience is that materials do matter!



GET PLUCKY!

Not all picks are equal, and yes, they certainly can affect your tone. Eric Johnson and John Petrucci have each made use of Dunlop Jazz IIIs, both tweaking the shape of the point and edges for a smoother glide across the strings. The Edge uses Herdim Blue picks, plucking the strings with the textured end for a brighter, er, edge to his sound. Famously, Brian May uses an Old English Sixpence for his trademark tones. More fundamentally, the thickness of your pick can affect tone. Thin picks have a lovely gentle sound for strumming, for example.

SET YOUR AMP LEVELS

Your main aim is to set your amp so that it's always at a suitable level and has the desired tone when your guitar and any effects are plugged in. Here are some basics:

- Begin with the master volume knob set between zero and two, so you can hear yourself without blowing your ears off.
- Keep all tone controls at their midway points, not zero, so you can make tone cuts or boosts as required.
- If using a multi-channel amp, check each channel is roughly the same volume – it's not always obvious from the position of the knobs, so listen carefully!
- A gain control will add distortion, but it's dependent on the level of your guitar output, so make sure your instrument's volume is maxed out while you get set up.
- If you run your amp (especially a valve amp) loud, eg, at a gig, you will usually need less gain than you did in your living room. With your core tone set, practise with higher volumes.

PEDALS: AIM FOR UNITY

We'll look at individual effects later on, but, as regards the very basics, just like your amp, you need to check the levels of your effect pedals. Play each pedal one by one, with all the others



TAKE THE LEAD

Choose premium cables for better tone and a reliable rig



switched to bypass/off. Unless you're dialling in a volume boost (eg, for a bit of a kick during a solo), your best starting point is to be at 'unity gain' – which simply means the volume stays the same, with or without the pedal engaged. When you know your amp and pedals are at unity gain, it's easier to make changes to the levels where you really need them. Low output? Check your power supply. Failing batteries and mismatched 'wall-wart' power supplies can make your pedals act up.

GO PREMIUM WITH CABLES

Budget cables are usually a false economy. Though not always the case, cheap leads are generally more susceptible to picking up microphonic noise and are more likely to fail under the rigours of general use. A small upgrade in price to a premium cable (which often includes a substantial warranty) is worth the extra outlay. Brands such as Mogami, D'Addario, Planet Waves, Ernie Ball, Fender and many more will see you right. You'll need an 'instrument' T/S jack to jack cable in most cases. Opt for the shortest cables you can. Tone-sapping capacitance increases with longer cable runs. Gold-plated plugs offer minimal sonic improvements but won't corrode, ensuring the best signal flow.



Words Chris Bird

TONE TIPS JARGON BUSTER

Get the lowdown on the most important terms in all things tone related

Amp channel

An amplifier increases a guitar's electrical signal in order to reproduce the sound through a connected speaker. Many amplifiers are equipped with separate audio signal paths (aka channels), usually voiced differently to produce a clean sound on one and a more distorted sound on the other.

British amp sound

A catch-all term referring originally to the tones of British amp brands from the 1960s and '70s such as Marshall and Vox. The former is renowned for the overdriven, saturated tones of the JTM and JCM series. Vox's AC30 is noted for a cleaner, chimier sound as heard on music by The Beatles and The Shadows.

Delay

An effect that plays back an audio signal after a period of time. Typically the pause ranges from a few milliseconds to one or two seconds. Most units allow for control of the number of times the signal is repeated and the level of said repeats.

Digital modelling

A process employing software to emulate the sound of other equipment, typically classic amplifiers and effects. Early examples include the Line 6 AxSys 212 modelling amp, the Line 6 POD multi-effect, and the Roland VG-8 virtual guitar system. A later innovation is Kemper's profiling technology, which allows users to capture digital emulations of their own equipment.

Distortion

A form of 'hard clipping' signal processing produced, in general, by increasing gain. Various forms of distortion are employed, including overdrive for valve amplifiers or bespoke fuzz or boost units.

Effect loop

This is a break in the signal chain between an amplifier's preamp and power amp stages, allowing the user to insert audio effects. Subjectively, certain effects are said to sound better when connected within an effect loop as opposed to being placed before an amplifier's main input.

Filter effect

Low- and high-pass 'filters' allow low- and high-end frequencies respectively to be heard, while a band-pass filter works within a predetermined frequency range and cuts low- and high-end frequencies on either side. Wah is a manually controlled form of the effect. Other units use pre-set frequencies and timings.

Fuzz

A form of distorted signal processing. Notable units include the Dunlop Fuzz Face, the EHX Big Muff and the ZVex Fuzz Factory.

Gain

An amplifier's gain refers to how much it boosts the strength of the signal passing through its preamp. Typically, gain introduces a desirable form of distortion into the signal, increasing compression and sustain.

Humbucker

This is a magnetic transducer that uses two wire coils to convert the vibration of metal strings into an electrical signal, which is subsequently routed to an amplifier. The two coils are employed in order to cancel out hum inherent in single-coil pickup designs.

Intonation

This is the fine tuning of guitar strings along the length of the fretboard. Typically, adjustments are made on a guitar's bridge saddles.

Modulation effect

A category of effect encompassing tremolo, phaser, chorus, flanger, vibrato and ring modulation.

Multi-effect

These are equipped with many commonly used guitar effects, with some flagship units including extensive ranges of digitally modelled classic desirable stomp boxes and studio effects, alongside amplifier, microphone, speaker and cabinet models.

Overdrive

This form of distortion boosts the guitar's gain with the aim of driving a valve amp into clipping. Where, in general, distortion and fuzz pedals use harsh-sounding 'hard clipping', overdrive employs soft clipping for a smoother sound.

Pitch shifter

This raises or lowers the pitch of an audio signal. Most units offer pre-set pitch changes and harmonising abilities. DigiTech's Whammy utilises a treadle for dynamic pitch shifting.

Reverb

The reflection of sound in a space. Reverb effects are recreations of this phenomenon using various technologies such as spring reverb, plate reverb and digitally modelled reverb.

Scooped tone

The practice of lowering the midrange setting in the EQ. Bass and treble frequencies remain at medium/high settings.

Single coil pickup

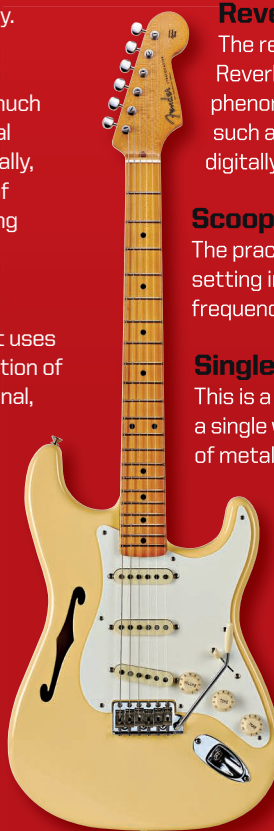
This is a magnetic transducer that employs a single wire coil to convert the vibration of metal strings into an electrical signal, which is subsequently routed to an amplifier. Notably seen on the Fender Standard Stratocaster.

Unity gain

The idea that an output signal's level is equal to its input level. In practical terms, this might refer to ensuring an effect pedal doesn't significantly alter volume when switched on compared to when it is bypassed.

US amp sound

A catch-all term referring originally to the tones of US amp brands as far back as the 1950s, notably Fender, and then in the '70s and '80s with Mesa/Boogie. Early Fenders are renowned for wide dynamic range and clean headroom. Mesa/Boogie became associated with high gain tones, notably used by Metallica's James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett.



Words Chris Bird Photos Rob Monk/Paul Rodgers

TONE TIPS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PICKUPS

Today, it's harder than ever to describe the sonic characteristics of pickup types – there are so many configurations, both stock and after-market, that blur the lines of each core design. For every classic single coil there's a stacked noiseless unit; for every vintage-voiced humbucker there's a high-output facemelter for metal. However, there are a few key categories of pickup to know about. A little knowledge of each one's origins and uses will help you identify your own tonal requirements should you wish to swap out your axe's pups.

SINGLE COILS

Early designs appeared in Rickenbacker lap steels, Gibson and Gretsch semis, and then later in Fender's Telecaster predecessor, the Esquire, but perhaps the archetypal single-coil pickup is that found in the Fender Stratocaster. The Strat's later five-way (originally three-way) switching design has become integral to common perception of what this type of pickup should sound like, and guitarists as varied as Jimi Hendrix and Cory Wong have made the sounds of these pickups their own. HSS/HSH-style Superstrats are arguably only simple variations on the original theme.

HUMBUCKERS

Humbuckers solve the problem of noise inherent in passive single coil designs. Two coils are employed in a "reverse-wound reverse-polarity" configuration that cancels out the hum. 20 or so years after the first humbuckers appeared, Gibson released its PAF unit in the 1950s, setting a much copied template for passive 'bucker design that remains essentially the same to this day. Typically, humbuckers sound fatter, bassier and have less treble than single coils. The Les Paul tones of Jimmy Page and Slash wouldn't be the same without 'em.

P-90S

Designed by Gibson's Walt Fuller in the 1940s, the P-90 is sonically distinct from other



single-coil designs by virtue of a (ahem!) fuller-bodied sound that falls somewhere between the fatness of humbuckers and treble-rich presentation of Fender-style single coils. They're most famously deployed on the Les Paul Jr (though also commonly on LP Standards and SGs), as used by Bob Marley, Leslie West and Billie Joe Armstrong, amongst countless others.

ACTIVE PICKUPS

Active (ie, battery-powered) pickup systems gained popularity in the '80s, notably among many metal acts, but also in the hands of David Gilmour and Mark Knopfler, who, let's face it, are no strangers to quality tone. The active circuitry gives higher output levels than passive units and ensures both single coils and humbuckers alike deliver next to no audible noise. Typically these systems would have a 'hi-fi' style tight, crisp top end befitting of '80s high production value music.

FLUENCE PICKUPS

A later active innovation developed by Fishman, here the electronic gubbins is printed onto a 'Fluence Core' circuit board instead of being wound around a bobbin. The high-performance, low-noise units offer some of the 'organic' experience of passive pickups, plus the power, low-end clarity and low noise that only actives can give. Oft-used on seven-, eight- and even nine-string guitars, the units are well-suited to 'modern' styles. However, clearly not wishing to pigeonhole their tech, Fishman have also created Fluence versions of classic-voiced humbuckers, single coils and P-90s.



GUITARISTS AS LEADERS
Tosin Abasi is no stranger to Fluence pickups

Words Stuart Williams Photo Neil Godwin

TONE TIPS GUITAR MODS AND FIXES

Great tone starts at the source. Get your guitar working right first and you'll have a solid foundation to build on

CONSIDER GETTING A SETUP

A guitar setup from an experienced luthier is the quickest way to get your guitar back into shape. If you've changed string gauge from the original size, there's every chance your guitar's nut, neck relief, string height and intonation will need adjusting too. Some (or all) of this work can be carried out yourself, however if you've never done it before then paying a professional to give your pride and joy a once-over is well worth it.

INTONATE

You wouldn't expect your guitar to sound great without tuning it, but just because the open strings are in tune, doesn't mean that the guitar is accurately pitched throughout the length of the fretboard. That's where intonation adjustment at the bridge comes in, and it's achieved by moving the saddles backwards or forwards to raise or lower the string's pitch with the saddle adjustment screws. You can spot these as they are encased inside a spring. It's a straightforward and zero-cost job which requires a screwdriver, guitar tuner and a little bit of patience. Here's what to do:

■ GET IN TUNE

To start, get all of your open strings to pitch at the tuning you're going to be using the guitar in most often. You're going to be making adjustments to the guitar so use a tuner to ensure that you're as accurate as possible.

■ HARMONICS VS FRETTED NOTES

With your tuner still connected, play a harmonic on the lowest string at the 12th fret. Make sure it's played cleanly to give yourself an accurate reading. Next, fret the same string at the 12th fret and compare the pitches of the harmonic and fretted note.

■ SADDLE-UP!

Your next step depends on the variance between the harmonic and fretted notes. If there is none, move on to the next string and repeat the same steps. If the fretted note is flat, you need to move the saddle towards the headstock. If the fretted note is sharp, it needs to move towards the bridge. Once the notes match, repeat the process for each string and you're done!

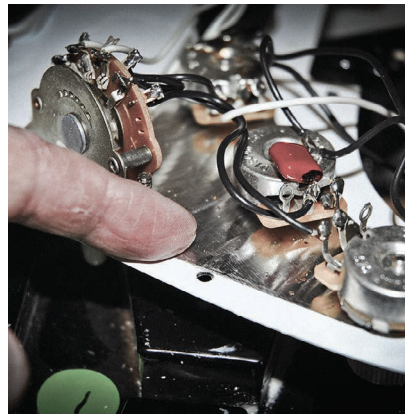
TONE MAGNET

There's every chance you've considered swapping your guitar's pickups at some point, but have you ever considered adjusting your pickup height? This free fix takes no time at all, and might just change your mind about your magnets. Changing your pickup height also allows you to create an even transition between the pickup positions, or make certain pickups (ie, the bridge position) louder for a perceived boost when selected.

If your tone is too thin and lacking detail, try raising them up for more power and clarity. Conversely, if your guitar is lacking sustain it could be that the pickup is too close and restricting the string's vibration with 'string pull' (particularly in the neck position).

Another sign that your pickups are too high are the dreaded 'wolf notes': unwanted and often dissonant harmonics. Experiment with pickup height by tightening the surrounding screws to raise them, or loosening them to lower them.

If you're adjusting the pole pieces on a humbucker or P-90, make small adjustments and set them to the same curved profile as your strings.



CHECK YOUR TUNERS

Keeping your guitar in tune starts, unsurprisingly with the tuners. If you have a budget guitar then you may want to think about upgrading. High-ratio, locking tuners from the likes of Grover, Schaller, Gotoh allow for finer tuning and speedy string changes due to the firm locking mechanism – particularly handy if your guitar has a vibrato. As well as this, they'll hold your tuning with greater stability as there are no string windings.

If you're sticking with your current models, check the fastening screws and nuts next time you change strings. With your tuners attached securely you'll give yourself the best chance at solid tuning, regardless of the brand or type.

ELECTRONICS POT LUCK

The resistance value of your guitar pots – along with the capacitors on your tone control(s) – also contributes to your overall tone. As a general rule, guitars fitted with brighter pickups (such as single coils) tend to use lower resistance, 250k pots. This filters out and tames some of the high end, while humbucker-equipped guitars often use a higher resistance value (500k) so as not to

become too muddy. You can experiment with this by using a different pot value in order to allow more or less high end through.

ELECTRONICS DOWN TO EARTH

Every component on your guitar is earthed via a connection to the back of your control pots. If you're experiencing electronic buzzing *until* you touch the metal parts of your guitar, it's likely you have an earthing issue. So, it's worth checking that there are no loose wires inside the control cavity, and don't forget that your bridge should also be connected to ground.

ELECTRONICS SPINNING POTS

Ever turned your controls to their minimum or maximum setting and had them continue to move? That's a loose pot, friend, and if left unaddressed, it'll most likely sever the wire connection. The good news is, it's easy to fix with a simple spanner. Pull the plastic knob off your guitar and position the pot correctly, then tighten the nuts up to hold it securely in place. Set the control to min or max, put the control knob back on in the correct position and you'll be back to stability.

ELECTRONICS SECURE SOCKET

Much like your pots, a jack socket that isn't secure will eventually break, but worse than that it can cause all kinds of unwanted popping and crackling before it does. Tighten up your jack socket nut and you'll keep it firmly in place. Ideally you'll remove the scratchplate or jack socket plate to do this, but for a quick fix, try plugging a cable in and use it to gently pull the socket up. This will give you the maximum amount of thread to tighten the nut onto.

ELECTRONICS KEEP IT CLEAN

Dust inside your pots and switches can result in scratching and popping when you operate them. Before you look to replace these parts, try some contact cleaner. You'll need to access the components via the control cavities in your guitar and apply the cleaner to the moving parts of the contacts. For pots, that means the hole in the metal casing. Spray it, move it and hopefully you'll have a smooth signal.

FX TONE GUIDE





GET MORE FROM YOUR DRIVE PEDALS

TUBE AMP SATURATION USING A BOOST

This is the oldest tone trick in the book. Tube amps sound best when they're being pushed. Using a gain pedal in front of an amp results in additional breakup and compression. This works best with smaller tube amps, as they run out of headroom quicker, and trip into power tube saturation. For higher-wattage amps, add some preamp gain at the amp, too.

DON'T USE TOO MUCH GAIN

Most of the time, distortion and overdrive pedals don't sound great when maxed out. Start at a low setting, and gradually raise the gain until you're happy with the sound. Even for metal, most bands are using less gain than you think. As discussed above, into a tube amp, the level control is the one you want to push as high as possible to thicken your sound.

DJENT WITH A TUBE SCREAMER

Overdrive pedals add compression of their own, as well as a distinct EQ profile – and the Ibanez Tube Screamer, with its mid hump, is excellent placed in front of a high-gain amp. With a valve amp on its drive channel, turn the Screamer's gain down low, then bring up the level until it djents. Many other companies have Tube Screamer type pedals in their catalogues.

DON'T OVERLOAD THE LEVEL

So far we've only discussed tube amplifiers, but what if you're going into a solid state piece of kit, or an audio interface? Simple – you don't want to push the level, as that will result in audio clipping of the kind you don't want. Instead, always push the level up to the point where clipping occurs – usually the red light on an interface, then back off the input trim slightly. This will give you the thickest sound.

DECIDE IF YOU ACTUALLY NEED A FUZZ

For players that remember '90s albums like Smashing Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream*, fuzz is the thickest distortion tone. Right? Well, even a lot of fuzz-obsessed bands – including SP – recorded using other gain devices in studio. For extreme saturation, RAT-style distortions and flatter-EQ pedals often record better. Open the gain right up, and it can sound pretty close to a fuzz once recorded.

LEARN HOW PEDALS' TONE CONTROLS AFFECT YOUR SOUND

Most gain pedals have a tone pot, but there are many different types. Some are tilt, some are low-pass filters, and some pedals have more than one. If the pedal has a single tone pot, make sure you're not making assumptions. Try it at the limit of

its range to figure out its operation, before pulling it back to a place that works for you.

LEARN ABOUT HOW YOUR GAIN STAGES INTERACT

The trick to thick, rich guitar tone is higher-order harmonics. These are most easily added with gain stages. Ever notice why a distorted signal sounds louder and punchier? This is why. Even low-gain amplifier stages will add additional harmonic content and richness. Managing your gain stages – boosts, overdrives, distortions, fuzzes and amplifiers – is the key to great tone.

CONSIDER USING A BUFFER

The true bypass revolution that came along with boutique pedals was a necessary correction in some ways. Before that, most pedals were buffered, and long chains of buffered pedals could have an adverse effect on tone. However, to manage impedance mismatch between different pedals, a buffer is still very useful. So if your signal chain is a little weak sounding, or dark, then consider adding a buffered pedal or dedicated buffer to the start of your chain.

FLATTEN THE EQ PROFILE OF SCOOPED-EQ PEDALS

The Big Muff sounds as massive as it does in isolation because of its pronounced mid scoop. However, in a band or recording context sometimes this isn't what you want. Luckily it's easy to solve – pair it with another gain stage for solos or rhythm work. Classic options include an MXR Distortion+ for solos, and an Ibanez Tube Screamer for rhythm. The latter adds additional compression, and flattens out the EQ profile.

FUZZY RAT
A ProCo Rat can work as distortion or fuzz



TRY A WET-WET DRIVE SETUP

If you're running a stereo setup, or two heads into a stereo cab, you can try running two different drive paths. Normally, you'd probably have the same gain stages set to run into both amps, and only split at stereo time effects. However, splitting earlier – if your rig has a full stereo path – means you can have two more distinct 'voices'. This is ideal for thickening your tone if you're a lone guitarist.

CUT BASS WHEN USING HIGHER GAIN

If you're palm-muting or playing with an extended-range guitar, pay close attention to the bass EQ on gain pedals. Generally speaking, the more bass in your guitar signal, the more careful you need to be about higher-gain settings. Mud and rumble builds up at the bottom-end fast. If you're unsure, as the gain control goes up, cut the bass. This reduction and tightening actually makes the bottom end sound more focused.

STACK GAIN STAGES

Heard of gain stacking? Put simply, this means using more than one drive stage – and that could be a couple of drive/distortion pedals, plus your amp's own gain. The question is: how much stacking of pedals is too much? Well, if less is more, then imagine how much more 'more' will be! The answer is to try stacking every gain stage you own, in different orders to see which combination of gain stages and EQ profiles work best. When stacking, generally you want lower gain pedals first, with level controls used to trim.



REMEMBER! CYMBALS EAT GUITARS

If you're having trouble punching through a mix, either live or while recording, remember this: certain frequency ranges get very busy and your guitar won't punch through – especially if there's lots of treble content. Instead, EQ your guitar around these to find space, and cut the 'muddier' bands. This is where combining a preamp and EQ pedal with your gain stages can really make the difference.

TONE TRIAGE

If something sounds off and the culprit isn't obvious, try systematically taking pedals out of the chain one by one to make a diagnosis. In the worst case, plug directly into the amp. Everybody with a larger 'board at some point has had to do this, tearing their hair out, before finding that one faulty patch cable, drained battery or rolled off knob. As you do this, check the tone controls on each gain pedal, as this is another common pitfall.

USE A COMPRESSOR

Compression is a type of dynamic amplification that evens out the levels in your signal. You can think of it as making the loud bits quieter, and the quiet bits louder. As a result, it's great for times when your guitar needs to punch right through, regardless of input dynamics. Examples would be solos and tapping phrases, especially clean ones.

USE AN ISOLATED POWER SUPPLY

If you're getting audio line noise then one of the most likely culprits is a pedal without power line filtering. Once you've eliminated your drive pedals as the source, then the next

likely suspect is your power supply. Isolated power supplies are a boring purchase, yes, but they're one of the biggest things you can do to improve your tone, especially if your rig does suffer noise problems.

CHECK WHETHER GAIN STAGES ARE OUT OF PHASE

Amplification stages have an inverting or non-inverting topology, which means they either invert the phase of the input signal, or leave it as-is. This means that in certain situations using some combinations of gain pedals can result in a thin, out-of-phase sound. This can happen live, or when double-tracking with particular pedals in the studio. Change the pedal or flip the phase of the mixer channel to hear the sound thicken up immediately.

TRY AN ALWAYS-ON BOOST

We've talked about how important adding additional amp stages and gain is. So why go without it? Many players buy a boost or preamp pedal and simply leave it on all the time. In the case of classic tape echoes like the Echoplex and Roland Space Echo, some guitarists kept units in their signal chain even after the tape itself had broken – like Nick Zinner from Yeah Yeah Yeahs. Spare yourself the hassle of lugging around a vintage tape machine and get a pedal recreation, and leave it on to thicken your tone.

USE AN EQ PEDAL AS A GAIN STAGE

Both flavours of active EQ pedal that you normally encounter, graphic and parametric, are also a gain stage. Use an EQ after your drives to passively cut problem bands, or put it early in your chain as an additional stacked amplifier stage. It can be used to boost specific bands for punchier voicing, and will thicken your tone.

EQ OR BUST
Get more drive with a simple EQ pedal



GET MORE FROM YOUR MODULATIONS AND FILTER EFFECTS

USE STEREO CHORUS

Stereo chorus is a great way of thickening up guitar parts, and will work even when at subtle settings. Set the rate at the lowest possible setting and then experiment with the depth or wet-dry control. Depending on the type of chorus, it can be very subtle, giving almost the feel of a double-tracked guitar.

TRY A COCKED WAH

Cocked wah is one of the most fun effects to use, though it's easier in the studio than live. Even the most basic settings – fully open, and fully closed – can be very impactful for breakdowns and pre-choruses. For more complex riffs you can go full Mark Knopfler and find a place to 'park' the pedal for a *Money For Nothing* kind of sound.

EXPERIMENT WITH THE DEPTH CONTROL

Modulation effects are great for adding gentle movement to all sorts of guitar parts, from clean picked passages to solos. Even so, the far end of the depth control is an area feared by many guitarists – but try experimenting, we say! Simply max out the depth on your pedal, then see if you can find a use for the sound. After all, it worked for Eddie Van Halen.

FUZZ INTO WAH

Wah pedals are normally a variable bandpass filter, and as such the more harmonic content they have to chew on, the better. Since gain stages add additional harmonic content, this means that pairings like fuzz into wah are particularly impactful. Even so, it's also true that the inverse can yield interesting results too, with an overdrive boosting an already-filtered signal. Generally, higher gain in front, and lower gain after is the way to go.

FREEBIE UNI-VIBE USING A PHASER

If you own a phaser, depending on the voicing you probably also have a passable fixed Uni-Vibe emulation at your disposal. Simply stick a mid-gain pedal in front, then turn the rate and depth right up to get your wobble on.

HIT IT HARDER

Almost all modulation pedals benefit from gain stages in front, since many involve some kind of filtering. Top of the list are wah and phase effects, but flangers also sound ace when smashed. Unless you have these pedals in your amp's effect loop, this is another reason to own a couple of decent gain stages even if you primarily rely on amp gain.

MANUAL FILTER

A wah is a bandpass filter, so by moving your foot from open to closed or vice versa over the duration of a phrase or riff you can create a dynamic filter sweep. Since you have full control, this can work even for very long riffs, or a whole section like a pre-chorus or intro. A version of this – albeit with a quick sweep – can be heard applied to a pick scrape on the Rage Against The Machine track *Testify*.

IMPOSE ORDER ON YOUR 'BOARD

There's no such thing as correct pedal order. In fact, one of the easiest, and most inspirational things you can do is to regularly change up the order of your 'board. Even so, there are some rules of thumb that tend to hold. If you're not happy about the sound of your 'board, then it's sometimes worth resetting and then going from there. In the case of modulation pedals, that's simple – stick them at the end, where the signal is the most complex.



GET MORE FROM YOUR DELAYS AND REVERBS

SINGLE-SHOT STUDIO REVERSE

To mimic the '70s-style effect of reversing your guitar sound in the studio, you can use this trick. Set a delay to reverse mode, then turn feedback down to a single repeat and the level up to max (or unity with the dry signal). Live, the gap between playing and repeat shouldn't be an issue. When recording, simply play to a click with the monitoring off, then drag the waveform back to the start of the passage. If you played to the click, it should be in time, apart from the initial offset caused by the buffer size.

VERB INTO DRIVE

There are few things as rock 'n' roll as running a reverb into a drive, distortion or fuzz. Conventional wisdom says to order these effects the other way around, but for runaway train washes of distorted reverb, this is far more attention-grabbing! For bonus points use a reverb that has an infinite or swell mode for pure noise bliss.

PARALLEL DELAYS

Instead of using reverb, get more defined but disorientating ambience by running two mono channels of delay panned right and left. Set the times differently, and listen to the repeats as they converge and diverge in complex patterns. Some psychedelic and shoegaze guitarists used this trick for space cadet guitar sounds.





LOWER THE TREBLE ON TAILS AND REPEATS

Reverb tails can quickly swamp your dry signal. Especially at longer decay or dwell settings, managing the tone of reverb tails is key. Beyond short slapback and room effects, as reverb time goes up, tails need to have their treble rolled off, similar to how high frequency content would be dampened in real spaces. This can also apply to delay tails, and it's why BBD or analogue delays gel into a band mix so well.

MAX THOSE CONTROLS!

There's a lot of crossover between digital buffered time effects like delay, reverb, loopers and pitch shifters. Try maxing out the controls in odd combinations, to unlock oddities such as fake harmonisation, oscillation, machine-gun repeats and more. Take the classic intro to Bloc Party's debut album *Silent Alarm*, for example. Its eerily drifting digital repeats are caused by dimed feedback and level controls.

POST-ROCK TREMOLO PICKING

Countless post-rock acts have used tremolo picking to create a wash of noise. Choose a delay and set it to a moderate length, with the effect level rolled back slightly, then tremolo pick to create a cascading shower of notes. As you change frets, the repeats will blend single-note lines into a complex pad. Using a reverse delay will mean there's a slight lag between dry and wet, ideal for phrases with faster note changes.

EXPERIMENT WITH AUTO-OSCILLATION

What happens when you turn delay feedback to max? Auto-oscillation, where the delays run away, increasing in pitch and creating a drone that can be tuned to a note. Think the end of Radiohead's *Karma Police* (although that was a tape echo). This is mostly only available on analogue delays, but some digital delays will

oscillate, or even do stranger things, like create glitchy loops.

REMEMBER THE DIFFERENT TIMBRES OF DELAY TYPES

If you're using a digital delay and the repeats are getting in the way of your playing, first reduce the effect level. If there's still something a little off, reduce the treble if possible. If that still doesn't do it, the clinical nature of a digital delay might not be for you. Switch to a darker analogue or tape mode if you're using a multi-effect, or pick up a BBD-based delay.

THE DRONE RANGER

Reverbs and delays go excellently with tremolo-picking, so it should come as no surprise that they also sound ace with drones. The combination of say, E-Bow drone notes and longer time settings allows you to create synth-like pads. If you don't have an E-Bow, then try volume swelling in a distorted guitar and capturing it with a looper in front of



TAKE ME TO CHURCH

Get cavernous sounds with a dedicated stereo reverb

your time effects.

S-S-S-STUTTER

Using a looper or delay with the time set to its quickest repeat, you can capture a tiny buffer of audio and have it immediately play back. This machine-gun, typewriter-like rattle of repeats is a staple of riff articulation in genres like math and post-rock, as well as modern tech metal.

DON'T USE TOO HIGH DECAY OR FEEDBACK SETTINGS

Managing the dwell, decay or feedback control for reverb, and the feedback control for delay, is essential to sounding good. At home or playing solo, longer times sound amazing, giving you the feeling you're playing in a concert hall. In a band, live or recording mix however, longer times left unchecked can result in muddiness, phase issues and a lack of clarity. When in doubt, pull the control back until you can barely tell the effect is on, then turn it up until it sounds most impactful.



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GET MORE FROM YOUR PITCH EFFECTS

CAN YOU REACH THE PEDALS YOU USE MOST?

It's all very well having the coolest pitch shifter, pad generator or cloud reverb on the market, but if you can't hit it cleanly when you need it, it's not much use. Pitch shifters, like wah or volume pedals, are usually used dynamically, or triggered using a momentary function. Make sure they're positioned on your 'board in an easy-to-reach place, so you can write riffs and parts around them with confidence.

PLAY SINGLE NOTES WITH ANALOGUE PITCH EFFECTS

If you're having trouble with note definition, tracking or heavy artefacts in your sound, then try playing single notes rather than chords. Older generations of digital pitch shifters and analogue octave units are often monophonic (they only process single notes). For some, they will attempt to keep up, generating artefacts along the way, while other units will not work as intended.

STACK PITCH SHIFTERS FOR EXTRA ARTEFACTS

If clean pitch-shifting isn't your bag, then you might be in the camp that enjoys jankiness, digital artefacts and grit. You're in good company, so why not lean into it like glitchcore noise merchants Melt Banana and stack pitch shifters? Yes, pretty quickly notes lose all definition, but that's part of the fun.

EXPLORE THE HARMONISER FUNCTIONS

Most pitch shifters also have a harmoniser, but very few players use them to their fullest. Trying off-kilter intervals like 4ths can add additional flavour to a riff that was 90 per cent there, but lacking that special sauce on top.

WHAMMY SCOOP AND DOOP

Floyd Rose users know how to use pitch bends to accentuate a note. A scoop involves pre-bending down, and then releasing into the note. A doop means hitting the whammy bar after a note, giving an elastic feel to the interval. Using a rocker pedal makes these downward pitch bends easy, while a ballistic shifter like the Boss PS-5 or PS-6, or DigiTech's Whammy Ricochet can make any shift robotically smooth in momentary mode.

BITCRUSHED CHORDS

Some modern octave and pitch pedals are polyphonic (they process multiple notes at the same time). For this, however, you'll need a pedal that isn't. Set up the pedal to shift and then play two-note chords with the unit fully wet. It won't quite work, but the resulting chords aren't totally incoherent either. You can hear the glassy strangeness of this in the intro riff to RATM's *Know Your Enemy*.

STACK PITCH SHIFTERS FOR RIFF PUNCTUATION

If you have two pitch shifters, you can create new articulation in riffs that sound impossible. For example, set a Whammy to one or two octaves up, while having a second pedal set to an octave down. As an added bonus, this can create artefacts that sound like a phaser pedal, especially if you have a dry signal chain bypassing the shifters.

ADD A DRONE NOTE

For those that like the glitchier side of pitch effects, adding a drone note to a riff or phrase is always a good call. Some tunings, like DADGAD, are optimised for drones. Even polyphonic shifters can track in weird and wonderful ways when faced with a persistent drone note. When shifting up, the strange added harmonic content and overtones are often mesmerising when paired with reverb or delay.

PLAY TO THE STRENGTHS OF ANALOGUE OCTAVERS

Many players have picked up analogue octave pedals like the Octavia, Green Ringer or EQD Tentacle only to be disappointed. Obviously the first thing to say is that these are not true pitch shifters like a digital unit. Still, there are some tricks to getting a clearer octave, for example using the neck pickup, and constructing riffs above the 12th fret. The same suggestion of pickup choice also applies for analogue octave-down pedals.

CREATE AUTO-RIFFING WITH A HARMONISER

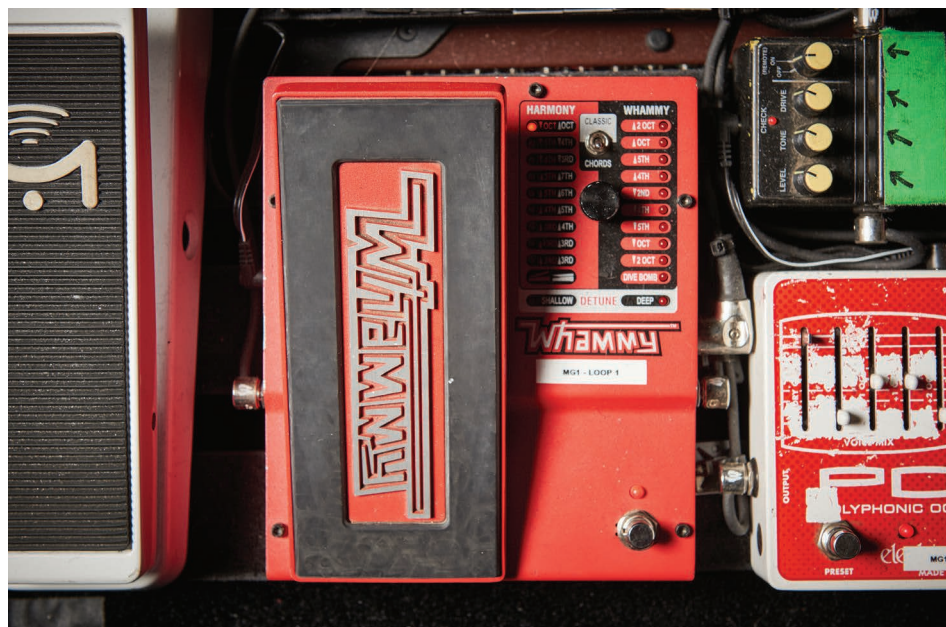
Using either distortion to sustain a note, or a looper or E-Bow, it's possible to build whole drone riffs and chords using just a harmoniser. The Whammy has a harmoniser function where the pitch is controlled by a knob, and it's possible to 'play' a riff using this. As with anything Tom Morello has done on record, it's hard to unpick his magic tricks. However, the intro and verse riff in *Voice Of The Voiceless* can be replicated using this technique.

USE A BASS DI WITH OCTAVE-DOWN EFFECTS

With two-piece bands becoming more common, you might find yourself using a pitch shifting pedal or octaver to replace a bassist. In this case, make sure that you're using a pedal with a split output, like the Whammy IV, or EHX Micro/Nano POG. Then, run the wet out to either a dedicated bass amp, or a Bass DI box, and out to the sound desk. Even in smaller venues this will give you a weightier bottom end and clarity throughout the frequency range.

GET DIGI WITH IT

DigiTech's Whammy pedal rules the pitch shift roost



Words Amit Sharma Photos Rob Monk/Paul Rodgers

TONE TIPS GET MORE FROM YOUR AMP

STICK WITH LOWER WATTAGES IN SMALL SPACES

It's all too easy to get carried away with volume when buying a new valve amp. More power equals more tone, right? Well, no. That only really comes into effect when you're driving the valves hard at higher volumes on arena or festival stages. If you're playing small gigs and using your amp at rehearsal studios or home, a 20-watt combo will probably suit you better than a 100-watt behemoth you can't quite push to its full potential. If your high-wattage amp has a low-power mode or built-in power soak, try seeing how the tones compare, or consider using an external attenuator. "We've found great satisfaction with the Blackstar Artisan when recording in the studio," ZZ Top legend Billy Gibbons said in 2016. "They make a pretty wide range of gear, but that amp in particular is simple. It's a 15-watt single-speaker thing – almost an entry-level, low power piece, but it has this great sustain and depth."

GET CREATIVE WITH YOUR MIDRANGE

The mids control is often one of the most overlooked features to be found on the face of an amp. But given that the guitar is a midrange instrument, it's the kind of dial that can drastically shape your tone the most. Lead guitarists may benefit from keeping the mids halfway, or boosting them to help cut through, while rhythm guitarists – particularly those playing harder rock and heavy metal – usually opt for having the mids cut or in more extreme cases 'scooped' out almost completely, as typified by the late, great Pantera guitarist Dimebag Darrell.

USE MORE THAN AMBIENT EFFECTS IN THE LOOP

Your amp's send and return is perfect for effects like reverb and delay – especially if you're using overdrive and distortion. However, it's worth seeing how other pedals might sound in there, from boosts to modulation, because their insertion after the preamp section of your amp will ultimately make them behave in different ways. At the end of the day, you can never go wrong with more options out of the gear you already own.

TRY REVERBS AND DELAYS IN FRONT

There's a reason why most players put ambient effects in the loop rather than in the front end of their amp – echoes and reverbs can sound ambiguous and unmusical when run through overdrive or distortion. But, as we all know, there are no laws when it comes to tone. Porcupine Tree mastermind Steven Wilson actually prefers the more atmospheric noises produced this way. "I'm a big fan of putting the delay and reverb in front of the gain stage on amps," he said in 2020. "I'm not a big fan of that clean and polite way of putting the delay after the gain or in the loop. I love the sound of twisted metal, by which I mean the sound of distortion, reverb and delay fighting for supremacy in the gain stage of an amp. You get that Neil Young kind of messy grunginess to it. I like it sounding out of control. As a player, you almost have to fight to harness it. You hear that sound on old Mahavishnu Orchestra albums... trying to tame the beast and control all that information!"

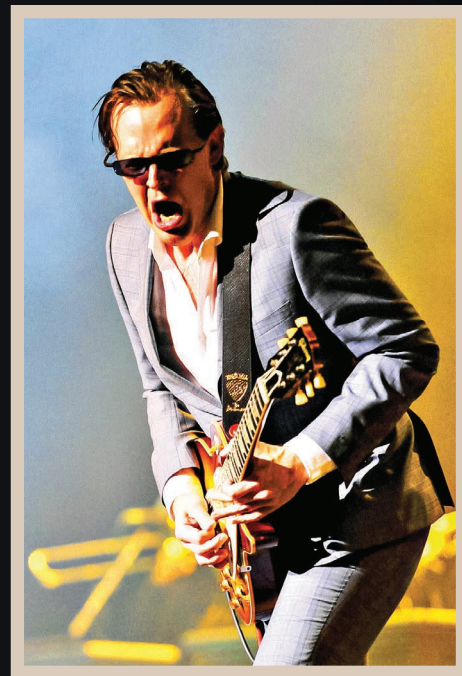
USE YOUR GUITAR VOLUME INSTEAD OF SWITCHING CHANNELS

Some amps might have up to three or four channels for you to use, which can be great if you need to cover a lot of tonal ground in one performance. Instead of switching, however, you could always try dialling in your most overdriven sound and then backing it down via your guitar's volume control for more of a DIY clean and crunch channel. Ultimately it will make your guitar tones feel more seamless, existing as one sound with varying levels of gain and volume rather than the inconsistency of different voicings coming out of the same head or combo.

USE LESS GAIN FOR MORE CLARITY

Few things excite guitarists as much as the words 'more gain' – but it's worth remembering that using more gain and drive than you need can actually distract from the notes being played and make them less impactful. This is particularly important when recording, as there's an added tightness to lower levels of gain compared to more generous helpings. Listen to classic recordings by Rage Against

The Machine, for instance, and you'll see how backing off the gain for more clarity can still yield some truly explosive results.



GO EASY ON THE TREBLE

It doesn't matter how accomplished you are as a player, if your sound comes across as unflattering and harsh, listeners will quickly get tired of hearing you. It's something Joe Bonamassa learned early on in his years of entertaining – and many would consider him to be an expert in such matters. "I'd rather play an evening where the guitar sounds a bit dull, than an evening where the guitar sounds a bit 'Holy sh*t' bright?!" he admitted in 2019. "Ear fatigue is a big thing about going to a guitar show. It's like, 'How do you make two hours seem like four?' Well, I can show you real easy: we'll take the baffles down and turn the gain up, and turn the brightness up. If you listen to B.B. King, it was like a human voice speaking. It was never gratey."

RUN DISTORTION PEDALS THROUGH YOUR AMP'S DRIVE CHANNEL

Guitar pedals react differently depending on what channel of your amp you've chosen to use. Though there are guitarists out there who are happy going in clean, the vast majority of us will use overdrive and fuzz with an amp sound that's already on the edge of breakup and beyond. The results are often smoother and warmer as the amp channel will be voiced specifically for the extra gain and drive. Using fuzz pedals on a clean channel often results in a harsher-sounding tone with an abundance of high harmonic information – which may work for some but generally isn't ideal.

SHARP TONED MAN

ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons is a master of making small amps sound huge





Words Amit Sharma

TONE TIPS GET MORE FROM YOUR MULTI-EFFECTS

USE YOUR MULTI-EFFECTS' COMPUTER SOFTWARE

Many multi-effects units have USB connectivity and come with software for more intensive tweaking, giving increased control over the parameters of each effect and amp model, as well as the signal chain in general. It's potentially the key to unlocking the exact sound you hear in your head. Even if your sonic requirements are relatively simple, the ability to experiment by dragging and dropping virtual effects around the signal chain can be a highly creative and fun process.

MAKE SURE YOUR PRESET LEVELS ARE SIMILAR

One of the most important things when using a multi-effect unit is having a uniform volume across all your presets. Uneven levels means your parts won't cut through the mix when you switch between presets. A smartphone app such as Decibel X can help you tackle the problem, giving you an idea of each preset's loudness – though make sure to unify output levels in your multi's menus too where possible. Be aware that clean sounds often have greater dynamic range than drive tones (a little compression can help even things out here). With cleans, crunches and heavy rhythms set roughly the same, next add in boosts for your lead tones. Again, start by making every boost roughly the same, then tweak it if a song needs more or less of a push.

GO DIRECT INTO YOUR AMP'S FX LOOP

If you prefer real amp tone over digital modelling, plug your multi-effect direct into the loop rather than the front of your amp. This will mean overdrives and distortions won't necessarily work as they should, however everything from boost and EQ to modulation and ambiences will still function well. In a recent interview, Avenged Sevenfold guitarist Synyster Gates explained how this was a fundamental part of his live rig. "We're

using the Schecter Hellwin amps in tandem with the Fractal Axe-Fx, which is just in the loop for effects. I have delays, and you'll also hear some weird things happening to my guitar signal! I really like the harmoniser, we're you can do a lot of intelligent harmonising – like jumping from a 6th above to a 6th below, and it's all happening in the loop."

USE THE FOUR-CABLE METHOD

This is a way of connecting a multi-effect pedal to an amplifier using, you guessed it, four cables – but why bother? Well, the idea is to 'split' the virtual signal chain inside your multi unit to send certain effects to your amp's input (traditionally the drive effects), while placing others (typically modulation, delay, reverb etc) in the loop – giving you all the I/O options of a traditional pedalboard. All you need is for both your amplifier and your multi-effect unit to be equipped with an effect loop. Here's how to connect it all up:

- 1 **Guitar** → **Multi-effect input**
- 2 **Multi-effect main output** → **Amp effect loop return**
- 3 **Multi-effect loop send** → **Amp main input**
- 4 **Amp loop send** → **Multi-effect loop return**

TRY PUSHING DIGITAL MODELS TO UNREALISTIC EXTREMES

One of the best benefits of using digital gear is that you can do things that wouldn't otherwise be possible – whether that's dialling in levels of gain that real amps wouldn't normally be capable of or tweaking digital recreations of famous pedals far beyond their usual remit. For example, classic Fender amps tend not to offer extreme levels of distortion, but in the virtual world such limitations might not exist. The same goes for delay times, reverb depths, chorus rates etc on the digital versions of your favourite pedals.

COMBINE YOUR FAVOURITE ANALOGUE PEDALS WITH YOUR MULTI-EFFECTS UNIT

Some players prefer to stick with analogue overdrives and fuzz pedals in front of the amp's input and then run their digital gear in the effect loop – creating a best of both worlds scenario. This way you keep a lot of the functionality from your multi-effects device but the core of your tone is coming from handpicked pedals and amps. It's how Swedish progressive metallers Opeth were running their amps when they toured in 2016. "I have an Axe-Fx but I only use it for timed echoes and weird noises... I prefer having my real pedals out with me," singer/guitarist Mikael Åkerfeldt said at the time.

SAVE ONE GROUP OF PRESETS FOR HUMBUCKERS AND ANOTHER FOR SINGLE COILS

If you use different styles of guitars, it may be worth doubling-up on presets so your tones cater for different kinds of pickups. Humbuckers tend to have a higher output that'll break up quicker, while single-coils may need an extra push or gain stage to find that high sustain sweet spot. Given how much memory you'll find on modern multi-effects units, it makes sense to tailor your favourite settings to different guitars.

USE COMPRESSION AND EQ TO BRING CLEAN SOUNDS TO LIFE

Digital gear has never felt closer to the real deal than it does right now – to the point where amp and pedal emulations are often too convincing for most people to tell the difference. Bring your cleans to life by using compression and EQ to add a little more soul to your tones and make them feel more real and full-bodied. Technically, you'd be reducing the dynamic range, but it'll help those clean tones pop!

RECORD UNPROCESSED, THEN REAMP

Advanced routing options under the hood of many multi-effect units allow you to record with your chosen preset activated while simultaneously recording a dry unprocessed signal. The benefit? You get to choose the best tone for your track at mixdown instead of committing to it when you record. Simply route the dry-recorded signal from your DAW back to your multi-effect (or any other rig at your disposal) to 'reamp' your take, rerecording it as it plays through the new preset. Try recording with loads of gain and sustain, then reamping with a gentler, cleaner sound.

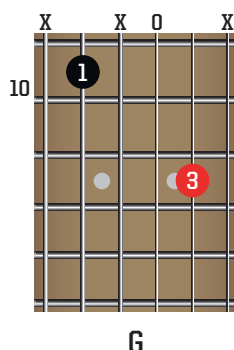
Words Chris Bird / Jenna Scaramanga

12 COOL CHORDS TO PLAY ON ACOUSTIC GUITAR

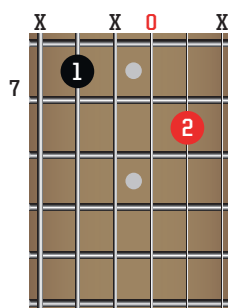
Have a go at 12 open-string chords that we think will fire up your creativity!

Let's be clear! There's no such thing as an 'acoustic guitar chord'. If a guitar has a standard fretboard, then, acoustic or electric, all chord shapes are fair game. However, some chords do sound *great* when played on acoustic – and we're looking at some of our favourites here.

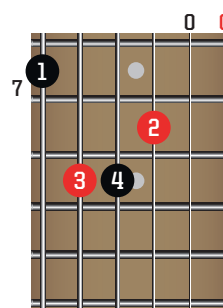
We're looking at a particular category of guitar chords: open-string shapes. These are chords that include open strings, but aren't necessarily played in the open position. The lush, ringing open strings give a richness to these shapes that really fire up any acoustic arrangement, solo or in a band. Right, let's get strumming!



G



Em



Badd11

01 THE BIRD IS THE WORD

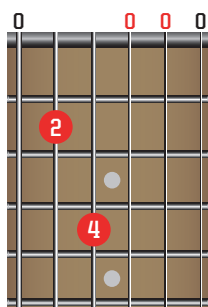
Played famously by Paul McCartney on The Fab Four's *Blackbird*, this sweet shape can easily be moved around the fretboard – the open third string comes in and out of tune when you move the shape, creating harmony and dissonance. Try experimenting with it.

02 STILL FLYING HIGH

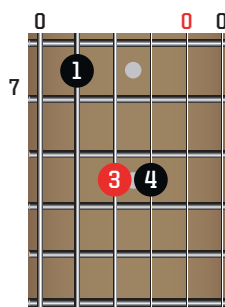
Another shape from *Blackbird*, this time played as a minor chord. Contemporary pop rocker James Bay has also taken these shapes to heart. *Hold Back The River* uses both of McCartney's shapes, so make sure to try them both out.

03 UNCHAINED

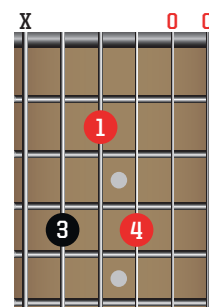
Whenever we hear this chord we think of *No Excuses* by Alice In Chains. Just slide in from two frets below to outline the intro. This is a versatile shape that you can move all around the fretboard. For instance, in 2nd position it's the opening chord in Rush's *Hemispheres*.



Emadd9



Em



C#m7

04 FEELING MOODY

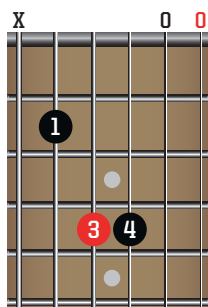
If you need a moody sound beyond the more basic Em chord, try out this minor add9 shape. We're in the open position here in E minor, but it is possible to play it as a barre chord – it'll be a stretch at the lower frets, though, so perhaps try it higher up the fretboard first.

05 JUMBO POWERCHORD

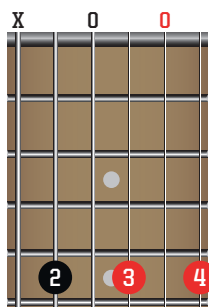
The guitar is never more glorious than when blasting out a powerchord, and here is the most powerful of them all: an enormous E5. Making use of open strings for maximum ring, the top two strings double notes from lower in the chord, creating a pseudo-12 string effect.

06 THE BEST OF FOO

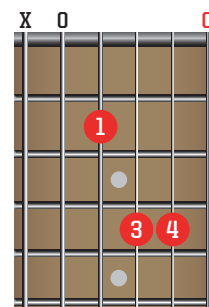
Dave Grohl is a master of using open strings in unusual voicings for a combination of jangle and crunch – and it sounds great on acoustic, too! This one opens *Best Of You*. It's arguably easier than many more common minor 7 shapes thanks to the lack of a barre.



Bsus4



D13



Asus2#4

07 UNBEARABLE SUSPENSE

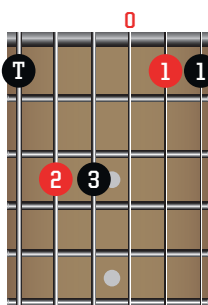
A logical way to follow the Grohl C#m7, this Bsus4 retains the same open strings for a sense of continuity. It has a stronger ring than entirely fretted versions of the chord and if your hand starts to cramp from barring it's a handy escape route.

08 HAPPIER TIMES

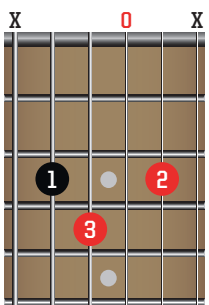
Yet another Dave Grohl open-string special here, and this immediately recognisable shape kicks off *Times Like These*. Though the original part was played on electric guitar, its open strings make it sound utterly majestic on steel-string acoustic.

09 LYDIAN DREAM

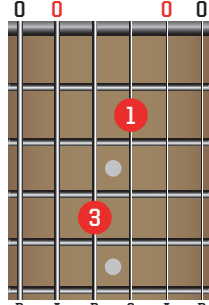
This uplifting chord's characteristic #4th interval (D#) makes it a great way to explore the Lydian mode. Or use it as a substitute for A major when you're playing in the key of E major and want more sophisticated chords. Prince used it, so you know it's good.



Fsus2



Csus2#4



D

10 THUMBS UP

Some guitarists live with their thumbs placed over the neck, and others hate the position. There are a range of chords that aren't possible without using the thumb to fret bass notes, though. This tasty Fsus2 should be enough to persuade you it's worth the effort – and that ringing open G string is lush!

11 THE SOUND OF YEARNING

Employed by super producer Butch Walker (Green Day, Fall Out Boy) on his first solo album, this chord sounds sad and hopeful at the same time, which makes it ideal for plaintive ballads. It's a tense collection of notes, so it tends to work best when arpeggiated or gently fingerpicked.

12 DADGAD D MAJOR

DADGAD is a great place to start with altered tunings on the acoustic guitar because it has such a rich chord vocabulary available. Here's a straightforward D major chord, but immediately it has more depth and colour than you get from the same chord played in standard tuning.

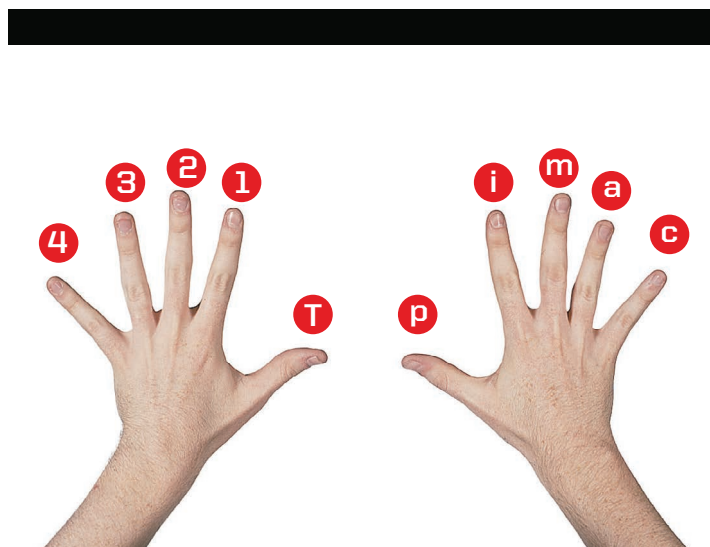
Words Chris Bird

FINGERSTYLE TRAINER

Take your fingerpicking skills to the next level with AG's straightforward drills and workouts

Fingerstyle. It's one of those techniques most of us would probably say we wish we were a bit better at. Let's face it, it's easy to blast out a few chords from *Wonderwall*, *Wish You Were Here* or a simple strum-along of choice. And those intricate fingerpicked lines we promised ourselves we'd practise? Well, they can start to feel like a bit of a labour of love – and difficult!

Well, that's where we come in. Here we break down some of the core techniques of fingerstyle acoustic guitar playing with 15 tab examples for you to work on. In places we've taken inspiration from acoustic guitarists of note, but our main focus is on pure technique. Some of our exercises are multi-dimensional, too, so you can easily reinvent them to suit your own purposes. You could try an alternative fingerpicking pattern, change how you apply accents, or just play the same exercise on a different chord. Right, let's get picky with it!



LIFE OF PIMAC...

Fingerstyle notation explained

In fingerstyle notation, the letters p, i, m, a and c refer to the thumb and fingers in your picking hand. That's not just us, by the way. It's a longstanding tradition of classical music. And the fretting fingers? They're numbered 1 to 4, with a 'T' to indicate the thumb. You'll need to know what it all means to get the most out of our tab lessons and just for a life of fingerstyle fun!

01 ACCENTING EXERCISE 1

♩ = 110
C⁵
Play 4 times

let ring throughout

TAB

p m i m p m i

Perhaps the de facto standard in 4/4 time is that every 'on-beat' note is played with some emphasis – i.e., a little louder than the offbeat notes around them. Try playing our example, inspired by Led Zeppelin's *Going To California*, with emphasis where you see the musical 'accent' mark (>).

02 ACCENTING EXERCISE 2

♩ = 110
C⁵
Play 4 times

let ring throughout

TAB

p m i m p m i

You might think we've repeated the tab from the previous example here, but no, look carefully! Though the notes are the same, there are three accents here, not four – and one is on an offbeat. Play it, and you'll sense a totally different feel. As an exercise, simply swap between these two examples.

03 TIME SIGNATURES: 6/8

♩ = 60
Em
Play 4 times

let ring throughout

TAB

p i m a m i

Classic 6/8-time ballads like Metallica's *Nothing Else Matters* and REM's *Everybody Hurts* feature this kind of arpeggio with an accent on the first and fourth eighth notes of the bar. Hone your skills first by picking these two notes a little louder, then try playing every note at the same level.

04 TIME SIGNATURES: 3/4

♩ = 90
Em
Play 4 times

let ring throughout

TAB

p i m a m i

3/4 time is often confused with 6/8 time – both time signatures feature six eighth notes in each bar after all. The difference is in the accenting. Here in our 3/4 time example you can see there are accents on the first, third and fifth eighth notes of the bar. Try swapping between our two examples in 6/8 and 3/4.

05 GROOVE WITH MUTED STRIKES

♩=90

G

Play 4 times

TAB

3 4 5 3 4 5 3 4 5

p a m i

Here we're striking the strings with the picking hand on beats 2 and 4 for a percussive groove. The technique is arguably most useful when you're playing unaccompanied. Extreme's *More Than Words* is probably the best known example.

06 GROOVE WITH ACCENTED CHORDS

♩=105

Am G

Play 4 times

TAB

5 7 5 3 5 5 3

p i m i

Taking inspiration from Jack Johnson's *Banana Pancakes* here we're keeping the groove with a downward strum from the picking fingers. The challenge is switching between fingerpicking the first two notes before switching to a finger-strum on beat 2.

07 PALM MUTING

♩=72

C Am⁷ C Em

PM

Play 4 times

TAB

3 2 0 3 2 2 0 2 2 0

p i p i i m

† let open G notes ring on

Palm muting – that's a rock technique, right? Well, yes it is, but it has a place in acoustic music, too – and if you're a fingerstylist aiming to emphasise a melody over a bassline you'll understand. Here in our example inspired by Ed Sheeran's *Bloodstream*, the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-string notes are muted while the third string rings out. Take the idea further by introducing more melody notes, replacing bass notes where needed.

08 HARMONICS PRIMER

♩=95

Em⁷

NH

let ring throughout

Play 4 times

TAB

12 12 12 12

p a i m

12th-fret harmonics are a relatively easy technique. Just touch the string over the fretwire without pressing down, then pick. Simple. Our example presents the challenge of picking single notes and a two-note shape, which requires accurate picking, especially if you want to hit the final single note cleanly.

09 POSITION-SHIFT HARMONICS

♩=95

Em⁷

NH

let ring throughout

Play 4 times

TAB

12 12 7 12 7 12

p a m i m i m

Here's a real challenge! Shifting between 7th- and 12th-fret harmonics can be tough – and it might throw your timing out. Try practising the fingerpicking *all* in the 12th position first, only then introducing the position shift once you're confident your fingerpicking is accurate.

10 PIMA VARIATIONS 1

♩=132

C

let ring throughout

Play 4 times

TAB

0 2 3 0 2 3

p m i a

This simple drill will help you hone your fingerstyle technique. We're playing four notes from an open C chord but instead of simply ascending we're mixing things up with this picking pattern: p-m-i-a. Try alternating four bars of this pattern then switching to 'straight' p-i-m-a.

11 PIMA VARIATIONS 2

♩=132

A⁷

let ring throughout

Play 4 times

TAB

2 0 2 0 2 0

p a i m

This is the same exercise as you've just done, but this time with a p-a-i-m pattern. We're also playing A⁷ – but only for the sake of variety. For a full fingerstyle workout come up with as many variations on the picking pattern as you can and with as many chords as possible.

13 PIMA VARIATIONS 3

♩=132

D Dsus⁴ D Dsus² Play 4 times

let ring throughout

a m i p

In general, fingerstyle feels easiest when you start on a thumb-picked note – it's your strongest digit after all. This example is a challenge because it follows an a-m-i-p pattern. So not only is the thumb the last digit you come to, it's playing on the offbeat, too. Remember, offbeats are most commonly de-emphasised, so you'll need to take care here not to strike the string too hard with your thumb. Practise without playing the chord changes while you get used to the picking part.

13 STRING SLIDES

♩=60

E D/E E B/E Emaj⁷ sus⁴ Play 4 times

let ring throughout

m i p p i m a m i p

This is a fretting technique, but when played fingerstyle the phrasing sounds pretty sweet on acoustic guitar. We're taking inspiration from Ben Howard's early-career classic, *Old Pine*, here, though staying in standard tuning for convenience. The trick in bar 1 is to ensure you keep the first- and second-string notes fretted for as long as possible, including during the slides down the string.

14 HOT COUNTRY PULL-OFFS

♩=90

E⁷ A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ Play 4 times

let ring

p m i p m i p m i m

Another fretting technique here in this well-worn country lick, but there are fingerpicking considerations too. The i-m-picked diads in bar 1 should seem like an obvious choice by now, as should the thumb-picked note that precedes each one. However, the second half of bar 2 and into bar 3 is more like 'lead guitar'. It's a single-note lick that could be picked a few different ways, and we've shown our preferred option. It'll also sound great played at double speed with a Telecaster bridge single-coil!

15 THE PINCH

♩=72

C G/B Am G/B Play 4 times

let ring throughout

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

If fingerpicking isn't your area of expertise, we recommend breaking this example down into phrases of two beats duration each. That means you can turn the first half of bar 1 into its own exercise, focusing only on the C chord. Obviously that gives you three more sections to work on through the rest of the bar and into bar 2. The 'pinch' is a technique where you pick two notes simultaneously: downwards with your thumb and up with a finger – so, loosely, that's a pinch! Pull your hand fractionally away from the strings after each one so you don't collide with adjacent strings.

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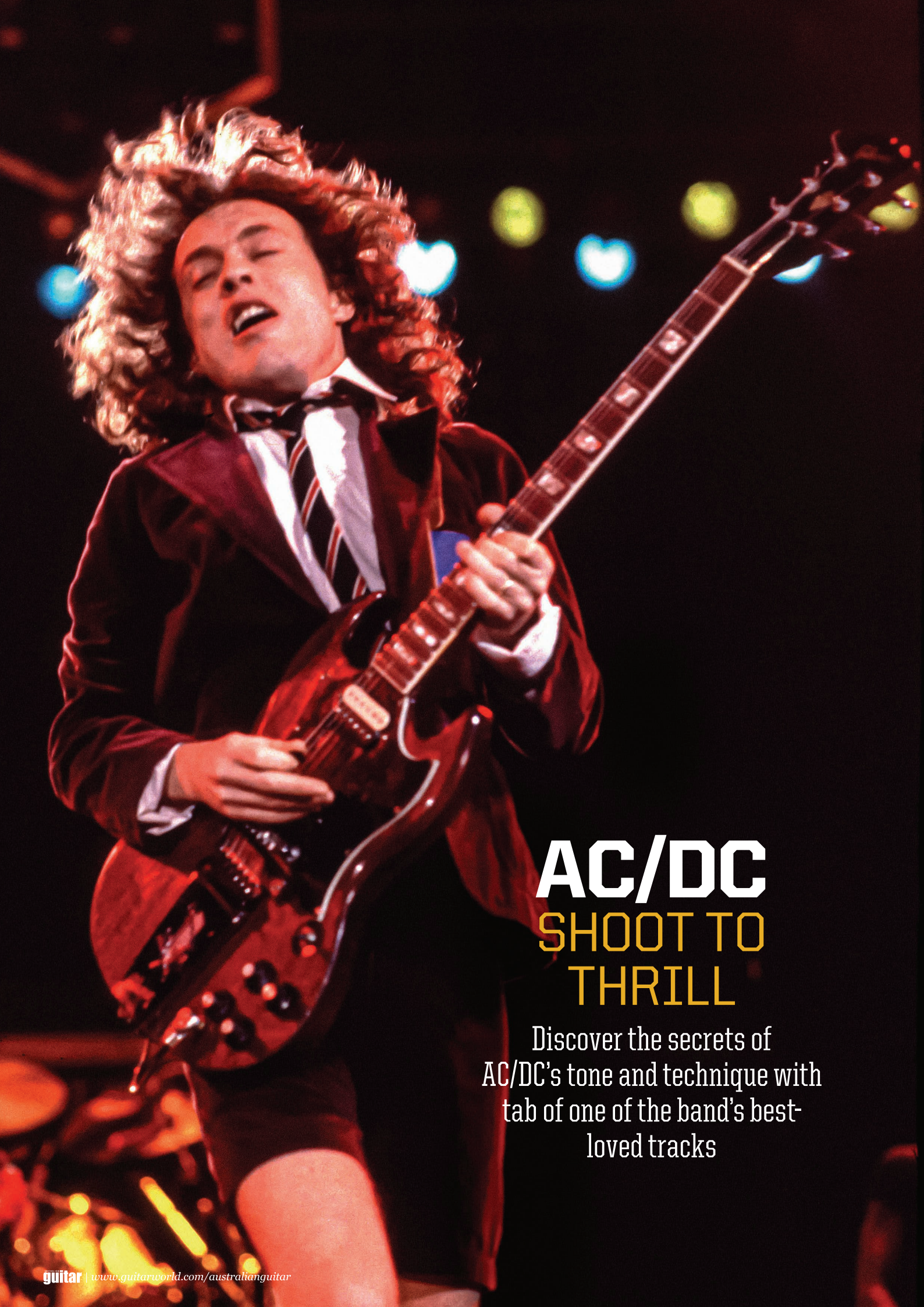
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AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL

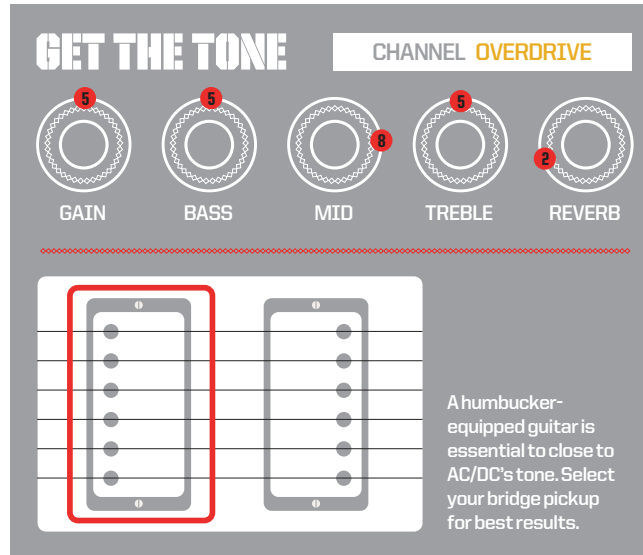
Discover the secrets of
AC/DC's tone and technique with
tab of one of the band's best-
loved tracks

Shoot To Thrill features on AC/DC's global smash comeback album, *Back In Black*. The backbone of the band's sound comes from the dual guitars of sibling pair Angus and Malcolm Young. Their powerhouse rhythm parts are the perfect example of how twin guitar parts should lock and groove, with Angus' solos providing the icing on the cake – hard-hitting blues-influenced licks delivered with killer tone and perfect time.

The rhythm parts are based around open-position powerchords. G5 is the same as open G, but the fifth string is nearly always muted. D5 is based on that easy open D shape, but frequently played over a low A. Angus' lead parts are largely pentatonic, but *STT*'s solos are much more than mere one-shape wonders, so be sure to read the scales info below.

SOUND ADVICE

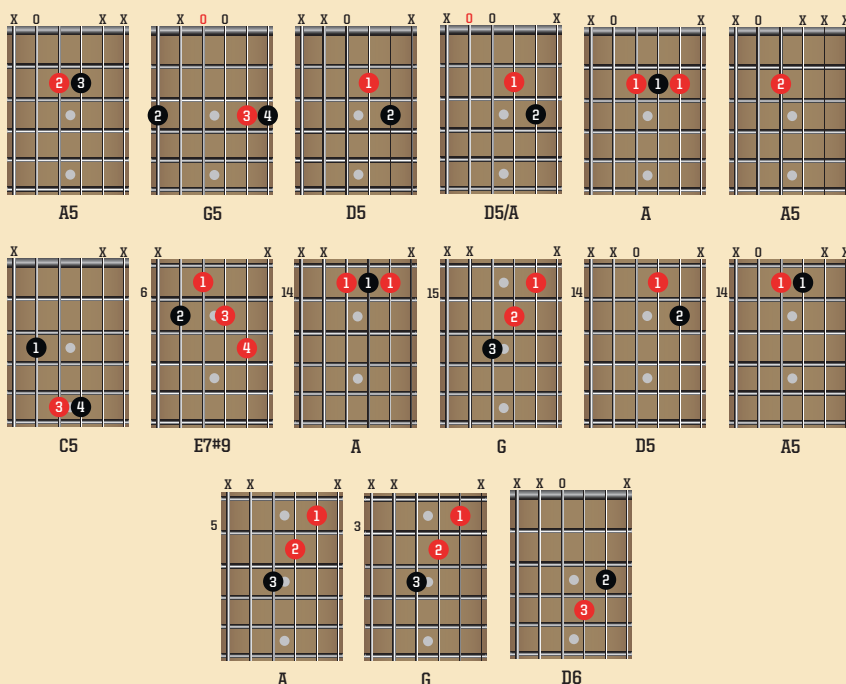
Everything you need to know before playing 'Shoot To Thrill'



Angus Young achieved his trademark tone by playing his cherry red Gibson SG through Marshall stacks. Malcolm Young also favoured Marshall amps but playing his 1963 Gretsch G6131 Jet Firebird, AKA 'the Beast'. Malcolm's tone is slightly more spiky and less overdriven than Angus', and it's the combination of these two tones that creates the AC/DC signature sound. If playing alone, it's worth having two tones set up – a Malcolm-esque light drive plus an overdrive/boost (a Tube Screamer type is a decent option) to get closer to the sound of Angus' Marshalls, which he cranks to the max, of course.

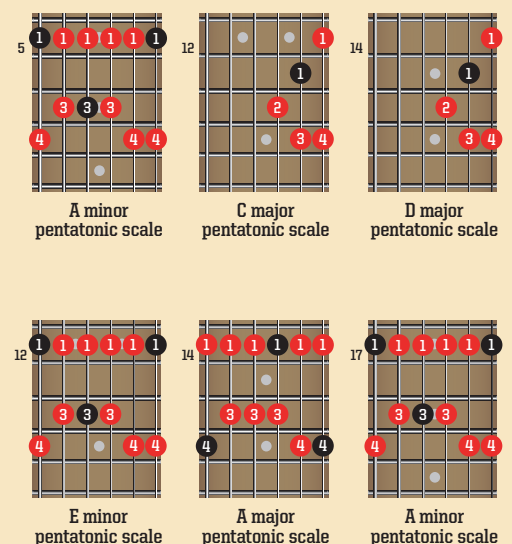
CHORDS

Although this looks like a lot of chords, the majority are easy open shapes. It's important to keep open strings marked 'X' carefully muted throughout – these are a major feature of this track and, indeed, of Malcolm's rhythm playing in general. In each case, try to rest a fretting finger against the idle strings as you play and, where possible, double up with palm-muting, too. A selection of the shapes shown here are to be found in the outro chorus where they're played fingerstyle.



SCALES

You'll need both low and high versions of the A minor pentatonic scale to play Angus' solos. In the first, the major pentatonic scale is used to follow the chord changes, shifting up a tone to follow the change from C to D. The E minor pentatonic scale is used at the end of the first solo over the E7#9 chord, which it fits perfectly. In the outro solo, the A major pentatonic scale is used at the 14th fret before shifting up to the high position of the A minor pentatonic. The song wraps up back down in the 5th position A minor pentatonic scale.



FULL
TAB

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AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Intro/verse (guitar 2)

0:08

Play 12 times

T B

3 0 2 0 3 0 2 0 4 0 0

G⁵ D⁵ G⁵ D⁵ A⁵

This is Malcolm's riff that you'll hear propelling the intro and verses. Keep your third finger in position on the 3rd fret of the second string until the A5 at the end of bar 2. You'll then need to use your fourth finger to play the low C# on the fifth string. Use your picking hand to mute out the strings between chords.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Verse (guitar 1)

[illegible]

Angus uses partial shapes to keep his overdriven sound in balance with Malcom's bigger chords and cleaner tone. A tight delivery relies on a double whammy of techniques with both hands. Picking-wise, use palm-muting on the bass strings and try to strike only the strings indicated in the tab. Use your fret hand to mute out the idle strings.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL **Bridge**

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part and a bass part, both with standard notation and tablature. The guitar part is in the key of D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The bass part is in the key of A major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The guitar part starts with a 0:49 timestamp. The score is divided into two systems, each with a measure number (1 and 5) at the beginning. The guitar part features various chords and melodic lines, while the bass part provides a steady accompaniment. The tablature for the guitar part is written on a six-line staff, and the tablature for the bass part is written on a four-line staff. The guitar part includes a 0:49 timestamp. The score is divided into two systems, each with a measure number (1 and 5) at the beginning. The guitar part features various chords and melodic lines, while the bass part provides a steady accompaniment. The tablature for the guitar part is written on a six-line staff, and the tablature for the bass part is written on a four-line staff.

Both guitars play the same part here in a mix of open and moveable powerchord shapes. Once again, it's vital to keep idle strings silent with picking accuracy and fret-hand muting. For example, use the tip of your first finger to keep the sixth string silent as you play C5. Listen carefully to our recording to check the rhythm of the E7#9, where the low notes are played mostly on the offbeat.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Chorus 1

1:02

TAB

Both guitars continue in unison here in the chorus. You can use either downpicking throughout or down/up eighth-note strumming for this section. In general terms, Angus is more likely to alternate, while Malcolm would tend more towards straight downstrokes – but even he can be seen taking a down/up approach at times.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL **Interlude**

[illegible]

The two guitars are almost the same here, but Angus plays the riff tabbed in bars 2 and 4, while Malcolm would hold a single A5 powerchord underneath. Your hand should be in 2nd position with your first finger barring across the third and fourth strings.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Chorus 2

1:50

Play 3 times

A⁵ G⁵ D⁵/A

TAB

5

The second chorus is doubled, with a sustained D5 chord in the last two bars, but otherwise the parts are exactly the same as for chorus 1. Don't forget to add the low A note to all of the D5/A chords here.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Outro chorus (guitar 2, cont'd)

This part enters on the eighth bar of guitar 1's outro chorus sequence. Play fairly softly at first, then increase in volume when the bass enters and through to the end of the section. Don't play too hard, though. Keep some attack back for ramping up the dynamics in the outro solo.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL **Outro solo (guitar 1)**

[illegible][illegible]

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Outro solo (guitar 1, cont'd)

13

Chords: A⁵, G⁵, D⁵

Techniques: RP, BU, BD

17

Chords: A⁵, G⁵, D⁵, G⁵

Techniques: BU, BD, RP

21

Chords: D⁵, G⁵, D⁵

Techniques: BU, RP

24

Chords: G⁵, A⁵

Techniques: BU, RP

Take care to bend in tune on the opening unison bends and the minor 3rd bends in bar 8. In bars 11 to 14 you'll need to fret the top two strings simultaneously while bending the third string; not an impossible task, but worth practising – it's easy to accidentally fluff the bend or pull the other fretted notes sharp.

AC/DC SHOOT TO THRILL Outro solo (guitar 2)

4:18

Chords: A⁵, G⁵, D⁵/A, A⁵

Techniques: PM

Play 3 times

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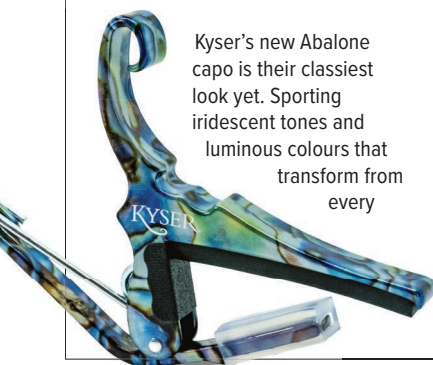
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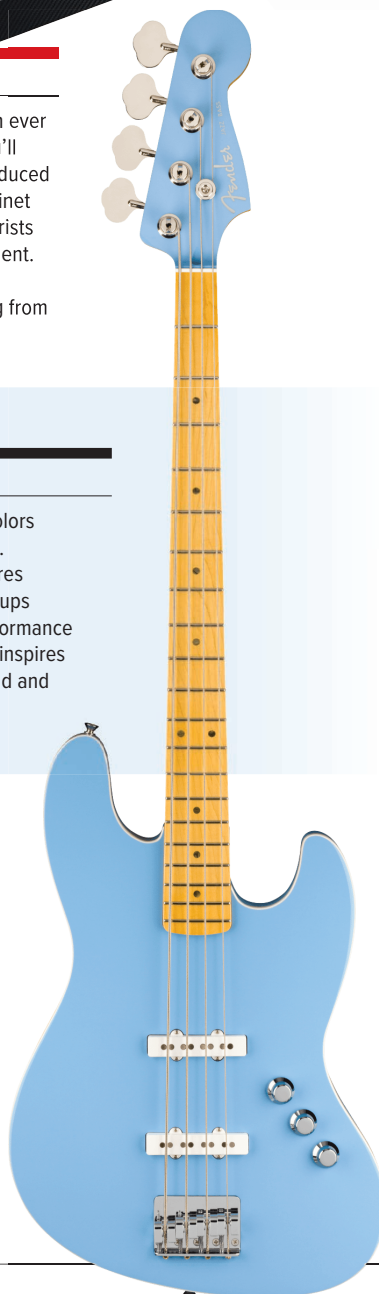
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CORT GB-MODERN 4

RRP: \$2,099 • dynamicmusic.com.au

A great bass has just the right blend of timeless design and modernized features. The GB Modern bass is developed for the J-Bass enthusiasts with a surprisingly lightweight design for greater comfort and enhanced playability while reducing fatigue. Also featured are top tier visual and spec enhancements such as roasted maple neck and fretboard, Hipshot Ultralite Tuners and Babicz FCH4 Bridge to reduce the weight even further, and an ultimate tone combination of Nordstrand Big Single Pickup Set paired with MarkBass MB Instrument Pre preamp system.



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Dingbat PX pedalboards are based on the Dingbat Medium size platform and include onboard true bypass pedal switching for managing and optimizing the performance of your effects. Its innovative patented design places the switcher beneath the foot of the board keeping all cabling neatly out of view and preserving maximum space for pedals. Installing Pedal Power with the included mounting hardware is quick and easy using only a screwdriver. Dingbat PX also features a dedicated position for a second Pedal Power that can be quickly installed with optional mounting brackets. Hook-and-loop tape is provided to attach pedals, as well as zip ties and 4-way tie mounts to secure cabling underneath.



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The Aerodyne Special Series offers a contemporary take on classic Fender designs. Distinctive aerodynamic lines, custom voiced pickups, state-of-the-art hardware, dazzling finishes, and unmistakable silhouettes combine to create instruments that are pure, purposeful, instantly familiar and radically new. The Aerodyne Special Stratocaster features a sleek new look with vibrant colors adorning the elegantly bound basswood body and the matching headcap. A modern "C" shape satin finished neck with 12" radius fingerboard ensures effortless playability, while newly designed vintage-voiced Stratocaster pickups and a Babicz Z-Series FCH-2 Point Tremolo deliver a perfect balance of high-performance and classic Fender tone.

ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN KAIZEN

RRP: Contact retailer • cmcmusic.com.au

Ernie Ball Music Man's Kaizen range of guitars is now shipping in Australia. An all-new visionary collaboration between the Ernie Ball Music Man design team and the world-renowned guitarist, innovator, and designer Tosin Abasi. Built for the modern player, the Kaizen is available in 6 and 7-string versions crafted with forward-thinking design concepts guided by Tosin Abasi's unique playing style and vision. Offered with a decidedly contoured alder body, roasted figured

maple neck, and ebony fretboard, the multi-scale length fretboard also features an "infinity radius" that provides improved visibility of the fretboard in any playing position. The electronics include a new Music Man HT bridge humbucker, a custom offset neck humbucker, and a 3-way switch wired with a custom middle position. Each guitar comes equipped with a Music Man tremolo, Steinberger gearless tuners, and a hardshell case.



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4 easy ways to record acoustic guitar

The acoustic guitar is a pure instrument. The sound it produces is self-contained, and relies on you as the player to influence it. This can be done with different string types, picks, but most of all, the room.

There are loads of tricks for getting different acoustic guitar sounds on your recording, and in this tutorial we'll show you just a few.

The good news is that you can get brilliant-sounding acoustic tracks with just one microphone, some careful room selection and mic placement.

THE ONE MIC METHOD

Acoustic guitars are dynamic instruments, capable of outputting a range of levels and frequency responses. For this reason, the most common way of capturing an acoustic guitar with a single mic is to use a condenser. But before you position the mic, have a listen to the guitar in the room.

Your environment can have a great effect on the sound; empty spaces with lots of hard reflective surfaces (a bathroom, for instance) will give you a bright, lively sound, whereas a room with carpet, sofas and curtains will soak up a lot of the reflections, giving you a dryer, punchier tone.

An acoustic can be played anywhere, so experiment with different rooms to see which gets you the sound you prefer. Position the mic about 30cm in front of your acoustic, aimed at the join between the body and the neck. Positioning the mic here will keep it out of the way of your picking hand, and will avoid too much muddy low-end from the soundhole.

You will need: Condenser microphone, one microphone input, one track.

STEREO SETUP 1: X/Y CONFIGURATION

Capturing your guitar in stereo can give you a



huge, wide-sounding acoustic part for your tune, and it's easy to do. When you record in stereo, it's best if you can use a pair of identical mics, so that the signal picked up by each will be equal. For this method, we're going to use an X/Y placement. This is where the capsules are crossed over, so that they're an equal distance from the source to minimise phase. Position them around the 14th fret of your acoustic. Pan them left and right, and bask in the super-wide stereo effect!

You will need: Two condenser microphones, two microphone inputs, two tracks.



STEREO SETUP 2: SPACED PAIR

The second way of recording in stereo is using a spaced pair. It's similar to the X/Y idea, except for this time we'll physically move the microphones apart to achieve an even wider sound than before. Place one microphone between the bridge and the soundhole, and aim the other at the fretboard.

Once again, you'll want to pan these tracks left and right respectively when mixing to achieve a spacey, stereo effect.

You will need: Two condenser microphones, two microphone inputs, two tracks.

OVERHEADS

The acoustic guitar is an organic sound, and there's an argument that it should be captured more ambiently. After all, you don't stick your head down by the body of the guitar when listening to someone play!

A good method for achieving a very natural acoustic sound is to try positioning a pair of microphones at the player's head height as shown. This way, you'll be recording 'what they hear' rather than an artificially close sound.

You will need: Two condenser microphones, two microphone inputs, two tracks.



PICKUP / MIC BLEND

If your acoustic has a pickup on it, you can get two contrasting tones from one take by blending the sound of your pickup with the ambience of a microphone. It's easy to do – simply plug your guitar into your interface's instrument input (we'd suggest keeping your preamp's EQ 'flat' so you can tweak the tonality later), then record the mic signal on a separate track using the one mic method above. You might want to play with the distance of the microphone, just to get the sounds to compliment each other as well as possible.

Once you're done, try panning the tracks, or running the pickup track through amp/speaker modelling to create some extra texture. If your guitar doesn't have a pickup, but you're looking to fit one, take a look at our guide to the best acoustic guitar pickups on the market.

You will need: Electro-acoustic, condenser microphone, mic/instrument inputs, two tracks. 



CAROL KAYE: THE SESSION BASS ICON WHO HELPED DEFINE THE '60S

If you've ever wondered what connects Frank Zappa to Frank Sinatra, Burt Bacharach to The Beach Boys, the answer is Carol Kaye. The session legend tells the story behind her career and legendary bass recordings

Words by Denny Ilett

If plucking a ripe plum from a tree had a sound, it would resemble Carol Kaye's signature tone – a tone that made her a 'first-call' bassist in the highly competitive studio session world. It wasn't just that, though.

Kaye is arguably the first bassist to exploit the instrument in a truly melodic fashion, a nod perhaps to her early days as a jazz guitar prodigy. Her ability to invent memorable and influential bass and guitar parts on the spot in a high-pressure situation took her to – and kept her at – the very top of the studio scene and onto more than 10,000 recordings.

Kaye was born into a musical family in Washington state on the Pacific Northwest in 1935, with both parents professional musicians. In 1942, they relocated to California and by the age of 13, she took possession of her first guitar. Incredibly, within a year she was proficient enough to take on students of her own alongside playing gigs in the local jazz clubs.

"I turned professional in 1948 after working with a fine jazz guitar teacher on the West Coast," Carol says. "Within a few months I'd learned enough to be out playing jazz gigs. Almost everyone in those days had a musical instrument. If you think of how many people today have cell phones and computers, that's how many people had instruments and how popular music was then. You heard real music everywhere: on the radio, TV and in the movies."

The Jazz Scene

In the 1950s Carol worked for the jazz saxophonist Teddy Edwards. While in his band, she came to the attention of producer Robert 'Bumps' Blackwell who is best remembered for producing and co-writing with Little Richard on a string of rock 'n' roll classics such as Tutti Frutti, Long Tall Sally and Good Golly, Miss Molly.

"I was asked by Bumps Blackwell to do some studio sessions for him," Carol tells us. "I was working at the Beverly Cavern in LA at the time with Teddy Edwards and Bumps loved the way I soloed real jazz guitar. Everyone worked at the Cavern, but I played in dozens of jazz clubs with lots of different bands. I was one of the few, in late-'50s LA, that was esteemed for playing fine jazz guitar."

"In those days I played a secondhand Gibson ES-175 and a Gibson amp but traded it for an Epiphone Emperor. By the way, my Epiphone was Phil Spector's favourite guitar sound; he loved that guitar. Around 1957 I swapped the Gibson amp for a Fender Super Reverb, which had an open back and four 10-inch speakers. I continued to use that amp even when I switched to bass in the early '60s."

The song that Blackwell invited Carol to play on happened to be Sam Cooke's classic version of the jazz standard Summertime. The track is underpinned by Kaye's simple yet highly effective acoustic arpeggios on what sounds like her Emperor

archtop. The A-side You Send Me went to No 1 on the American R&B chart and, later, into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame as one of the 500 'Most Important Songs' list.

"From then on I decided to focus more on studio work," says Carol. "It paid 10 times more than the jazz clubs paid and, by then, I had two children and a mother to support!"

Creating a feeling

In 1958 Carol played rhythm guitar on Ritchie Valen's million-seller La Bamba at Gold Star Studios in Hollywood. Phil Spector, a regular client of Gold Star, noticed what Kaye was capable of and wasted no time hiring her for his own sessions. Ultimately, these sessions generated such 'Wall Of Sound' masterpieces as The Crystals' Then He Kissed Me and You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin' by The Righteous Brothers, among many others.

Carol shares her experience of the sessions: "There was so much echo in the earphones on Lovin' Feelin' that no-one was playing well together. I had to bear down extra hard on my Epiphone, grinding away with rhythmic eighth notes, trying to congeal the rhythm together."

"Phil heard that and liked it so much he put a double-time echo on it, making it sound like I was playing 16th notes. It worked! We knew that was going to be a big hit. The tune was great and The Righteous Brothers were knocking our blocks off with the way they were singing. We'd never heard white singers sing like that before."

Having to adapt to whatever the session might

throw their way, these studio giants had to be able to sight-read sheet music as well as be top-drawer improvisers, well accustomed to adapting to those times when they'd merely be given a chord chart.

"Studio time was very expensive in those days. You'd have to record three or four tunes in three hours. We'd never heard the music before and had to be able to invent our lines and make sure the music sounded good. If you didn't, you never got hired again. It was that simple!" Carol states. "The producers were there to make hit records and they booked the musicians that could deliver musically as well as be ultra professional on the record date."

"We would play several of these sessions every day! You drank a lot of coffee to stay awake, especially on those six-hour sessions where you'd have to first invent then record a whole album. Yes, it was boring a lot of the time, but you took care of business."

"There were no drugs or booze allowed in the studios. Anyone turning up drunk or high would never get another session. The drugs started to turn up in the '70s and that's when most of us quit the studio scene and started to concentrate more on movie work."

From Tedesco to Burrell

The list of musicians who Carol worked with on sessions is intriguing. The vast majority were jazz players who'd grown up through the big-band era or were touring jazz clubs across the States before settling for the relative comfort of the studio scene. Joe Pass, Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, Tommy





Tedesco and Kenny Burrell were just some of the heavyweight guitarists Kaye regularly played with on studio dates.

"People don't realise this fact: all of those '60s pop records were played by jazz musicians! The guys on the album covers, bar the singers, didn't record their own parts; we did them. We were the only ones who had the reading and improvising skills to handle the pressure of those sessions.

"It wasn't until the '70s that the rockers were good enough to play their own parts on record – and, even then, they couldn't do it in the short time we did. By then, bands were taking months to make an album that used to take us a few hours."

Carol's list of credits through the '60s and into the '70s is a veritable who's-who of top-level recording artists of the day: Ike and Tina, The Beach Boys, Simon & Garfunkel, Sinatra, Sonny and Cher, Neil Young, The Monkees, to name just a few. By this time, Carol had switched to playing a Fender Precision Bass through her Super Reverb guitar amp.

"I was in my sixth year as a studio guitarist when, one day in 1963, the bass player didn't show up at a session. The producer asked me if I could play bass and I found it was a lot more fun to play and created good, interesting lines, [rather than] playing all those rinky-dink silly parts on guitar that we all had to dumb-down for on those rock and pop records.

"I found that my Fender Precision strung with flatwounds and played with a pick created the sound all the producers wanted. I stuck a piece of foam on the bridge to stop those horrible overtones, which also produced a slightly muted effect that became really popular for hit records.

"Having been a jazz guitarist it was easy for me to invent basslines for those records. Us jazz musicians hated the bulk of the pop records we played on, but I liked some of it – [such as] the more creative stuff like The Beach Boys. Brian Wilson was the only pop

composer that wrote basslines for me and they were very good, but the rest I had to make up on the spot."

The male-dominated world of the '60s studio scene could be intimidating for women but not for Carol Kaye, who quickly became known as the best bassist in the business. Quincy Jones wouldn't do a session until Carol was available and Brian Wilson called her "the best bassist in the world and way ahead of her time".

Carol recalls: "There were always women who worked with men in the jazz groups and big bands going back to the 1920s, but there were very few women in the studios – just a few who played in string sections or on harp.

"You know, a note doesn't have sex attached to it. You either play it good or you don't. Some people can't handle that, especially men. They want to see the bass as a masculine thing, but when you hear a bass played with balls... that's me!"

Levelling the score

As the '70s progressed, things began to change in the studios and many of the top session artists were leaving the scene. Carol continued to record for film composers such as Lalo Schiffrin (*Mission: Impossible*) and Henry Mancini (*Pink Panther*) alongside laying down bass parts for TV shows such as *M*A*S*H*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Ironside*, *Kojak* and, appropriately, *Wonder Woman*.

Carol released a series of guitar and bass tuition books to complement her growing teaching commitments and contributed to such movie scores as *Bullitt*, *Planet Of The Apes* and *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*.

"You had one take to get your parts right on those movie sessions," says Carol. "The money people weren't into wasting time repeating things you should've got right first time. It was no pressure, though. We knew what we were doing and we

were thrilled to work with some of the greatest film composers of all time.

"Apart from movies and TV shows, I quit the studio scene and went back to playing jazz. I'd missed it so much. I'd been playing so much eighth- and 16th-note basslines that I'd started losing my jazz chops. I had all kinds of guitars for the studios: electric, acoustic six- and 12-strings, even mandolin, banjo and a Danelectro baritone guitar.

"You had them all in the trunk of your car along with your Fender amp with spares for all. I never had time to change my strings. Every two years I'd go to the store and buy a new bass and that would be my new strings! After all those years I was happy to be back playing jazz in the clubs and at festivals, writing my books and helping people with music, spreading the truth to hopefully get rid of all the ego-driven BS out there."

To have played on so many iconic record sessions without a name-check might irk many musicians these days, but Carol Kaye is quick to point out that the studio scene wasn't like that then. The studio musicians played each session knowing they would not be credited for their work on any album sleeves and didn't expect to be. All egos had to be left in the parking lot, and from the moment the tape started rolling, it was business as usual.

"Today people are fighting for credits, they're fighting for 'me, me, me!' We didn't think like that; we thought 'us, us, us.' As a group, we were just trying to create a product, we did our best to turn those things into hits and we had a lot of success with that attitude. Music is, after all, a business and if more musicians thought that way, we would have a damn good business." 

Carol Kaye's series of tutor books and her 502-page autobiography, *Studio Musician*, are available from CarolKaye.com.



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Zoom UAC-232 USB Audio Converter

An audio interface that's simpler, better, cheaper, and with Midi...? Not too good to be true. Review by **Steve Henderson**

The Zoom Corporation has come a long way since their 1990 debut device: the belt-pack multi-effect box, model 9002, that defied its physical dimensions to offer an extraordinary (for the time) array of sounds and effect combinations. Since then, these adventurous folks have released at least one new Zoom product literally every single year. Some of these products have received a less-than-enthusiastic reception, while others have been welcomed whole-heartedly as serious tools for serious music creators. Either way, there never was any doubt that Zoom products offered great value for money. Innovative ideas, such as an audio interface built into a guitar pedal, or the very practical R-16 and R-24 interface/controllers, have come at a steady pace, and Zoom's range of products are always designed to be portable, easy to operate, and supremely useful.

This philosophy continues with their UAC-232 audio converter: a simple-to-use, light weight, compact USB audio recorder with everything you need to do the business and no redundant features to unnecessarily use up space, time, or dollars. The 232 is a 32-bit, two channel, stereo interface with XLR/TRS ins, stereo outs (jacks), a stereo volume control, a variable headphone socket, phantom power, and a rear USB-C port. It runs on 5 volts (USB-C) and – bonus time – it is Midi capable, with rear-mounted in and out din sockets. Also: it's tiny! At just 355 grams and only 164mm wide (a touch larger, but a touch lighter, than a Boss pedal), it's a super-easy lug and it'll slip into your laptop bag with ease.

You can look up the complete spec online but, be assured, this is a complete, full-featured device that makes most other similar products look dated.

The 232's claim to fame is its 32-bit float recording, the first of its kind. This means it collects audio data beyond the range of any other interface, from a simple whisper to the crack of a free-floating brass snare. The dynamic range is not limited by the technology and the captured audio is clear and clean. There's no need to adjust input levels (in fact, there are no input controls at all), and post-production benefits from having a more complex audio image.

The 232 has the same low-noise preamps that we've enjoyed in other Zoom products, such as their excellent field recorders. These preamps are super-clean and, combined with the 32-bit

technology, present a strikingly clean and rich image with which to work. The amount of nuance in the recorded tone is quite extraordinary.

With the Zoom feeding a Mac with Logic Pro, I plugged in a Maton acoustic, with the Maton's preamp on 10, using the Hi-Z TRS socket. The recorded sound was wonderfully rich, and clearly more complex than I'd achieved with other interfaces. With a Neumann U87 into the Lo-Z XLR, I recorded the guitar again and noted the more subtle dynamic range. Recording a Boogie combo with the U87 (a metre away on axis) on one track and a 57 (close, off axis) on another track, the clean sounds were broad and dynamic while the drive tones rich and focussed. Drums, too, had a more accurate dynamic attack, with a more complex tone. Vocal recordings were a big surprise, capturing tones that were both complex and subtle. There's no hiding behind technological limitations here, as you might with other interfaces: it's all there to hear. Importantly, throughout this test drive, there was no latency to deal with.

The Zoom website has all the tricky technical data, so let's not bother. Let's just say that there's a lot happening here and you won't find a better value interface, especially one that features MIDI. Also on the website, check out the UAC-232 Mix Control software and see all the clever stuff it lets you do to make the UAC-232 more usable for your own particular applications.

Having a plug-n-play device like this makes everyone's life simpler. It has super-clean, uncoloured preamps (which we all love, whether we're musos, podcasters, whatever...) and the signal boost that these preamps provide is subtle but delivers a huge benefit by transparently punching up the signal just a touch. Think of it as a "hifi" function.

One wonders about a company that releases new product so often. On the one hand, some of their models might be superseded quickly; on the other, their tech is always up-to-date. **AB**



► VERDICT

The UAC-232 is a go-anywhere interface defined by both its simplicity and its quality, and a great looking piece of contemporary kit to boot. For this kind of money, it's a no brainer.

► PROS

- Lightweight.
- Easy to set up and use.
- No excess tech to distract.
- Latency-free monitoring.

► CONS

- ♥ None.

► CONTACT

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Fender Gold Foil Telecaster

When is a Telecaster not a Telecaster? When it comes with a pair of mini-humbuckers, a mahogany body and ebony fingerboard like this one! **Review by Dave Burrluck**

Continuing a long run of pickup-pimped Telecasters, this 2023 release sees our favourite bolt-on in new dress and with a pair of Gold Foil pickups, which, says Fender, “combines the enduring charm of mid-century mail-order guitars with the style and playability of an authentic Fender”.

Technically, there’s no such thing as a single-recipe ‘gold foil’ pickup; the style is inspired by various pawnshop-prize brands such as Teisco, Guyatone, Harmony and Kay. The pickup itself – anything with a bit of gold metallic ‘foil’ on the front with a partial metal cover – came in a variety of usually single-coil styles, some using rubberised ‘fridge’ magnets. But, hey, they’re trendy and have been for some years with many pickup makers offering their own versions, from Jason Lollar’s boutique style to Roswell’s mass-market take. Fender

tells us these are mini-humbuckers, not single coils, but that’s about it.

Before we dig deeper into the pickups, this Mexican-made Telecaster is also unusual in that, firstly, it uses mahogany for its standard slab body, which appears lightly striped through the slightly translucent White Blonde finish. We also get a Gibson-radius (305mm) ebony fingerboard and some pretty big frets compared with vintage style. Then there’s the cut-off Tele-style bridge, with its uncompensated brass saddles, that allows the bridge pickup to sit tidily in front in its own chromed pickup-mounting ring. The neck pickup is placed a little lower than normal towards the bridge and is suspended on the laminated black-faced scratchplate. It’s the sort of mash-up that’s a part of

many boutique builders’ catalogues, and although it’s hardly an impulse buy at this asking price, it’s significantly less expensive than those small-shop builds.

Despite our tongue-in-cheek introduction and this model’s differences, our Gold Foil Tele is very much a Telecaster and feels like any other with a pretty standard weight of 3.61kg. There’s nothing new to get used to here, either: for example, the chromed control plate is standard (not reversed) and there’s no angled three-way switch or wiring tricks.

The neck has quite a deep tint to the satin finish on the back and is a perfectly good relaxed slim ‘C’, measuring 20.8mm deep at the 1st fret and 23mm by the 12th with a typical Fender 42.2mm width at the nut. The ebony fingerboard, with its light edge rolling, is almost jet black with some striping that shows off the well-installed and very well-polished medium jumbo frets (which measure approximately 2.6mm wide with a height of 1.15mm). Compared with a big 50s neck with its small radius and small frets, this does feel quite different; it’s more contemporary, a sort of Tele for a Gibson player.

If that were the aim then the neck pickup is where the money lies. It’s full and clear sounding but with a clean humbucker flavour. It’s rather contrasted by the bridge, which definitely sounds more ‘Telecaster’ and has plenty of (maybe a little too much) high-end bite that sounds a little sweeter

with slight volume reduction and/or tone roll-off. The parallel mix is another strong sound, the depth of the neck contributing with the added sparkle of the bridge – there are some really useful rhythm sounds here. The pickups seem only lightly potted, which adds to the liveliness, especially with some grit and gain. And, being hum-cancelling, they’re very quiet in terms of hum pick-up.

It’s well set up, too. In fact, as supplied, the string heights were a little low for us, and slightly raising the saddles also helps to bury those slot-head adjustment screws. That said, although there’s already a glass-paper shim in the neck pocket, you might want to increase

the thickness of the shim to completely bury those sharp-edged adjustment screws; the outer two screws should really be slightly shorter in height.

While limited runs of the classics, not to mention a plethora of artist models, seem to be becoming the norm for both the giants of our industry and plenty of other large-scale makers, it means we’re getting an increasing choice with our much-loved classic designs. So, another Tele flavour? Very much so, and just as important as those Gold Foil pickups is the quiet hum-cancellation that removes one of the age-old problems with the Tele. While you might need to tame the bite of the bridge pickup, both the neck and mix are especially strong, valid voices. **AD**

► VERDICT

This isn’t the only Tele available with humbuckers, but it is the only current model with mini-humbuckers. If you want to experiment with other aftermarket mini-humbuckers, or Firebird-style minis, what better platform?

► PROS

- Good detail to build
- Good weight and setup
- Hum-cancelling sounds produce a credible Tele sound

► CONS

- ♥ Bridge saddles could be compensated
- ♥ Protruding bridge saddle screws may bother some

► CONTACT

FENDER AUSTRALIA
Ph: 0281981300
Web: fender.com/en-au/



Sterling By Music Man Ray34 PSK

Music Man offers a bass for the masses that still comes bearing exclusive pedigree. Review by **Steve Henderson**

The Music Man people are at it again, offering a classic instrument that leans heavily on their tried-and-true heritage, but with a modern attitude. The Ray34 is based on the renowned Music Man StingRay. Well, actually, it *is* a StingRay. Released in the mid '70s, the original StingRay Bass was an immediate hit because it had the low-end thump of Leo's mighty P Bass, plus the upper-mid articulation that players and producers were after for the emerging funk and fusion styles. For rock, funk and fusion, the StingRay had a richer bass than the P Bass and rounder midrange and treble than either the J Bass or the Rickenbacker 4001. Just as

the Fender's P Bass was a game changer upon its release in 1951, and again in 1957 with its slit humbucker, the StingRay made the bass sound suddenly high fidelity, with its large humbucker and clever active EQ. And here we are, nearly 50 years later, with an instrument that is just as relevant today as it was in 1976.

The Sterling Ray34 is made in Indonesia from premium materials and to exacting specs. Like all Music Man instruments, it arrived for review faultlessly set up – there was nothing for me to adjust to make it play better.

This particular Ray34 has a nyatoh body (other Ray34s have mahogany or swamp ash) and a maple neck. Nyatoh is an equatorial timber found from India to the Western Pacific islands and has the fine grain of mahogany combined with some of the broader grain of ash.

The maple has been torrefied (roasted) to reduce the moisture content and make it more stable.

Torrefication is a fairly recent process that is intended to "age" the timber, making it lighter and stiffer – as if it had been cut from the forest decades earlier. Topped with a rosewood fretboard, the neck is a delight to play and the whole package is lighter than many basses, and well balanced too, whether seated or standing. The body is resonant and has clear fundamental notes when played unplugged.

Other details include a 3-band active tone circuit, an H-1 alnico humbucker, a StingRay bridge, Fender-style open-geared tuners, and a neck joint with six (yes...six!) bolts. Importantly, the body contours are a little more modern than an original StingRay, which is a good thing, and the neck shape and finish is very modern, which is a very good thing. The scale length is 34", the fretboard radius is 9.5" and the nut is 1.69". It has 21 perfectly crowned medium frets...but you can get all this and more from the Music Man website. How does it sound, feel and respond?

Plugging into a Mark Bass head wired to a Hartke 410 and a

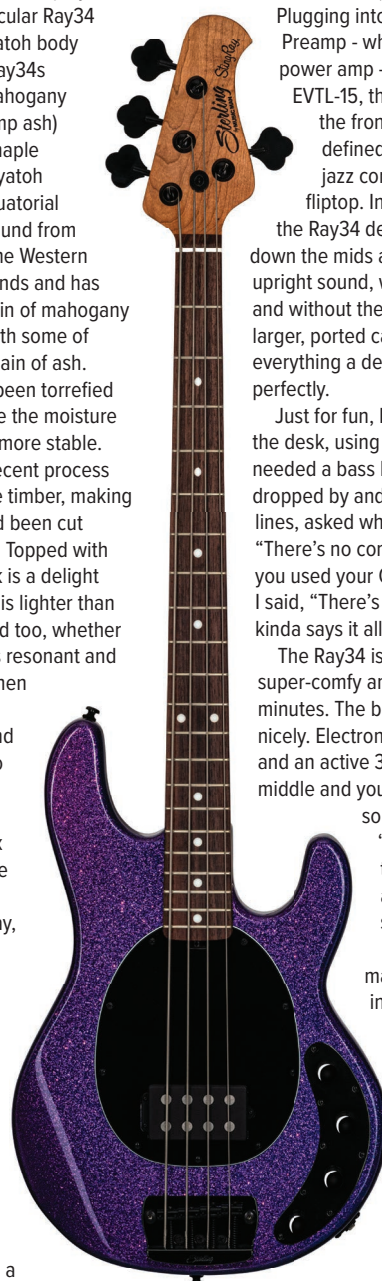
Hartke 115, the first thing I noticed was the bloom of the low frequencies. There's that comforting focus of the fundamental note but there's a layer of harmonic richness that delivers softly just a split second later. Compared to my P Bass, there's a little less thud and much more boom: the fundamental doesn't crack through harshly, and its tone is much richer with a delivery much smoother. There's a level of confidence here that most basses don't offer, and it's very responsive to picking dynamics: play with fingers and it's smooth and even, but dig in with a pick and it gives up an organic growl that punches the amp's input stage without that annoying electronic bite (overload, not distortion).

Plugging into an old GT Electronics Studio Preamp - which also incorporates a tube power amp - connected to an even older EVTL-15, the Ray34 worked beautifully with the front end tube to create a rich but defined tone, reminiscent of the tight jazz combo sound of an Ampeg B-15R fliptop. In fact, through the smaller amp, the Ray34 delivers superb jazz tones. Wind down the mids and you have a woody, almost-upright sound, with plenty of tight articulation and without the whoosh accentuated by a larger, ported cab. The EVTL's 6K top end gives everything a delightful snap that the Ray34 feeds perfectly.

Just for fun, I recorded the Ray34 direct into the desk, using Logic Pro, on a friend's track that needed a bass line. The next day, another friend dropped by and, listening to the isolated Ray34 lines, asked what compressor I was using. I said, "There's no compressor involved." He said, "So you used your GT preamp. You always use that." I said, "There's no preamp here. It's direct." That kinda says it all.

The Ray34 is a pleasure to play. The neck is super-comfy and slicks up well after just a few minutes. The body is not heavy and resonates nicely. Electronically, it's pretty simple: volume and an active 3-band EQ. Set them all in the middle and you'll get that classic '60s/'70s sound, then work from there for '80s and more contemporary tones. The hardware is first rate and made to last. The balance, seated or standing, is perfect.

I don't know what they did to make this a more down-market instrument. Usually, these companies will leave off a feature or two, so that there's a reason to dig deeper into the pocket for the "real thing" or at least the next model. But the Sterling Ray34 is a fully equipped, ready-to-rock, professional instrument. 



► VERDICT

A sophisticated piece of hardware made for the working pro but priced for the serious amateur enthusiast. With the Ray34, there's just no downside.

► PROS

- Great tone and sustain
- EQ offers plenty of variation
- Super easy to play
- Excellent build quality

► CONS

- ♥ None

► CONTACT

CMC MUSIC

Ph: (02) 9905 2511

Web: cmcmusic.com.au

RRP: \$7,299

Yamaha FG9 M

Decades of insight and cutting-edge vision animate this discreetly packaged steel string. **Review by Chris Gill**

When most guitarists talk about acoustic steel string guitars, a few American brands like Martin, Taylor and Gibson usually dominate the discussion. However, for many decades Yamaha has remained the world's best-selling acoustic guitar brand, quietly but prominently leading the market thanks to the incredible value and quality that Yamaha instruments offer beginning-to-intermediate guitarists. It's like Yamaha acoustics are so ubiquitous, players simply take their presence for granted.

With the recent introduction of their FG9 model steel string flattops, Yamaha has made a bold statement by offering guitars that deserve serious consideration by guitarists seeking an uncompromising, professional quality acoustic. Meticulously designed by Yamaha's most experienced and skilled custom shop luthiers, using a combination of scientific analysis and handcrafted attention to detail, the FG9 represents Yamaha's decades of insight as well as its cutting-edge vision for the acoustic's future. Two FG9 models are available, both dreadnought style with the main differences being rosewood (FG9 R) and mahogany (FG9 M) construction. We took a look at the latter model.

The FG9 M's overall specs follow the relatively standard, classic formula for a square-shoulder, non-cutaway dreadnought. The top is solid Adirondack spruce with scalloped x-bracing and tapered edges; the back and sides are solid African mahogany; and the bolt-on one-piece mahogany neck offers an ebony fingerboard, slightly longer 25 9/16-inch scale length, flat 15 3/4-inch radius and 20 medium frets. The belly bridge and bridge pins are ebony; and the nut and saddle are bone, the latter featuring compensation for the B string. Tuners are open-back Gotoh SXN510 models with a Cosmo Black finish.

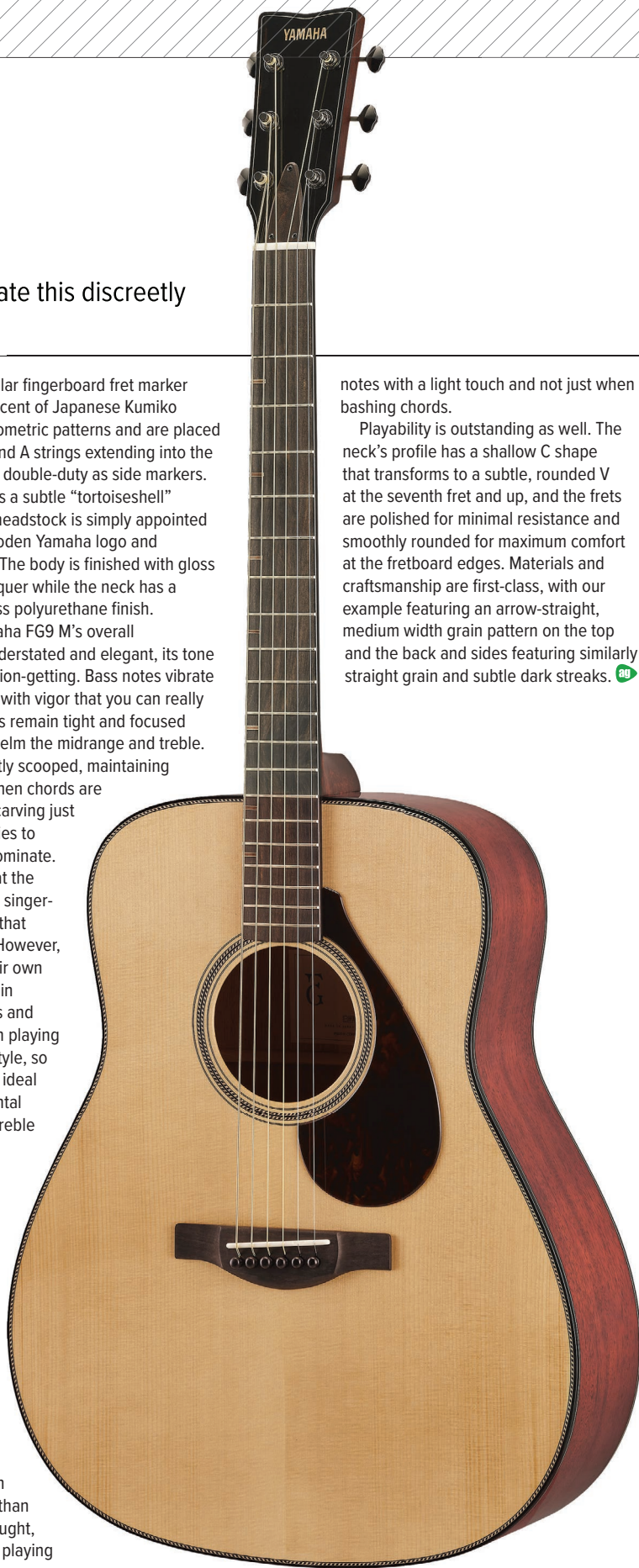
Styling is relatively minimalistic. The body is bound with ebony strips and rope-pattern (sort of a "half herringbone" design) top purfling, and two rope-pattern rings surround the soundhole. The layered

wooden rectangular fingerboard fret marker inlays are reminiscent of Japanese Kumiko woodworking geometric patterns and are placed along the low E and A strings extending into the upper edge to do double-duty as side markers. The pickguard has a subtle "tortoiseshell" pattern, and the headstock is simply appointed with an inlaid wooden Yamaha logo and pinstripe outline. The body is finished with gloss nitrocellulose lacquer while the neck has a durable semi-gloss polyurethane finish.

While the Yamaha FG9 M's overall appearance is understated and elegant, its tone is bold and attention-getting. Bass notes vibrate the top and body with vigor that you can really feel, yet low notes remain tight and focused and don't overwhelm the midrange and treble. The mids are subtly scooped, maintaining sufficient body when chords are strummed while carving just enough frequencies to allow vocals to dominate. Yamaha notes that the FG9 M is ideal for singer-songwriters, and that certainly shows. However, the mids hold their own nicely and maintain balance with bass and treble notes when playing the guitar fingerstyle, so this model is also ideal for solo instrumental performers. The treble projects with a crisp, metallic cut with impressive body. The sound chamber's resonance is rich and complex, with a subtle hall reverb-like decay even when playing above the 12th fret on the high E string. Volume projection is notably louder than a typical dreadnought, particularly when playing

notes with a light touch and not just when bashing chords.

Playability is outstanding as well. The neck's profile has a shallow C shape that transforms to a subtle, rounded V at the seventh fret and up, and the frets are polished for minimal resistance and smoothly rounded for maximum comfort at the fretboard edges. Materials and craftsmanship are first-class, with our example featuring an arrow-straight, medium width grain pattern on the top and the back and sides featuring similarly straight grain and subtle dark streaks. 



“The mids are subtly scooped, maintaining sufficient body when chords are strummed while carving just enough frequencies to allow vocals to dominate.”

► VERDICT

Yamaha acoustics have a great reputation as beginner's and affordable intermediate instruments, but the FG9 M shows that Yamaha deserves serious consideration from guitarists seeking top-quality, no-compromise professional acoustics as well.

► PROS

- ▲ Beautifully balanced tone. Elegantly minimalist design.

► CONS

- ♥ Some might want some more visual flair.

► CONTACT

YAMAHA MUSIC AUSTRALIA
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Boss SDE-3000EVH Dual Digital Delay

All the Eddie Van Halen delay you'll need in one heavy duty unit.

Review by Chris Gill

Eddie Van Halen never stopped using his pair of Roland SDE-3000 digital delays ever since he first installed them in his stage rack in 1985. His SDE-3000s played a crucial role in his mammoth sound, first in a stereo setup in the Eighties and from the early Nineties onward, as part of a wet/dry/wet rig he innovated, which employed a dry signal in the center and a mix of dry/delay processed signals on the left and right. This gave Van Halen's guitar a huge, reverb-like spread and depth without sacrificing an atom of punch, clarity or definition.

Anyone who has attempted to configure a wet/dry/wet rig like Ed's knows it can be an expensive proposition involving reactive load boxes and speaker-to-line level converters. Fortunately, about eight years ago Ed and his expert team at EVH joined forces with Boss to start development on the SDE-3000EVH Dual Digital Delay pedal, which combines a pair of SDE-3000 delays with an ingenious set of features that significantly simplify a wet/dry/wet rig for studio and stage applications.

Boss released the SDE-3000EVH at the same time as the less expensive SDE-3000D, so I'll first cover the differences that the extra investment provides. The rear panel features numerous additional jacks, including Direct, EFXL and EFXR ¼-inch output jacks that facilitate a wet/dry/wet setup and an EFX Loop for using the dry amp's preamp to drive all three wet/dry/wet outputs for optimal tone. The loop section

also includes ground lift and return impedance switches, plus a noise suppressor with adjustable threshold and release parameters. Three ground lift cables are included for eliminating hum that can occur when using three separate amps together. And finally, the pedal has an EVH preset button that accesses eight exclusive non-rewritable presets actually used by Ed — long, medium and short "reverb" and medium mono delays configured in separate sets for wet/dry/wet and stereo rigs.

The top panel will look very familiar to users of original SDE-3000 units as it has the same Time, Feedback, Out, Rate and Depth up/down buttons, square Bank A/B, Memory 1-4, Filter, Time x2, Delay Phase, Mod and Feedback Phase switches and "Back To The Future"-style alpha-numeric LED display that glows brilliant blue. New additions include a Setup switch for accessing deeper parameter settings and individual access switches for Delay 1 and 2. Two footswitches allow users to engage Delay 1 and/or 2 in Manual Mode or select or bypass a pair of presets in Memory mode. A Tap Tempo footswitch is also included. A pair of ¼-inch control jacks enable the connection of various footswitch and pedal controllers, and MIDI In, Out and USB jacks are located on the side panel.

Since I own an original SDE-3000 unit from the early Eighties, I had to do an A/B comparison. After carefully tweaking optimal input and output levels

on the rack unit and pedal, selecting the correct modulation waveforms and filter characteristics and making other adjustments to ensure all of the finer settings were identical, I truly could not tell the difference — the EVH pedal perfectly matched the world-class delays that made the 3000 a perennial favorite of guitarists and studio pros.

Beware of online video demos that suggest otherwise. The new pedal goes significantly above and beyond the original 3000 with powerful additional features, like sine wave modulation (in addition to the original's triangle wave only) and user programmable low- and high-cut filters for the Filter section, so some of the deeper settings can be quite different from the original. Users should take time and carefully read the manual to familiarize themselves with the various expanded parameters.

Memory mode is great for quickly toggling between two settings or bypassing the effect. Manual mode is best for programming or live applications like engaging each delay individually. The delays can lock to an external clock via MIDI, switch between millisecond or bpm tempo displays and be set to any of 13 different note values like dotted eighth, half and whole notes. Whereas the original unit stored only eight presets, the pedal provides 100 memory locations.

The wet/dry/wet configuration using the four-cable method/EFX loop setup with three amps sounds simply majestic with the corresponding EVH presets and beyond. The delay tails are richly detailed and lush — to this day the sound quality of the SDE-3000 remains the standard to beat. Using both delays to program chorus and flanger effects can generate lush, complex textures that competing digital delay units in its price range can't match. **AB**

► VERDICT

For about half the price of the original SDE-3000's 1983 list price, the Boss SDE-3000EVH provides two world-class digital delays with identical sound and expanded features, plus the easiest and most affordable way to duplicate Eddie Van Halen's wet/dry/wet rig setup.

► PROS

- ▲ Amazing value
- ▲ Beautiful tones and versatile

► CONS

- ♥ None

► CONTACT

BOSS AUSTRALIA
Web: boss.info/au



RRP: \$1,399

and master volume controls for clean and lead, expanded with clean/overdrive and lead/burn boost preset switches. There's a shared EQ with global controls for reverb, resonance and presence, these last two working to fine-tune the output stage's response. A clever baffle arrangement inside the cabinet pumps up the bass from the specially-designed 10" EVH/Celestion driver.

The Iconic's two channels produce the full range of EVH sounds, from sparkling cleans and toothsome crunch on the clean channel to the responsive, touch-sensitive dynamics of the lead and burn channel voices. Both channels are a delight to play using single coils or humbuckers, with a ton of low end, balanced mids and sparkling highs giving the impression you're using a much bigger cabinet. The pure class A single-ended 6L6 power stage adds a gentle compression which emphasises the lead channel's vocal quality, with controlled feedback and 'edge of the pick' harmonics appearing just when you want them, almost as if by magic. The Iconic's buffered effect loop is quiet and well-suited to delays and modulation effects, while the speaker-emulated DI output is also noise-free and does a good job of sounding like the 5150 4x12 cab. It's a carefully tuned analogue filter, so you won't run into latency issues, meanwhile microphone enthusiasts can also make use of the useful 1/4 power option for quiet recording or home practice.

There are smaller and lighter 1x10 combos, although for us the Iconic's superb sounds more than make up for the generous cabinet size. The single-ended class A output stage helps with maintenance costs as there's only one power valve to replace, however because it's continuously conducting 100% current you'll need to replace it more frequently – not a quick job due to the fully-enclosed cabinet. Overall, though, the new EVH Iconic 1x10 combo is an excellent solution for amateurs and semi-pros. **88**

EVH 5150 Iconic Series 15w 1x10 combo

EVH expand their Iconic series with this compact yet powerful combo

Review by Nick Guppy

Eddie Van Halen wasn't just one of the greatest guitarists of all time; his quest for the perfect tone drove him to become an expert tweaker of amps, pedals and guitars, all of which were brought together under the EVH brand, currently curated by Fender. EVH's popular and affordable Iconic series of 5150 amplifiers evolved from the mighty 5150 III head, a go-to powerhouse of tones used by many top metal and rock professionals, and the range has recently been expanded to include this new 1x10 combo.

Designed with assistance from amp guru James Brown, the Iconic 1x10 is a smartly-presented combo available in black or ivory vinyl, with a brushed aluminum control panel that's easy to read in low light. It's a two-channel design with separate gain



► VERDICT

This tidy combo delivers the big sounds of the legendary 5150 in a relatively portable and affordable package.

► PROS

- Bigger sound than you'd expect
- Great tone range

► CONS

- ♥ Could be smaller
- ♥ Valve replacement could be fiddly

► CONTACT

FENDER AUSTRALIA

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Web: fender.com/en-au/

Fishman Fluence Tim Henson Signature Series and Scott LePage Custom Series

An obvious boon for Polyphia fans, but guitarists across the spectrum will love these pickups. **Review by Chris Gill**



RRP: \$729

For most guitarists, the general appeal of artist signature gear is being able to play the same instruments and duplicate the same sounds used by the artists themselves. However, truly great signature gear can also help guitarists find their own voice and can be embraced by players from a variety of genres, like the Gibson Les Paul or, more recently, the EVH Wolfgang. Fishman's new Fluence Signature and Custom Series humbucking pickup sets developed with Polyphia guitarists Tim Henson and Scott LePage will certainly appeal to fans of Polyphia's innovative multi-textural tones, but even guitarists ranging from conservative traditionalists to adventurous progressives will be enticed by the impressive sonic character and versatility that these pickups offer.

We evaluated each set separately installed in a pair of virtually identical Ibanez AZ42P1 guitars with basswood bodies, roasted maple necks and rosewood fingerboards. Switches consisted of a three-way pickup selector and a three-way mini toggle for selecting each voice. Both test models also had Fishman's optional lithium ion battery pack.

The Tim Henson Signature Series set is designed to provide acoustic-style clean tones in addition to a wide range of full humbucking and single-coil tones for heavier electric textures. The Scott LePage

Custom Series is more electric oriented, providing vintage and hot-rodded humbucker and single-coil tones as well as voices optimized for clean tones. Both pickups feature Alnico V bar magnets and are available with either black or white bobbins, but the Hensons have 12 screw polepieces while the LePages have six slug and six screw polepieces that are gold plated. Both sets are direct replacements for standard-size humbuckers.

The Tim Henson set offers a diverse range of tones and textures, including semi-acoustic. The bridge pickup's voices consist of hot-rodded Classic with a 1.65kHz midrange peak (1), Henson's enhanced humbucker with 2.3kHz and 480Hz peaks (2) and a 6kHz peak single-coil (3) that Henson usually uses combined with neck pickup single-coil voice. The neck humbucker's voices include a thick, smooth humbucker (1), a 9.5kHz and 450Hz peak setting designed to replicate his electric-acoustic solidbody nylon string guitar's tone when used with a clean amp setting (2) and a single-coil with a 4.2kHz peak (3) that he prefers in the aforementioned neck/bridge setting above.

Scott LePage's set provides a versatile selection of electric tones. The bridge pickup offers a vintage PAF voice with a 2.4kHz midrange peak (1), a classic hot-rodded voice with a darker 1.7kHz peak that still

maintains outstanding clarity and definition (2) and slightly overwound single-coil voice with a 4kHz peak (3). The neck humbucker's voices consist of a vintage PAF with 3kHz peak (1), an exclusive custom humbucker voice with 4.7kHz and 360Hz peaks with distinctive brilliant chime, full bodied mids and tight bass (2) and a vintage single-coil with 5kHz peak (3).

Fishman Fluence pickups in general are great for guitarists who prefer to employ a wide variety of tones without changing instruments, but with each of these sets the differences between voices can be so dramatic that it truly sounds like an entirely different guitar is being played. The 12 different voices provided by these two sets cover an incredible range. If you're a session player who wants to minimize cartage, these two sets can cover a lot of ground with just two guitars.

My favorite humbucker tones are a toss-up between the Henson's enhanced bridge voice 2, which is tastefully punchy and well balanced, and the LePage's vintage PAF voice 1, which has the aggressive yet sweet character players want from a good PAF. The single-coil tones are stellar as well, and while I found that the Henson set's neck voice 2 didn't quite deliver the nylon-string-style tones promised, I'm sure that Henson employs some clever tricks in his rig to accomplish that goal. **A+**

If you're a session player who wants to minimize cartage, these two sets can cover a lot of ground with just two guitars.

► VERDICT

The Fishman Fluence Tim Henson Signature Series and Scott LePage Custom Series offer guitarists a versatile and useful range of tones that modern adventurists and classic purists alike will find alluring.

► PROS

- Both have wider appeal than Polyphia enthusiasts.
- A diverse range of tone and textures.

► CONS

- None

► CONTACT

DYNAMIC MUSIC

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HOW I WROTE...

"SHE'S SO YOUNG"

MOE BERG LOOKS BACK TO THE BIRTH OF THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS'S 1988 INTERNATIONAL POWER-POP HIT.

BY JOE BOSSO

In most places, Moe Berg isn't a household name, but in his homeland of Canada he's something of a national treasure. With his power-pop band the Pursuit of Happiness, the singer-songwriter and guitarist scored a number of ear-candy hits in the late '80s, such as the snappy yet wistful gem "She's So Young," from the group's Todd Rundgren-produced debut album, *Love Junk*.

"In some of my earliest songs, like 'She's So Young' and 'I'm an Adult Now,' I was so preoccupied with age," Berg says. "I hear them now and I'm like, Who was that guy? I was young when I wrote them, but I felt a sense of impending doom. 'She's So Young' sounds very carefree, but it's tinged with melancholy."

"HEY MOE, IT'S TODD"

Berg hadn't yet formed TPOH when the idea for "She's So Young" hit him in 1985. "I saw these teenaged girls on the street, and they exuded this air of confidence," he recalls. "I felt jealous of them because they seemed to have everything figured out. I ran home, picked up my guitar and wrote as fast as I could. I used these odd chords — major and minor 7ths with different bass notes. I borrowed that from listening to Todd Rundgren and Joni Mitchell. To my ears, that gave the song a poignant Beach Boys feel."

"TODD SAID, 'YOUR SOLOS ARE TERRIBLE.' I WAS CRUSHED, BUT I WORKED AT IT"



Moe Berg (second from left) poses with the Pursuit of Happiness in Minneapolis, 1989.

For a while, the guitarist performed the song solo at open-mic nights. Once he put the five-piece TPOH together, the band played some shows before issuing an indie single consisting of "I'm an Adult Now" with "She's So Young" as its B-side.

Thanks to a super-cheap video that caught fire on Canada's MuchMusic, the A-side became a fluke hit, winning the band a deal with Chrysalis Records. Todd Rundgren was Berg's favorite producer, and the guitarist half-jokingly told label execs that he wanted his idol to helm the band's debut. To his amazement, he soon received a phone call at a sound check: "Hey Moe, it's Todd Rundgren. I want to produce your record." "I couldn't believe it," Berg says. "I thought I was dreaming."

"YOUR SOLOS ARE TERRIBLE"

In Berg's view, Rundgren didn't impose his own stamp on the band's songs as much as point out where things needed work. "Todd's basic approach during pre-production was, 'This isn't good. Make it good,'" he says. Berg had already made one change to "She's So Young." The original recording opened with the infectious chorus, but since then he'd decided to begin with the first verse instead. Rundgren agreed. "Todd said, 'The chorus at the front is way too much of a good thing.'"

However, there was one touchy point concerning Berg's guitar skills. "Todd didn't pull any punches," Berg recalls. "He said, 'Your solos are terrible. You've really got to

practice.' I was crushed, but I worked at it in the time that I had. I wrote solos that more or less followed the chords."

Recording at Rundgren's Utopia Studios in Bearsville, New York, Berg used his 1981 Squier Telecaster and a Marshall combo for rhythm work, but he borrowed one of the producer's Stratocasters for his solos. "Our other guitarist, Kris Abbot, played some solos, but I did the one on 'She's So Young,'" he says. "It only took one or two passes. Todd threw in all kinds of effects — distortion, chorus and harmonizers."

NOT-SO-HAPPY FACES

Love Junk was completed in 10 days, and the re-recordings of "I'm an Adult Now" and "She's So Young" scored high on Canadian, U.S. and U.K. alternative charts; in Canada, the album went both Gold and Platinum. Berg notes that "She's So Young" would have fared even better in Britain had its video not run into censorship problems. "We had these happy faces superimposed in places," he says. "Back then, happy faces were associated with the drug Ecstasy, so the U.K. wouldn't play the clip. We were caught off guard by that."

Although TPOH never technically broke up, they ceased full-time activity in 1996 and regroup only for occasional tours, where "She's So Young" remains a staple in the band's live set. "People connect with the song right away," Berg says. "We start playing it and we see a change in the audience. I would never do a show without playing it." **AB**

The Godin logo is written in a white, elegant script font. It is positioned in the upper right area of the image, set against a dark, semi-transparent background that also contains the text describing the guitar. The background of the entire page is a collage of various Godin guitars, including a prominent white one in the foreground and others in blue, red, and dark wood finishes in the background.

The Multiac Mundial has been one of our most popular recent releases. A more modern and stylish variation of our other Multiacs, this nylon string guitar is the result of years of research and development. If you are looking for a clean, uncluttered instrument with a natural amplified nylon string sound, look no further.

Specifications

Body: Hollowed Silver Leaf Maple

Top: Solid Clear

Neck: Spanish Cedar

Fingerboard: Rosewood

Nut Width: 1.9"

Scale Length: 25.5"

Bridge: Rosewood

Mundial Electronics: 2 Body Sensors, Custom Godin Dual Source System, undersaddle bridge

Finish: High Gloss

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See www.pedaltrain.com for conditions

