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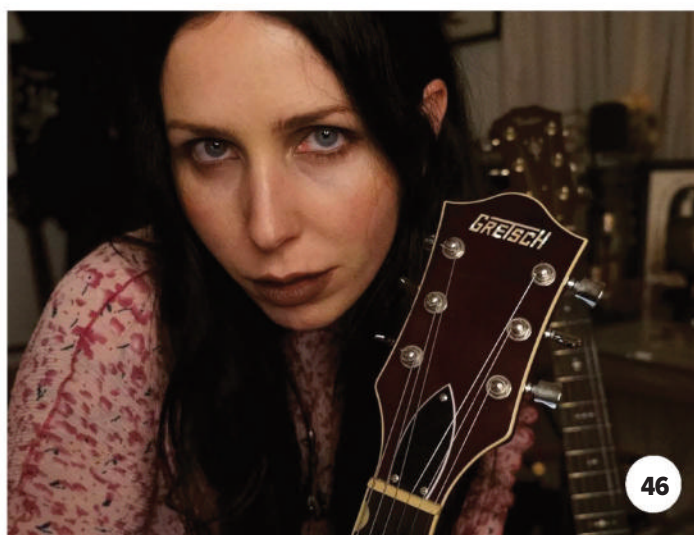
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JACKSON'S NEW X SERIES DINKY DK1 GUITARS OFFER STRAIGHTFORWARD SPEED MACHINES WITH COMPLEX FINISHES

Jackson has unveiled a host of new models for the new year, including two eye-catching additions to its affordable X-Series, in the shape of these Dinky DK1s. The Dinky is, of course, a Jackson classic – its name owing to its slightly smaller body (being 7/8ths the size of the firm's other double-cutaway electric guitar, the Soloist). It also has a bolt on neck, rather than the neck-thru body build of its bigger brother.

The new models – the X-Series DK1A and DK1 H – follow that form factor but offer an appealing combination of dazzling finishes and the stripped-back spec of a shred workhorse. Both guitars feature nyatoh bodies, graphite reinforced maple necks and a laurel fretboard with a 12-16" compound radius – making for a nice low-action playing surface at the body. They also share something in common on the hardware front, with Floyd Rose Special double-locking tremolos and Jackson's sealed die-cast tuners on the headstock.

The differences ultimately come down to pickup configuration and finish. The DK1A appears to offer an HS pickup configuration, but closer inspection reveals it's actually an HH pairing. As such, you get Jackson's own high output bridge humbucker at the bridge and a rail-style neck humbucker (in single coil size format) at the neck position, plus a three-way blade selector switch and tone and volume knobs. That's all finished in 'White Tortoise', should you wish to channel your inner guitar hero-in-a-halfshell.

Our pick of the pair though the single-humbucker DK1 H, which channels a Van Halen-esque setup, i.e. single pickup, Floyd Rose – and go! Controls are limited to a simple volume, meaning your focus is on the fretboard and picking, rather than getting sidetracked by tone tweaks. It's also got a killer Skull Kaos paint job, which is complemented by a matching headstock design. It is about as subtle as a sledgehammer and we respect that. **Words by Matt Parker**

WHAT IS THIS BULLS**T? A TAMAGOTCHI GUITAR PEDAL THAT LEVELS UP WITH YOUR PLAYING

Montreal's Ground Control is setting the worlds of guitar pedals and video games on a collision course with its latest pedal, the UwU. It's tremendously ridiculous and was the firm's centrepiece at NAMM 2024. The pedal itself is a signal chain booster and Tamagotchi-inspired game all in one. A cat-like creature lives inside the pedal and responds to your playing. Suffice to say, it's blown our minds.

Stepping momentarily aside from the gimmicks, the UwU is a robust op-amp guitar buffer pedal, giving it actual live rig value. It guards even the longest chains from signal loss thanks to its 18v of signal headroom and it also sports high input impedance (1MΩ) and low output impedance (25Ω). Naturally, though, it's the other side of the pedal that's grabbing the headlines, including this one.

For those too young to remember, Tamagotchis took a generation by storm in the '90s, with virtual pets living inside a tiny, egg-shaped unit which featured a small screen and a couple of buttons. They had to be regularly fed and entertained, just like a real pet or else, erm... there was a reset button on the back. Now Ground Control has injected that Tamagotchi spirit into a guitar pedal for absolutely no reason. But we are very much here for it.

The pedal's pet, visible via an OLED screen, reacts to your input signal in real-time, levelling up the more you play. Each level features its own cutsey animations, with the level cap at 30. At that point, we predict it can only be satisfied by a diet of Arpeggios From Hell, Through the Fire and Flames and Dance of Eternity. They can be pre-ordered through groundcontrolaudio.com

Words by Phil Weller



THE SMASHING PUMPKINS HAVE RECEIVED 10,000 SUBMISSIONS FOR NEW GUITARIST ROLE

As the world eased itself into 2024, the Smashing Pumpkins broke the internet when they announced they were looking for a new guitarist... and anyone could apply. Now, the alt-rock icons are facing up to the reality of their generous offer, revealing that over 10,000 guitar players have applied for the position.

In a social media post simply captioned, "Update", SP writes, "The band has received over 10,000 submissions for the position of additional guitarist. Currently, there are 8 people working full-time to review each and every one."

There's no word on the credentials of the eight-strong team reviewing applications, but we'd assume they are pretty guitar- and Pumpkins-savvy. Although we imagine their primary job will be weeding out anyone who just emailed in to say, "I can play Today on Guitar Hero – can I be your guitarist LOL?"

The Pumpkins began their search following the departure of longtime guitarist Jeff Schroeder, who left the band in October 2023 "to explore a slightly different path". The band's initial social media post was shared on January 5, and stated, "The Smashing Pumpkins are in search of an additional guitarist. The application process is open to anyone who might be interested. Applicants may submit a resume and related materials to SPGuitar@redlightmanagement.com."

There's no word on a closing date for applications, or indeed, when the recipient of the role will be revealed, but the Smashing Pumpkins are due to embark on a European tour in June, so presumably we can expect some kind of announcement before then. **Words by Michael Astley-Brown**



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INDUSTRIAL- STRENGTH STRINGS

AUSSIE HARD ROCK STALWARTS THE **MARK OF CAIN** RECENTLY FINISHED A NATIONAL TOUR IN SUPPORT OF THEIR GROUNDBREAKING 1995 ALBUM, *ILL AT EASE*. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR CHECKED IN WITH THEIR FOUNDING MEMBER, JOHN SCOTT.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**.

The Mark Of Cain emerged from a relatively isolated city whose music scene, in the mid '80s, had already birthed punk acts like The Exploding White Mice and Perdition. A decade prior Adelaide had experienced the glory days of their most popular musical exports, Cold Chisel and The Angels, with lingering memories of the '60s and The Masters Apprentices.

Formed by the brothers John and Kim Scott in 1984, The Mark Of Cain released their debut album *Battlesick* in 1989. Originally a four-piece, the brothers Scott were first joined by vocalist Rod Archer and the first of their 15 subsequent drummers, Gavin Atkinson, who both remained until mid-1985.

Inspired by the acridity of Big Black, early Swans, and the darkness of Joy Division, whose singer Ian Curtis was a notable vocal influence on John Scott, The Mark Of Cain forged a confrontational heavy rock sound and possibly influenced succeeding riff-merchants such as Rollins Band, Helmet, Grinspoon and Silverchair.

In 1993, The Mark Of Cain collaborated with American engineer-producer Steve Albini (Big Black) on their *Incoming* EP, during the same year Albini worked with Nirvana on *In Utero*. In 1995, another American, Henry Rollins (Black Flag, Rollins Band) produced The Mark Of Cain's most notable album, *III At Ease*, known for tracks like 'Interloper', 'The Contender' and 'LMA'. In 1997, The Mark Of Cain broke onto the ABC when Rollins spun 'LMA' during a guest slot on *rage* while praising them as "amazing", while they also performed live on *Recovery*. The group were inducted into the SA Music Hall Of Fame in 2022.

Former Helmet drummer John Stainer picked up sticks for The Mark Of Cain in 2000 and held the position until 2013, when he was replaced by Life Pilot's Eli Green in the lineup that finished touring *III At Ease* on January 20 this year. The album has now been reissued in a remastered, expanded format. Playing in Sydney in December clad in short-sleeved black shirts, it's clear to see that their attitude has remained unwavering. "We like to look like we're a gang", John explained.

Shortly after that gig Australian Guitar spoke to John, who still lives in Adelaide.

What memories do you have of your set at Livid festival in Brisbane, which was recorded for your recent live album, *Livid Live '96*?

It was very hot. I was amazed by the crowd there, they were so into it. That whole period of time was our zenith. We had come from relative obscurity to a certain extent, and then we had two years off [between 1990-1992]. We came back to that post-Nirvana world, in 1992, and a lot of people thought, 'oh, who's this brand new band?'. We weren't one, but that was the right time for us.

How did Henry Rollins' overall production style on *III At Ease* differ from Steve Albini's approach for *Incoming*?

Albini sees himself as an engineer. He may suggest something but he's more about capturing what the band wants. When Rollins came along, we had already recorded everything on the album, so his production value [mainly involved applying] a sonic landscape through all the songs. He brought a lot of space to it, and he was really good with vocals. Rollins sat across the entire mix.

The formation of The Mark Of Cain pre-dates Rollins Band and Helmet, but they're often compared to you guys, sonically. How much of an influence do you think you had on these bands?

I don't think we had any influence on them, but we all had similar influences as bands. It's probably a bit of both. Helmet was an interesting one. When we played with them in Melbourne in '91, it was like, 'oh yeah, we're both doing this weird stop-start stuff'. They were much more riff-O-rama, though. That's where we met John Stainer. Later, when he joined us, he supplied those [Helmet-type] beats.

You've mentioned that you're influenced by outsider characters and antiheroes when writing your songs. Where do some of these figures come from?

Weird outsiders are something that I've always found interesting. I love Jack Kerouac, and I'm a big fan of beatnik writers like William S. Burroughs, along with existential writers like Sartre and Camus, poets like Wilfred Owen and films like *On The Waterfront*.

On *Battlesick*, the track 'You Are Alone' opens with a sample of a

phone call between a young man and his mother, where he tells her that he's killed someone. What's that about?

That's Elmer-Wayne Henley talking about Dean Corll. [Henley killed around 28 teenage boys and young men between 1970 and 1973 in Texas; Corll was his accomplice.] Dean eventually turned on Elmer, who killed him. That's a sample of the intercepted call from *The Killing Of America* documentary. Henley was also portrayed on *Mindhunter*. What's interesting is that the guy from the Adelaide record shop Thrash, Grind, Grunge, in the '90s, used to write to American criminals. While writing to Elmer-Wayne Henley, he said, 'there's a band in Adelaide that used your call at the beginning of one of their songs'. Henley was like, 'I want to ask them why they did that', and we were told about it. I said, 'I don't want anything to do with the guy'. In the '90s, there were a lot of people writing to people that you shouldn't write to.

I've heard of people writing to serial killers like John Wayne Gacy...

I've got the Pogo The Clown photo [of Gacy in his children's party clown costume], signed by Gacy himself. A friend of mine had a lot of Gacy's paintings hung up in his house, but when he had kids he decided to take them down.

In the '90s The Mark Of Cain toured with lots of other alternative bands, like Primus, Silverchair and Butthole Surfers. Do you have any wild memories of those shows at all?

Primus kept to themselves. Their soundchecks would go forever, but they were great. Butthole Surfers were really great. We played with them for one show [in their *Hairway To Steven* era], and we all got on really well. They did some great live renditions of some of the songs on that album, which sounded huge. We also toured with Babes In Toyland, and they were great too.

TMOC's live combination of dual Rickenbacker guitars is an unusual one. How did you get turned onto Rickenbackers?

Kim got his Rickenbacker bass because we like Joy Division [Peter Hook once used an imitation Rickenbacker from Hondo]. The Rickenbacker bass is just a cool looking thing. Kim also likes Ibanez. Wars went on between Rickenbacker and Ibanez because their '80s Ibanez design was basically a Rickenbacker. Kim actually uses an Ibanez bass. I originally had a Stratocaster because, believe it or not, I'm a huge Jimi Hendrix fan. When I joined a mod band [Spiral Collapse] the other guitarist had a Rickenbacker 330. I wanted one but I didn't have enough money, so I sold my '78 sunburst Stratocaster and bought a Rickenbacker 330 for \$1,050 in 1981 or 1982. That was a lot of money back then. I would buy secondhand cars for around \$600. When I was kicked out of that band, I formed The Mark Of Cain and kept the Rickenbacker. I never saw the need to change it. I love the Rickenbacker sound. I love the sound of Kim's basses too.

At your recent Metro show, I was very impressed by the pummeling drumming of Eli Green. How did he come to be involved with the band?

I met him at the singing recital of my doctor's daughter, who he happened to be dating. He performed a complex drumming piece, which impressed me, so I told him about our band. When Eli turned up [to his first rehearsal with us], he had written down [the structure of our songs] and he could play it all. We originally wanted to get him in to help us stay match-fit for gigs. After a couple of rehearsals, we realised that we could play live with Eli. John Stainer was getting harder to tie down for touring, so when the chance to tour arrived, we brought Eli along. He had big shoes to fill, but he's more than proven himself now. He's now been with us for ten years, and he's learnt our entire catalogue. There are a couple of new things that we've been noodling around on with Eli, to see what we can record and release, but we'll mainly 'shut down' again after February. 🍷

The Mark of Cain will headline the Nice Day To Go To The Club festival on February 24 at the Port Noarlunga Football Club in SA.

**I SOLD MY '78
SUNBURST
STRATOCASTER
AND BOUGHT A
RICKENBACKER
330 FOR \$1,050
IN 1981 OR 1982.
THAT WAS A LOT
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GUT HEALTH'S *SINGLES '23* IS A RIOTOUS DEMONSTRATION OF ORIGINAL, INNOVATIVE PUNK. WITH THE YOUNG MELBOURNE SIX-PIECE RAPIDLY RISING FROM PUB GIGS TO STADIUM TOURS, AUSTRALIAN GUITAR THOUGHT IT WAS TIME FOR A CHECKUP.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **CELESTE DE CLARIO**.

The group's name comes from a buzzword promoted by fitness trainers and doctors. Now, Gut Health is causing a buzz of their own beyond Melbourne's music community, releasing two EPs and three singles in the last 15 months. After playing industry expos such as SXSW and Bigsound, Gut Health has now shared lineups with the likes of Kraftwerk, Mudhoney and Alex G.

As one might expect from such an eclectic purveyor of disorienting, bouncy post-punk, Gut Health's origin is quite surprising. The concept for the band was first conceived in Melbourne around 2020-2021, partially-inspired by the boredom of eight months of COVID-induced lockdown in the most locked-down city on earth. Gut Health's founding figures are their exuberant singer and front person, Athina Uh Oh, and bassist Adam Markmann. As housemates, Uh Oh and Markmann's idea grew alongside their new songs, and more mutual friends were thrown into the mix, including guitarist Eloise Murphy-Hill. Meanwhile, Gut Health's synth player and second guitarist Dom Willmott was already friends with Markmann, as two expats from the world of noisy rock. By contrast, Murphy-Hill had emerged from the folk-pop scene.

Group influences might include Gang Of Four and James Chance, but as individuals, some of Gut Health's members are inspired by soul music, shoegaze, experimental music of the '50s and '60s, and improvised jazz. After squeezing onto stages across the country, the positive reception to their recent *Singles '23* EP has gifted the group with much more room to move on their upcoming national tour with Queens Of The Stone Age. Australian Guitar investigated Gut Health's world with Murphy-Hill and Willmott.

As band members, you all come from such different musical worlds. Is it a miracle that Gut Health is currently doing so well?

Eloise Murphy-Hill: It's definitely pretty random. As individual players, it's a very special group. I feel as though it's quite democratic. We're constantly asking questions.

Dom Willmott: We started making post-punk with a vision that Adam and Athina brought to the table when they formed the band, but the concept of Gut Health is now about the six people that are making music together. We're now embracing the fact that we come from very different places. We have an improvisational spirit of saying yes to each other.

When you had the idea of getting two guitarists to join the group, was this in an effort to increase more onstage volume in a punk setting, or to create more intricate melodies as a band?

EMH: Dom and I try to figure out ways to play a patchwork of melodies or something, as opposed to playing in unison. With Dom playing synth, we're able to bounce off of each other and create this ping-pong effect, which is interesting because it's a bit disorienting. [We also utilise] the sound of two different-sounding guitars.

DW: I got asked to join the band because I'm a synth player. Then I started playing guitar more, even though we already had our guitarist. We had this notion of wanting angular guitars, seeing as we're into post-punk. We realised that style involves cutting up a melody and moving it across different instruments, which we could do with synth and guitars. Then we reached a point where we had enough songs that needed two guitar parts, so that stuck. The other day, we were saying that I play guitar like a percussionist, and Eloise plays guitar like a saxophonist. After some time, we brought in Angus, who is percussionist, and also played sax for our set at Meredith. Subconsciously, we have been using guitars to emulate traditional post-punk elements of sax and percussion.

How do you try to enhance your guitar sound at gigs?

DW: At the moment, I've been using a [Boss DD-20] Giga Delay. It's got every delay you'd ever want, but it can also do triplets and 16th notes at 9999 BPM, if you want it to. It becomes a ring modulator, as it's pitched.

I've seen some great moments of controlled chaos and tightness in live footage from your shows. How many rehearsals do have to do before you record or go out on the road?

DW: [We're] all on the same wavelength of dedication, so we practice a lot. Some things are still meant to sound like chaos and noise. There are always new surprises that come by way of testing things out, or new ideas springing from moments of chaos.

EMH: Mondays are our rehearsal days. For the last couple of months, we've been rehearsing in a warehouse on the border of Thornbury and Preston, called APAX warehouse. Weekly rehearsals allow for almost every moment of the live performances to be planned out.

When you recorded *Electric Party Chrome Girl* in a storage unit in Brunswick, that appears to have been an intense environment...

DW: Yeah, that was our first rehearsal space. It felt like there were twelve bands playing in there, in different rooms on the same floor.

I saw that *Singles '23* was recorded in another place called Button Pusher?

DW: It's a Melbourne shop front converted into a studio. With the storage unit, as far as the acoustics went, I very quickly reached the limits of my abilities to record. I recorded the first EP, and then we got our friend Simon [Maisch] to fix a lot of issues. Now we've reached the conclusion on our new album with Julian Cue (screensaver, Civic). He helped to mix and co-produce it with us.

EMH: We had the whole studio to ourselves. We kind of got to go a little bit crazy through having no natural light, and going on endless walks down to the servo.

To quickly mention gear, I spotted you playing a white Stratocaster in one of Gut Health's live videos. Dom. Is that one of the main axes that you use?

DW: Yeah, it's a \$200 backup guitar. Options are pretty limited when you're a leftie, so I picked the best-sounding left-handed guitar from the Music Swap Shop in Carlton. It's like a Tokai-copy Strat. It's the brightest guitar I've ever heard.

Eloise, the guitar that you used during Gut Health's gig at Tanswells Hotel in Beechworth looked like a piece of art, with a long headstock and elongated features. What type of guitar is that?

EMH: It's a Guyatone guitar from the 1970s. It's such a versatile guitar, and it's got a lot of mid-range. I really want to boost its twang, to get those scratchy high frequencies out, but I love it. It's really fun to play.

I'm sure the group will enjoy having a lot more onstage room to move around in at your upcoming stadium gigs. As a six piece group, it must be hard to squeeze onto certain stages sometimes...

EMH: It's pretty challenging. It's a Tetris situation.

DW: What's gonna be good about these wide open stadium stages is that Athina is going to have more territory to just -

Dominate?

EMH: That's gonna be great.

Well, they're definitely the perfect front person for a band like Gut Health. They have so much vitality. It's like you've got your own Iggy Pop, or someone like Ari Up from The Slits.

DW: Or Greg from The Wiggles. 🐣

Gut Health's *Singles '23* is out now. The group will support Queens of the Stone Age during their February 2024 Australian tour.



Katoh Hispania



The Hispania's crossover design features a chambered solid body that blends Katoh's expertise in acoustics with the features of solid body electrics.

The guitar boasts a classical tone from an aesthetically streamlined body design typical of Katoh stage guitars. It retains the warmth and tone of classic guitars while providing the scope for broadening your tonal pallet. The Hispania's remarkable playability and striking appearance really does make it the perfect performance instrument.



TAKING ONE FOR THE TEAM

FOUR YEARS AFTER BEING BILLED NEAR THE TOP OF GOOD THINGS' 2019 FESTIVAL LINEUP, QUEBEC'S POP-PUNK LEGENDS **SIMPLE PLAN** ARE RETURNING TO AUSTRALIA. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR BRUSHED OFF OUR BASEBALL CAPS AND GOT HYPED.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON, PHOTO BY SKYLER BARBERIO.

As one of the few remaining pop-punk bands from the genre's early-2000s resurgence, Simple Plan maintain their reputation as a stadium-filling musical force in their 25th year of existence. The group first assembled in the French-Canadian suburbia of Montreal in 1999, comprised of young members of two defunct teenage punk bands, Roach and Reset. Roach's former members Pierre Bouvier, Chuck Comeau and Jeff Stinco have remained members of Simple Plan ever since, alongside Sebastien Lefebvre.

The group released their debut album *No Pads, No Helmets...Just Balls* in 2002, promoted via their breakthrough first single 'I'm Just A Kid'. The album's title started a tradition of sly genitalia and sex jokes, most recently continued with 2022's *Harder Than It Looks*. In the decades between, Simple Plan became Warped Tour mainstays, provided the theme to What's New, Scooby-Doo?, and established their own charity, The Simple Plan Foundation. They also collaborated with producers like Swedish pop titan Max Martin (Taylor Swift, The Weeknd) and Bob Rock (Metallica, Mötley Crüe).

Simple Plan will bring *Harder Than It Looks* to Australia in April on with support acts We The Kings, Boys Like Girls and their recent collaborator Jax. Ahead of that tour, Australian Guitar chats with guitarist Jeff Stinco.

It's nice to see the band is still playing some of your most recognisable songs live, such as 'I'm Just A Kid' and your theme for What's New, Scooby Doo?

We used to resist playing those songs. Suddenly, the requests for us to play them were nonstop. We decided to not fight it, as it's part of our history. And we're proud of it.

What memories do you have of first breaking onto the international pop punk scene, way back in 2002?

It was a crazy, interesting time, because we had no clue what we were doing. We were having a lot of fun on the road, but we had no lives. We were just touring nonstop, playing 200+ shows a year, while traveling all around the world and seeing new things. It was great though. We toured through Australia for the first time in 2004, along with Asia and Europe. Things had

grown organically, but we had no preparation for the kind of success that we got very quickly.

Pierre used to hand out Simple Plan's demo CDs to people waiting in concert ticket lines in Canada, before the band got signed by Atlantic in the early 2000s. You contacted label after label before being signed, but in 2022 you released *Harder Than It Looks* independently. What influenced this decision?

The hustle of us doing DIY things to promote our music back then brings amazing memories. I'm really proud of that. That was the best way for us to get our name out there. I remember we got an offer from our promoter at the time, who offered us a gig on a tiny stage in a venue's parking lot right before a blink-182 and Green Day show inside the actual venue. The only way to gather people for that was for us to go into the parking lot and hustle by telling people about our band. The release of our last record was a comeback to that DIY approach, through doing a record on our own terms. I don't know if we'll do it again, as it was quite the ordeal and involved a lot more work, but we really enjoyed it.

With Simple Plan promoting a strong message of audience inclusivity for your fans, do you prefer to play all ages shows as opposed to 18+ shows?

It has to be inclusive. It was shitty to see my favourite bands go through my town while not being able to go to the shows. We try to make our shows as inclusive as possible. The pandemic made us rethink touring. We realised the cultures that we were in didn't have a lot of women in them, or many different types of people, so we wanted things to be more open.

Simple Plan has made many music videos, while appearing in movies, TV shows, on MTV and on Total Request Live. How did screen media help to shape your career as a band?

We basically broke through television first, because we didn't have any radio play. MTV embraced our band and played us on this show called *Oven Fresh*, which was a midnight show, where they would put two new songs face-to-face and people would call in and decide which song they preferred. [2002 single] 'I'd Do Anything' performed well on that show,

and got us more rotation. Eventually we made it on to Total Request Live, which was really big for us. Through TRL, we got radio play and more exposure, which was very exciting.

When you're writing songs, what are the main types of chords that you like to use?

Power chords are the go-to formula for writing pop punk songs, but I like to use [chordal] extensions. I also like to create tension and resolve it. I'll do lots of overdubs, through which I'll introduce certain triads or inversions of chords that change the colour. That's a cool thing to do. With pop punk, you can do whatever you want to. There are alternate tunings that you can dabble with, and open strings you can use. I think it's more about your energy and intention than what you're using, as far as the vocabulary goes, and when it comes to playing gigs.

I see you like to use a lot of Telecasters on stage. What do you like about them?

What I love about Teles is that their tunings are impeccable. They're so easy to carry and jump around with and they never go out of tune. Even when traveling the world, their tunings don't move. They're a workhorse instrument. Sebastien [Lefebvre, Simple Plan's rhythm guitarist] uses hollow body guitars, which have a big, thick sound, so my sound complements that. My only option is to cut through and find the frequencies that he's not involved in, so my sound is pretty gnarly. It involves a lot of mids and aggressiveness, and that's what Teles bring me.

When did you guys first play in Australia?

We came pretty early on, I'd say 2004, around our second record. We had so much fun there. We did the whole tourist thing, like holding koalas and going over the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We barely slept, we went out every night and we played everywhere. It's an experience that's very hard to reproduce. It was a time that was filled with energy, naivety and wonder. It's pretty exotic in Australia. You're surrounded by a bunch of creatures that could kill you, in one of the most beautiful places in the world. I'm looking forward to coming back. 🐨

Simple Plan will tour Australia in April. See destroyalllines.com for dates and tickets.

THEY'VE FINALLY GOTTEN BETTER LIVE

AFTER FOUR BUSY DECADES CHEATING DEATH IN THE NAME OF PUNK ROCK, AMERICAN ICONS **NOFX** ARE PLAYING THEIR FINAL SHOW ON OCTOBER 5 IN THEIR BIRTHPLACE OF LOS ANGELES. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR CAUGHT UP WITH CO-FOUNDING MEMBER ERIC MELVIN TO GET THE LOW-DOWN.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. LEAD PHOTO BY **J WEINER**.



They've slept in a freezing-cold Yakuza safe house, faced stage-invaders in Chile, and been on safari in South Africa. All the while, they've delivered anthemic songs about drugs, sex and damaged lives (among other topics) from their catalogue of 15 studio albums and 17 EPs.

All this is shown in the documentary *Backstage Passport*, which tracks the events of NOFX's 2006-2007 touring schedule. Watching it, it feels miraculous that the group's three founding members haven't already quit for good, or been incarcerated, or died as a result of addiction, violence or human error.

NOFX's most recognised member is their chief songwriter, lead singer and bassist 'Fat' Mike Burkett, a cross-dressing BDSM enthusiast who opened The Punk Rock Museum in Las Vegas last year. After moving with his mother from Massachusetts to California in 1972 at the age of five, Mike was introduced to punk rock in 1980 and co-founded NOFX three years later, after one year spent playing bass in the punk band False Alarm.

Mike was subsequently joined by 17-year old guitarist Eric Melvin and 17-year old drummer Erik Sandin. Thanks to a music-loving artistic mother, Melvin was exposed to punk rock bands like Suburban Lawns from the age of ten by way of his mother's art-studio-building-sharing friend, New Age Theatre's David Jove. Jove's aforementioned TV show, which ran from 1982-1984, would regularly feature live punk bands such as The Dead Kennedys, along with new wave bands. Having spent one year drumming in the punk band Caustic Cause, Sandin would join NOFX and adopt the nickname 'Smelly', after unleashing LSD-induced farts while touring in vans with the band. The trio first met at the now-defunct Cathay De-Grande in Hollywood, one of California's extremely violent, gang-populated hotbeds for punk and alt-rock in the 1980s. In 1991, NOFX recruited Mexican shredder Aaron 'El Hefe' Abeyta as their lead guitarist and trumpet player (after he narrowly avoided being jailed for counterfeiting).

After existing alongside Bad Religion and Pennywise as an edgy indie influence on decades of younger bands, NOFX are playing their last ever show in their birthplace of LA on October 5, 2024. They've sold over eight million albums and have toured through 42 countries on six continents. They're perhaps best known for their 1994 song 'Linoleum', which has been covered by hundreds of bands across the world.

Australian Guitar reached out to Eric Melvin to discuss the end of the line for NOFX, his new projects, and 40+ years of punk action.

I've seen NOFX twice, the first time in March 2018, and the second time was at Good Things festival in December 2022. You played your 1994 album *Punk In Drublic* in full at Good Things, but the track list was randomised. Is that something you guys like to do, to keep your fans guessing?

A bit. We don't like to do things the way people expect them to be done. But at the festival we had an hour-long set time. *Punk In Drublic* is around 37 minutes, so we like to chat while we're playing, and we love to play our other popular songs.

The group is playing its last shows in LA this October, which is where NOFX started 40 years

ago.

Yeah, full circle. It's sad. For 40 years I've never not had some kind of tour to look forward to. A big part of it is seeing the other guys, because we haven't really lived in nearby cities for a long time. I moved to San Diego, Hefe's in LA, Smelly's in Long Beach, and Mike was just in the valley north of LA, but he moved out to Vegas.

Will your upcoming solo album sound like those EDM-inspired covers of NOFX songs that you created for your *Rise Of The Melvinator*?

It's pretty similar. Even before I had my own computer and I was able to experiment, I loved Nine Inch Nails and Killing Joke. Also, in the '90s in LA, the underground rave scene started to take off which felt



very punk rock to me. I always wanted to incorporate all those influences into *Melvinator*. Because Mike is one of my favourite songwriters, my first idea was to try doing NOFX covers.

You also worked on *Melvinator* music with Danny Lohner from Nine Inch Nails.

He's an amazing guy. I also started working with BAZ, who conducted 'The Decline' orchestra. [NOFX recorded a live symphonic performance of their 20 minute 1999 song 'The Decline' at Red Rocks Amphitheatre in 2019].

In terms of new musical projects, you're the *Melvinator* and Mike's with *The Codefendants*, but what about Smelly and Hefe? Are they thinking of starting any new musical projects after the end of NOFX?

Hefe has been doing his own music for a long time, but the punk rock he's been involved with was with

his own label, Cyber Tracks [Unwritten Law, Pulley]. He's famous for his voiceovers and impressions, and he's a working actor with an agent, so he's got gigs. Smelly has his surf company Pickle Stix, so we're all busy. COVID shutdowns fucked us over, but people pushed us into finding other things. I started doing life coaching after I took an online course at a university that specialises in alternative therapies, like meditation and yoga. Now I coach all the time. It's not so much music based, except my clients are mostly NOFX fans.

When Fat Mike announced via a reply to a comment on Instagram that NOFX would stop playing live, how did you react to that at first?

I just laughed, because I thought, A) that wasn't the plan, and B) how perfectly fitting. It probably was better than what the plan was to begin with. The original plan would have involved spending more time getting dates sorted so that we could make the announcement. That's the way other people would do it. Not us.

For your final tour, the idea of revisiting the entirety of your 'back catalogue' albums, like 2006's *Wolves In Wolves Clothing*, is really cool, though you've excluded your first three albums.

The shows are going to be similar to what we did at Good Things. We're doing two hour sets now. We have to give it a big start to get everyone energised. We'll then play a reggae tune or a slower one, and then there'll be a break in the middle.

After NOFX put out nine new songs in a limited edition vinyl boxset during August last year, *NOFXxxX*, I heard rumours of an upcoming compilation album with alphabetised tracks, and another album with the rumoured title *Everybody Else Is Insane*.

Yeah, [with 'EEIA'], that's a Mike song title right there. With the alphabetical NOFX, it's a compilation. For example, 'Q' is 'The Quitter'. I don't think anyone counts the 'T'. As for release dates, there's a lot going on, and Mike is pretty busy with the museum. With finishing the alphabetical thing, that's more about getting them compiled.

Another special thing about the history of NOFX is when you did those *Backstage Passport* tours in 2006-2007, where you went to play in places like Peru, Israel, China and Bali.

It was something we all wanted to do. We never got to India and I wish we had, but in our next lives or next bands, who knows? Right now, with my solo project, I've been performing solo, live with my laptop. I don't know if I could ever play live with any other guys. Mike still wants to write music for NOFX, so we'll still have reasons to go into a studio together.

Do you use a thin pick, like Mike, or a thicker one?

They've gradually gotten thinner, while the tone has gotten a bit more distorted on my main channel. Thin picks make me more focused with my strumming. I just used to bang out chords. 



A METRO RODEO

BACK ON THE DRINK, THE NEW EP FROM AUSSIE ALT-COUNTRY ACT **DAVE FAVOURS & THE ROADSIDE ASHES** HAS MAINTAINED THE SAME POSITIVE RECEPTION EARNED BY ITS PRECURSOR, *CHEAP MOTELS AFTER MIDNIGHT*. LOADED WITH GRIT, POP HOOKS AND PEDAL STEEL, IT'S THE SHORTEST ALBUM IN FAVOURS' CATALOGUE, AND ONE OF THE SNAPPIEST. HE SPOKE TO AUSTRALIAN GUITAR ABOUT HIS BAND'S HONKYTONKIN' ORIGINS, AND MUCH MORE.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON. PHOTO BY PETA CASWELL.

Sydney-based songwriter and guitarist Dave Favours followed a unique path to alt-country. He grew up as a punk rocker in the '80s and '90s with exposure to the Ramones and the Descendents, as well as Aussie bands like the Hard-Ons, The Hellmenn and Massappeal. After that, an exciting new world of "hip underground bands" helped to lead Favours to groups from the US who looked further back to vintage rock 'n' roll, blues and country, namely The Gun Club and X, with a dash of The Cramps. A rapidly-growing reverence for Johnny Cash led Favours further down the rabbit-hole of American country music, and things progressed organically from there.

After being enlisted in a Johnny Cash tribute show before releasing his first of two solo albums in 2012, Favours became the guitar-slingin' frontman of Dave Favours & The Roadside Ashes. Building their career through blending "indie rock, alt-country and ragged dusty pop", they recently finished a five-date east coast tour in support of their fourth release, a new EP called *Back On The Drink*. The four-track release proudly displays cover art from Hard-Ons bassist Ray Ahn and features a cover of 'Bleeding Heart' by early-'80s Aussie cowpunks The Johnnys, proving that Favours is still very much in touch with his punk rock roots.

After performing at the Tamworth Country Music Festival at the end of their EP tour, the group is preparing to play Tasmania in March. When he isn't on the road or in the studio, Favours also works as the "head honcho" of Stanley Records, an independent label that has been releasing quality alt-country music since 2010. He kicked off his boots to have a yarn with Australian Guitar.

What's the origin story of your backing band, The Roadside Ashes?

It happened a bit over seven years ago. I was in another alt-country band [The Delivery] between 2008 and 2011 and we broke up. I thought I was never going to play in a band again after it finished, but I had a bunch of songs I'd written for that band, so I decided to demo them. I liked the sound of them, so I decided to start playing solo shows. I then put out a couple of solo releases. After a while, I found it really limiting to just play solo with an acoustic guitar and a harmonica. Through growing

up on punk, I felt like I needed a full, raucous band around me. So that's how the band came about. It was the first time I had ever advertised for members. We've been through a couple of members, but they've all become my best mates and it's managed to become a long term project, which has been great.

Was the guitar your first instrument?

Yeah, it was, but I didn't really learn to play it properly until a bit later on. I played in a couple of punk bands that went nowhere in the '90s and I didn't really try to get better on the guitar until I got asked to join a Johnny Cash tribute show. I worship Johnny Cash. My son's name is Cash. About 20 years ago, I got a call from a guy who was putting a Johnny Cash tribute band together whose friend-of-a-friend told him about how me and my mates would sit around and play Johnny Cash covers on the weekends over a few beers. I ended up playing lead guitar in that band. I wasn't that gifted a guitar player, so it forced me to learn how to play properly, a bit more than punk rock did. Things just happened organically. I've always seen myself as more of a songwriter, but through having done this for a while now, guitar playing has become a much bigger part of our sound over the last couple of years.

After growing up as a punk rocker, how did you start playing country music?

Before the Johnny Cash tribute band, I was in a garage rock band who never played live, but for which I brought a new acoustic guitar. One of our guitarists worked for Fender, and got me a cheap Guild guitar because it was slightly damaged, but it was the first nice acoustic I'd ever had. I don't know what made me do it, but I was in a record shop around the same time and I bought the CD of *Johnny Cash Live At Folsom Prison*. Because I had gotten this acoustic guitar, I only wanted to play acoustic stuff. So, we put on the album at rehearsal, sat down, and learned every track off of it. That was the start of it. Then I was asked to join the tribute band, and things happened organically from there.

I saw that you have a cover of 'Bankrobber' by The Clash on your first solo album. What's your approach to covering songs?

Most covers I've done haven't been country songs. I've covered Beasts Of Bourbon, The Eastern Dark, Ramones, Rolling Stones and The Johnnys, as well as The Saints. Chris Bailey is probably my favourite Australian songwriter of all time. I always put pedal steel on the covers though, or turn them into something else.

So what's the story behind your label, Stanley Records?

It started as a bit of a joke. Ages ago, my old band The Delivery were putting a CD out, but no one was pressing vinyl at that point. I said to a mate, 'why don't we create a fake label to make it look like we're bigger than we are'. Before I got my Guild acoustic, the garage band I was in were called The Stanleys, so I said, 'why don't we just call it Stanley Records'? Then that CD [from The Delivery] came out a couple of months later, before a mate of mine told me how he didn't know how to put another CD out, and asked for some help. So, I put it out with the Stanley Records label on it. Before I knew it, I'd put a couple of releases from my band, and there were suddenly five releases on the label. It just happened from there. Now all my best mates are involved with the label. We've got a bunch of records coming out this year, and a few other things in the pipeline.

What main guitars are you using for touring at the moment?

The love of my life is my Gretsch 6120. I've been playing that quite a bit. I've recently been playing a Greco Telecaster from 1976 which I love. I just love the sound and feel of some of those Japanese models so I've suddenly become obsessed with Japanese guitars. That's the main one I'm playing at the moment, but I also always play Guitar Lab guitars too. Their pickups are interchangeable, so you can basically turn your guitar into a Telecaster, a Stratocaster or a Les Paul just by swapping out the pickups. Because my guitar playing happened organically, and I've never had a lesson, I tend to treat guitars like tools. If it sounds good, I don't care how much it cost or what brand it is. 🎸

Dave Favours & The Roadside Ashes' *Back on the Drink* is out now. See stanleyrecords.com.au



REVERSE LIGHTYEARS IN SPACE

MELBOURNE-BORN GUITARIST, SINGER AND SONGWRITER **ASHLEY NAYLOR** HAS STEADILY GROWN HIS PROLIFIC CAREER IN A DOZEN DIFFERENT BANDS SINCE THE LATE 1980S. BEST KNOWN FOR HIS WORK IN THE POP-ROCK GROUP EVEN, HE NOW TOURS AND RECORDS WITH PAUL KELLY AND THE CHURCH, WHILE RECORDING INCREASINGLY EXPERIMENTAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC UNDER HIS OWN NAME. HE RECENTLY TALKED TOURING, GEAR AND GROOVE WITH AUSTRALIAN GUITAR.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **JASON ROSEWARNE**.

As a teenage guitarist growing up in the Melbourne suburbs of the '80s, a young Ashley Naylor was introduced to the exciting possibilities of rock and pop music by way of free-thinking bands like The Church, R.E.M. and The Smiths. Decades later in 2019, Naylor joined The Church and contributed parts to their latest album, *The Hypnogogue*, which proved that they could still be as unique as ever. Naylor also toured twice through the US with The Church last year.

Since 2007, Naylor has served as Paul Kelly's lead guitarist, while contributing to four of his albums. These include Kelly's first #1 charting album in his long career of 28, *Life Is Fine* (2017), which gained gold certification, and *Nature* (2018), his second of three #1 charting releases.

Meanwhile, Naylor's solo material – with his solo band Spaceship – has marked a shift towards more explorative and expansive guitar-based music. The recent instrumental albums *Soundtracks Vol. 1 & 2* are testament to Naylor's experimentalism, ranging from pastoral melancholy through to brain-fried psychedelia.

His storied career has been marked by many twists and turns, including sharing stages with members of Spiderbait, Grinspoon and You Am I, playing in the RockWiz Orchestra, working with Kim Salmon (Scientists, Beasts Of Bourbon) and contributing to a multicultural fusion of Indigenous, Chinese and Anglo music traditions in a trio called Manta.

How was the launch of *Soundtracks Vol. 2* at The Brunswick Ballroom?

It was awesome. It's the second gig of its kind that I've ever done, so it's all pretty new to me. Even though I'm a mature-age rookie at 53, breaking out into this new phase has been great. I only started performing primarily instrumental music last year. I've spent the best part of 30 years trying to perfect pop songs, and there's no such thing as being able to perfect them, but in my new project I've set myself free.

On your latest US tour with The Church, when you played in 26 cities in five weeks, how did you keep your energy levels up on the road?

Conserving your energy is key. We look after ourselves as we're not in our 20s anymore. You make sure that all your mental energy is saved for those two and a half to three hours at the end of the day, when you go on stage. For a five-week period, you mentally prepare yourself for being away for that long. I find the mental challenge greater than the physical challenge, to be honest. You also mentally prepare for being in a bus for four or five days a week. Sleep becomes one of the most precious commodities. At the same time, I try to look at certain places from a musical and geographical perspective when I'm in different parts of the world.

How much lead playing do you get to do with The Church and Paul Kelly?

I get a good distribution of key lines to do, in both bands. I also have the privilege of playing new parts that I've contributed to in songs like 'Rising Moon' [from Paul Kelly's 2017 album *Life Is Fine*]. The same applies

to The Church, in songs like [*The Hypnogogue*'s] 'No Other You'. When you've played a part in that record coming to life and you get to do it at a show, it's a great feeling. Paul's been very gracious in giving me time away to do Church tours.

When you're doing your expansive solo stuff with Spaceship, how big does your pedalboard have to be in order for you to get different psychedelic tones?

I try to keep a bit of a limit on the amount of pedals I bring to the Spaceship gigs because I don't want to be dancing around on my pedalboard all night. That being said, I do bring a few different kinds of flavours to the board [for different gigs with different projects]. I've been using a BOSS delay since the dawn of time, and with Spaceship I've been incorporating a Tru-Fi Spider Fuzz tone into my rig with a wah and a little bit of phaser/flanger. I also like to chuck in a bit of ECHOREC.

In terms of the guitars you now use, do you mainly hop between a Les Paul and a Strat?

Pretty much, yeah. I've also got a Tele which I used in Even primarily, from '97 to 2004. Then I moved into Les Paul territory. Strats are great, but you have to set them up properly, and the intonation has to be spot on. I love both for different reasons.

You've also played with people like Vika & Linda and Fanny Lumsden. With these artists basing their styles on different genres, such as blues-soul and country, respectively, does this encourage you to play in new ways?

I'm not a country player, but I've got a few country style licks in my vocabulary. I only played on 'When I Die' on the Fanny Lumsden record, [2023's *Hey Dawn*], but I played on quite a lot of The Wait, Vika & Linda's last album. Every recording session is an experience to cherish. I love being able to refine things in the studio. With both artists, I had leeway to play the way I play, which is not in an overtly schooled way, but its hopefully got a bit of spirit to it if it's executed properly.

Was it exciting to enter the recording studio with The Church for the first time?

Yeah! That happened in November 2019 [The Hypnogogue]. A lot of it was largely experimental. The song 'Antarctica' began as a jam session that morphed into other pieces of improvised music. [Co-producer] Andrew Beck and Steve [Kilbey] picked the guts out of it and put together the best sequence of jams. Steve then put lyrics to it and it became what it is today. We've managed to bring it to life on the stage, which is fantastic. There's three guitarists in The Church, Jeffrey Cain, Ian Haug and myself. Among the three of us, we can get a lot of bases covered.

Considering your new solo band is called Spaceship and the latest Even album was called *Reverse Lightyears*, are you interested in astronomy and the cosmos?

I don't profess to understand the universe from a mathematical, scientific or spiritual perspective. If anything, I would like any music that I'm part of to be something that encourages people to feel limitless. It's up to the listener. With the instrumental records I wanted to create feeling, and if that conjures up space or the universe, then so be it. I do like the idea of a universal/space theme. I aspire to create emotion through music. I'll release songs again, but I also like creating an atmosphere. 🌌

Ashley Naylor's *Soundtracks Volume 2* is available now through ashleynaylor.bandcamp.com

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LAURA JANE GRACE OF AGAINST ME! FAME RELEASES HER FOURTH SOLO ALBUM, *HOLE IN MY HEAD*, THIS MONTH. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR CHECKED IN TO CHAT RECORDING, HER NEW BAND WITH DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS' MATT PATTON, AND HER LOVE FOR ROWLAND S. HOWARD.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **TRAVIS SHINN**.

If you like rock music that's confrontational and confessional, you'd be doing yourself a disservice not exploring the gut-punching songs of solo artist Laura Jane Grace and her punk band Against Me! Known for tackling a range of intense topics in songs written for both projects, such as gender dysphoria and mental illness, Grace's talent for writing honest, unapologetic songs has made a global impact.

So too did her decision to come out as a trans woman in May 2012 - one of the first in the American punk scene to have done so since Jayne County in 1979. Common to the story of many transgender people, Grace's decision didn't come easily. A tough, winding journey through three decades pushed her to make the leap. Reflecting on coming out, Grace states, "I had sampled every barbiturate and narcotic in my lifetime, but this was a high I'd never felt".

Before becoming a self-confessed teenage anarchist inspired by protest folk, Grace grew up as the frequently-moving child of a US Army Major, before forming Against Me! in Gainesville, Florida in 1997. Looking back at these formative years, Grace describes herself as "a grubby little punk kid", whose first violent arrest at age 14 for loitering encouraged her dislike of authority figures. Grace would end up dropping out of high school to live in a crowded share house, while volunteering with socialist groups and doing odd jobs, including giving blood for money.

Originally an acoustic solo project characterised by harshly-screamed vocals, Against Me!'s ensemble era was solidified in 2000 when they embarked on their first tour. After releasing a handful of EPs, the group released the first of their seven studio albums in 2002, (*Against Me! Is*) *Reinventing Axl Rose*, whose oft-shortened title alludes to Grace's earlier fascination with Guns N' Roses' androgynous '80s looks. In 2008, Grace released *Heart Burns*, the first of her four solo releases. Further insights

into her rebellious career can be discovered in her 2016 autobiography *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout*, while she also hosted the 2014 TV show *True Trans* and collaborated with Joan Jett and Miley Cyrus.

Her fourth solo album *Hole In My Head* will be released on February 16. One night before flying out to tour solo in Greece as a return favour for contributing music to the Greek prison documentary *Walls*, she spoke to Australian Guitar about her recent studio endeavours. As Grace says, "I feel most comfortable when I'm in motion".

When you're writing new songs, do you mainly do so on acoustic or electric guitars?

I start on acoustics. A sign of a good song is being able to strip it down to its bare minimum and have it still exist on its own. That's how you know you have something sturdy. You can throw whatever you want on it after that. You don't need electricity, and if you're a musician you can always [use one to earn enough to] eat. Just open up your guitar case on a street corner.

After the completion of *Hole In My Head*, what have you been working on in the studio?

Well, upon going into the studio [to record *Hole In My Head*], I didn't have a band to go with me. I sent out a message asking for a bass player and a drummer, and [Drive-By Truckers'] Matt Patton raised his hand. I didn't know Matt, but I drove to St. Louis and we ended up recording together. He played bass and sang all over the record, and we started a friendship. He told me about his Mississippi studio, so I made time in December to go down there and spend a week working on six songs that I recorded with Matt, [drummer] Mikey Erg and my wife Paris [Campbell]. That should hopefully come out at some point next year. Right now I have solo tours planned for March and May, and I'm working on stuff for the summer. Then hopefully I'll come to Australia again.

Will your work with the Mississippi project eventuate in another solo album?

It's a [new] band. We're calling it The Mississippi Medicals right now, but we'll see what happens.

Against Me!'s debut album *Reinventing Axl Rose* turned 20 in 2022. Did that milestone influence the nostalgic quality of one of your new songs, 'Punk Rock In Basements'?

That song was more about coming out of the pandemic while thinking back to punk shows in basements, and the idea of being that close to people. Those shows are always so sweaty, and everyone's fuckin' spitting and singing into the air. Then you go through a global pandemic and the idea of getting someone else's bodily fluids on you is anxiety inducing, right? So the idea of a basement show kind of became perversely fascinating. I miss that closeness and togetherness that we all lost.

What guitars are you mainly playing on stage at the moment?

My main acoustic right now is a Yamaha LJ16, which I was a lot through my old Fender Twin Reverb. Then for Christmas, my wife got me a Silvertone Espanada, which is so choice. I think that's my main guitar now, but on *Hole In My Head*, I used a Rickenbacker 370 and a 1964 Fender Jaguar, which is a total homage to Rowland S. Howard, to emulate his sound. I've loved his guitar playing forever. I also used a little bit of Gretsch on the album too. Amplifier wise, I used a Fender Twin Reverb and a Rickenbacker TR7.

Do you have a good relationship with Australia?

Yeah, I started coming there in 2003, and at this point I've probably done well over a dozen Australian tours for Big Day Out and Groovin The Moo. I mythologize Australia. The Australian music scene in the late '80s and early '90s was so pristine and pure. Going there always struck me as [being reminiscent of] Florida, but at the same time, so far away. I felt familiarity and foreignness mixed together. The people have always been so enthusiastically supportive of Against Me! there, and the shows are always so choice. I've had some of the best times of my life while touring in Australia. I always look forward to coming back. I mean that from the heart.

As someone who has a lot of art on their skin, what's one of the most painful places you've been tattooed?

My kneecap for sure. I had to stop. The bottom of your foot is a really painful spot, especially the heel. However, I got my head tattooed [by the Japanese artist Gakkin] in the summer of 2022 and that was surprisingly not painful. I went into it thinking it would be super painful and it was a breeze.

Have there been any recent developments on new work with Against Me!, in terms of playing more shows or getting back into the rehearsal or recording room?

Hopefully sometime next year. Everyone has been doing their own thing. Then Atom [Willard, drummer] had a really bad motorcycle accident. He was also playing with Alkaline Trio and James [Bowman, lead guitarist] was touring with My Chemical Romance, doing tech. Hopefully we'll kick on again at some point, soon. 🍷

Laura Jane Grace's *Hole in My Head* releases on February 16.



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RECOMMENDED FOR FANS OF AT THE GATES, LAMB OF GOD AND PARKWAY DRIVE, BLUE MOUNTAINS/LITHGOW METALCORE GROUP **NAUGRIM** ('GNAW-GRIM') HAS GOTTEN HEADBANGERS TALKING WITH THE RELEASE OF ADVERSITY, THEIR DEBUT EP. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR ENTERED THE PIT.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **LIAM DALEY**.

Taking their name from J.R.R Tolkien's Elvish term for the dwarves that inhabited the Blue Mountains region in Middle-earth, Naugrim is a metalcore quartet from the Blue Mountains and Lithgow regions west of Sydney. Founded in 2021 by rhythm guitarist Luke Boyd, AKA Boydie, through a call-out to musical friends, players include members of Celestial Oath, a riff-loving doom metal trio, and Greg McManus, a formidable frontman with a background in festival organisation.

Boydie himself emerged out of the extreme metal subgenres of death, slam and grind, as a drummer in Festering Dripping and in Lithgow's 12Gauge Rampage, who have supported Napalm Death in Sydney. Boydie's two current bands are now part of his region's unofficial 'Big 4' of metal bands, rounded out by Foothills and Celestial Oath, and backed up by Magma One.

With multiple influences in tow, Naugrim presented a diverse mix of heaviness in their 2022 debut single, 'Forever Know My Name', produced by Matt Clarke (To The Grave, Lycanthrope). Maintaining their search for crushing instrumental clarity and soul-searching lyrical themes, Naugrim's debut EP *Adversity* was released in October, after more sessions with Clarke in Ryde. "Adversity was a medium [through which I could] deal with my own past discretions", explained McManus. Some of *Adversity*'s stand-out moments lie within 'Destroyer' and 'Accursed', two of Naugrim's five recent tracks that were honed through digital riff-sharing with rural rhythm refinement and rehearsals. Naugrim has now road-tested these tracks at gigs with acts such as Darkest Hour and Unearth, while also landing a slot at Canberra Metalfest with the likes of Psycroptic and Black Rhino. Boydie spoke to Australian Guitar about Naugrim's approach to songwriting, and the recording sessions for *Adversity*.

How long has Naugrim been a focus now?

It has to be creeping up to three years. It started as my idea, I guess. It formed with me and the other boys before Greg [McManus, vocalist] joined.

The band is comprised of the three members of Celestial Oath along with Greg, while you're the drummer in 12Gauge Rampage [on rhythm guitar]. Does that make Naugrim a supergroup?

I think it's more due to a lack of musicians around the [Lithgow / Blue Mountains] area. We all bring a lot of different dynamics to the band. Tom, Matt and Mal are a bit slower, in the sense of Celestial being a stoner doom metal band, while I have a faster, extreme metal background.

There are some really progressive moments in the EP too, along with some great thrashing moments and heavy breakdowns. How are these parts usually written?

I've got a bit of equipment and I spend a lot of time driving around while listening to music, so I do most of the writing. I then approach the other boys with what I've got, and they'll lend their bits. I love finding cool grooves.

So you record parts yourself and send it to the other guys, and they listen to it?

Exactly. We all use the same sort of programs, like Reaper, so I send stuff to Matt, he manipulates it, and then sends it back to me with his part done. I usually get Mal to come over to my place, where we'll spend a lot of time together brainstorming drum parts. We'll spend hours finding what gels and seeing what works.

Then you bounce things around to different guys in the band before coming together and rehearsing?

Exactly. We rehearse every Thursday.

What's your practice space like?

Mal has an awesome space at his house, out on a bit of property. There are no neighbours, so we all just go for gold out there until we're sick of playing.

How long was the EP been in the making for?

About 12-15 months.

For this EP, I heard you worked with metal producer Matt Clarke (The Wandering, To The Grave, Anoxia, 12Gauge Rampage)?

We did. He's in Ryde [at Matt Clarke Audio]. He's awesome, has great input, and is very welcoming and honest.

How long did the overall recording process with Matt take?

We started tracking during Easter. It took a few months to get through to the studio, about a week and a half of tracking, and the rest of the time was spent mixing.

What type of guitars did you guys use for tracking?

I use my [six-stringed] Ormsby GTR 6, with fanned frets. It has a tone that makes me feel like a better guitarist. Joe Haley from Psycroptic uses them, though he's got a custom one. Dino [Cazares] from Fear Factory used to use one too. They're Australian-made guitars, from Perth.

What tuning does Naugrim play in?

We're in Drop C.

What bass does Tom use?

He uses a five-string Dingwall. It's the custom bass of the bloke from Periphery, [Adam 'Nolly' Getgood]. Tom got his from Katoomba Music.

What guitar did Matt use for recording?

He used a custom six-string PRS, and we had the option of a Prestige Ibanez, but the Ormsby took on most of it.

Were these guitars mainly DI'd and modeled, or did Matt Clarke record your amps?

We DI'd when we were tracking, and then we went back and re-amped. I used my Triple XXX Peavey [head], 120 watt. It gave such a nice sustain. I had never re-amped before, so it was awesome to see the big differences between using a plugin and an amp. We went through a Mesa/Boogie quad cab for the re-amp process, with a basic Tubescreamer and a noise gate. The crunchy thickness of the EP came from that, but we also used a Blackstar HT 100 head, which had beautiful bottom-end in it.

I can hear traces of certain classic metal bands in the things you guys do, inspired by bands like Lamb Of God and Parkway Drive.

At The Gates, especially. I'm massively inspired by them. I also love In Flames.

How did Greg approach the recording of his vocals?

He was used to using more emotion, but he started figuring out a calmer approach so he could keep his throat from burning out. That helped get through the EP, and conserved a lot of his energy. He wrote all the lyrics too.

What have Naugrim got planned for 2024?

We're just going to see where we can go with our EP. We're reaching out to promoters, while trying to get on some shows and maybe get a tour, hopefully early next year. We're also doing a film clip and some guitar play-throughs with songs from the EP. We're willing to gig wherever we can. I really want to get a vinyl out as well. That'd be cool. 🎧

Naugrim's *Adversity* is out now. Go to naugrimau.bandcamp.com



PANTERA GOES WYLDE

Celebrated Texas metallers **PANTERA** are back for a gangbuster world tour — with Black Label Society's **ZAKK WYLDE** filling in for the late 'n' legendary **Dimebag Darrell**

Is it a reunion or a tribute? Who cares!
If you ask Zakk, it's simply a celebration of the music, spirit and legacy of his fallen brother.
Behold the fiery return of the Cowboys from Hell!

WORDS BY
JON WIEDERHORN

PHOTOS BY
DUSTIN JACK





**“WE’RE UP
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VINNIE. THAT’S
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IT BRINGS JOY
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PEOPLE”**

ON DECEMBER 18, 2022, about two weeks after playing their first-ever show together since 2001, Pantera are getting ready to tear up the Knotfest Carnival stage at the Anhembi Sambadrome in São Paulo, Brazil. Minutes before showtime, the ravenous crowd cheers along to *Jackass*-style video snippets of Pantera smashing things, blowing up shit, playing practical jokes and performing mind-blowing shows in the Nineties. A projection of a silhouette of the late Dimebag Darrell — wearing a Dean guitar, fist raised in triumph — and his late brother Vinnie Paul — holding up a drumstick — fill the screens as the band takes the stage to the weird and ethereal Peter Dinklage song “In Heaven (Lady in the Radiator Song)” from David Lynch’s *Eraserhead*. The moment the nation has waited more than 27 years for has arrived.

“This is called ‘A New Level,’” shouts vocalist Phil Anselmo, and immediately Black Label Society guitarist Zakk Wylde, Cattle Decapitation bassist Derek Engemann (who’s temporarily filling in for Covid-stricken Pantera co-founder Rex Brown) and Anthrax drummer Charlie Benante blast into the chugging opening rhythm of the song as the crowd chants to the beat. Then, Wylde, armed with an orange-and-black bullseye-decorated Wylde Audio Warhammer, doubles the speed of the riff and sparks start to fly — literally and figuratively.

Turbulence and discord were obstacles for Pantera’s return to the stage long before Vinnie Paul died of a heart attack in 2018. Many fans and critics have insisted that booking a “Pantera” tour that doesn’t feature founding members Dimebag Darrell Abbott (who was killed onstage in 2004) and Vinnie Paul Abbott is offensive, even with the remaining Abbotts’ blessings. Others claim the real offense would be to bury the band’s explosive concerts along with the brothers, and that Wylde and Benante are the perfect fill-ins (not replacements) for Dime and Vinnie. Zakk and Dime were close friends and Benante was tight with Dime and Vinnie, who were big Anthrax fans and who toured together in 1998.

“To me, it’s just a beautiful thing,” Wylde says of the worldwide tour that includes U.S. dates opening for Metallica and headlining with Lamb of God, as well as numerous festival appearances. “Whenever we do the

Experience Hendrix thing, we pay tribute to the amazing music and playing of Jimi Hendrix. And when I’m playing ‘Mr. Crowley’ or ‘Crazy Train’ with Ozzy [Osbourne], we’re celebrating the greatness of Randy [Rhoads]. It’s not controversial or tragic. It’s about this awesome thing Pantera created — and this community of people who still enjoy it.”

Seeing the revamped Pantera onstage in São Paulo (or anywhere else), it’s hard to dispute Wylde’s comments or talk smack about the band’s gangbuster performances. This is, indeed, a beautiful thing. Throughout the São Paulo show, Wylde plays most of the crunching rhythms in a partial crouch, biceps bulging, hair swaying left and right, obscuring his face. The sound is vintage Pantera — scooped mids, crushing power chords embellished with artificial harmonics, Whammy pedal squeals and jaw-dropping solos. If you close your eyes, you can picture Dime and Vinnie up there with Phil.

Wylde worked obsessively to emulate Dime’s sound and style, and if that’s not enough to convince everyone that this is an act of love for the Abbotts, the guitarist’s cut-off jean jacket cements the deal. It’s covered with orange-and-black patches dedicated to the late Abbott brothers. There are circular patches of their faces, each partially surrounded by “St. Dime” and “St. Vinnie,” respectively. A patch on Wylde’s right shoulder reads “Pantera” and features a line of stars that look like a military insignia. On his back, the edges of the CFH [Cowboys from Hell] logo peek out under his studded black strap. And just in case anyone missed the message, a rounded “Pantera” patch is positioned above the back patch and the words “Cowboys from Hell” are perched below. On a more personal level, a razorblade dangles

from a chain around Wylde’s neck — an homage to Dime’s trademark necklace, which Dime wore in homage to Judas Priest and the iconic cover of their *British Steel* album.

“We’re up there celebrating Dime and Vinnie. That’s what this is about, and it brings joy to so many people,” Wylde says, adding that playing Pantera songs is just as enjoyable for him and Benante,

whose T-shirt displays a *Simpsons*-style drawing of the Abbott brothers. “For us, it’s really special because we’re commemorating our buddies — the guys in Pantera who we loved — and everything they did for music.”

Usually, when Wylde talks to journalists, he regales them with hysterical stories about working and playing with Ozzy and Black Label Society. Frequently, he chronicles many of the madcap misadventures he enjoyed and the venues he destroyed when he was living out his rock ‘n’ roll fantasies. These days, he’s recapping his history and relationship with the guys in Pantera and discussing the tour that many — including Vinnie Paul — thought would never happen. While he’s occasionally self-deprecating and cracks a few good jokes, Wylde is absolutely reverential to everyone in Pantera and talks far less about himself than about the purpose of the reunion and Dime’s groundbreaking playing. In addition to addressing how inspiring Dime’s technique was to a legion of fans, he emphasizes how the insight he gained from their friendship keeps him upbeat and motivated today.

“Dime’s attitude was that you should be loving and living life to its fullest every waking moment,” Wylde says. “His and Vinnie’s love for life was totally infectious, and whenever you were around them everything was always positive. Always.”

Following decades of false rumors and dismissed press reports, the first legitimate hint that something was brewing in the Pantera camp came in July 2022, when *Billboard* reported that Anselmo and Brown were putting together a new Pantera lineup and had signed with Artist Group International to book a North American tour. When it was time to pick fill-ins for Dime and Vinnie, Wylde and Benante were the obvious choices.

Five months later, Pantera played their first show with the new lineup

Zakk Wylde — photographed in L.A. in March — holding a framed Nick Bowcott photo of him and Dimebag Darrell from 2002. We’ll hear more from Bowcott in a few pages...

at Mexico's Monterrey Metal Fest with Judas Priest. Just as fans in the U.S. were getting antsy wondering when Pantera would rock North America, Metallica announced Pantera as their opening act for a batch of shows that are likely to be some of the biggest concerts of the year. Pantera have also announced headline gigs with Lamb of God and festival appearances in Europe.

Sitting in his studio in Los Angeles a few weeks after a Black Label Society tour with Anthrax, Wylde must feel like a medal-decorated Olympic athlete about to head into his best event. Having won over any skeptics with his fiery, heartfelt performances at the late-2022 dates in Latin America — which were less a trial run and more a trial by fire — Wylde is feeling confident and relaxed. Perched before a wall of at least 35 variously colored hanging Wylde Audio Odin Barbarian and Odin Grail guitars, wearing a black ski hat and matching “1998 Black Label Society” sweatshirt (the year he formed the band) and thoughtfully stroking his viking beard, Wylde is effectively out of BLS mode and in the zone for the next round of Pantera shows, which begin in a week, with two dates at the Loud Park Festival in Osaka and Tokyo, Japan.

Black Label Society recently completed two legs of a tour with Anthrax. Did that give you an opportunity to do some jamming with drummer Charlie Benante in preparation for the Pantera tour?

No, because once you get on the road there's no time to hang out and go sightseeing. Charlie was actually thinking about it. When we did the first tour with Anthrax and Black Label, we were in Vegas having coffee in the morning and Charlie comes up to me and goes, “Zakk, you think we can get together and work on some stuff?” And I'm like, “It's not gonna happen, bro. Just stop. We'll worry about that when we go to New Orleans.” And he goes, “Yeah, but while we're on tour we could get a practice room and...” And I go, “No, dude. We're not gonna get together and jam before I get up on stage with Black Label. I don't even do sound checks with Black Label. It was funny. I said, “Charlie, you're better off practicing to the records than waiting around for me to go over stuff with you.”

Couldn't you have made the time to do it once or twice just to get your feet wet?

Bro, once the day gets rolling, we've got all these things to do, and before we know it we're onstage again. The running joke is — whether we're doing three or four shows in a row — as soon as we get up there and Zepelin and Sabbath are playing over the sound system right before we go on, we'll do a cheer with the fellas and I'll go, “Didn't we just do this 20 minutes ago? It feels like we're back up onstage for the third set of the night!” So, no, man. There's no time.

How long did you rehearse in New Orleans before the first Pantera show?

We were there for almost two weeks, just so we could go over all the parts and make sure everybody knew the playbook. It worked out really great. We just made sure everything fit in the right pocket and everyone was on the same wavelength.

Was there a learning curve before you found the right groove?

Not really, because we've all been doing this for so long. I think it's the same way with anything when you're dealing with professionals. Whether it's football teams, baseball teams, bands. You got other players in there that know what they're doing and how to play the game. If you take [wide receiver] Jerry Rice [who was best known for playing on the San Francisco 49ers] and put him on the New England Patriots — so that now he's with [former quarterback] Tom Brady — once him and Brady go over the routes it's just like, “Okay, Tom, just throw me the ball. I'll be there.” He knows the game well enough to play with anybody. It's the same with music. You learn the plays and then do what you gotta do.

Did you already know how to play all the songs?

It's so funny that people think I'd already played all these songs. On the first Anthrax/Black Label run we did, [bassist] Frankie Bello was like, “Zakk, you know all the parts, right?” I go, “No, I don't know any of the parts. Why would I?” It's like if Dime agreed to fill in for me doing a run with Ozzy and I asked him, “Hey, can you come up right now and play the solo to ‘No More Tears,’ ‘Miracle Man’ or ‘Stillborn?’” He'd be like, “Well, I've heard the songs, but that doesn't mean I know how to play 'em. First I gotta learn 'em!” You have to practice, and you have to work on it to get everything right.

Was it easy to learn Dime's parts?

Some of them. But I had to go to YouTube for a batch of stuff if I couldn't figure it out [See *Ola Englund sidebar*]. That was definitely a massive help. And then there were still about two or three things where Rex went, “Nah, you're slightly off. Do this” — whatever it was. And I'm like, “Oh, okay. I got it now.”

What was the greatest challenge?

The hardest thing wasn't learning them; it was learning the proper way

“It's so funny that people think I'd already played all these [Pantera] songs,” Wylde says. “You have to practice, and you have to work on it to get everything right”



to play them so they sound like Dime — because everybody's gonna play certain things their own way. I remember when I used to play [Rush's] “The Spirit of Radio,” I learned it on the B string and the G string, and I had to do this big stretch. My guitar teacher was like, “No, no, Zakk. It's all open strings. It's on the second fret on the E and the B.” That was way easier. I remember reading an article with Al Di Meola years ago, and he was saying that when he was learning all this hybrid chicken pickin' stuff, he was going, “Man, how do they do that?” There are all these string jumps and he's just using a pick [instead of his



fingers]. He said, “Looking back on it, learning it incorrectly helped me with my picking immensely.” So no matter how you do it, it’s really just a matter of sitting and learning it. You just work on it until you can do it and it sounds right.

What was your favorite Pantera part to learn?

The actual riff that Dime jammed on for “Cowboys from Hell” was very cool. I don’t know if Dime was doing a finger exercise when he came up with that, or he was just jamming and noodling on and on the way Slash put together “Sweet Child O’

Mine” — but it’s a really great pattern. Speaking of Al Di Meola, it’s almost like something he would do, but the way Dime presented it, it was totally metal.

A lot of people, including artists that have covered it, have played it wrong.

I mean, there’s several ways you could play it and it’s still the same if it sounds the same. But it’s definitely a signature Dimebag lick.

Were you surprised when Metallica offered you the main opening slot on their tour — or was that in the works for a long time?

I have no idea about any of that stuff. I just show up whenever we get these dates in. It’s like being a Navy Seal. You get your orders, and you go, “We gotta go kill some bad guys. Let’s do it!” But no, it’s great,

without a doubt. We’re friends with all those guys, so it’ll be a good time.

Pantera formed in 1981 as teenagers. Were you a fan back when they were releasing their own albums, or did you discover them later in their career?

When we were doing the Pride and Glory stuff [*in 1994*], our drummer Brian Tichy was really into checking out new stuff. He turned me on to Pantera, Soundgarden and other cool bands. So I heard [*Pantera’s*] “Walk” and “Mouth for War” and I loved them. And then I heard “I’m Broken” ‘cause it was on *Headbanger’s Ball*.

When did you first meet Dime?

We played the 1994 Monsters of Rock show at Castle Donington in England. Aerosmith was headlining and Extreme was on the bill. But then you had Sepultura and Pantera. We opened the show, so then we got to watch all the other bands and hang out. That's when we met all the guys in Pantera. They were awesome guys and, to me, they were the new breed.

People always ask me, "What was Dime's legacy?" I always think of Dime in the same way I think of Tony Iommi. He's just beyond — and loved, obviously. We all love King Edward [*Van Halen*] And Saint [*Randy*] Rhoads and everything they did with their chops. But I think Pantera is the benchmark for what they did with insanely heavy metal, kind of how Black Sabbath is the benchmark for hard, riff-driven stuff and just heaviness in general. As far as his riffs and his playing go, I think Dime sits at the table with Tony Iommi.

Dime didn't just play with speed and flair; he and the rest of the band were incredibly tight.

If you're talking about the sound of Pantera, a lot of that comes because of Dime's love for Eddie and Randy. The playing is rooted in precision. It's not sloppy. When you listen to punk, it's all about aggression. You're not worried about it being super tight or musically complicated. You just want the aggression, and the slop that's there is part of the flavor. But with Pantera, between Vinnie's drumming and Rex's tight basslines, along with Dime's incredible playing, which is also so tight, the band is just a fine-tuned precision instrument.

Aside from being so tight, what was Dime's greatest gift as a guitarist?

The way he played and his core choice of sounds. A lot of them are just for dissonance purposes, and it sounds dirty and nasty, and it screams, but that's the flavor you want in the soup. There's a lot of thought and planning that went into the way he chose to go from one chord to another in unexpected ways, and it totally works in every song. Everything he did worked, which is pretty incredible.

How long was it after you met Pantera at Castle Donington that you and Dime became tight?

He was super-cool to me from the start. He knew who I was because I had played with Ozzy. But really, our friendship started with us being huge fans of a lot of the same bands and talking about music. We'd always talk about the guitar players we loved and why we loved them.

There are legendary stories about you partying with Dime and tearing up shit. Is that what solidified your friendship? Or was it more a matter of being in the same industry, talking about guitarists and music?

It was a combination of everything. Between the playing, the drinking, how we matched our stilettos and our fishnets with our eyeliner and our rouge — all the typical stuff that brings fellas together. [*Laughs*]

Did you jam with Dime over the years?

No. Why would we do that? It cuts into drinking time. [*Laughs*] Let's see. We could be at an Irish pub somewhere laughing our asses off or we could be working on writing some new music. Hmmmm. I think we'll be at the Irish pub! [*Laughs*] Seriously, man. There was no time to jam. They live in Texas. I was out in California. Whenever we got together it was just to have a good time.

What's the first great drinking story you remember with Dime?

Dude, if I remembered it then it wouldn't be great. When we started hanging out, of course, we drank, but most of the time drinking with Dime would be over the phone. We talked on the phone all the time for several hours just drinking away. We'd make each other cry, we'd be laughing so hard. But every time we got together it was always hilarious — nothing but pure comedy. And sometimes we caused some mayhem.

Like what?

One time, I was down at Dime's house and it was like a lost *Weekend at Bernie's* down there. I had to make sure I got a flight home to Newark [*airport in New Jersey*] to help Barbaranne, my wife, with our two newborn kids. They were 15 months apart and they were in strollers. I end up in this drunken debacle, and of course, I miss the flight home. So Barb is with the babies and they're crying and I'm not there. So yeah, Barb wasn't a happy camper for that one. Dime smoothed that one over for me so she wouldn't yell at me too much. She's not gonna yell at Dime. He was my guardian angel on that one — my "get out of jail free" card.

There's a great story about Pantera trashing producer Terry Date's rental cars. You had a similar experience with Dime once and you wound up crashing a 4x4 through fences by the road and doing donuts on people's property, yes?

That was complete and total insanity. I thought it was a rental car the whole time and it turned out to be his buddy's truck that we trashed. [*Dime's wife*] Rita had to do some damage control and put out some fires on that one. Pretty much whatever we did — and you can see a lot of the kinds of practi-

Wylde wearing the cut-off jean jacket he's been wearing onstage for the Pantera shows; it's covered with orange-and-black patches dedicated to the late Abbott brothers

cal jokes on the *Vulgar Videos* they released — it was all just tons of silliness and stupidity. And thank God, nobody got hurt.

Dime and Vinnie had a reputation for being extremely generous. People close to them say the Christmas parties they threw at their dad's house were legendary and guests would get showered with gifts before they left. Did Dime ever give you an amazing present for Christmas or your birthday?

Oh, man, it didn't have to be Christmas or Easter or Thanksgiving. Dime would just pop up all the time and give people gifts. If he knew you were a Judas Priest fan and he got a copy of their new box set before it came out, he would just give it to you. He was Santa Claus with a pink beard. That was one of his nicknames.

What was your favorite gift from Dime?

It would have to be the Dean guitars. I'm probably going to break out two of them on this upcoming run, which will be pretty cool.

Some say Dime and Vinnie were larger than their music. Were they larger than life?

Oh, man. If you think about them or you want to celebrate them, then treat every day like it's a Friday or Saturday night because that's what they did. Don't feel sorry for yourself for 10 minutes, five minutes, five seconds. You should not be bumming about anything for even one second because that's not gonna fix anything anyway. They were always having fun and they were hysterical. They videotaped everything, and looking back it's all just Benny Hill comedy reels.

Did you ever see Dime when he was down?

No, not in person. The only time was when we used to talk on the phone back when he was starting Damageplan. He was upset about Pantera. They had worked so hard to get to where they did and then it all ended, and he basically had to start over again with Damageplan. He was like, "Zakk, what am I gonna do?" That was the only time I ever knew when he was upset or down.



**“AS FAR AS HIS
RIFFS AND HIS
PLAYING GO,
I THINK DIME
SITS AT THE
TABLE WITH
TONY IOMMI”**



What did you say to him?

I was just like, “Dude, you’re like Eddie or Randy to so many kids out there. You gotta take that gift and just carry on.” I had a famous shot of Randy, where he was sitting there looking into the mirror, practicing guitar. So, I sent it to Dime when he was making that *Damageplan* record and I said, “Whenever you’re feeling down, just look at this picture for inspiration.” Aside from that, he was always a powerful light and a force of positivity.

There was an incredible connection between Dime and Vinnie, and that was a big part of Pantera’s chemistry. They were closer than brothers.

Yeah, well, almost. I remember telling Eddie Van Halen, “Ed, you should check out this band Pantera. Dime and Vin are kind of like you and Alex. They’re brothers, and they love you guys.” And he was like, “Oh, yeah? Sounds cool.” But definitely, man, they were family. They were close, they had chemistry, and that’s always gonna be there in the music.

Dime was your best friend. How did his death affect you?

It was definitely crazy. They had played Seattle [on November 14, 2004] and then they were in Ohio [where Dime was murdered on December 8]. They were scheduled to go to L.A. from there. Not long before the Ohio thing, I spoke to Dime and he said, “I’ll see you in about two weeks!” And I went, “Alright, cool, man. We’ll all have a good time.” And then, suddenly, we’re in fuckin’ bizarre land. I was going to see him soon and suddenly... It was just weird. I remember talking to Vinnie when we were down in Australia in 2014, and he said, “Zakk, I can’t believe it. My brother’s almost been gone for 10 years.” I said, “Yeah, I know. It’s crazy, man. It’s just crazy.” And now Vinnie’s [been] gone [for almost five years]. It just goes to show you how every day is a gift. It really is. Not that you need to see your friends pass away to realize how precious life is. But it’s the truth. Every day is a gift.

There were reports back in 2014 that You, Phil and Rex wanted to play a reunion tour with Vinnie.

I told Vinnie and the fellas, “If you

guys ever wanted to do it, of course I would be there for you to support you and to support Dime. Just tell me what I need to learn and I'll learn it." There were all these conversations circling around.

How close did it come to happening?

I think it was pretty close, but you'd have to ask Phil and Rex exactly what happened — whether they got into an argument or something — I don't know. I'm friends with all of those guys, and I said, "It's none of my business. I'm just here for you if you want me involved."

Do you know if Vinnie ever made peace with Phil?

I have no idea where Vinnie was with Phil back then. Like I said, I don't get involved with that stuff. I'm not saying this [group of performers] is Pantera. I just want to honor Dime and the band. It's like asking Eric Clapton, "If Mitch [Mitchell] and Noel [Redding] said, "Would you honor Jimi and go out and play and sing with us?," of course Clapton's gonna say yes. It's not even a matter of saying yes. You *have* to do this. So if they ask you to do it, you do it.

Considering how much bad blood there was for so long, how did this finally end up happening? How did you get involved in what has turned out to be the greatest possible tribute to Pantera?

It was easy. Phil called me up and said, "Hey, Zakky, you want to go out and honor Dime and Vinnie?" And I was like, "Yeah, when do you want to do it?" And that was it. We talked about it for a while and then we all got on a group chat and talked about what songs we were gonna do and the tunings and everything like that.

What's the highlight for you in terms of doing these songs?

Just keeping them alive and paying tribute to Dime and Vinnie and Pantera. I just look at it this way. I [*imagine*] Dime and Vinnie are with us and we're at the House of Blues, and we say, "Wait 'til you see this early birthday present we got you guys." And they're figuring it's gonna be the ultimate Kiss tribute band because they love Kiss. The curtain opens up, and it's me and Charlie playing their stuff with Rex and Phil! They'd be going, "I can't believe what I'm seeing right now!" They'd be on the floor crying, laughing, high-fiving each other, going, "This is hilarious. The guys actually took the time to learn our stuff." I know they'd be having the best time. And I can just hear Dime saying, "Holy shit, Zakk bought a Whammy pedal for this!"

Do you ever feel Dime and Vinnie's presence?

All the time. And it's so crazy because when we started talking about doing this thing, there would be constant reminders about it wherever I went. I told Barb, "Dime is willing this thing to happen. He wants this to happen." I'd just get constant reminders of him all the time, whether it was a picture or something on my phone, or I'd be driving and I'd see a Pantera license

Dimebag Darrell at Castle Donington in the U.K. in 1994. "We got to watch all the other bands and hang out. That's when we met the guys in Pantera," Wyldie says



plate or a "333" somewhere — that was Dime's lucky number. I was literally going, "He's watching and he's here with me."

Dimebag was a guitar hero. You're a guitar hero. But no matter who you are, it's hard to step into someone else's shoes — especially when there are people out there who don't want that. Was there ever a moment when you thought it would be too hard physically or emotionally to get up there and play Pantera songs?

When Pantera released *Far Beyond Driven*, I asked Dime why he wrote such aggressive riffs, and if he's a really angry person inside. He said, "Dude, I'm not angry about anything." I realized Dime and Vinnie were literally the Van Halen side of the band — exciting, energetic and always ready for a good time — and Phil's lyrics and vocals made the music darker and more vicious. And the contrast was amazing.

When you look at the bands we love — whether it's the Beatles, the Stones, Zeppelin, Sabbath, Cream — when you look at them, every one of them had this special chemistry. With Van Halen, you got Eddie and then you got Dave [Lee Roth]. And it's just a perfect combination. But if you took John Bonham and put him in Black Sabbath, and you took Bill Ward and put him in Led Zeppelin, you'd have two completely different bands. And then imagine putting Robert Plant in Black Sabbath and Ozzy in Led Zeppelin. Completely different. When you talk about all these amazing musicians we love, if you mixed and matched them, it's crazy to think of what the outcomes might have been like. Pantera were four guys that were a perfect fit for each other — all of them — when they came to the table and made that soup. And for a while it was the best of all possible worlds. 🍲



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FAR BEYOND DRIVEN

The inimitable **Zakk Wylde** discusses his thoughts, his approach and his gear as he honors his much-missed friend with reverence and respect

WORDS BY
NICK BOWCOTT

PHOTOS BY
DUSTIN JACK



ZAKK

WYLDE IS not only one of the finest metal guitarists to ever grace this planet; he's always been an open book when it comes to expressing his deep love, plus his profound reverence and respect for his dear friend, the late Dimebag Darrell. Yes sir, Zakk literally wears his heart on his sleeve. Which is why every Black Label Society show since 2005 has featured "In This River" — the emotion-laden ballad Zakk wrote for Dime — complete with large, backline-covering images of his beloved friend. And, ever since Darrell's brother, Vinnie Paul, sadly passed away in 2018, his picture also graces the BLS set during said song. "Those are our buddies, man," Zakk says in an unusually soft but searingly sincere tone. "That song and their images will never, ever leave the Black Label set."

The heartfelt words Wylde wrote in his popular *Guitar World* column, "Brewtality," in early 2005 sum up his feelings for Darrell as a player and a person. "In my mind Dime was, without question, the best metal guitarist in the world — you've got Jimi Hendrix, you've got Eddie Van Halen, you've got Jimmy Page, you've got Randy Rhoads, you've got Tony Iommi, and you've got Dimebag Darrell. He belongs in those hallowed ranks without any shadow of a doubt.

"On top of his talent, though, Dime was also a beautiful guy. He was totally devoid of ego, as genuine as the day is long, and also the kindest person I've ever met. Every time he walked into a room; he'd light it up like the ray of sunshine he was. Dime was an angel that the good Lord sent down to brighten our lives and make us happy, but now he needs him, so he's taken him back. I never had a brother, but Dime was as close to blood as possible, and my love for him was, is and always will be beyond unconditional and forever. The bottom line is this: Dime's influence will be felt forever, and his memory will never, ever die. He lives on in every guitarist's veins 'cause that's what guitar playing is: one big

brotherhood."

And speaking of brotherhood, nearly 20 years later Zakk is now playing guitar on the Pantera tribute/celebration tour alongside Dime's bandmates Philip Anselmo and Rex Brown with Anthrax's Charlie Benante on drums. At every show, Wylde wears a denim vest featuring large "St. Dime" and "St. Vinnie" patches on its front.

Like I said, Zakk definitely wears his heart on his sleeve — or perhaps I should say, his chest.

One of the last times the two of us were together with Dime was for the "Booze Brothers" private guitar lesson

in 2003. In it, you said hearing a great player inspired you "to wanna practice 24/7, and it still does to this day." When you were learning Dime's guitar parts for the Pantera shows, what aspects of his playing inspired you?

Every single note, Father Nick — every single note! [Laughs] In addition to the hits like "Walk," "I'm Broken," "Cowboys" and "This Love," we also do some deeper tracks



like “Yesterday Don’t Mean Shit” [Reinventing the Steel], “Strength Beyond Strength” and “Use My Third Arm” [both from *Far Beyond Driven*]. While I was learning them, I realized a lot of the chord changes and note choices Dime would make were pretty dissonant — just for the flavor of the soup, if ya know what I mean. I kept thinking, “Wow, that was interesting. I would’ve never made that chord change or gone to that note; I wonder why he chose to go there for this section.” And obviously, some of Dime’s chord voicings are really interesting too. He used a lot of root/major 3rd, root/minor 3rd and inverted chords instead of just playing a normal root/5th power chord. It’s definitely been a very cool experience.

Dime also incorporated a lot of chromatic movement and blues bends, which, alongside the traits you’ve just mentioned, helped add extra tension, excitement and darkness to a riff or chord sequence.

Without a doubt. There are definitely certain little bits of trickery and some Doug Henning [*a famous Canadian magician who passed away in 2000*] magical things going on in Dime’s stuff. Rex showed me a couple of things I wasn’t 100 percent sure about, like when Dime goes to G# in “Becoming” instead of a G, which is what a lot of people think he played, and I was like, “What sort of sorcery is this?!” [Laughs]

It’s all about adding Tabasco sauce or whatever type of flavoring you want — whether it’s cilantro or sour cream. It all depends on what you’re writing and what you’re aiming for. It’s like Tony Iommi putting the flat five in there because it makes a riff sound darker. Whereas Jimmy Page would sometimes use the major 3rd [*hums the interlude riff of “Bring It on Home” from Led Zeppelin II*], which is more of an uplifting thing. There is no right, and there is no wrong.

How did you approach learning Dime’s riffs and solos?

I learned Dime’s stuff the same exact way I do when I play with Ozzy, Zakk Sabbath, Generation Axe [*with Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen, Nuno Bettencourt and Tosin Abasi*] or the Experience Hendrix stuff. You’ve just gotta sit down, do the work and

“I LEARNED DIME’S STUFF THE SAME EXACT WAY I DO WHEN I PLAY WITH OZZY, ZAKK SABBATH, GENERATION AXE OR THE EXPERIENCE HENDRIX STUFF. YOU’VE JUST GOTTA SIT DOWN, DO THE WORK AND LEARN HOW TO PLAY THE SONG AND SOLOS”

learn how to play the song and solos — whether they’re by Saint Dime, Saint Randy, Lord Iommi or Saint Jimi, plus of course, Jake [*E. Lee*]. It’s no different. There’s a big difference between listening to and loving a song and actually being able to play it. You’ve just gotta put in the time and work — there’s no iPhone app for that, brother! [Laughs]

Did you do it the “old school” way by listening to Pantera’s albums with guitar in hand, or did you use transcriptions and videos?

I did all of the above, including watching YouTube and everything like that. I remember checking out some videos by Ola [*Englund — see overleaf*] just from Googling “how to play” certain Pantera songs. Back in the day, you’d ask your friends if you couldn’t figure something out. Like I call you up and go, “Nick, you worked with Dime on his *Guitar World* column; what’s he doing on this section? I can’t make it out.” But nowadays you can just go on YouTube and find some slamming player who’ll show you how to play Eddie’s tapping part in “Eruption” or whatever. So I definitely did a lot of that.

I imagine the rehearsal boot camps were invaluable. Playing newly learned songs along with the recorded versions is one thing, but performing them in a band situation is a completely different beast, especially when they’re Pantera songs.

Rehearsing those songs with the fellas is obviously really important; the training wheels are definitely off at that point! [Laughs] Like you said, playing along with the album is one thing, but being able to play those same exact songs by yourself or with other players is completely different. It’s like trying to drive someplace you’ve been before but without your car’s GPS. Good luck with that!

Nick Bowcott was on hand — in Arlington, Texas, in late 2002 — as Zakk and Dimebag were photographed for the March 2003 *Guitar World*. For more about that issue, see page 68

For me it’s a matter of retaining everything: learning all the parts and then remembering how many times

they’re repeated before moving on to the next one. I deliberately write Black Label stuff as caveman as possible. But, as you and I know, a lot of Pantera’s material ain’t like that at all; it’s definitely not meat-and-potatoes-type stuff! Once again, you’ve gotta put the time and work in. There is no substitute for that, and there are no shortcuts. You can’t avoid it, Father Nick... you’ve just got to go to your room and do your homework like a good boy! [Laughs]

And then, of course, there are those stellar solos.

Dime’s solos are like prime steaks: ribeye, filet, porterhouse, sirloin, New York strip... They’re all different and they’re all great, so bring them all on! It’s kind of like the Ozzy thing, because for me they’re all fun to play. Obviously, I love doing Randy’s leads, but I also get to play the [*Jake E. Lee*] solo in “Bark at the Moon,” which is amazing too. With Dime’s leads it’s the exact same thing. I mean, we start the set with “A New Level,” and Dime was just shredding through the whole solo — and that’s right out of the gate! Obviously, his solos in songs like “Walk” and “This Love” are “Mr. Crowley”-type leads where you have to play them the way it is on the record. They’re songs within songs, straight from the Saint Rhoads school of song and solo writing.

To quote Dime from “The Booze Brothers” private lesson you guys did together in a 2023 edition of *Guitar World*, “When it comes to leads, Zakk plays a pretty hardcore right-hand game. He picks a hell of a lot more than I do, whereas I tend to slur a lot more than he does. Both approaches are equally cool, though; they just have a different attack and feel.” Did you find that learning his solos made you change your usual picking approach in certain places? As far as picking technique and stuff, I’m more staccato whereas Dime’s more legato. That’s just the way I play. That said, there are certain parts where it *has* to be legato, so you just do it, otherwise you’re not going to get that sound. If Saint [*Allan*] Holdsworth wanted to pick every note, he could have, but it wouldn’t have given him the flavor of soup he was looking for. He wanted it to sound breathy, like a

saxophone, not staccato.

Due to your unique playing style and approach, at the end of the day, you're always going to sound like you and, in my humble opinion, that's a wonderful thing.

Without a doubt, and that's the beauty of the guitar. Stevie Ray Vaughan playing "Voodoo Child" sounds like Stevie Ray Vaughan playing "Voodoo Child" — he has such a unique touch, sound and style, he just can't help it! It's the same thing as hearing Randy playing Black Sabbath stuff — it sounds like him and it's awesome.

I spoke with Ola [Englund] and Grady [Champion, Dime's guitar tech] and, like me, they both feel Darrell would've loved the fact that you're honoring him by playing his songs and solos "the Zakk way." And, just like you playing his material with Phil, Rex and Charlie, I'm sure Dime would be totally reverent to what you recorded but play it in his own unique, inimitable style.

Yeah, without a doubt. All the notes in the "No More Tears" solo would be right, but it would still sound like Dime playing because it would have his touch — you couldn't escape that, and you wouldn't want to. That's the beauty of it; it would be his interpretation of the parts he learned.

I noticed that in all the footage and photos I've seen of the first six South American shows, it looked like you were only using one guitar, a Wylde Audio Warhammer tuned down to C# and armed with a Floyd Rose plus your usual EMG 81/85 pickups. I just used one guitar through the whole show for that first run. That was it — plug in and off we go!

I know Dime gave you some guitars; can we expect to see any of those making an appearance at any of the upcoming shows?

I definitely want to bring them out, but I didn't want to travel with them on a lot of flights like we were doing in South America. I was like, "Man, if these things disappear, I'll be pretty bummed out." The guitars Dime gave me are literally "one of one." There are no replicas, and even if there were, the whole special part of it would be me bringing the real



thing out on stage.

From what I can gather, the rig you've been using thus far mainly consists of the usual amps, cabs and pedals you normally use.

That's right, I'm using the rig I use with Black Label, Ozzy, Zakk Sabbath, Experience Hendrix and Generation Axe — my Wylde Audio tops, my Marshall cabinets and my usual pedalboard. Because Dime used solid-state amps in Pantera and I use tube stuff, I wasn't sure if it would sound right. So when I was getting ready to rehearse with the fellas, I was thinking of finding out what Randall heads Dime used and then buying a whole bunch of them on Reverb or eBay. But when we got down to rehearsals, I used my rig and it worked out just fine. Obviously, I had to get a [DigiTech] Whammy pedal for "Becoming," so I'm now the proud owner of one of those. And I had to get noise gates too because I don't use them. I just Googled "best noise gates" and the Dunlop one [Dunlop MXR Smart Gate Noise Gate M135] came up so I bought a couple. Those pedals are amazing; I can stand right in front of my rig with it screaming pure lightning and it doesn't feed back when I'm playing stuff like "5 Minutes Alone," "Walk" or the verse riff in "Cowboys." There's nothing, just silence.

Zakk Wylde — with Pantera's *Cowboys from Hell* logo behind him — performs December 9, 2022, at Complejo El Campin in Bogotá, Colombia

Those gates definitely do their job, and that "silence" is such a huge part of the Dimebag soup. I mean, with Dime there was never enough distortion! [Laughs] He just wanted his tone as massively distorted as possible without having to turn down; that was a big part of Dime's sound.

Do you dial in your amps differently for the Pantera shows?

No. It's just balls to the wall. Thank the good Lord and John Paul II for those noise gates, though. Without those bad boys I wouldn't be able to get through the Pantera show; I'd be tap dancing on my pedalboard like I was in *Riverdance*, switching my OD pedal on and off all the time! [Laughs]

You pretty much leave your overdrive pedal on the whole time, right?

It's always on except for in "This Love" and "Planet Caravan," where I just turn the pedal off, turn the volume on my guitar down and there's my clean sound. I don't channel-switch or anything like that, I never

"I GUESS YOU
COULD SAY
I'M ON A
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ELWOOD!"

have. I just use stompboxes right into single-channel heads. There's fewer things that can go wrong with a simple setup like mine.

In addition to your long-serving guitar tech, Stephen Murillo, you've also got Dime's wingman, Grady Champion, working with you on the Pantera shows.

Yeah, Grady's part of the show. He's back there in the kitchen cooking things up, getting things ready, operating the Whammy pedal, tweaking the gates and stuff like that — just like he did with Dime.

People have been commenting on how your arms look impressively chiseled of late. I'm asking for a friend — what's the story there?

The music business isn't what it used to be, so now I'm doing a part-time gig at Chippendales! I've been giving Barb lap dances as well, so I'm making money on the side doing that. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do!

With several shows already under your belt and many more to come, what are your thoughts and takeaways from the Pantera experience so far?

I always knew Dime was great, but now [*that*] I've really studied a bunch of his songs and solos, he's even greater-er-er than I even realized. He definitely sits at the table with his heroes and breathes the same rarified air as Tony Iommi because, just like Black Sabbath, Pantera created a genre of music; they were the precision machine that's still considered its benchmark to this day. It's not just about Dime's chops and how great his technique was; it's about what he created. That's his legacy — and it's way, way bigger than just being a great lead player.

Also, Pantera's music is so powerful and special; it's perfectly designed for live shows and festivals — it really is. The crowd reactions have been just insane. Dime and Vinnie would definitely be loving it — seeing what they were a part of and what they created.

As you and I know, every day with Dime and Vinnie was Friday or Saturday night. They enjoyed life to the fullest. So, I always tell everybody this: if you want to celebrate Dime and Vinnie, you should be thankful every single day and kick as much ass as you possibly can! I enjoyed many Dimebag debacles that got me in the doghouse with the wife! [*Laughs*] And then I'd always have to send him in to talk with her to smooth things out — 'cause I knew she wasn't going to yell at Dime 'cause he was such a charming sweetheart of a guy!

At the end of the day, I'm far beyond honored that I got asked to help to celebrate the incredible greatness of Saint Dime and Saint Vinnie. I guess you could say I'm on a mission from God, just like Jake and Elwood! [*Laughs*] Joking aside, we're just four friends celebrating our buddies' memory and the amazing thing they created that brings so many people joy and happiness — just like their heroes did. That's why we still listen to Randy, Eddie, Sabbath, Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and Pantera — because it brings you to your happy place. It's a beautiful thing and to me, every show we've done in honor of Dime and Vinnie has been beyond special. Far beyond... 🎸

buddy, can you spare a dime solo?

WHEN ZAKK WYLDE NEEDED A HAND WITH SOME OF DIMEBAG'S GUITAR PARTS, WHERE DID HE TURN? TO OLA ENGLUND'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL, OF COURSE

IN THE VAST ocean of metal content that lurks within YouTube, Swedish six-stringer Ola Englund (the Haunted, Feared) is a major force, and deservedly so. He's also a huge Pantera fan — and many of his Dime-centric videos have amassed impressive views. In fact, they're so good that Zakk Wylde watched some of them when learning parts for the current Pantera celebration tour. "It's

funny to hear that a player I look up to would even bother checking out my stupid videos," Englund says. "It's come full circle in a way... Dimebag was my first real guitar hero. I heard the riff for 'Walk' when I was 15, and that was it. Best guitar tone and riff I've heard! I busted my ass that summer to be able to buy a Washburn Blackjack when I turned 16. There was no turning back after that."

What are your thoughts on the Pantera celebration tour and lineup?

Like a lot of people who love Pantera, when I first heard about it, it felt like a double-edged sword. I was like, "But you can't do it without Dimebag and Vinnie — Dimebag and Vinnie *are* Pantera." But, at the same time, Phil and Rex are also 50 percent of Pantera. Plus, as a fan, I felt this was the closest I'd get to seeing my favorite band again. You can be a gatekeeper, but we also need to keep the legacy of Pantera alive, the legacy of Dime and Vinnie. The best way to do that is to pay tribute to the brothers.

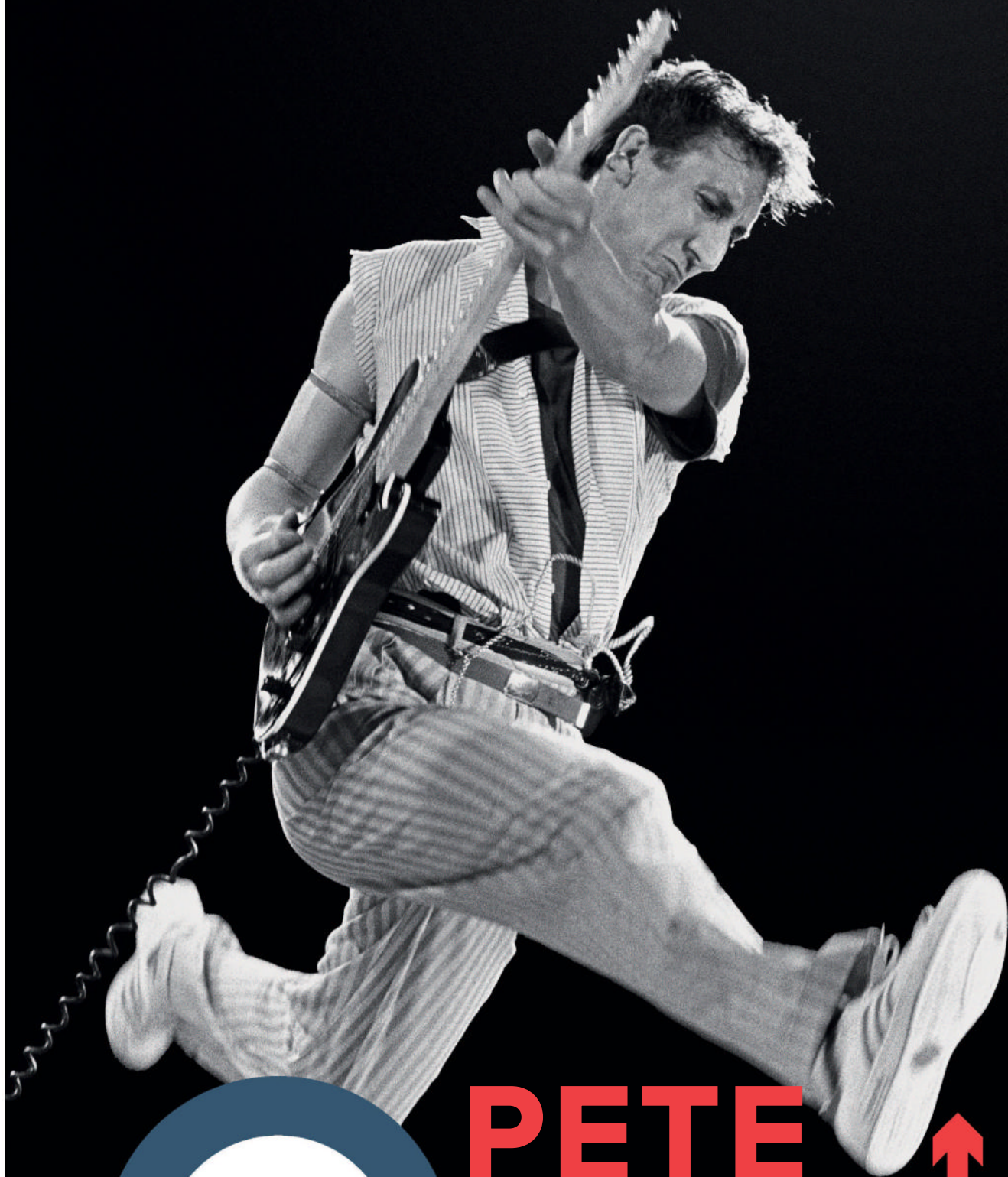
When I heard the lineup with Charlie [*Benante*] and Zakk, I felt, "That's the right way to do it." I'd probably say it's the only way to do it. As a fan, and I'm speaking for 15-year-old Ola here, Zakk is the only option. I don't want to see anybody else. Knowing Zakk and Dime were such good friends and that they spent so much time together, there's no one else who can do this like he can.

A lot of people have said you should be playing guitar in the Pantera tribute.

I'm extremely flattered by that, but no! It has to be Zakk. He's the guy. He's the rock star. There are plenty of guys who can play Dimebag guitar on YouTube, but they're not rock stars; they can't handle those shoes. Zakk can. Also, I want to see the band — I don't want to be up there! I want to be in the pit listening to that stuff being played live again; 15-year-old Ola has been longing for this. I can't wait!

— Nick Bowcott





**PETE
TOWNSHEND**



In an all-new interview, **The Who's** chief architect recalls the band's high-water mark, the album that never was, the album that almost wasn't but remains the band's calling card – and his enduring love for the guitar

Words Jeff Slate Photo By George Rose/Getty Images

During the golden age of rock 'n' roll, Pete Townshend helped define and redefine both the electric and acoustic guitar several times over. As The Who's guitarist, he pioneered an aggressive, almost punky approach to the guitar in the mid-1960s, at least a decade before punk was a genre. And his rampant destruction of his instrument on stage – which he later attributed to his studies at Ealing Art College of Gustav Metzger, the pioneer of auto-destructive art – became not just an expression of youthful angst but also a means of conveying ideas through musical performance.

"We advanced a new concept," Townshend wrote in his memoir. "Destruction is art when set to music."

It also set The Who apart from just about every one of their contemporaries, but most especially guitarists like Jimmy

Page, Peter Green and, of course, Townshend's friend Eric Clapton, who were peddling an English version of American blues back to the country of its origin.

"No-one who saw The Who at that time could deny that they were the best live band going," Richard Barnes, The Who's biographer and Townshend's flatmate at the time, recalled in 2021. "Even the biggest Kinks fan, if The Kinks and The Who were both playing in town, would go see The Who over The Kinks. They were a real show when no-one else was putting on a show. And that catapulted them into that rarified company."

Townshend's aggressive but melodic approach to the guitar, in a style that combined both lead and rhythm guitar, was hugely influential on guitarists from the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones to Guns N' Roses' Slash, and many others. Recently ranked No 37 on *Rolling*

Stone's 2023 list of 250 greatest guitarists of all time, he was also one of the first musicians to use large stacks of amplifiers and feedback as a musical tool, often ramming his guitar against the deafeningly loud speakers.

"Our managers signed Jimi Hendrix to their label and had me take him down to Jim Marshall's," Townshend told this writer in 1993, recalling a trip to the legendary amplifier designer's shop. "At the time I had two cabinets of four speakers each. Jimi bought four cabinets. He didn't *do* my act. He *stole* my act."

"Pete Townshend is one of my greatest influences," Rush's Alex Lifeson, a guitar virtuoso in his own right, said of Townshend's often underrated talent on the guitar. "More than any other guitarist, he taught me how to play rhythm guitar and demonstrated its importance, particularly in a three-piece band."

And as an acoustic guitarist, Townshend's staccato, cod-Flamenco approach and precise rhythm – often doubled with an electric rhythm guitar that pushed and pulled against drummer Keith Moon's brazen drumming – set a bar for players unmatched by anyone save, perhaps, Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones. It's a style of playing born from necessity, as Townshend describes it.

"Keith had spent so long playing the drums, but not being a drummer, being a decorator, being an interpreter, being somebody that created energy around what I was doing, I became very metronomic," Townshend tells us today. "I'm still very accurate."

But it is also a style that owes a huge debt not just to The Who's astonishing live performances of the era, but from Townshend's groundbreaking use of home recording as a way to demo and perfect the songs he was writing for The Who. As a result, Townshend's songwriting developed in leaps and bounds from the aggressive pop of *I Can't Explain* to the mini-opera *A Quick One (While He's Away)* and full-blown operatic aspirations of *Tommy*, which broke The Who as international superstars.

Eventually came the peerless sophistication of the songs from *Who's Next*, perhaps the greatest

rock 'n' roll album ever, and The Who at the peak of their considerable powers, as well as the rough elegance and power of Townshend's greatest songwriting achievement, *Quadrophenia*, taking the rock opera as far as it could go.

"I'd got my first really proper 3M tape machine," Townshend today recalls of that home studio-slash-workshop. "And I was using Dolby. I was using Dolby before recording studios were using Dolby. It wasn't innovation, it was just good luck. My company that made studios for people was based next to Dolby on Clapham in London, and so I knew Ray Dolby, and so I could work on my 8-track, but I could also do loads and loads of dumping – combining tracks – so I could add more and more elements."

Endurance Test

On a balmy October afternoon in France, Pete Townshend meets us to discuss *Who's Next*, The Who album that has always, and probably will always, define the band. His piercing blue eyes hidden behind wraparound shades, at 78, Townshend is still as animated as ever when discussing – and defending – his band.

"I don't think we've done a show since the 70s that didn't include at least three or four songs from it," Townshend says.

But *Who's Next* is also The Who album that almost wasn't. With his bandmates, not to mention management who also ran The Who's record label, champing at the bit for a big, bold follow-up to *Tommy*, Townshend, in between dates on a relentless touring schedule, dug in at his home studio – a luxury that was unheard of at the time.

"It rivalled Abbey Road, technically," he recalls, and started expanding his songwriting palette via the latest though ridiculously crude synthesizer technology. The results? *Lifhouse*.



"I was excited to have these [synth and organ] tools – that excitement translated into some interesting stuff. I was on a real high"

1. Another one bites the dust: Pete trashes a hybrid Telecaster on stage with The Who in Germany, 1967

2. Townshend's home studio was well ahead of its time, allowing him to make comprehensive demos of Who material

3. Pete's early flirtation with synths gave an electronic edge to Who songs like *Baba O'Riley*

Along with some of the best songs Townshend had ever written – *Baba O'Riley*, *Behind Blue Eyes*, *Bargain*, *Going Mobile* and *Won't Get Fooled Again* would all end up on *Who's Next*; *Naked Eye*, *Pure And Easy*, *Too Much Of Anything* and a host of others would trickle out during the era – over a couple of days in September 1970 he also wrote a futuristic script that foretells a planet on the verge of ecological collapse, with a population locked into virtual reality suits controlled by autocratic rulers and pacified by an endless stream of mind-numbing content.

While that may sound pretty easily digestible, if not downright prescient, today, even in the wake of the moon landing and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Townshend drew quizzical blanks from just about everyone he tried vainly to get onboard. The fact that the plot twist came in the guise of rock 'n' roll being outlawed, leading to a revolt and a stand-off at the *Lifhouse*, where music had allowed masses of people – who have ditched their "experience" suits – to congregate and merge into a single, universal mind, didn't help matters.

More than 50 years later, Townshend is in some ways still chasing his dream of the *Lifhouse* project, as a massive new 11-disc boxset entitled *Who's Next | Life*



PHOTO BY CHRIS MORPHET/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



2



3

4. A contact strip from The Who's performance at London's Rainbow Theatre in November 1971 shows Pete in full flight!



"[My home studio] rivalled Abbey Road, technically. I'd got my first really proper 3M tape machine, and I was using Dolby before recording studios"



House proves, coming complete with a remastered *Who's Next*, loads of Who tracks and a raft of home demos from the era, plus a book by Townshend and Who experts Andy Neill and Matt Kent, and a graphic novel expanding the story of *Lifeshouse*.

Along the way, *Lifeshouse* was never far from Townshend's mind. He nearly had a nervous breakdown during the early days of the project, barely sidestepping jumping out the window of the Manhattan hotel suite of one of his then managers Kit Lambert. And, after abandoning the *Lifeshouse* project in favour of the nine-song single-LP *Who's Next* album at producer Glyn Johns' urging, plus *Quadrophenia* and an aborted rock opera called *Long Live Rock*, Townshend enlisted The Who's singer, and then *au current* movie



PHOTO BY GUSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"I meet people in the street who say, 'I love *Tommy*.' But that didn't happen with *Lifeshouse* because it wasn't complete enough"

star, Roger Daltrey, to revisit the *Lifeshouse* script. Townshend fleshed out and updated the story with songs like *Slip Kid*, *Who Are You* and *Sister Disco* – which would go on to become Who staples – before giving up again.

Finally, at the turn of the century, Townshend released the *Lifeshouse Chronicles* boxset on his own Eel Pie label, which included home demos and even a radio play of *Lifeshouse* and a book, and performed two shows in London that once and for all put the pieces of Townshend's massive work into a cohesive narrative.

Still, like Brian Wilson's aborted *SMiLE* and so many other great, lost rock albums, *Lifeshouse* was really more an idea in Townshend's head than anything else.

"You're right that, like *SMiLE*, there's a sense of there being a lost concept," Townshend says. "Somebody wrote recently something that feels true but also feels sort of a little bit wonky, which is that *Lifeshouse*, as it exists, is an unfinished project, both as an experiment between artist and audience but also as a story, and also as an integrated series of songs

that helped to demonstrate and illustrate that story. It's basically just conceptual art. In other words, it's just coming up with an idea, putting it on paper, and then it not happening. And for me, I'm perfectly happy with that idea, but the fact is that there is no set of songs that tell the story. It's a very poetic idea, and that has never really properly come across. So, I meet people in the street, and they say, 'I love *Tommy*, I would listen to it when I was 13 years old, and it changed my life.' And that happened again with *Quadrophenia*, of course. But that didn't happen with *Lifeshouse* because it wasn't complete enough. It was just ideas that were unfinished."

In fact, the *Lifeshouse* recordings were strewn all over the place. There were songs on *Who's Next*, several on the 1974 compilation album *Odds & Sods*, and across B-sides, like the fantastic *Greyhound Girl* on the flipside of Townshend's 1980 hit *Let My Love Open The Door*. But it wasn't a cohesive project.

And, like Brian Wilson, Townshend had a serious mental breakdown during the making of what eventually became *Who's Next*. The members of The Who were at their most band-like at the time, but the pressure on Townshend, as the creative force and visionary and spokesperson, was intense.

Meanwhile, he kept getting thwarted. Co-manager Kit Lambert wanted to make a *Tommy* movie – so there were competing projects – so Townshend didn't have the man who had helped him realise the *Tommy* project. Very much on his own, even though he had a band that was functioning at its absolute peak, Townshend recalls his frustration as palpable.

As co-producer Glyn Johns recalls in his 2014 book, *Sound Man*, even as late as when he was brought on as producer, Townshend gave him not just a raft of demos but the script for *Lifeshouse*. Townshend clearly hadn't given up on his grand concept just yet.

"I was still hoping for a double-album," he recalls. "It became a tough time. But it was also a very important lesson for me. I'd given up, in a sense, on the idea of working with Kit, which was a very big thing. I still had the band, and the band was still behind me. So when Glyn took over, I was hoping that he would make a double-album. That was all. That's why I gave him the script. I sat down with him before, and he said, 'I really don't understand this at all.' And I just remember saying to him, 'Listen. I hope you don't feel I'm insulting you, but you really don't fucking need to. This is my project. Just do what you do.'"

5. The Gibson J-200 has played a role in many Townshend compositions and his enthusiasm for acoustic guitars is still evident today, with Collings, Fylde and Guild instruments in his collection

6. The *Lifehouse* project continually evaded completion but gave life to many of the songs on the *Who's Next* album

PHOTO BY TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"I didn't think that we would get to the end of the project and he would decide that the double-album was going to be a single album. And leave off *Pure And Easy!* I remember thinking that was like leaving *Amazing Journey* off *Tommy*. Because it's the song that sets the scene; that gives the story its backbone. Glyn chose *The Song Is Over* instead because it was a good closer to the album. He wasn't thinking about *Lifehouse*, he was thinking about a bunch of songs, and he made the decision based on that. But I decided to trust his instincts and his intuition – because by the time we got to the end of the recording, it was clear that Kit was gone for me, and that there was no way I was going to rescue the movie side of the project. And also, the idea that I might be able to do anything technological with the band had drifted into space. But remember, what we had invented was the use of backing tapes. And they fucking worked! And they worked so well partly because of Keith Moon. He didn't need a click. He was the click!"

Synth Horizons

Townshend's pioneering use of synthesizers, set against that often sparse acoustic/electric combination, gave The Who a new sound to play with, one that was, again, unlike any of the band's contemporaries.

"Because I was in a band with Keith Moon, I just had to hold it down. I had to be a metronomic, clear-cut, rhythmic player"

"It gave us this extra harmonic and musical implementation because we were just a three-piece band," Townshend explains. "We didn't even have a keyboard player. So it enriched our sound. And it was very, very exciting."

Although The Beatles had used a Moog on *Abbey Road* in 1969, when Townshend began writing the demos for what would become *Who's Next*, the use of synthesizers was both unheard of and nigh on impossible.

"Chris Thomas was assigned to help George Harrison figure out how to use the damn thing,"

Townshend says with a laugh, recalling those early synths to be large, unwieldy things. But Townshend was looking to augment the spare yet still relatively grand, guitar-based demos he was concocting.

7. In 1973 Pete managed to coax Eric Clapton out of his drug-induced hermitage for EC's comeback concert at The Rainbow

"I remember Leslie West saying, 'I prefer your licks to Eric's because he seems to be playing things he's picked up from other blues players'"

"When I got my first little EMS box, one of the first things I thought is, 'I can play flutes, I can play clarinets, I can play trumpets!'" he recalls. "They're funny little noises. But I wasn't thinking about East Coast type [or] Don Buchla, mad electronic music, or even the electronic music that I'd been listening to by people like Malcolm Cecil and Morton Subotnick and people like that. Or Terry Riley, which was astral, ecstatic, uplifting music. Or Subotnick, which was interesting and sometimes rhythmic. Instead, I discovered that these little machines allowed me to experiment with melody. Plus, I also had a Lowrey organ, rather than a Hammond, which people in rock loved so much, and all made exactly the same sounds. Only Garth Hudson of The Band played a Lowrey. And I had a Lowrey, and it made all these little thin trumpet sounds and little thin violin sounds. *Baba O'Riley* came from the marimba sound that was built into the Lowrey Berkshire that I owned at the time. So I was excited to have these tools, and I think that excitement translated into some pretty interesting stuff. I was on a real high."

Set against the relatively dry Gretsch 6120 that Joe Walsh had gifted him, *Baba O'Riley* was duly turned into the epic show-stopper it was destined to be.

"I kept the drums dry, I kept the bass clicky, I used the Lowrey as a decorative machine, not as a – sometimes I got the Leslie going and swirled it a bit – but the guitar work was often an afterthought," Townshend tells us. "On songs like *Behind Blue Eyes*, *Bargain*, and *Won't Get Fooled Again*, those songs began with guitar, and it's just me strumming away. And I've



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

always been really good at that. I don't think I was any better or worse at that than I'd been on *Pinball Wizard*. My acoustic work – I've had all of the great guitarists in the world, all of the great virtuosos in the world say to me, 'Pete, you're not in the Top 10 for virtuosity, but you're certainly No 1 as an acoustic rhythm player.' So, in a sense, that's something that just happened to me because I was in a band with Keith Moon. I just had to hold it down. I had to be a metronomic, clear-cut, rhythmic player."

Lifelong Love

Today, Townshend says he's still enamored with the guitar, and points around the room at some of the instruments he's been playing lately.

"I've got a Collings mandolin," he says, gesturing. "I've got a Fylde Ariel, an old Jazzmaster from 1958, one of the first, a brand-new short-scale Jaguar bass from Fender, which is incredibly good, a Guild 12-string, which is extraordinary and stays in tune over time, and I've got a J-200. And that will do me for here, this little studio that I have in France that I visit occasionally. I feel incredibly spoiled."

So how has Townshend's relationship with the guitar as a creative tool changed over time? And does he still have a sense of possibility in the instrument?

"Definitely!" he replies, emphatically. "What I'm happy

"Some of the surprises, some of the avoiding tricks and being willing to take risks is really what I still feel the guitar is great for"

about is that I can do two days of practice and learn some really flashy runs if I want to, though I'm still stuck with the old order, which is trying to make sure that I don't let my fingers play a series of clichés. I remember Leslie West saying to me about Eric Clapton: 'I prefer your licks, Pete, to Eric's, because Eric seems to be playing things that he's learned, that he's picked up from other blues players.' And I think that is a fair comparison, although I have seen Eric play live, where he really goes sky high. I think one of the things



8. The Who in action at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970

that all guitar players of today are intimidated by is these young guys on Instagram that shred to hell and back, or to heaven and back, I should say, who started when they were six. But we are just our fingers. So The Who have just done a tour of the UK, and I don't expect people to go on YouTube and get their minds blown, but I do think that some of the playing, some of the solos, some of the chordwork, some of the surprises, some of the avoiding tricks and being willing to take risks is really what I still feel the guitar is great for."

Of course, most people know Townshend as a songwriter, or perhaps as the flamboyant, high-jumping, guitar-smashing showman of The Who's heyday. But while he's no virtuoso, Townshend is a peerless rhythm player who's made an indelible mark on guitarists of all stripes over the past 60 years. So, what's his latest guitar discovery?

"The other day, I thought, 'It's time for me to try a Charvel, or one of these sort of heavy metal guitars,'" he confesses. "I've stuck with Eric Clapton-style Strats for such a long time now, though I do pick up Les Pauls and SGs and I love them, but they don't allow me enough scope and change on stage. So I've always thought, 'If I buy a Charvel or a PRS or any of those super-fast new jazz guitars, I'm going to have one sound and

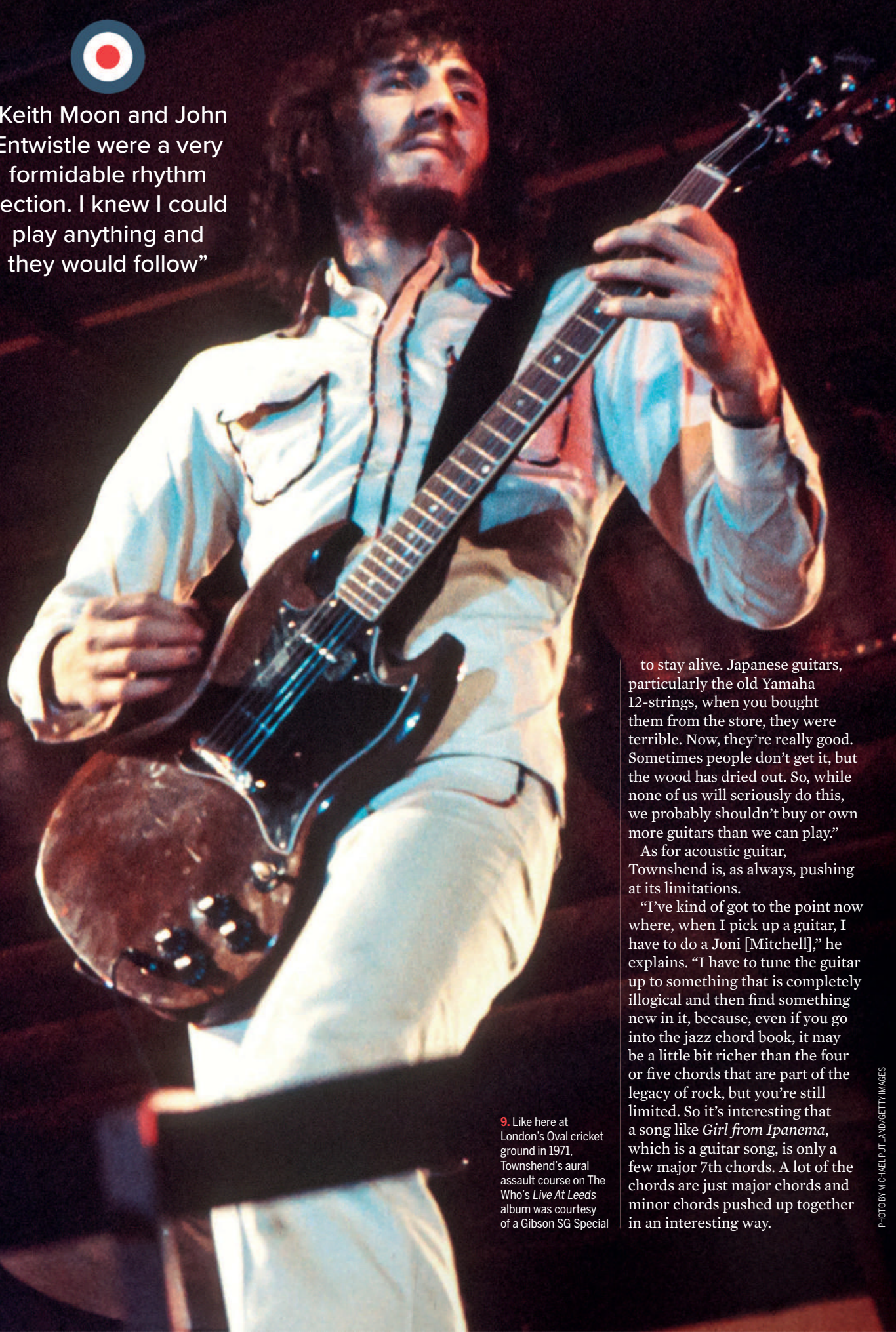
it's going to be finger memory.' But the other day, I thought, 'Fuck it. I'll try one out.' I bought a Jackson. I didn't know that they were owned by Charvel and that Charvel are now owned by Fender, but I bought a Jackson. I got it out of the box and it's got very light strings on and a notch where the strings are locked down, and it's got the strings locked at the other end, too, and you tune them with little buttons. And so, the whammy bar is extraordinary! I was playing faster. No question. I was playing at three times the speed that I normally play at. And when I did fingering, drumming, it didn't stop. It didn't go *thunk*; it went *ding*. Because these guitars are built for a particular kind of thing. So I'm still learning and I'm still having fun with guitars."

And does he still collect?

"I had [guitar tech] Alan Rogan in my life for so long, and whenever we finished a tour, he would always buy me a guitar," Townshend recalls. "And, of course, he bought me and gave me some fantastic guitars. I've never been really that interested in owning a '57 Les Paul or anything. I picked up a few in my life and thought, 'What's the story here?' Because what's important about guitars is that they need to be played, and I think, unfortunately, it's difficult to play them all properly. They need to be played



“Keith Moon and John Entwistle were a very formidable rhythm section. I knew I could play anything and they would follow”



to stay alive. Japanese guitars, particularly the old Yamaha 12-strings, when you bought them from the store, they were terrible. Now, they're really good. Sometimes people don't get it, but the wood has dried out. So, while none of us will seriously do this, we probably shouldn't buy or own more guitars than we can play.”

As for acoustic guitar, Townshend is, as always, pushing at its limitations.

“I've kind of got to the point now where, when I pick up a guitar, I have to do a Joni [Mitchell],” he explains. “I have to tune the guitar up to something that is completely illogical and then find something new in it, because, even if you go into the jazz chord book, it may be a little bit richer than the four or five chords that are part of the legacy of rock, but you're still limited. So it's interesting that a song like *Girl from Ipanema*, which is a guitar song, is only a few major 7th chords. A lot of the chords are just major chords and minor chords pushed up together in an interesting way.

9. Like here at London's Oval cricket ground in 1971. Townshend's aural assault course on The Who's *Live At Leeds* album was courtesy of a Gibson SG Special

“So the discovery in the work with guitar can be about chords, it can be about composition, it can be about harmony, it can be about shredding. But the thing about shredding is that thing about letting your fingers do the work. It’s difficult when you’ve watched, for example, some of the great shredders performing live, and they look disconnected. You think, ‘Are they really playing this or are their fingers playing it?’ In a way, if their fingers are playing it, that’s okay because then what they’re doing is they’re listening. They’re not playing, they’re listening, and that creates another sort of interesting fact about what’s called ‘found music’, when we sample and we listen to music and we’re inspired by it because we’re listening.

“Keith Moon was a nutty drummer, but he listened. John Entwistle, too. So they were a very formidable rhythm section. And I knew I could play anything and they would follow. John Entwistle would know the notes that I was playing sometimes before I did! So the importance of *listening* is vital.”

So, does Townshend think that, since those speed players are less listening, more performing, that’s why there’s less of a lyrical nature to that speed playing? Or is it the nature of the beast, that if you’re playing that fast, it’s hard to be melodic and lyrical?

“Well, Prince could shred and he often would play a really soulful blues track, and then in order to get from one bit of blues to the other, he would do an



extraordinary shred,” Townshend counters, emphatically. “So it was a bit flashy [vocalising]. Maybe it was just to show he could do it. So, I don’t know. I think it’s just the disconnect that has happened sometimes. And where you see it stop is when that kind of artist, and there are many on Instagram – one of my favorites is a guy called Angel Vivaldi, who’s a brilliant, brilliant player – but when he works with other musicians, he changes. He actually listens to them and fits in. He can play anything that he wants

10. Lately Pete has shunned Fender Strats and Teles in favour of more contemporary brands like Jackson

11. Still rocking hard on stage with Who bandmate Roger Daltrey in Barcelona, June 2023



“When I pick up a guitar now, I have to do a Joni. I have to tune up to something completely illogical and then find something new in it”

to play. And there are a couple of others that I follow as well, but a lot of them are just solo musicians that have mastered their craft and got really, really fast.

“So, I think what needs to happen is they need to be fitted into the music world, somewhere other than Instagram. That’s the challenge for them. I think it’s the challenge right now, as it is for a lot of electronic music musicians: they are very isolated, working on their own.”

As we wind up our hours-long chat about all things The Who, *Lifehouse*, expanding guitar music by way of synthesizers, and the guitar itself, we ask Townshend to reflect on his 60-year love affair with the instrument that made him a household name.

“I swing my arm 15 times, I have an adrenaline rush, and I just let my fingers fly,” he says of his approach, even to this day. “But I go back to *Live At Leeds* and I’m all over the place. I watch my hands and go, ‘Fucking hell.’ Because most of it is bum notes, but it’s also incredibly powerful stuff. So I’m enjoying learning to both appreciate and play the guitar, still, to this day. Because you never stop learning. So, yes, I still love the instrument and, yes, I still have hundreds. I mean, literally!”



The multi-format Super Deluxe edition of *Who’s Next* | *Life House* is available now on UMR www.thewho.com

WHISPERS

CHELSEA WOLFE and BRYAN TULAO

IN THE

break down the dark, swirling masterpiece that is

ECHO

SHE REACHES OUT TO SHE REACHES OUT TO SHE

CHAMBER

STORY BY JON WIEDERHORN PHOTO BY DAVE SIMPSON/WIREIMAGE

Chelsea Wolfe
— with her
ubiquitous
Gibson ES-335
— on stage
in Auckland,
New Zealand,
June 10, 2022



WHEN

multi-faceted iconoclast Chelsea Wolfe describes her new album, *She Reaches Out to She Reaches Out to She*, as a “musical rebirth,” she’s not just talking about a radical development in tone and timbre. She means everything from the creative process to the thematic content. And, as an artist tapped into music, literature, film, philosophy and spirituality, she’s well aware that birth never comes without pain.

“Pain and struggle on a musical level is never a bad thing because it usually leads to some sort of tension that breaks into something unexpected that maybe no one involved had previously thought of,” she says. “For us, that resulted in a really unique record.”

She Reaches Out to She Reaches Out to She isn’t just a unique release. It seems more like a watershed moment from a musical artist whose creations have previously incorporated elements of doom metal, indie punk, blackened folk and electronic music.

If you picture PJ Harvey, Bjork, Portishead and Trent Reznor being fed nothing but Radiohead’s *Kid A* for a year, that offers a vague idea of how different *She Reaches Out to She Reaches Out to She* is from any of Chelsea Wolfe’s previous albums.

The record marks the first time Chelsea Wolfe has worked with TV on the Radio co-founder and producer Dave Sitek, who took a hands-on approach in the studio.

With Wolfe’s sometimes quite reluctant blessings, Sitek modernized and transformed the raw songs from ethereal demos to haunting soundscapes of deconstructed instrumentation, textural guitars, abundant keyboards, electronic beats and pulsing samples.

There are still remnants of the band’s echoey, layered fuzz



and the occasional chuggy riffs in songs like “Dusk” and “Whispers in the Echo Chamber,” but many of Chelsea Wolfe’s recognizable guitar elements are downplayed and woven into a web of atmospheric rhythms, trip-hop beats and digital noise that complement and draw the focus to Wolfe’s mystical and heart-rending vocals.

“I feel like I changed so much as a person from the time that I originally conceptualized this album to the point when it actually came into shape in the studio with Dave,” Wolfe says. “So I was really open to watching it change and become what it wanted to be. I kind of think of this album as its own being, which willed itself into existence over time through all sorts of experimentation and a willingness to embrace the unexpected.”

Wolfe started working on songs for the album way back in 2019, using mostly her 1977 Gibson ES-335 and writing note-by-note melodies that created a framework for her vocals. She and the band continued to work on the compositions remotely throughout the pandemic, and over time, she gradually tapped into other creative techniques that provided more atmosphere.

“In 2021, I did this full-on ritual where I set up a circle of pedals and I stayed inside of it and wrote a bunch of demos,” she says. “When I wrote ‘The Liminal,’ I was using a lot of experimental pedals, like Death by Audio’s Echo Dream 2, and I had the Electro-Harmonix Mel 9 Tape Replay Machine, which turned the guitar into this chorus of voices.”

Along the way, Wolfe sought inspiration from various unconventional spiritual techniques, including intense meditation, reading moon cycle progressions, tarot cards readings and any number of sundry occult rituals. “I’m not a Wiccan, but I do practice elements of witchcraft, which is essentially ritualizing the way you live and the way you approach things,” she says. “It’s all very personal stuff to me, and it’s not about predicting the future or anything. But if I get stuck on a song, I’ll ask the tarot cards for guidance or to help me figure out what the song wants to be about.”

While she was integrally involved in assembling guitar parts for the new album demos, Wolfe put away her guitar when the band entered the studio and handed all six-string duties to lead guitarist Bryan Tulao, who joined in 2017, four albums into Chelsea Wolfe’s career — she released her first record, *The Grime and the Glow*, in 2010. Separated from his bandmates by the Covid lockdown, Tulao recorded his guitar parts and sent the files to his bandmates. That’s when the breakdown in communication began.

“They would send me a really minimal guitar part without vocals or a drum beat, and I would build some ideas around it,” Tulao says. “Each time I sent something back, I’d say, ‘Well, I don’t know if this is what we want. It’s just an idea, but there are a million other ways we could go with this.’ And I wouldn’t hear anything from them for a while. That happened with everything.”

Some of the files Tulao worked from included loose drum beats as a guide, but nothing gave him a clear vision for the album. So he kept adding parts and emailing them over. He waited for feedback from Wolfe but... nothing. The more he wrote, the less confident he became. “I thought, ‘Man, they hated it.’ But it’s okay. I’ll do something else.” Then, about three weeks after I’d sent them



something they’d say, ‘Oh hey, that was great.’ And I’d go, ‘Well, since then I did some other stuff. Can I send you that?’ And they’d go, ‘No, it’s really good.’ And then they’d give me something else to work on. And it was the same thing — something really minimalist that I could do 100 things with. There were definitely some big wall-of-sound guitar sections I put in there that just disappeared.”

While Tulao was wrangling with what type of mood to put on spare compositions that lacked direction, the other members of Chelsea Wolfe — Wolfe, multi-instrumentalist and

co-founder Ben Chisholm, drummer Jess Gowrie — were debating about how much they wanted to alter the compositions, which Sitek felt should be radically revamped and heavily saturated with keyboards. At first, not everyone agreed. Worse, Tulao was left mostly in the dark.

“There was a bit of a contrast between Dave Sitek’s desire to go for a very minimalistic take on the songs, and then our usual inclination as a band to build layer upon layer,” Wolfe says. “The compromise came in creating these pockets of void-like space where there would just be a synth or two going on with some pattern from

the guitars and then contrasting that with these swirling, visceral portals of sound.”

Wolfe worked with Chisholm to cut and paste guitar and drum parts to make the songs more unsettling. Then Sitek took the process further by running Tulao’s passages through a modular synth wall — which rendered them almost unrecognizable — or replacing them completely with new keyboard passages.

“We used The Pulsar 23 drum machine and Lyra-8 [organismic synth] a lot. Also, we used this old Behringer Arp 2600 synth to replay something that started as a guitar line,” Wolfe says. “So what began as these guitar songs got transformed into this other stuff, but it was still rooted in guitar. It was a totally new way to work, so there was some clashing. But then, we all saw that these ups and downs in dynamic range and the mix of minimalism and chaos started to make sense and work together in a way that reflected how we were all feeling.”

Since he was the musician most dramatically affected by the transformation, Tulao went through something of an emotional pinball machine. He tried to contribute to the new methodology by using a wide range of pedals, including the Earth-Quaker Devices Palisades overdrive, the Death by Audio Apocalypse fuzz and a Chicago Iron Tycobrahe Octavia octaver. He wasn’t off base. Everything fit into Sitek’s open-concept blueprint, just not as Tulao had originally intended them.

“Initially, it was a bit surprising to hear what they did with my parts,” Tulao says. “During the last couple of days of recording, Dave was doing a rough mix, and I could hear that my guitars weren’t there. I said, ‘Are my guitars going to get added back in there for the final mix?’ And he said, ‘I don’t think so.’ I was a bit taken aback. But I’ve come a long way since then, and now I think all the weird guitar parts sound really amazing, even if you can’t tell they’re guitars.”

Once *She Reaches Out to She* was recorded, Chelsea Wolfe had to figure out how they were going to play the new songs live. They didn’t want to use too many samples directly from the album, so they cherry-picked the sounds they wanted to trigger with

drums and encouraged Tulao to fill in the remaining space with new guitar parts. So the guitarist revamped his pedal board and revised his playing style.

“The first time we got together to rehearse, I came in with some synth pedals so I could emulate the synth parts on guitar. And Chelsea said, ‘You know, the guitars don’t have to sound like synth parts. They can totally sound like guitar,’” Tulao says. “I really liked that idea, and it broadened the spectrum much more for how creative I could be when I reimagined all of these parts for guitar.”

“I love that these things that started as guitar parts became synth parts for the album, and now they’re becoming different kinds of guitar parts for the live show,” Wolfe says.

“I like to loop parts and build on them in different ways, using harmonies or unusual tonal stuff,” he says. “I probably drive my neighbors nuts because there are times I’ll spend an hour hitting a C chord over and over and adding reverb and delay to see if I can find exactly the right tone.”

On tour, Wolfe will strap on a guitar for the older songs. She’s bringing her trusted 335, a hollow-body Gretsch and a Taylor acoustic. Tulao also plans to travel with his three favorite guitars — a Fender Troy Van Leeuwen Jazzmaster, a Fender Mustang with P90s and a Dunable Yeti. “I don’t want to be excessive, but I don’t want to keep having to tune between songs,” he says. “And there are a few different tunings on this album.”

Those tunings include D standard and drop C, and Tulao likes to mix them with more unconventional tunings. “A lot of them are tunings in my head,” he says. “I don’t know if anyone else plays them, but I like the way they sound. I mess around with the strings until I find a weird sound I like. Sometimes it’s as sim-

Lead guitarist BRYAN TULAO has been diving down a rabbit hole of ambience and experimentation. He has pulled out old boxes of BOSS and MXR PEDALS and stacked them with newer boutique effects to generate ambient swells and unconventional tones

“That’s an example of how this album is a reinvention and a rebirth. For me, these songs really demanded to be lived. I would write a song and then something would happen where I really had to live that song out. They weren’t going to let me get away without actually feeling them. I wrote ‘Everything Turns Blue’ about leaving a toxic relationship because I had seen someone really close in my life leave a toxic relationship and she talked to me a lot about it. I wrote that about her experience, and then I experienced something very similar and had to leave a toxic relationship, which was hard for me, but it was really interesting that I had to go through that after I wrote the song.”

To create so many innovative brand new arrangements for the songs live, Tulao has been diving down a rabbit hole of ambience and experimentation. He has pulled out old boxes of Boss and MXR pedals and stacked them with newer boutique effects to generate ambient swells and unconventional tones.

ple as having a string tuned just a little bit off, and when you play a chord it doesn’t quite sound right. It gives the songs a fuller, more unusual feel and sometimes I play octaves, so they ring out a little more prominently.”

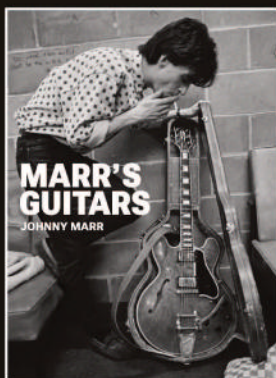
Having just experienced an emotional rebirth with *She Reaches Out to She Reaches Out to She*, Wolfe is excited to push the band’s sonic boundaries even further in the future. She has already mapped out ideas for Chelsea Wolfe’s next album and plans to fully dive into them after the band finishes touring. She is also finalizing plans for a collaboration with one of her favorite indie bands but can’t yet reveal who. Wolfe has always enjoyed working on other projects. In 2021, before the most arduous sessions with Sitek, she collaborated with hardcore band Converge on the record *Bloodmoon*. She also teamed up with Tyler Bates for a song for the soundtrack to the horror film *X*, and she continues to work with multi-instrumentalist Jess Gowrie on the project *Mrs. Piss*, which released *Self-Surgery* in 2020.

“I love writing in the studio,” Wolfe says. “Working in that zone and being all up in my head comes more naturally to me than being onstage. And I love the challenge of sharing ideas with other people and doing different kinds of stuff with them. I think that’s part of the way that I can continue to grow as a musician.”

“It’s all very personal stuff to me, and it’s not about predicting the future or anything.”
Wolfe says. “But if I get stuck on a song, I’ll ask the tarot cards for guidance or to help me figure out what the song wants to be about”



Johnny Marr — somewhere in North America — with a Gibson Les Paul Custom during the Smiths' *The Queen Is Dead* tour, 1986; [below] Marr — as seen on the cover of *Marr's Guitars* — with his 1960 Gibson ES-355



Citizens of Planet Marr

In a new book, **SMITHS** great **Johnny Marr** traces his entire career through the prism of his amazing collection of guitars. Why don't all our guitar heroes do this?

BY ANDREW DALY PHOTO BY NALINEE DARMRONG

Johnny Marr HAS long been known as “the man who would not solo.” But that’s kinda inaccurate, as Marr has soloed, sometimes in decidedly sing-song fashion, like on the Smiths’ “Shoplifters of the World,” for example. So maybe, Marr should be known as “the man who used crystal-clear arpeggios and interesting chord inversions rather than pulling off dive bobs via big-ass amps” instead. Then again, legends via folklore aren’t born through literalism.

Anyway, as per the perpetual positive vibes slung Marr’s way, we can agree that he’s the proverbial king of the anti-heroes — regardless of whether he solos. None of that has mattered to Marr, though, as he continues to craft landscape-defining indie music. But beyond that music, Marr’s life has been defined by utter devotion to all things six-string.

Marr is so intertwined with his now-massive collection

of curios that he’s decided to celebrate them via *Marr’s Guitars* [HarperCollins, 2023], a 288-page book that reads more like a life story than an art project. To that end, Marr agrees. “I’m glad it reads that way, because it’s basically my life story through the lens of photographing my guitars. The original inspiration came through photo shoots with Pat Graham while he was working on a book called *Instrument*. I recognized his unique way of photographing guitars, which I found very beautiful. Pat takes these close-up, abstract shots that show a bit of rust on the bridge or a scuff on the neck, and I was fascinated by that. I originally wanted *Marr’s Guitars* to be full of abstract photos, but as more guitars were photographed, it evolved.”

If you've been following along with Marr, you'll know he's almost never without his trusty Fender Jaguar. It's understandable, as he has done some incredible things with the guitar that figuratively and literally bears his signature. When asked what drew him to the Sixties-tinted off-set, Marr says, "The Jag, specifically my signature Jag, is a cross between a Gretsch and a Rickenbacker. And it plays like a Fender, but sonically, it's like playing all three. It's completely custom-made to sound like me. Like the Rickenbacker, the Jag made me play like *me*. When I picked up Isaac Brock's [Modest Mouse] '63 Jag while writing "Dashboard," it was life changing. And here I am still playing the Jag. I don't even like guitar changes in my live set."

Jag devotion aside, putting together Marr's *Guitars* has re-established Marr's connection with many long-relegated axes in his extensive collection. "When I picked up my Epiphone Casino that I hadn't played in 25 years, I was transported back to the last time I played it. When I grabbed my green Fender Tele I got in '84, I remembered the clothes I wore when I got it. It's hard to explain; guitar players will know what I'm talking about."

That "hard to explain" thing is precisely what Marr's *Guitars* is about. Sure, Marr has a massive, covet-worthy collection of guitars, but if we step outside the grandeur and dig into the crux of the thing, undoubtedly, one can understand the relationship. More so than any other instrument, a guitar in hand can transport the player to a time when a literal millisecond defined a feeling.

"There's tiny little messages you get from your brain when you put your hand on a neck," Marr says. "You expect it to be slim, and it's not. It's like, 'Oh, yeah, this is like a 1960 neck.' Or you pick up a Tele, and you're like, 'I was expecting this to be much lighter,' but you remember why it's not."

Marr smiles before adding, "And when you plug it in, you hear that sound and the nuances that make old, non-generic guitars different. The pickups are hand wound, and human beings carved out the neck. You forget how individual guitars are and how they get that character — until you pick them up again."

"A vintage guitar isn't rad because it's old and cool," he says. "It's about the unusual things that — as soon as you grab it — make you say, 'Okay, yeah, that's right. I remember that about this guitar.'"

A few photos from Marr's *Guitars* [clockwise from left]: circa 1984 Fender Telecaster Giffin Custom Korina, green burst; a very well-broken-in 1971 Martin D-28; sunburst 1951 Gibson L-5CES; black 1965 Fender Jaguar; gold 1952 Gibson ES-295; between the frets of a 1961 Silvertone 1415; a heavily modified 1978 Fender Stratocaster ("When Noel Gallagher and I went to a guitar shop after a long night out, I saw that guitar, and it made total sense to me," Marr says)



Tell me about how you came upon your Rickenbacker 330.

I got it when the Smiths started taking off. It was the first "Does this mean I've made it?" thing I got. Before that, I had been playing a Gretsch [Chet Atkins] Super Axe and constantly snapping strings because I was tuned up a whole step. I was forever snapping strings, and when the band got a deal, I got the Rickenbacker to be my "backup guitar," but that changed because it was better than my "main guitar." [Laughs]

Did you immediately know it was special?

I knew it would make me play a certain way about chords and arpeggios. I knew the strength of the Smiths in those early years was the chord progressions I was using, and I didn't want to do anything that reminded me — or anyone else — of pentatonic stuff. The Rickenbacker steered me in the harmonic direction of unusual arpeggios and chord changes. It was an excellent instinctive choice; I've had friends buy Rickenbackers, and they're never as good as mine. It turns out that in the early Eighties, Rickenbacker made some particularly good guitars.

Have you figured out why?

I used to think it was the finish. But then Martin Kelly

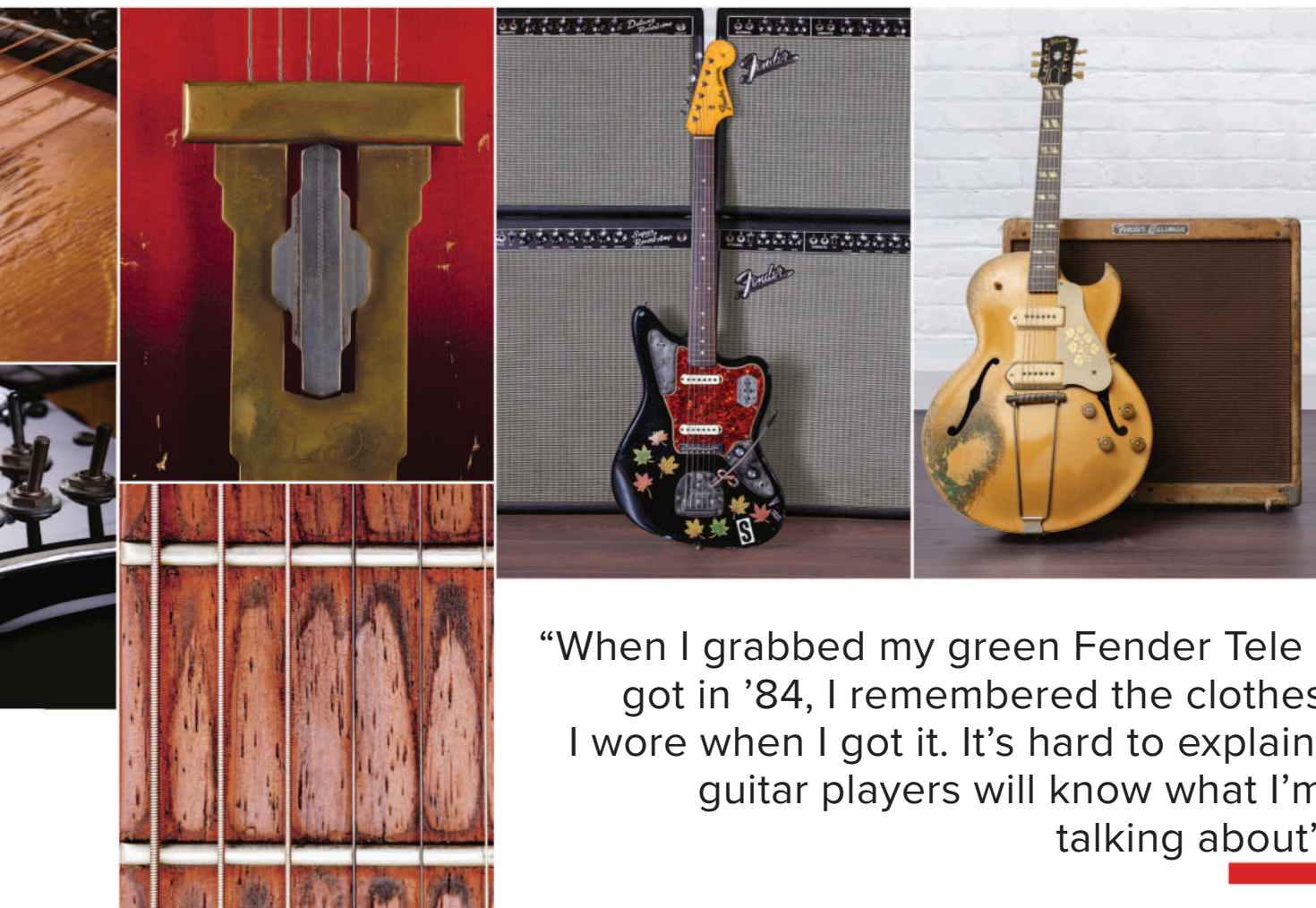
[musician, label boss] told me that John Hall took over Rickenbacker in '84 and spent 18 months getting all the specifications improved. And it's often said that '86 is the vintage year, but I bought mine in '84 when John Hall took over the company, and it's been great. I've always had an instinct that those few years in the Eighties were particularly good, and I was right. Those were the comeback years for Rickenbacker.

And how about the 12-string sunburst ES-335 used during the *Strangeways, Here We Come* sessions?

At that point, I liked 12-string guitars, but like almost every other player on the planet, I learned that they took some application. I had been playing a Rickenbacker, and a 12-string was a hassle for an impatient guy like me, who was now working with some impatient tech. I had to get used to it, and it was a bitch keeping it in tune, especially those Sixties ones. But when I discovered the ES-335 12-string, I said, "Okay, let's give this a go," and it immediately clicked. It was a big guitar, but the humbuckers were dialed down and a little darker. That was the guitar I gave Bernard [Butler] from Suede, who remains the custodian of that guitar.

Do you subscribe to the idea that we're only temporary stewards of our guitars, as the best guitars will outlast us?

That's a lovely notion, and I agree with that, but that's not why I've given guitars



“When I grabbed my green Fender Tele I got in '84, I remembered the clothes I wore when I got it. It's hard to explain; guitar players will know what I'm talking about”

away. I gave them away because I'm close with people like Bernard, Noel [Gallagher] and [Radiohead's] Ed [O'Brien], and I did it as a sign of respect. It was an act of sharing because I'm close to them. As you can see from the book, I've got a lot of guitars, so it was a way of letting go and letting my friends love them. But I will say the Oasis thing with Noel was different because in the very early days, they'd only played a few shows, and no one knew they'd be so big. I just liked Noel and wanted to help him as he was just starting. When I was starting, I got a helping hand, and I wanted to help a fellow Mancunian, Irish fellow, so I gave him the Les Paul I wrote “Panic” on.

These days, you're most often seen with your Fender Jaguar. Does it carry the same cache as some of the guitars you've had longer?

Oh, there's no competition when it comes to that. No guitar will ever come close to the Jag because I've played it exclusively for years. I've had these moments with the Jag, like doing the [James] Bond thing with Billie Eilish, the *Inception* thing, and playing Glastonbury. When I had 60,000 people singing “There Is a Light That Never Goes Out” back at me... I'll never forget

that because it was so brilliant. As for the older guitars, I became famous for using those through photographs from the Eighties, and they were close to me. But nothing comes close to the journey I've had with the Jag.

Is there one guitar of yours that people don't pay enough attention to?

One guitar that people who have followed me probably know about but maybe don't realize is such a big deal is my '85 Gibson Les Paul. It's the cherry red one I got when the Smiths were about to start recording *Meat Is Murder*. I got it to write on and used it a lot during that album. Before the Jag days, that Les Paul was on more records than any other guitar I owned. Many people think I was doing it all on the Rickenbacker in the Eighties, but a lot of the clean arpeggio stuff was done on that Les Paul.

One oddball guitar I can recall is the nine-pickup Strat used in your “Spirit, Power, and Soul” video.

Ah, yes. [Laughs] That was created by some crazy loon, who I imagine is somewhere in the north of England; they did that to a guitar. I got that Strat in the early Nine-

ties, while I was out with a young Noel Gallagher. Back then, I used to drink, and when Noel and I went to a guitar shop after a long night out, I saw that guitar, and it made total sense to me. But the thing about that guitar is it sounds terrific! There are nine on/off switches and nine out-of-phase positions. She's a guitar tech's nightmare, but I used it on [2022's] *Fever Dreams Pts. 1-4*, and I wrote “Spirit, Power, and Soul” on it.

Are there any guitars or tones you're still chasing?

The answer is not in buying another guitar, only because I bought one a few days ago. But I am sort of working on a sound... I'm chasing a sound I hope to use on the next record. You can have all these things, like a Uni-Vibe; I can have that, but I'll only ever sound like Jimi Hendrix, you know? As the years go by, it gets harder to do things that haven't been done, and you end up sounding like yourself anyway. So there's always a bit of chasing, but maybe the point of it all is adventure. I look around at all this tech, and I remind myself not to let it overtake me. I love adventure, but what I love most is the element of mystery that comes with it. 🎸



“IF I KNEW I WAS GONNA INFLUENCE THOUSANDS OF GUITAR PLAYERS, I WOULD’A PRACTICED MORE!”
EX-KISS LEGEND **ACE FREHLEY** TAKES A STRUT
DOWN MEMORY LANE

BY ANDREW DALY

FIRST KISS

With no musical training and a restless personality, there are a lot of assumptions thrown around when it comes to “Space” Ace Frehley. Some are true, but most, if not all, are unfounded. His detractors would declare Frehley unreliable and rudimentary. But if we look back, he never missed a single Kiss show. And as far as his playing goes, Frehley is consid-

ered a pillar of rock and metal, especially within the guitar community. How’s that for rudimentary?

Through his patented use of “dinosaur bends” and a torrential fury of frenetic notes, a.k.a. total fretboard domination, Frehley created an individualistic sound that’s impossible to duplicate. But that’s not all; he’s authentic as they come as a personality, making him a

lovable character that shredders and slow-burners alike aspire to.

But back in the Seventies, when Frehley was a young gun with a beer in one hand and a Les Paul in another, he couldn’t have imagined it. “I’m always flattered when people tell me I influenced them,” he says. “If I knew I was gonna influence thousands of guitar players, I woulda practiced more.

PHOTO: ROBIN PLATZER/IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



Ace Frehley on stage
with Kiss at NYC's
Madison Square Garden,
July 25, 1979

[Laughs] I laugh, but that's the truth. I didn't know I would become this iconic guitar player that so many people would listen to. I've had so many players come up to me and say, 'You are the reason I play guitar,' and I'm always like, 'Wow...'

Stunning as it is to the 72-year-old Bronx native, it rings true. On the strength of classics like "Strutter," "Deuce," "Strange Ways" and "Shock Me," Frehley unknowingly developed integral style elements that would define the across-the-board progression of rock guitar. But to do that, first, he had to couple up alongside Paul Stanley. When asked what the secret sauce was, he says, "More than anything, it was chemistry. But it's hard to say; it's always that way with those things. I do know that the little things about my style fit alongside Paul's well."

"Paul is a great rhythm player, and I am, too," Frehley says. "When we did chord work together, I'd play an octave up, so I wasn't doubling him. That came naturally, like during 'Strutter,' it's there. Paul is playing the low parts, and I'm doing the octaves. I liked to thicken up the song, which Paul agreed with. It just made sense."

Frehley left Kiss for the second and final time in 2002, but his imprint is scrawled in indelible ink across the band. Some deny it, others ignore it, but the fact remains. Still, Frehley can't be bothered with any of that these days. And with five solo records in the bank since leaving Kiss, and another, *10,000 Volts*, which Frehley calls "the best thing he's done since the '78 solo record," due in February, it's easy to see why.

Looking back on it all, true to form, Frehley doesn't get too deep: "It's a nice sentiment, but I don't look at myself as some brilliant guitar player," he says. "I've never taken a lesson, and my sense of melody came from singing in the church choir. So, whatever I have, it can't be taught. You've gotta have it in you. Either you've got it, or you've got nothing at all."

Did you have a guitar-related vision when you joined Kiss?

My guitar sound hasn't changed after all these years, so the template has stayed the same. If you follow what I do now, you'll get it. But I was always old school, played through a Marshall turned up to 10, and played a Les Paul for the most part. That's my sound, you know? The exception would be when I played one of my smoking guitars; I'd have repetitive delay when I did that.

I assume effect pedals didn't factor in much, as I've never seen them at your feet.

I use them a little, but I'm mostly a guitar-into-an-amp type of player. But when I have used effects, like fuzz, wah and drive, my roadies would run that stuff because I can't have pedals on the floor; I'd trip over them. [Laughs] You'd be hard pressed to find a photo of me playing with pedals on the floor; I'd be shocked if you could find one. It's rock 'n' roll, so I don't need 'em much anyway.

Paul Stanley has often spoken about creating "one big guitar" sound in Kiss's early years. Was that your viewpoint, too?

If you read what many people have written over the years — especially about the early days — most say I was the

sound of Kiss. And the thing with that is I never really worked hard on it. I just took a Les Paul, plugged it into a Marshall, and away I went. I get what Paul means when he says that, but there's more to it regarding how I get harmonics. But to me, it was pretty much a no-brainer to do that.

One thing that's not often mentioned is your use of octaves in Kiss's early music.

Oh, yeah, Paul would play barre chords and introduce the song, and I'd try to play the octave of his part. That would make the whole song thicker, rather than me doubling Paul's parts. Paul and I were cognizant of that, did the octave thing, and it worked well. It's cool that you picked that out; it doesn't get called out too often when people ask me about early Kiss music.

Regarding solos, did you have an approach?

All my solos, well, 90 percent of my solos were off the cuff. As long as I've been doing this, I empty my head, ask someone to tell me what key it's in and go for it. It might take me three, four, five or even six passes, but that's the way I do my best work. If I'm relaxed, and nothin' is botherin' me, and I can empty my head, the solos usually come out great. That's how it was in the Seventies, and it's the same today. If I'm not worried about stuff happening around me, I'm usually fine when doing a solo.

Your solos are thematic to the point that they're songs within the song.

That's a good point. If you listen to how my solos come out, meaning if you listen to how I play closely, you'll hear that I'm a blues-based player. And for me, that goes back to being a huge fan of guys like [Eric] Clapton and [Jimmy] Page; those guys played solos that you'd be humming for days while you're walking around, you know?

So there's an element of intent to what you're doing, then.

Those guys I mentioned had solos you could hum, but they also had these moments where I'd go, "Wait... what was that?" I learned that if I could make thousands of

people turn their heads when I played a solo by being able to hum it but also by having speed and agility, that I was doing something right. But that doesn't mean it's always about playing fast, either. I was good friends with Eddie Van Halen but knew I could never play like that. So having a lot of melodic sense was important, too. I'd play fast in the *right* spots, let it rip in others and slow down when needed.

You mentioned using a Les Paul, but it's said that you used an Ovation Breadwinner on the first Kiss record. Why was that?

I don't know what people are talking about when they say that. I've seen that for so long, and I don't know who first said I used the white Ovation guitar on the first Kiss record [Kiss]. I played that guitar during Kiss's early shows, and it was the guitar I used when Bill Aucoin came to see Kiss before he signed us, but I didn't use it on the first Kiss record.

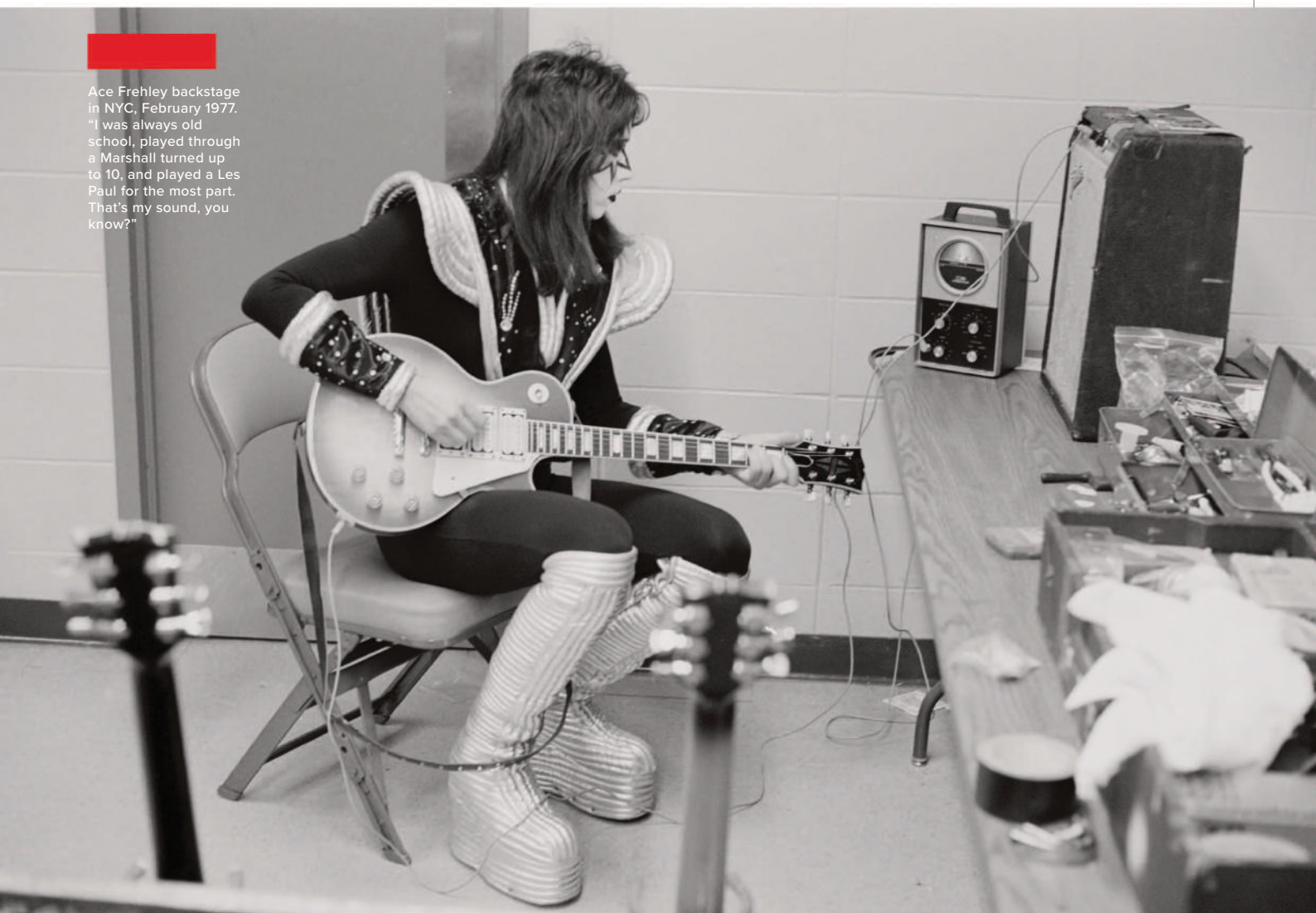
You've just debunked a long-standing narrative about the recording of Kiss's first record. What guitar did you use, then?

I had been playing the Ovation, put humbuckers in it, and grew to like that sound. I thought it was cool, which is probably part of what drew me to Les Paul guitars, with the other being that a Les Paul has a 6 percent neck angle in reference to the body. You can't lay a Les Paul flat on the table because of that arch, and when you tighten the strings, there's tension and body resonance — especially if it's made of good wood. That aside, I probably played my red Epiphone double-cutaway, the same one Steve Marriott played [Coronet].

I've seen that you didn't come upon the tobacco sunburst Les Paul until after Kiss was recorded. But you're saying you bought it before and that you used it during the recording, then?

I'm sure I used my tobacco Les Paul on the first Kiss record, along with the red Epiphone, and maybe even a Strat. I liked the Ovation because it had a neat shape and how it sounded with the humbuckers. But I wanted something cooler like the guitars Clapton and Page played. So, the minute Kiss signed the contract with Casablanca [Records], I went to Manny's Music in New York City and bought the tobacco sunburst Les Paul. And

Ace Frehley backstage in NYC, February 1977. "I was always old school, played through a Marshall turned up to 10, and played a Les Paul for the most part. That's my sound, you know?"



then, later, I converted that to my first smoking guitar before I turned it into a double cut.

What's the definitive guitar moment from Kiss's early Seventies era?

It's hard to say; honestly, I rarely think about things in those terms. Most people would say my solo from *Alive!* was great. But it's a tricky question; I've recorded hundreds of solos, but from the first three albums, I'd have to go with "Deuce." That was the first song I played with Kiss during my audition. I came in with a Gibson reverse Firebird with banjo tuning pegs and a 50-watt Marshall. I remember ripping through "Deuce" with them and thinking it was great, but they told me, "We'll get back to you in two weeks." But Paul later told me, "We knew you were the guy; we just didn't want to tell you right away." [Laughs]



"PAUL LATER TOLD ME, 'WE KNEW YOU WERE THE GUY; WE JUST DIDN'T WANT TO TELL YOU RIGHT AWAY'"

Were you comfortable making a regimented record like *Destroyer* as an off-the-cuff player?

People don't always say as much, but me and [producer] Bob Ezrin got along most of the time. But sometimes, I showed up late because I had a hang-over from the night before. Everybody knows I was an alcoholic, and luckily, I just celebrated 17 years of sobriety, but back then, it was different. Bob was a guy who liked to get things done quickly, probably because he had a mountain of cocaine and a bottle of Remy Martin on the mixing desk with him. But, of course, Paul and Gene [Simmons] never mention that.

I take it you weren't informed that Dick Wagner would be subbing for you on "Sweet Pain."

No, I wasn't. Later, I was told Bob did that because he felt my solos weren't as great as they should have been, so he had Dick play them. But it was more about punishing me for not being on time. I see it as partially my fault but also partly Bob's fault. But the thing that bothered me most was that I wasn't told he had replaced my solos; I had to find out after I listened to the record at home on my turntable. That bothered me for a long time.



[from left] Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley and Paul Stanley in action in the Seventies

Bob did have a hand in releasing the *Destroyer Resurrected* version of “Sweet Pain” with your solo in 2012. I found your solo to be better than Dick’s.

I’d have to listen to it, hang on [Ace pauses to listen to his version of “Sweet Pain”]. You like my solo better than Dick’s, huh? Well, Dick was a great player, and he did a great solo, but I don’t think there’s anything wrong with mine. [Laughs] But I’ll be honest — I don’t remember recording it. [Laughs] I think they took my solo out to punish me for being late. It was a political move that Bob Ezrin made when he said, “Ace has got to be taught a lesson,” and Gene and Paul followed him like puppets. They were always control freaks, and I was always the dude who drank too much and was late too many times. But even with all the nonsense, we were still friends and did get along to that point.

I wanted to touch on your late-Seventies live sound. I’ve read that while you had Marshall cabinets on stage,

you had Fender amps beneath the stage. Any truth to that?

That is true. [Laughs] I liked the hot sound of Fender amps, and I had an old Fender Champ that I had souped up with an even older Jensen C12 speaker. And I had a Linear Power Boost [LPB-I] by Electro-Harmonix that I loved. I used that, along with the Champ, because I liked the sustain I got. I’d have that mic’d up while I had these big Marshall cabinets behind me. If you listen to *Alive II*, you can hear the enormous sound I got from this little Fender amp running through the PA. Whatever works, right?

I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention “Shock Me.” Can you recall recording the solo?

Oh yeah, sure, I do. I played all the guitars and bass on “Shock Me.” But as far as doing that song... it just happened. I’m the kind of guy who likes to fly by the seat of his pants, and I’d be lying if I said “Shock Me” wasn’t like that. I don’t like to think too hard or ponder about stuff. That’s what

drove me crazy about *Destroyer*; we’d sometimes do 25 takes of a song, and they’d get worse and worse each time. I would tell the guys, “Look, let’s call it a day because this song has lost all its spontaneity.” And I was right because we’d come back the next day and nail it. So, when I was doing “Shock Me,” I did that thing where I emptied my mind, and there it was.

Did you have any idea you’d recorded a solo that would be considered iconic?

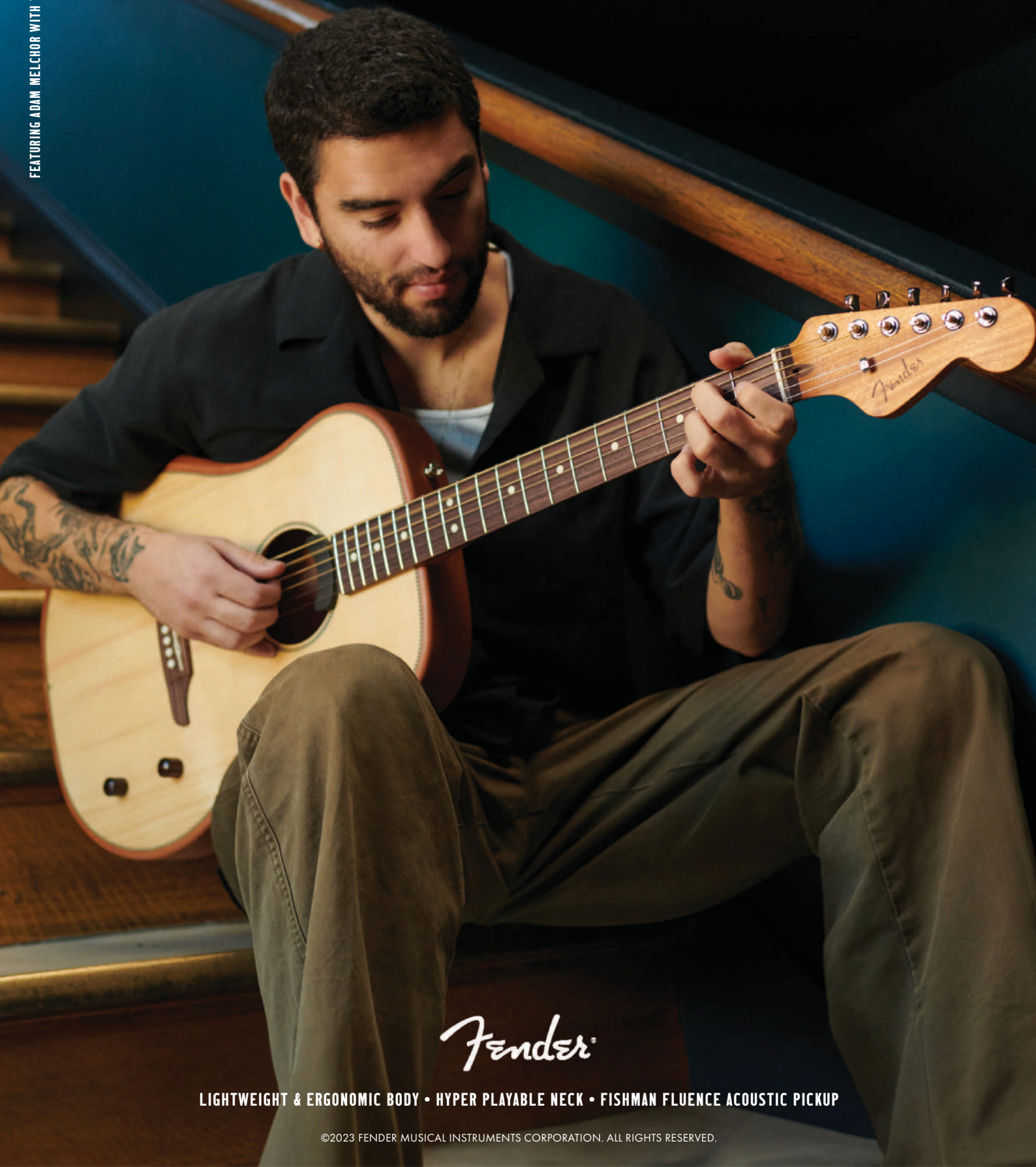
No. [Laughs] I was just happy I got it done, and I moved on to the next song. Like I said, I don’t like to overthink solos beforehand, and I don’t look back on them when I finish. I get one done, and I’m on to the next song.

Do you have a favorite solo from Kiss’s Seventies era?

One solo that always sticks out is “Strange Ways” from *Hotter Than Hell*. I had been recording all day and was frustrated. I remember saying, “I’m just gonna stand in front of the Marshall and let it fucking go.” And this crazy solo with a massive dinosaur bend came out. But like I said before, there’s “Deuce” because it was the first time I played with the guys, and then, there’s “Shock Me.” I consider those the bookends between the early and late-Seventies Kiss. As far as my playing goes, those are the definitive ones. 🎸

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Reba Meyers in action
with Code Orange
in Indio, California,
April 22, 2022

PURE ORANGE EXTRACT

“I JUST WANTED TO HEAR MORE HONESTY IN MY GUITAR PARTS”

CODE ORANGE’S REBA MEYERS AND DOM LANDOLINA
SHIFT LANES WITH *THE ABOVE* (WHILE STEVE ALBINI
AND SMASHING PUMPKINS’ BILLY CORGAN
COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE)

AGGRESSIVE METAL AND teeth-grinding tension go together like energy drinks and vodka — in more ways than one. They’re likely to ramp up the intensity and energy levels of a band, but they also can lead to emotional turmoil, instability and crippling volatility. The six touring members of Code Orange — guitarists Reba Meyers and Dom Landolina, vocalist Jami Morgan, bassist Joe Goldman, multi-instrumentalist Eric “Shade” Balderose and drummer Max Portnoy — don’t need caffeine and booze to feel jumpy. Theirs is an anxiety born from ambition, insecurity and a little chemical imbalance, and working together simultaneously feeds their neurosis and gives them an outlet to purge their poisons.

“We’re not five stereotypical rockers trying to put our best ass-kicking shit out there and show you our killer chops,” Meyers says. “It’s not really about that. It’s more about figuring our shit out and coping with stuff. For me, that’s the whole point. I love playing guitar, making music and doing shows. I love being in the band, but all that’s the icing on the cake.”

On albums like 2017’s *Forever* and 2020’s *Underneath*, the challenges that motivated Code Orange yielded a turbulent, off-kilter mix of hardcore, metalcore, nu-metal and industrial. The cathartic torrents of sound were as effective as primal scream therapy and twice as noisy. And there was no shortage of contorted guitars or jarring pedal-driven effects — or rage.

“I used to be really angry and have blowouts and see red all the time,” Meyers says. “I still get upset a lot. But

I'm not as bad as I used to be, and I think being in this band has really helped me get through that."

At the same time, being in Code Orange has caused a sometimes palpable friction between the band members. Since Morgan, Meyers and Balderose formed the group in high school in 2008 as Code Orange Kids, the three founding members have evolved from a bunch of impulsive teenagers to one of the most creative bands on the modern metal circuit. Focusing obsessively on their band for 15 years and being together nearly non-stop has made them as close as family members, and occasionally as flustered as family members working in the same office day and night.

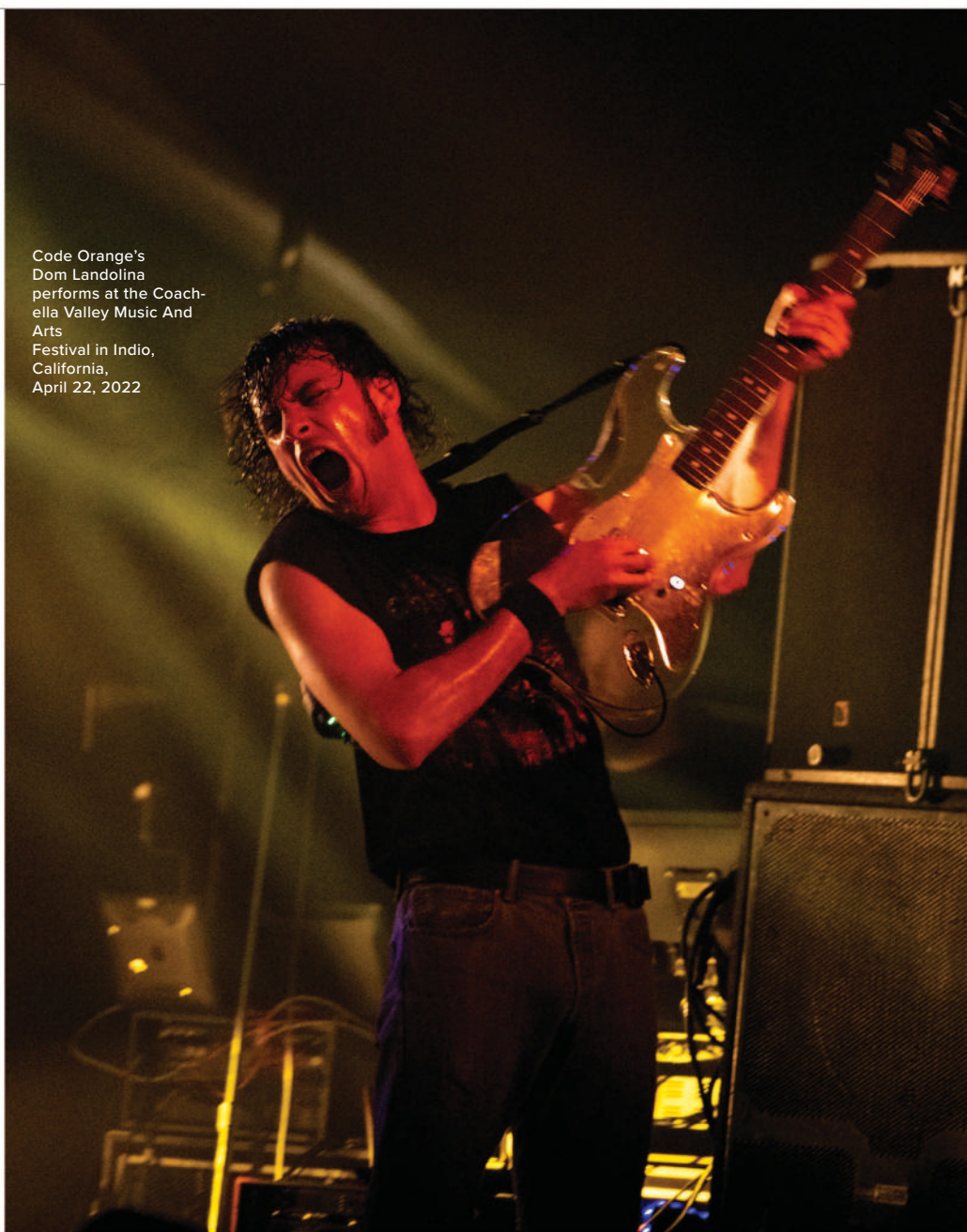
"We're five individuals with an intense amount of strong writing ability and an intense amount of passion and personality," Meyers says. "We've all grown into ourselves, but the more we know who we are, the harder it is to know what the band's identity is. And the more we struggle to have our voices heard and make our mark."

Code Orange started working on their new album, *The Above*, shortly after releasing 2020's *Underneath*, which was written and recorded largely during the pandemic lockdown. They started by recording demos, most of which were scrapped. Then they recorded seven songs, which they also discarded since they didn't fit the tone they wanted for the new album. Considering how hard they searched to find the right voice for the album and how much material didn't meet their criteria, fans might have expected another brutal machine gun blast of low, serrated guitars, slamming beats and feral vocals. While some of *The Above* is jarring and furious, it's far less savage and musically complex than the band's previous four releases, tempering primitive, staccato bursts of guitar with simple open-chord arrangements and textural flourishes, and even including the melancholy pop-rock song "Mirror" and a nuanced duet with Smashing Pumpkins frontman Billy Corgan, "Take Shape."

"I love brutal music more than anything, and I consider myself the metal riff guy in the band," Landolina says. "But at the same time, after releasing a bunch of albums that were heavy as fuck, it's like, 'Okay, maybe it's time to try something a little different.' How many more insane mosh parts do we need to write?"

During an unseasonably warm New York afternoon in early fall, Meyers and Landolina discussed the self-imposed

Code Orange's Dom Landolina performs at the Coachella Valley Music And Arts Festival in Indio, California, April 22, 2022



challenges they faced working on *The Above*, Code Orange's unyielding determination to grow and expand their musical reach, the physical and mental scars that keep them motivated, and working with two legends in the music business, Corgan and producer Steve Albini.

Right from the start, did you want *The Above* to be less chaotic and more commercial than *Underneath*, to appeal to a more mainstream audience?

REBA MEYERS: For me, it truly was not anything about the audience. I just wanted to hear more honesty in my guitar parts, and the best way for me to do that was to simplify my playing. That allowed me to get my personality into the songs more easily.

Did some of the more complex and aggressive parts on past albums get in the way of what you wanted to express?

MEYERS: If I'm dealing with too many parts, sometimes I feel like the emotion

is getting lost because I'm just playing a bunch of notes. I enjoy that sometimes for heavier music, but for this record I wanted to play fewer ideas and I almost wanted to be a little sloppier, so the music didn't sound too perfect.

What about you, Dom? Did you want to approach the album differently?

DOM LANDOLINA: Every time we do an album, I'm the guy that's always pushing for the heavy riffs. That's where I'm different from the other people in the band. They like to leave space and let the songs breathe. I like to fill everything with all these parts.

It sounds like you had different goals. Did you and Reba write together and then merge your styles to make them sound cohesive?

LANDOLINA: Sometimes. We wrote about 25 songs while we worked on this album. So, we had two or three albums' worth of songs to choose from. And they were writ-

One of the heavier songs, “The Game,” features rapid staccato, Slipknot-style chugging followed by slower, vibrato-laden riffs and pinch harmonics. Then it goes rhythmically off the rails with a skittering rhythm and electronic enhancements.

MEYERS: Most of that entire song was Dom’s riff. I heard it and loved it, so we kept it like that. I just didn’t see anything I could add to it to make it better. And then there are songs like “Theater of Cruelty,” where it’s more of this weird collaboration of different styles and dynamics.

LANDOLINA: “Theater of Cruelty” is a great example of how we work together. There’s a pinch harmonic-centric riff that comes and goes and riffs through the whole song with the chorus. Then you get to the end of the song and there are a lot of fast pinch harmonics. That’s my thing. A lot of the other parts are less heavy and more melodic, which was more Reba. I guess I think about what I want to play as a guitarist, and maybe the rest of the band thinks about the whole song.

guitar to help tell my story.

Do you think your longtime fans appreciate the nuances you’re weaving into the songs with the electronics and creative, melodic atmospheres?

MEYERS: I don’t know, and it doesn’t matter because we’re not thinking of them. We’re doing this for ourselves — I guess because we need to. We’re not trying to sound like anything else, or not sound like anything else. We just want to express who we are. If we were trying to make songs that would appeal to certain audiences, we wouldn’t do something like “Grooming My Replacement” because that song gets pretty fucking weird. I don’t think anyone from the mainstream universe would ever understand what I’m trying to do with that. But to me, you just pay attention to the aggression and it’s more about the mood than about the song. And the heavy things are interesting because they go through so much of a process of bringing everyone’s ideas in more than the more melodic ones do.

LANDOLINA: I think those are the harder



“IT’S LIKE, ‘OKAY, MAYBE IT’S TIME TO TRY SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT.’ HOW MANY MORE INSANE MOSH PARTS DO WE NEED TO WRITE?”

DOM LANDOLINA

ten in all kinds of ways. We came up with some parts separately, and we worked on some of them together. I worked with just Jami on some stuff. So the songs all came together differently. We did some of them in two days, and others were pieced together over a long period of time.

MEYERS: I was trying to encourage people to get in a room together because we hadn’t done that in a while. Like, on “Splinter the Soul,” me and Dom worked with each other and pulled from all this stuff we had been fucking around with and merged all these parts together. I think that song’s really cool because it has both of our voices in it. But you can’t listen to it and go, “Oh, this is Dom’s riff, that’s Reba’s riff.” We molded our styles together in a really cool, cohesive way.

Maybe it’s that contrast between you and them that makes the music diverse and creates a duality between the more textural parts and the heavier, more aggressive sections.

LANDOLINA: Yeah, but I just feel like those guys are probably better at writing songs than I am. I just like to see what I can play on guitar that sounds cool. But when Reba and Jami put a song together, I just sit back because I don’t know shit about chords. That’s just not how my brain works. But Reba’s perfect for that.

Reba, do you consider yourself a metal player?

MEYERS: I enjoy metal, I don’t consider myself a metal player. I write metal occasionally and use it to inspire me. But I think of myself more as a songwriter that uses

ones to write because each person is bringing their own thing to the table, and it all goes into the grinder. And then we all end up wrestling with it to get it right and get everyone’s personal stamp on it. You really have to go through a million versions. There’s a riff in “The Game” that we workshopped at five different times over two years.

Do you both use pedals to create additional noise and texture?

MEYERS: I love pedals to help create different elements for the music. We all brought our pedal boards into the studio, and I had two of them connected to each other.

LANDOLINA: On this album I was less reliant on pedals, which goes back to what we were saying a minute ago. We have our own ways of doing things, and I’m all

about riffs. The more open-chord rock songs like “Snapshot” were done with me out of the picture.

Reba, the structures on *The Above* are simpler than the ones on *Underneath*. Did playing less complex rhythms give you more space to shape the songs?

MEYERS: I just feel like if you don’t have too much happening in the song, you can really hear what your hands are doing, and it’s easier to tap into a groove that way. That’s the most important thing for me. The effects and other stuff are fun to put in after you know what you want to say with the music. A lot of the problem I have with connecting with a lot of music that’s being put out today is that people seem to be so worried about putting in all the notes and making sure they’re playing stuff that’s complex and technical enough to show how good they are. They’re not worried about the feeling and the mood and just being themselves.

Do you write the frameworks for your songs before you add the effects?

MEYERS: I like to see what I can do with just the songwriting because that’s where the power is coming from. And then the pedals can amplify that to an insane degree. Once we have something, I like to mold the tone to my liking. I’ve been using more fuzz pedals because I’ve found that they work great as a tonal tool. But you don’t always need some crazy piles of effects. I already went through that phase, and I still like to do it sometimes. But making new albums should be about growth. I don’t want to repeat what I already did.

Did you start writing *The Above* right after you finished *Underneath*?

LANDOLINA: We did them both pretty close together. When Covid happened, we realized we were going to have that extra time. We thought that maybe we should write an EP. And then we started coming up with ideas. And then more ideas started coming. We kept working and working, and eventually you have 25 songs on your plate, and you realize you could do a double album, so why do an EP?

MEYERS: We’ve been writing this damn thing forever. That’s why I feel so good to finally be able to let these songs out. “I Fly,” “Take Shape” and a couple more are freaking three years old at this point. That’s a long time for a song to be sitting there. It gives you too much time to think about it and too much time to fuck with it. You don’t want to over-paint the painting.



[from left] Max Portnoy, Reba Meyers, Joe Goldman, Jami Morgan, Eric “Shade” Balderose and Dom Landolina

You wrote a bunch of demos and recorded seven full songs that you threw away before you recorded anything you were all happy with. In the end, you had 25 songs you had to whittle down the 14 on the record. Did you feel creatively stifled?

MEYERS: Not at first, because there was so much shit coming out of us that in the beginning, it was fun. We were figuring out the identity of the record and it was taking shape. But for me, it did get pretty frustrating after a while. Some of the guys in the band enjoy the process and throwing shit at the wall for a long time until it forms

into this masterpiece. But I got tired of that. There were times I said, “Okay, isn’t this enough? Let’s just look at what we’ve got and take a snapshot of the moment.” But that’s hard because there are so many identities within the band. There’s literally multiple bands within this one band.

You’ve been working on *The Above* for a long time — and you had a few stops and starts. When did the vision for the album come together?

MEYERS: I don’t think that ever happened, which is funny. Jamie would text me and

go, “Reba, why aren’t you sending more songs?” And I would literally have to say, “No, that’s it! I’m not sending anything else because we’re done, and that’s it! We have to put a cap on this.” We all tunneled in deep on this record and became like moles burrowed into the ground. We needed to dig our way back out.

Billy Corgan sings on “Take Shape.” How did he get involved?

MEYERS: At one point, we shared management. It was cool because he had a genuine interest in the band. He’s a very creative person and he understood that we had some commonalities. He could see we were a very odd bunch, and we were trying to use our strong personalities to shape the music.

Did you contact Billy, or did he ask you if he could be involved?

MEYERS: It started off as us sending him the songs and talking about them, like a lot of musicians do with one another. That led naturally to us getting in a room together, which wasn’t originally part of the plan, but he wanted to do it. He had

LANDOLINA: I knew it was going to be great, but the first time I heard it, I was not so sure it belonged on the album. I listened to the demo and thought, “Wow, this is really good, but is this a Code Orange song?” In retrospect, I’m really glad we used it. We added it to the set at some of our shows and it feels really great when we play it.

Reba, what were you upset about when you wrote “Mirror”? Were you frustrated that the album was taking so long or wasn’t progressing the way you wanted it to?

MEYERS: No, no. It was really personal shit. Honestly, I get upset a lot. I’m less upset now, and I think creating the album helped me figure out some things about myself that I needed to figure out, which is the whole point. I’m not going to go into the details, but when you’re in that position, you try to use those feelings to your advantage to figure out what is going on inside. I’ve never been that verbal of a person. I’m not great at talking about my feelings. I’ve been that way since I was a kid, so it’s been helpful to

“[BILLY CORGAN] HAD AN ACOUSTIC,
AND HE STARTED PLAYING THIS MELODY...
IT FELT MAGICAL — LIKE CLASSIC
SMASHING PUMPKINS”
REBA MEYERS

an acoustic guitar and he started playing this little melody for the bridge of “Take Shape” and sang the part that he does on the record. It felt magical — like classic Smashing Pumpkins.

“Mirror” is a different kind of song for Code Orange. The guitars are rooted in open chords and single notes, and there are a lot of musical embellishments, including strings, background effects and keyboard samples. It’s almost a melancholy pop song.

MEYERS: I was feeling a lot of tension and pressure around the time we did that. The guys knew I was upset, and they encouraged me to use that frustration instead of crawling under a rock and moping. Sometimes it’s hard to sit down and write when you’re upset. But I took their advice and sat down and did what I consider to be one of my favorite songs. It represents a moment and is very pure.

have an outlet to create and deal with my shit. And then when I look back at it, I can say, “Oh, I see what I was going through.”

What was the greatest musical obstacle you faced while working on *The Above*?

LANDOLINA: I have a different challenge than Reba. By choice, I put myself in a box. I want to be the riff guy, and that’s a big role to take on. When you sit and write riffs all day long, and you’ve got the same five frets you’re working with — because nothing’s that heavy once you go past the fifth fret — you’ve got the same little tricks you can do with pinch harmonics. So you’re sitting there all day with your back against the wall, and then eight hours later you come out and realize you have absolutely nothing. Or, by accident, you wrote the exact same thing you wrote the day before.

You recorded the album with Steve Albini. Was that a positive experience?

MEYERS: It was great, but he’s not a typical producer. He tries to be invisible, and I think we needed someone who would let us do our thing and encourage us to play in the room together at the same time and just help us with the sound. He did that, and it brought out the best in us.

LANDOLINA: He was so extremely not a voice in the room. It was almost funny. He has no opinion. Once we were there long enough, we established a bit of a rapport where we could joke around with him. One time, one of us asked him, “What do you think of that song, Steve?” And he said, “I’ll tell you when it’s out, ‘cause I don’t know.” And he was being serious. You never see him smiling or nodding his head when he’s recording something. He’s like a human computer. He has all the facts for you. And that’s all he does. And that’s exactly what we needed.

It makes sense for a band like you to record everything together as if you’re onstage. In the past, did you take a more traditional approach in the studio?

LANDOLINA: It was always us tracking in the control room with a guitar, and the amp was a mile away. This time, we were all together like we are onstage, and we didn’t worry about everything being totally perfect. There’s a section at the end of “The Above,” where Reba and I play a harmonized lead together on our wah pedals. When we were tracking it, the volume made my notes feed back. We did a bunch of takes, and I remember being bothered by it. Now when I hear it on the record, it sounds real to me. And it sounds live in a great way. If we had recorded that during the *Underneath* era, we would have made it perfect-sounding, which wouldn’t have been as good. There’s stuff like that all over the record.

MEYERS: That real and natural thing is the message of the record. I look at *The Above* as a true expression of this band, and I think, “Man, this is the way we should have been working all along.” There’s no reason for a band like us to be isolated in a control room. We’re not fucking pop musicians. If it sounds good and it’s real, who cares if there are mistakes in the songs? If someone listening to it can’t tell that something is not what it was originally supposed to be, and it sounds cool and adds to the feel of the record, is it really a mistake? 

Words, guitars & backing Jon Bishop

THE 2024 GUITAR WORKOUT

Smash your new year guitar goals with our 30-day technical workout

This issue we're going to flex our fingers and strain those steel strings in AG's 30-day guitar workout. Of course, guitar practice can be a thorny subject for some. Most of us took up guitar because of our love for music – and 'homework'-style practice may not be high on your wish list. So, here, we're tackling the challenge head-on with a jam-packed set of lessons that are both fun to play and guaranteed to help you improve your technique. You can either dip into the lessons as you wish, or, alternatively, you can let our practice plan guide you through the next 30 days. It's designed to be as flexible as possible so you can work towards your own playing goals.

Grab your guitar, plug in and let's get started, with audio courtesy of our sibling publication Total Guitar.

A



DAY 1

ASSESS YOUR PLAYING SKILLS

1 CHECK YOU ARE PLAYING IN TIME

Choose a simple piece of music you know well and try playing in time with a metronome. Aim to synchronise onbeat notes with the click. If it doesn't seem fully aligned, you may need to work on your timing. Slow down a little and try to feel the rhythmic pulse more tightly.

You'll get more out of any practice routine if you know which areas of your playing need most attention. Get started by taking an honest look...



2 HOW CLEAN ARE YOUR CHORDS?

Put your fingers in the wrong position and you'll end up with annoying fret buzz, so aim to play most chords using the very tips of your fingers as close to each fret as possible. Barre chords, of course, need a flat finger. Keep your thumb roughly opposite your fingers for maximum strength.



3 ARE YOU PLAYING TOO FAST?

You don't have to be a shredder to want to play fast. We've all tried to play a song at full speed before we've fully learnt it, usually resulting in fluffed chord changes and solo lines that don't quite link together. Play slowly to a metronome or drum beat and try to improve your speed by a small amount every day.

DAY 2

CHECK YOUR LEAD TECHNIQUES

There's always an optimum position for your hands to be in when you're playing lead guitar. Make sure you've got the techniques sorted...



STRING BENDS

For most first-, second- and third-finger bends place your thumb on the top side of the neck (sometimes called a 'baseball bat grip') for maximum strength. You may need to adjust position for fourth finger bends.



HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS

Can you play a pull-off as you lead out of the hammer-on (and vice versa)? If not, adjust your hand position. You'll need a firm thwack for a hammer-on, then a flick of the finger to pull off.



ALTERNATE PICKING

The ability to pick in a down-up 'alternate' pattern is crucial. To practise, choose one note and play it down-up-down-up in time with a metronome. If your timing is choppy or uneven, slow down.



ONE-FINGER-PER-FRET HAND POSITION

For the minor pentatonic scale, hand position isn't so crucial. If you want to play more complex tunes and solos you need all four fingers. Arrange the digits next to each other at consecutive frets.



B

DAY 3

IMPROVE YOUR RHYTHM SKILLS

Eight exercises to tighten up your rhythm

A solid rhythm feel is an essential ingredient of any musician's skill set. In day three we are going to break down some key rhythmic subdivisions so you can practise and master each one in isolation. To

promote consistent delivery we've included the correct strumming directions, so try to stick to these even if they feel awkward at first. The pay off for all this hard work is two, fun to play examples designed to put your new skills to the test.

BAR 1

Crotchets

The crotchet (aka quarter note) lasts for one beat and is here played with a simple downstroke.

BAR 2

Quavers

The quaver (aka eighth note) lasts for half a crotchet beat and is best understood when played in a repeating down-up pattern.

BAR 3

Semiquavers

The semiquaver (aka 16th note) lasts for quarter of a crotchet beat. Play it with alternating down and upstrokes.

BAR 4

Crotchet triplets

The crotchet triplet places three evenly spaced beats in the place of two standard crotchets.

♩=100

1

♩=70

♩=100

5

BAR 5

Quaver triplets

Another triplet here, but this time we fit three in the space of two standard eighth notes.

BAR 6

Semiquaver triplets

Again, three in the space of two - but this time with semiquavers. Our example alternates eighth notes with bursts of semiquaver triplets.

BAR 7

All the rhythms 1

Here we are combining the rhythms to create a simple funky part. The dot above the rhythms means to play the chords short and snappy.

BAR 8

All the rhythms 2

For this last example we're combining the semiquaver and triplet rhythms to create more complex-sounding part.

DAY 4

LIGHT FUNK RHYTHM

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=100

Em⁷

C#m⁷

Play 4 times

We're keeping things light today with a couple of musical examples. Here, we're putting some easier rhythms together into a musical idea in the style of modern funk artists like Cory Wong and Vulfpeck. Check out the strumming directions and lock in with the backing track. Sound accompaniment comes thanks to our sibling pub Total Guitar.

JAZZ-FUNK RIFF

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=100

Cmaj⁹

Em⁷

Play 4 times

Our second example showcases the harder 16th note subdivision. The backing track provides an easy canvass for you to come up with parts of your own. Simply use our octave fingerings and add any of the rhythms we have worked on so far.

DAY 5



IMPROVE YOUR EAR FOR HARMONY

Today is all about working on your musical ear. For each exercise you will hear three strummed chords, followed by those same chords played in

a different order. It's your job to identify each chord type and the order they are played in the second time. The answers are printed upside down at the bottom of p76.

TEST 1 BASIC CHORDS

- **D major**
Listen out for the typically positive, happy sound of the major chord.
- **D minor**
The opposite of major, minor chords have a sad, melancholy flavour.
- **D5**
The powerchord has a stable sound, without the emotional character of major or minor.

TEST 2 7TH CHORDS

- **Dmaj7**
The major 7 has a very mellow and laid-back sound.
- **Dm7**
The minor 7 is more reflective, but not as sad as the minor chord.
- **D7**
The "dominant" 7 chord has an edgy, bluesy sound.

TEST 3 SUS CHORDS

- **Dsus4**
The sus4 chord sounds suspenseful and like it wants to resolve.
- **Dsus2**
The sus2 chord sounds strong, but more colourful than the powerchord.
- **D7sus4**
Harmonically more complex than other sus chords. Slightly mournful.

TEST 4 UNUSUAL CHORDS

- **Dm7,5**
The m7,5 chord has a dissonant sound and is the same as the minor 7 chord only with a 5th.
- **Ddim7**
Jazzy and mysterious. Useful as a chromatic passing chord between major, minor and 7th chords.
- **Dm6**
Another jazzy chord, this time with an almost scary vibe. Easier to jam to than a dim7, though.

FIND THE
ANSWERS
ON P76



MASTER THE FRETBOARD WITH CHORDS

Ride the road to fretboard mastery and learn some cool new chords along the way

A great all-round rhythm player needs really good chord knowledge. There are two ways to develop this part of your playing. The first is simply to learn some new chords – and this is fun, a journey of discovery with new sounds and moods. The other method is to learn how chords link together when played in various

positions on the fretboard. It's known as the CAGED system, because you'll be looking at C, A, G, E and, yep, you guessed it, D chord shapes. Get to grips with it and you'll soon be playing the best riffs and rhythm parts ever, as you navigate the whole fretboard in the process. Read on and we'll show you more...

DAY 6 MAJOR CHORDS

We start here with five C chords, including the good old open shape. Your task is to see how they link together across the fretboard. The first barre chord shares the root note with open C. This resembles an open A chord, so it gets called an "A shape" even though it could be any pitch – C here, of course. Play the chords one after the other, then see if any ideas come to mind.

DAY 7 MINOR CHORDS

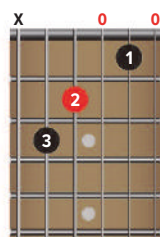
Once again, the idea is to see where these chords share notes – the idea being that you could create cool rhythm parts across the entire fretboard. Though a couple of these shapes are tough to play, it's still useful to see how they link together. And there's nothing to stop you playing an easier "partial" version – just fret three strings instead of the full shapes.

DAY 8 E SHAPE CHORDS

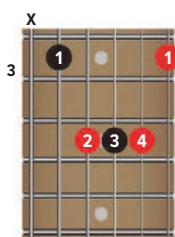
Here we'll turn our attention to fresh sounds, in particular, some variations on the open E chord we all know. Try them out in open position, then see if you can make them work as closed position barre chords.

DAY 9 A SHAPE CHORDS

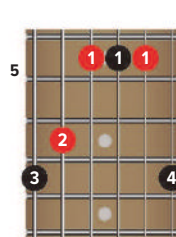
Today we're doing the same as yesterday, but with the open A chord as our starting point. Once again, try out the chords in open position and choose your favourites. If you can also make them work as barre chords you're acing it!



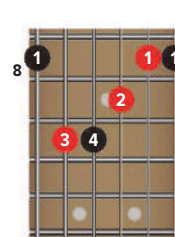
C (C shape)



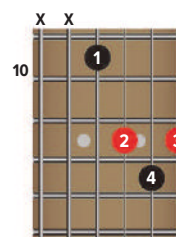
C (A shape)



C (G shape)



C (E shape)



C (D shape)



Cm (C shape)



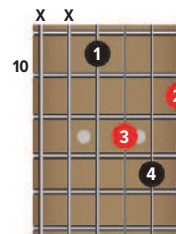
Cm (A shape)



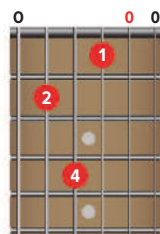
Cm/B $\flat$ (G shape)



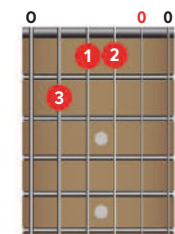
Cm (E shape)



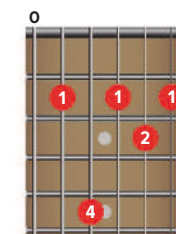
Cm (D shape)



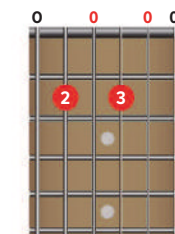
Eadd9



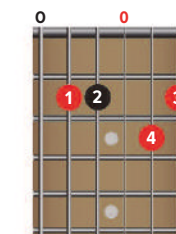
Emaj7



Em11



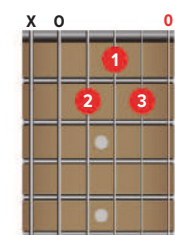
E7sus4



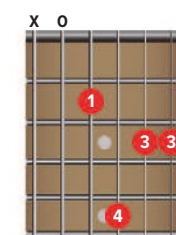
Em9



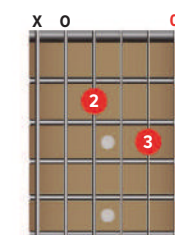
Aadd9



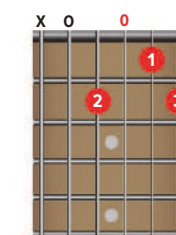
Amaj7



Am11



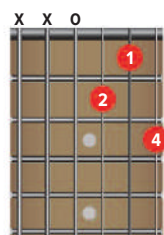
A7sus4



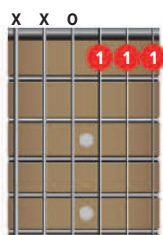
Am7add13

DAY 10 D SHAPE CHORDS

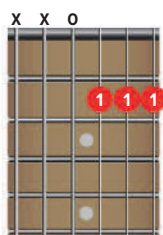
One more time! Here we're looking at some creative variations on the humble open D chord. Some of these can be tricky when played as barres, so take it slow and focus on accurate fretting before any changes.



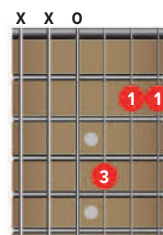
Dm7add11



Dm7 $\flat$ 5



Dmaj7



Dmaj7add13



D7

DAY 11

FOO FIGHTERS-STYLE SUS CHORDS

bit.ly/tq380audio

♩=160

B^bsus² Csus² D⁷/A

Play 4 times

TAB

The sus2 chord we're using here sounds great with a light overdrive and provides a contrast when followed by some dissonant sounding stabs. The D7/A chord we used for the stabs is a bit of a Dave Grohl favourite!

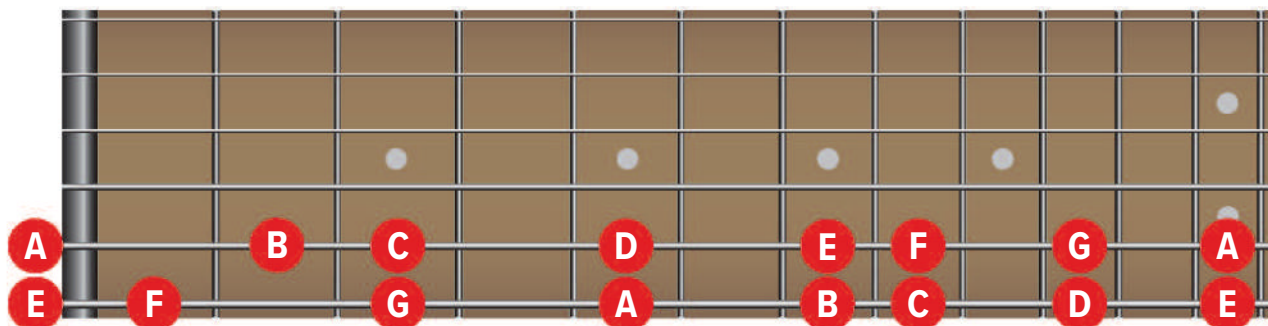
CHORDS WITH OPEN STRINGS

bit.ly/tq380audio

[illegible]

This part uses the open string to create a lush, ringing sound with plenty of sustain. Incorporating the open strings into pretty basic fingerings is an easy way to generate more harmonically rich sounding chords.

DAY 12 LEARN THE BASS-STRING ROOT NOTES



It's pretty tricky to remember all the notes on the neck at first, so here we're looking at just the natural notes (no sharps or flats) on the two bass strings. Try these two exercises to help you memorise them.

- 1 Play the notes on each string, saying the note names out loud as you go.
- 2 Play a barre chord using each note shown as your root.



DEVELOP YOUR LEAD PLAYING

Work on basic techniques, then increase your speed and your solos will soar!

Whether you're an aspiring shredder or you prefer to navigate your solos by feel, every player can improve their technical skills. Work on simple, repeatable ideas and you can take a relaxed approach to guitar practice and you're guaranteed to see results. Here, we're taking

a look at a mix of standard lead guitar techniques employed in solos of all genres. Each exercise is a short idea which you can widdle away at without really thinking about it. If you want to take things up a step, try pushing the tempo up higher along with a metronome. Spend a few minutes a day on each one.

HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=120 Play 4 times

TAB: 4 0 4 0 5 0 5 0 7 0 7 0 5 0 5 0

DAY 13 The open third string makes this an easy exercise to get started with. Experiment by fretting with different fingers. As you progress you can move the idea to other parts of the fretboard and onto other strings.

ALTERNATE PICKING

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=80 Play 4 times

TAB: 7 9 10 7 9 10 9 10 9 7 10 9 7 6

cont. sim.

DAY 14 Our alternate picking exercise addresses the issue of crossing strings and using the pinky for fretting. The constant down-up picking can be tough, so focus on short three- or four-note fragments to make it easier.

SYNCING PICKING AND LEGATO

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=50 Play 4 times

DAY 15 Our chromatic exercise is a simple pattern that works on picking, hammer-ons and pull-offs. This pattern can be adapted to move across all the strings and can be used to both ascend and descend the neck.

ONE-TONE BEND WITH A REFERENCE PITCH

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=50 Play 4 times

DAY 16 Aiming for a target pitch is a good way to ensure good string-bending intonation. This exercise works on a one-tone bend in two places on the fretboard. Be sure to adapt this idea to practise on other strings.

PITCHED WHAMMY BAR BENDS

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=50 Play 4 times

DAY 17 Guitarists like Jeff Beck and Steve Vai are masters of playing melodies with the whammy bar. As with string-bending it's good practice to take a target pitch and practise either scooping up or dooping down to it.

TRILLS

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=90 Play 4 times

DAY 18 If you can manage the tight timing here then the generally looser technique of trilling should feel a whole lot easier. Treat it as two exercises: the first half using two fingers, and the second part using just one digit.

PINCHED HARMONICS EXERCISE

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=90 Play 4 times

DAY 19 As you pick the string, let the flesh of the thumb that is holding the pick touch the string on the way through to release the harmonic. Try to pick 12 or 24 frets higher than the fretted note for the best harmonic.

TAPPING RUNS

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=70 Play 4 times

DAY 20 Eddie Van Halen and Nuno Bettencourt are masters of melodic tapping. Our example uses the minor pentatonic scale to create a flowing run. Make sure to start slow, focusing on steady, even timing.

COMBINING TECHNIQUES

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=60 Play 4 times

DAY 21 Here we're working on combining various techniques in one lick. We start out with some string bends and then finish off with a tapping run. After getting this down why not combine two of your favourite techniques?

MIX AND MATCH
NOTES AND
PHRASES FROM
EACH EXAMPLE FOR
A REAL-WORLD
WORKOUT

G

GET BETTER AT IMPROVISING

Try these improv exercises and shine at your next jam

Whether you play in a band, jam with backing tracks or you prefer to improvise unaccompanied, ad libbing is another of those continuous and unending quests. That doesn't

mean you can't get a whole lot better at it, though! Here, we're looking at a few strategies to help you develop your improv skills so you'll be 100 per cent ready when your next jam session comes around.



USING ONE SCALE #1

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩ = 110

Cm **Fm** **Gm** Play 4 times

TAB: . 13 12 11 11 13 11 10 | 8 10 10/12 13 10

DAY 22

The chords used for the backing music come from the same key: C minor. This means you can use just one scale (C minor pentatonic) and your ear for music to navigate the progression. It's a staple approach in simple blues progressions.

USING ONE SCALE #2

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩ = 110

C **F** **G** Play 4 times

TAB: . 8 8 9 7 5 7 5 | 7 9 8 10 7

DAY 23

Again, all of the chords are diatonic here (this time from the key of C major) so we can use the C major pentatonic scale for the whole solo. Guitarists like Brian May and Slash are masters of making major key solos sound good.

PHRASING AROUND ROOT NOTES

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=110
Cm Fm Gm

1/4 1/4

Play 4 times

TAB

11 8 11 8 BU 10 (12) 10 8 10 10 11 10/12

DAY 24 Targeting the root note of the chords is a good way to outline the harmony as it passes. Here, we approach linking the root notes together with finger slides to provide more interest.

USING RHYTHM IN YOUR SOLOS

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=110
C F G

Play 4 times

TAB

8 10 8 10 8 8 10 8 10 8 10 10 10 10/12 10

DAY 25 In this lick we get away with playing only a handful of notes as the rhythm is interesting. Rhythm is one of the most important aspects of a solo, and even a one-note solo can be memorable if a good rhythm is used.

POSITION SHIFT LICK

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=110
Cm Fm Gm

1/4 1/4

Play 4 times

TAB

15 [15] 13 16 13 13 11 13 11 11 8 11 8 8 6 8 6 6 3

DAY 26 Here, we move down through the pentatonic box shapes. Using position shifts allows you to recycle and rework each melodic lick, making only small adjustments to allow for the new shape.

IMPROVED IMPROVS...

Three ideas for your next jam session

1 ONE-NOTE JAM

Okay, staying on one note might not sound like a recipe for a world class solo, but, by ditching all the other notes, you can focus on rhythm and how loud or soft to play.

2 ONE-STRING JAM

Confine yourself to one string and you'll free yourself from predictable scale box patterns and start thinking more melodically. Give it a try!

3 CHOOSE FIVE RANDOM NOTES...

...and use only those five!
Okay, it could be four notes, six, seven, or however many, but improvising with a restricted set of notes will ensure creative new ideas.



CREATIVE SOLOING

Turn your attention to the more musical side of lead guitar with four ways to develop a solo



Yes, yes, we *are* aware we've just been looking at improvising solos and that "creative soloing" might appear to be just a little bit

similar... but bear with us. This next idea takes you a step further. Think of it as a more developed approach to improv if you like, but it's also something to employ

when writing longer solos. Here, we're going to take a basic C minor pentatonic lick and demonstrate three ways you could adapt the idea to take it somewhere new.

Recycling ideas and globalising concepts is a great way to maximise your vocabulary and make sure your solos always sound like they're going somewhere.

THE BASIC LICK

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=110

Cm E^b F Play 4 times

BU

TAB

8-11-11(13) 8-11-8 10-11-10-8-10-8 10

DAY 27 This is our basic lick. It uses the C minor pentatonic scale and has a simple, memorable melody. The use of string bends and finger slides helps to bring the idea to life.

CHANGING THE HARMONIC CONTEXT

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=110

C Play 4 times

BU

TAB

8-10-10(11) 10-8 7-8-7-5-7 7-5

DAY 28 If we move our basic lick down three frets a C major pentatonic version can be produced. Blues guitarists are fond of shifting licks around to make major versions with ease.

ADD IN TARGET NOTES

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=110

Cm E^b F Play 4 times

TAB

8-11-11/13 11-13 10 11 13 10 13 10

DAY 29 We can add in target tones and flavour notes in to spice up our basic lick. Here we are adding a D note. This D doesn't appear in the C minor pentatonic scale, but it sounds great.

CHANGING STYLE

bit.ly/tg380audio

♩=140

Cm E^b F Play 4 times

TAB

8-11-11/13 11 13 12\10 8-10 5-8-8\10 10 10\8 6-8

DAY 30 With a change of tone and phrasing we can adapt the basic lick to fit other styles of music. Here we're using octaves and a neck pickup to beef up the sound. Use downward thumb strokes to get a jazz-style delivery.

Week 1

- 1 Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
- 2 Daily practice: play the five or 10 easiest exercises from the feature
- 3 Day 7: play through all the exercises in the feature again

Take it fairly easy during week 1. You may not be able to play all the examples, so don't worry about it. Focus most of your time on the easiest riffs, licks and exercises as well as the ones you enjoy the most. Don't neglect your existing repertoire either. If you're playing for an hour, then 15 to 20 minutes on a technical workout is as much as you need.

Week 2

- 1 Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
- 2 Daily practice: aim to increase speed and accuracy on week 1's chosen exercises
- 3 Introduce five to 10 new exercises into your daily routine

Your aim this week is to upscale your efforts from week 1. Not in terms of how long you play for (unless you want to), but in terms of accuracy, quality and speed. If you're focusing on chord vocabulary, ear training or similar, then you should be seeing improvements here. Start to introduce some of the more challenging exercises, too.



30-DAY PLAN

You've tried all our exercises, now structure your practice time with our planner



Hopefully by now you've read through the feature and had a look at most of our lessons. Now, it's time to think about how to use the examples over the coming days and weeks so that you see steady improvements in your playing. Here, we're focusing on general improvement over the first three weeks, then homing in on more specific goals in week four. Feel free to adjust this flexible plan according to your own interests and playing goals.

Week 3

- 1 Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
- 2 Daily practice: increase speed and accuracy on week 1 & 2's exercises
- 3 Introduce the remaining exercises from the feature

Once again, this week your aim is to improve on the exercises you've been focusing on so far and to introduce anything you haven't tried. Jam along to our backing tracks or practise with a metronome or drum machine – either way, starting slowly and increasing the tempo in small steps is the key to sustained improvement.

Week 4

- 1 Daily practice: play the hardest exercises from the feature
- 2 General technique: sections A, B and F
- 3 Rhythm guitar: sections B, C, D and E
- 4 Lead guitar: sections E, F, G and H

Time to change tack. Ditch the easiest exercises – hopefully they're too easy for you by now. And dropping them in favour of more challenging material will help you continue to improve. Double down on your playing goals this week, too. If you want to improve your soloing then pay most attention to our lead guitar sections.

Days 29-30

- 1 Get creative! Mix and match from the feature
- 2 Test yourself

Try mixing up, say, alternate picking with pinched harmonics, or trills with tapping. Alternatively, try switching between rhythm and lead exercises, or rewriting one of our rhythm examples with some new chords. As you free yourself from the stricter practice of following tab you should find that the creative ideas begin to flow. Finally, test yourself on any areas you struggled with.

HOT GEAR

GUILD POLARA KIM THAYIL

RRP: Contact dealer
zenithmusic.com.au

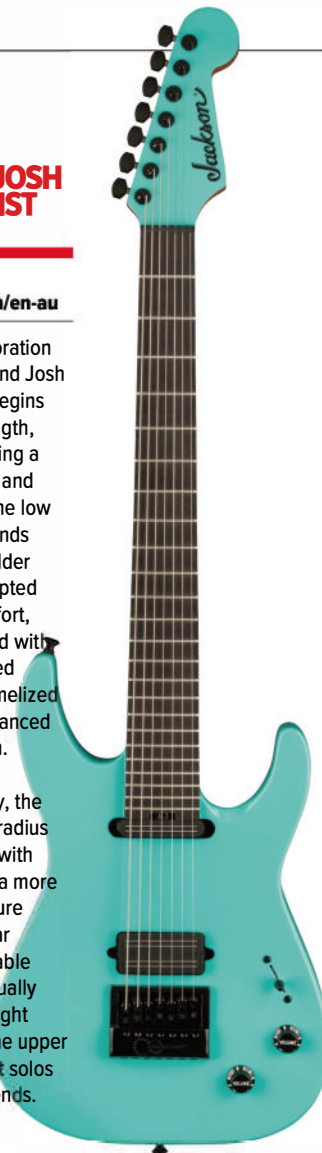
Crafted with a Mahogany body and neck, adorned with a Guild '70s headstock, the Polara Kim Thayil pays tribute to Kim's favorite features from his '78 S-100. Equipped with Grover Original Rotomatics tuners for stability, Guild HB-1 Humbuckers with Alnico II Magnets for warm yet articulate timbre, and a phase accurate to vintage spec. The Polara Kim Thayil features the "Badmotorfinger" back cover and "King Animal" truss rod cover, emblematic of Soundgarden's legacy. A bound Rosewood fingerboard with Pearlloid block inlays, Tune-o-Matic bridge & compensated stopbar tailpiece enhance playability.



JACKSON PRO SERIES SIGNATURE JOSH SMITH SOLOIST SL7 ET

RRP: \$4,699
jacksonguitars.com/en-au

The 7-string collaboration between Jackson and Josh Smith (Northlane) begins with a 27" scale length, essential for providing a wider sonic palette and handling the extreme low tunings Smith depends upon. The Soloist alder body is sleekly sculpted for ergonomic comfort, and has been paired with a graphite-reinforced through-body caramelized maple neck for enhanced stability and sustain. Designed to deliver effortless playability, the 12"-16" compound radius ebony fingerboard with 24 jumbo frets has a more pronounced curvature across its width near the nut for comfortable chording, and gradually flattens to a very slight curvature toward the upper frets for blazing fast solos and comfortable bends.



LINE 6 HX ONE

RRP: \$699.99 • au.yamaha.com

HX One is a powerful stereo effect pedal in an ultra-compact enclosure that easily fits onto any pedalboard. It features intuitive controls, 250+ effects taken from HX family processors, a unique Flux Controller, a jack for connecting an optional expression pedal or two footswitches, adjustable input impedance, MIDI capabilities, and a choice of true or buffered DSP bypass.



TONE CITY GOLDEN PLEXI 2

RRP: \$119 • egm.net.au

Get the classic plexi-style tone in an affordable version! Features less noise, wider gain response and a slight mid-range boost. The dynamics is like a real tube amplifier, so that when you play fast, you can still distinguish the sound of each string. When its set at low gain, the sound will not be obscure but will remain clear, which marks it as distinct from other common distortion pedals. Due to the reasonable circuit design, its noise is also controlled at a very low level.



EARTHQUAKER DEVICES ZOAR

RRP: \$249.99 • au.yamaha.com

Zoar is a medium-high gain discrete distortion (using only transistors; no opamps or diodes in here!) that has that touch sensitive amp-like quality to it that everyone craves. It has been finely tuned to create a highly tweakable hi-fi and modern sounding distortion, but with the ghosts of old school circuitry to deliver a grind that is both instantly familiar and delightfully unique. Want that defined sparkle and tightness of an overdrive? This has it. Want that low-medium gain fuzz that's perfect for drop tuned guitars and basses? This has it. Want to be able to dial in and control every nuance of your tone from jangly on-the-verge of break up to blowing the walls out heavy saturation? Then this is the pedal for you.





PHIL JONES BASS DOUBLE FOUR

RRP: From \$1,019 egm.com.au

The Double Four is the pinnacle of micro bass amps. With new driver design, acoustic loading and the latest digital amplifier technology, this tiny bass combo may be designed as a practice amp but continues to amaze everyone with the great PJB signature bass tone. From a cabinet with the size of a jewel box, this seems to defy the laws of physics.

MARKBASS CMB121 AND CMB101 BLACK LINE

RRP: \$1,095 - \$695 • cmcmusic.com.au

Markbass is now producing a range of bass combos that every bass player can afford – while maintaining their class leading tone and build quality. The CMB121 Black Line is a 150W combo with custom 12" speaker, and is the perfect choice when you need the right sound and power for jams or gigging. Like its big brother, the CMB101 Black Line, at 60w with a 10" speaker, is compact, light, ultra portable and delivers tone superior to any other practice amp at this price thanks to Markbass technology. Both combos feature a headphone output, and an aux input for mixing your bass sound with external media - letting you practice anywhere, anytime.



ZOOM MS-200D

RRP: \$TBA • dynamicmusic.com.au

The MS-200D+ features 200 drives and distortions, the most ever in one stompbox. That includes 164 Zoom originals plus 36 emulations of classic tones that cover overdrives, distortions, boosts, fuzz, and more. With up to 200 custom patches, you can create unique distortions by chaining any two effects together in series, parallel, or alternate for the ability to quickly switch between two tones. The LCD screen changes colour, making it easier to distinguish each drive and distortion type while scrolling.



FENDER VINTERA II '60S BASS VI

RRP: \$2,399 • fender.com

Revive the timeless sound of the '60s with the Vintera II '60s Bass VI and experience the iconic looks, inspiring feel and incomparable tone that only a Fender can deliver. The Vintera II '60s Bass VI features an alder body and a maple neck for classic Fender tone that's full of punch and clarity. The mid-'60s "C"-shape neck lends a comfortably familiar grip that feels just right in your hand, while the 7.25" radius fingerboard with vintage-tall frets provide vintage comfort with ample room for big bends and expressive vibrato. Under the hood, you'll find a trio of vintage-style early-'60s single-coil pickups that deliver all the sweet and sparkling, warm and woody tone that made Fender famous.

MUSIC MAN LUKE 4 SSS

RRP: Contact dealer • cmcmusic.com.au

Celebrating three decades with Grammy award-winning guitarist and signature artist Steve Lukather, the Ernie Ball Music Man company is proud to announce the arrival of the new Luke 4 SSS signature guitar. This fourth instalment in the Lukather signature line of instruments features a roasted alder body with a figured roasted maple neck and rosewood fingerboard. The Luke 4 is outfitted with custom Music Man pickup technology, delivering an incredibly dynamic and responsive playing experience. The pickups can achieve an ultra-high-output, powerful, low-end response while retaining a distinctively clean, clear tone at lower volume levels.



ESTEVE 65 ANOS GUITAR

RRP: Contact dealer
zenithmusic.com.au

Founded in 1957, Guitarras Esteve recently celebrated their 65 Anniversary. To mark this occasion they have developed a new guitar model, the '65 Años'. This instrument features a new double top with Nomex, cedar top, green ebony body with double back, and a special commemorative portal sound hole. It is a wonderful instrument with a clear sound, power and sustain.

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10 RECORDING MISTAKES EVERY GUITARIST MAKES

Whether you're recording at home or heading into the studio, these are the biggest recording blunders and how to avoid them.

Words by **Matt McCracken**.

Recording your guitar parts can be a nerve-racking experience, even for players who've done it a million times. If you're heading into the studio there are time constraints to think of, the leer of your bandmates as you fail to hit that tricky bend yet again, and the overall pressure of trying to nail a perfect take in front of other musicians.

Even when recording at home by yourself there's the option paralysis of plugins and presets to think about, ensuring your composition is perfect, and setting your own time constraints so you actually get your songs finished. It's a bit of a minefield to say the least, so to make things easier for you, we've put together a list of 10 common recording mistakes every guitarist makes to help ease you into your next recording project.

As a guitar player of over 20 years, I've done loads of studio sessions, and countless takes at home for freelance audio work and my own projects. I'm by no means the perfect guitarist, but I've learned a hell of a lot along the path of my own guitar journey. So allow my experience to lead you through any potential pitfalls in your next recording project, and ensure your upcoming recording session is a success.

RUSHING THE COMPOSITION

More than anything, the composition is the most important aspect of any recording. It doesn't matter how expensive the gear you use, how incredible your sweep picking is, or the size of your pedalboard if the song itself sucks. More than any other part of the recording process, the composition is king.

Think about the technology available to famous musicians in the '60s and '70s versus what's available to your average guitar player today. Those legends of guitar couldn't even have dreamed of having the amount of resources available to us, and

yet despite their technological disadvantage, songs from that era still ring true in the present.

That's because a good song is a good song whether it's recorded on a priceless Neve mixing desk or a free version of Cubase. You might be recording a three-chord earworm or a 15-minute prog metal epic, but the composition is what makes any recording truly great.

So, before you get down to properly recording your takes, make sure you've comprehensively demoed your song. Get feedback. Analyze it in depth and think about where each part sits, whether it serves the song, and how you can improve by simplifying things or adding more to pad out the composition.

NOT PRACTICING YOUR PARTS

As an extension of our previous point, once you're happy with your composition, you need to practice, practice, practice. Knowing every inch of your part, and the composition as a whole, is critical to ensuring top performance and is especially important if you're going into the studio, as you'll likely be on a time limit.

Of course, some aspects of your song will change in the studio, as that spark of inspiration to make a last-minute change or remove a part is always a possibility, but being totally prepared ahead of time

is the mark of a professional. Being well-rehearsed is also a great way to cull any stage fright you might get when it's your time to lay down a take.

Before I go into the studio I'll spend at least two weeks recording my parts at home to a click track. By the time I actually get to recording the song I'll be absolutely sick of it! But I'll know every aspect of my own part and those of my bandmates, which will result in a smoother and less stressful experience for everyone.

This is just as important if you're recording at home too, because not only will you save time on your project, but you'll ensure a better final product if your takes are as slick as they can be. Practicing your parts ahead of time can also give you a lot of focus that a solo project will need, as many of us are guilty of falling into the trap of not knowing when a part is done and you should move on to the next.

USING BRAND NEW STRINGS

You might think that using brand-new strings on a recording is the right way to do things, and you'd be half right. Putting a fresh set of strings on will ensure there aren't any intonation issues that often accompany old, dead strings, but what you don't want is strings that are totally fresh. There are a couple of reasons for this, and they're both tone and performance-related.

Before any recording, you'll want to 'bed' the strings in. Taking away some of that new string 'shininess' will give you a better-recorded tone, because the 'clank' of new strings can end up sticking out a mile on the record. Giving them some use before you commit to your takes will give your guitar a more balanced tone that will sit better in the mix.

There's a secondary purpose to this in that by playing your strings in a bit, it will give them a good stretch so they don't go out of tune mid-take. We'd recommend changing a day or two before you go to record, but make sure you play them a good amount before you put your takes on track. By doing this you'll get all the tone benefits of fresh strings, with optimal performance and stability too.

FORGETTING TO TUNE UP AFTER EACH TAKE

This is something I learned the hard way. After absolutely nailing two takes of a complex guitar part with super tight accuracy when we got to the mixing phase we suddenly realized that one of them was out of tune. It's a disheartening feeling knowing you'll have to go back to it again, especially when it's a complex part. So getting into the habit of tuning regularly will ensure you don't encounter this painful feeling.

I tune before every single take, whether it's an overdub of a small part or I'm going for a full 16 bars. The locking tuners on many of my guitars mean I'm hardly ever actually adjusting anything, but the painful memory of previous tuning mishaps is a strong reminder that it's a worthwhile habit to get into. Ideally, you'll have a dedicated guitar tuner you can run into, but a software tuner in your DAW will do the trick as well.

"PUTTING A FRESH SET OF STRINGS ON WILL ENSURE THERE AREN'T ANY INTONATION ISSUES THAT OFTEN ACCOMPANY OLD, DEAD STRINGS, BUT WHAT YOU DON'T WANT IS STRINGS THAT ARE TOTALLY FRESH."

"MANY PRO GUITARISTS USE FAR LESS DISTORTION THAN YOU'D IMAGINE, IN FACT, IT'S THEIR FEEL FOR RHYTHM AND TECHNIQUE THAT MAKES TRACKS SOUND HEAVY OR ARTICULATE."

POOR GAIN STAGING

Moving on to more technical matters, gain staging is the process of optimizing your levels at each point of amplification to ensure the optimal signal level. In other words, it's about getting the best sound possible. In a studio, your engineer should have the experience to take care of this, but when you're recording at home, it's a critical step in getting a great-sounding product.

To understand gain staging, let's start with an analog signal path, like what you would find in a traditional recording studio. With your guitar amplifier, and particularly tube amps, you want it loud enough that you're capturing the best possible sound, but not so loud that you're overloading the microphone it's going into. Conversely, you don't want the amp so quiet that you pick up extra room noise, so you need to find the perfect balance between mic position and amp setting to get the best tone.

Once that's set, you then need to repeat the process into your audio interface or any outboard gear that you have, ensuring that you have a loud enough signal that delivers a great sound, but not so loud that you get squaring off of the waveform, or 'clipping' as it's more commonly known. It's a balancing act that takes time, but trust us, it's totally worth the effort.

Just because you're recording digitally doesn't mean the same rules don't apply either. Your amp simulator will have an input and output level that can be set, so make sure it's not clipping before it goes into your DAW. Any plugins that emulate compression, EQ or saturation need proper gain staging too, so take the time to set your levels and make sure you've got enough space to boost things later on if you need to.

NOT GETTING IT RIGHT AT THE SOURCE

I've made the mistake of recording a song with a purely DI guitar and adding my amp simulation onto

the track later in the mixing phase. It doesn't give you a great result. In a studio, an engineer will dial the best sound possible before committing to the takes, and if you're recording at home, you should do the same.

The settings of your amp, pedals, and those on your guitar itself play a massive role in how you actually play your instrument. The way the strings react to the distortion, or how your notes play with your delay pedal's repeats are all part of the language of your music and your distinctive voice in it.

When recording at home you've got a myriad of sounds available, so picking the right one for the job is something you should take your time over. One of the best things about recording with plugins is that you can always go back and change things if you want to, but you should be careful with trying to find the 'perfect' tone in isolation, and instead find something that serves the song and sits nicely in the context of the whole mix.

If you're going into the studio, then honing in on your sound before you get there will save you time and prevent the back-and-forth of 'let's try this' or 'let's try that'. Your engineer may ask you to tweak certain things on your amp or pedalboard but you'll still want your core sound absolutely nailed before you go in, which will give you more time to experiment with additional sounds should you feel the need to.

USING TOO MUCH DISTORTION

Adding loads of distortion sounds fantastic in your bedroom, but on a recorded track it typically leads to an unfocused guitar sound. Many of the heaviest songs in existence were actually recorded with minimal distortion, as clarity and articulation are critical on guitar-heavy tracks. Many pro guitarists use far less distortion than you'd imagine, in fact, it's their feel for rhythm and technique that makes tracks sound heavy or articulate.

Not only does too much distortion cloud your tone, but it also covers up deficiencies in your playing. By using less distortion, you'll be forced to play far more cleanly, which will result in a better take with less string noise. If you really want to saturate things later on, just remember you can always add more distortion with plugins, but you can't remove it if it's there on your original take.

NOT USING A DI BOX

If you're recording the analog route with a microphone on your amplifier, then we highly recommend investing in a good DI box to capture a clean signal of your take. It gives you more options when coming to the mixing phase, allowing you to use an amp simulator to create a tight double of your original sound or reamp the take entirely if you're not happy with the sound you initially captured.

If you're taking the home recording route, then you can still grab a DI when using an amp simulator, as you can simply copy your take to a new track and use a different setting to create doubles or run it through any other plugins you want to. Whilst physically laying down a second take is always better than copy-pasting, sometimes it's not possible due to time constraints, and having a DI of your original take can end up being super handy if you find something isn't working during the mix phase.

RELYING ON PRESETS

Presets are great. Most amp simulations and plugins come with them but your favorite engineer doesn't rely on presets. A preset is a fantastic starting point, but just because that 'lead guitar' EQ patch sounded great on Chris Lord-Alge's mix, doesn't mean it will do the job on yours.

Falling into the trap of relying on presets is something that happens to producers of all kinds of music, so you need to get into the headspace that a preset is a great place to start, but shouldn't be used for the final product. You should be thinking about how the part is sitting with the drums, bass, vocals, and other instruments in your mix. Is it covering up that synth pad? Is it clashing with the hi-hat frequencies?

Don't be afraid to tweak things to get it sounding right, and always have the overall picture of the song in the back of your mind. Sure, in isolation that crazy ring modulator patch sounds amazing, but ask yourself if it's actually adding anything to the song.

NOT USING A REFERENCE TRACK

This is one of the most important lessons in producing music of any form, not just for guitarists. Using a reference track from a similar genre is one of the best ways to make your song sound amazing, as it gives you a point of focus that prevents you from getting lost in making changes to your sound.

Find a high-quality version of your favorite band's track on Bandcamp or Soundcloud and pull it into your mix, then once you've completed all your takes, A/B your mix with the great-sounding one you love. By comparing and contrasting the two, you can work out what your mix is missing compared to something done by a professional.

You won't get it sounding exactly the same of course, but that's not the point. By working this way you'll be constantly refreshing your ears, giving you a focal point that prevents you going down the wrong path with your mix decisions. Having a few reference tracks in mind before you even start the recording process is a great way to get results when it comes to polishing the final project. 





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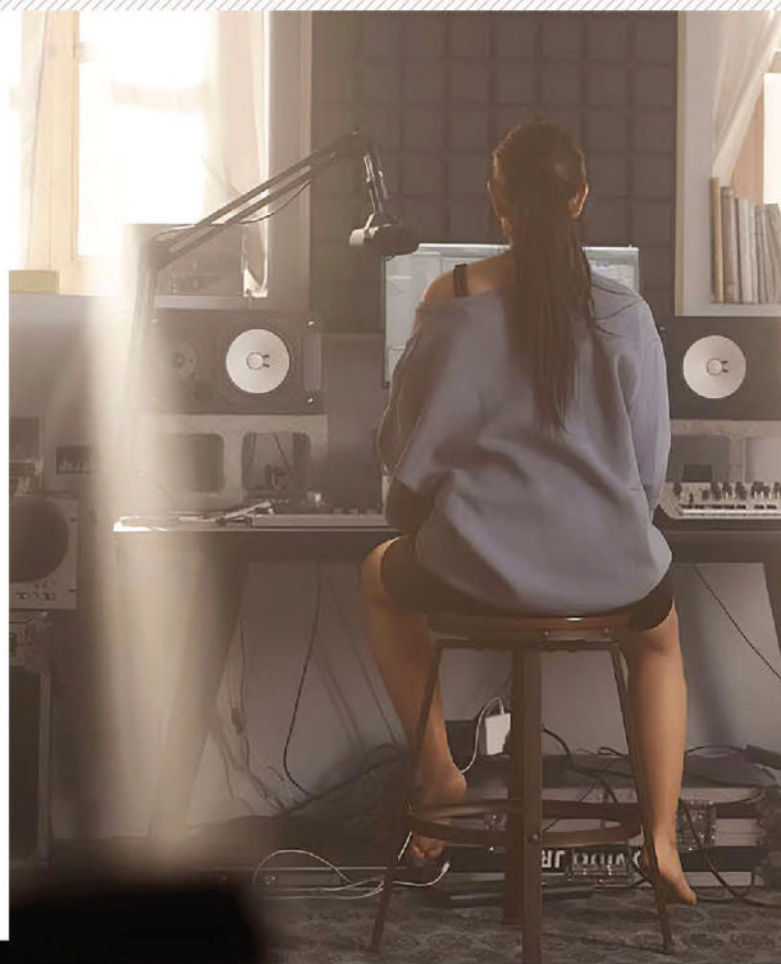
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SHURE MICROPHONES SORTED AND EXPLAINED

Our pick of the best recording mics from the biggest name in the game – and what you should do with them. Words by **Chris Corfield**.

Since 1925, this great American brand has been behind everything from Presidential addresses to conference calls, and from music festivals to YouTube reaction videos. That's a great legacy, but due to the many and varied Shure models available, you might wonder which is suited to your purpose. So below we've rounded up our favourite Shure microphones to help you choose the right mic for your needs. From straightforward vocal mics to feature-filled podcast options, there's a Shure mic to suit almost any application. Let's take a look.



SHURE SM7B BEST FOR VOICE RECORDING

Type: Cardioid **Connectivity:** XLR **Features:** Bass rolloff and presence boost controls, internal air suspension, pop filter

If you've watched a vlog, or listened to a podcast, in the last 10 years, then the chances are you've already experienced the aural delights of the Shure SM7B. This is a heavyweight vocal microphone, designed specifically to give your recordings that professional broadcast sheen. To achieve this, the SM7B has built-in frequency response filters, which do a great job at boosting or attenuating certain frequencies, meaning they don't require major surgery once you get them into your computer. Its cardioid polar pattern also effectively cuts off-axis noise, meaning it can focus all its power solely on capturing your voice. You will, however, require an audio interface or mixer to use the SM7B, as it only has an XLR connection.

However, for the ultimate in top-tier vocal performance, it's hard to recommend anything else.



SHURE MV7 BEST FOR LAPTOP RECORDINGS

Type: Cardioid **Connectivity:** XLR, USB **Features:** Complementary MOTIV app, touch controls

Turning its attention to the growing content creation market, and the vlogs, podcasts and streaming setups popping up in bedrooms and home studios the world over, Shure launched the MV7. This is arguably the best microphone for people who don't want to learn about microphones, as in, they want to plug something in and for it to sound great. In less capable hands, this could have led to a dumbed-down, stripped back approach but with the MV7, Shure has another classic on its hands. Sure, there are ways in which they've simplified the overall user-experience, from handy presets in the accompanying app through to the on-microphone touch controls. But underneath that layer of help there's still a high quality, superb sounding dynamic microphone that will meet the standard of any user in a variety of applications. We like the option of using USB or XLR to record - naturally you'll need USB to access the MOTIV app - while the build quality and durability is the same as we've come to expect from Shure.

"WE'VE ROUNDED UP OUR FAVOURITE SHURE MICROPHONES TO HELP YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT MIC FOR YOUR NEEDS. FROM STRAIGHTFORWARD VOCAL MICS TO FEATURE-FILLED PODCAST OPTIONS, THERE'S A SHURE MIC TO SUIT ALMOST ANY APPLICATION."



SHURE SH55

BEST FOR PERFORMING

Type: Cardioid **Connectivity:** XLR **Features:** Shock mount, on/off switch

The Shure SH55 is known to many as the 'Elvis' mic, on account of its association with The King himself. It's easy to see why it's proven popular over the years, offering vocalists a trusted tool which delivers on the vocal front while also looking extremely cool. The cardioid polar pattern means it focuses directly on the sound coming from the performer's mouth, while rejecting noise outside that axis, making it ideal for live performance over studio work. The SH55 is not, it must be said, a toy. It is solidly built, and weighs over 600g so is better suited to being housed on a stand, but with that weight comes a degree of heft in the results it provides.



SHURE SM57

BEST FOR RECORDING GUITAR AMPS

Type: Cardioid **Connectivity:** XLR **Features:** Tailored frequency response, built-in wind and pop filter

Recording instruments, in our experience, is more an art form than a science. Different instruments, from the snares, toms and kicks of an acoustic drum set through to the force of a raging valve amplifier, will yield different results and there is no right answer. However, one thing that rings true for any producer, is the place a trusty Shure SM57 will hold in their heart. Equally at home recording on a live stage as it is in a studio, the SM57 laughs in the face of excessive volume, and delivers the most consistent, usable results you'll get in any setting. Taking guitar amps as an example; a typical setup will employ two (or more) mics. A condenser, to pick up the nuance and unique character of an amp, and then almost always an SM57 pressed up against the grille to capture the quiet-to-loud dynamics of the performance. It's a potent combo, and one that has been used on countless records over the years. As with its vocal-focused brother, the SM58, you'll struggle to find a pro studio anywhere that doesn't rely on the veteran SM57 for recording instruments.



SHURE SM58

BEST FOR LIVE VOCALS

Type: Cardioid **Connectivity:** XLR **Features:** Tailored frequency response, built-in wind and pop filter

If you were to enter any live music venue, there's more than a high chance you'll be able to find at least one Shure SM58 vocal microphone. From the largest stadiums, to the grimmest underground clubs, the SM58 has been trusted to deliver exceptional vocal-forward performances for decades. Some users rate the slightly tweaked frequency response, designed to trim some of the mids while accentuating desirable upper and lower frequencies. Some users marvel at its relative low cost, which makes it a viable option for anybody at any budget. For most, however, it's the fact that - barring acts of god - you're going to have a very difficult time trying to break one of these. You'll struggle to find anyone who regrets owning at least one Shure SM58.



RRP: \$2,749

Fender Tone Master Pro

Fender's big entry into the digital modelling floorboard arena offers stunning amp and effects models and double the processing power of its nearest rivals. Review by **Nick Guppy**

It's been about four years since Fender sprang a surprise on us with the introduction of the all-digital Tone Master amplifier range, which leveraged high-powered digital processing, Class D power and lightweight speakers to recreate some of its best-loved 1960s black-panel amplifiers. These had no menus, no presets and no effects other than the reverb and tremolo the original amps came with.

With dwindling and increasingly variable valve supply putting pressure on volume manufacturers, the Tone Master amps make a lot of sense, delivering authentic classic tones with the consistency, reliability and portability that valves struggle to compete with. They also set many of us wondering what kind of product might result if the Tone Master's prodigious digital capability was unleashed. Now we have the answer with Fender's latest surprise – the Tone Master Pro, a stunning broadside into the professional modelling floorboard market.

The Tone Master Pro is a good-looking and substantial piece of kit, with a solid alloy top surrounding a seven-inch full-colour touchscreen

display, with two large knobs either side. Behind the screen lurk no less than eight cores of processing power, double that of the Tone Master amps and the immediate competition. The knob on the left is the Navigation control, which turns to browse presets and can be pushed to switch between Normal and Gig views – the latter being a high-visibility display of the current preset. The knob on the right is a global master volume, which can be pushed to display the Tone Master Pro's output mixer.

Below the screen are 10 footswitches, which also double as rotary encoders. Each switch has a dynamic illuminated 'scribble strip' above it as well as a colour-coded illuminated surround, which provides at-a-glance info for which preset or effect is active. The two switches on the far left govern bank up/down changes, while the two on the far right operate tap tempo/tuner and the footswitch mode, toggling between effect and footswitch operation and enabling the Tone Master Pro's 60-second looper.

There's a wealth of connectivity on the rear panel, with a standard guitar jack alongside a Mic/Line input

on combi jack/XLR. Four effects loops can be configured for mono or stereo operation, and there are two pairs of stereo line outputs on jack and XLR, with a useful ground lift switch. You'll also find an Aux In 3.5mm jack and a 6.3mm headphones jack back here, followed by sockets for two expression pedals, an external footswitch and a TRS amp control jack, which can be used on most amplifiers to operate up to two functions. Then we get MIDI In and Out/Thru DIN connectors, together with a mini SD Card connector and a USB 'C' socket for connecting to the Tone Master Pro's desktop editing app, as well as four-channel audio recording and firmware updating. Lastly, a regular IEC mains plug and on/off rocker switch are topped by a miniature version of Fender's iconic 'jewel' power indicator.

The Tone Master Pro's smart, understated looks and heavy-duty hardware exude the kind of class and professional reliability we'd expect from Fender.

The Tone Master Pro's display features superb visual renderings of effects, amps and cabinets. The screen is optimised for touch-controlled editing, with a few conventional menus operating quietly in the background. Tapping on amp or effects images zooms in and instantly makes parameters available to tweak on the rotary encoder footswitches. You can also swipe to add, remove or replace items as needed. It's a fast, flexible and highly intuitive workflow that needs little reference to user manuals as everything is on display with just a couple of taps or swipes.

"After tone, the second most important thing was



to make the interface absolutely easy to use," says Fender's director of product management, Jason Stilwell. "Our ethos is 'three knobs and the truth', that's the Fender way. We spent literally thousands of hours evaluating the workflows to make them so easy."

A USB 'C' socket on the rear panel of the unit lets you connect the Tone Master Pro to a Mac or PC desktop for editing, recording and connecting to the Fender Tone portal. There's also integrated Bluetooth for streaming music.

The Tone Master Pro's amp and effects voices use the same component-based modelling as the Tone Master designs, and they sound amazing with an organic depth and dynamic response that seems unique to the Tone Master family. "Each amp model takes around three months to complete from the day the engineer starts coding, then there are many listening tests until we feel the model is dialled in," adds Jason.

As you'd expect, then, there are many prime cuts from Fender's back catalogue, with Tweed and black-panel era legends to the fore, alongside more modern classics such as the 3x10 Vibro-King, while Fender family members EVH are well represented in the high-gain stakes, the highlight being an apparently Van-Halen-approved EVH 5150. British amp model offerings include the JCM800 and Silver Jubilee alongside normal and bright AC30s, while boutique fans can salivate over superb MkIIc+ and BE100 models.



Effects are equally tempting, with classic circuits such as the TS and Rat alongside many modern cult designs. There are currently around 125 amp and effects models, with many more due in the near future. Together with over 6,000 Fender-approved IRs, the Tone Master Pro offers a practically infinite range of sounds, from ethereal pads to stunning stripped-back valve-like authenticity.

With no less than eight processing cores, Fender has put the Tone Master Pro way ahead of the competition, as well as adding plenty of room for expansion over time. There's currently no option for profiling, although the separate mic/line input suggests it may be possible at some point further down the road. Meanwhile, the Tone Master Pro is a serious professional tool for stage, studio and home, especially when teamed with one or two of Fender's new FR cabs, and it's priced to compete with the nearest rivals. If you're ready to make the move to digital, we reckon there's very little that comes close at the moment. The Tone Master Pro is definitely a leap into the future. 🎸

guitar

VERDICT

Fender has issued a seriously impressive tool for all purposes: stage, studio and home. In the digital realm, there's little that can compete with it in terms of quality and versatility.

- 🌱 Stunning authentic amp and effects tones covering all genres
- 🌱 Industry-leading eight-core processing power
- 🌱 Superlative user interface
- 🌱 All the connectivity you could wish for
- 🌱 Available at a fair price

❤️ It's hard to level any criticism – this is a product that's set to grow and evolve and will likely stay at the top of the tree for some time

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Guild Surfliner Deluxe

The Surfliner gets a vibrato and 'deluxe'. Review by **Dave Burrluck**

It's rare that heritage companies like Guild come up with new guitar designs. Why should they when there are a huge number of models to reproduce from their own past? The Surfliner originally appeared in early 2022 and although you can see some design cues from their past, it was actually the first new design they'd created for, well, longer than we can remember.

Named after a train line that runs down the West coast of California, the original HSS model, quickly followed by a dual humbucker version, was a rare Guild bolt-on, but unusually features a tune-o-matic with through-body string anchorage along with, unusually, 23 frets. It also features some unusual on/off pickup switches, the sort of thing you'd find on a small table lamp from IKEA.

This aptly named Deluxe model – which was actually announced early in 2023 and has only just arrived on our shores – adds a touch of class to that base with three gloss metallic body colours, a block-inlaid and bound rosewood fingerboard on a roasted, as opposed to plain,

maple neck, its large back-angled and colour-matched headstock spliced on under the 2nd fret.

But the fundamental change is the addition of an offset-style vibrato – surely essential if you're going to have 'surf' in a guitar's name – along with rear-locking tuners while those tricky on/off switches are replaced with an industry-standard five-way pickup selector.

Yes, all this deluxe-ness heaps dollars onto the price but, plugged in, there's no sense of style over substance. Certainly, if you want some big clean surf sounds, the Deluxe delivers. The Aerosonics have a little edge to them that seems to add a little grit while the relatively low output HB-2 bridge humbucker combines a bit of thickness, smoother but with clarity and without a big volume difference. It certainly sounds rather good into a low-wattage valve amp but really loves a decent pedalboard where that clarity and bite can be tamed or enhanced to take you way beyond surf. It sounds huge with some ambient delays and nice and gnarly with your favourite fuzz.

It's a little heavier, at 8.47lb, than the earlier

Surfliner but that does give it a very centred feel strapped on. The frets could do with a final polish though, along with the neck to smooth the slightly papery-feeling satin. We'd also like to see a roller bridge tune-o-matic bridge although, to be fair, after the strings were stretched and things settled in a bit, the small travel vibrato stayed perfectly in-tune for those essential light shimmers.

Overall there's some good craft and classy design here, a very vibey, cool-looking guitar that pulls out some Strat-y sounds with kick if you need. We'd rock this one! 🎸

guitar WORLD VERDICT

While the street price of this Deluxe is closer to the \$1,000 mark, the improvements on the core Surfliner are ample and beneficial enough that it's worth it at RRP. This is gorgeous and affordable for the right player.

- ▲ Now with offset-style vibrato
- ▲ Great price
- ▲ Classic surf sounds
- ♥ Frets felt rough on tested unit
- ♥ Roller bridge tune-o-matic would be nice

GUILD GUITARS

Web: guildguitars.com/

RRP: \$1,399

Epiphone Joe Bonamassa 1963 SG Custom

It's budget, but this JB Custom nails the right SG points. Review by **Art Thompson**

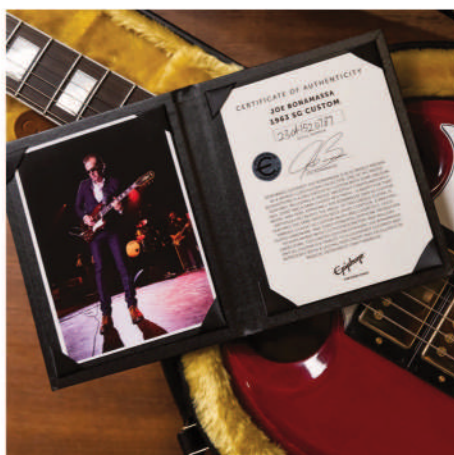
Epiphone's latest limited-edition release focuses on a particular 1963 Gibson SG Custom that was special-ordered and obviously treasured by its original owner and is now part of Joe Bonamassa's collection of prized vintage guitars. Finished in Dark Cherry Red to match the rare color worn by the original guitar, the JB 1963 SG Custom features a mahogany body and a glued-in neck that's carved in a SlimTaper C profile that melds into a smoothly contoured heel unique to this guitar. As such, the playing feel is very comfortable and bending strings is glassy smooth, courtesy of an ebony fingerboard with 22 medium-jumbo frets that offer even crowns, a silky polish and nicely beveled tips. A white Graph Tech nut with rounded corners enhances it all and helps make the guitar inspiring to pick up and play.

The SG Custom was a class act in 1963, and Epiphone's version is every bit as appealing. The attention to detail is impressive, as evidenced by the flawless multi-ply binding and split-diamond mother-of-pearl inlay on the headstock, and by the single-ply binding around the fretboard, which has mother-of-pearl block inlays that are set without a trace of epoxy visible. Other details include a white three-ply pickguard and a plastic "Custom" badge between the neck pickup and the end of the fretboard. A plush-lined hardshell case and a booklet with a certificate of authenticity sporting Bonamassa's signature are included.

The gold-plated hardware consists of Kluson Waffleback tuners, a LockTone Tune-o-matic bridge

with nylon saddles, and an engraved Maestro Vibrola tailpiece with an arm that rides in a nylon bushing and can fold out of the way when not being used. The action of the unit is smooth and positive, and it didn't knock the guitar excessively out of tune when used to its limits. The long tailpiece likely contributes to the SG Custom's piano-like sustain too, and the guitar sounds lively and resonant when played acoustically.

In the electronics department, Epiphone ProBucker 2 pickups with alnico poles are fitted in the neck and middle positions, along with a ProBucker 3 at the bridge. A three-way toggle switch selects neck, middle-plus-bridge and bridge, and it's noteworthy that the dual-pickup combination is wired in-phase, unlike most SG Customs and Black Beauty Les Pauls, according to Bonamassa. Far from sounding nasal, the tones are full and have a cool twanginess that's very usable since you're able to blend and EQ things to your heart's content with the dual volume and tone controls. The neck and bridge pickups offer everything from rich, clean jazzy sounds to meaty rock tones when revved up with distortion from pedals or pushed straight into an amp for classic PAF-style grind that's controllable from the guitar for clean and dirty tones. The CTS pots and Mallory caps used in the circuit certainly contribute to the guitar's sound and the fact that it doesn't lose crispness and definition when you turn down, or get muddy when you back off the tone knobs. 



australismusic **VERDICT**

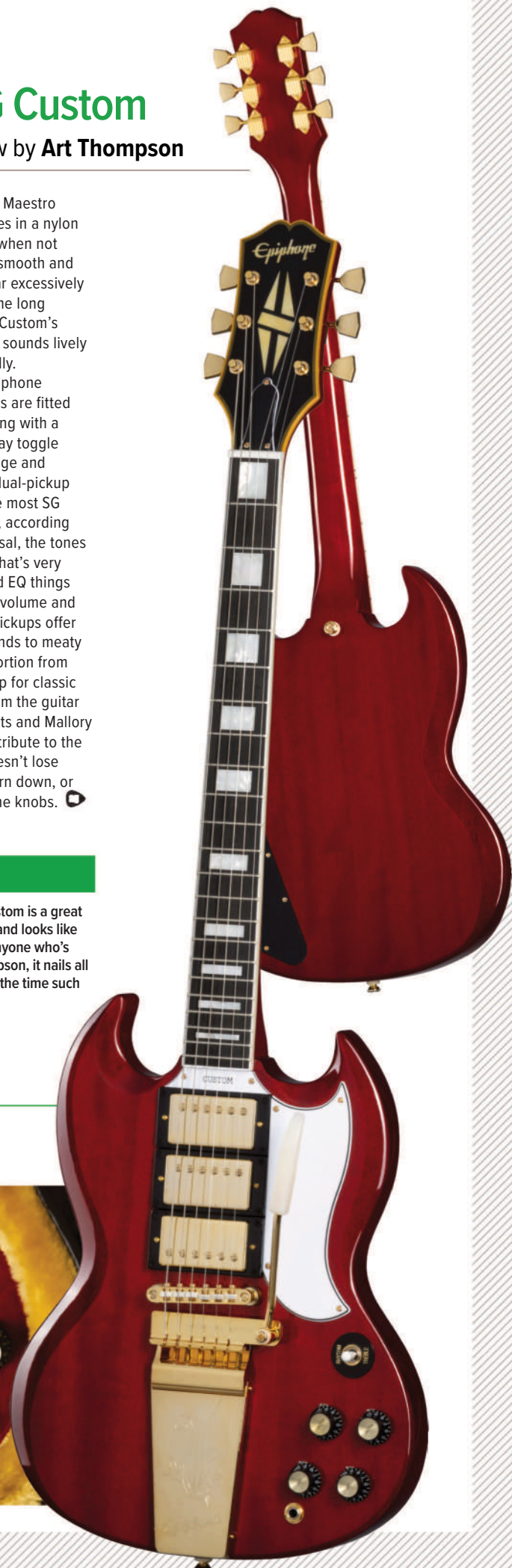
Epiphone's Joe Bonamassa 1963 SG Custom is a great guitar that plays and sounds wonderful and looks like a million bucks. An obvious choice for anyone who's priced out of the market for a vintage Gibson, it nails all the points that made the top-shelf SG of the time such an amazing guitar.

 Impressive tone, playability and build quality

 None

AUSTRALIS MUSIC

Web: australismusic.com.au/





RRP: \$5,549

Esteve Adalid Model 12

A nylon acoustic blending clarity and projection.

Review by **Rob McMullen**

Guitarras Esteve was Established in 1957 by Francisco Esteve, Manuel Adalid Lazaro, and Antonio Monfort in the Spanish City of Valencia on the east coast of the Iberian Peninsula. When the original founders retired, Manuel Adalid Lazaro's son, Manuel Adalid Balbuena, was appointed manager and has grown the business to its present size, employing fifty-two "artisans." Manuel Adalid Junior is a luthier in his own right and, although wanting to capture the quintessential "Spanish Sound", is also progressive in his use of modern technologies and takes inspiration from modern non-Spanish makers.

As well as classical and flamenco guitars Esteve manufactures other instruments in the guitar family such as the three string "Tres" and requinto (alto guitar). The comprehensive classical guitar line includes children's, entry-level, intermediate, professional and luthier-made concert level guitars. There are also models with cutaways and onboard electronics.

The Adalid model 12 lives on the second rung of the "professional" series ladder and has either a spruce or cedar soundboard; my test model is the cedar version. The back and sides are Granadillo, a Central American wood that is harder and denser than Indian rosewood; a quick internet search tells me it is commonly used for marimba bars because of its "clear, bell-like tone". A lightly coloured sapwood grain runs along the sides, just under where the sound board meets, and the mix of flamed and burl grains in the three-piece back is visually striking. The rosette is traditional yet tasteful, and the ornately carved headstock adds a "regal" touch to the occasion. A thin strip of green in the binding subtly sets off the 12's basic brown and black colour palette. This all makes for a seriously gorgeous guitar. Finish is a perfectly applied thin nitro cellulose lacquer. Although construction quality is first rate, the odd bit of glue peeking out from the internal braces and lining attest to the model 12's handcrafted origins.

The African mahogany neck is reinforced with a carbon fibre rod but is not adjustable. The fingerboard is perfectly flat, with a concert approved action of 4.2mm at the 12th fret from low E to high E. The flat "U" shaped neck seemed wider than most but when measured had a standard 52mm nut width. The medium frets feel flat under the fingers but upon close inspection, have a softly rounded crown. The German-made Van Gert machine heads have understated faux-bone buttons and perform their tuning duties with all the accuracy one would need. Strings are Savarez Alliance (carbon) medium tension.

Under the model 12's hood lies a time-honoured Spanish fan system, but instead of the standard seven, there are five tall skinny struts and one small diagonal strut on the treble side as well as a long bridge plate. This is, as the name implies, a small secondary piece of wood or "patch" on the underside of the soundboard directly below the bridge. Different luthiers have different theories as



to the purpose of the patch or if it even necessary. In this instance, it is probably there to stop the thinnish sound board from pulling forward, but this is just conjecture.

Adalid's intention to make an instrument with power and projection is abundantly clear from the start, as merely plucking the open low "E" string delivers a big round note with a satisfyingly solid core. The open "A" and "D" strings are also firmly full-bodied, and these qualities stay as you chromatically climb the fingerboard. The trebles share the above characteristics and at first sound more percussive than singing, and more punchy than romantic. These characteristics are partly a by-product of the model 12's design, but are exaggerated by the fitted carbon strings. A guitar that is so easily activated and with this much muscle doesn't need any aid in this department and would be, I feel, better suited to lower key non carbon strings. Having said that, the trebles seem expressive enough and both the trebles and basses are even, with excellent string to string separation without any obvious dead or "wolf" notes (notes that are inharmonic or louder than others). There is an impressively smooth transition from the unwound "G" string to the wound "D". An abrupt timbre change from these two strings can be the classical guitar's Achilles heel. Playing past the twelfth fret all notes speak well with even sustain, except the first-string B at the nineteenth fret. But this is just unreasonable nit picking in an otherwise very impressive upper fretboard performance. Besides, who's hanging around that end of the fingerboard anyway?

Moving from single notes to chords and robustly rolling an open position E minor add 9, the model 12's sheer power and grunt presents itself immediately. This inspired me to explore more in this key. The notes were well defined in the undulating arpeggios of Villa-Lobos' well-worn Etude No. 1, and the wound strings were robust without being overly bass heavy.

Moving to something more expressive, the

sentimental air of Torroba's "Torija" from his "Castles of Spain" suite was a perfect fit with the model 12's innately Spanish nature. I easily managed to coax emotion from the delicate melody, despite initial reservations about the treble string's inability to "sing". The way the melody stood out from the accompaniment was particularly impressive. The low "E" string tuned to "D" remained controlled and non-boomy despite the instrument's sonic girth.

Staying in dropped "D", I experimented with the light and shade of Leo Brouwer's "Cancion de Cuna (Berceuse)". There was no muddiness in the piece's pizzicato passages, and playing close to and over the soundhole extracted the desired dulcet timbre for the breezy major section. Conversely, playing near or at the bridge brought out the appropriate snap and snarl for the composition's angular minor section.

Warming up, I explored the area of the neck at the seventh position with single notes. When lent into with heavy vibrato, the bass strings answered back with expressive cello-like timbres and the trebles spoke with authority without becoming sloppy or diffuse. I found it almost impossible to drive any of

the strings into buzz or rattle.

Shifting musical gears, the Adalid added just enough colour to JS Bach's "Air on the G String" to support the piece's dreamy appeal without intruding on the piece's stately Northern European quality. The moving voices spoke with clarity with no blurring of notes. On a side note, what is popularly known as "Air on the G String" is a 19th century arrangement of the second movement of Bach's Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068. This arrangement was transposed to "C" as opposed to the original key of "D", and came to be played more romantically as opposed to the original baroque style. This key and interpretation suit the guitar, in my humble opinion.

As I got to know the Model 12 many of my preconceptions began to fade. My first impressions of a somewhat brutal and unforgiving loud box rapidly abated as I played through a variety of pieces and became acquainted with the instrument. It soon

became clear that it is capable of subtle nuance, and this combined with its outstanding definition, string separation, power and projection make it an exemplary musical instrument. It is a guitar that blends modern clarity and projection with a gentle nod to guitars from a bygone era, particularly the famous Madrid guitars heard on recording from the '60s and '70s. The action and string tension may require some strength in the fretting hand and a reasonably developed technique to bring out its best, but the model 12 was not designed for gentle non-committal noodling and a player of any level could be forgiven for buying it based on looks alone.

Because of its proficient design, build quality and tone it is obvious the Adalid Model 12 originates from a well-established maker with years of experience. The more I explored the Model 12 the more its strengths and charms were revealed. Combining premium timbers, top notch workmanship and design, it is a characterful, concert ready guitar approaching the performance of high-end bespoke instruments. All of this is wrapped in a seriously good-looking package. 🎸

guitar

VERDICT

If you're looking for a high-performance classical guitar but the budget can't quite stretch to a luthier-built instrument, the Adalid 12 is approaching that ballpark without breaking the bank.

- ▲ Exceptional power, volume and projection.
- ▲ Excellent string separation with authoritative trebles particularly the top E string
- ▲ Characterful but controlled basses.
- ▲ Concert worthy performance at a comparatively modest price.
- ▲ Striking aesthetics. Fit for purpose.
- ♥ High concert-style string tension and action requires strength and developed technique.

ZENITH MUSIC

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"My first impressions of a somewhat brutal and unforgiving loud box rapidly abated as I played through a variety of pieces and became acquainted with the instrument."

Seagull Maritime SWS CH CW Presys II

Small of stature, big of voice. Review by **Steve Henderson**

Seagull Guitars has been making high quality acoustic guitars for a long time. Their parent company, Godin Guitars, is rightly proud that their instruments are built entirely in their own North American factories. Founded in 1972 by Robert Godin in the rural town of La Patrie, Quebec, Canada, Godin Guitars is now one of North America's major guitar manufacturers. Seagull has been their premier acoustic range since its inception in 1982, and the company continues to offer new Seagull models as market requirements morph with playing trends.

This Seagull is from their Maritime range and features all solid wood construction in an auditorium sized instrument. Seagull's auditorium shape is called a "concert hall" (the "CH" in the title) and its body dimensions are almost identical to Martin's venerable 000/OM shape. Now almost ten years old, their concert hall range continues to be a popular choice for the singer/songwriter or the rocker who wants to add some acoustic flavour without the feedback issues of a dreadnought. Yes, Godin jumped on the popularity of the 000 revival (and why not?) but they've done such a great job with their CH models that nobody's complaining (except, maybe, Martin?).

This particular guitar is part of the Maritime "Solid Wood Series" (SWS): a mahogany neck on a mahogany body with a spruce top and an ebony pin bridge...all solid and all very traditional. The one non-traditional component is the fretboard. It's made from with Richlite, a man-made composite of paper and resin that has been applied with heat and pressure. This process produces a material that is tougher than ebony but with a very similar texture and feel, and the environment (including weather and body fluids) has no effect. Developed for the military, Richlite has been around for 80 years but its application for guitar is comparatively recent. Several guitar makers use it, including Martin. As an environmentally responsible replacement for ebony, it's a winner.

First impression? It looks fantastic! The Maritime is beautifully finished. The semi-gloss lacquer is faultless, and the multi-layer binding nicely offsets the mahogany and spruce. And the headstock binding is a nice touch. Another nice touch, and a nod to its vintage heritage, is the herringbone around the sound hole and the 1930s-style scratchplate, reminiscent of Gibson's Nick Lucas and Roy Smeck models. Some might not be too sure of Seagull's

tapered headstock but it's not just an aesthetic statement. This design facilitates an almost straight string angle through the nut, giving it greater tuning stability and a more even tension from string to string. You have to experience this to really get it, but it works.

Second impression? The tone is very even, as expected, but surprisingly bold, given its size. Strumming the guitar offers smooth, rich mids and highs, and the lows are tight and defined – it has none of the woolly bass notes that many dreadnoughts produce, especially when they are driven. Strum as hard as you like and the Maritime CH continues to deliver a consistent tone across the spectrum, and even compresses a touch. In a band environment, this is great because the Maritime will find its own niche in the mix.

Of course, for fingerstyle, the Maritime CH shines. The sound leaps out with that same rich tone. There's plenty of sonic separation between the strings and yet they meld together beautifully. It's a surprisingly robust sound, great for live performance (solo and duo players will love it), and quite at odds with the guitar's ease of playing and quick articulation. Usually, you have to work a bit harder to produce this much volume, but the Maritime just delivers! Also, low action like this is usually accompanied by some rattle and buzz, but there's none here. I left the action at the factory setting (2mm: 12th fret, low E string) and the guitar plays just fine. The C shaped neck is super comfy with a very friendly feel, and it resonates clearly with every note. Right along the fretboard, the Maritime has a clear, rich tone.

The Maritime is fitted with a Fishman Presys II pickup system. It's simple and effective: volume, tone set, tuner with readout, low battery light, and an easy access battery compartment in the jack assembly. Plugged into a Fishman Loudbox Mini, the tone is bright and woody – no latency or electronic compression, no digital artifacts, just a really natural sound. I also used a Fishman SA-330x (the one with the sub) and, whoosh, the bottom end came alive with rich, defined fundamental notes. The mid control scoops nicely for even more woodiness (is that a word?) and this focusses the bass a little more. Chunk along on the low strings and there's not a hint of feedback. It's a tight, controllable sound that cuts through the mix with ease. 

RRP: \$2,095



guitar VERDICT

The Maritime SWS CH CW is a super-versatile instrument, perfect for the soloist, ensemble player, and lead singer. With its figured spruce top and Venetian cutaway, it looks cool, too. Everybody wins.

- ▲ Great tone and sustain
- ▲ Excellent pickup tone
- ▲ Super-easy to play
- ▲ Excellent build quality
- ♥ None

DYNAMIC MUSIC

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Faith Trembesi Venus Cutaway

Does it get any better for under two grand?

Review by **Steve Henderson**

Faith Guitars are built in Indonesia and designed by famed British luthier Patrick James Eggle. He has a particular philosophy about guitar building, quite different to other guitar manufacturers. He and the folks at Faith Guitars build instruments that do not immediately draw attention with fancy inlays and trendy features. Instead, it's kind of like Paul Newman's 1963 VW Beetle with the Ford 351 shoehorned into the back seat: the outside looks pretty tame but there's a lot going "under the hood" – as they say in the classics. Eggle's philosophy is simple: Why spend money on cosmetics and clever artwork when you can invest it in higher quality materials and craftsmanship, i.e. the stuff that makes it play and sound great.

The Faith Trembesi Venus Cutaway is a great example of this attitude: simple and straight forward. That's not to say there's no bling at all. The headstock logo and the 12th fret marker are mother of pearl, the bridge pins are Macassar ebony with abalone dots, the body binding is ebony, the machine heads are gold Grover Rotomatics with ebony buttons, and the soundhole rosette will knock you over: 5mm of 3-dimensional blue/green abalone. So, there's some interesting stuff to see – it just doesn't shout at you from the rooftops. However, every player who's seen this guitar has liked the understated nature of its decor.

Faith's "Venus" body is an Eggle design and is ever so slightly larger than a 000, but not as big as a mini jumbo. It's super comfy and super resonant. It's light weight but all solid timber: an Engelmann spruce top, with hand-scalloped spruce braces, on a trembesi body. Trembesi is a highly figured tone wood from Indonesia – very pretty and very responsive. Tonally, it is somewhere between rosewood and mahogany, so it has a well-defined low end and a softer midrange than the more familiar Style 28 guitars that everyone builds. This is great for the solo or duo performer, where mids that are too prominent might mask the vocals a little. A mahogany neck, with a gently-figured Macassar ebony fretboard, is bolted to the body with Eggle's own fixing system. Rounding off the specs: an ebony bridge with a Tusq saddle, a Tusq nut at the other end, a satin finish except for a full gloss soundboard, and a Fishman Ink3 preamp/pickup system.

Playing the guitar is too easy. It resonates everywhere. You can feel the vibes from its back on your ribs and the neck resonance in your fretting hand. Actually, wherever it touches

you, you'll feel it resonate. Trembesi is a lively timber (tap the back to hear just how lively) and it, along with Macassar ebony, comes from Southeast Asia. It's great to see local timbers being used by Faith's artisans. Because of the influence of "big name" companies (Martin, Gibson, etc.: it's gotta be Honduran mahogany or Brazilian rosewood), we tend to forget that guitar makers have traditionally used local timbers because that's what they could easily source. And Faith's luthiers make it work wonderfully. Martin did just this with Sitka and Engelmann spruce, and Brazilian rosewood; Maton did this with bunya, Queensland maple, and Tassie blackwood. It's what luthiers are meant to do.

Playing complex open-string chords like Eminor9 and Aminor11 have great clarity and definition – nothing gets muddy, nothing conflicts. Hammering the low strings with a pick produces no fizzy background at all, just well-defined bass notes. This guitar strums really well but it LOVES fingerstyle. Be delicate or dig in, the Trembesi responds with a sweet, lively tone. Dropped D is a real treat with that focussed bass, and Open G or Open E have a clear chime, whether strummed or fingerpicked. Dig in on the bass strings and you'll hear a tight thump, an organic percussive attack that's very contemporary and entirely useable.

Even plugged in, there's no glitching or fuzzy attack on the note. The Fishman system replicates the natural tone really well, including all the Trembesi's ADSR characteristics. This particular Fishman preamp has a low profile control panel – not so much knobs as flat dials, and a push on/push off tuner display. The battery compartment is between the strap button and the jack socket, under a cover that, for success, you simply slide to one side. Genius. The tone set is interactive, like on a good guitar amp, so turn down the mids and a little of the high bass can be reduced as well as the low treble band. This avoids any hard knee effect and makes for a smooth transition through the tonal spectrum. Why is this important? Well, an acoustic steel string has way more harmonic content than an electric guitar, so you want a system that will affect the overtones and not just the fundamentals. Whether into a small amp (Fishman Loudbox Mini) or a loud amp (Performer) or a PA (SA330+), the sound was true to the Trembesi's natural tone. Only the bass presence changed with the addition of the SA330's sub. 

RRP: \$1995



guitar

VERDICT

A versatile and comfortable instrument. It'll do pop and rock, folk and blues, and anywhere in between. This is a brilliant guitar for twice the price but, at under two grand for guitar and case... I want one!

- ▲ Nice body size
- ▲ All solid construction
- ▲ Great for solo, duo, band
- ▲ Low-profile Fishman system

♥ None

“Playing the guitar is too easy. It resonates everywhere. You can feel the vibes from its back on your ribs and the neck resonance in your fretting hand.”

CMC MUSIC

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RRP: \$1,049

Fender Tone Master FR-12

Fender's new FRFR powered cabinets – which can partner with the new Tone Master Pro – pack a big punch. Review by **Nick Guppy**

Fender's new Tone Master Pro amp modelling floorboard is a significant new product from the company that practically invented the guitar amplifier, underlining the steadily increasing dominance of digital technology in the amplification market. The arrival of digital modelling floorboards brought with it another conundrum – how to amplify them?

At the upper end of the market, where many bands are using in-ear monitors with dedicated monitor mixes and the front-of-house PA system takes care of the rest, there's no real need for conventional backline any more. However, many players still prefer the convenience of an onstage loudspeaker that they have some measure of control over, while at grassroots level it's still common for

many bands to use a vocal PA and rely on backline to amplify their instruments.

With all of that in mind, Fender has introduced two new full range flat response (FRFR) powered speaker cabinets, primarily to partner the Tone Master Pro but more than capable of handling any input that needs a small self-contained PA. We're taking a look at the larger one of the pair here, the FR-12.

At first glance, the FR-12 could easily be mistaken for Fender's Hot Rod Deluxe, with similar dimensions and cosmetics. The silver sparkle grille and black Tolex combine for a classic look that's instantly recognisable around the world. Move a little closer, though, and the differences become more obvious. There's a top-facing control

panel with knobs for Volume, Treble, Middle and Bass, together with a Cut knob that reduces high frequencies as you turn it up. The other three EQ controls are active, providing up to 6dB of cut and boost at their centre frequencies.

On the rear panel are a combi jack/XLR input socket and a balanced XLR output with its own ground lift switch for onward connection to PA consoles. The speaker grille is secured by industrial Velcro; removing it gives access to the 12-inch loudspeaker and compression driver, which sit on a ply baffle with two circular ports to project and smooth out the lows. The rear baffle is completely sealed, while Fender's traditional tilt-back legs help optimise projection. The FR-12 looks substantial – and it is – but special lightweight plywood and clever loudspeaker design have helped to keep the weight down to just 12.5kg. There's nothing lightweight about the FR-12's sonic capabilities, though, with a Class D power stage delivering a whopping 1,000 watts of power and a maximum SPL of 130dB.

Thanks to its portability, the FR-12 is easy to deploy and set up, with its tilt-back legs neatly taking the place of cumbersome amp stands. It's very easy to dial in, too, working from a flat response starting point with the tone controls in the centre detent position and the Cut control at zero. From here, you can quickly dial in EQ changes to suit any room, large or small.

As for volume, the FR-12's 1,000-watt power stage ensures everything is heard with exceptional clarity, right down to the subtlest nuance. It's this huge power reserve that lends weight and authority to the Tone Master Pro's modelled amp dynamics, providing uncanny valve-like feel and ensuring everything is heard clearly, all the way to full-on powerchords and wailing solos. The rear-panel XLR output is a useful extra that neatly side-steps the problem of mic'ing up a multi-speaker cabinet, perfect for connection to front-of-house or recording consoles.

There's no doubt that if you own a modelling floorboard and you want to amplify it, then FRFR is where it's at – and Fender's FR-12 is a great solution, combining classic good looks with prodigious power and clarity. It's relatively affordable, and if you need it there's a more compact FR-10 cabinet with a 10-inch driver, which shaves a few inches off and loses a little weight, while retaining the same output power.

Like the Tone Master Pro modelling floorboard that it's intended to partner, the FR-12 is aimed at professional and serious amateur players, so we like the simple yet effective tone controls as they make it quick and easy to dial in for any environment. And since the price is quite affordable, we can also see lots of these being sold as multi-purpose PA speakers for grassroots bands and performers. 



VERDICT

Intended to partner with the new Tone Master Pro (see pg88), the FR-12 is an affordable, compact and classy combo intended for pros and hobbyists alike.

- ▲ Compact, good-looking, portable
- ▲ Massive headroom from 1,000-watt Class D output stage
- ▲ Good value for money
- ♥ Hard to find fault – it's a disarmingly simple solution that just works

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RRP: \$4,999



Tone King Royalist MkIII 1x12 Combo

Golden age British rock tones, cleverly packaged for 21st Century performance needs. Review by **Dave Hunter**

Introduced nearly 10 years ago, the original Royalist was the first amp from Tone King dedicated entirely to classic British tones. Prior to that — both under the sole stewardship of founder Mark Bartel, from 1993 to the early '00s, and during much of his association with Premier Builder's Guild, from around 2010 to 2016 — most Tone King models offered one American-voiced clean channel and another with a tweed-meets-Marshall dirt tone. Boutique Amplifiers Distribution (BAD), which has owned the brand since 2016, has brought noteworthy updates to all remaining models in the lineup, and the Royalist MkIII is the latest to get the treatment. The result expands the amp's functionality while retaining the basic premise, resulting in a circuit that applies its 1964-'70 Marshall-derived sonic template across a more versatile performance range.

Recognizing that many players don't want a two-channel M-style amp that's oversimplified as "clean and overdrive," the MkIII's designers have given it two — as opposed to the original's one — that are ostensibly the same but can be user-differentiated

with several variables. First, each channel's volume control has its own Pull Fat function. Each also has its own three-way toggle for 64/67/70 gain and voicing settings: 64 aims for the lower-gain, more balanced JTM45 (a.k.a. Bluesbreaker) circuit; 67 goes for the crisper highs and increased gain of the Plexi-era amps; and 70 maxes the gain into Super Lead territory. (In actuality, Plexi and Super Lead were not mutually exclusive, but we'll play along.) Finally, each channel has its own control to tap the built-in Iron Man II attenuator at -3, -9, -15, -24 or -36 dB, or none at all, as well as a shared high-frequency compensation switch (HF). An EQ complement of treble, middle, bass and presence is also shared between the channels.

The Royalist MkIII generates 40 watts from a pair of EL34 output tubes, with three 12AX7s in the front end for preamp and phase-inverter duties. It also carries a 5AR4 tube rectifier to enable early era compression and bloom. One tube it doesn't have is the unusual single 6V6GT tube Bartel employed in the original Royalist MkI circuit as a screen voltage regulator.

The combo cab is built from tongue-and-groove

Baltic birch plywood, measures 24½ by 21 by 12 inches and weighs 59 pounds. It's dressed in classic two-tone black-and-white Tolex with white piping and has a black-and-gold grille cloth. The speaker within is a 1660 model custom made for Tone King by Celestion, offset to the far side of the back-tilted, open-back cab to enhance balance and rated to handle 60 watts. As per the majority of Tone King creations — and other amps manufactured by BAD, for that matter — the circuit is a quality PCB construction, efficiently laid out and loaded with reliable components.

With both a Gibson Les Paul and a Fender Telecaster plugged in, the Royalist MkIII combo presented a few surprises in its format as tested, although it segued into more familiar sonic territory when applied to what we might consider a more classic rig for this template. The 64/67/70 voicing switches, individual Pull Fat switches and shared EQ all combine to elicit a lot of variety from channels A and B. Furthermore, no matter how they're set, each impressively runs the gamut from clean to crunch, with good clarity and articulation throughout the range. Which is to say, this two-channel platform doesn't have to be separated into "JMT45 for clean and Super Lead for overdrive," for example; rather, each historic voicing position applies its own tonality to whatever level of drive you give it on the respective volume knob. As such, I really dug the Telecaster tapping a 67 voicing at the edge of breakup, for example, or the Les Paul's neck humbucker for a bluesy lead with the 64 setting and volume rolled to around three o'clock.

Taken more as expected, though, yes, it all still works brilliantly: 64 for fat rhythm and 70 for crispy, crunchy leads? Easy peasy, and with familiar classic-rock results all the way. On one hand, the Royalist MkIII's resistance to slide into overdrive too quickly, even with the Les Paul applied, represents an admirable realism in this circuit, in that genuine non-master-volume Marshalls of the '60s and early '70s didn't start to scream until cranked up to ear-melting volumes. This is where the attenuation controls step in, and indeed they're an essential — perhaps the essential — part of the formula here.

Even so, I was rather surprised that, for example, none of the voicing settings started to break up until well past the volume control's midpoint and to some extent remained cleaner for longer than the originals I've played. And, rather unexpectedly, the open-back 1x12 combo format seemed to enhance this observation. Plugged into a closed-back 2x12 extension cab with Greenback-style speakers, or into a Torpedo Captor X loaded with an IR of a Marshall 4x12 with pre-Rola Celestions, the Royalist MkIII really started to sound like the classics to which it pays homage, with all the grunt, grind and thud of a good Plexi. 



guitar VERDICT

Provides a loud, powerful package, but for portability, flexibility, and broader sonic familiarity I think I'd opt for the Royalist MkIII head if I were to make one my own. Still, an impressive rethink of the best British rock tones.

🟢 clever reconfiguring of three classic Marshall-inspired circuits, boasting convenient built-in attenuation

🔴 The lack of an effects loop will bother some players; others might find the head option more versatile

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HOW I WROTE...

"TURN UP THE RADIO"

STEVE LYNCH REVEALS HOW AUTOGRAPH SPUN GOLD AND CONQUERED THE AIRWAVES WITH THEIR 1984 DEBUT SINGLE.

BY MARK MC STEA

With a title like "Turn Up the Radio," Autograph's 1984 hit song might seem like a cynical attempt to score points — and airplay — with deejays. But as lead guitarist Steve Lynch explains, that was the last thing he and his bandmates

were thinking when they penned the tune. In fact, it was titled "Turn Up the Tape Machine" when the group — Lynch, singer and guitarist Steve Plunkett, bassist Randy Rand, keyboardist Steve Isham and drummer Keni Richards — cut a demo of it during pre-production for their RCA debut album, *Sign in Please*. "Eventually, it dawned on us that we were missing an obvious way to reel in some serious airplay," Lynch says.

PUMP UP THE JAM

As Lynch reveals, the song was a late arrival, written near the end of pre-production. "We had taken a break and I was by myself, playing this idea that turned out to be the main riff," he recalls. "Randy heard it and began playing along, and then he came up with the next part. After that, the rest of the guys joined in, and we started blending our ideas. It was just a jam, but it had an undeniable groove to it." Within an hour, "Turn Up the Tape Machine" was complete — all but the critical name change, of course.

TAPPED FOR GREATNESS

Considering the predominance of shred guitar in the 1980s, Lynch was in his element. He

"I SPENT FIVE EIGHT-HOUR DAYS WORKING ON THAT SOLO UNTIL I KNEW I HAD IT"



(from left) Autograph's Steve Lynch, Simon Daniels and Randy Rand perform in 2015.

had already built a reputation as a fretboard tapper with the release of his 1979 book, *The Right Touch*. "I was influenced early on by Harvey Mandel, who I saw play in 1974," he explains. "But the real kicker was when I saw Emmett Chapman, the inventor of the Stick, when he did a clinic at GIT, back in 1978. That completely changed my view of guitar, and that's when I immersed myself in the technique heavily, using all eight fingers. I believe the release of my book in 1979 was so well received because there was nothing else out there to explain the technique."

Certainly, if you didn't know Lynch by 1984, you did after hearing "Turn Up the Radio." His solo announced the arrival of a major talent. "It was a composed solo, as all of mine are," he says. "I believe each solo should be written to accommodate the song. I spent five eight-hour days working on that solo until I knew I had it. I even had the band transpose the chord progression up a whole step, to A major, to give the solo a lift."

Critical to Lynch's guitar tone was his custom Charvel, which was fitted with a Seymour Duncan pickup. "It was built in 1984 by Grover Jackson at the San Dimas factory and had a poplar body, maple neck and ebony fretboard," he recalls. "I remember there was an old Marshall 50-watt head with 25-watt Celestion speakers. There was also a hot-rodded Mesa/Boogie amp that I played through simultaneously. I doubled the solo, as I've done with all my solos, with the tape

speed running at 99 percent on one track and 101 percent on the doubled track to give it a slight out-of-pitch sound, which actually made it sound fuller. We panned one at 10 o'clock and one at 2 o'clock for separation."

By the time the recording was completed, Autograph knew "Turn Up the Radio" had hit potential. "We had our suspicions that the song would do very well, not only because of the title and uplifting lyrics but because of the overall sound," Lynch says. "We knew we had something special."

NAILED TO THE FLOOR

Remarkably, the band's label didn't hear the song's hit potential. "RCA wanted the first single off the album to be 'Send Her to Me,'" Lynch says, "but we were adamant that 'Turn Up the Radio' was the song." Fortunately, RCA gave in. "I can't imagine how differently things would have been if that song wasn't our first release. I remember, we were all together on a tour bus when we first heard it on the radio. Needless to say, we were ecstatic, high-fiving and hugging each other. It's a special memory I'll cherish forever."

Forty years on, Lynch hasn't lost his fondness for the song and the rewards that its success brought. "I honestly think we captured the best feel this song could have ever had," he says. "It was 1984 and we nailed it to the floor. Whenever I play it live and I see the hands raise up in the air and the voices cheering, there's no better place to be." 🎸

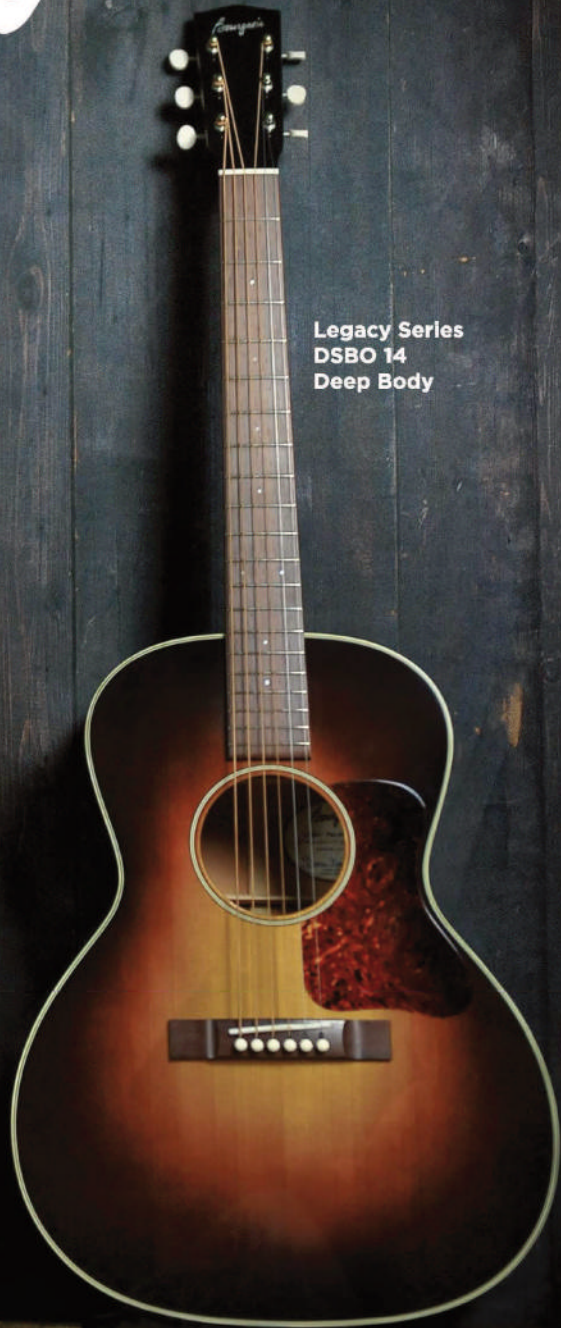
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