



ST. VINCENT

"I'M DONE WITH DIGITAL GUITAR TONES"



BLUES RHYTHM GUIDE

FIVE POPULAR STYLES TO HELP YOU MASTER GUITAR ACCOMPANIMENT

AUSTRALIAN

THE REAL PLAYER'S PICK

guitar



DAVE GROHL
SIGNATURE
EPIPHONE
REVIEWED

SLASH
THE ROCK
ICON AS YOU'VE
NEVER HEARD
HIM PLAY

THE ULTIMATE
CLAPTON
TRIBUTE

THE GEAR! THE SONGS! THE ALBUMS!

SLOWHAND IN THE
'60s, '70s & '80s
INTERVIEWS WITH, STEVE LUKATHER,
ALBERT LEE, PETER FRAMPTON
& MORE!

ERIC
CLAPTON



VOLUME 159

AUS \$12.95 • NZ \$13.90 (INC. GST)

ISSN 1329-7686

09



9 771329 768605

KERRY
KING

SLAYER SLINGSMAN
TALKS GOING SOLO

INTERVIEWS: HOT WATER MUSIC, THE DIRTY THREE, PETER BIBBY & MORE

• JULIEN BAKER PLAYING THE 2024 PLAYER II TELECASTER® IN BIRCH GREEN

THE ALL NEW PLAYER II SERIES

Fender®

A NEW KIND OF PLAYER

MODERN "C" NECKS WITH ROLLED EDGES
ROSEWOOD FINGERBOARDS
NEW VINTAGE COLORS

©2024 FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORPORATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



CONTENTS

INTERVIEWS

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 06 The Dirty Three | 14 Hana & Jessie-Lee's Bad Habits |
| 08 Peter Dinklage | 15 Black Lava |
| 09 The Lovely Eggs | 17 Red Kross |
| 12 Hot Water Music | 18 Acid Amora |

FEATURES

- 20** Slash
- 30** St. Vincent
- 36** Kerry King
- 42** Eric Clapton

REGULARS

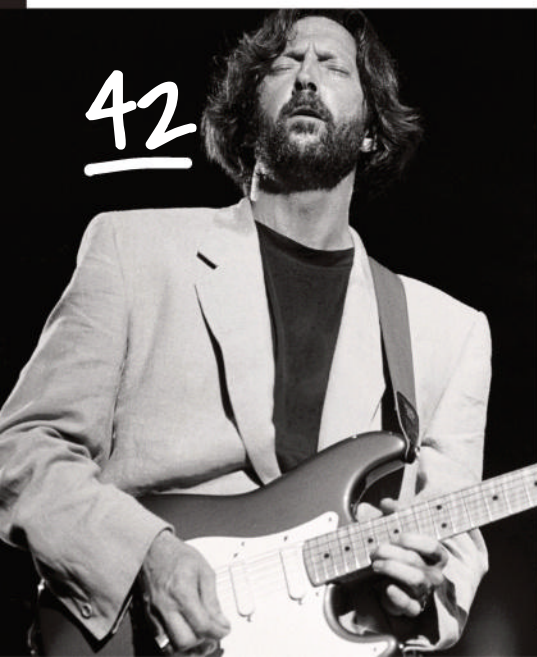
- 04** News
- 78** Hot Gear
- 83** Studio Tips
- 98** End Note

LESSONS

- 68** Slash technique
- 72** Five Ultimate Blues Rhythms
- 83** Know your mics

REVIEWS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 87 Electro-Voice Everse 12 | 93 Martin GPC Inception Maple |
| 89 Fender Tom DeLonge Starcaster | 94 Taylor 222ce-K DLX |
| 90 Epiphone Dave Grohl's Trini Lopez-tinged DG-335 | 95 Line 6 Catalyst CX 100 combo |
| 91 EVH SA-126 Special | 96 Markbass Little Marcus 58R and MB58R 102 Pure |
| 92 Yamaha Pacifica Standard Plus PACS+12M | 97 Peavey Classic 20 112 |





HOLE'S COURTNEY LOVE AND BASSIST MELISSA AUF DER MAUR HAVE REUNITED IN THE STUDIO

Hole's Courtney Love and Melissa Auf der Maur have posted a cryptic photo of themselves together at the studio. The June photo marks the first time in over two decades that the two members of Hole have reunited, potentially hinting at new music.

"Having a blast – first time in studio together in 24 years!" posted Love on Instagram.

Love and Auf der Maur briefly shared the stage in October 2018, performing several Hole classics at an event in Hudson, New York, celebrating Love's career. Later in 2020, Hole revealed to NME that she "had a good session" at a rehearsal with ex-bandmates Auf der Maur and Patty Schemel, leaving the door open for a possible reunion. However, she backtracked a year later when she told Vogue that "a proper Hole reunion will absolutely not [be happening]."

Yet Love teased the possibility of a Hole reunion this February when she joined Bille Joe Armstrong's The Coverups for a surprise performance in London, saying "Later... I'll be back in Hole". **Words by Janelle Borg**



FENDER LAUNCHES THE SUSAN TEDESCHI TELECASTER – FINALLY BRINGING A MUCH-REQUESTED SIGNATURE GUITAR TO LIFE

Fender has honored Susan Tedeschi with her first-ever signature Telecaster – finally making one of the most highly demanded and requested signature guitars of recent years a reality. That Tedeschi hasn't already got a signature Fender to her name may come as a surprise to many, given the fact the Tedeschi Trucks titan has used a variety of Stratocasters and Telecasters across her career to cement her status as a blues and American roots icon.

The guitarist and Fender decided instead to revisit her 1993 American Standard Tele, which was used as inspiration behind the flagship signature model. Notably, that '93 Tele – which features a knockout Caribbean Mist finish – has been Tedeschi's go-to guitar for over three decades, and can be spotted (with a few additional body stickers and signatures) on the cover of her seminal album, *Just Won't Burn*.

The '90s-inspired build arrives sans body stickers with a slim Tedeschi C-shaped maple, 9.5"-radius rosewood fingerboard and 22 medium jumbo frets, which are joined by a standard alder body. Custom Susan Tedeschi single-coils are in charge of tones, which are said to be "perfectly suited to blues and other genres". Given the guitar's master, that goes without saying.

This reproduction arrives with a mostly unblemished finish, which contrasts with Tedeschi's original model. That, by comparison, is covered in the signatures of Tedeschi's famous friends, including B.B. King.

While guitar fans have been clamoring for a Tedeschi signature guitar for a few years, the guitarist herself never set her sights on designing one. This model, therefore, arrives as something of a dream for the virtuoso. "Honestly, it's a dream," says Tedeschi. "I just wanted to be able to play the guitar, nevermind have one that is a signature model, so it's an incredible honor." It's available now for \$3,299. **Words by Matt Owen**

"2025 IS ALL ABOUT GUNS N' ROSES", SAYS SLASH

Next year is going to be a busy one for Guns N' Roses. According to Slash, anyway. In an interview with Loudwire Nights, the guitar icon was asked about his future plans and said, "I'm going into the studio with the Conspirators (his project with Myles Kennedy), getting a new record done and then after that, 2025 is all about Guns N' Roses."

"We're trying to get some things going with that," he continued. "I think there's a small tour in the summertime next year. I heard a rumour about that anyway, so that's going to be focused on that. But prior to that, it's the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. tour and then the Conspirators." Last month Slash said in another interview that Guns N' Roses are "trying" to make a new album. With these new comments it looks unlikely that any work on it will start before the New Year.

Since he rejoined in 2016 the band have toured extensively and released a number of one-off singles, but tracks like *Absurd*, *Old Skool* and *The General* have all been off-cuts from the tortuously long *Chinese Democracy* sessions, of which Slash played no part at all. For more on Slash, check out our extensive interview on pg20. **Words by Will Simpson**



On the cover: THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS - JULY 6TH: English guitarist Eric Clapton performs live on stage at the Statenhal in the Hague, the Netherlands on 6th July 1989. (photo by Frans Schellekens/Redferns)

EDITORIAL

EDITOR Shaun Prescott

EDITOR AT LARGE Corin Shearston

GROUP ART DIRECTOR Troy Coleman

CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Bird • Joe Bosso • Dave Burrluck
Andrew Daly • Chris Gill • Steve Henderson
Denny Ilet • Amit Sharma • Corin Shearston
Stuart Williams

ADVERTISING

NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER

Lewis Preece

EMAIL lewis.preece@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

techmags.com.au or call
+61 2 8227 6486

PO Box 161, Hornsby, NSW 1630

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) or PEFC certification and accreditation.

All contents ©2024 Future Publishing Australia or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

Privacy statement

If you provide information about yourself this will be used to provide you with products or services you have requested. We may supply your information to contractors to enable us to do this. Future Publishing Australia will also use your information to inform you of other publications, products, services and events. Future Publishing Australia may also give your information to organisations that are providing special prizes or offers and are clearly associated with the Reader Offer. Unless you tell us not to, Future Publishing Australia may give your information to other organisations that may use it to inform you of other products, services or events. If you would like to gain access to the information Future Publishing Australia holds about you, please contact us.



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive: Jon Steinberg
Non-executive chairman: Richard Huntingford
Chief financial officer: Sharjeel Suleman
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

a | *admira*
Guitarras Españolas

Guitars with Soul



Distributed by www.paytons.com.au

CLEANSED BY THE CHAOS

WARREN ELLIS HAS DESCRIBED MELBOURNE INSTRUMENTAL TRIO **THE DIRTY THREE** AS “THIS ODD CONCEPT”. AFTER A NATIONAL TOUR SUPPORTING THEIR FIRST NEW ALBUM IN TWELVE YEARS, *LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING*, AUSTRALIAN GUITAR EXAMINED THEIR JOYOUS LAWLESSNESS.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON PHOTO DANIEL BOUD



Having re-emerged onto our national scene feeling “sadder, meaner and totally dangerous”, as described by their co-founding violin virtuoso Warren Ellis, Melbourne’s Dirty Three made a triumphant return to playing last month. On an eleven-date tour from June 14-29, they landed four sold out Melbourne and Sydney shows while backing their latest album, *Love Changes Everything*.

The Dirty Three’s latest tour marked the end of a five-year hiatus. While providing a continuation of the fragile instrumental beauty and ragged depth heard on some of their classic ‘90s albums, such as 1998’s *Ocean Songs*, (produced by the late Steve Albini) and 1996’s *Horse Stories*, *Love Changes Everything* is the first release from the group to not feature individually titled songs. Instead it’s a six-part suite, inspired by jazz records like John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*.

The ‘90s saw the group sharing shows with Beastie Boys, Beck and Pavement, while juggling other creative ventures, and things have not calmed

down since. Paris-based Warren Ellis also plays in Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds; Melbourne-based guitarist Mick Turner is a painter and solo artist, while drummer Jim White (PJ Harvey, Cat Power, Xylouris White) works in New York as a prolific session musician and collaborator. In a 2006 documentary named after the band, fans and collaborators such as Nick Cave, Ed Kuepper and Bobby Gillespie sang their praises.

As *Love Changes Everything* proves, Ellis, White and Turner still have the power to conjure drawn-out moments of celestial bliss and lingering darkness when reunited as the Dirty Three. Attributing much of their power to improvisation built off fragments, ideas and motifs, their seasoned chemistry is on full display on their new album. Across a runtime of 41 minutes, completely improvised pieces like ‘Love Changes Everything I’ traverse rumbling distortion, feedback and noise harking back to the artful ‘punk’ of their self-titled 1995 debut. Most of the album is built through gentler, slower passages illuminated

by piercing, evocative violin from Ellis, White’s constant rhythmic experimentations, and Turner’s unpredictable playing, rapidly morphing from silky smoothness to rumbling grit.

Built from the trio’s relentless pursuit of tone, depth and space, *Love Changes Everything* is a bold reminder of the Dirty Three’s prowess as one of the world’s most beloved instrumental groups, who stand alongside the likes of Sigur Rós and The Necks as creators of music that speaks intense volumes without the use of words. From his art studio in Melbourne, Mick Turner spoke to Australian Guitar.

More than a decade has passed since the release of *Toward The Low Sun* in 2012. What pushed you guys to suddenly record a new album?

I think the only reason we haven’t made more records is that we all live in different continents, and we’re not in the same space that often. In 2019, when we started this record, we did some shows in Australia and because we were together, we thought,



'let's record, it's been a while', and we managed to make some time to get into the studio.

I'm sure you've been asked this a lot, but for people trying to decode the secrets of the sound with the Dirty Three, can you tell me the ratio of improvised versus structured playing in the new album?

We came along with some rough ideas, motifs and things, and played them out. We pretty much recorded everything we played and the tracks formed out of that. We'll have a basic idea, like a melody or a chord progression, and the person who brings it along will start playing it and the others will join in, but we pretty much press record as soon as we start doing that. The record gets formed out of that. We have a kind of unspoken language between us that seems to work quite well. Once we're in a room, playing music, we feed off each other quite organically. It was there from the start when we started playing together, and I think that's the secret

to our longevity. It's really enjoyable and organic. As to your question about how much is improvised, certainly nothing was written down on paper - it was all in our heads. The only written things were my notes on my ideas, which were very simple chord progressions and melody lines with an idea of rhythm and mood, but very loose, and I brought them along looking forward to how the others would interpret them.

So it didn't take long for the recording sessions for Love Changes Everything to occur and for the album to get finished?

We recorded for three or four days I think, or more maybe, then we came out of it with hours of recording. The rest of the process was going through and editing, finding the bits we liked and piecing them together. It's possible that we did some overdubbing but if we did it was minimal. It took a while, after our tour, and after the recording everyone flew off to their homes and whatever they were doing next. We've hardly been in the same place over the past few years. A lot of the steps in moving forward were done remotely, which were stifled by different time zones and people not having much time to get a good listen at something and make a decision. It takes a long time when you're separated geographically. But we did it eventually.

I hear Warren's in Paris and Jim's in the US, right? Yeah, Jim lives in New York.

He must be keeping busy there, as a musician. He's the busiest man I know, I think.

In the recording studio, how do you guys mentally prepare yourselves for playing for so long and with such intensity?

We all play so much, so we're used to it. We've been playing for so long together that we didn't have to prepare that much for it. We had been touring, and when we recorded [Love Changes Everything], it was all recorded live in the same room, but Warren's amp and my amp were in isolated rooms. There was that great feeling of playing live, which is so much better than doing overdubs on everything. It's great to get an actual performance. There'll be errors and there'll be mistakes, but that makes it feel more organic. I find music like that sits better with me. Stuff that's been polished so much so that everything is perfectly on beat and in tune is a bit sterile. The best thing about us is spontaneity and communication between us as players.

When you're playing this music with Jim and Warren, do you find yourself entering any trance-like states, or finding new types of emotions through the playing? What does it do to your mind, do you think?

You go somewhere else when you get absorbed in music. You hand over the controls to someone else, in a way. I very much get the out-of-body experience when I play music. If you can loosen up, you can go into this auto mode. That's what you do when you improvise. It's such a beautiful way of experiencing the world, playing music with that kind of approach. I feel sorry for some of those classical music players in orchestras. I feel like they're really missing out. It's sad because they're so skilled and that's admirable, but they're so limited.

Due to your background as a painter, do you start to visualise scenery in your mind when you're playing with Warren and Jim?

It's very much an aural experience, but I find it very emotional. I know the visual stuff happens for some people, but it doesn't happen with me. It's more like a feeling of the energy in the room, like being tossed about in the ocean and floating, when there are waves coming in from everywhere.

This album is notable for the fact that the songs are a suite of six pieces, not songs with individual titles, like on all the other Dirty Three albums. What influenced that?

We wanted to make a record that was one piece, and more influenced by jazz records and things like that. Warren's quite a fan of that era of John Coltrane and Miles Davis, and the albums they were making in the '60s where there was just one piece. He had no idea that we could make a record like that. I'd always liked that idea and so did Jim, so we went in with that in mind. No one does it these days, hardly. With the advent of streaming services, everyone goes to the quick hit. Not everyone, obviously. I think it worked well, doing that. I hope people will enjoy listening to the whole thing, just letting it run. It makes sense as a journey, from start to finish.

Its physical copy is coming out before the digital copy, or so I've been told.

That's because we're touring, and we want to be able to sell the vinyl at the shows.

What guitars are you going to be using for the tour?

A '74 Fender Telecaster, with a Bigsby [tremolo/vibrato]. It's the nicest sounding guitar. I keep trying out guitars and I've never found one that sounds as good as that one. I got mine in America in the '90s. It's a beauty. I'll pretty much be playing that and an Epiphone Casino, which is a semi-acoustic. It's quite a big-bodied guitar. It's got really great feedback, so you can get that really rattly sound. I used to use a guitar like that on a lot of things, like [1994's] 'Indian Love Song'. I used to use a lot of feedback in that song, and that guitar really lends itself to getting those sort of sounds.

So you still like experimenting with feedback and noise onstage?

For sure, yeah.

When you're onstage, do you mainly play using with the raw amp sound, or do you use a couple of pedals to boost your impact?

I use some. I've got a Hotcake Overdrive.

Made by a guy from New Zealand, right?

Yeah, Paul Hester. He was in the first iteration of Split Enz. I just use a couple of overdrives and an octave pedal, to get a bit of bottom end in sometimes, because we don't have bass, so I try and compensate for that a bit. It's a pretty simple setup. Nothing fancy.

There's a notable use of piano on the new album, which works well with the droning violin.

Yeah, Warren was using loops in the studio, and he's got some pretty gnarly effects like the Holy Grail [reverb pedal] from Electro Harmonix. He was getting those [violin] loops going, walking over to the piano and banging away. 

The Dirty Three's Love Changes Everything is out now.

STRAIGHT SHOOTIN'

HE'S TOURED THE US WITH POND, PERFORMED IN SOUTH AFRICA, HIT STAGES AT LANEWAY AND FALLS FESTIVALS, AND WORKED JOBS RANGING BARTENDER TO BIN CLEANER. NOW **PETER BIBBY** HAS RELEASED HIS NEW ALBUM *DRAMA KING*, AND AUSTRALIAN GUITAR CAUGHT UP WITH HIM TO SUSS IT OUT.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**. PHOTO BY **TIM BARRETTO**



Following a DIY approach that has informed his music since its origins in suburban Perth, Peter Bibby's second album *Drama King* dropped on May 31. It follows his 2018 solo album *Grand Champion*, and marks his first official collaboration with a producer Dan Luscombe (The Drones, Amyl & The Sniffers).

Drama King also represents a stylistic change from the direct live feel of 2020's *Marge*, due to the disbandment of his touring electric group Peter Bibby's Dog Act, who also played on that album. *Drama King* was recorded with Melbourne-based session musicians recruited by Luscombe, but it still runs the gamut between heaviness and tenderness thanks to Bibby's trademark, lyrical matter-of-factness. Recent single 'Fun Guy' is reminiscent of Suicide's 'Ghost Rider' in its hypnotic post-punk pounding. "The drugs I used to love, I just don't love 'em no more", Bibby confesses, playing the role of the titular "Fun Guy". With a line backed by the truth of his current parallel career as a plasterer, Bibby growls "these days I'm all about discipline and labour". Across the album's twelve tracks Bibby's lyrics veer from straightforward and irreverent to acerbic and cryptic. With indie pop-punk aplomb, a violent drunken punter is described as sounding like "a trumpet wearing a wig in a bin" in 'The Pricks'. Jaded resignation for a certain lifestyle is explained on 'Terracotta Brick', inspired by the time Bibby spent labouring with a bricklayer - a working-class ballad for anyone who's ever had to sweat in a hi-vis shirt. Australian Guitar expected a laidback, quirky chat with Bibby. He met our expectations, and then some.

I think that as a songwriter, you're kind of in a tradition of people like Paul Kelly - those who look at a small, daily situation or thing, and then magnify that as a metaphor for a larger thing. Yeah. For sure.

I'm thinking of 'Bin Boy' from *Drama King*, and 'Whyalla' from *Marge*, which is about a town in South Australia. Do you like focusing on smaller things as metaphors for larger things?

I kinda like to take a topic and write about it like I'm actually just writing about that topic, but I go about it in a way that could be interpreted in many different ways.

Other new songs like 'Turtle In The Sand' and 'Baby Squid' made me think that some relationship changes were reflected in the album too?

A few songs in there touch on lines drawn in the sand. The ends of relationships, the start of relationships. The song 'Old DC', that's definitely a big 'end of a relationship' type of song. I wrote that a month before recording the record. I definitely take a bit of inspiration from fucked up relationships.

Songs are a good way for venting feelings.

Oh, very much so. My favourite way to vent is through song. There's a lot of songs that people will never hear, that are extreme venting pieces. They're not for public consumption.

You worked with Dan Luscombe for this album, so this is your first album not to be independently-produced, right?

Yeah, I keep saying it's my first album working with a producer, and I'd say that some of the engineers I've worked with feel a little bit ripped off by that, because people were always offering advice and helping out here and there, but no one was ever in the title role of producer until this album. It's the first time I've let someone play that role, and have any authority over creative direction.

Did that impact the sonic heaviness of the album as compared to songs like 'Whyalla'?

Not so much. It definitely affected the direction of the record and the sounds, but I think a big part of the difference in sound between *Marge* and *Drama King* was different musicians, different songs, and a different approach in general. The old Dog Act band, which were on *Marge*, broke up right before we were going to record the new record. Dan was gonna come over to WA and record, but my band

broke up, so I went to Melbourne and he organised the musos and I played with a bunch of people I'd never met before.

Why did you choose Dan?

I just felt like he was the right kind of guy. For a first time experience working with a producer, I didn't want to go too far from my musical home, with some hip hop producer, [although it] could be cool. After working with Dan, I'm really excited by the idea of the producer. It might bring something I've never thought of - someone who wasn't involved in the writing process comes in and adds their own flavour, and takes [the music] in a completely different direction. It's a really exciting thing to do.

I imagine *Drama King* was recorded at Dan's studio?

We did all the drums and live tracking at Sound Park in Northcote, and then we did all the overdubs, vocals and everything else at Dan's studio.

What guitars did you bring to the tracking sessions?

I took my trusty Telecaster copy that I've had since I was about 16. It's like a Chinese-made Squire, on which I've replaced basically everything except the neck and body. Then I used all of Dan's good shit.

Like his pedals and amps?

I took my pedals, but we didn't do much amping. We went DI through all of his preamps. We used his guitars a bit, he had a real 70s Telecaster and some old Gretsch thing, and I borrowed this weird Gibson guitar off my mate.

How do you get your heavy tone?

My amp is generally pretty loud, but the pedal board has four different sorts of gains, overdrives, distortions, fuzzers, you know, a sequence of chaos.

There's a culture of masculinity in Australia with people being like, 'suck it up and get on with it'. With the title *Drama King* packaging an album full of songs that are often deeply heartfelt, is this title self-deprecating, as in, 'stop being such a drama king'?

A little, yeah, I mean I was either gonna call it *Drama King* or *Self Depo*, like 'self deprecation', you know, but I went with *Drama King*. It's also a play on the 'drama queen' thing, regardless of gender, calling the boys the 'drama kings'.

I think it's good Peter, because there's this whole thing of like, men being expected to be tough and strong and hold everything together, but being vulnerable is one of the toughest things to do, in my opinion.

There's a lot more guts in actually expressing yourself and being vulnerable than there is in bottling it all up, not saying anything, and maybe just turning into a prick. It's the same sort of topic in 'Terracotta Brick'. That's largely about toxic masculinity and construction and the boys not expressing themselves and just powering on to death, basically.

Yeah...having the "early morning tins"...

Yeah, just drinking piss and depressing the emotions. I love a bit of vulnerability. It's nice. 🍷

Peter Bibby's *Drama King* is out now via Spinning Top Records.



PEELING OFF THE LAYERS

THE LOVELY EGGS CREATED THEIR OWN RECORD LABEL, THEIR OWN MUSIC VIDEOS AND INSTRUMENTS, AND EVEN THEIR OWN ONLINE TV SHOW FEATURING THE LIKES OF IAN MACKAYE, JOHN COOPER CLARKE AND THE SPACE LADY. THE ENTERPRISING UK INDIE CHART TOPPERS CHAT WITH AUSTRALIAN GUITAR ABOUT THEIR NEW ALBUM, *EGGSISTENTIALISM*.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON** PHOTO **DARREN ANDREWS**

One could say that Holly Ross and David Blackwell live double lives. Based in Lancaster, they may appear to be middle-aged, married parents at their local Sainsbury's, but they hold the secret ability to morph into The Lovely Eggs. Their power lies in viewing their relentless creative pursuits as their way of life, instead of their career. Since 2006, they've performed hundreds of gigs around the UK, USA and Europe, sharing stages with the likes of The Brian Jonestown Massacre and Shonen Knife, while co-producing six albums, releasing numerous singles and working with members of bands such as Half Japanese.

Their seventh album, *Eggsistentialism*, was released on May 17. Ross describes its eleven songs as detailing a 'splurge' of emotion, following a five-year battle with their local council in order to save the Lancaster Music Co-Op, a long-running rehearsal and recording space. Miraculously, their efforts kept the space open. Over the years, the righteous, hardworking energy of The Lovely Eggs has attracted the attention of some famous friends and collaborators: after the release of their second latest album, *I Am Moron*, in 2020, The Lovely Eggs released a single featuring Iggy Pop, titled 'I, Moron'.

Eggsistentialism now displays the vibrant sonic flavours of a seasoned DIY band, from the abrasive, turbo thundering of 'Death Grip Kids' and surfy 'Meeting Friends At Night' to the sweeter, expansive pop of 'My Mood Wave' and the seven-minute 'Nothing Everything'. As heard in similarly shimmering albums by The Flaming Lips, the production skills of David Fridmann (ex-Mercury Rev) lend a cosmic edge to the noisy rock 'n' roll of The Lovely Eggs on their third full-length collaboration with him. *Eggsistentialism* features more electronic experimentation and more gentler songs than past releases, but the arrangements contain darker lyrical themes. From their home in Lancaster, Ross and Blackwell spoke to Australian Guitar. Then they had to take their son to school.

Why the theme of the egg? Why fixate on that so much as a band symbol?

David Blackwell: It wasn't supposed to be like a long term thing. When we formed the band, we were going out together and we were just like 'let's do something music related'.

Holly Ross: There's a reason. I was living in Paris, and there was an abandoned nest on my bathroom windowsill. When we started forming the band, I opened the window one day, where a pigeon sat on the nest. It flew off and there were two eggs that started to hatch while we were making tunes. When we decided to form a band, we needed a name, and we were like, 'we'll call ourselves The Lovely Eggs after these eggs', because they were forming as we were forming.

Do you think Eggsistentialism is your most electronic album yet?

DB: Without a doubt. We spent a lot more time in the studio with this one, just because it felt right, so that's just how it turned out. We didn't aim for it to be more electronic.

HR: I think we're always trying to find things that interest us. The last couple of albums formed more live. When you've done that for a few records, you'll always want to do something different.

Holly, you recently said that Eggsistentialism is a "wilderness years record". Was that because you guys survived the COVID-19 pandemic while making it?

HR: The album wasn't written through COVID. When I talked about it being a wilderness years album, we'd been fighting Lancaster City Council to save our local rehearsal room and recording studio, and that took over our lives. We wanted to record an album, and we had to fight to save our local practice space, a nonprofit space for people without money. It's a punk rock place where you can make loads of noise and have freedom of expression. That put the album back massively. The

album was done within a few short months while we were going through that process. It's like, 'here's us calling from hell...help us'. I think you can hear that sort of vulnerability and desperation in a lot of the songs.

DB: We were doing that and making a TV show, so we didn't have time to write. We took our mind off writing for quite a while and then we realised, 'shit, we've got to get a record out, let's write'. All these experiences were in the back of our heads and that went onto the record that we did quickly.

HR: For us, that place getting threatened with demolition was a major thing in our lives because we've practiced there since we were teenagers. You can't have that fighting going on for a year without it coming out on your record, which it did.

That's what punk's all about, right? Rebelling against oppression and institutions that get in the way of things.

HR: It's true. You have to fight your fights in your own backyard. If you can't sort your own community out, there's no point talking about bigger stuff. If it's happening in a town in England, it's happening in a town in Western Australia. It's our duty, as the alternative freaks of the world, to maintain our community. I think that's really important.

As for your onstage setup, in the video from Krankenhaus Festival last year, you've got a strange-looking guitar, Holly. What guitar were you using?

HR: It's from a Manchester company, a really small boutique guitar company called Ancoats Guitars. I think it was an NQ.

DB: Northern Quarter, yeah.

How many pedals are you going to be rocking on the tour from May 23?

DB: We've got Electro-Harmonix Mellotron pedal to emulate those sounds off the record, the Mono Synth as well.

HR: Electro-Harmonix Big Muff too. I started out with a Big Muff and a Boss tuner, and I've gone to ridiculous amounts. I've got a wah, I've got a delay, two distortions, a mellotron. It's gone a bit mental now.

Speaking about live stuff, there's an interesting sort-of manifesto on your website about 'no fake encores', which stood out to me.

DB: We got fed up of that whole formulaic, cabaret style that bands do where they know they're going to go off and they know they're gonna come back on and play and they have that all written into the setlist.

HR: Some gigs are pretty shit. Some gigs are fine, some gigs are amazing. Only the amazing ones should merit an encore.

Were you always enamoured with the duo idea, and did you ever think of becoming commercial? Is staying indie an important thing for The Lovely Eggs?

DB: It's a way of life for us. We live together. We've both been in bigger bands and the complexity of keeping that together is hard. Sometimes we'd like to work with other musicians, because you're always limited with two people, but the core of it is us two. That's important.

HR: We don't think of ourselves as an uncommercial or commercial band. We write what we write. If that goes commercial and appeals to more people, we're happy with that, but what we'll never do is let the outside world change our world. **AG**

The Lovely Eggs' *Eggsistentialism* is out now.



THE DREAM

“My dream was to have a Stratocaster®.
I loved it from the beginning. Buddy Holly
played one. Hank Marvin played one.
That was enough for me.”

DAVID GILMOUR

Fender

STRATOCASTER®

Forever Ahead Of Its Time



FEELING THE HEAT

WHETHER YOU CALL THEM POST-HARDCORE OR PUNK ROCK, YOU CAN'T DENY THE DIRECTNESS OF **HOT WATER MUSIC**'S SONIC ATTACK OR EMOTIONAL SONGWRITING. THE VETERAN FLORIDIAN ACT CELEBRATE THEIR 30TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2024 WITH THEIR NEW, TENTH ALBUM **VOWS**. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR FANNED THE FLAMES.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON** PHOTO **JESSE KORMAN**

In October 1994, four months after the death of Kurt Cobain, four musicians convened at a storage facility/rehearsal space in Florida. Little did they know that their actions here would lead to a unique continuance of American alt-rock spirit.

Partially raised on hardcore punk, the quartet chose their name from a collection of short stories by Charles Bukowski about women, drinking and gambling. As Hot Water Music, vocalist-guitarist Chuck Ragan, bassist Jason Black and drummer George Rebeles joined forces with guitarist-vocalist Chris Wollard to first record 1995's *Push For Coin*. The cassette demo caused the group's first ripples in their local scene, which formed into a tidal wave spreading from Gainesville, Florida to the rest of America's punk and alt-rock scenes with their 1997 debut album, *Fuel For The Hate Game*, followed later that year by

Forever And Counting.

In a career milestone, 2024 marks Hot Water Music's 30th anniversary, along with the release of their tenth album *VOWS*. Upon first listen to the twelve-song collection, one is reminded of the group's knack for crafting stadium-sized rock hooks, and that their foundational punk rock energy still holds its punch and precision. 'Touch The Sun' and 'Wildfire' burn with a fierce intensity that is cooled off by gentler songs like 'Side Of The Road' and 'Much Love' - the latter being a closing ballad with members of The Interrupters, who join the likes of Alkaline Trio, The Bouncing Souls and Leatherface as one of the many acts to collaborate on Hot Water Music releases over the years.

Other artists featured on the album include Thrice, City And Colour and members of Turnstile, who

named their band after a song on *Fuel For The Hate Game*. *VOWS* ultimately demonstrates that Hot Water Music still have things to prove. Wollard revealed that they craft songs through spontaneous jamming and collaboration on riffs, song fragments and lyrics that are brought in by all involved. Certain lyrics are even provided by their longtime producer Brian McTernan (Battery, Ashes). Unlike most punk bands, they have three singers, and as many guitarists as Iron Maiden. While Ragan is based in California and Cresswell lives in Canada, the other members of Hot Water Music still share Gainesville with eagles, panthers, bears, boars and alligators. The sun set and the moon rose as Wollard talked to Australian Guitar for nearly two hours from his front porch. The following interview about Hot Water Music was boiled down to preserve its informational importance.



Hot Water Music were founded 30 years ago. That's quite the ride.

It's become a lifetime. Even if the band stops, all of us are still going to keep being family. 30 years. We never thought that was gonna be. That's a ridiculous thing to imagine.

I actually saw Hot Water Music live, six years ago in Sydney, when you guys supported NOFX at the Hordern in 2018.

I wasn't at that show, but I know that happened. We've known those NOFX guys for years.

Speaking of punk, you co-wrote two songs on a Bad Religion album that came out in 2004 - The Empire Strikes First. Are you still in touch with those guys?

Yeah! I saw [Brian Baker, their guitarist] this winter up in New Jersey and we got to hang out a bit. Baker's one of my very few guitar heroes. He is such a wonderful dude. An amazing guitar player.

He was in Minor Threat!

I know! I'd already been playing guitar and playing shows when I first heard Minor Threat. I was 12 or 13. I was in detention one day, and there was another dude next to me that was a skateboarder, so we got talking, and he turned me onto punk rock, like [Minor Threat's] Out Of Step. These bands were burned to

tapes for me. One was Misfits on both sides, one was 7 Seconds on one side and Minor Threat on the other, another was GBH and DRI. Those were the first things I heard that were punk. I was more of a rock and roll guitar player coming up, because I'd never heard punk. I started pretty young.

When the sessions started for recording the album, how many songs did you bring in? How many songs did Chuck bring in?

We don't work like that. We try to not bring in whole songs. We try to bring in parts that we've written, or things that we've been working on, and we tear them apart. When everybody starts feeling the vibe, then it becomes its own thing. I don't think we're interested in putting out records where it's just me and Chuck writing songs. We just start following each other, then we find these cool things. We'll block out four days in our sound guy's studio, and we'll have the mics going the whole time while we're playing, recording everything we can come up with. We get something we like and we push it as far as we feel at that moment, then we'll record it and have a break from it. In the older days, we were starting mostly everything with a chord progression, then a vocal part that sounded good, or something like that, but we've always done lots of jam sessions. That's where we find the stuff that is most interesting to us.

So when you bring in parts to the sessions, do you guys sometimes bring lyrics along with these parts, or do you wait?

Sometimes it's a full song. It's about finding things that are not standard to you. Those things are hard to find. We usually spend more time working on that stuff, but regular songs are also getting written. There's a song on the new album called 'Chewing On Broken Glass', which was written with guitars and vocals in mind, but we get more excited when we're all discovering new things together.

With the 12 songs that ended up on VOWS, were there any parts that were adjusted to what you thought would get the biggest emotional reaction? Do you write with your audience in mind like that?

Personally I can't. I really think it needs to be just you and your bandmates in the room. You all have to trust each other, respect each other, and listen to each other. If you're thinking about anybody outside of that room, then you are not 100% there with your family. Sometimes it's hard, but I think you have to really be in there with your heart and soul. The crowds might come later and they might not, but there's a million bands in the world right now that are not playing shows, and they're having a fucking blast in their garage.

When you're recording vocals in the studio, how do you know when to sing a line cleanly, or when to scream something?

You go in and try it. If you think it needs to be super aggressive, then do what you think. Then you have to critique your own stuff while you're finishing lyrics. I try to get a vibe across. I'm not that great a singer.

Chuck's a way better singer. If it's not sounding right but I still believe in it, maybe I'm singing too low. I play with keys sometimes.

The lyrical content in a lot of the songs is quite dark. They're confronting negative emotions, or tackling harsh realities head on. I'm sure that partially comes from the hardcore punk tradition.

Corin, I've gotta say, that is one of the more observant things that anybody has said to me about our lyrics. Possibly ever.

Wow, thank you.

I never thought about that, dude. You might be right.

“AN EMPTY PAGE CAN BE THE SCARIEST THING EVER, BUT EVEN IF YOU DON'T WRITE A GOOD SONG, BY THE TIME YOU'RE DONE WITH IT, IT'S ALMOST LIKE YOU'VE HAD THIS TALK WITH YOURSELF.”

The songs are heavy, the lyrics are dark, but they never really come across as depressing. With you guys, I sense a real element of human struggle and trying to rally against the odds or survive.

Look man, we all have our own lives and sometimes you feel isolated, but when you get with your friends, you talk about the heavy shit. Trying to start writing a song is one of the scariest things ever. An empty page can be the scariest thing ever, but even if you don't write a good song, by the time you're done with it, it's almost like you've had

this talk with yourself. It's not all about the struggle, it's also about love and whatever human truths we can find. There's nothing pre-planned. You want to write about what's really on your mind. Earlier, you were asking, 'do you think about the audience?', and I said 'no'. That caught me in a lie. I don't think about them, but I also spend a fuckload of time thinking, 'do these lyrics make sense to whoever might read them?', whether they're mine, or Cresswell's, or all three of us together, or some of Brian [McTernan's] words in there too. I always sign off on the lyrics at the end, whether they're mine or not. I don't know who, a million years ago, said to me, 'it might take the writer five hours to save the reader five minutes of trying to figure out what he meant', but that's probably worth it, you know? It's not trying to figure out the biggest, best words, it's trying to just make sure that we're telling the story in the way we're really trying to tell it.

For the VOWS sessions, were you playing a Fender Telecaster?

No, I still have my Tele, but I've been playing a '79 Custom Les Paul for 40 fucking years. I got it when I was nine. It's on every single Hot Water record except for Exister. It's the main guitar on the new one, and the one before that. On [the new song] 'Remnants' I played a Strat. That's the first time a Stratocaster has been on a Hot water record. There's also a few songs with a [Gibson ES-335, from me. I gotta say, I didn't really know how to use a Strat before, but Midnight Oil is one of my all-time favourite bands and Stratocasters are a big ingredient in their sound, so I knew it was in my wheelhouse. I'll probably pick up a Strat if I can find a cheap one. Like I say, I have as much fun ripping guitars apart as anything else.]

Hot Water Music's VOWS is out now.



DELIVERING THE GOODS

AFTER SHARING STAGES WITH COLD CHISEL, JASON ISBELL AND EILEEN JEWELL, **HANA & JESSIE-LEE'S BAD HABITS** RELEASED THEIR SECOND ALBUM *SAY WHAT YOU MEAN* ON APRIL 12: A SOULFUL AND POP-ORIENTED COLLECTION OF DUSTY, TWANGY, ELECTRIC ROCK 'N' ROLL. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR ENTERED THEIR SALOON.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON PHOTO KATE ALEXANDER

With hook-laden choruses complemented by lead lines that soar and speak with the emotional range of a second singer, Hana & Jessie-Lee's *Bad Habits* are back to take a bite from Australia's alt-country scene. Quite literally, it seems: the video for 'The Tallest Of Tales' sees lead singer-songwriter and rhythm-guitarist Hana Brenecki with vampiric fangs, poised to take a chunk out of an unsuspecting bar patron's neck. Lead guitarist Jessie-Lee Zubkevych serves drinks in a cowboy hat while Brenecki's morbid one-liner lyrics lend a grim, foreboding atmosphere to the video.

Elsewhere on the 12-track album, Brenecki's voice powers through heartfelt shades of catchy RnB-tinged pop, mellow ballads and raunchy barroom rock 'n' roll in 'Arrowhead', 'Louisa' and 'Say What You Mean', respectively, while 'Under The Vines' bears a dramatic galloping rhythm that would suit the soundtrack of a western.

Released on April 12, seven years after their debut album, *Southlands*, it's clear to see how *Say What You Mean* represents a new musical era for the creative duo, enhanced by the rhythm section work of drummer and solo artist Patrick Wilson (Fanny Lumsden, Bill Chambers) along with ARIA-nominated bassist and Deadhead, Tommy Brooks. Many years after Brenecki's formative punk rock days and Zubkevych's foray to the London blues scene in her early 20s, after which she co-founded female punk-quartet The Villenettes, (who provided music for online casinos), and joined The Sloe Ruin, (which marked her first collaborations with Brenecki), Hana & Jessie-Lee's *Bad Habits* are more electric than ever. Before setting out on a 16-date tour in support of

Say What You Mean (April 27-June 22), Brenecki and Zubkevych talked songs, styles and strung things with Australian Guitar.

During the making of *Say What You Mean*, was the core duo responsible for the composition and arrangement of the songs, or were they full band decisions?

Hana Brenecki: [It was] definitely driven by us. I'm the songwriter, so I do all the lyrics, melodies and loose arrangements to start with, then me and Jess will work on stuff as a duo, and Jess will start writing guitar parts. Then we'll put it into the band room with the rhythm section. Things sometimes change when we're in the room together, but it always starts with me and Jess.

Jessie, did you want to be a lead guitarist from an early age, or did this gradually develop over time for you?

JLZ: I wanted to play guitar from an early age but I didn't actually start until I was 13. I took to it pretty quickly, but I didn't have any aspirations of being a lead guitarist. I was just playing rhythm on grunge songs and pop songs, then a guy at my school did a cover of Stevie Ray Vaughan's version of 'Little Wing' at the school concert. I'd heard Led Zeppelin and AC/DC, but I hadn't heard anything like that, and I was like, 'I've got to hear more of this'. I started to get into blues and Jimi Hendrix. That got me started with lead.

HB: Also you really got your chops in London as well, because you lived over there.

JLZ: Yeah, that was when I was a little bit older.

So what motivated you to move to London when you were 20?

JLZ: I had a few friends over there, blues musicians that I met on the internet. I was really looking to get out of Adelaide. There was a good blues scene [in London] so that was the enticement to go there. I started a band with three people that were around my age. We were quite young in that scene. We did our own music and we did a couple of gigs every week. It was a great learning experience for me, playing little bars, doing three-set gigs, trying to figure out how to do 45 songs in twelve-bar blues and still make it interesting, because I was the only soloist in the band. That was bass, drums, me on guitar, and a singer who only sang. It gave me a lot of freedom as a player.

Then you met Hana when you moved back to Australia?

JLZ: Yeah, I moved back in 2010, and around 2012 I started playing in some bands in Adelaide, which is where we're both from originally. I started playing in an all-girl, rockabilly, surf punk band called The Villenettes. We used to play a lot of gigs around town. We'd sometimes play with Hana's punk band called Ricochet Pete, and that's when we became friends. Hana started writing some country influenced songs, and she was looking for a guitarist to play on them. She asked me, so it worked out well.

HB: I'd heard about Jess through a mutual friend. I think the thing that I liked most about Jessie's lead guitar playing is that it's very vocalistic, like a lead singer. I asked Jess if she wanted to play music with me in 2014. As soon as I saw Jess, I was like, 'I think we should play music together'.

With your own guitar playing Hana, did you start playing guitar when you started writing songs? Or did the guitar come first?

HB: I started out on classical guitar in primary school, because you could learn an instrument for free as part of the curriculum. I was just like, 'this will get me out of some classes'. When I got to my first year of high school, I started getting into punk and then I got myself a job at 14, just so I could buy an electric guitar, which was a really cheap electric guitar. I started teaching myself every Rage Against The Machine song from their first album, because I loved all those guitar lines. They were so easy to play, but so melodic and fun. I started learning how to sing when I was 17-18. Being able to play guitar was very helpful for being able to sing, play and learn to sing in that way, as opposed to not having an instrument.

Jessie, were you turned onto the Gretsch because of its twang or aesthetic, or its place in music history?

JLZ: I'd been playing guitar for about ten years before I got my Gretsch. Every one of those ten years was spent playing a Strat. As I got into rockabilly, I was like, 'oh, the Gretsch looks really cool'. The first [Gretsch] I played was a bit hard to play. It's different to a Strat, 'cos a Strat's nice and small, contoured and comfortable. It totally changed my playing and my whole approach to the guitar. [Playing something that was] harder to play or more unusual made me play differently. If I play a Strat now I still fall into the habit of ripping off other people's licks. [The Gretsch] gives me more of my own voice. I also think it's the best looking guitar, but I'm biased. 🎸

Hana & Jessie-Lee's *Bad Habits*' *Say What You Mean* is out now.



SIX MONTHS AFTER TOURING AUSTRALIA WITH OBITUARY AND PSYCROPTIC, MELBOURNE-BASED BLACKENED DEATH METAL BAND **BLACK LAVA** RELEASE THEIR SECOND ALBUM *THE SAVAGE WINDS TO WISDOM* ON JULY 12. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR BATTENED DOWN THE HATCHES.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON

Melbourne metal quartet Black Lava emerged in 2021 from six long COVID-19 lockdowns, totaling eight months across two years. Their sound was a departure from the technical prog-metal played by guitarist Ben Boyle and Dan Presland in Vipassi. It also veered away from the tech-death of Hadal Maw, which Boyle plays in with Black Lava's past bassist Tim Anderson and current bassist Nick Rackham. Meanwhile, Boyle, Presland and Rackham also play in A Million Dead Birds Laughing, a tech-death/grind band. In contrast to all of this, Black Lava focuses on simplified, catchy songwriting, with lyrical themes informed by dark medieval fantasies. Black Lava vocalist-frontman Rob Watkins writes their lyrics, music videos and creates their album covers (he also fronts Blackhelm).

In late 2022 Black Lava released their debut album *Soul Furnace* through Season Of Mist. Enhanced by the crisp, weighty production of their longtime collaborator, Troy McCosker, *Soul Furnace* was mixed by Converge's Kurt Ballou (The Dillinger Escape Plan, High On Fire) and mastered by Alan Douches (Death, Cannibal Corpse). The core of the album's strength comes from tight song structures emphasised by drop-tuned chordal dissonance à la Gorguts and Deathspell Omega, with massive choruses and harmonising counter-tuned bass and throat-peeling roars, propelled by plenty of frostbitten blasts and double kick.

Despite not featuring counter-tuned guitars, further variations on the rest of these initial sonic blueprints will be revealed on July 12 within *The Savage Winds To Wisdom*. It was produced by McCosker at Presland's Bushido Studios on the formerly volcanic plains of Melton, Victoria, and its mixing and mastering was overseen by iconic Swedish metal producer Frederik Nordström (Opeth, At The Gates, In Flames). Its evocatively nightmarish album cover comes courtesy of masterful Italian painter Paulo Girardi, who also counts

the likes of Cryptopsy and Revocation as clients and created the cover for *Soul Furnace*. Boyle shed light on his techniques, gear and collaborative methods in a recent chat to Australian Guitar.

When writing *The Savage Winds To Wisdom*, what were the main ways you had of coming up with new material?

A lot of that's jamming. Me and Dan [Presland] get together and we jam out ideas, then I take the strongest ideas, and build on those to create full songs. A good 80 percent was through a jam. That last 20 percent was building on the ideas and the layering. We lost our bass player during the writing process and recording of *Savage Winds* and I ended up having to play the bass on the album. Most of it came from jams, and me and Dan going back and forth to make sure it was finished. Rob [Watkins] gives feedback but he generally gets more involved once it's ready for vocals. That's his domain.

Does Rob write most of the lyrics?

He writes all the concepts and lyrics, yeah. A lot of the album covers and video clips come from his ideas.

When you were tracking guitar, was your tone achieved by DI'ing and re-amping, or was it a live amp sound?

We re-amped. I used STL Tones and Pro Tools plugins to get the scratch guitars, then we used DIs. We re-amped through a couple of different heads. I blended two tones: one main, tight rhythm tone, and then I brought in a Boss HM-2 heavy tone and got it to a point where the blend was the tone on the album.

You're the only six-stringer in Black Lava, so how do you achieve crunchy thickness in your tone onstage, and what guitars do you like to use?

I've started using the Quad Cortex, the Neural foot controller. The way I built the preset in that is very similar to how we re-amped [my guitar for the album]. It's a blend of a HM-2 tone and a tight rhythm tone. I run that into two Mesa Boogie stereo cabs on each side, and I run direct to front of house as well. I use Jackson guitars. They're the best metal guitar you can get, pretty much. I've got the Jeff Loomis' Kelly Pro Model Ash. I've got the Mick Thomson signature as well, the white Jackson. They're my main axes. I used the Mick Thomson one to record the album. It's a pretty simple setup really, just a Quad Cortex, and my axes running into two cabs.

Just quickly, with pedals - overdrive, distortion, boost - do you employ some of these?

I have a collection of HM-2 pedals. I use some Fortin overdrives to boost the tight tone as well. I'm also a big fan of Sherlock's V3 preamp pedal. The sound on that is unreal. Great distortion. I incorporate that into the main tight tone.

What led to you guys being picked to tour with Obituary in January?

We were talking to the Soundworks Direct guys for a little while to see if there was anything coming up that we could get involved in, because *Soul Furnace* came out but we hadn't done a national tour yet. They're fans of our band and felt we were a good fit for Obituary. They hit us up, so we jumped at the chance. It was an absolute honour to play with Obituary. They're legends, and the whole tour was unreal. The crew that Soundworks have are unbelievably efficient. They're all nice as hell and awesome to deal with, so it was a very smooth tour. One of the smoothest tours that I've ever been on actually.

Did you get to have some downtime with some of the guys from Obituary, and share some beers or something?

Yeah, Psycroptic were on that tour as well, so it was great hanging with them, we've known those guys for years. Obituary were super nice, awesome to hang out with. They've obviously been at it a long time, so they've got a lot of stories and a lot of wisdom to pass on. They're really good dudes.

What was the band or album that first got you into metal?

It was kind of a slow process, ever since I was really young, because my dad has a huge vinyl collection of '70s heavy metal and rock. I heard a lot of that as a kid. Always loved it. A lot of Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Alex Harvey Band, all that sort of stuff at home. My older brother got me listening to Pantera, so I got introduced to that at a young age too. From there, I found Slayer, then from there, I found Cannibal Corpse, then I found Cradle Of Filth, which got me into more black metal, then I found Satyricon and Thorns. It went from there, and it just kept goin'. Sort of a nice, slow transition. By the time I was 13, I was right into metal, and that's when I decided that I had to play guitar. That's when I started.

It's cool how we delve in, as metalheads. We want it heavier, louder, faster, scarier. Then we go into the depths of nastiness with the whole genre.

That's it. You hear how extreme it is, and it makes you wonder, how further can it be taken? That drives a lot of bands. It's drives a lot of innovation and heavy music genres. Everyone wants to see how far we can take things, I guess. What boundaries can be pushed? It's an exciting genre to be a part of. 

Black Lava's *The Savage Winds To Wisdom* releases on July 12.

CORT®



X700 TRIALITY

SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR SLEEK
AND VERSATILE GUITARS.



SPACE 5

NOT JUST A MODERN HEADLESS INSTRUMENT
BUT A RESURRECTION OF A PIONEERING LEGACY.



KX707 EVERTUNE

TAKING THE MODERN EXTENDED
RANGE CONCEPT TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

CORTGUITARS.COM



REDDY AND WAITING

LA'S **REDD KROSS** HAVE BEEN MAKING PUNKY POWER-POP FOR DECADES, CULMINATING IN THEIR NEW SELF-TITLED DOUBLE ALBUM COINCIDING WITH AN UPCOMING MEMOIR AND DOCUMENTARY. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR JOINED THE PARTY.

WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON** PHOTO **WANDA MARTIN**

Founded in 1978 when founding member Steven McDonald was still in high school, Redd Kross first became known as the LA punk band featuring the squeaky-voiced 11-year-old bassist and his older vocalist-guitarist brother, Jeff. Their first gig saw them opening for Black Flag in a suburban lounge room, while the group's early lineups also included members of Black Flag and Circle Jerks.

In 2009, Circle Jerks' frontman Keith Morris (Black Flag) formed hardcore supergroup OFF! with Steven McDonald, who has been a Melvins member since 2015. Two former Red Hot Chili Peppers are also involved in the Redd Kross story - RHCP's '80s drummer Jack Irons, and more recent guitarist Josh Klinghoffer, who produced their new album while playing all of its drum tracks.

Red Kross's new self-titled LP coincides with a documentary, *Born Innocent: The Redd Kross Story*, as well as the memoir *Now You're One Of Us*. Its eighteen songs feature many fresh experiments in sound from the oft-underrated group; after a dreamy intro, 'Candy Coloured Catastrophe' erupts into a psychedelic haze of power-pop melody, fuzzy guitars, and soloing. 'Born Innocent' swings and sways through its intro-verse rhythms to march into a foot-stomping chorus reminiscent of classic Motown singles, featuring reflective lyrics inspired by the band's early years. Its format as a self-titled double album is a clear nod to The Beatles' 'White Album', reflected in its cover. Australian Guitar recently caught up with the brothers McDonald, who spoke to us from their east Hollywood homes.

How have you guys been so prolific of late?

Jeff McDonald: Well, we both started writing a lot of songs. Steven started the writing process, then I had some stuff and we scheduled time most week days to write. We would come up with a song every couple of days.

Do you both sit down and try to write, or do you get struck with inspiration at the weirdest times too?

JM: It can be any of those things. There's no set way of doing it with us.

Steven McDonald: Both of us agree that our first ideas are generally the best. Melodies for me usually come when I'm putting chords together, when I'm humming melodies. A long time ago [in 1997], when we did the last album of that first run, *Show World*, that record was really arduous because we did a lot of second guessing of ourselves. Nowadays, we just want to go with whatever is more intuitive.

Obviously through knowing each other your whole lives, you guys must be quite good at sensing where the other person might go creatively. Are you guys good at completing each other's ideas?

JM: Yeah, especially with lyrics. That was really fun. If I sat down with an idea, came up with something that clicked and then hit a brick wall, Stephen would come up with something that would finish the concept.

SM: It was also a process of encouraging each other. We're really lucky that we have that.

You worked with Josh Klinghoffer on this record, who produced and played drums. I heard you originally wanted to get Dale Crover in on drums but that he was recovering from spinal surgery. Is he on the mend?

SM: He's well on the mend. Dale has been playing with [Redd Kross] for well over five years as a band member.

Did you and Josh share guitar ideas during the making of this new album, Jeff, as guitarists?

JM: I played my parts and Josh played some guitar as well. He played the solo on 'Candy Coloured Catastrophe'. [Josh] played all the drums, but as far as guitars go, we mixed it up. Steve played a lot of guitar. Whoever would write a song would show it to the

band, and then we'd hammer it out until we were ready to go for a take. At the time, Josh would play the drums and I'd play guitar, but after that it's anyone's game, with overdubs.

SM: Josh would sit with me while I'd play bass, and he would give me encouragement. A lot of the time he'd encourage me to do more variations [on progressions and riffs]. He has an immaculate collection of vintage guitars, and his studio is a culmination of years spent collecting things. He would take a lot of delight in selecting the right gizmo, the nice amplifier, or the cool weird box.

What guitars did you guys bring to the sessions, for recording the new album?

JM: My 1964 Guild Thunderbird. Any other guitar I played on the record was just something I found at Josh's studio. He would have a '58 Les Paul next to a 1973 Ovation Deacon, like a museum guitar next to a garbage guitar. You never knew what would give you that certain bit of inspiration.

SM: I brought a bunch of basses, but I ended up using a lot of Josh's. The main thing I'll take is a '75 Gibson L6S. I'm the bass player, but I've always been trying to get better at guitar. I've never had a fancy Gibson guitar. It was the starting point of many of the songs that I wrote on the record, and it was super inspiring.

Seeing as Redd Kross have been going since '78, and you're now looking back at everything, which is reflected in the album, the memoir and the doco, why are you guys being so reflective on your career right now?

SM: The memoir and the documentary weren't our choices. People asked us to do them, and we went along with it. I'm happy with the results. As far as nostalgia's sake, the new video for 'Born Innocent' features lots of old footage, and that song was custom-made for the documentary, *Born Innocent*.

JM: When we get to go on tour and stuff, we get to play from ten albums, so it makes it really fun and fresh. The old stuff can become fresh next to the new stuff. We just continue having a reason to move forward.

Did you guys ever meet Kurt Cobain?

JM: I did. My wife [Charlotte Caffey] is in The Go-Go's and Kurt was a giant fan of theirs. He invited Charlotte to go off on some of the In Utero tour, so she went off on some dates. When [Nirvana] came into town to do their In Utero show at the LA Forum, I met him backstage with Courtney [Love] and their baby, [Frances Bean Cobain].

SM: I think that was at the end of '93.

What were they like?

JM: They were super nice. Nirvana had just played a really happening show at The Forum, which is our version of Madison Square Garden, so spirits were high.

Melvins went down under with Mr. Bungle in March this year, but when might us Aussies expect to see Redd Kross live?

SM: Our booking agent is Robby Fraser at the WME Agency. Feel free to reach out. We are totally up for coming down. We love Australia.

JM: We've been to Australia five, six times, at least.

SM: This is my statement to all the talent buyers in Australia - come December, January, we will be free, so, invite us. 🇦🇺

Red Kross' self-titled new album is out now.



CORRODING THE CONFORMITY

THEIR DRUMMER PLAYS IN FOUR BANDS, THEIR GUITARIST IN THREE, THEIR BASSIST IN TWO. YOUNG ROCK ACT **ACID AMORA** ARE SOME OF THE HARDEST-WORKING MUSOS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, AND ARE BOUND TO GENERATE HYPE WITH THEIR UPCOMING DEBUT ALBUM. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR ASCENDED THROUGH THE MIST.

WORDS BY CORIN SHEARSTON

The last 20 years has seen the Blue Mountains generate an eclectic range of artists. Hip hop acts Hermitude and Thundamentals were raised there, as were alt-rockers Cloud Control and singer-songwriter Julia Jacklin. Ever since Jacklin's rise to national prominence in 2016, new bands have emerged into the public eye from the bushy suburbia of the Blueys, via rehearsal spaces, recording studios and tour vans.

One of these acts is heavy alt-rock quartet Acid Amora, whose upcoming debut album looks set to leave a mark. A statement on their Bandcamp page describes them as the result of Smashing Pumpkins, Trivium and Hayley Williams having a four-headed baby. Recorded at Damien Gerard Studios with producer Andrew Beck (The Church, Grinspoon), Sam Lowe on mixing and Ian Pritchett (Angus & Julia Stone, Kim Churchill) on mastering, their debut single 'On Replay' received attention from the US, UK, Mexico and Indonesia.

Acid Amora features siblings Sam and Holly De Lima Garcia on guitar and drums, respectively, alongside Bec Smith on vocals and rhythm guitar, and Peter Simpson on bass. Through the combined heaviness of their metal-loving guitarist and drummer duo, the four-piece are propelled by Bec's soaring vocals, lending comparisons to a young Evanescence. With Sam being 20 and Holly aged 18, Acid Amora retain the youthful fire of emerging musicians looking to take on the world, which will be reflected in their debut album. Australian Guitar spoke to Sam from his home in Blackheath.

Your two singles show a clear evolution in your band's sound. 'On Replay' is quite poppy, but your second single 'Security Codes' is a lot heavier, and punkier. The latter song has a big mix of approaches, from finger-tapping to some cool fills and a breakdown with a harsh scream, but you've also got Bec's soaring voice in the choruses.
'On Replay' is a lot more of a pop rock song. That

was one of the first songs that we wrote with this lineup, in order to introduce ourselves. That definitely brought people, but when we released 'Security Codes', it was a bit more in-your-face. We thought that it would build a bit more momentum into our heavier stuff.

When I see Acid Amora live I tend to think your sound falls somewhere between a young Evanescence crossed with something resembling Pantera meets Rage Against The Machine.

It's funny you mentioned Pantera, because they had two family members in their band. There are two family members in this band, and they're both a guitarist and a drummer duo.

How would you describe Acid Amora to people who haven't heard you guys?

The name is stemmed into the concept of light and dark. 'Acid' represents the heavier sort of sound and 'amore' means love in Italian, the lighter side. I guess that's our sound.

When was the current lineup solidified?

2022 was our first proper year together, except this year is going to be our first proper taste of bringing our music out into many different areas. With the album that we're releasing, we're scheduling a tour to go with it. We're going to be playing shows up north and down south, as well as locally in the mountains, and through Sydney.

When did you know it was time to record an album?

When we first recorded 'On Replay', that was just a one-day thing. Five months later, we wanted to go back to the studio. We had so much music that we were sitting on so we were like, 'why don't we make an album - let's invest a bit more money and do two or three days of recording'. That was a collective thing.

Let's talk about the tour. When do you guys hit in the road?

We're playing some shows through the mountains and Sydney first and then we're going down south to play some shows through Canberra, Adelaide and Melbourne. Then we'll drive back up to play some more shows within the mountains and western Sydney, and then go north and play around the Gold Coast and Brisbane areas. We're going to be doing it from around late July, through to early September.

What guitars are you going to be bringing on the road?

I recently had a guitar addiction and probably spent too much money on guitars. I'll bring an Ibanez AR, and my Les Paul's definitely coming with me.

What's Peter's bass of choice?

He uses a Fender Precision.

And Bec plays guitar too?

Yes, she's a Les Paul player as well.

I heard that Paint Job are working on another release right now, too? What's the lowdown on that?

We recorded a second EP fairly soon after I did the recording with Acid Amora, in a studio in Newcastle. We're releasing it at some point, this year. We'll get a run of shows happening for that as well.

Do you guys still rehearse at MYST, the youth centre in Katoomba?

If we weren't going there, we'd most likely be going to someone's house, and we'd have to let all the neighbours know beforehand. We wouldn't be able to be as loud. MYST have brought more youth into the mountains music scene, and they can provide for younger people who are starting out. It's a great rehearsal space. They've definitely helped us out, big time.

Do you guys sometimes think about where your band might be in a year or two?

We're just rolling with the punches, man. Whatever happens happens. Because we like doing this type of music, and we're doing it for all of us, if people like it that's a bonus. With this tour that we're setting up, this will be a first for us. It's going to really help us determine where we can go, and what we can do. We're going to go into places that we've never been to before and we're trying our best to collaborate with other artists, and network with different musicians and bands. This is a big first for us. We have no idea what to expect or where it's going to, but at the end of the day, it's music that we love playing and writing, so I feel that's always going to be the main thing for us, no matter where it goes.

A lot of bands kind of think that capital cities are the be-all-end-all of our live music scene in Australia, but you can find some great connections in small rural places, because that's where people are most starved for music. You never know where you're going to find some opportunities.

You could say somewhere like Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains, which is a lot more of a smaller community than the Sydney scene holds so many different styles of music. Some of the venues that we have here, like the Station Bar, are super small, raw, and in-your-face, and sometimes you can't replicate that in the city because there's much more live music there. Those smaller areas can pack a lot more punch. 



TOMMY EMMANUEL GUITAR RETREAT 2024

STEVE HENDERSON WAS IN ATTENDANCE TO WITNESS THE FIFTH RETURN OF ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S BEST GUITAR-CENTRIC GATHERINGS.

In March this year, 80 guitar players came together in the Dandenongs to spend four days and nights celebrating their mutual love for the guitar. This was the fifth Australian retreat for our very own Grammy-winning Tommy Emmanuel and his team, and this year's event was the most exciting to date. Delegates came from all over Australia, plus there were quite a few from overseas. People of all genders, ages and levels of ability (from beginners to professionals) gathered to share their musical passion. A few were even young guys who required the presence of their guardians, and both student and guardian had a great time. Some couples made it a "working" holiday (as one couple described it), with one partner attending the classes while the other chilled. Nice work indeed.

This time, Tommy's instructors were Michael Fix,

Simon Hosford, and Adam Miller, and together they presented playing, compositional, and performance concepts through masterclasses, workshops, group classes, one-on-one lessons, and evening concerts. Their variety of styles and techniques offered a broad range of teaching content.

Every evening featured a two-hour concert showcasing Tommy and the instructors, plus a student concert on the last evening, where delegates had the opportunity to perform for their peers with the instructor of their choice.

All the activities, especially the evening shows, were sprinkled with a generous dose of humour as well as some serious musical excellence. The masterclasses were entertaining as well as informative, and that was part of the educational

content as well: let's not take this too seriously – you can have fun while you learn and improve.

In between all the activities, there was plenty of time to enjoy the venue's award-winning menu, to hang out with friends, both old and brand new, to play music together, and to have a few laughs. New connections were made, networks formed, musical partnerships initiated, and all done with a complete absence of negative competition.

The main message: work hard at your craft and have a good time doing it. This was epitomised by the collegiate spirit that pervaded the event, where everyone was welcoming regardless of age, musical style or ability.

Good company, good humour, good food, and good music. 

Words Jonathan Horsley Photos Gene Kirkland, Austin Nelson, Getty.

“IT’S ALL THE
SAME CHORD
CHANGES. MORE
OR LESS THE
SAME NOTES.
BUT IT’S JUST
THE WAY THAT
THE INDIVIDUAL
CHOOSES HOW
TO PLAY THEM.
THAT IS WHAT’S
GREAT ABOUT
BLUES GUITAR...”

The rock icon finding new inspiration in deathless blues standards. The guitarist synonymous with the Les Paul now mixing up his Gibsons with a Strat and a Tele. This is Slash as you’ve never heard him before...



Blues guitar is a high-risk endeavour. Don't be fooled into thinking it's easy or safe just because there are fewer notes

in the scale. If you want a safer pursuit, take up whitewater rafting, spelunking or snake milking. An easier way to pass your practice time would be to woodshed, build up speed and throw in some neoclassical tonalities. Stick some compression and delay on it and everyone on TikTok will think you are a genius. But blues is not that. Blues is making more out of less and that leaves a player wholly exposed.

Personality counts. Charisma matters. It is like stand-up comedy; you have to tell a story, you have to tell it well, and come the end of it you have to arrive at a punchline. Quarter-tone bends have to be on-point, and pity the fool who incautiously mixes major and minor note choices, slipping out of key and souring the jam. The audience expects. They want to hear soul in the vibrato. And if they don't, you die. Maybe that's why Slash has decided to record an album of (mostly) blues covers. It's the old BMX bandit in him. No longer willing – or foolish – enough to put limb on the line on two wheels, he's putting his reputation out there on the precipice by pulling together a blues band and welcoming a rotating cast of A-list singers to the studio for *Orgy Of The Damned*.

And what the hell, the band would track the album live in the studio while they were at it. This was the approach that worked so well on *4*, Slash's most recent album with Myles Kennedy and

the Conspirators. On *Orgy Of The Damned*, veteran producer Mike Clink, who famously presided over Guns N' Roses as they cut the most dangerous hard-rock debut of all time, *Appetite For Destruction*, in 1987, would be on hand to make sure the tape was rolling.

"From my first real session, back in 1986, up until now, we have progressed into a technological kind of arena where producers don't do anything that is not safe," says Slash, joining us on from his UK tour with Kennedy and co. "Everything has to be mapped out.

Everything has to be recorded a certain way. Everything has to be separated. Everything has to be Pro Tooled to death, and it's really hard to find engineers who will let a band just play in a room and mic them, and just go for it! So yeah, *4* was a fun record for me, and then doing this one with Mike Clink, he just let us do our thing."

There are a few ways of looking at *Orgy Of The Damned* and what the track choices tell us about Slash. There is a case to be made that there's an autobiographical thread to this, a through-line that takes us from Robert Johnson to T-Bone Walker, from Peter Green to Stevie Wonder, from the young Saul Hudson growing up in England before crossing the Atlantic, establishing himself on the West Coast and becoming Slash – Guns N' Roses guitarist, Gibson Brand Ambassador, rock icon. Slash isn't so sure. At least, this wasn't the intent.

"No, I didn't think about it in terms of any kind of retrospective look at my upbringing, but I guess when you think about it, that's sort of what it is," he says. "It's stuff that I have been influenced by, and stuff that I like from early on up until this point. I hadn't thought about it in those terms, but it's an interesting way to look at it..."

BLUES AND SOUL

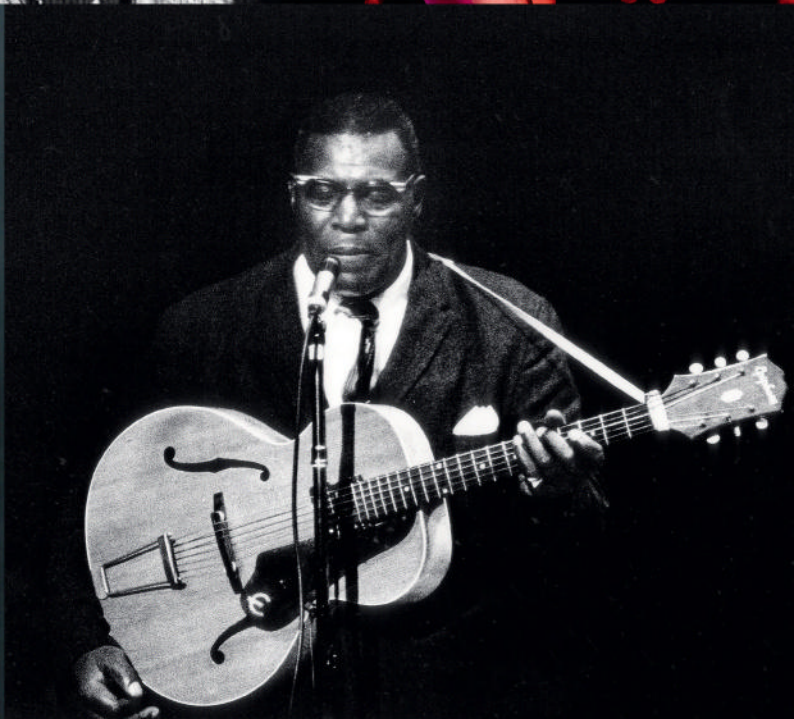
The inspirations for *Orgy Of The Damned*, and Slash's guest stars on the album. Top, from left: The Temptations, Gary Clark Jr. Centre: B.B. King, Stevie Wonder, Beth Hart. Bottom: Iggy Pop, Howlin' Wolf.

Alternatively, we could interpret this album as a statement on how far the blues has evolved, and how the blues has given guitar-driven rock and pop the raw materials to sustain itself, and how it can in turn accommodate those new sounds and still retain its essence. It's one of those myths that blues is somehow preserved in aspic and resistant to change when its prime movers had done nothing but innovate ever since first putting together a I-IV-V progression. Freddie King was injecting funk, soul and R&B into the blues way back in the '70s with the stylistically audacious album *Burglar*. Gary Clark Jr., who features on *Orgy Of The Damned* singing and playing guitar alongside Billy Gibbons on *Hoochie Coochie Man*, said in TG just a couple of months ago that you don't preserve an art form by keeping it stale.

"All the guys that came before me were pioneers in terms of moving it forward," Clark said. "Robert Johnson. Muddy Waters. Son House. All these guys put their own flavour into this music and evolved it. We sometimes look at it as this thing to preserve, but the guys who were making it weren't preserving it. They were trying to push the boundaries. If you're trying to do Muddy Waters, that's some big shoes to fill, and I don't really want to spend my time trying to be that guy. People used to tell me all the time, 'Just play the blues, you gotta preserve the blues!' And I'd think, 'Yeah, but look at Buddy Guy with a record like *Sweet Tea* – what the hell is that?' Why would people want me to sound like Buddy Guy's old records when even Buddy Guy doesn't sound like that anymore? What kinda sense does that make?"

He has a point. Not to mention that blues standards are standards because they have been reinterpreted over and over again. Who even wrote *Key To The Highway*? The credits go to Charles Segar and William 'Big Bill' Broonzy, but the story goes that those lyrics had been passed around the American South in one form or another. Contested origin stories are part of the blues folk mythos. They deepen the mystery, as though songs have a mortal life force all their own. What we do know is that their version of *Key To The Highway* was recorded, cut to vinyl and became definitive, and it has since been covered by Little Walter with Muddy Waters on guitar, Eric Clapton and Duane Allman, The Tedeschi

**"THIS IS ME
DOING WHAT
INFLUENCED ME
TO BE WHO I AM"**





Trucks Band, B.B. King and now Slash, with Dorothy on lead vocals, and he surely won't be the last. Once you read who is involved with this project and the songs that they will be recording, *Orgy Of The Damned*, officially Slash's second solo album, is not your regular blues record.

"For me, it was just a fun thing; songs that I really dug, and I just did my own spin on it. But that said, it wasn't intended to be a traditional blues record," says Slash. "There are so many great, very traditional blues artists out there that keep that flame going, but I wanted it to be, 'This is me, doing what influenced me to be who I am.' And I bought all of these eclectic, different kind of singers into it – maybe just because subconsciously I didn't want people to think I was trying to do the same kind of record that all these really hardcore blues artists do."

The Blues Ball is back in play

We should introduce the band. The lineup is a "reincarnation" of Slash's Blues Ball, the guitarist's mid-'90s blues project that gave him something to do after his exit from Guns N' Roses. Teddy Andreadis plays keys. Johnny Griparic plays bass, with Michael Jerome on drums. It was Griparic who suggested Iggy Pop guest on the record. Tash Neal rounds out the lineup on guitar and vocals, stealing the show on the cover of Stevie Wonder's *Living For The City*.

"Tash is f*cking amazing," says Slash. "I first heard him sing at a blues event that I was involved with in Los Angeles, with a bunch of cool players all jamming one night, and I was just floored, because I had never heard him, never met him. He and I struck up a relationship, and his band opened up for the Conspirators back in 2019, doing a US run, and we were just amazed by his band."

NOT JUST THE SAME OLD HAT
"It's not a real, traditional kind of blues record," Slash says. "But there is a lot of blues on it..."

"We would go out before our set and just watch them play every single night, so when I was putting this blues thing together I thought he would be a great guy to come in and sing, and play guitar, because he is a great guitar player. He plays a lot on the record."

No one in the band knew what this record was going to be, at least not at first. They had a list of tracks and were workshopping the arrangements before being told how it was going to go down. Andreadis will be singing live with the band, and as far as he knew, he was going to be singing on this record, too.

"I never told them that I was going to pick different singers," says Slash. "Teddy was always the singer in the original lineup of the Blues Ball back in the '90s, so I sort of had this thing in my mind. As we were learning the songs I had this thing in my mind, who the singers should be."

The record opens with *The Pusher*, a song written by country/folk singer-songwriter Hoyt Axton and made famous with the version by Steppenwolf that featured in the 1969 movie *Easy Rider*. For this countercultural anthem, The Black Crowes' singer Chris Robinson was a perfect fit. "When I called him about it he loved that song," says Slash. "It was cool that he was so passionate about it, and excited about coming in and doing it." There would be Brian Johnson of AC/DC doing his best Howlin' Wolf on a raucous take on *Killing Floor*, with Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler playing the harmonica. Demi Lovato sings on *Papa Was A Rollin' Stone* by The Temptations, complementing the blues with a Motown soul classic that demanded a different treatment from the band, and, again, like Freddie King, shows how far you can push things on a blues record. "Like I said, it's not a real, traditional kind of blues record," Slash says. "Obviously, there is a lot of blues

on it! I don't know about comparing it to that great, great f*cking Freddie King record, but it is off the beaten path."

Some of Slash's choices are no-brainers. Paul Rodgers steps up for *Born Under A Bad Sign*, having already sung Albert King's *The Hunter* on Free's seminal 1969 debut album *Tons Of Sobs*. Chris Stapleton has the chops on vocals to guest on a cover of Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac classic *Oh Well* that turns into a riotous eighth-note pummelling, which by its climax is more Motörhead than British blues. And Beth Hart dropped by – literally dropped by – for a totally smoking performance on T-Bone Walker's *Stormy Monday*.

"That was a funny take, because I talked to Beth on the phone; she was excited about doing it, and she called me back and had this idea about doing it in a minor key, which was a f*cking great idea," Slash says. "It made it a different version to all the other ones out there. We rehearsed it in minor, like, the last day of rehearsal, and we ended up doing it in minor, and then I think Ted had the idea of transposing it back to major at the end, which really was cool. So we had just learned how to do that, and we went into the studio the next day, and we were basically going to rehearse it – and Beth showed up. She just came in! She just jumped on the mic and sang it, and that's the only take and it was a rehearsal take. It really was almost like a live jam in a club with a guest vocalist. Nobody knew exactly what was going to happen, so the spontaneity in that was great. It was flying by the seat of our pants."

Stormy Monday is where you can really hear the benefits of recording a band live in a room. There's a dynamic range and an energy that feels like the documenting of a performance, not just a take. When Hart dials her voice back to a whisper, Slash takes the guitar

"I DO PLAY A LOT WITH MY FINGERS, BACK AND FORTH WITH MY PICK AND MY FINGERTIPS"

there, too. It sounds like he ditches the pick for this and is just kissing the string with his thumb, letting the amp clean up. “You know what? I do play a lot with my fingers, back and forth with my pick and my fingertips, but I can’t really remember,” he says, admitting that Hart’s ambush caught him and the band unaware, but these moments can be the making of a record. They give it life, especially when everyone is setup together and the tape is rolling.

“It’s great, maybe it’s because I am not that comfortable in the studio when you have too much time to sit about and think about what you are going to do,” he says. “So when you are doing sessions and you’ve got a lot of overdubbing, and you’ve got to come in again, you can overthink this stuff. When you are playing live, you are just in the heat of the moment, performing, just using your wits at the time. Just play! And if you’ve got a good guitar sound and the band is locked in, it sometimes provides much more exciting guitar.

“I just think playing live as a band is the only way to do rock ‘n’ roll anyway. Rock ‘n’ roll and blues – and jazz – has to be performed live with the band together in one room. It’s not something that could be pieced together because the feel gets lost. So I try to keep everything as live as possible.”

That might explain the pounding Motörhead treatment on *Oh Well*. The one-two punch of Slash and Neal’s guitar turns it into a powerhouse jam. Listen to it on headphones and you will pick out all these overtones, moments of illusory musical information. It sounds like there’s an acoustic guitar buried deep at the back of the mix, doubling the riff for texture, but there’s not. There might have been had they had more time, but overdubs for this album were kept to a minimum. You might hear a couple here and there, such as the talkbox work on *Papa Was A Rollin’ Stone*, which was rehearsed with Slash using a wah pedal and talkbox at the same time. Now, listen back to *Oh Well* again and what do you hear? Yeah, the helter-skelter take is classic Slash – getting carried away with himself, more ‘Fast’ Eddie Clarke than Big Bill Broonzy – but there is something off-menu as far as guitar choices go.

“Yeah, for me that song was one of my favourites,” he says with a chuckle that’s as good as an admission that, yes,

he did get carried away. “I remember when they used to play it on the radio back in the ‘70s, and I always loved it. Y’know I’ve jammed the riff a few times but I have never played the full song. My take on it is a little bit more hard-driving than most, right? It was a hell of a lot of f*cking fun to play. And I’m playing a Strat, too, which you never hear me use.”

Wait. Record scratch. Time out. He what?

“It just sounded like a Strat to me,” he says. “I used a Strat on that, and I used an old ‘50s Tele on *Living For The City*.” You think you know someone and then this...

Old, new, borrowed and blue

As it turns out, doing *Orgy For The Damned* was as good excuse as any to play around with his rig. “Anything, everything is an excuse to buy a new guitar!” protests Slash. This in part led to his new signature guitar amp collaboration with Magnatone. In the video for *Killing Floor*, Slash is playing a 1963 Gibson ES-335. It’s Neal playing the Les Paul. And your eyes did not deceive you, those were vintage Fender tube combos in the background.

“What happened was that, when I decided I was going to do this record, I pulled out a bunch of my old vintage combo amps and whatnot because I knew it was going to be a more laidback,” Slash explains. “It is still sort of a rock ‘n’ roll tone. I just wanted it to be less Marshall-y. And have a little bit more of a clean, gritty sort of a sound to it. I had those amps that I pulled out, and then I pulled out some vintage guitars I had.

“I’m funny with amps. I have

NO JACKET REQUIRED

Slash photographed at the Baked Potato jazz club in Studio City, California

obviously been a Marshall guy forever, and I love Marshalls – nothing gets the Marshall sound, right? But I also love old Fender Deluxes. I love old Fender amps for lots of different kinds of things, and they pop up here and there for clean stuff on a record or whatever. But I pulled them out, a couple of old Fender ‘50s Deluxes. I had a Dumble Fender Deluxe that he (Alexander ‘Howard’ Dumble) built for me, just before he passed away. I think it was the last one he ever built. And I had an old Marshall 50-watt, which I don’t usually use but I thought might be applicable for this.”

Enter, the Magnatone. There was a moment’s pause, panic across the internet, when the news broke that Slash was teaming up with Magnatone for a signature amplifier, that this amp would be in his backline when touring with Kennedy and the Conspirators. The official press release never mentioned a continuation with Marshall Amps. Slash leaving Marshall seemed unthinkable – and it was. A hastily released clarification was issued. He was adding to his backline, not decommissioning the Marshalls. When his signature Magnatone SL-100 arrived, finished in green snakeskin vinyl, it was clearly inspired by vintage Marshall Super Leads, with traditional British valve amp accoutrements such as the quartet of EL34s augmented with switchable Lo and Hi gain modes, a tube-buffered effects loop, and a master volume because 100-watts of this could take some heads off. The collaboration on the amp started here.

“Funnily enough, I had this Magnatone M-80 50-watt that Billy Gibbons gave me a long time ago that I had never used before,” Slash says.

“I HAVE OBVIOUSLY BEEN A MARSHALL GUY FOREVER, BUT I ALSO LOVE OLD FENDER DELUXES”



"I had never even heard it! He gave it to me, I put it with a bunch of stuff and never listened to it, and so then I had a Vox that I brought out. I wanna say something else, oh yeah, a vintage Mesa/Boogie, like an early Mesa/Boogie. I was trying all these amps, and going through the songs, and it was all very laidback and relaxed, and I tried that Magnatone and it sounded amazing.

"Everyday I would say, 'Okay, we're going to play this song and I am going to try a couple of amps with it, a couple of different guitars.' And I ended up back at that Magnatone. I ended up doing that whole record with the Magnatone and ended up designing an amp with them as a result."

The moral of this story is that, when the Reverend Billy F. Gibbons gifts you an amplifier, you put it in rotation. Also, do whatever you can to get him to guest on your record. Gibbons' turn on *Hoochie Coochie Man* is a high-water mark for the sessions and it gives one of Chicago's greatest blues standards a little Texas flavour, with Gibbons playing rhythm guitar, singing, and taking one of the solos.

"Billy, he's just hands down one of my favourite guitar players, ever since I first heard him back when I was a kid, and he just has this laidback kind of approach," Slash says. "There are three of us doing solos on *Hoochie Coochie Man*, but he is the one that's got the clean tone. I think he is the third solo in. That was something that he did just off the cuff, and it is so note perfect that I actually had to learn it! Ha! Just to learn it! Because his selection of notes on that little solo are just so great, not to mention his vocals are great. And also the same with Gary Clark Jr. He and I played back and forth, but his solo is so indicative of what makes him such a fabulous blues player."

Riding with the King

What makes a great blues player? There are no rules per se. You don't need expensive guitars. Robert Johnson inaugurated the art form with a Depression-era Gibson Kalamazoo flat-top. A suit is traditional but non-essential. You don't need heavy strings and a bear trap grip for a fretting hand. Billy Gibbons is proof of that. His electric guitars are strung up with .007s after some friendly advice from B.B. King that amounted to: "Why are you working so hard?" But that was exactly the opposite lesson Slash took from

B.B. King, whom he was lucky enough to jam with at the Royal Albert Hall in 2011, when he joined the King of the Blues with Ronnie Wood, Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi on *The Thrill Is Gone*. B.B. King makes a great blues player.

"He was the guy, when I was a kid, way, way before I ever thought of picking up a guitar, he was the first traditional blues artist that I was exposed to," says Slash. "My grandmother played me B.B. King and it stuck with me. I heard a lot of blues artists after that, all around the family and stuff, but B.B. King, the first time I ever heard it, it really stuck with me, and so he ended up being my favourite blues guitar player out of all the greats that I really dig. He is sort of my top guy. And I think one of the reasons I love Jimmy Page is because he plays very much like B.B. King."

Slash played with B.B. King on a couple of occasions over the years, but the first time the occasion escaped him. It was one of those LA nights that got lost to the drink.

"I can barely remember it!" he says. "But he was so cordial to me, and so almost fatherly and nice and generous with his time. That had a positive affect on me. And I played with him a couple of times over the years, and the last time I played with him was at the Royal Albert Hall, and Ronnie Wood was there. It was just a lot of fun. I remember being a little bit nervous, and not really feeling comfortable trying to play, but I was there, so... whatcha gonna do? But it was a really nice moment to spend with him. He was a really sweet guy, and a genuine road dog.

"This was a guy who spent 70 per cent or even 80 per cent of his entire life working, and I have always admired that. I have probably modelled myself after that because I am a total workaholic. I go, 'Well B.B. did it, so I can do it!' Anyway, it was just a great moment. Just being in the same space as one of your all-time favourite and most influential artists."

B.B. King was a stickler for details. His many Gibson ES-variant Lucilles were modified to remove the f-holes so that feedback wouldn't be an issue. He took a pride in his intonation, took every precaution; his bridges were augmented with a TP-6 tailpiece with fine tuners. His ear was as good as a Peterson Strobe Tuner. B.B. might



have given Slash the appetite for road miles, but maybe this is where he gets his appreciation for good intonation at all times. You would be hard pushed to call Slash neurotic, but on matters intonation he is not far off.

"I don't know, but my ear is pretty sensitive to being out of tune, and I appreciate you saying that," he says. "That's a compliment, because one of my biggest pet peeves about my playing is intonation. Sometimes a lot of it has to do with in-ears because you can go so high that you can't hear it anymore because you don't have the space of the room to really fill out the note. My pet peeve with intonation is something that I am still working on!"

Lightnin' in a bottle

Not all of the tracks on *Orgy Of The Damned* were chosen by Slash. It was at Iggy Pop's request that they covered *Awful Dream*, the old Lightnin' Hopkins tune from 1960's *Mojo Hand*. A more obscure country blues cut, Slash wasn't initially familiar with the arrangement, such as it is; Hopkins style is so spare that invites reinterpretation, as though his songs arrived fresh on record already as blues standards. It's like there's dust on it.

Listen to the original and you can hear why it works for Iggy Pop's voice. Maybe it was Hopkins's choice of words, or how his acoustic guitar had this sleepwalking slow shuffle rhythm to it, or maybe his voice, which managed to have this reedy top-end and yet be canyon-deep at the same time, but he was one of those musicians who gave the blues a supernatural feel, as though it was coming from the beyond – a haunting. Slash and Iggy are faithful to that spirit, if not the arrangement, making it sound as though the guitar itself had been exhumed from the Mojave before being brought up to pitch and recorded.

Slash says of the track: "Iggy came in and he and I just sat on stools," Slash recalls. "And I hadn't ever actually

SLASH, RATTLE N' ROLL

"Blues is all about bringing people together," says Slash of his upcoming S.E.R.P.E.N.T. festival

learned the song because it was so loose to begin with; I just did my own thing, how I remembered it would go. Iggy had all the words down and we sat and jammed it. I think we did it a couple of times, and then just did it from top to bottom live like that. It was a really great outlet for Iggy. He really cherished the moment to do that, and I love that feeling."

Lightnin' Hopkins played Gibson and Harmony acoustics, but Slash's choice for *Awful Dream* was more inspired by Lead Belly and Blind Willie McTell – a Fraulini 12-string with a longer baritone scale. "I got turned onto these guitars by Cher's son," he says. "These 12-string guitars were built like baritone acoustic guitars in the '40s. So they are tuned really low, and they're 12-strings. Just amazing sounding." Hendrix agreed. In the 1973 documentary *Jimi Hendrix*, there is footage of him playing *Hear My Train A Comin'* on a downtuned Zemaitis 12-string acoustic. And there's something undeniably gnarly about a downtuned 12-string – those low open strings sound like a death rattle.

Spare a thought for Teddy Andreadis, who will be singing these tracks when the band takes to the stage at Slash's S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival, which kicks off in July and tours across the US, with Warren Haynes, Keb' Mo', Chrstone 'Kingfish' Ingram, Samantha Fish, Larkin Poe, Robert Randolph and Eric Gales all confirmed among the lineup. S.E.R.P.E.N.T. stands for Solidarity, Engagement, Restore, Peace, Equality, N' Tolerance. It's a celebration of the blues, a chance to play these songs live, but it's also to raise money for good causes, with a dollar from each ticket sold going to charity.

"We are trying to do something that supports people coming together and not pointing fingers at people, and ostracising different races, people of different genders, all that kind of sh*t," says Slash. "That's the driving force

behind the festival, but blues is all about bringing people together."

Looking at the bill is proof positive that there is no one way to play the blues, and that's the point. If there was, it would be easy. But it's like the great contemporary jazz guitarist Julian Lage says: everyone has their own shuffle that's unique to them. Use yours. That rhythm is just as important as phrasing a lead, note choice, tone. Listen to the pocket on *Hoochie Coochie Man*. Listen to Slash's leads on this record. None were worked out beforehand. You've got to know where to start, where to finish, and which notes to avoid. All else is up for grabs. Make it your own.

"That is what's great about blues guitar," Slash says. "It's all the same chord changes. It's all more or less the same notes, but it's just the way that the individual's personality chooses how to play them, and that's what makes all these blues guitar players so f*cking great. You can really hear their personalities in their melodies, and in their solos, and in their rhythms, and just the way that they play it. It is such a diverse canvas, because you just have these three chords, 12 notes and a couple of different octaves, and the different things that people do with them are so much more different than all the technical players out there who are spending so much time on all this technique, and all of these f*cking different kinds of picking techniques and scales. It's all brilliant. It's amazing. But it's hard to tell a lot of those players apart because they are all doing more or less the same kind of thing at blinding speed.

"If you just listen to blues players, man, there's so much personality and individuality between all these different guitar players, and it is one of these things I love about it. It's not something you can necessarily pick up from watching tutorials on YouTube. It's just something you feel." 

***Orgy Of The Damned* is out now.**

"I LOVE JIMMY PAGE
BECAUSE HE PLAYS VERY
MUCH LIKE B.B. KING"

“IS THIS
PERSON
VIRTUOSIC,
OR DO
THEY
TOTALLY
SUCK?
THAT’S
KIND OF
WHERE
I LIVE!”



St. Vincent's new album sees her teaming up with two Foo Fighters, stealing Josh Homme's secret weapon, using Prince's favourite pedal and embarking on a prog odyssey. It also sees her return to real amps played real loud...

Words Jenna Scaramanga



A

nnie Clark – aka St. Vincent – is finished, for now at least, with digital guitar tones. “I’ve done enough direct guitar sounds,” she declares. “I wanted to move some air again.” The result helps St. Vincent’s latest album, *All Born Screaming*, sound extremely human. “It sounds real because it is real,” Annie says of the record’s emotional content, but she could also be talking about the Marshall she used to express some of those emotions. When she wrote this record, Clark explains: “I personally was metabolising inward and outward violence.

How do you make sense of the human condition? It’s wild and fraught. I’m lucky in the way I get to try to make sense of everything, by making work that takes chaos and puts it into some kind of order, whether that’s literally, with electricity through circuitry, or in more esoteric ways.”

“Every record I make is just a direct reflection of what’s happening in life,” she continues. “I’m not really deconstructing persona or identity this time. That’s not really where my head is at. It was more, ‘Okay, life is very short. It’s in some ways very binary. You are alive or you are dead, and there’s not an in between. So if you’re alive, let’s go. Let’s live...’”

Living things need to breathe, and the guitars on the record mirror that, with roomy, ambient sounds. The vibey

guitar licks on *Big Time Nothing*, for example: “That is my Music Man Goldie signature guitar through a reissue Marshall cranked in a room, with two Coles stereo ribbon mics for room sound.”

All Born Screaming sees Clark self-producing for the first time. Although guitar is central to what she does, it’s just one of many instruments she plays. Wearing all those hats means she must decide not just what to play, but whether to play at all: “I don’t mean

GEAR HEAD

“I’m happy to nerd out any day!” Annie says

to sound like a total space cadet,” she smiles, “but I think the song tells me if guitar needs to happen.” Her position as songwriter and producer informs her thinking about every part of the process. When we ask about the guitar gear on the album, she includes what mics she used on guitar cabinets (C12s and SM57s) and even mentions her Neve Decca mixing console. Where most guitarists imagine their signal path starting at the strings and ending at the amp, for Clark it seems to begin in her brain and end in the listener’s, encompassing everything between.

Clark’s gear obsession is evident. “I’m happy to nerd out any day!” she cries, volunteering her favourite pick, but she values gear for its creative uses. She describes pedals with creative adjectives like “gnarly” and “kaleidoscopic” rather than technical descriptions of what they do, but wearing her producer’s hat, she also knows the technical stuff. “Say, with a 500 millisecond delay. You gotta know what that equals in quarter notes and eighth notes,” she insists.

“There’s always going to be that guitar player ego going, ‘Put me in, coach! Hey! What about guitar? What about guitar?’ Sometimes guitar is exactly what needs to happen, and sometimes guitar is just not on the cards,” she shrugs. “One must be strong in their resolve, not to put guitar on things that don’t need guitar! But that also means that you try and be as innovative as possible when there is guitar.”

Sometimes that innovation means layering guitars with synths or unusual bass tones to create sounds that are both familiar and new: “The real nastiness on the song *Flea* comes from the bass,” she says. “Justin Meldal-Johnson played that bass clean, but I distorted it. I’m not one to go, ‘Oh, to make a big chorus I’ll put eighth-note distorted guitars over it.’ In the midrange, by the time you have Dave Grohl on drums and Justin’s bass, all the guitars need to do is be this riffy, seasick, out-of-tune EBow choir, and that’s the thing that will give you the additional harmonic information.





BLONDE AMBITION
St. Vincent on stage
in Madrid in 2023

It's fuzzy, because the EBow has a has a built-in buzz to it."

Wait a second... who on drums? "We've been buddies since I helped induct Nirvana into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," Annie tells us. "I just hit him up and was like, 'There's a song called *Flea* and you're the only person I could hear on it!' He's a great drummer because he's a great songwriter. He has all the power and all the chops, but everything he does serves the song. He's just gonna take the song from a nine to a 21! He just brings that kind of power, but it's never ego-blowing. He just came over, knew the song inside and out, every turn. He probably only heard it three or four times but he just had it." New Foo Fighter Josh Freese also supplies drums on a further two tracks, *Hell Is Near* and *So Many Planets*.

Despite the presence of those rock giants, *All Born Screaming* makes us think mainly of Prince, to whom St. Vincent paid tribute at the 2020 Grammy Salute. It's not that it sounds

like a Prince record, although there's a deep funk influence worthy of the *Purple One*. It's that they are both such polymaths – producers, songwriters, and multi-instrumentalists – who nevertheless keep guitar at the forefront of their sound. Both are far better guitarists than they ought to be, given their breadth of other talents, and both have threaded the needle of maintaining

artistry and musicianship alongside commercial success. And they share a favourite pedal: "On the songs *All Born Screaming* and *Inverse To This*, I recorded my Roland JC-40 with a Boss

VB-2, the original one," she says. "You know, Prince's vibrato pedal. He only played Boss pedals."

Also like Prince, Clark displays an engagingly non-linear thought process. "If I had to name my favourite bass tone ever, I would say Chris Squire from Yes on *Close To The Edge*. That is a perfect bass tone," she asserts at one point, apropos of nothing. "I know you did not

**"AN AMP
CRANKED UP
IN A ROOM
- THAT'S A
REAL SOUND"**





"A STRAT IT SHALL BE!"

How a gift from a grunge legend turned Annie Clark's head

"Mike McCready from Pearl Jam gave me one of his amazing signature Strats," Annie reveals, "and I played that on the record a bit. I've typically been afraid of Strats just because they carry so much baggage, but there were certain songs on this record that was like, 'A Strat is exactly what needs to happen here, so a Strat it shall be!' The end of the big riff on *Broken Man* was that Strat. I was just playing it as aggressively as possible. I play with my fingers most of the time, but I think I played that with a pick. My pick of choice is the Ernie Ball nylon light (0.53mm)."

"GUITAR IS INTERESTING BECAUSE ITS VERSATILITY IS UNPARALLELED"





ask me that question!” This is not the only time Yes come up for conversation. She also refers to the instrumental section of *Flea* as “my Yes prog odyssey”.

That prog odyssey is powered by two pedals that use sampling in innovative ways. The first is the Hologram Microcosm, also beloved of Covet’s Yvette Young, which combines pitch-shifting, delay, and looping. “It was for that kaleidoscopic delay trail,” Annie explains. The other is the Cooper FX Outward, which she likes “for gnarliness,” admitting: “I don’t even know what it does! It just makes everything sound melted and gnarly, just disturbing.”

All Born Screaming also sees St. Vincent delivering supremely tight funk guitar parts. “The guitars in *Big Time Nothing* are very much in the pocket, which is nice. You gotta have that pocket!” she grins.

Funk tones are powered by the Roland JC-40, while the Marshall takes care of dirty tones for things like *Broken Man*. “It sort of is and isn’t enormous,” she reflects. “I think the attack feels punchy and aggressive, but it’s not like I put a big fuzz pedal on it. It’s almost a

little bit more spanky of a tone, which is why it feels more aggressive. Using pedals on a Strat, you just have to be conscientious of avoiding unpleasant brightness, so that’s all from the amp. That’s it. An amp cranked up in a room. Not to be corny, but that’s a real sound.”

She adds: “There may be a couple EBow parts that are direct to the console, or run through a pedal chain and then direct.

Other than that, it’s all air coming through speakers.”

There’s also an unlikely third amp: “Cian Riordan, who recorded a lot of the record and mixed it, let me borrow his Peavey Decade.” The Decade is a previously unloved 10w solid-state

affair whose second-hand prices shot from \$50 to \$500 after Josh Homme described it as his “secret weapon” in a 2020 Mark Ronson documentary. “It’s a Homme homage,” Clark confirms, though she can’t remember precisely where on the record it ended up.

The main guitar on the album is the Music Man Goldie, the latest edition of her signature model. It’s so named because of its gold foil pickups, which ape the appearance and vibe of the budget single-coils on 1950s Teiscos

BAD FOR GOOD

Annie says of her solo in the song *Flea*: “I was going for a sound where it’s like... wrong?”

“THE SONG TELLS ME IF GUITAR NEEDS TO HAPPEN”

and DeArmonds. Unlike those models, however, the Music Man pickups are hum-cancelling. “It has a little bit more of a midrange brightness that I was going for,” she explains. “That was especially nice with the amp and room sound.” Other guitars on the record include a Gretsch 12-string on opener *Hell Is Near*, and a Telecaster strung in Nashville tuning (standard tuning, but with the low E, A, and D strings one octave higher) on *Big Time Nothing*.

Annie’s favourite guitar moment on the album comes near its end: “There’s a solo in *So Many Planets* that I’m fond of. That song is my love letter to second-wave ska and 2 Tone Records. I thought I was totally aping The Specials’ *Man At C&A*, and then I went back and listened to it and realised, ‘Oh, no I wasn’t.’ Usually when you reference things, you’re only really referencing your memory of the feeling that you had when you last heard something, you’re not literally referencing it.”

Another favourite moment comes in the aforementioned *Flea*. “I take a kind of solo in the chorus that reminds me of listening to Butthole Surfers in Dallas in 1997. I was going for a sound where it’s like... wrong? Like, ‘Is this person virtuosic, or do they totally suck? That’s kind of where I live. Like, one of the great guitar solos, Neil Young’s *Down By The River* is, what, one note? So it’s just in the hands of the beholder, I think.” She laughs: “That’s not an expression!”

St Vincent’s brain is firmly planted in the here and now. We invite her to speculate where her music might be headed next, but she declines to think beyond the next day: “Tonight, I’m going to play a benefit. I’m going to play this classical guitar that I tune down to C. I’m going to put it through a couple of chorus and vibrato pedals into a JC-40, and play *Moon River* and have a really fun time. I’ll be playing very delicately and playing chords with lots of numbers behind them, you know what I mean? After that, I don’t really know...”

She muses: “Guitar is interesting, because its versatility is unparalleled. But it also is an instrument with a lot of baggage. We all know the tropes that we’re trying to avoid. There’s a fine line between, ‘Wow, that’s amazing and virtuosic, and I love it!’ and, ‘That’s an act of ego and not an act of art!’ It’s a really funny balance.”

All Born Screaming is out now.

Words Amit Sharma Portrait Andrew Stuart

"I'M VERY GOOD AT NOT FOLLOWING RULES!"

As one half of Slayer's fearsome guitar attack, **Kerry King** shaped the sound of extreme metal. With a new album and a new sparring partner, he hasn't mellowed...

Kerry King's no-nonsense approach to creating razor-sharp, life-affirming heavy metal has made him one of the world's most influential players. His work in Slayer with co-guitarist the late Jeff Hanneman set the benchmark for a new kind of murderous noise – sounding thicker and angrier than anything before it. As pioneers of thrash metal in the early '80s alongside Metallica, Megadeth and a host of other speed-fuelled bands, Slayer would lay the groundwork for the varying waves of metal that followed.

When Slayer announced their retirement and played their final show in 2019, Kerry was certainly vocal about not being happy with the decision. "We quit too early," he reflected. "I hate not playing." But now he's back on the horse and doing what he does best, writing riffs heavy enough to knock the earth off-axis to create *From Hell I Rise* – the debut offering from a new band under his own name.

Before we get to the music, however, we need to address the elephant in the room. Only weeks after Kerry officially announced his comeback, Slayer were confirmed to be headlining US festivals later in the year. Few could have predicted things turning out like this, including the guitarist himself...

"It caught me off-guard, too!" he admits.

"Do I wish the timing was different? Absolutely, but that's completely out of my hands."

Either way, don't get your hopes up about a full-scale Slayer reunion. Kerry leaves no room for doubt in his explanation of where the band see themselves in 2024. "Everyone thinks Slayer are getting back together but that couldn't be further from the truth," he says. "We've been turning down gigs ever since we stopped. This one came and I thought, 'If we're ever going to do one, this could be cool because it's the five year anniversary of our final tour'. We're not going to record anymore. That final tour was definitely our final tour. This is just a reason to have some fun the guys, play a few shows and then jump back in the coffin..."

The other big news is your new partnership with Dean. It came as a surprise, given how loyal you've been to B.C. Rich since Slayer's earliest days...

With any of the companies I'm with, I'm super loyal, and I'd become friends with all my B.C. reps. But the company got sold to people who didn't have the same agenda. It was time for me to get out.

Do you still favour a Sustainiac in the neck and an EMG 81, with a PA2 Preamp Booster, in the bridge?

The boost is a carryover from the way I've been playing for the last 20 years or so. It's just

comfortable for me to have it there. If there's a funny-sounding stage or a situation where I need an extra kick, I'll use that preamp boost. I was using it for my leads but now I'll kick in my MXR Zakk Wylde Overdrive.

You've been a Marshall diehard over the years. Is that what we're hearing on the new album?

Yeah, I used my signature 'Beast' Marshall heads which come with a built-in thing called the Assault, based on my signature MXR 10-band Graphic EQ parameters. They just put it into a knob where you could get more or less of it, working like an overdrive. And for serious gain, it has a noise gate. I like the way they sound going through Marshall Mode Four cabinets, there's a lot of low-end girth. The heads sound different going through a regular 1960 cab. When I was doubling, I would change guitars and heads, just for variety.

Digital gear, particularly plug-ins, has really taken off since you last released an album. We can't imagine you plugging into a laptop because of the lack of air moving, but have you ever tried it?

When we did the last Slayer album, Gary Holt was using his Kemper for the solos. Phil Demmel, who is playing with me in this new band, used something digital on this album. I don't know what it was. I haven't been pushed





KING OF SPEED

"Concentrate on performing with articulation at whatever speed it is," Kerry says. "Full notes played clean..."

to the point of trying that stuff. Like you said, I want air moving. Is it more difficult towing real amps from country to country? Abso-f*cking-lutely. But I haven't found anything to match that. And if it ain't broke...

What do you look for in a riff? Is there anything you tend to rely on?

One thing that sticks out is my choice of chords and rhythmic patterns. I attribute a lot of that to Judas Priest, because they would write riffs that went from A to F and C, with icing here and there. And I think my go-to is more like E to F and G, or maybe G#. That idea turns up in most of my riffs. I don't try to change that, it's just where I end up. I probably base too many songs on that kind of

progression, but most people probably don't notice! There are no shocks on this album. I like bands to stay true to the sound that works. I'm happy that AC/DC have been making the same record for 50 years. That's why I like them!

Crucifixion is one of the faster tracks. How did that come about?

Yeah, it's pretty quick. The one that gave me the most trouble, which has actually been around since the last Slayer album, is the title track. If you're not warmed up, you're not getting anywhere near that opening riff.

How exactly does one master the skill, though?

It's like anything. If you want to

bench press 200lbs, you start at 80. If you don't like practising, get a song that's in the BPM range of where you need to start off, play along and then bump it in increments of 10 until you get to there. You should concentrate on performing with articulation at whatever speed it is – full notes played clean.

Crucifixion also has a harmonised riff using 5th intervals. You've done this a lot in the past to exaggerate the eerie quality to your riffs...

I always forget what the intervals are. I never talk shop, I always say 'This is four frets up, the next is five and the final one is seven!' There are so many things we've harmonised in the past. I try to present it in ways that are

"EVERYONE THINKS SLAYER ARE GETTING BACK TOGETHER BUT THAT COULDN'T BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH"

familiar to fans, and ways that aren't as familiar. There are tons of ways to go about it. Find the harmony you like and stick with it!

Idle Hands was the first single. Kirk Hammett referred to Phil's lead as the best solo he's heard this year – high praise, indeed!

Anytime Kirk's got something to say, you should listen. He doesn't have praise for a lot of things – that's not to say he doesn't like them, he just doesn't freak out about them. He texted me after *Idle Hands* came out and was raving about the leads. Phil is very well-rehearsed. He comes from a killer pedigree. I think he knew that would be the first single, so he attacked it in a way that would stand out.

It's an interesting balance – you've described your sound to us as archaic and atonal, while Phil has more melodic influences. Together that creates a really wide sonic picture...

I remember him sending back lead ideas saying, 'I don't know if this is too melodic?' and I'd say, 'This is your record, if this is what you are happy with – unless it makes me throw up – I don't care!' I wanted him to be proud. This band wasn't called Kerry King originally, and even though that's what we're called now, I still don't look at it like a solo project. Other people might, but whatever. Phil brought a far more melodic approach and I think we play off each other well."

Even the slower leads, like *Trophies Of The Tyrant*, seem to follow their own rules. They can be hard to predict, almost like jazz!

I'm very good at not following rules, especially as I don't know what all the rules are! That song definitely has some wide-open notes that cascade down the neck. I was picking out notes that worked with the chords behind them.

But do you ever find yourself listening to jazz?

I hit a jazz bar in the city once and

want to go more. I was bummed they didn't have a guitarist that day, as that's what I was hoping to check out. So I'll definitely be back. So yeah, I like that stuff, I like classical. Me and my wife hit the opera six or seven times a season and take it all in.

Two Fists has some almost classic rock-sounding moments.

I know the part you mean, it sounds like me trying to write a KISS riff! I wanted it to sound like a song from an '80s punk band. Musically and lyrically, I wanted to convey punk thoughts. Punk was a big influence on Slayer. We had the doom from Sabbath, the angst from punk, the polish of Priest and Maiden... take that, throw it into a cocktail shaker and it would spew out Slayer! On the song *Shrapnel* I actually wanted to have the wide-openness of Scorpions' *Animal Magnetism* crossed with the beginning of [Slayer classic] *Hell Awaits*."

Jeff Hanneman was known for being more on the punk side in Slayer while you were the card-carrying metal maniac. Together you birthed a new sound that would go on to

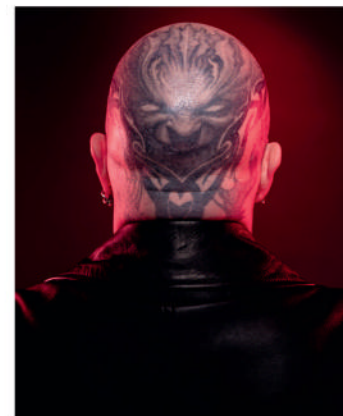
rule the world...

He'd been listening to metal for so long, he became tired of it. When he played punk to us, I didn't understand it. After years, it started to click. I realised it was cool in a different way. Things didn't have to be polished to sound angry and raunchy. As time wore on, I became more of a punk guy than Jeff! It helped lay the groundwork for what we'd go on to become.

You learned on your dad's Gibson ES-175. It's hard to picture you with a jazz box like that!

I'd forgotten about that! It was a fat Ted Nugent guitar. It was a big guitar for me as a teenager, but looking back now after playing guitar for so many years, it was fun. My dad also had a couple of ES-335s. There was a Tobacco Sunburst one that was nice. The ES-175 was in a Blonde finish. It had the f-holes and worked nicely as an acoustic when not plugged in. It was a quality instrument to learn on. Without my dad, who knows what kind of tree trunk I would've had.

Given the amount of gain you use, there's no chance of you



MEET THE BAND

From left: Kyle Sanders (bass), Phil Demmel (guitar), Kerry King, Mark Osegueda (vocals) and Paul Bostaph (drums)





RENAISSANCE MAN

"I like jazz, I like classical. Me and my wife hit the opera six or seven times a season..."

stepping on stage with one of those...

And that picture would break the Internet!

You also played a Strat in those formative years...

Yeah, my dad had a 1963 L-Series Strat, which apparently is a big deal. I'm not a big collector, but from what I understand that would be an expensive guitar these days. I played that enough for me realise I was definitely not a single-coil guy. I immediately knew I preferred humbuckers. Even though I love Ritchie Blackmore, single-coils are not for me. After that is when I got introduced to the B.C. Rich Mockingbird. Jeff had the B.C.

Rich Bich, though he played a black Les Paul on the debut.

What are the most valuable instruments we'd find in your house, then?

I've still got the Mockingbird in my house. I don't know if I'll ever part ways with it, but I do find myself looking at my gear wondering 'Why do I have all this stuff?' Maybe it would be good to make these things available for proper collectors. I've still got my first V from B.C. Rich and the one of a kind doubleneck V that I used on *Spill The Blood* [from 1988's *South Of Heaven*]. I keep about 10 guitars at home, another 25 in storage and then another 20 in the band storage. And there are more

in Hard Rock Cafes and Hotels around the world...

So you've never thought about becoming a serious vintage collector like Joe Bonamassa?

Knowing me, I'd have too many and spend too much doing it! If there was one special guitar I'd consider, maybe it would be something Ritchie Blackmore played or Judas Priest used. I'd love something like that.

Well, no one is expecting to see you with a Tele anytime soon.

I'll leave that to John 5. He plays them well! 

From Hell I Rise is out now.



"I DO FIND MYSELF LOOKING AT MY GEAR
WONDERING, WHY DO I HAVE ALL THIS STUFF?"



SLOWHAND IN THE
'60s

A 'BURST OF ENERGY



Eric
Clapton

INVENTS THE MODERN ELECTRIC GUITAR
SOUND AND FOREVER CHANGES HOW
WE ALL PLAY GUITAR

By DAVID SINCLAIR

IT IS DIFFICULT, in retrospect, to convey the impact that Eric Clapton had on the world of electric guitar playing in 1966. For one thing, Clapton himself has spent most of his career since 1970 in denial about his achievements in revolutionizing the sound and status of the instrument, and he has been only too happy to let the spotlight fall instead on those who followed in his footsteps, including Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page and too many others to count.

But even allowing for Clapton's latter-day reticence, it takes a supreme effort of either memory or imagination to fully appreciate how different the state and sound of electric guitar playing was prior to the release of John Mayall's *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton* in 1966.

The prototype guitar heroes of the Fifties and early Sixties were either moody types such as Link Wray and

Duane Eddy, or bands like the Ventures and, in the U.K., the Shadows, whose guitar star was the clean-cut Hank Marvin. What they shared was a guitar sound that seemed to have been recorded at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Layers of echo and reverb were added to a precise plectrum and fingering style that placed the ability to conjure a haunting melody cloaked in a deep, twanging



Eric Clapton — with the Bigsby-equipped Gibson Les Paul that he borrowed from the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards — performing with Cream at the Windsor (England) Jazz and Blues Festival, July 31, 1966. It was one of the new band's first live appearances

DAVID REDFERN/
REDFERNS



On May 17, 1964, the Yardbirds unexpectedly showed up at Lord Willis' house in Kent, England, for reasons that must have mattered to someone a very long time ago; [from left] Eric Clapton — with his pre-John Mayall Fender-and-Vox setup, Lady Willis, Yardbirds drummer Jim McCarty and guitarist Chris Dreja, who's sitting on his own Vox AC30

tone above all other considerations. Clear enunciation of individual notes played cleanly in tandem with a deft tremolo bar technique was central to the sound of records ranging from Wray's "Rumble" to any number of Shadows hits, from "Apache" to "Man of Mystery."

As the new wave of beat groups got into their stride, particularly in the U.K., guitarists became emboldened and started to take a more unfettered approach, often informed by the stylings of the original American blues guitarists. Brian Jones supplied a loud, super-aggressive slide guitar part to the front of the Rolling Stones' "I Wanna Be Your Man." Dave Davies offered a raw, run-away solo on the Kinks' first hit, "You Really Got Me." Pete Townshend introduced some startling feedback effects on the Who's "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere." Jeff Beck layered experimental, Eastern-sounding, psychedelic solos across the Yardbirds hit "Shapes of Things" and its B-side, "You're a Better Man Than I." But none of these early outliers had truly captured what a full-blown, modern electric guitar sound could be — or was about to become.

Clapton, meanwhile, had been not-so-quietly working up to his *piece de resistance* for some time. As the guitarist in the Yardbirds from 1963 to 1965, he gained a cult following that was out of proportion to the traditional status of a non-frontman musician in a band. This was thanks in part to his cool fashion sense and stage presence, but in even larger part to his incendiary soloing skills. The band's debut album, *Five Live Yardbirds*, released in the U.K. in December 1964, was both a blueprint and a harbinger of what was to come.

A raw, scrappy, low-budget production, *Five Live Yardbirds* was recorded without fuss or fanfare at one of the band's regular shows at the Marquee Club in London on March 20, 1964. It was notable for many things; the incredible energy of the performance was evident from the opening surge of Chuck Berry's "Too Much Monkey Business," in which Clapton and bass player Paul Samwell-Smith engage in a whirling, skirling, insanely propulsive blast of soloing that had a foretaste

66

ONE THING *FIVE LIVE YARDBIRDS* DID NOT POSSESS WAS ANYTHING REMOTELY RESEMBLING A MODERN LEAD GUITAR SOUND. THAT WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE...



of the punk aesthetic about it. Clapton's developing skill as a soloist was clearly on display throughout numbers such as Eddie Boyd's slow blues "Five Long Years" and a rip-roaring take on John Lee Hooker's "Louise." The recording also captured several extended improvised passages — what the band referred to as their "rave-ups" — in songs such as Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightning" and a ragged version of Bo Diddley's call-and-response epic "Here 'Tis," in which Samwell-Smith and Clapton performed a high-speed duel amid a closing sequence of indistinct aural mayhem from band and audience alike. These rave-ups were quite unlike anything that any other "pop" or beat bands of the pre-rock era had committed to tape and were a precursor of the working practices that Clapton would later pursue with monumental results in Cream.

What *Five Live Yardbirds* did not possess was anything remotely resembling a modern lead guitar sound. Throughout his tenure with the Yardbirds, Clapton mostly played a red Fender Tele-

caster through a Vox AC30. The sound this produced, although perfectly acceptable for the period, was comparatively thin and trebly with virtually no sustain. Clapton continued to use the Telecaster when he initially joined John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in April 1965. But the following month he bought a sunburst 1960 Gibson Les Paul Standard with humbucking pickups, which turned out to be a game-changer. This instrument, which became known as "the Beano Burst" after the nickname of the album he recorded with the Bluesbreakers the following year (Clapton is reading a *Beano* comic in the cover photo), has acquired a mythical status in the guitar world — not least because it was stolen soon after Clapton joined Cream in 1966 and has since vanished into a swirling mist of rumors as to its whereabouts, rumors that continue to surface to this day.

"The Les Paul has two pickups, one at the end of the neck, giving the guitar a kind of round jazz sound, and the other next to the bridge giving you the treble," Clapton explained in his 2007 autobiography. "What I would do was use the bridge pickup with all of the bass turned up, so the sound was very thick and on the edge of distortion. I also used amps that would overload. I would have the amp on full and I would have the volume on the guitar also turned up full, so everything was on full volume and overloading. I would hit a note, hold it and give it some vibrato with my fingers until it sustained and then the distortion would turn into feedback. It was all of these things, plus the distortion, that created what I suppose you could call 'my sound.'"

While the heavy, humbucking resonance of the Les Paul was key to the overall sound, so too was the new Marshall amplification that Clapton also bought into at this time. A small, innovative business run by Jim Marshall, an ex-drummer, the company was at that time based in Hanwell, West London, from where Clapton acquired a Marshall model 1962 2x12 combo based on the JTM45 design. This new setup produced a much fuller, more powerful sound than his Tele-and-Vox combo, and even before the release of the *Beano* album, it was clear something special was in the air.

Mayall's Bluesbreakers didn't tour, exactly; they simply played six or seven nights a week as a matter of course. "We were paid £35 a week," Clapton recalled. "It was a set wage no matter how much work you did. The idea was that you would play a gig, and when you were done you might have to play again that night. A not un-typical night might involve travelling up to Sheffield to play the evening gig at eight o'clock, then heading off to Manchester to play the all-nighter, followed by driving back to London and being dropped off at Charing Cross station at six in the morning."

It is not altogether clear when the graffiti proclaiming that "Clapton is God" started to appear on the streets of London. But the equipment overhaul and the intense gigging schedule had clearly elevated the guitarist into an exalted zone as a performer. There is a live recording of the Bluesbreakers playing "Call It Stormy Monday" at the Flamingo Club on March 17, 1966 — two weeks before Clapton's 21st birthday and

a month before the *Beano* album was recorded — that has been hailed by several commentators as one of the best blues guitar solos ever. Clapton's tone, along with the outrageous timing and aggressive phrasing on this recording, is little short of supernatural. Nashville guitar great Kenny Vaughan [*Marty Stuart & His Fabulous Superlatives*] spoke for many when he called it "just the most wicked-ass... frantic, most intense guitar solo you ever heard on a blues in your life."

It sounds phenomenal in every department — even today. But imagine how it must have sounded to the guy who had just wandered into the bohemian neighborhood of nightclubs, strip joints and coffee bars on Wardour Street in 1966 and happened to hear that solo. It must have been like hearing music from another planet.

Against the odds, the *Beano* album caught something of the thrill of that moment in time, making it one of the most successful exercises in the art of capturing lightning in a bottle yet undertaken in the modern recording era.

"We went into the Decca studios in West Hampstead for three days in April [1966] and played exactly the set we did on stage, with the addition of a horn section on some of the tracks," Clapton said. "Because the album was recorded so quickly, it had a raw, edgy quality about it which made it special. It was almost like a live performance. I insisted on having the mic exactly where I wanted it to be during the recording, which was not too close to my amplifier, so that I could play through it and get the same sound as I had on stage."

That was all very well for Clapton. But for producer Mike Vernon and engineer Gus Dudgeon, it wasn't quite that simple, as Mayall recounted in his 2019 autobiography. "I recall that the engineer, Gus Dudgeon, was horrified that Eric was intending to play through his Marshall amp at full volume," Mayall said. "This simply wasn't the acceptable way to do things in 1966. However, Eric stood his ground, refusing to turn his amp down. Mike Vernon had to mediate in order for us to start."

"It took a while to get a sound that everybody was happy with, especially Eric, but everybody had to take on board that we were going into an unknown era," Vernon told Harry Shapiro in 2011. "Nobody in Decca studios had ever witnessed somebody coming into the studio, setting up their guitar and amp and playing at that volume. People in the canteen behind the studio were complaining about the noise. Normally they'd never hear it, but this was travelling around the studio complex. People were saying, 'What the bloody hell is that?'" and coming to see what was going on."

The resulting album — *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton* by John Mayall — marked Year Zero for the modern electric guitar sound. Clapton's tone was nothing short of revolutionary and, harnessed to the skill and visceral emotional quality of his solos (especially on slow numbers "Have You Heard" and "Double Crossing Time"), produced an effect of a different magnitude to anything that had gone before. Kudos to Mayall for assembling a great collection of new and traditional blues songs and stamping his singular English mark on them. And respect to the fine rhythm section of John McVie (bass) and Hughie Flint (drums). But this album was all about Clapton using his Gibson/Marshall setup to redefine the sonic

and technical norms of electric guitar playing.

Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton ushered in a new era, not just in the playing of music but also the marketing of it. It was released July 22, 1966, with little fanfare and promptly rose to Number 6 in the U.K. albums chart. This was unheard of for an act that had enjoyed no previous success in the singles chart, and its unexpected yet emphatic progress was a key moment in the process whereby albums started to take over from singles as the barometer of a band's success.

With its revolutionary guitar sound and compelling spiritual vigor derived from the musicians' deep love and knowledge of American blues forms, the impact of the album was seismic on many levels. A generation of guitarists received the wake-up call of their careers, and within a year the British Blues Boom would be in full swing. More than that, it was effectively the first "rock" album.

"When we heard the *Beano* album, that was like... Nobody had ever heard a guitar sound like that," Kenny Vaughan said. "Johnny 'Guitar' Watson records from the 1950s had some wicked-ass sounds. And, of course, Guitar Slim and Earl King — they both had great sounds. And Link Wray had a brash, rude sound. But they weren't like that. Nobody had that Eric Clapton sound on that record."

Nobody had it — and now everybody wanted it. Unfortunately for Mayall, by the time the *Beano* album was released, Clapton had already left the group. Ever the pragmatist, Mayall immediately recruited Peter Green to replace him and continued his eight-days-a-week schedule playing to ever-expanding audiences. Clapton, meanwhile, had embarked on another project that would further define the role of the modern guitar hero and redraw the boundaries of the rock genre he had already done so much to invent.

Cream were the first power/guitar trio and the first group of any kind to bring a flamboyantly virtuosic musical technique to bear on the traditionally basic structures of popular music. Drummer Ginger Baker

66

A GENERATION
OF GUITARISTS
RECEIVED THE
WAKE-UP CALL OF
THEIR CAREERS, AND
WITHIN A YEAR, THE
BRITISH BLUES BOOM
WOULD BE IN FULL
SWING



and bass player/vocalist/harmonica man Jack Bruce were highly evolved musicians with backgrounds in jazz, where the impulse to experiment and improvise at length was taken as part of the basic motivation for performing. To play with musicians like these gave Clapton an opportunity to deploy his technique to its full extent and explore musical avenues that took him far beyond the confines of performing in a regular band. Cream were a short-lived and volatile combination of individuals, but it's worth remembering the spirit of optimism that brought the group together. "Musically we are idealistic," Clapton told Penny Valentine in July 1967. "When I first met Ginger and Jack I realized they were the only two musicians I could ever play with."

Cream played their first gig at the Twisted Wheel in Manchester on July 29, 1966, the night before England won the World Cup, and the trio's first album, *Fresh Cream*, was released just five months later on December 9. The chronology of the 1960s gets a bit hazy after all this time, but it is worth noting that Jimi Hendrix released his first single, "Hey Joe," one week after *Fresh Cream*. Indeed, when Hendrix's



Cream perform
 "I Feel Free," a *Fresh Cream*
 track, on *Top of the Pops*
 in London, January 25, 1967;
 [from left] Jack Bruce
 (playing a Fender Bass VI),
 Ginger Baker and Clapton
 (playing what is commonly
 called the *Fresh Cream* "Burst")

manager Chas Chandler was trying to persuade Hendrix to move from New York to London, one of Chandler's key bargaining chips was to promise that once they were in London, he would arrange for Hendrix to see his hero, Eric Clapton, playing with Cream. It was perhaps no coincidence that Hendrix also elected to form a trio as opposed to a conventional four-man band on his arrival in London.

With *Fresh Cream*, Clapton further extended the range of sounds and musical sensibilities available to the modern guitar hero. On "Sweet Wine," he constructed a lat-

ticework of interlocking guitar lines — some of them little more than wails of feedback, others hauntingly melodic — to create a passage that was more of a soundscape than a guitar solo. He developed an extraordinary sense of narrative in his solos — which even on the extemporized blues rumble of "Spoonful" or the two-chord chant of "I'm So Glad" seemed to hang together as if they

were totally spontaneous and carefully structured at the same time.

As they toured America, the trio's facility for improvising around a commonly understood framework became ever more finely developed. They played many times at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, where promoter Bill Graham gave them *carte blanche* to play for as long and as loud as they liked, even



February 19, 1967: A shot of Clapton playing the *Fresh Cream* 'Burst at the Starlite Ballroom, Greenford, England. Just a few weeks later, it would suffer a headstock injury, with Clapton switching to an SG

if the show went on until dawn the next day.

"It was very liberating," Clapton recalled. "We'd go off in our own directions, but sometimes we would hit these coincidental points... and we would jam on it for a little while and then go back into our own thing. I had never experienced anything like it. It was nothing to do with lyrics or ideas; it was much deeper, something purely musical. We were at our peak during that period."

This semi-improvised approach led to one of the most celebrated guitar solos of all time, in the shape of the comparatively concise and structured live version of "Crossroads" recorded on March 10, 1968, on a mobile studio parked outside the group's gig at the 5,400-capacity Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco, and first presented to the wider world as the opening track on the live disc of the double-album *Wheels of Fire*, released on August 9 of that year.

Clapton's phrasing, timing and choice of notes on this version was sensational, as he started in a low register and gradually climbed over two verses building tension and excitement. After another verse of vocals ("Going down to Rosedale..."), he came back in for a second stretch of solos, doubling the intensity in all departments for another three verses. Never repeating himself or losing his way through the intense three-way wrestling match going on between the guitar, bass and drums, he pulled out a succession of soaring blues licks and double-stop bends to create a thrilling climax that was both super-aggressive and intensely focused. In the many polls, lists and tabulations of Clapton's greatest guitar solos, this is the one that invariably comes out at the top.

Surprisingly, by modern standards, all the sound of the guitar (and the bass, for that matter) at Cream's shows was generated from the back line. None of the speakers for the instruments was miked up and put through the PA, even in venues of 5,000 capacity or more. The PA systems of the time were still unbelievably rudimentary; a couple of WEM columns or a Marshall 200-watt system for the vocal mics and maybe a couple of overhead mics for the drums was considered sufficient for a gig at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

The incredible sound that Clapton got with Cream (as with Mayall before that) was a function of the outrageous volume at which he played his Gibsons, which were usually either the 1964 SG Standard affectionately known as "The Fool," a '63/'65 one-pickup Firebird 1 or a '64 ES-335. He generally used two 100-watt Marshall stacks, each comprising a model 1959 100-watt head, a model 1960 angled 4x12 cabinet and a model 1960B flat-fronted 4x12 cabinet. "I set them full on everything," Clapton told *Rolling Stone* in 1967. "Full treble, full bass and full presence, same with the controls on the guitar. If you've got the amp and guitar full, there is so much volume that you can get it 100 miles away and it's going to feedback — the sustaining effect — and anywhere in the vicinity it's going to feedback."

Clapton gradually introduced various pedals into his setup. He was the first "name" guitarist to release a track featuring a wah pedal — the Vox V846 (later reissued as the Clyde McCoy) — which he used on "Tales of Brave Ulysses," released as a U.K. B-side to "Strange Brew" in June 1967. Although Hendrix ultimately made much more extensive use of the wah and did far more to popularize it, his first use of the pedal wasn't heard on record until "Burning of the Midnight Lamp," a U.K. single released in August 1967. Clapton also used a Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face, notably to beef up the iconic riff of "Sunshine of

66

CLAPTON WAS THE FIRST "NAME" GUITARIST TO RELEASE A TRACK FEATURING A WAH PEDAL — THE VOX V846 — WHICH HE USED ON "TALES OF BRAVE ULYSSES"



Your Love" and to add extra saturation and sustain to his sound on "White Room" and others. He used other pedals and effects — including the revolving (Leslie) speaker sound heard on "Badge" — but often his amp and guitar settings, combined with his extraordinary touch, were all it took to generate a specific sound, such as the high, pure "woman" tone he conjured on "Outside Woman Blues" and others.

The huge popularity and acclaim that greeted Clapton and Cream inspired a transformation in popular music on many levels. The sheer volume at which they played and the heavy, riff-based style of songwriting they developed paved the way for Black Sabbath and Deep Purple — both founded in 1968 — and the subsequent birth of heavy metal. And Cream's fondness for improvising unleashed a tsunami of extended jamming among the heroes of the heavy rock genre they had done so much to create. It's hardly an exaggeration to say that by their example Cream transformed a concert and record industry previously dominated by the three- or four-minute song structure into a world where long-form improvisation and instru-

BONAMASSA'S PICKS

JOE CHOOSES SOME UNDERAPPRECIATED '60S CLAPTON GEMS

"DOUBLE CROSSING TIME" FROM *BLUES BREAKERS* WITH ERIC CLAPTON (1966)

THERE'S ONE SONG that I feel is overlooked from the Bluesbreakers record — "Double Crossing Time." It's like this slow blues, and it's so damn devastating. Obviously, that album has a lot of cover songs, but that doesn't matter, you know? The fact remains that it changed the game and re-did the landscape as far as electric blues. You cannot deny that. That was especially true for people in the U.S. when they — like me — began their adventure through the blues via London Records. But that was the one record and the one song that really got me. I heard that and said, "Oh, my God, just wow." And it's the sound I'm still forever chasing. We all are.

"DESERTED CITIES OF THE HEART" FROM *WHEELS OF FIRE* (1968)

ONE SONG YOU never hear being talked about is Cream's "Deserted Cities of the Heart." I really do think it was one of their best, and it's very overlooked. Clapton had this kind of sitar sound happening on the guitar solo, which was so cool. And the way Jack [Bruce] kinda screamed like James Brown, where he got really deep, was memorable. This song is just a cool psychedelic rock classic you never hear people mention. You always heard about "White Room," "Sunshine of Your Love" and "Crossroads," but for me, this song was an instant classic.

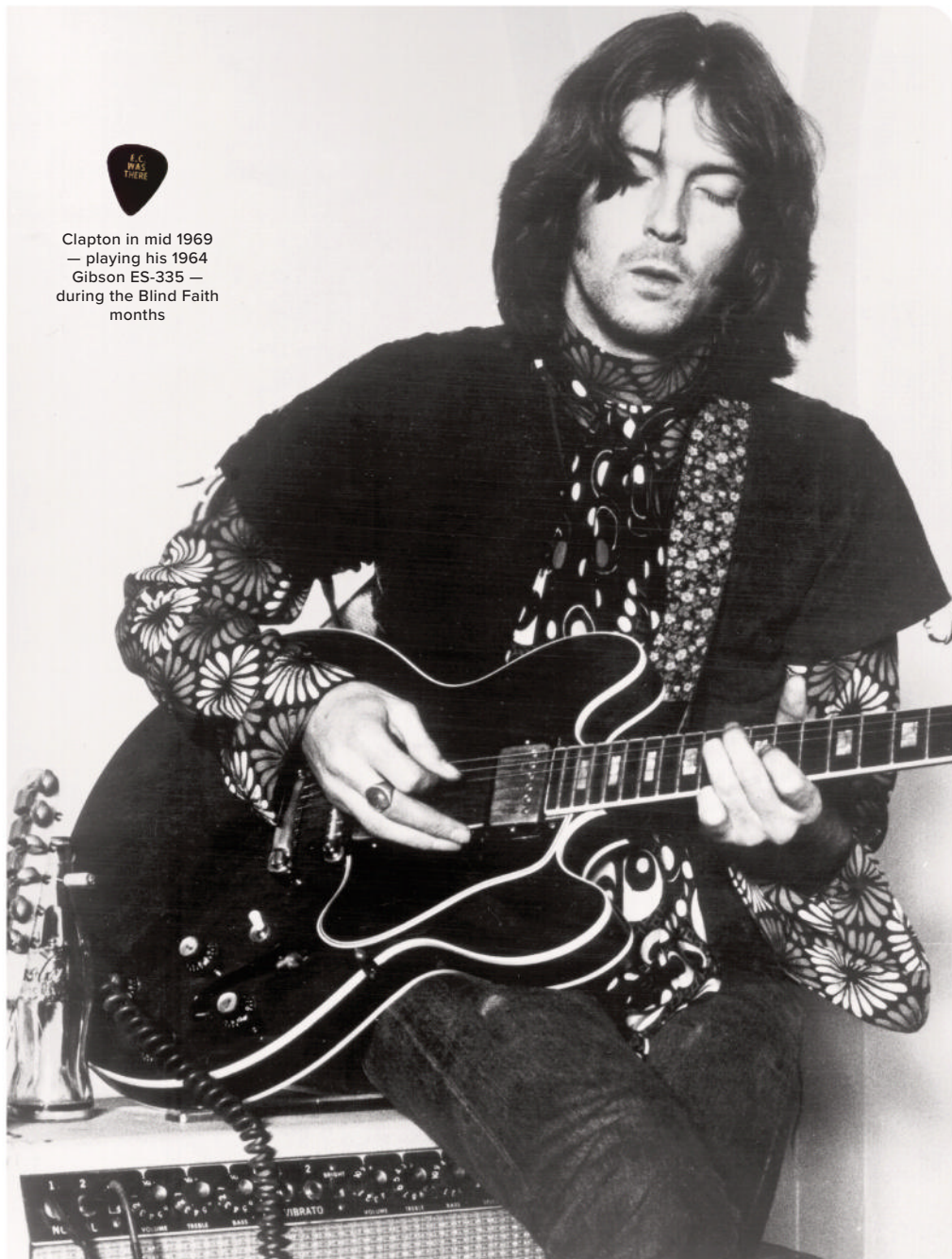
— Interview by Andrew Daly

mental free-for-alls became commonplace, if not the norm.

Hendrix certainly took it as the model for his live performances, as did Led Zeppelin — who, of course, started life as the New Yardbirds and thereby carried forward the legacy of the original Clapton rave-ups that got the ball rolling in the first place. And over the next few years bands such as Ten Years After (at Woodstock), Mountain, Humble Pie and many others piled in with ever more extravagant performances that trod an increasingly erratic line between grand musical



Clapton in mid 1969 — playing his 1964 Gibson ES-335 — during the Blind Faith months



visions and wanton grandiloquence. In 1968 Canned Heat filled two sides of their double-album *Living the Blues* with one track, "Refried Boogie," a 40-minute epic of non-stop noodling and nebulosity.

It all got to be a bit too much for Clapton. He was particularly affected by a negative review of a Cream show in *Rolling Stone* by Jon Landau, who described the band as "three virtuosos romping through their bag... always in a one-dimensional style" and Clapton as "a master of the blues clichés of all of the post-World War II blues guitarists."

"And it was true!" Clapton said later. "The ring of truth just knocked me backward."

By that point, Clapton had been performing for many years at a level of intensity that had become impos-

sible to maintain. There was an emotional cost to digging so deep into his reserves of musical creativity night after night, not to mention the physical toll of doing so at such punishingly high volumes.

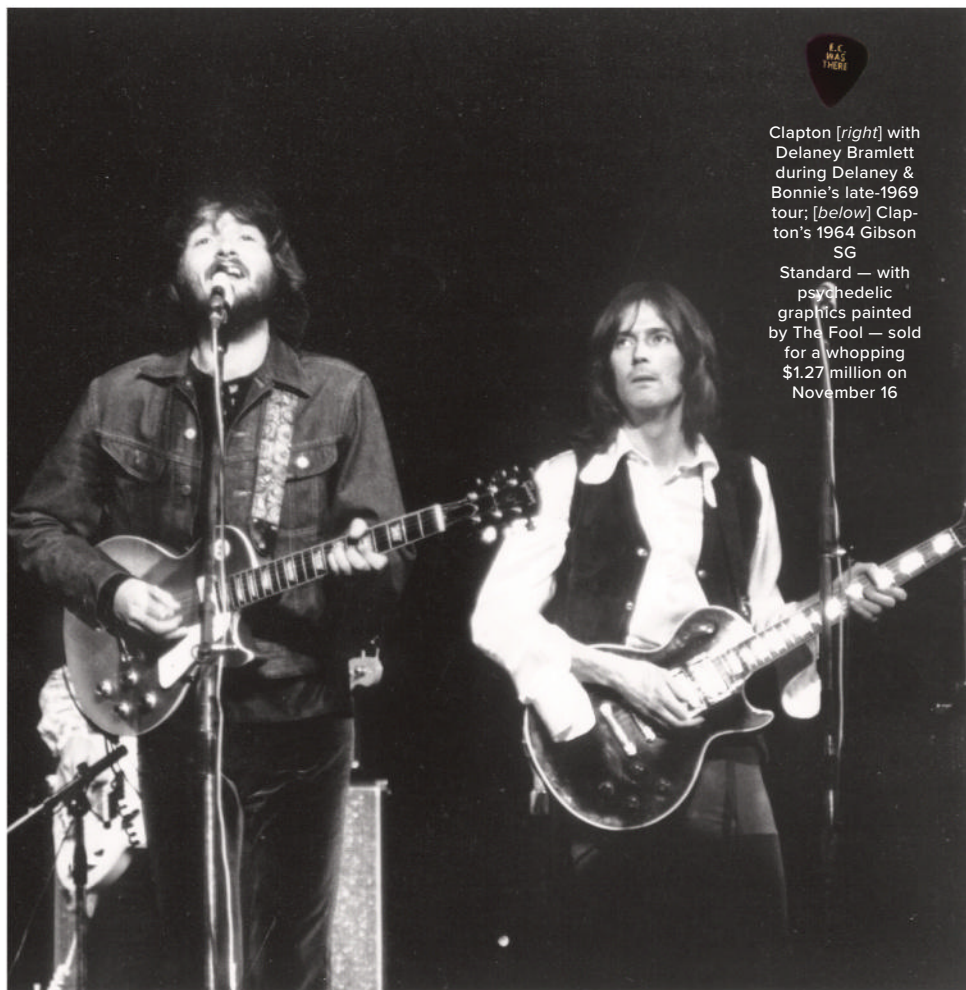
"When you're in your mid-20s you've got something that you lose," Clapton reflected in an interview with *Q* magazine in 1986. "If I was a sportsman I would have retired by now. You've just got a certain amount of dynamism that you lose when you turn 30. You have to accept that otherwise you're chasing a dream."

Looking back on that period much later, he recalled that, "There were times too when, playing to audiences who were only too happy to worship us, complacency set in. I began to be quite ashamed of being in Cream, because I thought it was a con. Musically I was fed up with the virtuoso thing. Our gigs had become nothing more than an excuse for us to show off as individuals, and any sense of unity we might have had when we started out seemed to have gone out of the window."

Clapton made one last roll of the guitar hero dice with the ill-fated supergroup Blind Faith, which came into being, recorded and released a U.S. and U.K. chart-top-

CC

CHECK OUT THE RECORDING OF EDDIE VAN HALEN CONJURING A NOTE-PERFECT RECREATION OF CLAPTON'S "CROSSROADS" SOLO DURING A 1984 RADIO SHOW



Clapton [right] with Delaney Bramlett during Delaney & Bonnie's late-1969 tour; [below] Clapton's 1964 Gibson SG Standard — with psychedelic graphics painted by The Fool — sold for a whopping \$1.27 million on November 16

ping album, headlined a massive show in Hyde Park, toured in Scandinavia and America and then split up — all between January and August 1969.

"I think just playing the guitar isn't enough," Clapton told *Rolling Stone* the following year. "If I was a great songwriter or a great singer, then I wouldn't be so humble about it. I wouldn't be shy."

So saying, Clapton very firmly stepped down from the pedestal onto which he had been placed and turned his back on the world of rock virtuoso superstars he had been instrumental in creating. He (along with George Harrison) instead joined forces with Delaney & Bonnie Bramlett, a husband-and-wife duo from Los Angeles whose loose-knit band had supported Blind Faith on their tour of America. Delaney & Bonnie's soulful blend of Southern rock, blues and gospel music was a soothing balm to Clapton's troubled spirit.

"You really have to start singing, and you ought to be leading your own band," Delaney told Clapton. "God has given you this gift, and if you don't use it he will take it away." Clapton took Delaney's advice to heart, and his subsequent campaign since the 1970s to reinvent himself has been so successful that as far as many casual observers of the rock world today are concerned, he is now regarded as a singer who also plays a bit of guitar.

And yet the influence that Clapton had, whether directly or indirectly, on just about every electric guitarist who followed him is undeniable. Just listen to Mick Taylor playing "Snowy Wood" on the Bluesbreakers'

1967 album *Crusade*. Or check out the incredible off-the-cuff recording of Eddie Van Halen conjuring a note-perfect recreation of Clapton's solo from "Crossroads" during a 1984 radio show called *The Inside Track*.

Then there's John Mayer's emotionally charged playing (and soulful singing) on "Gravity." Mayer once described Eric Clapton as his "musical father" and has often performed "Crossroads" in his live shows, while many latter-day guitarists ranging from Joe Bonamassa to Gary Clark Jr. have testified to Clapton's towering influence on their playing.

"Cream explored the outer reaches that three players could accomplish," said Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, another trio that emerged from under the long shadow of Clapton, Bruce and Baker. Gibbons nominated *Fresh Cream* as one of the albums that changed his life, no less, delivering his verdict on the group's sound with a typical Texas flourish: "Killer tones."

With thanks to Geoff Peel, London.

NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS (LEFT) CHRIS WALTER/WIRE IMAGE (RIGHT)

Cort

G300 PRO



VIVID BURGUNDY

BLACK

METALLIC GOLD

NATURAL SATIN



FREE PREMIUM GUITAR BAG
PURCHASE A G300 PRO AND RECEIVE A
FREE CORT PREMIUM ELECTRIC GUITAR
BAG VALUED AT \$129 RRP

AVAILABLE AT CORT PREMIUM
DEALERS WHILE STOCKS LAST

SCAN HERE FOR PARTICIPATING DEALERS

Cort



 @CORTAUSTRALIA

 @CORTAUSTRALIA

SLOWHAND IN THE
'70s

GIVE ME STRENGTH

Eric
Clapton

PUTS ASIDE HIS GUITAR HEROICS,
WEATHERS DRUG AND DRINK ADDICTIONS
AND DEVELOPS A DEEPER, MORE
WELL-ROUNDED ARTISTRY

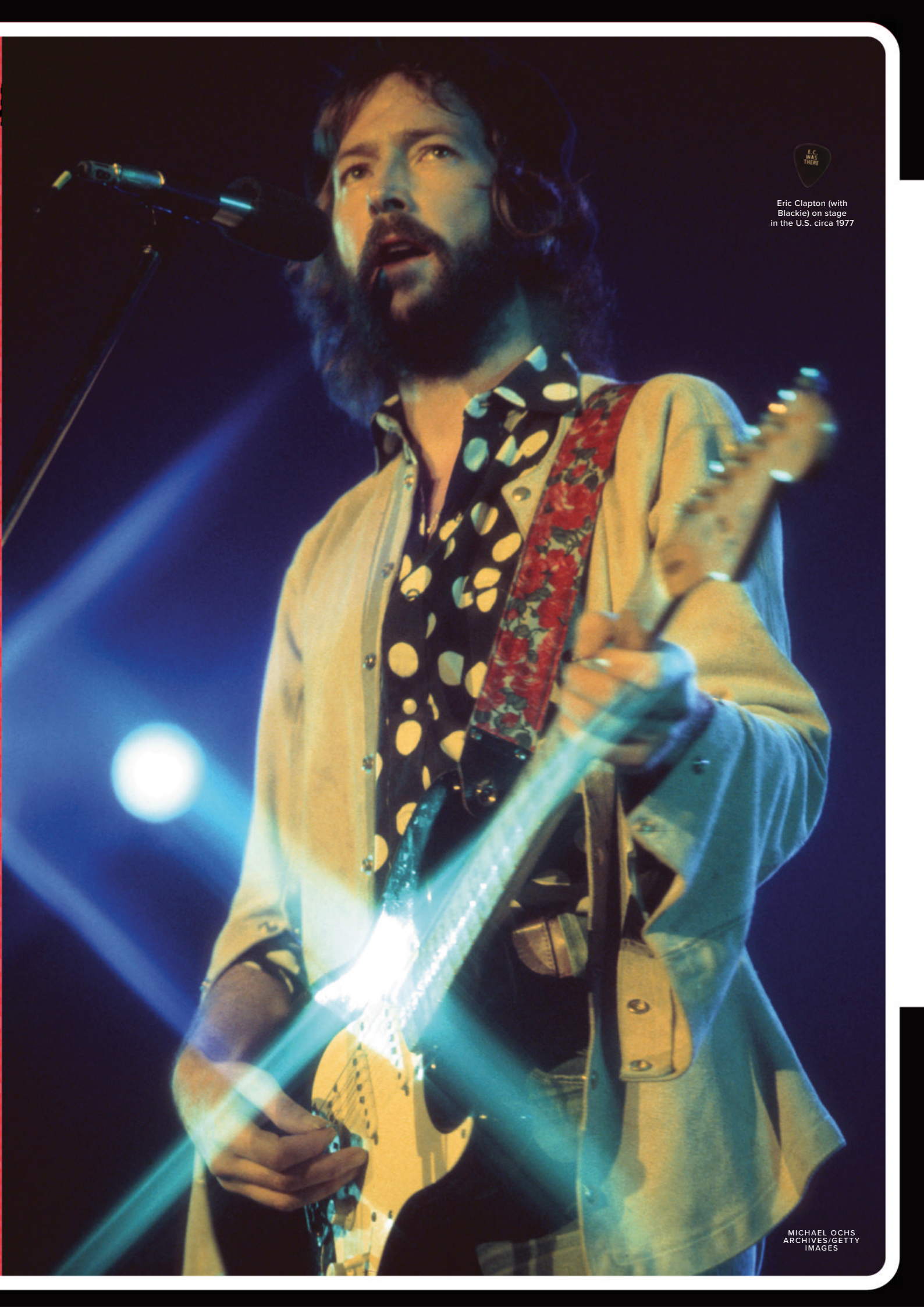
By BILL DeMAIN

IN LATE 1968, Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood had a conversation that would help define Clapton's direction in the coming decade. "We discussed the philosophy of what we wanted to do," Clapton recalled in his autobiography. "Steve said that for him, it was all about *unskilled labor*, where you just played with your friends and fit the music around that. It was the opposite of virtuosity, and it rang a bell with me because I was trying so hard to escape the pseudo-virtuoso image I had helped create for

myself."

Indeed, Clapton's Sixties hadn't been so much swinging as swash-buckling. From the Yardbirds to the Bluesbreakers to Cream to Blind Faith, he leapt from band to band, wielding Teles, Les Pauls, SGs and 335s, while fanatics with spray-paint cans started a new three-word graffiti gospel across England — "Clapton is God." In the final

days of Cream, the by-then reluctant messiah's go-to escape for sanity was the Band's 1968 debut album, *Music from Big Pink*. That, and the music of J.J. Cale, with its understatement, groove and economy, became stylistic templates for Clapton, as did a brief tour in 1969 with Delaney & Bonnie, who encouraged him to focus on his singing and songwriting.



Eric Clapton (with
Blackie) on stage
in the U.S. circa 1977

So began the transition from 'God' to 'good all-rounder.'

Of course, it wasn't just musical influences that were shaping him. He came into the decade with a developing addiction to heroin, which — after his first solo album — became so debilitating that it sidelined him for two and a half years. When he finally managed to get clean, it was only to trade one dependency for another; to read the chapters about the Seventies in Clapton's autobiography is to almost feel contact drunkenness, so prevalent was his boozing. But like many alcoholics, he was high-functioning, and he continued to tour and make records.

What follows is a roundup of those records and key moments, along with conversations with a few supporting players who were integral to Clapton's Seventies.

ERIC CLAPTON (1970)



OPENING SONGS

SAY so much. Released in August 1970, *Eric Clapton*, his first solo album, could have rung in the new decade with the heralding guitar chime of "Let It Rain," the big brass gallop of "After Midnight" or the kicked-down doors of Leon Russell's "Blues Power." Instead, he chose to slunk into the 11-song sequence with a funky instrumental jam called, well, "Slunky." Led by Bobby Keys' sax, it's a minute-and-a-half before Clapton's guitar appears, and even then, he's mostly just idling on one note with wrist-shaking vibrato and repeating a six-note blues lick... So, what's the message here? It's very much about subverting, then redefining, Clapton's guitar hero status. As he put it to *Circus*, "Until I'm either a great songwriter or a great singer, I shall carry on being embarrassed when people come on with that praise stuff about my guitar solos."

To that end, this album really does make a steady move forward on those fronts. The lilting "Easy Now," with its falsetto break melody and major-to-minor shifts, is an obvious nod to George Harrison (big strumming courtesy of "Ivan the

Terrible," Clapton's beloved custom-made Tony Zemaitis 12-string). "Bottle of Red Wine" shuffles with searing, less-is-more blues licks. "Lonesome and a Long Way from Home" features one of Clapton's most soulful, confident vocals. And even though he'd later complain that his voice sounded "too young" on this record, he strikes a balance between the grit and laid-back phrasing that would define his style.

LAYLA AND OTHER ASSORTED LOVE SONGS (1970)



RELEASED JUST THREE months after his self-titled debut, Derek and the Dominos'

Layla and Other

Assorted Love Songs marked the last of the five legendary bands that Clapton would join or lead before officially going solo.

With classics like the title track, "Why Does Love Got to Be So Sad," "Bell Bottom Blues" and his blazing cover of Freddie King's "Have You Ever Loved a Woman," the record was an exorcism for Clapton, working through his tortured love for Pattie Boyd, the wife of George Harrison. Because Clapton's name and image was absent from the sleeve (the label later added stickers explaining that "Derek is Eric!"), the record initially didn't sell.

FRIENDLY GUNSLINGERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHUCK KIRKPATRICK

ENGINEER CHUCK KIRKPATRICK — one of the last surviving members of the team behind *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* — spoke to us about his impressions of Clapton's playing and his "friendly gunslinger" competition with Duane Allman.

What was your impression of Eric Clapton in 1970?

From day one, he just wanted to play the blues, in a pure sense. He was trying to escape all that "Clapton is God" stuff. He just wanted to be in a band. Because he was the most famous, he was the bandleader. But he didn't dictate.

How did Eric and Duane meet?

We all went to see the Allman Brothers perform in Miami, and afterwards, Eric invited Duane back to Criteria Studios. At midnight, Duane walks in. Moments later, they were sitting down with guitars, laughing and trading licks.

Were they competitive?

Well, I remember the session for "Why Does Love Got to Be So Sad?" Duane and Eric came in to overdub solos. Eric went out, while Duane stayed in the control room, and he played a great solo. Then Tom Dowd said, "Now, Duane, you go out there and do one." So Duane played a great solo, came back, and Eric says, "Well, I want to do mine again!" This went on for at least an hour or two. [Laughs] It was a gunfight, but a friendly one.

What gear did Clapton use?

His "Brownie" Stratocaster into a Fender Champ. He would crank it all the way up, and that was the sound he liked. It was very easy to record because it really didn't make all that much noise in the room. He also used a blonde Fender Bandmaster for cleaner, fatter rhythm parts. But all the solos are played through the Champ, with no effects.

Did you have the sense during the making of this record that it was going to be as successful as it eventually became?

When it came out, Atlantic either didn't get behind it, or people were confused by the band name. The record didn't take off until a few years later. What I thought then is what I still think — it's one of the greatest guitar records ever made.

1971 TO 1973: I LOOKED AWAY

FROM 1971 TO '73, Clapton was in "self-imposed exile," as he slipped deeper into heroin addiction. He admitted that, initially, he was swayed by the drug's romantic mythology, surrounding the lives of musical heroes Charlie Parker and Ray Charles.

"But addiction doesn't negotiate, and it gradually crept up on me, like a fog," Clapton said. He half-heartedly tried clinics and therapies, but mostly spent his days "eating junk food, lying on the couch and watching TV."

His guitar skills atrophied.

There were only two musical interludes during this period — George Harrison's August 1971 Concert for Bangladesh in New York and a January 13, 1973, concert at London's Rainbow Theatre (see photo on page 110), which was basically a rescue mission led by Steve Winwood and Pete Townshend "to prop Eric up and teach him how to play again."

Finally, a stint on the family farm of his then-girlfriend, Alice Ormsby-Gore, helped Clapton "trade isolation for gregarious living" and rediscover the guitar and music. While he admitted that he traded one abusable substance for another, Clapton said he left the farm "fit, clean and buzzing with excitement at the possibilities ahead."





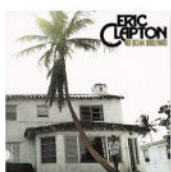
“

DUANE ALLMAN PLAYED A GREAT SOLO, CAME BACK, AND ERIC SAYS, 'WELL, I WANT TO DO MINE AGAIN!' THIS WENT ON FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR OR TWO"

— CHUCK KIRKPATRICK

Derek and the Dominos' Bobby Whitlock (left) and Eric Clapton (with Brownie) perform "It's Too Late" on *The Johnny Cash Show*. The episode, which was shot November 5, 1970, was aired January 6, 1971

461 OCEAN BOULEVARD (1974)



THE TITLE OF *461 Ocean Boulevard* represents the oceanside Miami address where Clapton started redefining himself musically. At Clapton's request, Derek and the Dominos bassist Carl Radle had put together a core band, including Tulsa-based drummer Jamie Oldaker and pianist Dick Sims. They were joined by local session guitarist George Terry, keyboardist Albhy Galuten and backing vocalist Yvonne Elliman (Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*) at Criteria, with Tom Dowd in the producer's chair.

For three weeks, working mostly through the wee hours, Clapton and the band jammed on blues covers by Robert Johnson and Willie Dixon and worked up three originals. There were a few extroverted moments, especially on "Mainline Florida" and "Motherless Children," which retooled a 1927 gospel standard into a steam-rolling romp. But mostly, the record sustains a slow-burn intensity — much influenced by J.J. Cale — especially on "Give Me Strength," "I Can't Hold Out" and the gospel-esque "Let It Grow." The set's surprise hit came via a cover of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff," which Clapton fought to leave off the record, but which helped

make said record a Number 1 platinum-seller. Re-learning to play, his guitar solos are tasteful and simple throughout, more melodic than the "gymnastic playing" he'd come to resist. Clapton said, "I knew I could still play from the heart, and no matter how primitive or sloppy it sounded, it would be real. That was my strength."

THE TURNING POINT: AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBHY GALUTEN

BEST KNOWN FOR co-producing the Bee Gees' *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, Albhy Galuten also worked with Diana Ross, Dolly Parton and Jellyfish. Starting as Tom Dowd's assistant on the Derek and the Dominos record, Galuten joined Clapton's studio band as keyboardist for *461 Ocean Boulevard*, remaining part of the team for the rest of the decade. He also co-wrote *Slowhand*'s closing track, "Peaches and Diesel," with Clapton.

Why was *461 Ocean Boulevard* such an important album for Clapton?

When Eric came back, he was clean, more relaxed and done with wanting to be famous. *461* was a turning point. He was leaving the bombast behind him. It was more like, "I just want to play with my friends in a band and make a nice record. We're not going to worry about hits." He even said to me, "If I knew what hits were, then all blues records would be hits." Even though the album is laid-back, there's an intensity to it, and that came out of his history of very emotional situations in his life.

You'd worked with Clapton a few years earlier. How had his guitar playing changed?

When he was younger, I think he was trying to impress people. Then as he got older, he was just trying to play the song. Eric put in his 10,000 hours to get his technique to where it was flawless. And then once he let it go,



Eric Clapton and his band in a truly lovely hotel room in 1975 [clockwise from left]: drummer Jamie Oldaker, Clapton (holding the bound-headstock Martin), keyboard player Dick Sims, guitarist George Terry, backing vocalists Yvonne Elliman and Marcella Detroit, and bassist Carl Radle

he was like Oscar Peterson or Ella Fitzgerald, where your instrument is second nature. He could play whatever he thought of.

How did you come to write “Peaches and Diesel” with him?

I had this little riff on a guitar and Eric liked it. He was very generous to develop it with me and give me a co-writing credit. But then he’s always been that way. Years later, he’d make sure his producers got paid royalties from SoundExchange when most big artists never bothered.

What do you think of those Seventies Clapton albums now?
They stand up — for their realness and their humanity.

And your lasting impression of Eric during that period?

The main thing about Eric is he always loves playing. That’s his whole reason for being.

E.C. WAS HERE (1975)

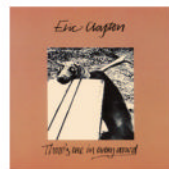


“C’MON, ERIC, DO some Cream!” yelled a disgruntled fan at a show in 1974. Such catcalls

weren’t uncommon in the Seventies, and they got under Clapton’s skin.

Clapton admitted that his 1975 live album, *E.C. Was Here*, was a way of “filling that space that people were complaining about.” Of the six tracks, four are straight-ahead blues, and the other two from Blind Faith. Most top out over seven minutes long. Robert Johnson’s “Rambling On My Mind,” more than any, proved that Clapton was still an inspired architect. For three-and-half minutes, over four separate key modulations, Clapton leans into Blackie with deep bends and a fiery abandon that recalls the Bluesbreakers’ “Beano” album from nine years earlier.

THERE’S ONE IN EVERY CROWD (1975)



CLAPTON WANTED TO call 461’s sequel *E.C. Is God: There’s One in Every Crowd*, but his label failed to see the humor. Returning to Miami’s Criteria Studio with the same creative team and his road band well-tightened would have seemed to ensure success. But despite a couple of memorable songs — the sinewy “Singin’ the Blues” and the buoyant, Allmans-like “High,” with Clapton and George Terry on tandem leads — the material doesn’t measure up. Both “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” and “Don’t Blame Me” try to replicate the reggae vibe of “I Shot the Sheriff,” while “Opposites” and “Better Make It Through Today” meander without quite arriving.

NO REASON TO CRY (1976)



CLAPTON TOLD CRAWDADDY in 1975, “I think I’ve explored the possibilities of that laid-back feel. The next studio album will be stronger, with stage numbers.”

And was it? Well, sort of. Upping stakes to the West Coast of the U.S.A., *No Reason to Cry* included a sprawling cast of contributors, including Bob



Clapton — holding a cassette — and Pattie Boyd on board a private jet in or near the U.S. in 1978

[right] Clapton with Don Williams



WHEN E.C. WAS LIVIN' ON TULSA TIME

IN 1978, NASHVILLE-based songwriter Danny Flowers was playing guitar on the road with country star Don Williams. The band had a night off in Tulsa. "It was the middle of blizzard, and I wrote 'Tulsa Time,' in about 30 minutes in my hotel room while watching *The Rockford Files* — like you do," Flowers says with a laugh. "I was thinking about my musician friends who lived there — Jamie Oldaker and Dick Sims, who played with Eric — and the vibe of the place."

The next day, at a rehearsal, the band started working up Flowers' new song. Williams heard it and loved it. Flowers says, "He said, 'Get me the lyric, I want to record it.'" A week later, they were opening a concert for Clapton in Nashville. Flowers says, "Eric used to come to our shows and was a big fan of Don's." Afterwards, Flowers was hanging out with Williams in Clapton's hotel room.

"We were playing guitars, and Don says, 'Danny, play that new song.' So I'm doing it, and Don's playing rhythm and Eric's playing Dobro. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. When I got through, Eric said, 'I love that song and I want to record it right away.' Don said, 'No, you can't record it. It's mine!' They were play-arguing. I said, 'If you're gonna fight, I'm not gonna let either one of you have it.'"

A few months later, Flowers bought a copy of *Backless*. "And there it was, my name on the back of a Clapton album," he says. "It was a beautiful thing."

Knowing that much of Clapton's music in the Seventies felt like a tribute to Tulsa's J.J. Cale, Flowers says, "One of the biggest compliments I ever got about 'Tulsa Time' was somebody who knew J.J. asked him if he had written that song, and he said, 'No, but I wish I had!'"

Dylan, Ronnie Wood, Billy Preston and the Band. But Clapton didn't leave much room for himself, sounding more like a guest than the confident leader (his band-mates called him "Captain Clapton") he was on the previous two albums. On the Dylan-penned "Sign Language," the two share lead vocals, though it sounds like neither claims the mic; meanwhile, the Band's Robbie Robertson plays the (bizarre) guitar solo while his Band-mate, Rick Danko, sings lead on "All Our Past Times." Newcomer vocalist Marcy Levy gets the most spotlight here, doing her best Linda Ronstadt on "Innocent Times" and "Hungry." Overall, it's an album that goes by pleasantly enough, but hardly invites repeated listens.

SLOWHAND (1977)



THE FRONT-LOADED *Slowhand* is the purest distillation of everything Clapton was aiming for in the Seventies. His spirit guide, J.J. Cale, resides in the cover of "Cocaine" and the slippery country-blues groove of "Lay Down Sally," Clapton's highest-charting single of the decade. And there's the happy-ever-after sequel to "Layla," the gentle "Wonderful Night." Apparently written in frustration while he was waiting for Pattie Boyd to get dressed for a party, Clapton delivers it in dewy tones, both vocally and with his Strat. As a contrast to the lean economy of Side 1, polished by new producer Glyn Johns, Clapton stretches out for "The Core," an eight-minute response to all those frustrated fans who missed his extended solos. The other highlight is John Martyn's "May You Never," which is one of Clapton's warmest, most affecting vocals from any of his albums. Glyn Johns

wrote in his autobiography, "It was like falling off a log working with this lot. Because they had been on the road for a few weeks, Eric and the band were in great form. There [was] a camaraderie between them socially as well as musically, Eric's sense of humor leading the way."

BACKLESS (1978)



"FOR MOST OF the Seventies, I was content to lie back and do what I had to do with the least amount of effort,"

Clapton said. "I was very grateful to be alive." Clapton's final studio album of the decade, *Backless*, brims with that feeling as it returns to the winning formula of *Slowhand*, with Glyn Johns producing 10 easy-to-like songs. There's a J.J. Cale cover ("I'll Make Love to You Anytime"), a Marcy Levy duet ("Roll It"), a "Lay Down Sally" sequel ("Watch Out for Lucy"), two Dylan tunes and an eight-minute traditional blues that gives Clapton and George Terry room to stretch out on solos ("Early in the Morning"). But it's the final song that's most memorable, a rocking tribute to the musical city that influenced so much of Clapton's Seventies work — "Tulsa Time."

SLOWHAND IN THE
'80s

MR. SLOWHAND'S WILD RIDE

Eric
Clapton

BOARDS A TRAIN WITH ANOTHER
TICKET AND DISEMBARKS EIGHT YEARS
LATER AS A FULLY-FLEDGED
JOURNEYMAN

By ANDREW DALY

DESPITE KICKING THINGS off with a bang alongside Jeff Beck for 1981's Amnesty International benefit in London, which many signaled as "a return to form," Eric Clapton wasn't ready for the Eighties. It seems obvious now, but looking back, even Clapton would probably agree. To that end, the

downfall, if you could call it that, wasn't so much steep as it was somber, with Clapton progressively moving away from his patented "woman tone," which had come by way of blending various humbucker-equipped guitars with cranked Marshall amps.

Going into the Seventies, Clapton was still considered "God" by some. But by 1980, at 35, he was per-

haps one of your lesser gods, shell-ing out soft rock accented by even softer — but still kinda bluesy — licks. But it wasn't all bad, as by the early Eighties, Clapton had assembled a rocking, all-British band featuring Gary Booker on keys, Dave Mar-kee on bass, Henry Spinetti (younger brother of actor Victor Spinetti, who starred in three Beatles movies) on drums, and most importantly, the



Clapton — during the final “active duty” days of Blackie — on stage at the Hordern Pavilion in Sydney, Australia, November 1984



BONAMASSA'S PICKS

JOE CHOOSES HIS FAVORITE CLAPTON TUNE FROM THE '80S

"FOREVER MAN" FROM *BEHIND THE SUN* (1985)

ONE OF MY favorite ever songs from Clapton is "Forever Man." It's a sound that many guys his age were going for back then, which married where he'd been with the sound of the Eighties — and also shed some light on where he was going afterward. I guess he was doing a Don Williams-type thing, you know? I've always felt that "Forever Man" had a real Tulsa feel but also was kind of European in some of its style and influence. The song starts off great and has such a hook. Then that cool riff comes along; I just love it. Many people think Clapton peaked in the Sixties or Seventies, but he was at his best once he was in his 40s. Once you get to that age, you still have piss and vinegar like when you're in your 20s, but you're more mature.

I think those things began to coalesce for Clapton, and that's why you get a very winning song like "Forever Man." It's an example of how just when you think you've got him figured out, Eric Clapton will turn around and fuck you up on guitar like no other. He can still play better, has better songs, and, to this day, still brings it.

— Interview by Andrew Daly

ever-capable and entirely essential Albert Lee on guitar.

When Lee wandered into Clapton's camp in 1978, the idea was to spice up Clapton's backing band. "We'd known each other for a long time, and we ended up doing a session together in London in 1978 for Marc Benno," Lee says. "We played together for a week on that. At the end of the session, Eric's manager [Roger Forrester] came up to me and said, 'How would you feel about coming out on the road with Eric to play second guitar?' I thought, 'That sounds like fun' — and off we went."

Considering that Clapton was grappling with self-inflicted issues including (but not limited to) drug

and alcohol addiction, Lee coming along wasn't just about providing a capable live partner; with his finger-style approach and hybrid-picking technique that was entirely different from Clapton's, Lee brought new flavors and positive energy to the party. Moreover, he inserted some sorely needed blues edginess — or call it country sharpness — into a mix that had become increasingly soft-rock.

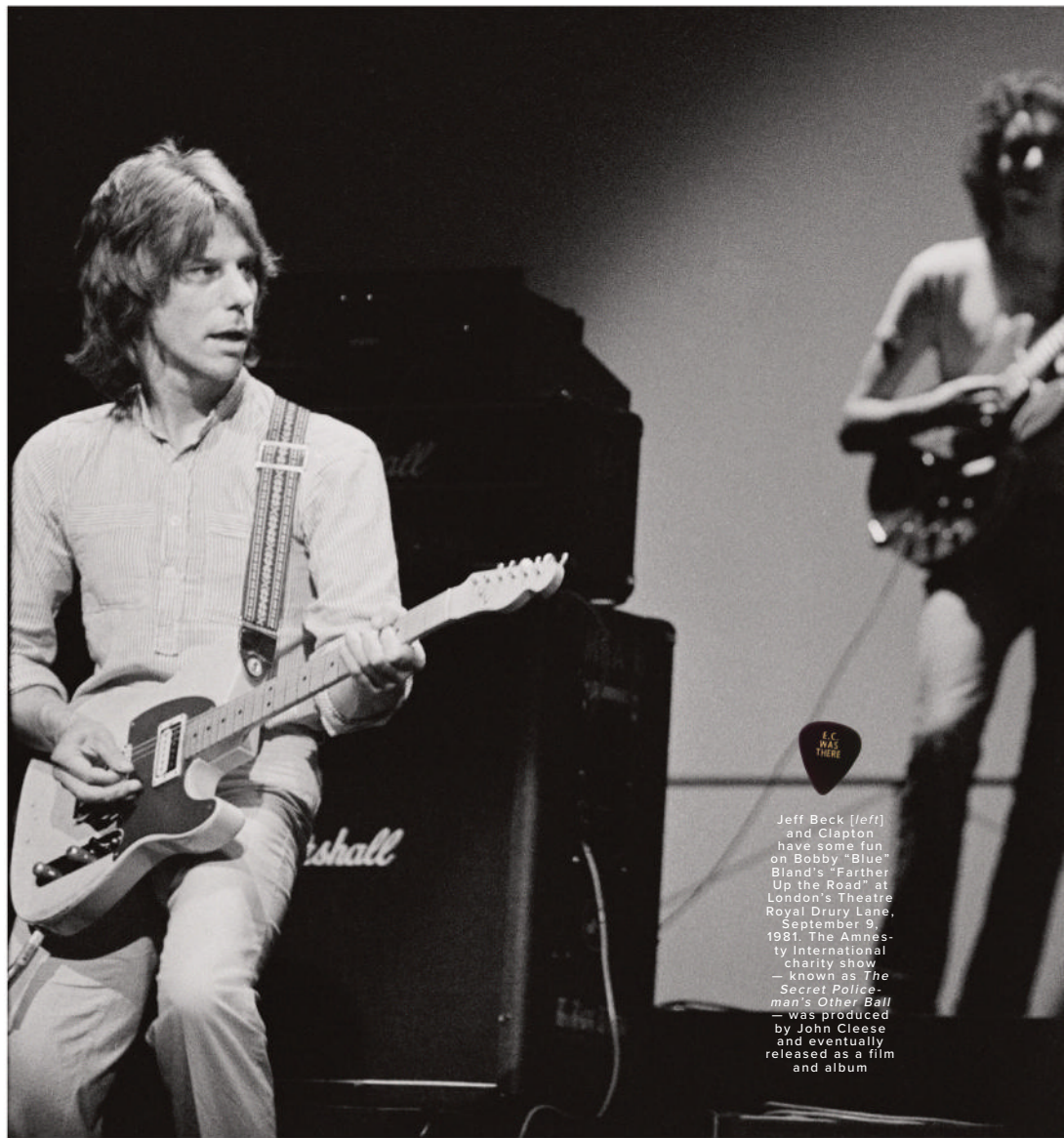
None of this was lost on Clapton, who, despite his status, has reportedly always been generous — certainly, to bandmates who deliver the goods. Clapton was so happy to have Lee on board that he gifted him a coveted '58 Gibson Les Paul. "At our very first rehearsal, we were talking about guitars," Lee says. "I happened to mention a Les Paul Custom that I had in the Sixties, and I was regretting the fact I'd sold it to buy something else; it was a big mistake. So Eric said, 'Oh, yeah, I've got one of those at home somewhere.' I thought no more about it — and I thought he'd forgotten about it. But the roadie showed up the next day with a '58 Les Paul Cus-

tom, and he handed it over to me to use. Eric was a Strat man by then, so he wasn't using it."

Despite the softness seeping its way into his studio recordings, once on the road with Lee, Clapton seemed invigorated, leading to the recording of two December 1979 performances at Budokan Theater in Tokyo that became the beloved 1980 double live album, *Just One Night*. Unlike what was to come, *Just One Night* found Clapton and friends brimming with passion and raw energy (Case in point: the band's dramatic, eight-minute-long take on Otis Rush's "Double Trouble"). More memorable still is the fact that the record showcases the interplay between Clapton and Lee — especially when it comes to their respective solos on the extended version of J.J. Cale's "Cocaine."

It's important to know that Lee — despite the pride associated with the performance (he played the country-tinged second solo while Clapton played the bluesy first solo) — doesn't quite look at it that way. "I never really felt it was a guitar battle," Lee says. "I felt it was a conversation, really. Also, I sang two or three songs [including "Setting Me Up" and Rick Danko's vocal parts on "All Our Past Times"]. Throughout the whole time I was with Eric, really, I was the harmony singer. There were no girl singers in those years. It was mainly down to me."

One would've assumed that Clapton would take the energy he found on the road into the studio for his next record, and its title, *Another Ticket*, seemed to foreshadow as much. Instead, when Clapton and his band



Jeff Beck (left) and Clapton have some fun on Bobby "Blue" Bland's "Farther Up the Road" at London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane, September 9, 1981. The Amnesty International charity show — known as *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball* — was produced by John Cleese and eventually released as a film and album.



hit Compass Point Studios in Nassau, Bahamas, in 1980, the edge that once defined him was still missing in action.

Retrospect says that 1981's *Another Ticket* was a modest success, as evidenced by its position at Number 18 on the U.K. charts (and the Top 10 status of its Clapton-penned single, "I Can't Stand It"). But Clapton's music was never meant to be modest — especially with such a rocking yet blues-leaning band. That's not to say *Another Ticket* is poor; it's more to say that at 35, it seemed Clapton was more interested in blues complacency than juicing up the genre as he had a decade prior.

Still, "Floating Bridge" features some interesting tones, and the overall tragic nature of the album, which centers around death, and in the case of "Rita Mae," murder, could be seen as an example of Clapton leaning into his blues heritage, albeit in a highly mellowed-out fashion. Indeed, it seems Slowhand was wallowing in misery by this time, which is pre-

“

"HOW WOULD YOU
FEEL ABOUT COMING
OUT ON THE ROAD
TO PLAY SECOND
GUITAR?' I THOUGHT,
'THAT SOUNDS LIKE
FUN' — AND OFF
WE WENT"
— ALBERT LEE



cisely why *Another Ticket* is a bit low on gusto.

It was bad enough that Clapton had gone from innovative dragon slayer to a yacht rock-leaning softy nearly overnight, leading to cookie-cutter album after cookie-cutter album. But making matters worse — and this was nothing new by the early Eighties — was his worsening alcoholism, which by 1982 had reached code red status. Somewhere in between fits of complacency and a sudden 'Come to Jesus' moment that saw him "deepen his commitment to Christianity," Clapton checked himself into rehab to sort himself out. Specifically, he checked himself in during January 1982 — but not before hopping on a plane and drinking himself into oblivion one last time out of fear that he'd never drink again.

That sounds pretty damn awful, and according to Clapton, it was. "In the lowest moments of my life, the only reason I didn't commit suicide was that I knew I wouldn't be able to drink anymore if I were dead," Clapton said in his autobiography. "It was the only thing I thought was worth living for, and the idea that people were about to try and remove me from alcohol was so terrible that I drank and drank and drank, and they had to practically carry me to the clinic."

Despite doctors' orders not to engage in activities that would trigger alcohol consumption or stress, Clapton, seemingly brimming with energy, hit the studio to record what would be his next album, 1983's *Money and Cigarettes*, a name chosen because Clapton is said to have felt that those two things were all he had left. Sadly, Clapton's new and more clear-headed lease on life did not result in a change of musical course, with *Money and Cigarettes* providing more of the same low-energy content he'd been perpetrating since the mid-to-late Seventies. The only difference is that now Clapton couldn't lean on addiction as an excuse for his amour-propre.

And to be sure, it wasn't his band's fault, either — especially given that slide ace Ry Cooder and master bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn were added to the mix, moves that should have been inspiring. But this was Clapton, after all, and while *Money and Cigarettes* might have been past its sell-by date out of the gate, it does have its moments, such as "Man in Love," the "All Along the Watchtower"-esque "Ain't Going Down" and — best of all — the blazing six-string interplay between Clapton and Lee on "The Shape You're In," which Lee remembers well. "We had such different approaches to the music," he says. "I was always very conscious about trying to accompany and supplement what he was doing. That's what people pay to hear, and he was happy to let me step out and play."

Money and Cigarettes dropped in February of 1983 and was touted as a comeback album, which was to feature a sober and supposedly more creative Clapton. But success was again measured in modesty, with the album topping out at Number 20 in several countries. In short, this was not a level of success for someone who had achieved "God" status.

Another wrinkle showed up when a younger, hipper, far more aggressive-sounding and also Strat-wielding gunslinger from Texas — Stevie Ray Vaughan — inserted himself into the conversation via his debut record, *Texas Flood*, which was released in June 1983.

For too long, Clapton had been asleep at the wheel, mainly providing records to use as white noise for lazy drives through the countryside or the desert. It had been years since he unleashed himself and made his Strat squeal, but now SRV was here with a record stacked with tracks to bump, grind and sweat to, including "Love Struck Baby," "Pride and Joy" and his version of Buddy Guy's "Mary Had a Little Lamb," quite possibly leaving Clapton a smidge envious. For the first time since the aforementioned "Clapton is God" graffiti, Clapton's status as a premier bluesbreaker had been challenged. And while you might think his ego and track record kept him from caring, if Albert Lee is to be believed, Clapton was, at the very least, listening to what SRV was doing.

"[Eric] got a great joy out of listening to other guitarists," Lee says. "He especially loved Stevie Ray [Vaughan]." Literally within months of *Texas Flood*'s release, Clapton changed his style, guitar tone and overall vibe to something — well, with a bit more heft to it. More on that later.

Looking back on his time with Clapton, Lee says, "I think I did a pretty good job, but I never really looked at the whole deal as me competing with him. We were all there to make music, and my style worked alongside him. It was complementary rather than competitive."

Meanwhile, SRV released another barnburner of a record in 1984's *Couldn't Stand the Weather*, further loosening Clapton's once ironclad grip on blues-rock guitar. Vaughan also was being compared (in these very pages) to Jimi Hendrix; after all, he was serving up blistering covers of "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)," "Little Wing" and "Third Stone from the Sun" night after night.

But Clapton had a retort of sorts — 1984's masterful *The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking* — which saw him partnering up with Roger Waters for the latter's first post-Pink Floyd foray. Once he was perched beside Waters, Clapton was a man on fire, dishing out solos that still read back as some of the best of his career. To this point, Clapton had made a tactical error by meandering around and releasing blues-like but mostly

“

ERIC SAID, 'YOU DON'T HAVE ANY CALLUSES.' HE SEEMED DISAPPOINTED, BUT I HAD JUST GOTTEN OUT OF THE SHOWER, SO MY HANDS WERE SOFT"
— STEVE LUKATHER



blues-adjacent pop filler, forsaking the "song within the song" approach that many of his Cream, Blind Faith and Derek and the Dominos solos had shown. But with Waters, as evidenced by songs like "5:01 AM (The Pros and Cons of Hitchhiking)" and "4:41 AM (Sexual Revolution)," Clapton threw everything he had at the wall, and nearly all of it stuck.

In short, the album and its subsequent tour showcased the array of E minor, heavily compressed, tone-perfect solos and riffs that proved Clapton could still be "God" — even if SRV were here to stay; and SRV wasn't going anywhere. But that shouldn't have been an issue, as Clapton was back amid the conversation and primed and ready to take on the remainder of the Eighties, right?

You would have thought that, and in some ways, it was true. Yes, Clapton did revamp his look, tone and approach. And yes, he was prepared to back up the success alongside Waters with his own success. But the thing is, Clapton wasn't ready for the Eighties, and by late 1984, he had become painfully aware of that. And so, while on a split from his wife, Pattie Boyd, Clapton teamed up with — and this still seems odd — Phil Collins to help right the ship, along with legendary producer Ted Templeman, resulting in 1985's *Behind the*

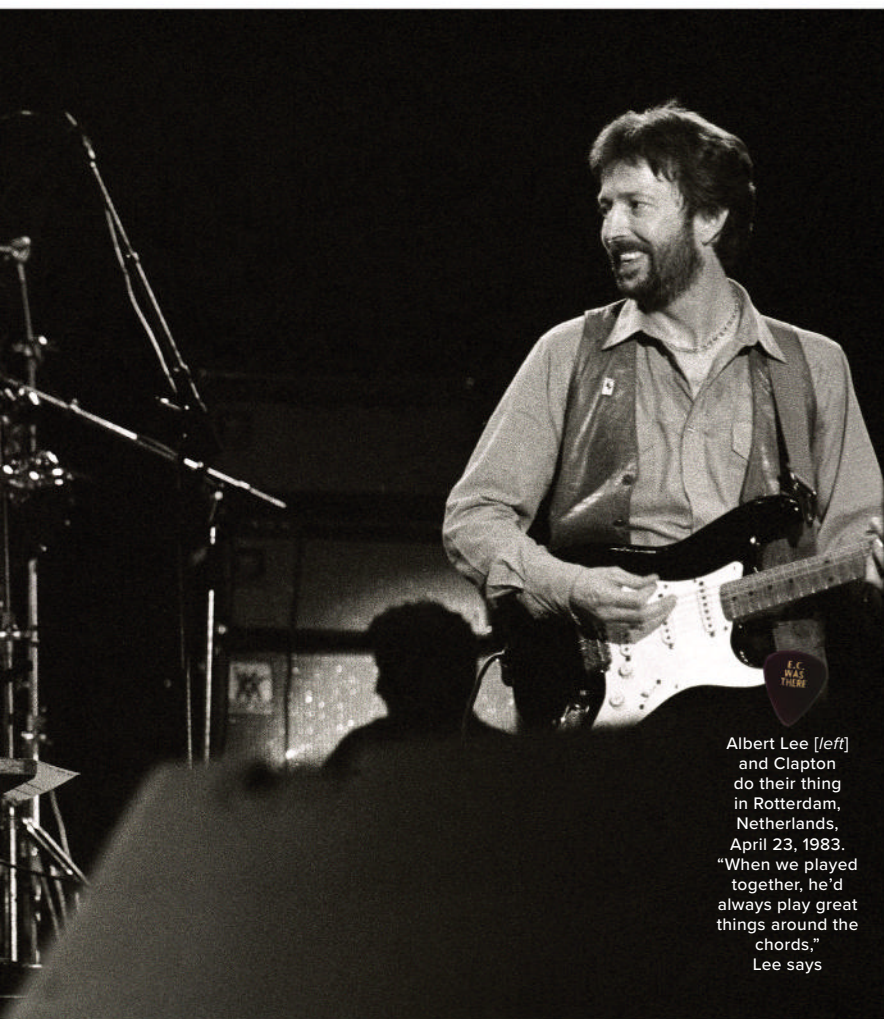


Sun.

One of the most significant issues with Clapton's work, dating back to the mid-Seventies, was that his guitar playing had taken a backseat to whatever sounds he felt would grant him chart success, stripping him of what made him great in the first place. Surely, Clapton was aware of this — especially with the guitar-forward SRV gobbling up headlines and air time — and *Behind the Sun* certainly has its share of memorable solos and riffs.

So that was one problem sorted; but now, another presented itself, which admittedly is subjective: an over-reliance — probably at the behest of Collins — on drum machines and synthesizers. Case in point, here's how *Guitar World* put it back in 2015: "The last minute and a half of 'Just Like a Prisoner' might represent Clapton's mid-Eighties high-water mark, at least from a shred perspective. The song features what could easily be considered one of his 'angriest' solos. He even keeps playing long after the intended fade-out point, until the band stops abruptly. Maybe he was upset about the overpowering Eighties production, ridiculous synthesizers and obtrusive, way-too-loud drums that threaten to hijack the song at any moment."

But on the bright side, while Clapton's old band was gone, *Behind the Sun* does feature a ton of quality players, such as Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham, who played rhythm guitar on "Something's Happening," and Toto's Steve Lukather on "See What Love Can Do" and the album's most memorable track, the polarizing yet



Albert Lee [left] and Clapton do their thing in Rotterdam, Netherlands, April 23, 1983. "When we played together, he'd always play great things around the chords," Lee says

strength, if you could call it that, of Templeman and Collins' techy production, Clapton had a hit on his hands. "Forever Man" was very well received, even if it, along with the rest of the album, sounded more akin to Steve Winwood ala *High Life* than anything he'd done back when he was universally considered the greatest guitarist on the planet.

The reinvigorated Clapton wasn't letting any time go to waste, either. Only a year after *Behind the Sun* (not to mention the *Edge of Darkness* soundtrack, which he recorded with Michael Kamen), he delivered the super-slick *August*, which was successful courtesy of tracks like "It's in the Way That You Use It" and "Tearing Us Apart," which featured Tina Turner. But retrospect tells a different story, and it's hard to deny that *August* is probably Clapton's worst record — especially as far as the Eighties are concerned. Not even a track like "Miss You," which features some of Clapton's most inspired playing of the decade, could save an album entirely bogged down by synths, gated reverb and guitars that are often buried in the mix.

In his search for success, Clapton not only fell off the wagon of sobriety but also saw his marriage to Boyd come to an end. The latter was a bit of karma, seeing as he'd stolen her from his best friend, George Harrison, in the Seventies, but the former was especially unfortunate, as it came at a time when Clapton was seen as regaining his footing. In the wake of a second and still successful trip to rehab, Clapton emerged prepared to reclaim the throne again. And much like he had with Waters in '84, he set his own music aside and played session man, this time for

beloved
"Forever Man."

Looking back on how he ended up at the *Behind the Sun* sessions, Lukather almost seems embarrassed, saying, "I wasn't very important to the album at all. Honestly, I feel like I did very little in those sessions. I remember being very nervous and thinking I should play really simple so that people wouldn't even know I was there."

As for Clapton's state of mind at a time when the urgency to deliver a competitive record must have been at the forefront, Lukather says, "Eric was really nice to me, but we weren't close. I added very little to his stuff, I think. I remember walking in, and Eric examined my fingers and said, 'You don't have any calluses.' He seemed disappointed, but I had just gotten out of the shower, so my hands were soft!"

Indeed, Clapton now seemed ready for the Eighties... or he was at least prepared to try and sound like something out of the Eighties. On the



The engine behind *Journeyman*, Fender's Eric Clapton Strat, which was issued in 1988

SIGN HERE, MR. CLAPTON!

THE ORIGINAL 1988 Fender Eric Clapton Stratocaster was Fender's first official signature model — aka, the guitar that kicked off the company's highly successful artist program (BTW, Fender's latest installment, the Bruno Mars Signature Strat, was announced in early November). The initial collaboration with Clapton took Blackie (See page 58) as its basic inspiration, with a V-shape neck profile and more modern tweaks, including Gold Lace Sensor pickups and a 25dB mid-boost circuit. Clapton used prototypes of the guitar in 1986 during his Eric Clapton & Friends shows, and it soon became Fender's most successful signature guitar. To hear the guitar in action — in the Eighties, anyway — check out his 1989 album, *Journeyman*. The guitar can be heard on every track. Well, almost... As Clapton told us in 1988, "The only song I don't use it on is 'Hard Times,' where I used the ES-335 to get a kind of an old studio sound, a more acoustic blues guitar tone."

— Damian Fanelli

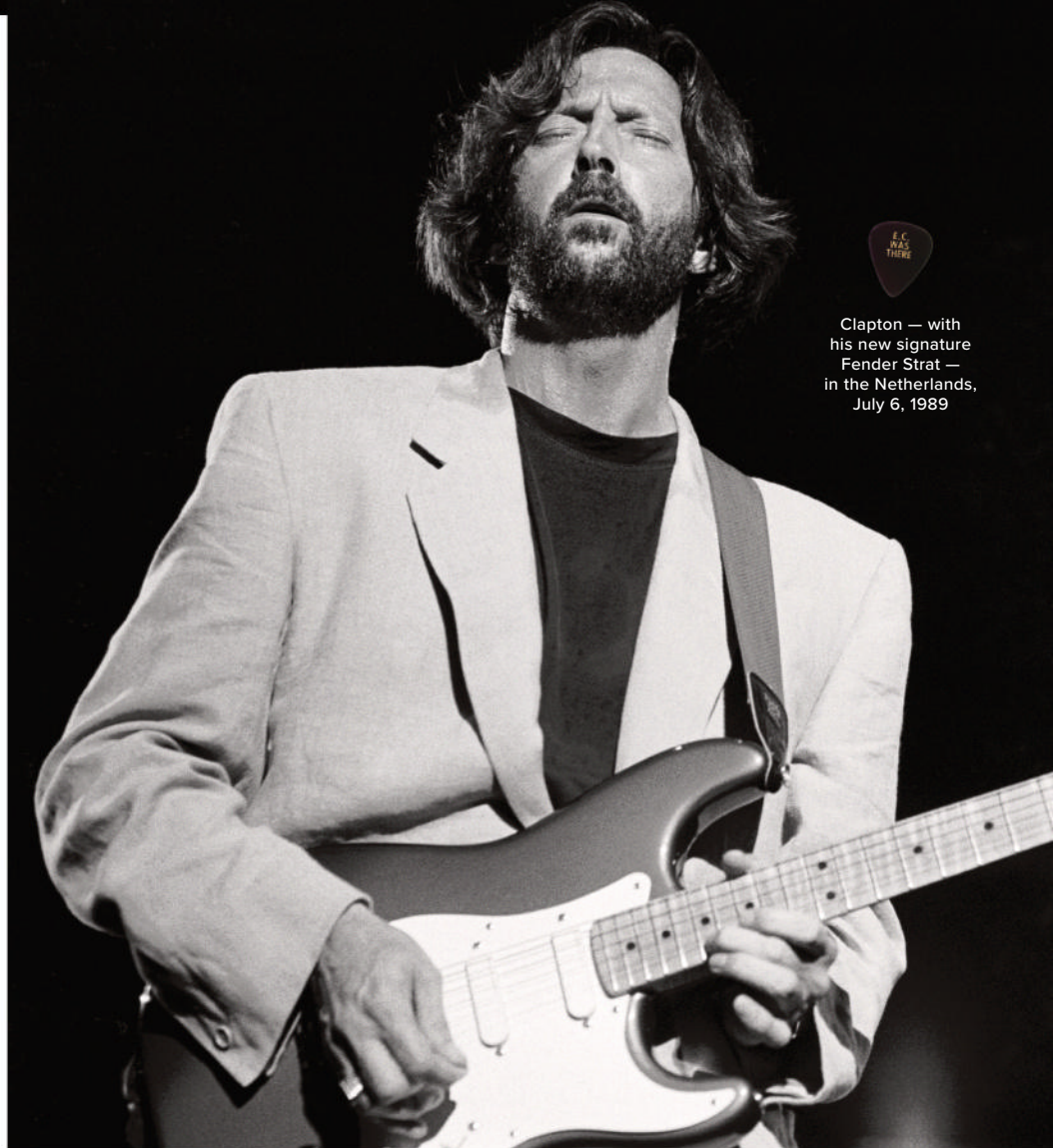
IT'S IN THE WAY THAT YOU USE IT

PETER FRAMPTON, ALBERT LEE AND MARTIN BARRE, FORMERLY OF JETHRO TULL, EXPLAIN WHAT SETS CLAPTON'S PLAYING APART FROM THE PACK

PETER FRAMPTON: "It's his attention to the past and his fluidity. He has a very intoxicating style. In some of the Cream songs, he lifted solos from Albert King, Freddie King — all of the Kings — and he put them into his own, which I thought was fantastic. In fact, my favorite Eric solos ever were from that 1968 farewell concert Cream did at the Albert Hall, when he was playing the Gibson ES-335. But Eric is very forward-thinking. By the time he was touring with Delaney & Bonnie in 1969, I think he was envisioning what he wanted to do in the years ahead. He already had so much credibility and presence as a player, going into the Seventies, that I think he'd had enough of the guitar hero thing and wanted to expand, writing songs and singing. Which he did — brilliantly."

ALBERT LEE: "As a guitarist, he's in total command of what he does. His ideas, his phrasing, how melodic he can be. When he's on, he's just brilliant. I spent five years on the road with him. He was drinking at the time, and he'd have the occasional bad night, but most nights, he'd be absolutely brilliant, and everyone in the band would be astounded by what he played. I think by the early Seventies, he disliked that image of being a guitar god. But he surpassed that because he turned into a really good singer and songwriter. That's what I admire about him most — his songwriting and choice of songs that he covers. When we played together, he'd always play great things around the chords. It always astounded me, because I'd do a solo and play something far more complicated than what he was doing. Then his solo would just have a simplicity, and be nicer and sweeter to the ear. And that's what the general public likes."

MARTIN BARRE: "Eric Clapton was the hot ticket for wannabe guitarists, including myself! We devoured every Cream album for inspiration and information and played them to destruction! I never met him, unfortunately, but I followed his career through the many years of touring and always had great respect for him as a person as well as a musician."
— Interviews by Bill DeMain



Clapton — with his new signature Fender Strat — in the Netherlands, July 6, 1989

Harrison, who was due for a renaissance of his own — and got one via 1987's *Cloud Nine*.

It was a serendipitous meeting of musical minds; with Clapton seemingly being unencumbered by the pressures of measuring up to his past, he laid down some of his best Eighties work on tracks like "Cloud 9," "That's What It Takes," "Devil's Radio" and "Wreck of the Hesperus." On the backside of those tracks, among other hits, *Cloud Nine* was a success, and a now sober and soon-to-be-single Clapton began ruminating on his next move, seeing him begin to write many of the songs that would appear on his final — and best — album of the Eighties, *Journeyman*.

Everything about *Journeyman* was different. For starters, it came on the heels of the successful (and truly awesome) 1988 box set, *Crossroads*, which showcased many of Clapton's older and sometimes out-of-print-on-vinyl hits to a new and now CD-consuming generation. The positive reception for *Crossroads*, coupled with the fact that SRV had been slightly down for the count while battling his own addiction demons, allowed Clapton the space to reorient himself. Moreover, Clapton had found himself, meaning he rediscovered that long-lost "woman tone" he'd been missing, much of which can be attributed to his new signature Fender Stratocaster (see below). Yes, *Journeyman* has its share of Eighties production — no one can deny that. But it's also loaded with blues numbers, including "Before You Accuse Me," "Running on Faith" and "Hard Times."

A critical addition to the sessions was Robert Cray, who lent his licks to six of the album's 12 tracks and even co-wrote "Old Love" with Clapton. Sadly, Cray declined to be interviewed for this story; however, another venerable six-string veteran — Phil Palmer — also played a role on *Journeyman*, especially the album's signature track, "Bad Love."

"I had run into Eric in a little club in London called the Mean Fiddler," Palmer says. "I looked up while playing and was shocked to see Eric standing there. Long story short, we got to talking, and Eric said to me, 'Phil, it's nice to see you. I'm making a record, and I'd like you to drop by and play on a few tracks. I did so, and the first track we did was 'Bad Love.'"

Looking back on how he approached the track, given that his fingerstyle approach was in stark contrast to Clapton's, Palmer says, "Musically, Eric was a very generous guy. I loved working with him because he encouraged me to play. Of course, you have to learn not to step on what Eric's doing, but through my session work, I'd learned how to



adapt, and Eric had a good way of letting me know in an unspoken way when I should jump in. He'd give a nod, and off I'd go."

Of note, Palmer is only credited with lending a hand to "Bad Love," but he recalls being heavily involved with two additional tracks, "Old Love" and "Running on Faith," saying, "Eric encouraged me to play loud, which was like a dream come true. I wasn't always encouraged to do that in other sessions, but Eric did. And I remember that by that point, I'd gotten the idea that my long-used [Fender] Nocaster was pretty valuable, so I didn't use that with Eric. Eric supplied me with one of his signature Strats, which were great guitars put together in the Fender Custom Shop. I still use them."

Looking back, it's easy to see why *Journeyman* is considered Clapton's best album of the Eighties, even if some reviewers, such as Robert Christgau, likened it to a "fluke," saying, "[Clapton] has no record-making knack. He farms out the songs, sings them competently enough and marks them with his guitar, which sounds kind of like Mark Knopfler's."

That's harsh criticism, and perhaps there's some truth to it, but regardless, *Journeyman* gave Clapton the success and singularity he needed. Moreover, it finally gave him something to compete against SRV, who released his own comeback album (of sorts) in 1989, *In Step*. But this time, Clapton bettered SRV, as *Journeyman* reached Number 1 on the Album Rock Chart and landed him a Grammy for Best Male Rock

66

"I'D LEARNED HOW TO
ADAPT, AND ERIC HAD
A GOOD WAY OF
LETTING ME KNOW IN
AN UNSPOKEN WAY
WHEN I SHOULD JUMP
IN. HE'D GIVE A NOD,
AND OFF I'D GO "
— PHIL PALMER



Vocal Performance in 1990. Not too shabby.

As for Palmer, he stayed on with Clapton, hitting the road in support of *Journeyman* and proving his most capable sideman since Lee left him half a decade prior. Looking back, Palmer says, "That album was just great... but it's hard to quantify. The band was magnificent, and spontaneous things would happen daily."

As for what he learned from Clapton, Palmer says, "The biggest lesson I got from Eric was to relax. I played with him hundreds of times, and when I stood behind him on stage, I saw that he was most at home. Maybe not in the studio, but live, Eric was free. He wasn't nervous on stage, so that was the biggest lesson — to enjoy the moment."

Palmer makes a good point: Clapton was always freer on stage than in the studio. It's probably why he kicked off the decade so successfully with *Just One Night*, and it's perhaps why many felt his appearance alongside Jeff Beck at the Amnesty International benefit would signal a return to form. And if he'd carry that

same vigor into the studio, we'd look back on Clapton's decade in the doldrums a bit differently.

But then again, it wasn't all bad, and some of us, even though albums like *Behind the Sun* and *August* play back more like dollar bin and thrift store fodder than albums to remember, have a ton of personal memories tied to the likes of "Forever Man," "It's in the Way That You Use It" and "She's Waiting." And to be sure, no one can take away the God-like strokes of genius heard on Clapton's collaborations with Roger Waters, and to a lesser extent, George Harrison.

And so, the Eighties did little to encourage the idea that Clapton was "God," but in the end, it didn't entirely dispel the notion, either. As for Lee, when he looks back, he admits, "I haven't listened back [to Clapton's Eighties music] in a long time, so I can't name a specific track. But I like the later stuff; the solos are really melodic, even though I'm not really into Eric for the guitar solos. I think he's a great writer and a really good singer. The whole package works for me as a listener."

As for Lukather, who sheepishly lent a hand to one of Clapton's most polarizing Eighties moments in "Forever Man," he seems to echo Lee's sentiment, saying, "I am embarrassed even to be a part of the whole thing, but Eric is great. He was a huge influence on me, and I wore his stuff out. What can I say that hasn't already been said?"

While the Eighties may have been choppy for Clapton, if anything, what he'll most be remembered for is the redemptive way he rounded the decade out. In truth, not many artists could survive such critical onslaught, the unintentional creation of eventual thrift store fodder and those perpetual assertions of "God" status being revoked, but Clapton did.

And so, for Eric Clapton, the Eighties wasn't only about music or even about guitar; it was about across-the-board survival and living to fight another day. Clapton might not have been ready for the Eighties, but he sure as hell did his damndest to survive them — and to eventually come out on top.

Bill DeMain contributed to this feature.

Subscribe for your chance to win



A ZOOM R4 MULTITRAK RECORDER VALUED AT \$369

The R4 Portable Multitrack Recorder was designed to empower musicians to explore big ideas. With a unique dedicated 'bounce track' and 32-bit float recording, the R4 is perfect for capturing your most ambitious compositions. With the R4, you can record up to four tracks, mix and then bounce them to the dedicated 'bounce track.' This lets you free up additional tracks to keep adding layers. You can choose to do a 'quick' bounce or mix and bounce in real time. The R4 also allows you to 'undo' your last bounce, if you're not satisfied with the results. In the words of Australian Guitar's Steve Henderson: "The Zoom R4 packs a load of features into a tiny form factory that doesn't skimp on fidelity, making it perfect for home and in-transit recording".

For your chance to win, just subscribe or renew your subscription to Australian Guitar for at least one year via techmags.com.au and answer the following question in 25 words or less:

Who produced Nirvana's 1993 LP In utero?



subscribe at www.techmags.com.au

- > Subscribe today and you'll receive 12 issues of Australian Guitar Magazine delivered direct to your door for only \$129.
- > Never miss another issue, and save \$26 on the newsstand price!



TERMS & CONDITIONS This offer expires September 22nd 2024 and is available to new or renewing subscribers to the Australian Guitar print magazine within Australia only. Please allow 6–8 weeks for delivery of your first issue. For prize terms and conditions, see the relevant subscription pages at techmags.com.au and subscribe techmags.com.au/style/images/FutureTC.pdf. Please see our privacy policy on page 4. While stocks last. Your subscription includes GST and postage, and will start from the next available issue, and only once payment has been received. All subscription offers are subject to availability. Privacy - the subscription offer, and competitions and offers included in this issue may require you to provide information about yourself if you choose to enter, take part, or subscribe. If you provide information about yourself to Future Publishing, we will use this information to provide you with the products or services you have requested, and we will supply your information to contractors to enable Future Publishing to fulfil this obligation. Unless you write to tell us not to, Future Publishing will also use your information to inform you of other Future Publishing publications, products, services and events. Future Publishing may also give your information to organisations that are providing special prizes, offers or events. If you would like to gain access to the information Future Publishing holds about you, please write to the Managing Director, Future Australia, PO Box Q1179 Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230



Guitars and backing Jon Bishop

CROSSROAD BLUES

We take a look at his phrasing and technique as Slash explores a new direction in his playing

New album *Orgy Of The Damned* is very much not business as usual for the Guns N' Roses icon! Take one look at the *Killing Floor* music video and you'll immediately notice The Cat In The Hat eschewing his usual Les Pauls and donning a Bigsby-loaded 1963 Tobacco Sunburst Gibson ES-335 in front of a rack gear that includes (gasp!) a pair of Strats and a Telecaster. And if the experiments in tone hadn't given the game away, well, presumably the song

title has – it's a blues cover, from an album of more of the same.

You know this already, of course, but the new direction sees Slash taking influence from blues pioneers he holds in high regard – and his playing sounds revitalised as a result. Here in our tab lesson, we're taking a look at some of the techniques and phrasing he employs on his latest outing. As ever, you can find accompanying audio files at the link at the top of the page, courtesy of our sibling mag Total Guitar.

Plug in and let's get started.

1 COUNTRY-STYLE CHROMATIC RUNS

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩ = 120

A⁵ **D⁵**

TAB

5 (10) 8 (10) 8 (10) 8 7 5 7 8 7 5 8 7 5 7 5 7 8

1

A⁵ **E7#9**

TAB

9 10 9 8 7 10 7 6 5 8 7 6 5

let ring – – – – –

BU 15 (17) RP BD (17) (15) 13 14

3

Play 4 times

Our first example is inspired by Slash's lead work on *Killing Floor* – played on that 1963 Gibson ES-335. Using country-style chromatics in a rock/blues-rock backing is a Slash trademark, and you can hear them in action in Slash's solo (at 2:25) and here in our tab example.

2 DOUBLESTOP BENDS

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=120

A⁵ D⁵

let ring ————¹ RP BU 12 12 (14) (12) 10 BD 11 (13) 12 12 (13) (11) 9 A⁵ 5 5 BU BD 4 (6) 4 (6) (4) 2 4 2

Play 4 times

3

More of the country-rock here, as we start with a couple of doublestop shapes played on the first and third strings. These can be augmented by finger sliding in or hammering on from a semitone below. It's a staple Slash motif.

3 SHUFFLE PHRASING

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=80

E⁷ 8va

let ring ————¹ BU 15 (17) 15 BU 15 (17) 15 BU 17-18 19 BU 19 (21) 19 17-17 15 18 16 14 12 14 12 13 12 14 14 (15) (14) 12 14 12 13

Play 4 times

This example is inspired by Slash's collaboration with Billie Gibbons on *Hoochie Coochie Man*. The track has a shuffle feel, and our example mirrors some of the ways Slash phrases within the shuffle feel. High-register string-bending is a Slash trademark, as is the use of chromatic notes to add extra colour.

4 WHAMMY BAR VIBRATO

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=200

E⁵ w/bar

let ring ————¹ w/bar 9 7 4 2

Play 4 times

Yep, you read that right! Slash has opted for a tremolo-loaded Fender Strat instead of the fixed stop bars of his usual arsenal of Les Pauls on his rendition of Fleetwood Mac's *Oh Well*—and, here, we're looking at the whammy shimmer he applies on doublestops. Make sure you're holding down both the first and third strings as you wobble the tremolo arm in bars 3 and 4.

5 MAJOR KEY PHRASING

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=105

D A D⁵ D⁵/C D⁵/B D⁵/B[♭] A

Play 4 times

TAB

Slash has always been great at major and Mixolydian phrasing, and in *Key To The Highway* he really goes to town, with D major and A major pentatonic scales. Our example showcases a way to navigate the classic blues turnaround in the key of D. The finger slides are a classic way to improve the overall feel and presentation.

6 REPEATING PATTERNS

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=105

A^m

Play 4 times

TAB

Born Under A Bad Sign sees Slash channeling his inner Albert King, with his trademark pentatonic rock licks driving the solos. Here, we're looking at a trademark Slash-ism that he's employed to some extent with every act he's been in: repeatable short phrases. Most of the action takes place in bars 1 and 2, but watch out for the early change on the last note of that first bar.

7 FUNKY WAH WAH LEAD

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=120

A^m7

1/4

Play 4 times

TAB

Slash's *Papa Was A Rolling Stone* cover sees wah and talkbox riffing, but it's in the solo at 3:54 where the hatted one really opens up with his wah pedal – and our example features a typical descending phrase. The basic pattern is two picked notes followed by a pull-off and finger-slide. This creates a four-note pattern that can be moved around on the second string as required.

8 LOW-REGISTER SOLOING

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=107

E⁷

RP

RP

Play 4 times

TAB

BU (5) BD (5) (4) 2 4 1/4 1/4 2 BU (5) BD (5) (4) 2 4

Slash's solo in his cover of Stevie Wonder's *Living For The City* starts in the low register, gradually ascending to a big finish up at the dusty end. Your main aim here in our example is to concentrate on the string bending and digging in with your pick to get all of the juice out of the notes.

9 USING THE HARMONIC MINOR SCALE

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=66

Am⁷

3

1/4

3

1/4

Play 4 times

TAB

7/9 9 13-12-13-12-10-9 12-10-7 5-7-5 4-5-4 7-6 7 5 7-7 7 (9) 7 5 7-5-0 5 7

Over the years, Slash has flirted with the harmonic minor scale to spice up his soloing, and his take on T-Bone Walker's *Stormy Monday* features an exploration of the exotic sounding scale in its unaccompanied intro. The tension of the harmonic minor scale is released by reverting back to the A minor pentatonic scale.

10 DOUBLESTOP ACCOMPANIMENT

bit.ly/tg384audio

♩=120

A⁷

D⁷

Play 4 times

TAB

2 3 5 5/7 5 3 2 3 7 8 7 5 5/7 5 3 2 4 5 5/7 5 4 2 4 7 9 7 5 5/7 5 4

Our final example is inspired by the opening doublestops in the new instrumental track *Metal Chestnut*. The 6th interval sounds great and can be used to create movement and colour. We have used a simple chord progression of A7 to D7, and then spiced it up by moving the doublestop 6ths around. We've used a slightly cleaner tone by rolling off the volume control.

THE CROSSROADS

FIVE ULTIMATE BLUES RHYTHMS



This issue John Wheatcroft shines a light on the importance of guitar accompaniment, with a collection of blues rhythm styles to empower your playing.

ABILITY RATING

Info <https://bit.ly/4bghT62>

Key Various Tempo Various

Moderate



Will improve your... ✓

✓ Timing and control

Application of chord voicings

✓ Articulation and range of techniques

It's fair to say that we guitarists like to take solos, and a huge amount of the material we've covered in this very series has covered this topic explicitly and expansively. While this is undoubtedly a hugely enjoyable and fulfilling pursuit, in actuality this aspect of our playing is really the icing on a much bigger musical cake.

Unless your chosen musical genre is completely lead-centric (such as certain styles of fusion or instrumental rock) then you'll find yourself in the rhythm guitar chair percentage-wise more often than not.

TECHNIQUE FOCUS

Get to know your guitar

There is definitely something to say for choosing one good quality instrument and figuring out exactly what it's capable of. Experiment with pickup combinations, how the tone and volume controls interact, and how it behaves with various different amp and effect setups. One could also argue that the single most defining feature of good tone has nothing to do with equipment. Clear articulation and positive, defined and bold delivery all help immensely. Remember there isn't a microphone in the world that will make a mumbling vocalist's articulation any clearer. Guitar is exactly the same. Try recording your next woodshedding session; position a recording device (voice notes on your phone will do) close to your speakers, go easy on the reverb and perhaps even record yourself playing the examples that accompany this article. Listen back closely to the timing, the control of noise, the dynamics and the tone. You could record each example a few times, making subtle adjustments to your picking location, along with the settings on your guitar to decide which are your favourites.

You have two choices; grin and bear your rhythmic role, biding your time until we get to the solo, or you can put some thought, effort, and research into this area of your playing, approaching this accompaniment component with flair, creativity, musicality and inventiveness. Needless to say, all of the best (and busiest) guitarists fall into this latter category. The secret really here is in achieving that balance.

It's definitely a case of getting out what you put in, and with just a little effort you can have equally as much musical significance, impact and possibly most importantly, fun, while grooving away behind a soloist or singer, and really contributing to the musical effectiveness of the group in the process. Presumably you fell in love with music before you fell in love with the guitar? By seeing the rhythm role as a crucial part of the bigger musical picture you may even remind yourself why you were inspired to want to play music in the first place.

To be a good rhythm player, you also need to be a good team player. Familiarise yourself with the roles of each instrument in the 'rhythm section', usually the drums, bass, second guitar or keyboard player, and be aware of their respective parts for every piece that you play. It's unimportant what style you prefer; the main difference between performing in a small band, say a rock power-trio, to performing in much larger ensemble, such as an orchestra, is that each member in the smaller group is usually responsible for creating their own part. Stylistic authenticity, inventiveness, flair and the ability to respond to your surroundings are all essential parts of the rhythm king's arsenal.

There are five short studies this month, each with an introductory exercise and accompanying musical example covering a wide variety of styles. But they're all fairly blues influenced; syncopated rock-blues riffs, 12/8 gospel, swing-shuffle, country-rock and walking bass.

"I've been paid to play rhythm guitar ninety percent of the time. It's harder than it looks."

Steve Lukather

Treat each example as the beginning of your studies. Take each concept or rhythmic approach and experiment with rearranging the ideas through as range of keys or perhaps against a different harmonic sequence. Creating great rhythm parts is a lifelong endeavour, and any work put into this crucial area of your playing now, will reap dividends in the future. Be sure to check out the video and audio supplements at <http://bit.ly/4bghT62>, courtesy of our sibling publication Guitar Techniques.

Get the Tone

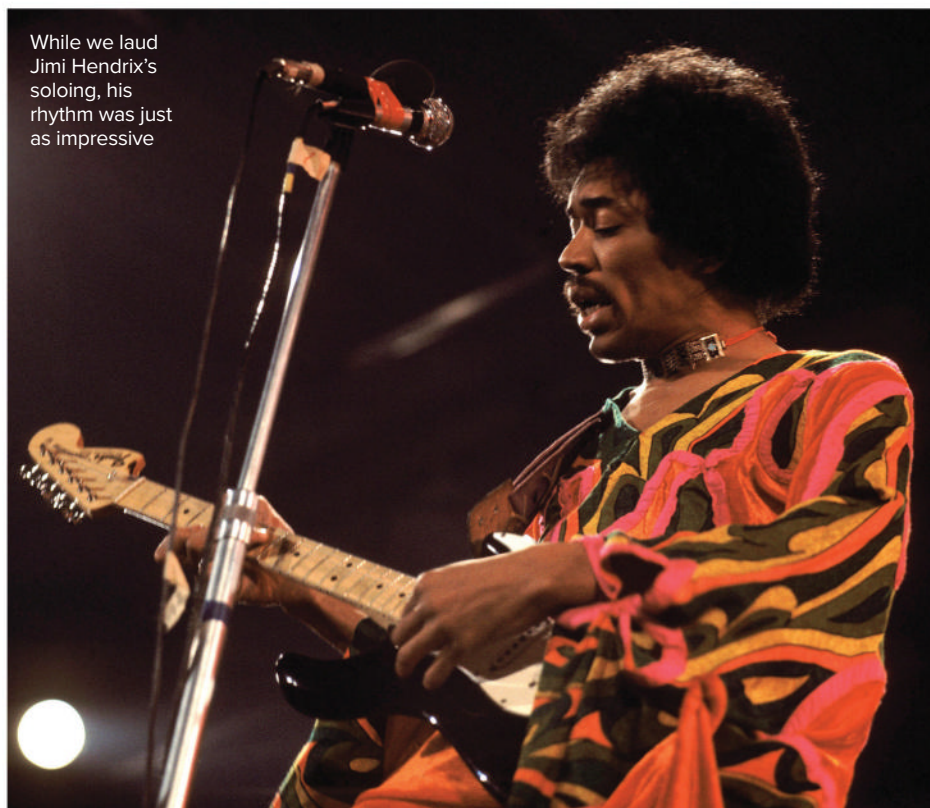
As we're dealing with concepts here, you can use pretty much any guitar you like. I used my Martyn Booth Signature with two humbuckers, varying the pickup selection and working from a clean amp model from a Line 6 Helix. I added virtual overdrive for the rock-blues example with moderate gain for dynamic variation, leaving all other settings untouched.



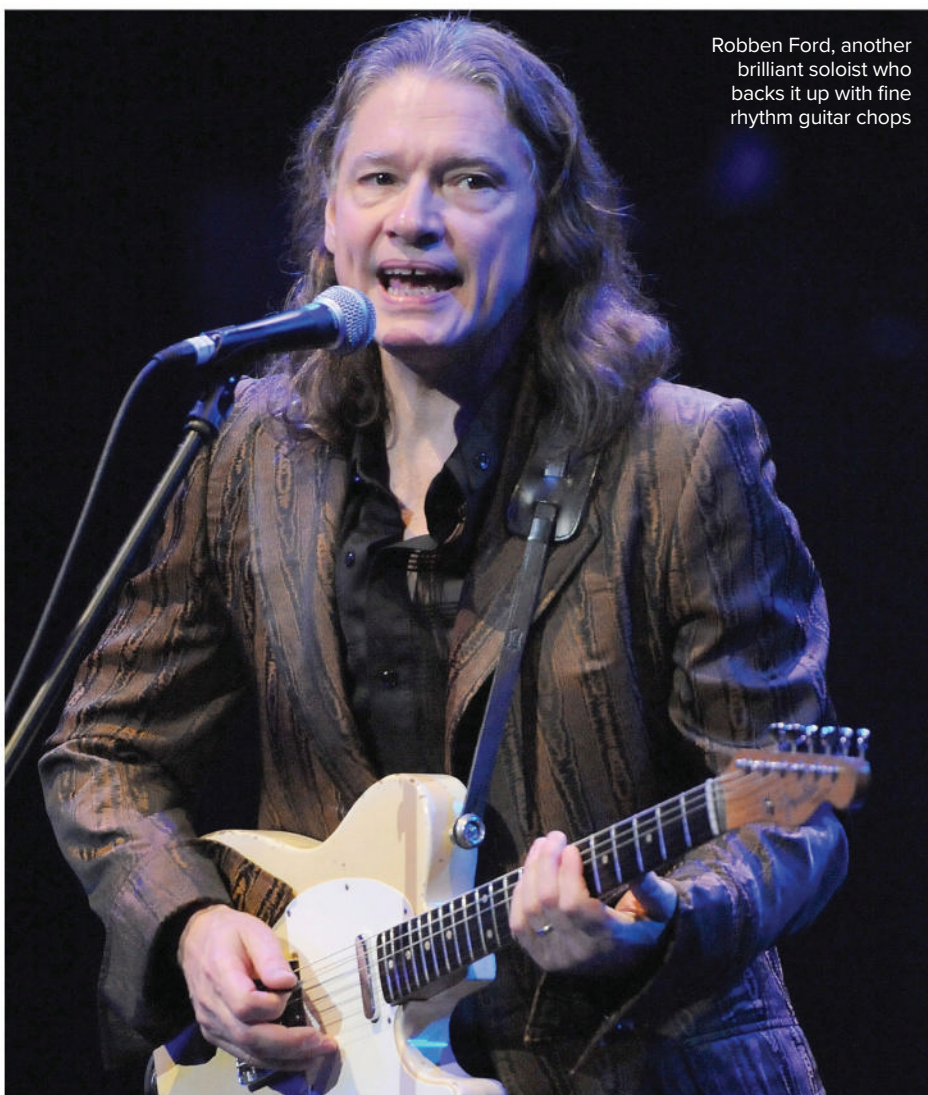
TRACK RECORD Some of the world's best lead guitarists are also rather special when it comes to rhythm guitar, so we'd suggest the following players to check out, directing your listening attention specifically to their rhythm chops: Robben Ford - Soul On Ten (Decca 2009), Danny Gatton - Relentless (Big Mo 1994), Joe Pass - Virtuoso (Pablo 1973), and Jimi Hendrix - Electric Ladyland (Track 1968).



Joe Pass's abilities to accompany an artist using just solo guitar are legendary



While we laud Jimi Hendrix's soloing, his rhythm was just as impressive



Robben Ford, another brilliant soloist who backs it up with fine rhythm guitar chops

“You can have equally as much impact, musical significance and fun, grooving away behind a soloist or singer.”



Danny Gatton's love of all musical styles fed into his awesome rhythm and lead work

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 1 EIGHTH-NOTE SYNCOPATED ROCK-BLUES RIFFS

We begin with a study using steady eighth notes, and create syncopation by leaving a rest on each downbeat, moving backwards for each subsequent bar from beat four to beat one. This is followed by a syncopated riff-based

study based around a rock-blues in the key of E, juxtaposing single-note lines with punctuated chord voicings. Make sure you don't rush and be mindful of extraneous open strings when moving between single notes and chords.

1a) Eighth note exercise with beat drops
♩ = 90
A5

1b) Riff based cohesive study
A7#9

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 2 12/8 GOSPEL BLUES

The time signature shifts to 12/8 and we begin with a chordal exercise exploring the voice leading connections between I7, IV, and V7 chords (A7-D7-E7). We can introduce a greater sense of tension and release when A moves to D, and when

E moves back to A, by adding the #5 to the first chord in each move (A7#5: A-C#-E#-G to D, E7#5: E-G#-B#-D back to A). In the following study we see these ideas positioned into a common eight-bar gospel blues sequence in the key of A.

2a) 7#5 connections
♩. = 55
A7 A7#5 D9 E7#5 A7 A7#5 D9 E7#5

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 2 12/8 GOSPEL BLUES CONTINUED...

2b) Gospel based cohesive study

2b) Gospel based cohesive study

5

A7

Let ring - - - - -

Let ring - - - - -

Let ring - - - - -

Let ring - - - - -

E B G D A E

5

D9

Let ring - - - - -

Let ring - - - - -

G13

Let ring - - - - -

Let ring - - - - -

A7

Let ring - - - - -

F#7#5

Let ring - - - - -

E B G D A E

8

Bm7

Let ring - - - - -

E7#5

Let ring - - - - -

A7

Let ring - - - - -

A7#5

Let ring - - - - -

D9

Let ring - - - - -

E#5

Let ring - - - - -

A9

Let ring - - - - -

E#5

Let ring - - - - -

E B G D A E

11

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 3 MID-TEMPO SWING SHUFFLE

This example blends sliding fragmentary chord shapes with muted double-stop arpeggios, so we begin with an exercise that outlines both B₉ and E₉ in two-note couplets. The contextualised musical example moves between

three-note sliding chord voicings alongside a palm-muted double-stop riff idea coming from these shapes, once again harmonised to follow a conventional 12-bar blues progression in the key of B_b.

3a) I9 & IV9 in double stops

3b) Mid tempo shuffle cohesive study

Swing

B $\flat$ 6 B $\flat$ 9

B $\flat$ 6 B $\flat$ 9

PM

3

E
B
G
D
A
E

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 3 MID-TEMPO SWING SHUFFLE CONTINUED...

10

14

m m etc

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 4 STRAIGHT DRIVING COUNTRY-ROCK

This one juxtaposes triads against stationary bass notes to bring out a selection of extensions, tensions and suspensions. Our initial example positions a Major triad from the root, 4th and 7th degrees, so for an implied A7 we use A (A-C#-E), D

(D-F#-A) and G (G-B-D) respectively. When we put these notes in order we achieve the A Mixolydian scale (A-B-C#-D-E-F#-G). We repeat the principle for both D7 and E7, before contextualising the ideas in the following 12-bar study.

4a) Triad superimposition

♩ = 160 Straight

1

5

10

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 4 STRAIGHT DRIVING COUNTRY-ROCK CONTINUED...

Chord sequence: E A/E D/E D G/D C/D A D/A E E D/E

Fingering numbers (Bass line):

1	2	2	2	4	5	2	3	3	4	2
2	2	4	4	5	5	2	2	4	6	4
2	4	5	5	5	7	0	2	4	7	5

Measure numbers: 14, 3, 4, 0, 7, 0

EXERCISE AND EXAMPLE 5 JAZZ-STYLE WALKING BASSLINE

Our final example begins by highlighting the 3rd/7th connections in Major and Minor II-V-I sequences in the key of A_b Major/F Minor in two positions. Knowledge of these connections is crucial when we add chordal stabs over a

walking bassline, as in our example. The conundrum is to maintain contrasting rhythmic feels, where the bassline sounds smooth and the chord fragments have more of a staccato (choppy and disconnected) feel and sound.

5a) 3rd & 7th voice leading connections

Tempo: ♩ = 190 Swing

Chord sequence: B^bm7 E^b7 A^bma7 Gm7^b5 C7 Fm7 B^bm7 E^b7 A^bma7 Gm7^b5 C7 Fm7

Annotation: ^b5 implied

Fingering numbers (Bass line):

6	6	5	3	3	1	13	12	12	10	9	8
6	5	5	3	2	1	11	11	10	8	8	6
6	6	4	3	3	1	13	11	11	10	8	8

Measure numbers: 1, 6, 4, 3, 1, 11, 8

5b) Walking bass cohesive study

Chord sequence: A^b6 Gm7^b5 C7 Fm7 B^b7 E^bm7 A^b7

Fingering numbers (Bass line):

12	12	10	8	9	8	8	7	6	6	5	4	3
10	10	10	8	8	8	6	6	7	4	4	4	3
11	10	11	9	10	9	8	7	6	6	5	4	3

Measure numbers: 9, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3

Chord sequence: D^bma7 D^bm7 G^b7 A^b6 B^bm7 Cm7 F7

Fingering numbers (Bass line):

5	5	4	3	5	6	8	8	7	8	7	7
3	3	4	3	2	2	3	6	6	8	7	7
4	3	4	3	4	2	4	5	6	7	8	7

Measure numbers: 14, 4, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 7, 7

Chord sequence: B^bm7 E^b7 Cm7 F7 B^bm7 E^b7 A^b6

Fingering numbers (Bass line):

6	6	6	8	8	6	6	5	5	5	4
6	6	5	8	7	6	6	5	6	3	3
6	5	6	8	7	6	7	6	5	4	4

Measure numbers: 18, 6, 5, 6, 7, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 4

HOT GEAR

SUSAN TEDESCHI TELECASTER

RRP: \$3,299 • fender.com

One of the most celebrated musicians of her generation, Susan Tedeschi's powerful vocal performances and dynamic musicality are a testament to the vital emotive power of the blues. Her musical catalog as a solo artist and with Grammy-award winning Tedeschi Trucks Band showcases her prowess on both vocals and guitar. The Susan Tedeschi Telecaster is patterned after the instantly identifiable Caribbean Mist 1993 American Standard Tele that has been Susan's go-to since she first picked it up. Featured on the cover of Tedeschi's seminal album "Just Won't Burn" and still synonymous with her soulful brand of blues 25 years since – the simple sophistication of the Susan Tedeschi Telecaster shines brightly. From the slim Tedeschi "C" neck profile and modern block steel saddle bridge to the custom-voiced pickups and indispensable TBX tone circuit, these carefully calibrated elements combine to ensure that each Susan Tedeschi Telecaster delivers the authentic tone and inspiring playability of Tedeschi's treasured original.

GUILD M-260E DELUXE ARCHBACK

RRP: Contact dealer
zenithmusic.com.au

The M-260E Deluxe offers upgraded appointments and features to the "M" concert-sized acoustics in Guild's 200 series lineup. Taking after the flagship USA-made M-20, the M-260E carries the same reduced body dimensions and shorter scale length that have made Guild "M" models the choice of many players over the brand's 70-year history, from folk singer-songwriter Nick Drake to indie-pop hitmaker Beabadoobee. Thanks to its archback design, this acoustic delivers a powerful voice with its small body and is perfect for fingerstyle playing and light strumming.



FISHMAN LOUDBOX MICRO ACOUSTIC AMP

RRP: \$849 • dynamicmusic.com.au

Loudbox Micro packs 40 watts of clean acoustic power into a lunchbox-sized acoustic combo. A sealed cabinet design paired with a bi-amplified driver configuration generates rich, full tone from your acoustic instruments. It features a dedicated microphone channel plus an instrument channel with Fishman's legendary preamp and tone control design. Use the high-quality digital reverb and chorus on the instrument channel to create space and textures while reverb is there for the ready on the microphone channel. Loudbox Micro also includes an aux input, a balanced XLR D.I. output, and a headphone jack when you want to play quietly. With Loudbox Micro, aspiring acoustic musicians are finally able to experience the dynamics and quality sound of more expensive Loudbox models in an easy to use amp that's inspiring to practice and record with.

YAMAHA PACIFICA STANDARD PLUS

RRP: \$2,399 • au.yamaha.com

Pacifica Standard Plus guitars were designed for players of all types seeking their own unique sounds. They deliver exceptional sound and playability, and feature newly designed alder bodies, slim C-shape maple necks with rosewood or maple fingerboards, Reflectone pickups co-developed with Rupert Neve Designs, and a choice of four vibrant finishes developed jointly by teams in Hamamatsu and Los Angeles, inspired by Japanese city pop art and the sun-soaked vibes of Southern California.





LIMITED EDITION AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II TELECASTER THINLINE

RRP: \$3,399 • fender.com

The American Professional II Telecaster draws from more than seventy years of innovation, inspiration and evolution to meet the demands of today's working player. Fender's popular Deep "C" neck sports smooth rolled fingerboard edges, a "Super-Natural" satin finish and a sculpted neck heel for a supremely comfortable feel and easy access to the upper register. V-Mod II Telecaster single-coil pickups are more articulate than ever while delivering the twang, snap and snarl that made the Tele famous. The top-load/string-through bridge with compensated "bullet" saddles is our most comfortable, flexible Tele bridge yet - retaining classic brass-saddle tone and providing excellent intonation and flexible setup options, allowing you to tailor the tension and tone of each string to your liking. These stellar instruments are now being offered in a Limited Edition Thinline configuration, with semi-hollow ash bodies and four beautiful transparent finish options. These won't last long!



FENDER DELUXE WOODEN AMPLIFIER STAND

RRP: \$499 • fender.com

Introducing Fender's innovative line of Gear Furniture, featuring beautifully crafted, upscale stand solutions to serve players and collectors alike. Expertly designed with durable materials, this collection provides a stylish and functional way for you to proudly display your gear while elevating your home or studio space. The Fender Deluxe Wooden Amp Stand features a mid-century modern design and is built tough enough to withstand your largest combo amps. The integrated drawer allows for storage and organization of your essential accessories - keeping your pedals, cables and power supplies off the floor.



ZOOM MS-70CDR+

RRP: \$249 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The MS-70CDR+ gives musicians 149 spatial effects ranging from lush choruses to crystal-clear delays to atmospheric reverbs. This single stompbox can shape your tone and provide endless depth and textures. Included are 43 different chorus and modulation effects that add depth and motion to your sound including phasing, flanging, tremolo, vibrato, detuning, and pitch shifting, and 29 mono and stereo delays with delay times of up to 4 seconds. Choose from a variety of delays including tape echo, ping-pong, and multi-tap. There are also 33 studio-quality reverbs and 44 dynamic and filter effects, all in a form factor with greatly expanded controls.



TONE CITY HEAVENLY LAKE

RRP: \$249 • egm.net.au

Inspired by Tone City's Tape Machine and Tiny Spring pedals, the Heavenly Lake broadens its horizons by provide you with the same great airy and spacious soundscapes, with the ability to sonically refine the decay and depth of your tone. Housed in a bigger 'two-in-one' unit, Tone City have upgraded the Tape Machine's circuitry, adding decay and tone adjustable controls enabling the user to precisely develop and shape delay for a refined tonal experience.



TONE CITY BIG RUMBLE

RRP: \$199 • egm.net.au

Producing a wide sonic palette of rich, responsive low-to-medium tones, the Tone City Big Rumble Overdrive pedal transforms your tone giving you a mix of varied in-between clean and crunchy gain flavours. The Attack knob enables you to adjust the overall fatness tone that can be refined for a punchy attack, or whack it all the way up for a massive wall of sound featuring intertwine distortion elements.



TONE CITY HOLY AURA

RRP: \$219 • egm.net.au

The Tone City Holy Aura Distortion pedal harnesses inspired iconic American sounding amp tones with high gain, sustain and most important distortion goodness. Featuring 3 stages of EQ regulation, gain, presence, volume, and boost. You are able to fully adjust the tone with a wide sonic palette finding that overdriven sweet spot.



EARTHQUAKER DEVICES TIME SHADOWS V2

RRP: \$369.99 • au.yamaha.com

This joint collaboration between EarthQuaker Devices and Death By Audio is a major update to the original Time Shadows that was released in 2020 and limited to 1000 units! Time Shadows now features 3 modes, user assignable expression control and 6 preset slots to save and recall your favorite settings. The EQD Mode is an envelope controlled sub-octave filter delay, the ALL NEW I; Mode is a dual delay where each repeat simultaneously shifts up and down with each regeneration, and the DBA Mode is a multi-delay regenerating filter. All three sounds are wildly different from each other and yet share a perfectly designed harmony to be completely complementary and suitable for every style and genre of music.



SAVE THE DATE

australian

hi-fi

Show **SYDNEY 2025**

4-6 APRIL 2025

AT THE SYDNEY CENTRAL HOTEL

MANAGED BY ASCOTT

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

WHAT HI-FI?

australian
hi-fi

**SOUND
IMAGE**

AUSTRALIAN recording TECHNIQUE

CAPTURE THE SOUND



**ROAD-TESTED
ELECTRO-VOICE
EVERSE 12**

SPECIAL FEATURE

STEVE ALBINI THE 'ANTI-PRODUCER'

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



**EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF AN ENGINEER
WHOSE UNCOMPROMISING APPROACH
HELPED TO SHAPE THE SOUND OF ALBUMS
FROM NIRVANA, PIXIES AND PJ HARVEY**



Electro-Voice

BIG SOUND MEETS BATTERY POWER

EVERSE 12

WEATHERIZED BATTERY-POWERED LOUDSPEAKER
WITH BLUETOOTH® AUDIO AND CONTROL

RACHEL LYNCH

Electro-Voice user

OUR
ELECTRO-VOICE
COMMUNITY



UNSTOPPABLE

Experience real pro audio that you can take anywhere. Premium features include a titanium dome compression driver, up to 12 hours of run time, true stereo streaming, power for mobile devices and a wireless microphone system, and much more. Great sound to grab and go.



**LOUDER
LOWER
LONGER**

Higher output,
deeper bass,
longer run time*



SIMPLE SETUP

It's never been easier
to optimize your sound,
with user-friendly
QuickSmart DSP and
app control/mixing



WHERE TO BUY

* Compared to EVERSE 8 at 95 dB SPL. The EVERSE 12 battery pack will provide 12+ hours at 100 dB SPL average with typical program material, or 8+ hours at maximum output level before limit indication. Always use the supplied weatherized input cover, or the Electro-Voice approved accessory rain resistant cover in wet or damp environments. The EVERSE accessory tray and RE3 wireless microphone system are sold separately. Information in this document is subject to change without notice. All trademarks are the copyrights of their respective owners. ©2024 Bosch Security Systems, LLC

proudly distributed by

JANDS

jands.com.au

Microphone designs and how they work

If you've heard the terms dynamic, condenser, and ribbon mic before and wondered what they actually mean, we're here to help.

All microphones work in a similar way. They have a diaphragm (or a ribbon) that moves in response to changes in air pressure due to sound waves impinging on the diaphragm – similarly to how the diaphragm or 'eardrum' in the human ear responds to sound.

The movement of this diaphragm, or ribbon, then produces a changing voltage, with a positive value (or amplitude) when the diaphragm moves one way and a negative value (or amplitude) when the diaphragm moves the opposite way. There are three main types of microphone to choose from – dynamic, ribbon, and condenser.

1 DYNAMIC MICS

With a so-called 'dynamic' microphone (the word 'dynamic' means changing or moving), a small coil of wire, positioned within the magnetic field of a permanent magnet, is attached to the diaphragm. When a sound wave enters the microphone, the diaphragm vibrates back and forth in an analogous way to the movements of the sound wave.

When a wire moves in a magnetic field, a current is induced in it. So, the pressure of the sound wave vibrates the diaphragm, which in turn moves the coil in the magnetic field, inducing the electrical signal in the wire, which is then passed to the microphone cable (sometimes through a step-up transformer to increase the voltage).

The mass of the diaphragm and coil arrangement means that the moving coil mic suffers from inertia issues. That is, the arrangement is resistant to changes in its state of motion, meaning that it doesn't fully

accurately represent the sound pressure, particularly at high frequencies where the diaphragm and coil arrangement must change speed and direction more frequently.

As something of a side note, you may notice that the construction of a moving coil mic is very similar to that of a loudspeaker driver, which consists of a loosely suspended cone attached to a moving voice coil in close proximity to a fixed magnet. The speaker driver works in the opposite way to the microphone – the flow of a signal through the coil induces a magnetic field which drives the coil away from the magnet, moving the speaker cone. This is the reason that a speaker driver may be wired up to an input and used as a rudimentary mic.

2 RIBBON MICS

Ribbon mics are another form of dynamic mic, although usually billed as a distinct design by manufacturers due to their high-end desirability.

In the case of a ribbon microphone, the ribbon is made of metal and is suspended in a magnetic field, so when it vibrates, varying electrical signals are produced. The output voltage of the ribbon is low, so most ribbon mics also contain a step-up transformer to boost the voltage to an optimal level. The lighter arrangement of the moving parts helps to overcome some of the inertia problems of the moving coil mic, meaning that ribbon mics are generally more accurate at higher frequencies than moving coil.

Ribbon mics tend to be more delicate than moving coil mics, so are better suited to studio work than live performance.

3 CONDENSER MICS

Condenser mics do not operate using the same basic magnetic principles as dynamic mics, instead being based around a smaller, capacitor-based element.

In a condenser microphone, the diaphragm acts as one plate of a capacitor, and the vibrations produce changes in the distance between the plates. These changes are translated into varying electrical signals by one of two methods – DC-biasing or RF biasing.

Because the front plate of a condenser mic is significantly smaller than the diaphragm and coil/ribbon setup of a dynamic mic, it is lighter and therefore its speed and direction of movement changes more rapidly, allowing it to create a more accurate representation of the sound pressure.

As such, condenser mics usually have a more accurate frequency response curve than dynamic mics. Electret mics are a form of condenser mic where the capacitor dielectric is permanently charged without the need for phantom power. The electret itself is a small capacitor which functions in a broadly similar way to a traditional condenser mic.

4 PICKUP (POLAR) PATTERNS

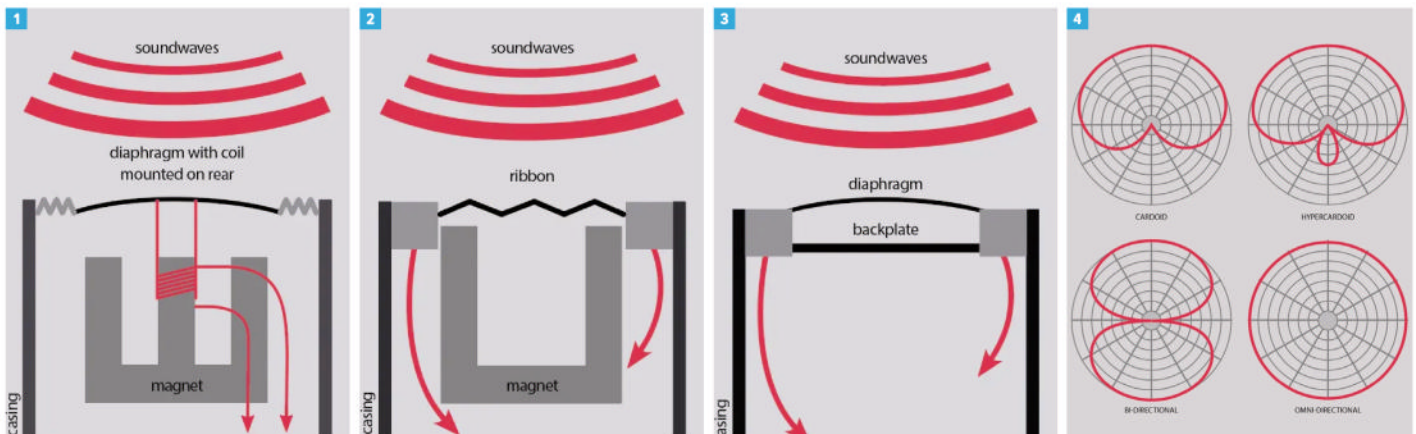
Another typical microphone specification is the pickup pattern, more usually called a polar pattern. This is a circular graph showing how the microphone picks up sound coming from the different directions in a circle around the microphone.

An omni-directional microphone, as its name suggests, picks up sound equally from all directions. This is particularly useful when you want to capture the ambience of the space around the microphone.

A cardioid microphone, again as its name suggests (cardioid means heart-shaped), picks up sounds in a heart-shaped pattern, mainly from the front, while rejecting sounds coming from the sides and the rear. The advantage here is that this microphone mostly just captures sound from the sound source that it is pointing at.

A hyper-cardioid is similar but with a narrower area of sensitivity at the front and a small area of sensitivity at the rear. A variation on this is the hypercardioid, which has an even narrower pickup area at the front and even less pickup from the rear. These pickup patterns can help isolate the instruments that they are intended to pick up more effectively, and also help to minimise feedback in live situations.

The other main type of pickup pattern is the figure-of-eight or bi-directional pattern, in which sound is picked up equally from the front and the rear, while sound from the sides is strongly rejected. Microphones with this type of pickup pattern can be used to record two nearby sound sources, either side of the microphone, while rejecting sounds coming from the other two directions. 🎧




 A photograph of Steve Albini in a recording studio. He is sitting in a chair, leaning back with his feet propped up on a large mixing console. He is wearing a maroon button-down shirt over a grey t-shirt, blue jeans, and white sneakers. He has glasses and is looking towards the camera. The studio is filled with various pieces of equipment, including two large speakers on stands, a Neotek microphone, and a keyboard on the console. The background shows more studio equipment and a dimly lit room.

STEVE ALBINI

THE 'ANTI-PRODUCER'

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF AN ENGINEER WHOSE UNCOMPROMISING APPROACH HELPED TO SHAPE THE SOUND OF ALBUMS FROM NIRVANA, PIXIES AND PJ HARVEY. WORDS BY **ANDY JONES**.

While most 21st-century producers like to surround themselves with a console full of the latest outboard gear, a supercomputer packed with a million plugins, and then take full creative control of a recording project and, consequently, a big points-based slice of its profits, the late Steve Albini, who died on May 7, used little gear, took a low fee, and let the band and their music do the talking. And if he could do it all in one take, so much the better.

In an industry famed for precise recording, a million vocal takes, and where a knowledge of Pro Tools shortcuts impresses more than ideas, this pioneering spIrit – or bloody-minded stubbornness, you decide – would earn

Albini literally thousands of recording projects.

The only thing Albini shared with many other producers is that he set out wanting to make it big in his own band, the first of which was Big Black, which he formed in 1981. His musical cues and attitude stemmed from '70s punk and new wave, and the people who recorded it. He cited both the English studio engineer/producers John Loder and Iain Burgess as big influences on his own studio methods; Albini recorded tracks with both, and their ethos of capturing a band's live spirit would stay with him throughout his career, as would their attitude of using just a few choice pieces of recording gear that they knew

inside out.

This was why Albini would later rail against using the computer in the studio. "No-one knows their computer software well enough to be aware of every single thing it does," he told *Sound on Sound* in 2005. "In the analogue domain you know what you're supposed to do, you plug something in, and it's done."

With this mindset, Albini would begin a hugely successful producer/engineer career in the late '80s including recording the 1988 Pixies album *Surfer Rosa*. Later milestones included *Pod* by The Breeders (1990), several tracks by The Wedding Present including 1991's *Seamonsters LP*, and PJ Harvey's second album *Rid of Me* in 1993. But it would be

the same year's *In Utero* by Nirvana that would seal the Albini deal and give him a 'grunge' tag that would be hard to lose, but – eventually anyway – would lead to more work with everyone from The Auteurs to Page & Plant, Mogwai to the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. In truth, the Albini sound was not so much grunge, but simply capturing the raw energy of a band, much of the time in his own Chicago-based Electrical Audio studio.

With his own music, Big Black would produce albums with titles like *Songs About Fucking* but this would be at the lighter end of the controversy scale, as Albini's next project was called Rapeman, and other band names he was associated with are simply unprintable.

Indeed, Albini was never far from controversy, and while his reputation in the studio was second to none, his attempts at provoking a reaction, either through his own music or in interviews, would often backfire. Those sympathetic to him would cite his ironic and twisted sense of humour, and also his passion for getting people to think. At the opposite end of the scale he was often caught up in racist or homophobic controversy where the 'ironic' label wasn't such a convenient get-out.

Albini later apologised for his outspoken statements, telling *The Guardian*, "the one thing I don't want to do is say: 'The culture shifted – excuse my behaviour.' It provides a context for why I was wrong at the time, but I was wrong at the time." And while you could put many actions down to naivety, or his punk attitude and provocative nature, Albini would also channel this rebellious side into doing good within what he saw as a corrupt music industry.

Not only did this manifest itself in his redefinition of the record production role into an engineering one, where he would help bands record rather than advise on creativity, but he would never agree to a slice of a record's points success that means so much cash for other successful producers. It meant that he lost out on some big numbers – somewhere close to US\$400,000 for the Nirvana album alone, according to some reports.

Albini's final band was called Shellac, with whom he recorded five albums, the last of which, *To All Trains*, was released just over a week after his death this year. He helmed thousands of projects over his four decade career – the maths suggests up to 4,000 – so it's fair to say that the pioneering maverick has left a huge mark on music, and it's a catalogue that will only be more appreciated as the years and decades pass. "The recording part is the part that matters to me," he told *The Guardian*. "I take that part very seriously. I want the music to outlive all of us." 🎧

STEVE ALBINI FOUR HIGHLIGHTS



PIXIES
Cactus (1988)

The Pixies album *Surfer Rosa* was very much Albini's big break, and *Cactus* sets a mark in the sand for the Albini sound. It's raw, it's in your face, it's sparse and it's over in two minutes. Move on! We love the story about why Pixies spell out the word 'Pixies' between verses too – they copied that from T-Rex who spelt out their name on the track *The Groover*. Bowie later covered *Cactus* on his 2002 album, *Heathen*, and spelled out 'David' in his version. Isn't music great?



PJ HARVEY
Rid to Me (1993)

Harvey chose Albini to record her second album because she knew what he did best was record a band like they are playing in front of you. No messing, no fills, just the band. This is the title track from Harvey's second album and pretty much sums that whole attitude and recording methodology, as if you are standing in the studio while Harvey sings and plays guitar, Rob Ellis drums and Steve Vaughan plays bass before you. Who needs effects, eh?



NIRVANA
Serve the Servants (1993)

If you think we should have included *Heart Shaped Box* from Nirvana's *In Utero*, then think again, as the band had it and other singles from the album remixed because they (or label DGC) weren't happy with Albini's versions. *Serve the Servant* was certainly single-worthy but escaped the remix treatment and is as raw and abrasive as the day it was recorded. And it was just one day, just one take in fact.

Albini later recounted how Kurt played the first chord louder than he had expected so it sounds very overdriven, but the band didn't mind and that one take is what you hear. That attitude got the entire album in the can in less than a week and then mixed in five days – what probably seemed like an eternity for Albini.



MOGWAI
My Father My King (2001)

A 20-minute opus based on the melody from a Jewish prayer might not be your ideal party-starter, but Mogwai turn this into a wall of sound playing it live, and Albini was responsible for getting it onto tape – a lot of it – in 2001. Being the producer/engineer that he was, he made the final song from two earlier takes, splicing the tape old-school with a razor blade. Brilliant.

SHURE

GLX-D+
DUAL BAND
DIGITAL WIRELESS

**READY-TO-GO.
EVERY TIME.
AUTOMATICALLY.**



24
58

Dual Band
Wireless
Technology



Automatic
Frequency
Management

12
HOURS

Smart
Rechargeability
Included



Multiple
System
Installations



Exceptional
Digital Wireless
Audio



**SCAN To Find
Out More**



proudly distributed by

JANDS

jands.com.au



Electro-Voice Everse 12

Portable showerproof PA gear that prompts the question: How is this possible? Review by **Steve Henderson**

I love Electro-Voice gear. I have to say that right up front. I still have a PL-91 bought in the late '70s, a TL15 bass cabinet bought in 1980 and often used for guitar, and a few EVM12L speakers, either in a Boogie or in an extension cab. Electro-Voice gear just seems to work and keep on working, no matter what you do with it. The company is nearly 100 years of age (older than JBL or Sennheiser, or AKG) and they are still innovating. Their latest products are quite a leap from the plywood speaker boxes of 40 years ago or the large diaphragm miles of the '40s. Nowadays, they are small and portable, but with the same level of quality and bullet-proof engineering.

The EV Everse 12 is the big brother of the Everse 8, reviewed here a while back. It's a portable, 400 watt, battery-powered, full-range PA cab that, even with the built-in battery, weighs just 14 kilos. That's an easier lift than a Deluxe Reverb. The cabinet is polypropylene, so it's made to withstand the rigours of the road, and stands a mere 600mm tall. It has a Class D power amp driving a 12" speaker and a 1" titanium compression driver for the top end. It has 4 channels (sorta: two mono + one stereo) and a whole bunch of built-in digital trickery like graphic equaliser, ducking, digital effects, location compensation, and a whole bunch more that you can easily find on the EV website. And forget about running cables to a second Everse – there's a Bluetooth pairing program to eliminate the mess and fuss, and the whole business can be controlled from your iPad. Amazing.

Tonally, the Everse 12 has all the good stuff of the Everse 8 (which we were super-impressed with) but with increased low end boom. Those bass frequencies are really a feature of this amp's tone: unlike a lot of portable PA cabs, which tend

to have woolly low frequencies, the Everse is really smooth and defined. I plugged in a Maton MSH-210 acoustic/electric dreadnought and the bottom E was big and round, without a hint of furriness. In fact, first position chords sounded full and dynamic, and the low notes didn't mush out with all those extra overtones. Changing to dropped D for a drone and moving up the neck, the mids were bold and smooth, not honky and overbearing and the treble frequencies were crisp, without any of the harsh attack we've come to expect from many powered PA speakers. A TE model 808 sounded just as fine, but with a slightly more prominent midrange. Just for fun, I plugged in my P-bass and the Everse handled it effortlessly – no hint of bottom end breakup, just a smooth bass tone with a lot more top end sparkle. I then used the built-in 7-band graphic to dial down the treble and switched to the middle position (P and J pickups together) for a woody upright tone. And my fretless Stingray sounded amazing with this setting.

Vocals, of course, excel through the Everse. As a portable, all-in-one box for the singer-songwriter, this is ideal. The sound is full and rich: the vocals are articulate and the acoustic guitar has a sweet woody tone. For the performer who plays keyboards, I plugged in a Roland RD700 (I know: this is a guitar mag, you don't care, I don't blame you) and the Everse handled all those critical low notes perfectly, and the vocals still cut through the keyboard's midrange. The two principal channels, each with a phono/XLR combo jack, provide the main interface while the stereo mini jack input handles backing tracks, drum machines, etc., or the between-sets iPad music. All of the volume settings are displayed in real time on the LCD panel next to the master volume, which is also the effects control (depress the volume

knob for a moment to access the other functions. The controls are so-o-o simple and intuitive, and making changes on the fly is a snap.

If you need a battery powered system, you've come to the right place. The Everse battery will last six hours when the amp is running flat out, or 12 hours at a more appropriate volume. Not only that, the Everse is "weatherised" – EV's term for water resistance. I'm not sure that I'd be doing a lot of gigs in the rain but at least it's reassuring that they've planned for a splash or two. The built-in effects are designed for the singer-songwriter, so there's no unnecessary stuff that some companies include to fill out the number ("Wow! 732 on-board effects!!!"), so you don't pay for any redundant aural bling that you'll never use.

The Electro-Voice Everse 12 is value plus. It has all the power you'd want, and with plenty of tonal control and sensible effect options. You can Bluetooth a pair for stereo, or use one as a monitor (it has two lay back angles) for those noisier pub gigs. Like everything that EV makes, the Everse is built to last. Old style engineering meets new technology: pick it up, it feels solid, it feels confident, it feels right. 🎵

guitar VERDICT

In the 21st century when everything is disposable, we rarely see electronics designed and built this well. These Everse cabs will be around for a long time.

- 🟢 High quality audio.
- 🟢 Plenty of power.
- 🟢 Simple to operate.
- 🟢 Lightweight.
- 🔴 None.

JANDS

Web: jands.com.au

RRP: \$2,099

**WHERE'S IT
MADE, AGAIN?**

We've already made parallels to Epiphone's DG-335 here, and that's because both are semi-acoustic signature models coming in at higher price points than we're used to from the Far East. This is due to many factors – a global pandemic, multiple wars, shipping piracy and global inflation being a few – but it's not going away. With a change in origin has also come a change in spec, with more premium features and third-party additions to our guitars coming as standard. The question is, if it plays and sounds as you'd expect, how important is a guitar's place-of-build to your buying decision?

**FENDER TOM
DELONGE
STARCASTER****BODY:** Laminated maple**NECK:** Roasted maple, lacquered**SCALE:** 25.5"**FINGERBOARD:**

Rosewood

FRETS: 22**PICKUPS:** Seymour Duncan SH-5 (ceramic)**CONTROLS:** Volume (with treble-bleed circuit)**HARDWARE:** Fender locking tuners, adjustable bridge, chrome**FINISH:** Surf Green (pictured), Shoreline Gold, Olympic White, Shell Pink

Fender Tom DeLonge Starcaster

DeLonge's second signature model in a year takes the form of Fender's offset, semi-acoustic classic.

Review by **Stuart Williams**

It's been 25 years since Blink-182 rocketed to global success with third album, *Enema Of The State*. Somewhere between the poo jokes, zany bants and persistent nudity, Tom DeLonge also managed to forge a path as a hugely influential guitar hero to a generation. As is often the case, the key to his success is simplicity – hooky riffs, full of melody and harmony, and he's consistently played them on guitars with a similar ethos. Last year, Fender reissued DeLonge's sought-after Stratocaster: a single-pickup take on the Strat finished in retro colours. But to fully understand his latest model, we need to rewind a couple of decades to his 'grown-up' transition to a Gibson ES-335. Subsequently issued as an Epiphone version in 2008, before being discontinued five years ago, the stage is now set for DeLonge's latest signature guitar – the Fender Tom DeLonge Starcaster.

The Starcaster was Fender's answer to bigger-bodied semi-acoustics, first introduced in the mid-'70s and finding favour with a host of players from Leo Nocentelli of New Orleans funkateers The Meters through to Martin Gore of synth-goths Depeche

Mode. Radiohead's Johnny Greenwood kept the Starcaster alive in the '90s, and more recently, the guitar with one of the most unwieldy headstocks in rock has most often been attributed to The Killers' Dave Keuning. Fender released the Modern Player Starcaster in 2013, with Squier-branded Classic Vibe and Contemporary versions following in the years since.

Which brings us to now. DeLonge's iteration of the Starcaster hails from Indonesia, clocking in at just under the price of his Mexican-made Strat. It maintains the familiarity of the offset, semi-hollow body, but nearly everything else is up for grabs. Starting with that headstock. Gone is the wavy, scrolling, bevelled shape; in its place is a much more understated Strat 'stock, which makes us a lot less nervous about bumping into things while we review it. Which is just as well, because the C-shaped neck is a thing of beauty: dark, roasted maple under a coat of glossy lacquer that wouldn't look out of place on the dashboard of your grandad's Jag. But here, its deep, walnut-ish vibe is met with a rosewood fingerboard, together contrasting with the matte Surf

Green finish of our review model beautifully. To the back, there's a set of Fender locking tuners for speedy string changes and (hopefully) rock-solid tuning tension, while at the other end sits a Fender Adjusto-Matic bridge and tailpiece.

Given DeLonge's previous form, it should come as no surprise that this guitar is fitted with a single humbucker in the bridge position – a Seymour Duncan SH-5, known for its medium-output, all-rounder performance for everything from blues to hard rock and metal. In turn, it's wired to a solitary volume control which is also equipped with a treble-bleed circuit in order to preserve your high-end when the volume knob is rolled down. Electronically, that's it; there's no tone control, no switching (because there's no alternative position to select), and the humbucker remains in its full dual-coil state.

On paper, it's quite the departure from the quirky guitar of the '70s, but as a signature model, we view that as a good thing. Finish-wise, it looks great, spare a couple of slightly untidy bits of paintwork around the neck and unbound f-holes. The setup is low, but surprisingly, buzz-free, and those frets come highly polished for a silky glide when bending strings. This is furthered by the fact that the neck features a 12" radius, stopping our notes from choking out. It's all very much 'Strat'-feeling, rather than aping a classic semi-acoustic neck feel.

Tonally, it's something to behold. With only one pickup, we were expecting it to be a one-trick pony, and while we can't say that it's going to do everything, it does have a surprising amount of mileage. That's largely thanks to the treble-bleed circuit. Played clean, we get a solid pluck out of our notes, and while reducing the volume softens this slightly, the clarity is still there due to the fact that the treble frequencies aren't filtered out. Under gain, this guitar has bite. Powerchords come out with aggression followed by a meaty chunk, and Tom's signature arpeggiated riffs chime through clearly with a little crunch.

There's always a conundrum with signature models, in that they need to reflect the artist whose name they bear, and in that sense can't be criticised for being 'niche'. This model nails the brief, and does so with excellent sound quality and playability. It's not a jack-of-many-trades model in the way that Epiphone's DG-335 is, and nor does it claim to be. It's a bare-bones rock guitar designed for energetic playing, and if you're from the school of 'plug in, turn up', without getting fussy with your controls, you're going to love it.

guitar VERDICT

With interactive changes to the format that feel big in practice, this signature Starcaster walks the line between source material authenticity and a respect for the artist that inspired it.

- ▲ Welcome headstock refinements
- ▲ More tone than meets the eyes
- ♥ Simplified take on the old Starcaster may not gel with some players

FENDER

Web: www.fender.com





Epiphone Dave Grohl's Trini Lopez-tinged DG-335

Let's see if it can punch above the logo. Review by **Stuart Williams**

Since Dave Grohl made his post-Nirvana debut with Foo Fighters in 1995, there have been multiple eras of his favoured onstage guitars, with the common thread being that they're more often than not an iteration of the classic Gibson dual-humbucker format – from the Les Paul Standards and Customs, Explorers and SGs, to the occasional Firebird. One of the few breaks in this chain came in the early Noughties around the band's fourth album, *One By One*, where he briefly became associated with his Ampeg Dan Armstrong, temporarily introducing a whole new generation to the revered see-through Lucite model before moving back to his familiar Gibsons.

In 2007 came the biggest constant for Grohl: the Gibson DG-335. It's this guitar that we've seen him playing most often – in fact, pretty much exclusively – since its introduction. Gibson issued it in a limited run of 200 the same year and it's subsequently seen further runs periodically since, including an all-black and a gold version. On the used market, these guitars command high prices (or, at least, high asking prices),

with current listings pushing upwards of \$30 grand.

For those of us who can't drop part of a house deposit on a signature guitar, however, comes the Epiphone DG-335. First, there's a little more to the backstory of how an ES-335 came to be the backbone of one of the biggest rock bands in the world.

You might be aware that back in 1992 Dave Grohl was the drummer in another Biggest Band On The Planet. While on tour with Nirvana, he picked up a 1967 Gibson Trini Lopez Standard (Gibson also produced the fully-hollow Trini Lopez Deluxe, which was based on the Barney Kessel). The Standard was ES-335-like in design, but here the semi-hollow body featured diamond-shaped soundholes, split-diamond inlays, a six-in-a-line headstock similar to a Firebird, and the strings were anchored by a trapeze tailpiece, rather than a stopbar.

Grohl's Cherry Trini Lopez became, and remained, his go-to studio guitar. Why is this important? Well, it's this guitar that informs many of the distinctive features of Grohl's Gibson and now Epiphone signature model. The soundholes, inlays and headstock are all directly derived from the Trini Lopez Standard, and the Epiphone

DG-335 is currently the only guitar in the Gibson stable to offer all of these in the Grohl configuration.

The body is made from layered maple/poplar and centre-blocked maple. A one-piece mahogany neck is glued on and fitted with a laurel fingerboard, rather than its Gibson counterpart's rosewood. Obviously, it's in the unmistakable Pelham Blue finish, but for the Epiphone version, the nitrocellulose finish gives way to polyurethane. Double-binding highlights the outline on both sides, the fingerboard and the soundholes. Of course, the six-in-a-line headstock is present and correct, stocked with Grover Mini Rotomatics, and to the back of the headstock sits the obligatory signature, which is also reproduced on the included hardcase.

But there's a pair of not-so-secret weapons fitted, too, and they account for nearly 25 per cent of the guitar's retail price: Gibson USA Burstbuckers. There's a Burstbucker 2 in the neck position, with a Burstbucker 3 at the bridge, both featuring Alnico II magnets, with the 2 being the 'mid-powered' model in the core trio of Burstbuckers, while the 3 is overwound and slightly hotter. In addition to this, Epiphone has beefed up the internals, with CTS pots, Mallory capacitors and a Switchcraft three-way selector. Keen-eyed Grohl fans will have already worked out that these are the same pickups that were fitted in the Gibson version, giving us the electronic firepower of a much pricier guitar.

Once the initial familiarity of the visual details has settled, the first thing you'll notice is the feel of the neck. It's what Epiphone calls an 'elliptical C' shape and it's exclusive to the DG-335. It's chunky, with a taste of a 50s-style profile, but without being quite so clubby, and to our hands it's quite different from that of, say, a common SlimTaper. In practice, it's a great-feeling all-rounder that leans towards Grohl's heartland rhythm playing, but it's also perfectly comfortable for playing lead lines further up the neck. It's worth noting that on a strap it does have a slight neck-heavy pull, but given the mostly empty body, it's to be expected.

The Burstbuckers pay their way tonally, too. It's an acoustically vibrant guitar and that translates most through the neck pickup. Played clean, we get a piano-like response: attack, followed by a big woody, slightly bass-heavy sound. Under gain, open chords on the neck pickup can be a little woolly, but, conversely, this translates to thick lead sounds at the same setting. The bridge pickup has a much more 'studio' response, there's more honk and punch in the mids and less build up of lower frequencies, and we imagine this is where a lot of potential owners of this guitar will spend the majority of their time.

Foo Fighters guitar tones are hardly complex, but then simplicity is also arguably a place that provides little to no hiding places. We tried the DG through multiple valve amps, hardware modellers and plug-ins, and with a few tweaks of the gain and EQ, it was quick and easy to dial in sounds that were very close to the recordings. 🎧

guitar VERDICT

Visually, it's a Dave Grohl replica, but, tonally, it's 'classic ES-335' with added firepower beyond what we'd normally get from Epiphone, which happens to nail the sounds you'd expect. .

- 🟢 Look, playability and sound are exactly as you'd hope
- 🟢 Capable of a lot more than Foo Fighters
- 🔴 Slightly headstock-heavy
- 🔴 A rosewood fingerboard would be nice at this price

EPIPHONE

Web: www.epiphone.com

EVH SA-126 Special

Hard rockin' solidbody meets semi-acoustic. Review by **Chris Gill**

Edward Van Halen named his Wolfgang model signature guitars after his son. Now that Wolf has conceived his own EVH signature guitar, the SA-126 Special, he has returned the tribute by naming the model number after Edward's January 26 birthdate.

Representing a new chapter in the evolution and future of the EVH brand, the SA-126 Special is Wolfgang Van Halen's brain child and the company's first guitar developed without input from Ed, although the elder Van Halen's spirit is present in the meticulous attention to detail in every aspect of the guitar's design. Like Ed did with the original EVH Wolfgang, Wolf subjected the SA-126 to a prolonged period of rigorous road testing, playing a variety of prototypes with his band Mammoth WVH. It took more than two years for the SA-126 Special to reach the market, and the dedication behind the project truly shows in the final product.

The SA-126 semi-acoustic electric is a truly original model featuring numerous innovative details. Its construction is particularly individualistic. The body starts with a slab of mahogany with large acoustic chambers carved on either side of a partially raised section in the center running from the neck joint to the bottom strap pin.

A "belly" contour is also carved out of the back to enhance playing comfort.

The flat maple top has a similar partially raised interior block carved down the center, with the "wings" on either side shaved down to about an 1/8-inch thickness. The top also has a single distinctive "E" hole cut out of the bass bout.

A slab of basswood is sandwiched in between the mahogany body and maple top center blocks, providing a lightweight, highly resonant conduit for top vibrations to transfer to the back. Each of the mahogany, basswood and maple center block sections appear to be equally thick (slightly more than 1/2-inch each — the body measures 1.75 inches deep).

With its asymmetrical design, the body looks quite large. Actually, it has about the same overall body volume (in terms of dimensions, not acoustic properties) as a 335-style guitar, but its upper bass bout cutaway horn extends further up the neck while the body's width is about one inch narrower, making it better balanced and more comfortable to play than an old school semi-hollow.

Whereas traditional semi-hollow electrics with humbuckers usually have pickups floating in mounting rings, the SA-126's bridge and neck humbuckers are mounted directly to the body's center block with four screws, and the mounting rings seen here are purely cosmetic. Designed by

industry veteran Tim Shaw, the EVH SA-126 bridge and neck pickups are entirely new designs. These pickups sound quite bold and assertive, yet they deliver stellar definition and clarity whether played through a blazing high-gain amp with everything turned up to 11 or through a clean amp with the guitar's volume controls backed off. The bridge pickup is slightly hotter and brighter than the separately voiced neck humbucker.

The SA-126 features a two-piece mahogany bolt-on neck with an ebony fingerboard, 22 jumbo frets, 24.75-inch scale and 12-16-inch compound radius. The neck has a slim EVH modified "C" shape profile that feels similar to the neck on the EVH Wolfgang USA. The 3x3 headstock is slightly larger than a traditional Gibson "open book" headstock, with added mass that delivers enhanced resonance, dynamic response and tonal body.

Other notable features include a large EVH

Harmonica bridge with stop tailpiece, EVH Keystone tuners, Graph Tech TUSQ nut, triple block fretboard inlays, single-ply bound headstock, 5-ply body binding, a 3-way pickup switch and individual volume and tone controls for each pickup with Fender amp-style skirted, numbered black plastic knobs.

"Compared to several classic electrics, its tone is the sonic equivalent of a 4K Ultra HD movie while the others are like a Standard Definition DVD"

Sonically, the SA-126 Special is an aggressive beast. Compared to several classic electrics, its tone is the sonic equivalent of a 4K Ultra HD movie while the others are like a Standard Definition DVD. There's a distinctive Strat-like crystalline upper midrange that's seamlessly layered with the throaty lower mid growl of a Les Paul/335 hybrid and the tight low-end punch of an Explorer. The attack is instantaneous and punchy when played hard, transforming to a sweet swell with a lighter touch. The SA-126 can even deliver genuine country twang with the volume controls backed down. Surprisingly for hollow chambered guitar, it remains feedback free even when using an amp dialed to extreme high gain and high volume settings. 🎸

guitar VERDICT

The EVH SA-126 Special is an impressively versatile electric that combines the dynamic responsiveness and "air" of a semi-acoustic with aggressive character and punch that outshines many solidbody designs, making it ideal for a comprehensive range of musical styles.

🎸 The SA-126 humbucking pickups deliver an impressively wide range of tones; unique mahogany/basswood/maple center block provides stellar dynamic responsiveness and touch-sensitivity.

❤️ Pickup height is moderately adjustable

EVH

Web: EVHgear.com

RRP: \$2,999



RRP: \$1,999

Yamaha Pacifica Standard Plus PACS+12M

Yamaha's long-running doublecut finally gets a makeover.

Review by **Dave Burrluck**

Unlike the majority of large-scale manufacturers, Yamaha doesn't flood the market with new guitar models every five minutes. Last year's Revstar Mk II models came some seven years after the original line was launched, and at the start of this year, the first new Pacifica guitars were announced over a decade after any previous introductions.

Now, the Pacifica dates back to 1990, designed by the small team at then-new Hollywood based R&D centre. It started life as a high-end 'SuperStrat' and achieved colossal sales in the start-up 112 format, introduced around three years later, and still being made today. The two new models fit in at the top of the long-running range: the Standard Plus, on review here, is made in Yamaha's huge Indonesian factory; the much pricier new Professional model in smaller numbers in Hamamatsu, Japan. While those locations explain some of the considerable price difference, we could argue that the Standard Plus is something of a bargain as its specification is virtually identical to the Professional model.

With its sleek design and typically airier cutaways than a Stratocaster, the new models are tweaked with a nicely contoured heel and a curved forearm contour – the previous models have a more angular bevel. Yamaha employ their Acoustic Design process in the design – which "utilises scientific processes such as 3D modelling to devise wood-routing techniques that increase body resonance and improve the transfer of vibrations between neck and body" – resulting in small channels cut into the body under the new Revstar-inspired scratchplate and an added brace in the rear control cavity. Weight is good for the style, too, at just over 8lbs.

The slab-sawn maple neck is more standard – both models have a choice of maple or rosewood fingerboard – and while the Professional employs a compound fingerboard radius, the Standard Plus has a single 13.75" camber. Both models also sport stainless steel frets along with the same industry standard Gotoh 510 vibrato and rear-locking tuners.

If the chassis is quite superb, the new Reflectone pickups certainly don't let the side down. The



single-coils almost sound as if you've applied some post-recording production to enhance the classic Stratocaster's voice: big basses, clear present highs but no sharp edges anywhere. These are perfect for classic or modern funk, pristine pop and a lot more. The bridge humbucker is well matched with a little more heat and a fuller midrange but not the over-egged high-output 'bucker that you find on many HSS guitars. There's a pull switch on the tone that splits the humbucker, voicing the neck-facing slug coil, that certainly cleans up the bridge and middle mix and on its own avoids sounding over-thin: another option. Even the volume control is considered, using a treble bleed circuit that keeps the clarity as you wind it down.

Historically, Pacificas have always had quite a narrow neck width: these increase that slightly – our Standard Plus measures a more regular 42.8mm at the nut – which is welcome, but the 'slim C' profile is exactly that and, yes, if you like big V's or baseball bat shapes you probably won't be at home here. But there's a very mainstream feel and slim depth that, along with a great step-up, makes for effortless playing.

That Gotoh vibrato is used by a lot of major brands and – after standard string stretching – holds its tuning really well, with plenty of travel for standard use rather than dive-bombing antics.

But there must be something we don't like, right? To be honest, for the style, it's a near perfect. Yes, there's plenty of competition from the usual suspects, and some might be thinking that the price, certainly to the higher end of other Indonesian-made guitars, is steep. Yet this Standard Plus looks, feels and sounds thoroughly professional. It's fit for purpose both as a superb and stable live tool or rather good for your recordings: a perfect match for modellers like Helix, which, as Line 6 is a Yamaha-owned brand, is hardly surprising.

So, no, Yamaha doesn't flood the market with new guitars, but when they're this good, you can see why. A considered design with feel and sounds to match. 

guitar **VERDICT**

This model may face stiff competition on the market, but the Standard Plus is an elegant, professional and gorgeously playable take on Yamaha's famed SuperStrat instrument.

- ▲ Great price
- ▲ Pickups offer rich and versatile sounds
- ▲ Gorgeous
- ▼ Narrow neck isn't for everyone

YAMAHA

Web: au.yamaha.com



RRP: \$6,549

Martin GPCe Inception Maple

Martin shapes the future of tonewood to brilliant effect. Review by **Paul Riario**

When you introduce a new acoustic with a name like “Inception,” it stirs up at least one pressing question about a movie with the same name — at least for me. That said, I quickly found out Inception isn’t some fanciful collaboration between director Christopher Nolan and Martin Guitar for an instrument that manipulatively invades your dreams. Instead, it’s an acoustic that bears an imaginative design using sustainably harvested tonewoods, and if anything, might ideally “plant” some genuine musical inspiration in you with its warmly focused response.

So what is the idea behind the Inception Maple? It’s essentially Martin Guitar’s fresh approach in using domestic tonewoods to create a uniquely voiced acoustic geared toward singer-songwriter players and fingerstylists. What makes it instantly inviting is the fact that it arrives in Martin’s comfortably compact “Grand Performance” GP-body shape fashioned with a generous cutaway and onboard LR Baggs Anthem electronics. Of the Inception’s many focal points, what stands out is its predominantly maple construction — hence its moniker, the Inception Maple — found along its sides and visually striking three-piece back made of maple along with a prodigious centerpiece wedge of black walnut. In addition, an FSC-certified European spruce top, black walnut for the neck and headplate and a black walnut fingerboard adorned with hex arrow inlays made of maple, round out the rest of the guitar. Martin went to great lengths

to keep the Inception primarily a wood instrument, as evidenced by its tidy walnut binding and lack of plastic, pearl or abalone adornments. Finally, it all comes together in an arresting Amber Fade Sunburst in an ultra-thin satin finish.

Considering that traditional tonewoods (like mahogany and rosewood) not only come at a premium cost but might not be as readily available in the future, Martin’s concentrated effort to source prevalent North American hardwoods such as maple and walnut for the Inception is a smart move in building a new generation of acoustics using sustainable woods. However, as a tonewood, maple leans toward brighter dynamics and a more immediate response, and for that, Martin put in a great deal of analysis and measurement in broadening maple’s inherent sonic properties to achieve an enriching new voice while also embracing that distinctive “Martin tone.” To get there, an elaborate system was implemented under the top and body to expand the dynamic range of the Inception. Using lasers to weight-relieve the hexagonal honeycomb “skeletonized” X-bracing and carving “sonic” tone channels around each brace allows the top to vibrate even more freely without compromising the guitar’s structural stability. Moreover, the widest area of the walnut back wedge is deliberately positioned below the guitar’s black walnut bridge to reflect the energy from the top for increased bass response and warmth in the Inception’s tone.

What this all adds up to from Martin’s spectral analysis is that the Inception’s skeletonized bracing increases sustain while its sonic channeling increases amplitude. While I don’t dispute the results, I’m not sure there’s that much of a difference there compared to other Martin acoustics I own. Regardless, most of us just want to know what the Inception Maple sounds and feels like, which I can tell you, is quite remarkable. Martin intended to make “maple sound better than it ever has” and undoubtedly, the Inception succeeds in removing the strident and compressed overtones of maple and replaces it with a softer brightness, ringing midrange and a firm bass as you strum through cowboy chords. It’s certainly a louder Martin guitar that belies its GP-body size and powerfully projects a crisp and airy tone with a snappy response. For fingerstyle playing, the Inception maintains a focused balance between the bass and treble registers where each note is heard cleanly. Another highlight for me is that the Inception is set up with Martin’s Kovar strings and a low action similar to Martin’s SC-series of acoustics that feels instantly like your favorite electric, and combined with its modified low oval neck profile and fantastic fretwork, makes playing the Inception worth your time. **BUY**

guitar
MARTIN

VERDICT

Does the Inception offer the tonal complexity of some of Martin’s Authentic models? No, but that was never the intention. For me, I find the Inception is an acoustic to be experienced because I believe its finely-tuned voice will resonate among many players.

- ▲ USA-made
- ▲ Strong projection and added warmth in a maple and black walnut constructed acoustic
- ▲ GP-body style and modified low oval neck profile offer player comfort and electric playability
- ▲ Top-of-the-line LR Baggs Anthem electronics
- ♥ Expensive
- ♥ Some players may prefer traditional tonewoods



MARTIN GUITAR

Web: martinguitar.com

Taylor 222ce-K DLX

Koa for the masses, but it's still costly.

Review by **Chris Gill**

RRP: \$3,299

Koa is a very attractive-looking tone wood that is commonly associated with high-end models or expensive custom or boutique instruments. Because of its higher cost, many guitarists haven't experienced koa's distinctive tonal qualities, which are sort of a "goldilocks" combo of the powerful bass of rosewood, sweet, warm mids of mahogany and brilliance of maple.

Taylor, which offers more koa models than any of the other major acoustic guitar companies, is now making full-size guitars with tops, backs and sides made of Hawaiian koa more accessible to the masses with the introduction of two new 200 series guitars — the 222ce-K DLX Grand Concert and 224ce-K DLX Grand Auditorium — that cost almost half the price of their 700 series koa instruments, which previously were Taylor's lowest priced full-size koa guitars.

We looked at the 222ce-K DLX, which is basically identical to the 224ce-K DLX with the exception of its smaller Grand Concert body dimensions and shorter scale length. In addition to its attractively striped Hawaiian solid koa top and layered koa back and sides with a shaded edgeburst gloss finish, the 222ce-K DLX features a neo-tropical mahogany neck with a matte finish, West African Crelicam ebony fingerboard, 24 7/8-inch scale length and 20 medium-tall frets

that are all easily accessible thanks to the Venetian cutaway.

The "DLX" means the guitar is adorned with deluxe appointments that include a gloss body finish, faux pearl Sentinel fretboard inlays and single-ring rosette, black top and back binding and gold hardware. It's also equipped with Taylor's acclaimed Expression System 2 electronics with side-mounted volume, treble and bass controls and behind-the-saddle pickup with three sensors. And this DLX model arrives in a Taylor deluxe hardshell case.

With its compact Grand Concert body that measures about 15 inches across the lower bout and X bracing, the 222ce-K DLX provides a well-balanced overall tone that is particularly well-suited for fingerstyle playing. The treble has a sweet, alluring chime that accentuates upper spectrum harmonics but never sounds thin — a quality that also comes through quite nicely via the Expression System 2 electronics when amplified. The warm, full midrange and focused bass will certainly please traditionalists, and thanks to the aging characteristics of koa the sound will continue to become sweeter and warmer the more it's played over the years.

The neck's shallow C-shaped profile is ideally comfortable for fingerstyle players, particularly

those who anchor their thumbs in the center of the neck. Thanks to the 1.6875-inch nut width, the strings are comfortably placed far enough apart for clean fretting yet close enough to facilitate fast chord changes without too much stretching.

Typical of all Taylor guitars from the entry-level Baby and GS Mini models through their high-end Builder's Edition models, the construction and attention to detail is immaculate. Although the 222ce-K DLX may cost twice as much as its Sitka spruce/walnut counterpart the 212ce, the koa version's beauty is much more than skin deep and the upgrade is worth the price if you're a discriminating fingerstyle player who can appreciate its more intriguing and sonically complex character. 

guitar **VERDICT**

By offering a true all-koa body guitar at a significantly reduced price, Taylor has made it easier than ever for guitarists to experience the alluring "goldilocks" tonal qualities of a koa acoustic.

- ▲ Gorgeous Hawaiian koa top, back and sides
- ▲ well-balanced tonal personality that is ideal for fingerstyle playing
- ▲ Venetian cutaway provides unrestricted access to upper frets
- ▲ Very affordable koa model. tones
- ♥ Costs twice as much as the 212ce and \$1,000 more than the comparable 212ce Plus.

"The warm, full midrange and focused bass will certainly please traditionalists, and thanks to the aging characteristics of koa the sound will continue to become sweeter and warmer the more it's played over the years."

TAYLOR GUITARS

Web: taylorguitars.com



RRP: \$829

Line 6 Catalyst CX 100 combo

A modeling amp for the modern player. Review by **Dave Hunter**

In updating its Catalyst combo lineup, introduced a few years back with the new-and-improved CX range, Line 6 reminds us that it was born as a modeling amp company. The AxSys, FlexTone and Spider released in the early years following the company's birth in 1996 provided many players with their first taste of digital amp modeling. While many would agree those products have been far outshone by the tones and capabilities of more compact units today, there's no denying Line 6 provided players with an aural glimpse of what a fully digitized guitar-tone future might sound like.

The CX 100 is a 100-watt, 1x12 combo, and is flanked by the smaller 60-watt 1x12 CX 60 and larger 200-watt 2x12 CX 200. While the range doesn't bring Line 6 entirely full circle to the company's beginnings, it does acknowledge that a faction of guitarists remain more comfortable using traditional-looking amps.

The amp's front end is derived from Line 6's Helix amp-and-effects processing platform and includes 12 amp voicings and 24 HX-quality effects in four categories: Delay, Modulation, Pitch/Filter and Reverb. The amp models run the gamut from clean to crunch to high-gain, and they feature many Helix favorites, such as the Aristocrat (based on a Dumble Overdrive Special), the Carillon (Vox), the 2204 MOD (Marshall), and the contemporary metal/shred-certified models Oblivion and Badonk. When used with Line 6's basic two-button LFS2 channel switcher (sold separately), the combo's two-channel architecture allows you to store and select two amps paired with up to two effects at a time. While accessing and editing the models on the amp is initially a little confusing, the manual explains the procedure well and it becomes second nature after a few edits, saves and recalls.

A six-position selector knob rotates between Clean, Boutique, Chime, Crunch, Dynamic and High Gain settings, each of which can be configured to access two different amp banks, for a total of 12. Any of these can be adjusted via the gain, bass, mid, treble, presence and channel volume controls — and tweaked with effects and boost, if you desire — and saved for later recall by giving a long press to either the ChA or ChB button. Similarly, Effect 1 and 2 wet/depth controls and

their related on/off/edit push buttons let you select from between the 24 offerings in that department. The master control sets the global output level regardless of which preset or channel is selected, and it also governs headphone volume. Alternatively, you can engage Manual mode and simply use the Catalyst as a traditional amp that performs according to where you set the knobs.

In addition, a MIDI controller can be connected via the back panel to select from 12 presets loaded into six slots each in ChA and ChB and to control a plethora of functions using MIDI CC (control change) messages. All of this begs the question, "How do you program so many presets into the thing using such basic front-panel controls?" Answer: Line 6 provides a Catalyst Edit app for use on Mac and Windows computers and iOS and Android mobile devices.

The app opens up a range of bonus parameters, including cabinet and mic selections, which are only accessible via the editing software — although it's worth noting that these are only applied to the DI, headphone and USB outs, not the combo's onboard speaker, which is intended to provide that "guitar cab" live tone. The app provides access to three cabs (1x12, 2x12 and 4x12) and 16 mics, including most of the usual suspects in the dynamic, condenser and ribbon range.

The amp's back panel has an output power switch for mute, 1/2-watt, 50-watt, and full 100-watt settings. This is followed by a USB-B port, a five-pin MIDI input, a foot-switch jack, a 1/8-inch aux in, a 1/4-inch phones out, an FX loop with send and return and mode switch (Loop/Power Amp In), and an XLR DI output with ground-lift switch. When the loop is in Power Amp In mode, its return can receive another modeler's output, allowing the Catalyst CX 100 to act as a powered cab without engaging its own modeling stages. The USB-B port enables Catalyst Edit connections and use of the amp as a recording interface to send a 24-bit/44.1kHz or 48kHz signal to your DAW and/or receive audio signal to monitor through the headphones or the speaker.

It's all swaddled in a combo cab that measures 22 by 20 by 10.3 inches and weighs a mere 32 pounds. Made from fiberboard (MDF), the cabinet is open-back in the extreme, with just a four-inch panel at the bottom

covering any of the rear air space. The speaker is a 12-inch Line 6-branded HC 100 rated at 100 watts and four ohms.

Given the Catalyst CX 100's \$829 list price, it's clear compromises were made somewhere, and most of them likely revolve around the cabinet and speaker, as well as the power amp used to drive the entire rig. Obviously the amp, FX and cab-sim selections are reduced from what's offered on Helix products, which requires less processing power. But when you consider what portion of the production budget would be left for the hardware that makes this a "real" amp rather than a floor unit or plug-in software, it's easy to guess where compromises might be heard.

In use, that assumption largely plays out. Tested with a Fender Stratocaster and a Gibson ES-355, the Catalyst CX 100 pumps enough power into a rehearsal room or club stage to fully cut it as a stand-alone, two-channel amp with the standard included foot switch attached, or a more fully featured sonic Swiss Army knife with my Morningstar MC8 MIDI controller programmed for extra selections. Its amp models and effects sound decent when used as such, and at times are rather compressed, boxy and flat. Connecting my Fractal FM9 and Neural DSP Quad Cortex — both of which have several killer tones that fly in other settings — to the Catalyst CX 100 in Power Amp In mode proves that the power amp, speaker and cabinet are the culprits.

However, when played through headphones, or DI'd into studio monitors or an FRFR (Full Range, Flat Response) cab, the Helix-derived models really come into their own, with significantly greater dynamics, dimension and overall realism than the in-the-box rig allows. That's no great surprise, and it's really no major ding against the Catalyst CX 100. **DH**

guitar VERDICT

A modeling combo with highly tweakable guitar sounds and functionality at an unbelievable price. It's an impressively affordable modeling rig housed in an in-the-room combo when you need it.

▲ An impressive bundle of modeling features in an extremely affordable package

♥ Live, in-the-room sounds are compromised by budget hardware

YAMAHA

Web: au.yamaha.com

RRP: \$1,550 / \$1,795



Markbass Little Marcus 58R and MB58R 102 Pure

Markbass redefine the parameters of tone, power and portability. Review by **Steve Henderson**

The clever folks at Markbass continue to push the boundaries of what a professional bass system should deliver. In this case, it's a punchy, full-featured, gig bag-sized amp head and a lightweight, rear-ported 2x10 cab. Both are dressed in Markbass' usual orange-on-black livery, and both offer simple and practical features.

The speaker cab heralds a new direction in weight reduction – even for Markbass. The previous 2x10 record holder, the Markbass 102P, weighs in at a very portable 14.5kgs. This new 400w 2x10 cab is just 10.5kgs and is still full-featured. The 10" speakers are MB's high-powered neodymium drivers plus there's a new hi-fidelity tweeter for the super-high end. If you're after a more vintage tone, the tweeter can be easily bypassed via a rear-mounted defeat switch. Or, it can be activated but tempered with three levels of attenuation: -6db, -9db, and -15db. The differences are subtle but very effective, and much easier to set-and-forget than an attenuation knob. The MB's new composite material accounts for the weight reduction but proves no less punchy than a cab built with traditional materials. And due to its composite material, it's probably the world's first eco-friendly speaker box.



The Little Mark 58R amp head is small and super-light weight, providing 500w of everything you need and nothing you don't. At 276mm long and 83mm high, and weighing just 2kgs ("Are you kidding?" I hear you say...), it'll slip into your gig bag and then perch proportionately on the 102 PURE cab. The ins and outs are as you'd expect: jack in, XLR DI out (variable, with a ground lift), send and return jacks (pre or post assignable), stereo footswitch jack, and two output jack plus a speakon output. There's also a mute switch (can be footswitched) and an "always on" low end limiter – so you don't blow up anything with the low end thud that this amp produces. The

really cool stuff is the "Old School" knob (a sensible re-branding of their VLE knob), which progressively cuts treble, and the "Scooped" switch (a pre-set version of their VPF circuit), which dramatically cuts the mids and boosts the lows and highs – if you want to hear some serious funk popping, this is the place to go. This "classic V" setting is also footswitchable, for those who want to use it as a momentary effect.

Alternating between a Fender PJ-style bass and a fretless MusicMan StingRay, this amp/speaker recipe dishes up a

broad and even tonal palette. The lows are deep but still dynamic, and park it near a wall or baffle and those bass notes will quickly bloom around you – thanks to the rear ports. The mids have a nice presence and there's no hard knee from one range to another. The top end has as much snap or rounded sweetness as you'd like – thanks to the combination of the treble knob, the "old school" circuit, and those clever tweeter switches. The Fender's P pickup can have that classic R&R thump or an edgy scoop, while its J pickup serves up classic funk without ever being harsh. The StingRay's more hi-fi humbucker is gloriously rich and articulate through this Markbass system. Even bass chords (does anyone do that anymore?) hang together nicely because there's so much clarity in the amp and cab that the overtones find their own space. And, if you're playing a fretless (does anyone do that anymore, either?), hit that Scoop switch and get ready for some seriously woody whine.

Markbass are continually pushing the limits of both tone and technology - this head and cabinet are prime examples of this. Great tone, heaps of power, easy to lug...what more could you want. It even has an illuminated input jack so you're not fluffing around on a dark stage.

But be warned: this is a hi fidelity-type system, and that means you'll hear every little pop, squeak or whatever. So, it'll either drive you a little crazy or make you a better player. Your choice. 

guitar VERDICT

The balance of tone, punch, and clarity here is second to none, and the facilities available to create your own tone are easy to access and understand. It's a tone aficionado's amp with a working-class attitude.

- ▲ Great tone and volume.
- ▲ Pro build quality.
- ▲ Simple operation.
- ▲ Portable.

♥ None.

"Markbass are continually pushing the limits of both tone and technology - this head and cabinet are prime examples of this. Great tone, heaps of power, easy to lug...what more could you want?"

CMC MUSIC

Ph: 02 9905 2511 Web: cmcmusic.com.au



RRP: \$TBC

Peavey Classic 20 112

A simple 'n' portable tube amp for all styles. Review by **Art Thompson**

The newest member of Peavey's long-running Classic series of tube amplifiers, the Classic 20 112 is a compact affair with a birch-ply cabinet measuring just 14 by 17.25 by 7.25 inches (HxWxD) and weighing a little over 15 kilos. It's a nice-looking rig, with neatly applied tweed covering, an oxblood grille cloth with gold piping, and a chrome-plated front panel with pointer-style knobs. There are also steel corner protectors and a padded handle for easy carry.

The knob layout is straightforward. From left to right you've got reverb, treble, middle, bass, Pre (gain), Post (volume) and master volume. In addition to toggles for power and standby there's a jeweled pilot light with a pair of T.S.I. (Tube Status Indicator) LEDs. A channel-select push button is also provided. There's no indicator for it but the included foot switch has an LED for each of its two buttons.

Features on the rear panel include USB with MSDI (Microphone Simulated Direct Interface) for recording into a computer, a speaker jack with a 16-ohm/eight-ohm toggle switch, a speaker defeat switch, a 1/8-inch headphone out, an MSDI XLR out with ground-lift switch, 1/4-inch send and return jacks, a pair of 1/4-inch foot-switch jacks for channel select/boost or reverb/FX loop, an IEC power-cord receptacle, and a global-voltage selector with settings for 115 and 220–230 volts.

Taking a look inside the chassis proved slightly challenging because the back panel is not only secured by eight screws but was such a tight fit that I needed a pry bar to pop it loose. With that out of the way, it was simple to remove the steel chassis to view the boiler room, where we find most of the components on interconnected PCBs. Ceramic sockets are used for the preamp and power tubes, the resistors for the

attenuation circuit are large ceramic types, and the toggle switches for power and standby are chassis-mounted for extra strength. The power and output transformers are fairly small, but that's typical of production tube amps.

On the sonic front, it's easy to get good tones from this amp. Tested with a variety of guitars (Strat, Tele, Epiphone JB 1963 SG Custom and a PRS Dustie Waring signature), the amp delivered clean tones that were squarely in the camp of a Fender Deluxe Reverb, especially with the Classic's spring-flavored digital reverb set to three or so, to add the requisite airiness. The amp gets gritty at around four on the volume knob (depending on whether you're using humbuckers or single-coils), and things get progressively crunchier from there on, especially when boost is activated on the foot switch. With boost off, the tones remain cleaner until the amp is turned up enough to where the EL84s are bringing their own distortion into the brew. The power-attenuator switch is a useful feature here, as you can set it to one watt and get that power-tube grind at whisper levels or put it on the five-watt setting for rehearsing or playing a small room. On the 20-watt position, the Classic is loud enough for the stage and had no problem hanging with bass and drums. Conversely, you can turn the speaker off and run the amp direct into a computer (Mac/Windows) via the USB for home recording. There's also a headphone jack for silent practicing with the full sound of the amp.

To activate the lead channel, push the front-panel button or foot switch, then use the Pre control to dial in the amount of grind you want for lead and dirty rhythm, and the Post knob to set the volume at which it's delivered. The British-voiced distortion is available at any amount of sustain needed for solos and slide

playing, and you can control it from the guitar to clean things up for rhythm, or by pressing the channel or boost buttons on the foot switch to drop back to a crisp rhythm tone.

The Peavey Sheffield 12-inch speaker is a good match for this amp as it stays smooth on the top when pumping out the grind, while maintaining a good balance of crispness and warmth for clean sounds. And if you don't need to remotely switch channels, you can plug the foot switch into the lower jack on the rear panel and use it to independently toggle the reverb and FX loop on and off. This is handy in a configuration where you might choose to run distortion pedals through the clean channel to take advantage of its high headroom and keep delay, reverb and modulation effects in the loop. 

guitar VERDICT

A well-equipped combo for rock, blues, country, roots and many similar genres, the Classic 20 112 is a great addition to Peavey's lineup and a worthy choice for anyone who wants a channel-switching tube amplifier that's simple, easy to carry and delivers a lot of bang for the buck.

▲ Good range of clean and overdriven tones

▲ Compact and lightweight

♥ None

PEAVEY

Web: peavey.com

HOW I WROTE...

"BLACK WATER"

PAT SIMMONS DIPS INTO THE HISTORY OF THE DOOBIE BROTHERS' FIRST NUMBER ONE HIT.

BY GARY GRAFF

The first two singles from the Doobie Brothers' fourth album failed to catch fire. So it was a surprise when "Black Water," the third offering from 1974's *What Were Once Vices Are Now Habits*, went to number one on the Billboard Hot 100.

Originally issue as the B side to one of those failed singles — "Another Park, Another Sunday" — "Black a" was an unusual cut from a group known for rockers like "Listen to the Music," "Long Train Runnin'" and "China Grove." Its easygoing cadence, back-porch fingerpicking and images of Mississippi moons, catfish and riverboats came out of left field.

CRESCENT CITY MAGIC

Composed by band co-founder Patrick Simmons, "Black Water" sprang from a riff. "Most of our tunes begin with a riff, if they're from the guitar players," Simmons says. "That riff is the first thing I had when I was living in the Santa Cruz mountains, between Los Gatos and Santa Cruz. I played it for a long time, thinking, 'Someday I'll do something with this.'"

"Then one day in the studio, in between takes for something else, I started playing it. Our producer, Ted Templeman, pressed the talkback and asked, 'What is that?' I said, 'It's just a riff I have.' He goes, 'You should write a song with that. It's catchy.'"

"TED TEMPLEMAN ASKED, 'WHAT IS THAT? YOU SHOULD WRITE A SONG WITH THAT. IT'S CATCHY'"



The Doobie Brothers in 1974. (from left) John Hartman, Tiran Porter, Tom Johnston, Pat Simmons and Keith Knudsen.

Shortly afterward, during a week's worth of shows in New Orleans, Simmons took Templeman's advice to heart. "I thought, 'This is a really good place. I should try to come up with something,'" he explains. "I was taking the trolley that goes up by [Tulane] university to a laundromat to do some laundry. It was a sunny day, but when I got on the trolley, it started to rain. And yet it was still sunny. And I'm thinking, 'I gotta write this down: 'If it rains I don't care / Makes no difference to me / Just take that streetcar that's going uptown.' That became the second verse of the song."

"Then, as I'm doing my laundry, I'm thinking, 'What else goes with that?' I'd read *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer*... So I started thinking, 'Well, there's the Mississippi River, and they call that Black Water. I started jotting down other things — 'built me a raft / she's ready for floatin'.' And then I thought about the Mississippi moon in the sky being reflected on the river. That's the vision I was having."

"And then I remembered one of the first times I was ever in the French Quarter, I went into a bar and there was a Dixieland band playing, and I flipped. I thought, 'I'm having a drink at a bar in New Orleans and a Dixieland band's playing! So I put that in the song — 'I wanna hear some funky Dixieland.' That's how that came about."

DIXIE KICKS

Tracking the song was fairly easy, thanks to its spare arrangement, but from the start, Simmons had his heart set on adding some New Orleans flavor to it. "I originally thought we would add some Dixieland elements," he says, "a clarinet and a trombone, a trumpet or something." It was Templeman's idea to overdub a viola instead. "And I was saying, 'God, I want to do that Dixieland thing,'" Simmons recalls. "But he's the producer."

"So he put that viola on there, and I loved it. Then he says, 'I tried this other thing you should hear,' and he played the 'Dixieland' section a cappella. Suddenly, it started sounding like the Pointer Sisters, who I love. It really made the song. I was thrilled."

BLACK MAGIC

Despite the band's enthusiasm for "Black Water," Simmons says "nobody thought it was a hit. You can have an intuition about whether a song has commerciality, but that's as far as you can go, I think."

For the Doobie Brothers, the success of "Black Water" couldn't have come at a better time. Despite their earlier hits, the band was struggling to prove its durability. "It was a difficult time," Simmons concurs. "We were taking every gig, every offer to play, that we could. And I loved 'Another Park, Another Sunday.' I thought that was the most commercial thing we had, but it kind of went [makes splatting sound]. So when 'Black Water' hit, the album took on a new life. I wouldn't have guessed it would happen like that. But I love that it did." 🎵

GLADESVILLE GUITAR FACTORY



Amplified Nation | Dirty Wonderland 22W Black Croc



Henriksen | Bud 10
120W Compact Electric Amplifier



Seth Baccus | Shoreline JM H/H



Lowden | S50 Sinker Redwood/Royal Ebony

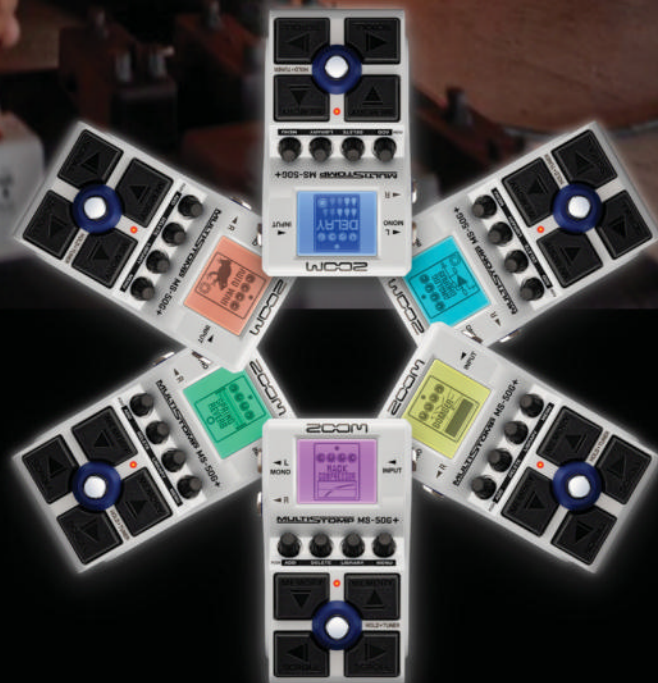
SYDNEY'S PREMIER BOUTIQUE GUITAR & FRETTED INSTRUMENT SHOP. SINCE 1972.

www.guitarfactory.net | 02 9817 2173 | [@theguitarfactory](https://www.instagram.com/theguitarfactory)

zoom

MS-50G+ STOMP

THE PEDAL YOUR BOARD HAS BEEN WAITING FOR



WE'RE FOR CREATORS

zoom

ZOOMCORP.COM