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Seven pages on
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blues scale licks

INTERVIEWED

Merpire | **Thin Lizzy**
Alien Weaponry
Zakk Wylde

THE RISE
& RISE
OF THE
GIBSON SG



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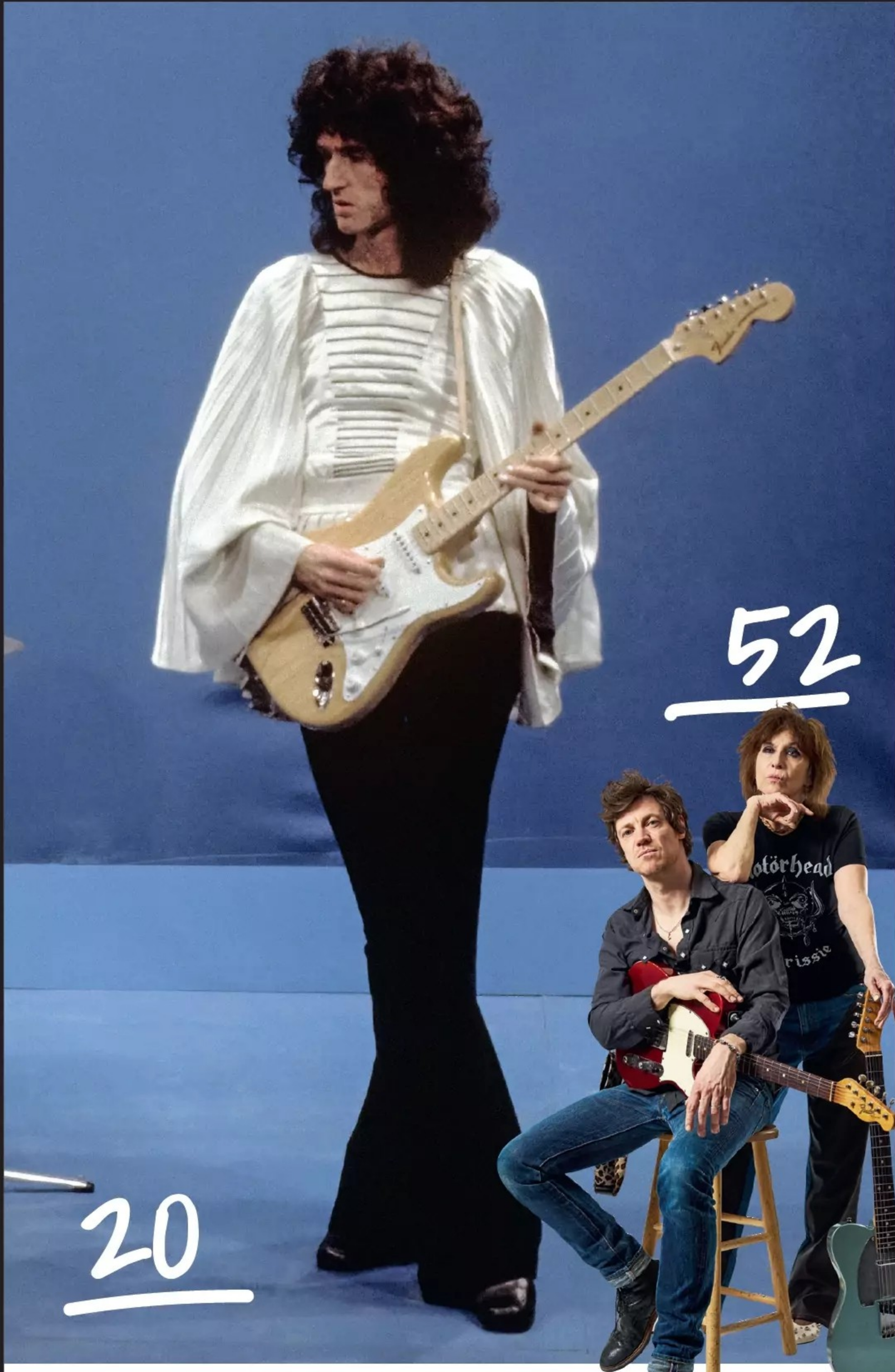


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KEITH URBAN OFFERS FIRST LOOK AT HIS TELE-INSPIRED PRS SIGNATURE MODEL

Keith Urban provided details on his forthcoming signature guitar he's developing with Paul Reed Smith – and while it might be inspired by his favourite Telecaster, this looks like it is going to be something completely different. And how could it not be? It's a semi-hollow electric inspired by a Custom Shop three-pickup Telecaster named Clarence that survived the Nashville floods, and its f-hole is inspired by Urban's tattoo.

In September 2024, Urban told Guitar World that he actually sent Smith a picture of his tattoo and asked him to design the f-hole from that. "I like a little bit of a hollowbody, so it's got a little bit of that in there," he said. "We have a customized f-hole shape that is modeled after the phoenix tattoo on my forearm."

In an interview with Premier Guitar, Urban lets us see exactly what he meant – and it's pretty cool. His prototype also has its own custom tint and floss finish, and we've now got some firm details. It will have a swamp ash body, figured maple top, with a maple neck and maple fingerboard. Urban says it feels good. The weight is bang-on. The neck remains a work in progress.

So what's Urban looking for from an electric guitar? After seeing John Mayer with his 'Dead Spec' Silver Sky, he wanted something similar, i.e. a guitar that is versatile enough to handle an entire set.

"This PRS is an ongoing project. It started from me wanting to see if I could get a guitar that I could lean on most of the night," says Urban. "So it had the versatility I needed, and a better tonal response than my Telecaster I've bonded with."

It sounds like there will be a few more revisions, but Urban assures us that this will be a production model. If it sounds better than his Clarence Custom Shop Tele, it'll be down to a set of pickups that Urban likens to a PAFs, and the 500K volume and 250K tone pots from Riboloff Engineering.

Words by Jonathan Horsley



A STOLEN ROLLING STONES '59 LES PAUL THAT HAS BEEN MISSING SINCE 1972 HAS SURFACED – IN A MUSEUM

The Met's new exhibition of guitars has become the center of international intrigue, after a 1959 Les Paul Standard that had been stolen from Rolling Stones guitarist Mick Taylor in the early 1970s mysteriously re-surfaced as part of the collection.

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art announced that it had come into the possession of a 500-strong arsenal of guitars back in May. Included in the hefty donation was a Bigsby-loaded 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard used by Keith Richards during the band's legendary appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. Having seen the news of the guitar's arrival at the Met, Taylor's manager has now revealed that the guitar's prominence goes beyond that show, sharing previously unknown details about the guitar.

Taylor had bought the guitar from Richards in 1967 as he prepared to join John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. However, a few years later, after Taylor then joined the Stones in 1969, the guitar was stolen in 1972 during the recording of Exile on Main Street. It was stolen from Villa Nellcôte, a sprawling mansion in Côte d'Azur, and was said to have been carried out by local drug dealers. Nine guitars ultimately went missing, alongside a bass guitar belonging to Bill Wyman and Bobby Keys' saxophone.

A source claims, "Taylor says he never received compensation for the theft and is mystified as to how his property found its way into the Met's collection."

Avid gear collector, Dirk Ziff, was behind the Met's new donation, which has been in the works since 1987. The instruments date between 1920 and 1970, with guitars that once belonged to notable players including Roy Rogers and Mississippi John Hurt among them. Its existence, up until May, had been kept secret for decades.

Words by Phil Weller



MOOER'S F15i LOOKS TO SET A NEW BENCHMARK FOR DESKTOP MODELING AMPS

Mooer is no stranger to product launches that look to drag traditional guitar gear into the modern era, and its F15i Intelligent Amp is no exception. Though a regular desktop amp in its proportions, the F15i works hard to differentiate itself from the likes of Yamaha, Positive Grid, Boss and Line 6 by leaning into what makes Mooer such an interesting brand.

The F15i modeling amp reportedly "redefines portable guitar practice" thanks to a new iAmp system, which offers 55 pre-installed amp models that are in turn designed using the firm's MNRS modeling tech. These are bolstered by 69 effect types – reverb, delay, modulation among them – as well as Mooer's Dynamic Spatial Enhancement function, which looks to deliver a more expansive listening experience with a bit more depth.

To make it a more suitable practice companion, it also offers a drum machine with 60 grooves, 10 metronome variations and a 60-second looper. It comes loaded with a built-in tuner, and much more. **Words by Matt Owen**



On the cover: LONDON, ENGLAND - MAY 31: Brian May on stage during the curtain call of the final performance of "We Will Rock You" at the Dominion Theatre on May 31, 2014 in London, England. (Photo by David M. Benett/Getty Images)

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TUNE-UPS



Milky ways

MELBOURNE-BASED POP ARTIST **MERPIRE** HAS JUST RELEASED A LUXURIOUS SOPHOMORE RECORD IN THE FORM OF *MILK POOL*. LEAD SONGWRITER RHIANNON ATKINSON-HOWATT CHATS WITH AUSTRALIAN GUITAR ABOUT POP GUITAR TEXTURES, '90S STYLES, AND THE GROWING INCURSION OF AI-GENERATED SLOP.

Words by Shaun Prescott

Merpire is the performing name of Melbourne-based solo artist Rhiannon Atkinson-Howatt. Her 2021 debut *Simulation Ride* - released slapbang at the height of the COVID period - sounded like a modern, bedroom-recorded take on the high production sensibilities of '90s alternative pop. Now, four years later, that debut is followed up by *Milk Pool*, which transmutes alternative pop into something dreamier and blurrier, without sacrificing hooks and momentum.

It's a much more confident, and much more varied record, compared to its predecessor, and within its dayglo pop swirls is a fascinating, painterly approach to the guitar. While the instrument doesn't take a front seat - this feels like a record written with a whole studio - Atkinson-Howatt's guitar serves a huge number of textural responsibilities.

Australian Guitar spent some time with Merpire to discuss her approach to composition and recording, the enduring moodiness of a palm-muted verse, and the new reality for IRL artists in the age of AI.

Four years after *Simulation Ride* released, how do you feel about it now?

Being a first album, it'll always be special. I'm so proud of what James (Seymour) my producer and I created together. Still, playing the singles from it live with the band, I forget about a few of the other songs on the record until someone reminds me. Like 'Sink In': that's one of my favourite songs I've ever written. I love the interlude to that song too. I sometimes get it stuck in my head. There's so much to love from what came as a result of putting that record out - connection with fans and hearing what different songs mean to people.

***Milk Pool* is a nice evolution from that record - especially on the level of production. There's a striking intricacy and**

attention to detail. How did you know when it was done?

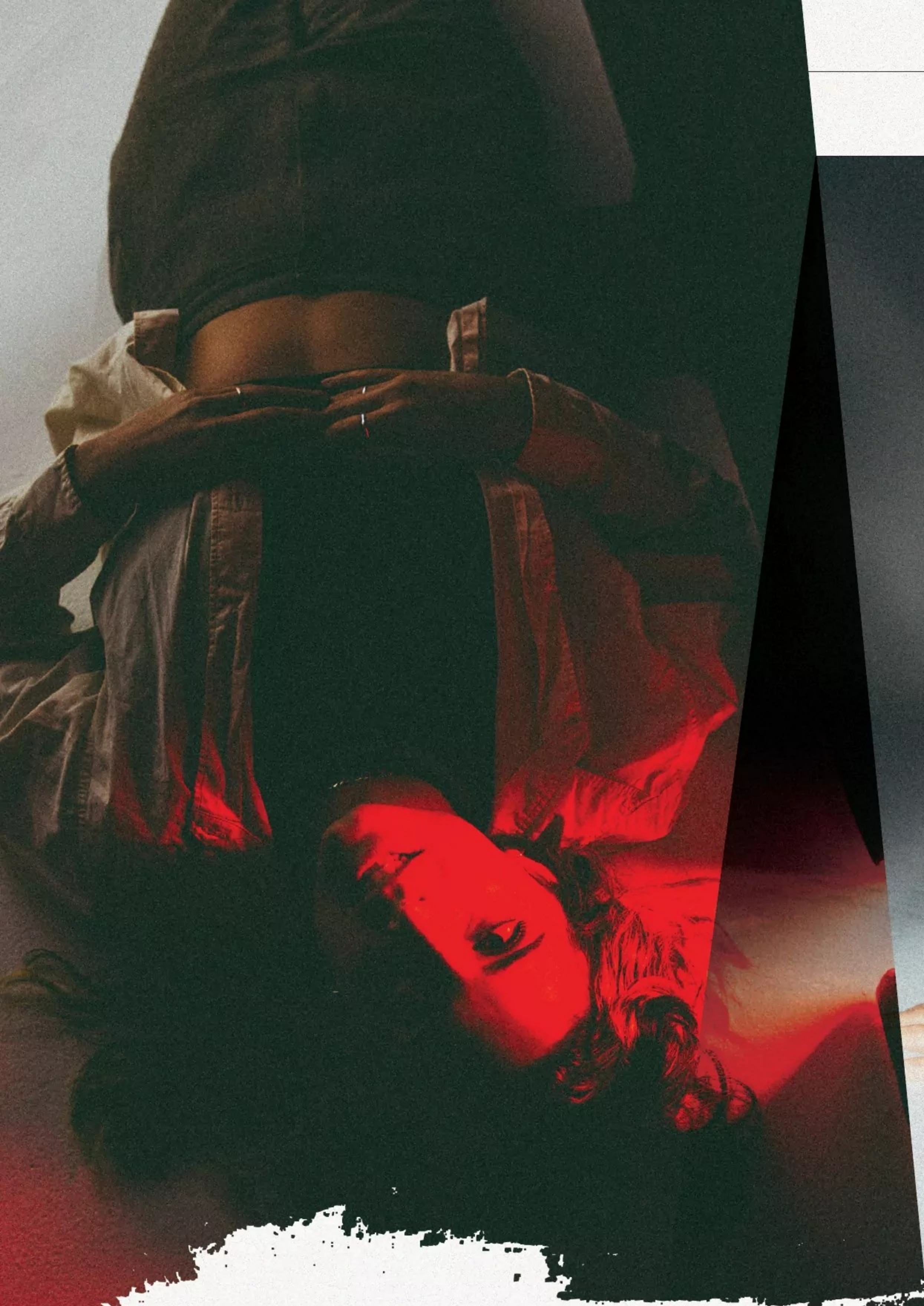
Thank you! It was definitely difficult to decide when it was done, particularly in the mixing phase, which Ali the mixing engineer very patiently worked with me back and forth on. It was a real psychological challenge at times because of that intricacy. I'd scour each song and pick out where maybe a note on a synth was too long, or a guitar needed to be brought forward. It was a real zoom in, then zoom out, then zoom in, then zoom out operation.

I'd say there were about three or four songs that sounded done to me after Ali's first pass at mixing them. My producer on most of the songs, James (Seymour), mixed as we co-produced, so he got some of them a good chunk of the way there before Ali worked his magic. James is one of the best producers I've ever had the pleasure of working with. We produced *Simulation Ride* together too so we had that trust and connection to work from. I loved having more of an input on production and mixing with *Milk Pool*. The sonic world of Merpire has expanded and become more character-full.

'Premonition' has a dreamy quality: the palm-muted chugging sits perfectly with the glistening melodic elements. Where do you start when writing a song like that? It doesn't seem as straightforward as sitting on a couch with a guitar.

This one was the hardest to get right, production wise. Writing, not so much to be honest! I wrote it on a nylon in open 'D' with a high 'E', and a capo on the first fret. It was one of the first songs where I'd written a guitar riff to play while singing. This happens over the chorus. I'm not the greatest guitarist so to write the riff over the chorus, I strummed the open chord most of the time and just hit individual notes for the riff to ring in between.

We decided the dreamy synth would play the walk-down



notes while I sang the syncopated words ‘I get a prem-o-nit-ion’ as one note. Then we brought the guitar back in for the three-note chromatic climb back up between the words ‘hug it out’ and ‘I get a premonition’. I love how tiny it sounds in contrast to the synth. It sounds like a little kitten. I love it.

When transposing some of the parts to synth, and simplifying the chugging guitar chords, I was disappointed at first that some of those 5th, 7th and dissonant notes on the guitar in that tuning were lost, particularly in the middle 8. I also wrote the verses in 7/8. But again, as we changed the whole song to 4/4, it was a reminder to listen to what the song calls for and it wanted to be a pop banger! I keep those alternate chords and notes for when performing it solo.

You seem to love a good palm-muted verse. I detect a dreamy ‘80s and ‘90s radio quality in the record at times; what would you name as chief inspirations?

Haha I do love a good palm-muted chug! You know, I was actually reminded today of a few bands that surely play a deep-rooted part in the way I write on guitar, particularly for dynamics. I’m talking Creed, Nickelback, Pearl Jam, Nirvana. And more recently,

Mitski, Japanese Breakfast, Jay Som.

‘Retriever’ is a great example of your versatility as a guitarist: there’s the propulsive palm-muting, some gently melancholic clean jangle, and a squalling, stumbling lead. These elements sound mis-matched on paper but they work brilliantly in practice. What’s your journey as a player?

It’s so funny, I still don’t necessarily think of myself as a versatile guitarist. It’s only been in the last three years or so that I consider myself even a proficient guitarist. I picked up the guitar in high school and played it on and off while writing. I played enough to be able to get by when playing small gigs and open mic nights around town.

What really helped my confidence, and also helped develop my skills on guitar - like when I mentioned writing that guitar riff over ‘Premonition’ - was joining another band as one of the lead guitarists. This was my mates, RAT!hammock. If you haven’t delved, I strongly urge you to. Jackson, the lead songwriter, is truly one of the best you’ll ever hear.

I remember so clearly, Jackson showing me the parts he wanted me to play and I

laughed and said ‘There’s no way I can do that! Especially if you want me to sing harmonies as well.’ He said, ‘I reckon you could do it. Just have a go, and if you don’t feel comfortable, you can play something else.’ Like most things in life for me, I’ll do things that are hard if they’re for other people. So I went home and practised and - what do you know? - I could do it. That feeling when you go from thinking like a part is impossible to play and you get really frustrated, to your fingers magically and suddenly being able to do it: it’s one of the best feelings ever.

The attention to texture extends even to the more conventional acoustic-centric songs like ‘Cinnamon’ and ‘You Are Loved’. The guitar on the latter sounds deliberately “poorly” mic’ced. What’s the thinking behind that?

Haha it certainly does! ‘You Are Loved’ is entirely one phone recording. It’s the sound of me writing the song as it’s coming to me. I had thought about re-recording it but the way it sounded so rough and sad was exactly how it needed to be to me. I couldn’t tap into feeling that way again, and the room I wrote it in - even though you probably can’t hear it

- had the best acoustics to sing and play in. I wrote many songs in that room.

I was cat-sitting for a friend and I love that you can hear their cat taking a shit in the kitty litter in the background. That's the stuff you can't write! It was like someone had control of the situation and was saying "Oh, you're feeling dark and broody and sorry for yourself? Well here's a cat in the kitty litter to remind you that life just be that way sometimes and everything exists together."

I love the heavily chorus-laden guitar melodies in 'Rosanna' - it's reminiscent of '90s grunge ballads or, more recently, ML Buch. Your playing sounds especially concerned with atmosphere - are you a pedal hoarder?

Yeah, great huh?! That was all Elizabeth M. Drummond, who produced this song. You should definitely check out her self-produced solo stuff too. She's got an envious collection of chorus pedals, none of which I can name. But yes, atmosphere is definitely important across everything for me. Liz is truly a wizard at building certain atmospheric moods within songs. I love

how do you feel about AI and its increasing incursion in creative spaces? Do you feel threatened by it?

Ah, it makes me pretty mad. The whole thing. The platforms, the industry. It was already broken, but now we're seeing how broken and how evil it really is. So much of it has nothing to do with music either. Just money and power.

Only today I heard about this band that's potentially AI-generated, Velvet Sundown. If they're not, they're unintentionally or intentionally doing everything they can to appear that way. It could be a clever publicity stunt or an accident but - and again, sorry if they're real - I really hope they're fake so we can tear down another part of this facade that DSPs aren't just evil overlords in cahoots with major labels.

I'd like to think I could hear if something isn't "real" but I'm yet to test this theory. I do however think there is something in music, live or recorded, that cannot be heard, only felt. Like how the singer was feeling that day, or the room it was recorded in... I think energy gets picked up that you can't see or name. A great example of this is hearing for the first time, the first second of the song,

You're right, it is a very band-centric record. I love performing with my band. We've been together for eight years, plus some absolute legends that fill in when need be.

When I have the chance to put on a band show, we're all in. It's dynamic. It's powerful. It's anthemic. It's intimate and vulnerable. We respect and love our audiences because without them there, it's not the show. The magic only happens when there's people there playing their part to create what sometimes can be a pretty surreal ebb and flow, pushing and pulling of energy.

I chat to the audience like I'm just in my lounge room at home and - so I'm told - my banter is one of the most entertaining things about the set (laughs).

Being on stage with my band is my favourite place in the world and I live to share that with anyone who wants to witness it.

To be asked this question initially makes me sad. I'm an independent artist. I'm essentially a solo artist that hires my band as session musicians. From my business savings and money earned from work I do outside of music to have those business savings, I pay

"It makes me pretty mad. The whole thing. The platforms, the industry. It was already broken, but now we're seeing how broken and how evil it really is. So much of it has nothing to do with music either. Just money and power."

what she did with the instrumental too. So creepy and stalky.

I Wish I could be a pedal hoarder. Alas, I cannot afford it. I've been lucky enough to get guitar pedals as birthday presents. My favourites at the moment are a DOD overdrive and this (TC Electronic) Tailspin vibrato. I use them together when playing the song, 'Canine' live on a nylon.

What guitars and amps do you predominantly use on the record?

I'm in love with the chorus setting on the Roland JC-120, especially on a Tele playing bass lines. That amp really helped inspire that choice when writing in open tunings. I could play around all day.

At home I have a Fender Superchamp. It's a tube amp with settings to replicate other vintage Fender amps. That's really fun to muck around on.

To be honest, apart from that, I didn't really take too much notice of the amps we used! Often, James would set them up in another room so we could blast them and not blow our heads off.

With some streaming platforms becoming increasingly flooded with "fake bands",

'Tonight' by Sibylle Baier. Even before reading the fascinating story about her, you can hear there's something magic about it.

How has the Melbourne scene picked up post-COVID? Is it feeling healthy again? Is it still hard as a working musician?

Oh man. It's still so hard. It's almost laughable because it's just so ridiculous. It's healthy in terms of people making and sharing incredible music any way they can, but when you're trying to find your way around a broken, elitist industry, matched with the cost of living, 'cultural cringe', underrepresentation and a lack of respect from government, your community is all you have. That's what my song, 'Fishing' is about, actually.

Melbourne's music scene is proof though that you just can't kill art. All the time I'm seeing new and creative initiatives pop up from artists themselves, industry workers and venues, just doing what we can with what we've got. It's very inspiring and empowering.

What can people expect from Merpire in a live capacity, post *Milk Pool*? It sounds like a very band-centric record.

my band a fair fee for rehearsals and shows. Because I want to do right by them, I have to be careful about the gigs I choose to play. It's really expensive. I'd give my everything to be able to do a national band tour but when each show is costing me a minimum \$2000 just in band fees, it makes it very difficult.

I forget sometimes that general punters don't know that as solo independent artists, we're paying for the whole band's fees, flights, accommodation, travel days. Without grants and a bit of help from my angel of a Mum from time to time, I'd have no chance.

What I can do though is get creative with solo shows. I love playing solo too. I can be more dynamic with my guitar-playing, pedals and the songs in general. I've got a solo tour coming up in August. Between sets, myself and the artist who'll be opening the show are going to have a q+a type chat between us to share our highs and lows of pursuing this career, how people can support us and anything else we want to share. It's important to have these conversations outside of your community to help make change. 

Merpire's Milk Pool is out now.

Aaron Fenech's workshop is based in Queensland



The Fenech Connection

WE TAKE A DEEPER LOOK INTO THE HISTORY AND BUILDING PHILOSOPHY BEHIND AUSTRALIAN BRAND FENECH GUITARS BY TALKING TO THE LUTHIER AT ITS HELM

By David Mead

BASED ON THE Gold Coast in Queensland, Fenech Guitars has been around for nearly 10 years, but it's a name that is only just beginning to be known on our shores. And, as you will have read in our review on page 92, we became very quickly impressed by not only the build quality but also the feel and tone of both the samples we looked at. Aaron Fenech has a background in carpentry and science, having gained a BSc that "looked at engineering principles but really focused around ocean environments and a lot of mathematics, a lot of physics", he tells us. Factor in a fascination for the acoustic guitar and the idea for a business took off...

What inspired you to launch Fenech Guitars in the first place?

I've always had a deep connection to the guitar, not just as a player but as someone fascinated by how they're built and how every element contributes to its sound and character. What started as curiosity turned into a passion, then an obsession, and eventually a business. I've been very fortunate, I suppose, to stand on the shoulders of some of these giant companies like Martin, Gibson and Taylor, as well as some of the broader, bigger American guitar companies that have been around a long time. And then, I looked at some of our unique Australian timbers and how I was able to voice my guitars a certain way.

Camphor laurel is a new tonewood to us. What made you use it for your guitars?

The Camphor Series VT guitar is one of our proudest achievements. Camphor laurel is a unique and lesser-known tonewood, particularly outside of Australia, and it offers a lot of distinct advantages. Visually, it's stunning – each piece of wood has a swirling grain pattern and rich, warm hues that make each guitar a true work of art.

Tonally, it delivers a balanced and responsive sound with a beautiful warmth. It's not too overpowering but still has a rich character that resonates well with players looking for something unique. Over the years, we've dedicated

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FENECH GUITARS



The Fenech range extends from standard models up to bespoke Custom Shop guitars

significant research and development into understanding how camphor laurel behaves acoustically, especially in relation to our custom bracing and body shapes.

The history of camphor laurel is interesting, too. It was introduced to Australia in the 1800s from Asia, and while it's often considered an invasive species, we saw an opportunity to repurpose this timber into something meaningful. We're in a unique position to use it because it is local, within 200 to 300 kilometres; all around where my workshop is, it's in abundance. We're the first to use camphor laurel at scale across our entire model range, and it's been



Aaron aims to use as many indigenous woods as possible in his guitars

incredible to see the positive response from players who appreciate its distinct tonal qualities.

Our other review guitar, the VT Professional, has Australian blackwood for its back and sides.

Australian blackwood is one of our favourite native tonewoods to work with. It's incredibly versatile – visually striking with rich, golden-brown hues, but it also delivers a warm, articulate tone with great projection. It has a natural musicality that suits a wide range of playing styles. Using blackwood is also part of our commitment to showcasing the richness of Australian materials in high-end guitar making.

Do you mainly produce custom guitars, or do you offer a standard range?

We offer both a standard range and fully custom guitars. Our standard range is built by our expert luthiers, and each guitar is bench-made, one at a time. Fewer than five sets of hands touch every instrument, ensuring that each guitar maintains the same high level of craftsmanship and attention to detail.

In addition to the standard range, we have our Custom Shop, where everything is

fully customisable. These guitars are crafted with the utmost care, and the entire process is personally overseen by me. Whether it's selecting unique tonewoods, customising finishes, or refining tonal characteristics, the Custom Shop is all

about creating something truly bespoke for the player.

What's your philosophy when it comes to guitar building?

Great guitars come from a harmony of precision, intuition and purpose. We don't build instruments just to look beautiful; we build them to inspire. Every decision, from wood selection to bracing design, is made to elevate the musical experience for the player.

"What sets us apart is our commitment to consistency and quality across all of our series. Whether it's a Player Series or a Masterbuilt, you're getting the same level of care, craftsmanship and tonal integrity. We're also proud to embrace Australian tonewoods and blend traditional lutherie with modern production techniques to ensure every instrument meets our exacting standards. It's this balance that allows us to create guitars that feel as great to play as they sound.

<https://fenechguitars.com.au>

“What started as curiosity turned into a passion, then an obsession, and eventually a business”



Alien Weaponry's third LP features a collaboration with Lamb of God's Randy Blythe

Alien nation

NEW ZEALAND METALLERS **ALIEN WEAPONRY** HAVE SUPPORTED KERRY KING, HAVE LAMB OF GOD GUESTING ON THEIR RECORD, AND A SOUND THAT CELEBRATES THEIR MĀORI HERITAGE THAT GUITARIST LEWIS DE JONG SAYS IS ALL ABOUT THE RIFF.

By Amit Sharma

OVER THE PAST decade, New Zealand trio Alien Weaponry have positioned themselves as one of the most exciting new forces in metal, opening for giants like Guns N' Roses and Gojira.

After inking a deal with Napalm Records, they released their Tā debut in 2018, peaking at Number 5 in their native charts. What made it an even more impressive feat was singer/guitarist Lewis de Jong being only 16 at the time.

Their second album, Tangaroa, arrived in 2021, not long after landing a worldwide-management deal with the same team who look after Slayer, Mastodon and Ghost, and this year sees them building on that momentum with their third full-length, Te Rā.

The 11 new tracks could very well be the

most explosive they're written to date, splicing elements of groove and thrash metal into a hypnotic storm of noise, with veteran producer Josh Wilbur (Lamb of God, Megadeth) ensuring the three members sound as big as groups with double the personnel.

The Lamb of God connection doesn't end there, either. Lamb of God's Randy Blythe lends his voice to the track Taniwha, which was a dream come true for the young bucks hoping to tread similar musical ground.

"[Lamb of God's] Mark Morton and Willie Adler are huge inspirations for me," says de Jong, not long after flying back from some American dates supporting Kerry King. "They have this certain something about their tones and riffs – you

can always tell when you're listening to Lamb of God. Randy guesting on our album is one of the craziest moments of our career so far. When me and my brother, Henry [drums] found out, we couldn't believe it. We were both speechless."

Who were the first guitar heroes that inspired you to get into music?

The person who made me want to play guitar from a young age was Stevie Ray Vaughan. His whole way of operating and playing the Strat drew me in. You can feel that dude's soul through his playing. Some of his songs were ridiculously fast.

"Even though he wasn't playing heavy metal, I feel like he had the elements of the style just through pure skill alone.



Alien Weaponry guitarist Lewis De Jong was only 16 when the group's debut LP released

You can hear it on tracks like Scuttle Buttin'. David Gilmour is another big inspiration. His bends and feel always blow my mind. You don't even need a vocalist in your band when you're that good at guitar.

All three of you share Māori ancestry. When did you realize that the Māori language could work so well with heavy metal riffs?

Me and Henry grew up in a Māori-speaking household. We were put in Māori schools as kids. That was instilled in us from a young age. We had friends in a reggae/ska band who entered a competition where the idea was to incorporate native culture into the music.

We wondered what would happen if a metal band did the same thing. I felt like the concept worked. The sound of the Māori language pairs well with heavy music. That's been our direction ever since, though we also write some songs in English.

Which song are you most proud of on this album?

I love how 'Hanging by a Thread' came

out. The ideas on that track capture the emotion well. It's one of the seven-string songs, so we're playing in drop A, and I think the tones came out great. It was interesting working with Josh Wilbur; after two days, we locked into his way of operating. It all ran like clockwork.

What have been your biggest discoveries in the art of riffing?

The main lessons came from listening to Metallica. You can say what you want about the band, but James Hetfield has a strong right hand. He can rip through those triplets super-tight, like it's second nature. I wish my chugging and tremolo picking was more natural.

"I'm always focused on making it all match up and sound uniform with no unwanted noises. I have to work hard on not making mistakes. I'm more of a riff guy, though I appreciate lead guitar. I've been trying to work on that stuff to see if I can bring it into our sound.

Some of the groove metal ideas on tracks like Tama-Nui-Te-Rā are reminiscent of Gojira, another band who

have two brothers on drums and guitar.

They are the champions of that groove metal sound. They can write riffs that clear your brain, rather than making it more busy. I firmly believe you can overcook an idea until it's a messy, overcomplicated soup. I've been guilty of that in the past.

I will listen back and think, 'Yeah, it's impressive but it doesn't groove!' The best riffs you end up writing are the ones that come out of nowhere. The simple ones that end up stuck in your head. Basically, I just want to write riffs that make people bounce and start mosh pits.

In the past, you've stuck with DBZ and ESP guitars. Is that still the case?

I've been experimenting. I have an endorsement with ESP so the plan is to get a whole fleet at some point soon. The DBZ guitars will probably get phased out – not that I don't like them; it's just a case of being endorsed by someone else. I didn't use any DBZs this time; it was all ESP stuff for six- and seven-string. Josh had some nice guitars lying around, so I used his baritone for a bit. The Evertune bridges worked great for saving time.

What exactly do you look for in a guitar?

I don't like spiky guitars. Explorers are too weird and wonky for me. B.C. Rich guitars look cool, but I don't like the way they sit. I generally go for a singlecut, though I'm open to doubles. I'm more into the classic shapes. Most of my guitars come already fitted with EMGs or Seymour Duncan Blackouts. We recorded through an EVH head, which was really screaming.

It doesn't sound like you're using loads of pedals.

It was just raw distortion from the amp, for the most part. Maybe there was a gate in line to clean up, any other effects were done post-tracking. To be honest, the digital stuff is incredible these days.

There's software out there that can emulate any amp or pedal perfectly. I have some things in the pipeline in terms of upgrades for my live rig. I haven't decided on the final setup, but it will be stuff to make my life easier. I don't want to deal with fragile tube heads anymore.

What do you use currently?

I run a DI out from my Marshall DSLs, and I have my cabinets mic'd. The mix of both really helps get a really big tone. In front of me I have my Line 6 M5 stompbox modeler, which helps with songs that need different settings.

My wah pedal is the Ibanez Weeping Demon, though I think they've discontinued that one. I try not to use too many effects. It's more about adding little bits of color where necessary. 

MY LIFE IN THREE GUITARS: ZAKK WYLDE

THE TRIO OF AXES THAT HAVE MEANT THE MOST TO THE OZZY, BLS AND ZAKK SABBATH GUITAR GOD

By Mark McStea

SHRED LEGEND ZAKK Wylde was grabbing some downtime when we connected with him at his home in California not long after he appeared at Ozzy Osbourne's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction. Only hours before we connected, he'd been busy tracking songs for the next Black Label Society album, before heading into six weeks of rehearsals for a Zakk Sabbath tour. After that, he's scheduled to start rehearsing

for the Pantera celebration tour, followed by more Zakk Sabbath. He's also already penciled in numerous BLS shows. As Wylde says, "It's just music, music, music as far as I can see, and that's how I love it." No matter how busy he is, Wylde is always ready to talk guitars, and the rock 'n' roll viking was stoked to tell us why these are the three most important axes in his armory.

1 Gibson Firebrand SG (1981)

"This was the Firebrand SG in Pelham Blue, the first real 'quality' guitar I ever owned. I did so much of my learning on it. I bought it at Red Bank Music [*in New Jersey*] back in the day. There was a lot of publicity for these models at the time; I remember the Gibson ads saying, 'A Firebrand for under a grand.' It was a fantastic guitar, though, and a major step up for me. My guitar teacher at the time, Leroy, recommended it to me. He was a fan of SGs; he thought the double cutaways and access to the top frets would suit the stuff I wanted to play. I wasn't really playing shows when I got it, more parties and jamming in the basement. I spent a ton of time woodshedding. I never changed a single thing on it — it's completely stock. I still pull it out from time to time at home; it's a bit of a lost classic in the Gibson range. Another thing about it was the color, which I liked so much that I've used it on a few guitars since then as well as on some of my own Wylde Audio fiddles.

"I still have it. I sold it but managed to buy it back, which was an amazing feeling. Before I got it, I had a bunch of guitars that weren't anywhere close to the SG. There was a copy of a Gibson L6 with action that was about 10 feet off the neck. I had a Fernandes and a couple of Electras in crazy shapes and some other stuff that was pretty crappy. The ones I didn't hang on to, I tried to pick up in later years on eBay or Reverb; some I managed to buy back from the guys I'd sold them to, so I have all my childhood memory guitars one way or another. I think it's important to keep your early gear if you can; there's something special about picking up a guitar years later and thinking about the hours you put in. Those first guitars are what set you off on the path. I have friends who say they wish they still had some old toy or something, and I always say just go and hunt one down on the internet! Reconnect yourself, you know?"

2 Gibson Les Paul Custom (1985)

"I remember saving up for this guitar; it was a big deal. I bought it new, complete with the 'chainsaw' case. I still have the receipt — \$800. Those models go for four grand now. This guitar is actually in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame at the moment. I graduated from high school in 1985, and I hadn't saved enough money for it by that time, but my parents surprised me by adding the rest of the money to the pot. I think I needed about \$300. I got home and they said something had come for me. I went into the room, and I freaked out because they'd got me the white Les Paul Custom. This is another one where I never changed a thing; it still has the original PAFs.

"I'd go and look at it all the time in the store — I wanted that guitar so badly, man. This guitar holds so much sentimental value because my parents got it for me. I used to take this and the Grail [*see Number 3*] on the road, which seems crazy now, given how precarious it is to travel with guitars on tour. After a few years I stopped doing that and started treating show guitars as exactly that; I wouldn't touch them until I got on stage. I felt much happier leaving all the important guitars safely at home.

"My first guitars were all fitted with humbuckers, and I know people don't associate me with single-coils, but I have quite a few Fenders. I've got a Tele I bought for \$600 that I asked Bill Lawrence to paint to look like the one Jimmy Page had with the dragon on it. This was way before Fender brought out their Page model. I have a bunch of Strats, and I have a few guitars loaded with P90s, including a '65 SG and a '58 Junior. It's all about having tones to paint with when you're in the studio. If you're painting a picture, you're going to want a whole palette of colors. If you can hear something in your head, you find the right tools to capture it."

3 Gibson Les Paul Custom, "The Grail" (1981)

"A friend of mine, Scott Quinn, who used to work at Garden State Music in New Jersey, made a deal with me. I was endorsed by Gibson after I'd got the gig with Ozzy; Scott, a huge John McLaughlin fan, said that if I could get him a double-neck, he'd trade the Grail for it. Gibson hooked me up and I made the trade. I'd played this guitar and been knocked out by how amazing it sounded and how well it played. It was one of those moments where you just really connect with an instrument. It already had EMGs; I'd discovered them a little before I played the Grail. One of my students had a Fender Jaguar with EMGs. He was telling me you had to put a battery in the back for the pickups, which was a weird notion to me at the time. Anyway, when I plugged it into my Marshall combo I was astounded. The clarity, the depth, the glassy highs, the tightness and definition — I was amazed.

"I wrote my first Ozzy song, 'Miracle Man,' on this one. Most of the records I did with Ozzy featured this guitar. After we'd recorded [1988's] *No Rest for the Wicked*, I was gonna be shooting some photos and I realized I was gonna look like I was trying to be Randy [*Rhoads*] with the cream Les Paul, so I sent it to be refinished. It was meant to look like the poster for [1958 *Alfred Hitchcock* film] *Vertigo*, but it came back with the bullseye. I realized it was pretty cool anyway, and I made it a signature look ever since. I nearly lost it around 2000 when it fell out of our gear trailer. It came with one of those tough chainsaw cases, so it survived crashing onto the highway. It turned up in a pawn shop; someone bought it, realized it was mine and — three years after I'd lost it — contacted me and sold it back. I exclusively use Wylde Audio models on the road now; they're exactly the same as the ones for sale. They're already modded, because they're built to my specs, with the Tone Pros hardware, the EMGs and everything."

1. COURTESY OF ZAKK WYLDE, 2. FUTURE, 3. PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES



Wylde's '85 Les Paul Custom probably looks a lot like this 1990 model, which belongs to Manic Street Preachers guitarist James Dean Bradfield





[from left] Amir Yaghmai, Julian Casablancas and Jeramy "Beardo" Gritter perform on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, October 23, 2024

Different Strokes

WHY HAVE ONE COOL ROCK BAND WHEN YOU CAN HAVE TWO? MEET THE FLEET-FINGERED AX-SLINGERS FROM STROKES SINGER JULIAN CASABLANCAS' INVENTIVE OTHER BAND, THE VOIDZ

By Adriana Toma

YOU'LL BE FAMILIAR with the New York five-piece the Strokes, renowned since their formation in 1998 for their angular, stripped-down rock singles. While that band remains sporadically active, back in 2013 singer Julian Casablancas announced the formation of the Voidz, a side project featuring guitarists Amir Yaghmai and Jeramy "Beardo" Gritter, bassist Jake Bercovici, keyboard player Jeff Kite and drummer Alex Carapetis that has grown dramatically in profile over its decade-plus in business.

The appeal of the Voidz is obvious. Their charismatic debut album, *Tyranny* (2014), set the tone perfectly, with Yaghmai and Gritter exploring a wide range of experimental textures on singles such as "Human Sadness." As musicians, the guitarists use unorthodox tones and complex lines to complement the synth-heavy songwriting,

leading to a sound that's worlds away from the knowingly retro approach of Casablancas' day-job band. It's no surprise that multi-instrumentalist Yaghmai has a diverse resume that includes sessions with Daedelus and Scarlett Johansson (for *Break Up*, her 2009 album with Pete Dinklage), while Gritter has built an online presence with W.A.N.T (featuring Andre Legacy) and other projects.

"There are a lot of great players out there, but they're more like 'Look at me!' on YouTube instead of 'Go learn!'"

JERAMY GRITTER

On their second album, *Virtue* (2018), the Voidz expanded their sound while reining in the experimental edges, delivering five singles and touring alongside Beck and Phoenix. The band's third album, *Like All Before You* (2024), covered even wider ground — see the 15-minute video for "Flexorcist"/"Prophecy of the Dragon" for evidence — and a new EP, *Megz of Ram*, is set for release as this issue of *Guitar World* goes to press. Although its leadoff single, "Blue Demon," released in March, was primarily electronic and highly Autotuned, the two musicians reassure us that guitar is very much at the forefront of the Voidz' approach.

How has your music changed since your first single, 2014's "Human Sadness"?

AMIR YAGHMAI: "Human Sadness" was pre-2016 when we were doing more

TODD OWYOUNG/NBC VIA GETTY IMAGES



Yaghmai [left] and Gritter do their thing in Madrid, June 10, 2023

introspective stuff. Then, with the pandemic and everything else going on, collectively everyone is more aware of external forces. “Human Sadness” and “Blue Demon” came about during really different times.

JERAMY GRITTER: I think we were all at a point in our musical journeys when we wanted to push the limits a little bit, and the guitars kinda followed that. Hearing these melodies, I wanted to do something that was a little more chaotic. Also, Julian pushes the boundaries on the guitar. He’s got a specific sound and message he’s going for. That first song blended external things with specifics from Julian’s experience, which he really hasn’t done that much in the Voidz since then.

How do the differing personalities co-exist in your band?

YAGHMAI: With any band, it’s the result of everyone reacting to one another and bringing a style. I definitely think we’re lucky. We had different careers before this, so I’d never expected to join another band. I thought I’d merge into more production and studio time and other things, not get started with a new band.

GRITTER: I was thinking about that too, since keeping a band together is hard. It’s like five horses pulling in five different directions and hopefully we all run the same way forever. With the guitar, Amir will tone-search for the records. He knows right away when it’s wrong or right. I’m such a loose artist in my brain, so Amir structures me in a way, and I make him a little looser. I always used to joke, “If it ain’t feedback, it ain’t working.”

YAGHMAI: There are a few days you get where everything will just come together and it just happens.

GRITTER: And we don’t want to let each other down. When you have six people in a band, you take what you don’t have from them, and they take what they don’t have from you.

How do you write songs?

YAGHMAI: All of us come from very different backgrounds, and we’re bringing five different things at all times. We’ll have this whiteboard and Julian will jigsaw it all together. Even if he’s not physically engineering the album, he’s doing it in its own way.

GRITTER: We all have our studios in L.A. and create our own stuff, so if we’re getting ready to make music together, we start

a random Dropbox and everyone has their own folder, including Julian. We all add what we think will work for the Voidz. I dumped “Blue Demon” into that box as a sequencer line.

How did you create the unusual melody that runs through “Blue Demon”?

GRITTER: I used a Korg MS-10 synthesizer to a Korg SQ-10 sequencer through a Neve. Then I wondered what it would sound like on an electric guitar. The only way was through octave displacement, where you’re jumping between them. You could play a low D, but you play a high one instead. It’s tricky since you have to skip strings. I put down this crazy line but didn’t record it. Months later, I was thinking about that wacky line when Julian said we’d play “Blue Demon” live on TV for millions of people. That’s the lineage of the song.

Are solos an important part of your songwriting?

GRITTER: I think that guitar-solo moment in “Human Sadness” was important because I don’t think that was happening as much then, and I don’t think it does now. There are a lot of great players out there, but they’re more like “Look at me!” on YouTube instead of “Go learn!” We live in this digital era, but we came from analog. When we first got together in New York, Amir and I were learning and figuring out how to play this crazy-hard technical song, “Human Sadness,” and we knew Julian was expecting a 10 on the guitar.

Your songs require a lot of picking-hand dexterity.

YAGHMAI: Playing it live, you have to do it correctly 30 times in a row and avoid hand fatigue. You have to get it right.

GRITTER: There’s just a lot of parts that happen in the Voidz. I get smarter just being around these guys. We’re just like, “What can we do now? What haven’t we done?” Isn’t that the whole idea of writing, but with as little words as possible? 

A X O L O G Y

GRITTER Guitars

1999 Fender Jeff Beck Stratocaster,
1985 Fender Contemporary Telecaster,
1963 Guild S-50

Amps

Vox AC30, Roland JC-77, Fender DeVille

Effects

Terry Audio White Rabbit, Death by Audio Rooms reverb, Death by Audio Space Bender chorus modulator, Supercool Pedals ’77 Fuzz Blender, JFX Fresmann PLL custom Voidz pedal [pictured below], Cosmodio Pet Yeti distortion

YAGHMAI Guitars

1973 Guild S-90, Fender Stratocaster

Amps

1960s Fender Bassman head and 2x12 cab

Effects

Fairfield Circuitry Randy’s Revenge, JFX Fresmann PLL custom Voidz pedal, Marshall Guv’nor, EarthQuaker Devices Dispatch Master, various Boss effects





Ally Venable

THE TEXAS TRIPLE-THREAT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS, MAGENTA LES PAULS AND "FACING YOUR OWN BLUES"

By Bill DeMain

LAST YEAR, IN the middle of a solo on stage, Ally Venable had a revelation. "I was playing so many shows that it started to become kind of a monotonous blur," she says. "I noticed I was playing to my ego and just looking for applause. It was like I knew when people were gonna clap when I did certain things. After I caught myself, I started to get very intentional about playing for connection over playing for praise. And that really changed the energy for me and my band on stage and opened up a whole new world."

"Connection" is a word the fiery 25-year-old guitarist-singer-songwriter returns to often during our conversation. "I connect to the guitar on a very emotive level," she says. "I connect with blues music, and I think it's one in the same — blues music and guitar music."

Venable first felt that connection when she was 12 and heard her dad playing Stevie Ray Vaughan's *Texas Flood* in the car. "When I looked him up on YouTube, it changed my world," she says. "I wanted to play like Stevie and wanted to see if I could break my guitar in half like he tried to do. Through him, I found Albert King, Jimi Hendrix,

Buddy Guy and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. My goal for my music became to introduce other people that don't know a whole lot about blues or guitar music to this genre — like Stevie did for me."

On her sixth album, *Money and Power*, she continues to do that. From the empowering Zep-like roar of the title track to the funky "Stopper Back Papa" to the tender melodicism of "Keep Me in Mind," there's a maturity in the writing, singing and playing that's remarkable for someone so young.

In addition to her own extensive touring behind the record this year, Venable will be playing dates with Experience Hendrix alongside Eric Johnson, Samantha Fish, Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Zakk Wylde.

"I like being surrounded by guitar players that are better than me," Venable says with a smile. "It makes me feel like I can work on something and learn something new from somebody else."

Your last record, *Real Gone*, went to Number 1 on the Billboard blues chart. How'd that affect what you wanted to do with the new album?

It's cool when your album has any kind of

chart success, and I was very grateful. But I don't want to make music solely for the intention of receiving accolades. My goal is to write about what goes on in my life and try to connect with myself, my instrument and other people. Making music is always about connection.

What was going on in your emotional life that fed the new songs?

Over the past two years, I was going through a lot of grieving, thinking about all of these situations and relationships and people who aren't in my life anymore. And so what I did was I wrote a letter to each of them. That helped me come out the other side and become a better version of myself. I think it's important to face your own blues, because you're going to come out on the other side of that as a better person.

The title track, "Money and Power," speaks to not only women in music but in society at large, and that's especially resonant in the current political climate.

Recently, I've been seeing more young girls at my shows — with their parents. I was thinking about them seeing someone like me, not that much older, playing music and following her dreams. Even if she doesn't want to play guitar, just seeing a woman doing her thing is inspiring. The song asks, "Why is it so conflicting to see a woman with money and power?" That's a conversation we need to keep having. Let's dig into our history, especially with where we're at right now and raise awareness about how far women have come and how much work still needs to be done.

What gear are you using?

In the Nineties, Gibson did a limited-colors-edition series for Les Pauls, and I love my magenta model. I call her "The Wounded Warrior," because I've dropped her so many times. [Laughs] For amps, I use a Category 5 [Andrew]; last year, I upgraded the speaker to a Celestion. It has a nice big, round sound. I use a [Detrik Fx] Experience Wah — the white one — with an Analogman King of Tone [overdrive]. That's my bare-bones setup. But then there's also an MXR Carbon Copy for delay and a Keeley Monterey [Rotary Fuzz Vibe] for fun, vibe-y effects.

Do you have outside interests that feed your creativity?

I just bought a house that I've been renovating, so that's been a hobby. But don't ever renovate a house and release the album at the same time — you'll go crazy! [Laughs] I'm gardening, trying to grow some strawberries and potatoes and perennials. And I love thrifting, going in and not knowing what little treasures I'll come out with. It's like creating music. You kind of know where you'll start, but you don't really know what you'll get until it's finished. 

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BATTLE ROYAL

For 51 years, Queen's self-titled debut album was the cult curio of their fabled catalogue. Now, as the new *Queen I* boxset drags these lost songs into the daylight, Brian May tells us about poverty, parental disapproval, the Red Special's first run-out – and the perils of playing through Jimi's stack

Words Henry Yates Photo David Tan/Shinko Music/Getty Images

Half a century later, when discussing the road to Queen's self-titled 1973 debut album with Brian May, it's necessary to suspend your disbelief. Imagine, if you can, a time when the classic line-up of May, Freddie Mercury, John Deacon and Roger Taylor were not multi-platinum national treasures. A time, in fact, when they were penniless nobodies, typically found bottom of the bill at a sweatbox club, being ushered from record label offices or facing tough questions from parents convinced these four bright boys were burning their futures for an impossible dream.

Appearing on our Zoom call in a halo of grey curls, May can smile about it now, knowing what lay ahead. In spring '72, the

band cut their first chink in the industry's formerly impenetrable armour as they were granted nocturnal recording sessions at the famed Trident Studios. And with precisely nothing to lose, the music flooded out, with the visceral gallop of *Keep Yourself Alive* leading them across the gamut of soul-metal (*Doing Alright*), proto-prog (*My Fairy King*), acoustic percussive tapping (*The Night Comes Down*), even flashes of flamenco (*Great King Rat*).

The first Queen record is a head-scratcher, though. Selling modestly on release, for 51 years, it has been the closest thing this all-conquering band had to a curio, its tracklisting unfamiliar to fans who know every note of, say, *A Night At The Opera* or *The Works*. In that same period, the band, too, had an uneasy

relationship with their opening gambit, frustrated by the album's dry, distant sound. It's a thorn plucked in style, however, by the new *Queen I* boxset: a paving slab-sized vinyl/CD package whose remastered and expanded treatment finally reveals these songs as sunken treasures to rank among the band's very best.

If there is one final, jarring aspect of discussing May's distant youth, it is the 77-year-old's recent brush with mortality. In late August of 2024, the guitarist was set to conduct this interview when he suffered a minor stroke that left him temporarily unable to use his left arm. With customary kindness, May rescheduled when his health mercifully returned, and our first question had to be how this great guitarist is bearing up.



Your stroke must have been frightening. Did you wonder whether you'd play guitar again – or was that the least of your worries at the time?

"It went through my mind. When I suddenly couldn't control this left arm, it was quite scary. I had no idea what was going on. I phoned my doctor and she said, 'Okay, I think you're having a minor stroke. Dial 999, get in the ambulance and I'll see you there.' But even at the worst time, although I couldn't control where the arm was, I could control my fingers. So I thought, 'I'm probably not really in danger.' I'm all right now. I'm just taking it slow."

The first Queen album is largely a story of struggle, isn't it?

"It was very tough. And I sometimes wonder if that helped to shape us because everything was a fight. It was a fight to get into a studio. It was a fight to get our own way – and we didn't, entirely, because we were just boys and everyone else was more powerful. It was a fight to get it released – and then it got completely slaughtered by the music press. But later I learned we weren't the only people being hit by those destructive arrows. In fact, that's one thing that

cheered me up. I remember they gave Led Zeppelin a bad review, and I just thought, 'Well, Jesus Christ, if they don't understand that [throws up his hands]...'"

Likewise, every label rejected your demo recorded at De Lane Lea Studios?

"Nobody bit. Not one record company wanted it. Some of them said, 'Come back in a few years, we'll talk to you then.' Again, it strengthens your resolve. You look inside yourself and you think, 'No, actually, I do believe in this.' Very early on, as soon as we had John, we really felt we had the power."

Perhaps it's no surprise your father didn't approve of your musical career. But could he really complain, given that he helped you build the Red Special?

"Well, you wouldn't think he could complain – but he did! He liked helping me with my hobby, but when the hobby became my career, he was very unhappy. I think he also felt he'd sacrificed a lot of his own life to enable me to take my education so far. Me giving that up was the worst thing he could imagine. So it was hard for him. It took a long time to sort that out. It only got sorted when

1. Pictured here performing in November of 1973, Brian and the band had to hold their nerve to get as far as the debut album in the face of sceptics of their unique sound

I flew him to Madison Square Garden on Concorde, sat him down and said, 'Okay dad, what do you think?' A great moment. I think we all need that approval from our parents, don't we?"

The early 70s was the golden era of blues-rock. And Queen were definitely not that.

"There were a lot of people staring at their feet on stage. I don't know if that made it easier or harder to break through. We just knew what we wanted to be. It was very arrogant of us, but we had big dreams. We wanted to give people the experience we'd felt watching The Who at Regent Street

"I learned [guitar] quickly, and maybe you do when you've got that amount of passion and hunger in your body" **BRIAN MAY**

Polytechnic. They were an hour late, and when they finally got on stage, it was like an earthquake. We wanted to give people that same intake of breath. The sound, the lights, the performance, the clothing, the drama – give them everything we had. And, yes, it was very different from the mood of the day. It also wasn't glam-rock. That was going on at the same time and it's very much about the glitter or whatever. Which we weren't."

As a live band, could you have competed with Black Sabbath or Led Zeppelin?

"Well, we had to. There's videos from the early days and I think we were pretty good. Very early on, we arrived at this view that being a live act was not the same as the studio. Actually, it was simpler because there's only four of us on stage and no overdubs. It took me a long time to feel confident about being the only guitar on stage. I always felt like I needed a rhythm guitar. But, gradually, I got into this habit of playing lead and rhythm at the same time – and I realised that nobody noticed the lack of it. So we had enough. You could fashion that live performance to make people feel they'd heard an orchestra."



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

It was while recording Queen's demo that you first tracked a three-part solo. How did that feel?

"Amazing. That was in my head long before I could actually make it happen. It goes right back to hearing Jeff Beck on *Hi Ho Silver Lining*, where he double-tracks his lead. I never asked him about it, but he goes into a two-part harmony – probably accidentally – halfway through. And I realised it would be possible to build up whole panoramas of orchestral sounds but with guitars. So I had this vision that the solo for *Keep Yourself Alive* could be this three-part sequence. But to actually make it happen was a great moment.

"Okay, there was one predecessor, when I did a two-part harmony on *Earth*, a single we did as *Smile*. But the three-part harmony is the big deal. Because things suddenly get colourful if you use three parts in creative ways.

"[Making the first album] was tough. I wonder if that helped shape us because everything was a fight" BRIAN MAY

2. Queen, pictured here in 1973, were flamboyant harlequins in a rock scene dominated by blues rockers in jeans and tees. They never lost their ability to use theatrical flair to expand their musical presence, and it soon became an integral part of their success

Not just parallel 3rds and 5ths, which is an easy trap to fall into; I never wanted to do that. I always wanted the tensions and colours of dissonance and counterpoint. Everything that an orchestral arranger needs to know, you have to get in your head if you're going to do something that endures."

Eventually, the sessions proper began at Trident. How was the atmosphere?

"We were pretty jolly. This was an amazing opportunity, and we were all leaving our supposed careers behind. In a sense, we were aware we were leaving our families and friends behind as well. Because once you put

a foot on that road, it takes you a long way from everything you know. But we had each other and our belief that we were doing something special that nobody else could do. We had that insane optimism.

"Through the years, there's been times when there was tension from trying to paint on the same canvas. You're feeling sidelined, your baby is being neglected or whatever. But in the case of the first album, that hasn't happened yet. We're just thrilled to be there. So on the 'Sessions' CD in this boxset, you hear snatches of us baiting each other, having a laugh. But you can also tell we're serious about what we're doing. We get frustrated when it's not right, when we can't get the blend or things aren't in time. Making that album was an amazing exploratory process. It's like giving a sculptor his first bit of clay and saying, 'Here you go.'"

*“The Red Special has
a very wide sound.
But hearing it back
through the speakers
was thrilling... We
wanted it to sing”*

BRIAN MAY

The unique guitar
that helped Brian May
forge an inimitable
sound: his homemade
Red Special. Though
unconventional, its
distinctive sound
became his sonic
calling card



Could you immediately relax as a studio player or did that take time?

"There's a definite learning process. I remember finding that with the backing tracks you could immerse yourself and let go fairly quickly. Overdubbing is actually harder to keep the spontaneity. Because you're standing there

"Making that album was an amazing exploratory process. It's like giving a sculptor his first bit of clay" **BRIAN MAY**

with your headphones on. Your guitar is revved up. And you're waiting for your moment. It feels unnatural. But I got into this little trick where I fooled myself into thinking I was playing live, and when the moment hit, I was on stage and there were people out there watching."

How would you describe yourself as a guitarist back then?

"I'm surprised, looking back, how complete I was. I don't think I can play that much better now than I could then. It had all happened in the teenage years. It's quite a hothouse, where I came from. Richmond and Twickenham is where The Yardbirds and Rolling Stones came from. I had lots of mates to play with and there was fierce competition. You know, 'Have you heard this latest solo? How did Hank Marvin do that? Can you do that?' So I learned quickly, and maybe you do when you've got that amount of passion and hunger in your body."

Would you play anything differently if you were tracking that debut album now?

"Actually, no. We're rebuilding the sound on the boxset. But we didn't feel the urge to change any of the performances. It would be different, but it wouldn't necessarily be better. I honestly wouldn't change a note – and we didn't."

That was the first run-out for your homemade Red Special. Wasn't there pressure to use a standard production model?

"Not at the time. I remember,

much later, when we did *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*, I said, 'I want a James Burton atmosphere on the solo, so I'm going to make my guitar sound like a Telecaster.' And the producer, Reinhold Mack, who's a dour old sod, said, 'Well, why don't you just play one?' But that's probably the only time in my whole career when I've given way.

"The Red Special held up surprisingly well. I did have doubts in the early days because I knew it sounded different from what everybody else was using. It was different from a Strat:

it's warmer. It's different from a Gibson: it's got more top-end. It's got a very wide sound. But hearing it back through the speakers was thrilling. Everyone had told us, 'Nah, it's never going to work.' But hearing that stuff coming back, we thought, 'We can conquer the world.' We weren't a modest lot [laughs]. But that self-belief has to be there. It has to be the source of your power.

"You know, the Red Special was designed to make that kind of noise. We wanted it to sing. We wanted it to feed back. That's why it's got the acoustic pockets in the



Remastered to reveal the full glory of the original – the expansive new boxset edition of *Queen I*



BOXING CLEVER

Brian May on the newly remastered and expanded *Queen I* boxset

"Most of all, with the new *Queen I* boxset, I get a feeling of completeness. You know, the idea that you've done everything you could possibly do and now you can leave it to posterity. There's no stone that's been left unturned in making it the best that it can possibly be, the very best version of itself. I am a perfectionist. I kind of fight it some of the time because it can sometimes get in the way. But I love to do things to the max, the best they can possibly be done.

"I think in all of our minds – and that includes Freddie – we always felt this first album was... Yes, we were proud of it, but we didn't like the way it actually sounded, particularly the drums. We liked the performances, we liked the songs, but as far as the actual sounds, it didn't feel like we were in the room with you, and that's what we always

wanted, for it to sound like the live situation. So now we were able to achieve that, by various dodgy means! Again, we've altered the guitar sound on the *Queen I* boxset and made it more like how I would record it these days.

"My favourite element of all, I suppose, is the vinyl. Because it's a complete revisit. And to open the box and see that beautiful, pristine vinyl and know that, through the digital medium, we've been able to restore it to what we wanted it to be originally – that's a great feeling. I'm talking sound-wise but also the cover itself – I was the original culprit and I made that with my scalpel and glue and a piece of board. It's all been updated to the point where we're completely proud of it."

The *Queen I: Super Deluxe Edition* Boxset is available now on EMI. For details, see <https://queenonlinestore.com>



PHOTO BY GILBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

body. I still don't know if it was all thanks to our design or luck, but it just made that sound. Still does."

Were the other elements of your classic rig – the AC30 and Dallas Rangemaster treble booster – already in place?

"Yes. That was there from the moment I saw Rory Gallagher and managed to stay behind at The Marquee when everyone had gone home. I asked him, 'Rory, how do you get that sound?' And he said, 'Well, it's easy, I have the AC30 and this little box, and I turn it up and it sings for me.' The next day, I went to a guitar shop and found two secondhand AC30s for £30 each (around \$70). I found a treble booster. And that did it. I plugged in with my guitar, turned all the way up and it just melted my stomach. That's my sound. And it's different from Rory's. His is much more bright."

You came up in the era of the Marshall stack. Did that never call to you?

"It did – but it was a false call! I remember, we played one show at Olympia. Top of the bill was

"I plugged in with my guitar, turned all the way up and it just melted my stomach.

That's my sound" **BRIAN MAY**

Jimi Hendrix and everybody essentially played through the same gear. So I plugged into a Marshall stack with my guitar and treble booster. Turned it all the way up – and it sounded so awful. I could hardly play. I didn't know what to do. It sounded like an angry wasp. It didn't have any depth or articulation, I couldn't play chords.

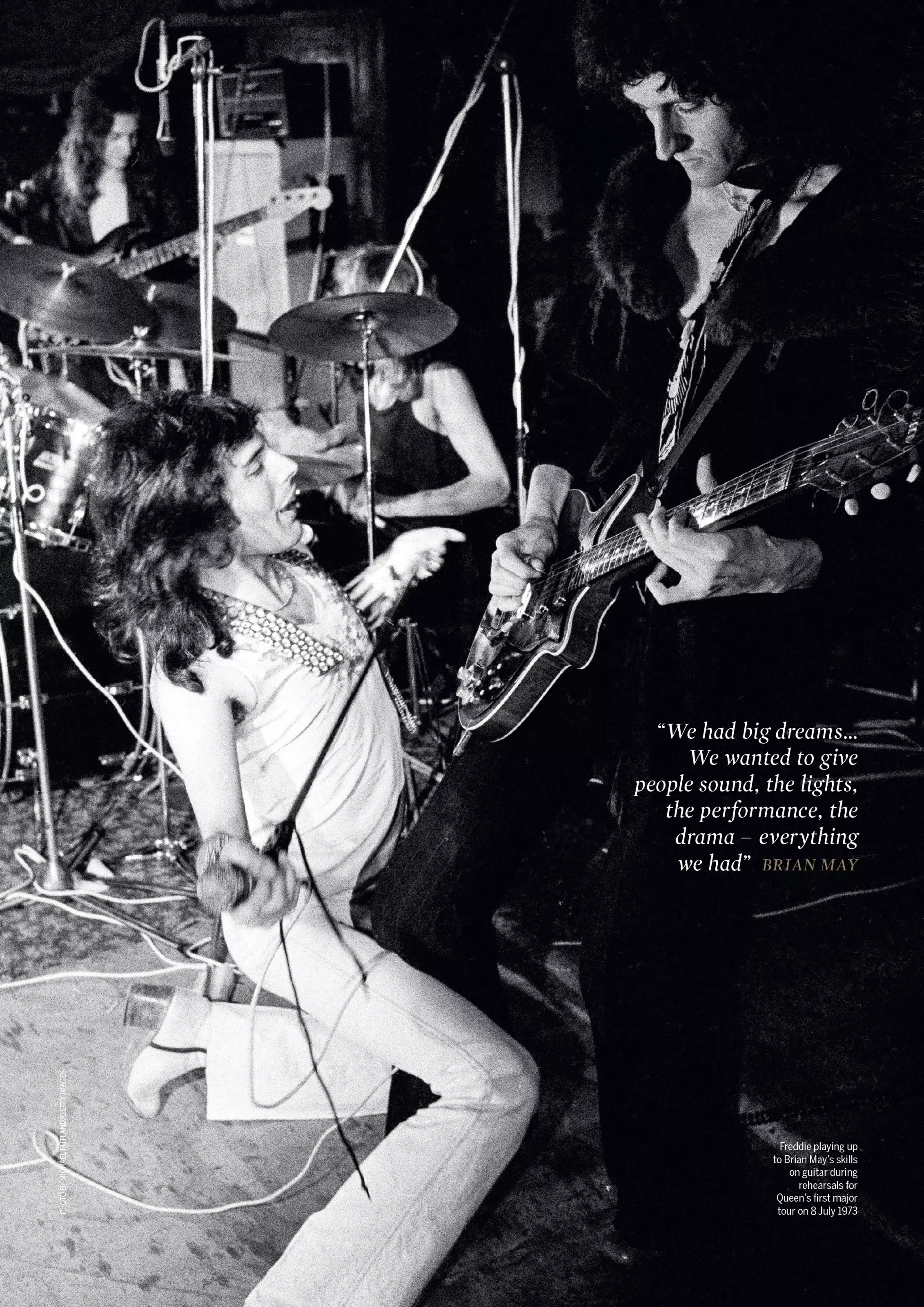
"After we'd played, I stayed behind backstage and I looked through between the amps as Jimi came on stage, plugged into that same amp – and it sounded like cataclysm. I think he had some kind of voodoo magic, but he made that amp sound like an orchestra. And for me, it just didn't work. So I never got on with Marshalls. I knew Jim Marshall and got on with him very well, but I could never quite tell him, 'Sorry, I can't quite get to grips with your amps...'"

3. A rare shot of Brian May posing with a Fender Stratocaster for a TV show in the Netherlands in November 1974. He soon found that staples of 70s rock tone such as Marshall amps didn't suit his harmonically rich, articulate sound, while on the guitar side the Red Special was, besides an occasional expedient switch to an alternative, completely central to his sound

How did Roy Thomas Baker record your guitars?

"Roy was a brilliant technician, but his head was in a completely different place from us. He'd been recording things like *Get It On*, when he'd plugged Marc Bolan's guitar directly into the desk. So it had no ambience whatsoever. You have no natural amp sound, no compression or smooth distortion. All you have is the direct sound of the guitar, and if you turn it up a lot, it distorts the electronics in the desk – which is a nasty sound, I would say.

"So this was the complete opposite of the way I wanted my guitar to be recorded. I wanted it to have the sound of the amp and the room. So we had a bit of a fight. To be fair, Roy and I had a long relationship where we evolved really good ways of recording guitars. But in those days, it was such a rush. And Roy was under pressure to get that 'Trident sound', which was very clean, guitars all tight – and it wasn't what we wanted, but that's what we got because of pressure from above. The Sheffield brothers [Norman and Barry]



*“We had big dreams...
We wanted to give
people sound, the lights,
the performance, the
drama – everything
we had”* **BRIAN MAY**

Freddie playing up
to Brian May's skills
on guitar during
rehearsals for
Queen's first major
tour on 8 July 1973



PHOTO BY BOJAN HOHNJEK © MIRACLE PRODUCTIONS LLP

wanted it to sound like an album that had the signature sound of Trident Studios. And we wanted to sound like Queen.”

What are your own favourite guitar moments?

“I love *My Fairy King*. We were experimenting with backwards stuff and I used to get the guys to turn the tape over and give me a cassette I could take home, so I was ready when we came into the studio. *Keep Yourself Alive* was supposed to be ironic, a reaction to the idea that life was just about keeping yourself alive. But I discovered it’s hard to be ironic in a rock song. It came out sounding jolly. And in the end I didn’t fight it because people got a lift from it, so why not?”

“That riff goes all the way back. I remember playing it on acoustic at parties, late at night, when people are sitting around. And I remember being surprised that people were impressed because I was a loner and didn’t very often play to people. I remember everyone surrounding me going, ‘Wow, we’ve never seen that before.’”

“You could fashion that [rhythm and lead guitar] performance to make people feel they’d heard an orchestra” **BRIAN MAY**

What’s happening at the start of *The Night Comes Down*?

“That was played on a very unorthodox guitar. It’s a little acoustic that had belonged to my best friend at school, Dave Dilloway, who drilled holes all over it to put pickups on. So it looked a mess. I put my own bridge on and made it lower and lower until eventually the strings were buzzing on the frets. But I thought, ‘Well, I actually like this, it sounds like a sitar.’ So I designed the bridge with all sorts of junk, like needles and pins, to make each string buzz. It’s a guitar that no-one else would take seriously, but it made that particular noise on *The Night Comes Down*. I’m tapping it and making it buzz, and John is playing in unison with me. When it comes to the chorus, that’s me doing Mantovani’s strings with guitars.”

4. Brian’s use of acoustic guitars has been a little more diverse than his electric guitars over the years – here, he is pictured with a custom Gibson J-200 12-string while performing with Queen + Adam Lambert in Baltimore in October of 2023. On *Queen I*, the most distinctive acoustic sound was a guitar that belonged to one of May’s school friends

Big rockstars always say the most exciting moment is that first breakthrough. Is that how *Queen I* felt?

“Yes. And thanks for calling me a big rockstar. I’m still a kid! I haven’t changed since those days. But it’s a good question. And the moment we felt it was that first Imperial College gig after the album was released. I’d been on the entertainments committee at Imperial College. We booked Hendrix to play in that big Union Hall, and I remember thinking, if we ever did anything like that, it would be incredible.”

“Three years later, we’d booked it out, and from being a band that everybody walked past, suddenly we had an audience who actually wanted to hear what we did. Instead of people who grudgingly listened but really they’d rather hear us play covers – they were shouting out for our songs. That was an extraordinary moment. I remember that thought in my head: ‘There is a boulder rolling here...’” **ag**

For the latest news from Brian May, see his website at <https://brianmay.com>

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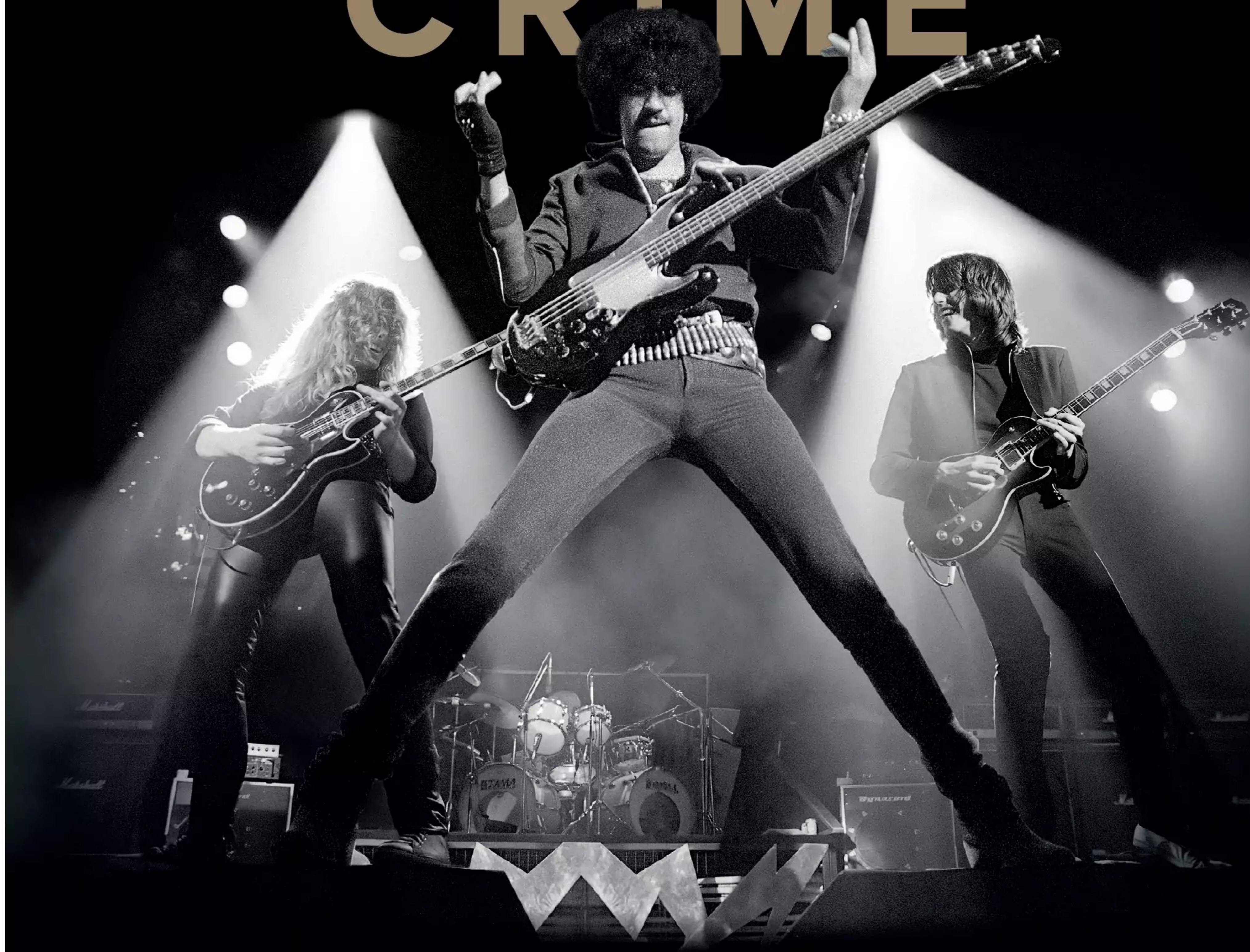
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PARTNERS — IN — CRIME



FOR A HALF-CENTURY AND COUNTING, THE THIN LIZZY SOUND HAS BEEN FORGED AND RECAST BY SCOTT GORHAM AND THE GREATS WHO PARTNERED HIM ON DUELLING LES PAULS, INCLUDING THE LATE JOHN SYKES. GORHAM LOOKS BACK ON THE HIGHS, LOWS, JOY AND PAIN OF HIS CLASSIC PARTNERSHIPS

Words Henry Yates Photo Harry Potts

You'd like Scott Gorham. As countless rock writers have discovered since the mid-70s, an afternoon with the Thin Lizzy guitarist passes in a happy haze of dirty jokes, political potshots, flumes of e-cigarette smoke and drawled war stories (some more libellous than others). If we weren't talking on Zoom, you suspect the conspiratorial Gorham would suggest ditching the interview and hitting the pub – although had you accepted that invitation back in his hellraising days, you might never have never made it home.

That industrial-strength likeability isn't just a gift for journalists; it's also helped Gorham keep the wheels on a band whose combustible chemistry meant a line-up shift was never far away. By our calculations, the band's 74-year-old custodian has partnered no fewer than 12 other guitarists in Lizzy, finding common ground with such disparate characters as Gary Moore, Brian Robertson, John Sykes, Midge Ure and Viv Campbell.

But bonhomie can only get you so far. The fact that every incarnation of Lizzy has produced great music

is testament to Gorham's sympathetic, sharp-eared playing and his desire to recruit foils who push him beyond his comfort zone. "You want to play with people that are better than you," he shrugs, as we open the history books. "It doesn't do any good to be the best guy in the band because you're not gonna learn anything. That's why I loved playing with all these guys we're gonna talk about – because I could watch what they were doing and build my own curriculum. This whole thing is a giant learning system. Hopefully, you never stop..."

BRIAN ROBERTSON

1974-1978

Wind back the clock to '74, then, and imagine yourself a fly on the wall at the London supper club where the Irish band had set up auditions for a second guitarist to partner their latest recruit, the fiery, soulful Scottish gunslinger, Brian Robertson.

Born a world away in California, and moving to England in 1973 with vague hopes of joining his brother-in-law in the Supertramp line-up, Gorham was now flailing on the pub circuit. He knew nothing of Lizzy, except that they'd had a minor hit two years earlier with the old Irish traditional *Whiskey In The Jar*. But it was either: take the audition or crawl home with his rock 'n' roll dreams dashed.

"I had 30 days left on my visa or they're gonna throw me out of the country," he remembers. "I was late and the first guy I meet is [frontman] Phil Lynott, who goes, 'Let me introduce you

to the guys.' So we walk in and Phil goes, 'Hey, everybody, this is Scott,' – and Robbo and Brian Downey [drums] just go, 'Yeah, yeah.' I didn't know they'd already auditioned 24 guitarists, and here comes number 25. I guess they thought, 'Well, here's another one we're going to reject.' So they didn't want to get too friendly."

Likewise, Robertson had no patience to walk yet another hopeful through the set. "Robbo

"You want to play with people that are better than you... This whole thing is a giant learning system" **SCOTT GORHAM**

showed me the first song really quickly and said, 'You got that?'" explains Gorham. "Then we're off and running and I'm watching Robbo's hand on the neck, trying to follow every move, barely making the changes in time. But I'm realising, as I'm struggling with these chord patterns, that these guys are really good. And it was probably after the third song, I said to myself, 'I gotta be in this band.'"

1. In a line-up still well beloved by fans, Brian Robertson, Phil Lynott and Scott Gorham proved to be a classic hard-rock guitar triumvirate, performing here at the Wembley Empire in 1978

Robertson was arguably the strongest link in the chain: a startlingly mature player whose fluid phrasing and ear for harmonic extensions was a product of his upbringing. "This guy was younger than me, but he had so much more musical knowledge," says Gorham. "Brian's father played saxophone in Art Blakey's jazz band, so he grew up in this atmosphere of scales, tones, all that. He was absolutely more technical than me and our styles were different, but we had to put our egos aside and toe the line."

So began the duelling harmony guitars of Lizzy MkII. "We were all 5ths and 3rds, that was our whole thing," explains Gorham. "The metal way of playing harmonies is 7ths and 9ths, but that tweaks my ear. We always tried to hit the sweet spot, and the 5ths and 3rds are the most pleasing to the ear. You can crank it up, or go to the middle setting on a Les Paul at low volume, and those harmonies are still sweet as hell."

Beyond note choice, even the minutiae of Gorham and Robertson's touch needed dialling in. "You're not only trying to get the notation right; you're trying to



PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

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get the vibrato in time. Because if one guy has a slow vibrato and the other guy is fast, that's not gonna work. A lot of people don't even think about that. But to get a tight sound, those vibratos really have to be together."

That quest for synergy also led the pair to twin Les Pauls. "I had a really cheap-ass, no-name Japanese Les Paul copy," says Gorham. "That's one of the first things Phil said to me: 'Okay, you're in, but we gotta change that guitar.' So we went to Edgware Road and I bought my sunburst Les Paul. But even before he had the stompboxes and all that, Robbo had some great tones coming out of that guitar."

Many fans would argue Lizzy's best output came in that period. *Nightlife* (1974), *Fighting* (1975), *Jailbreak* (1976), *Johnny The Fox* (1976): all are showcases for the pair's fist-tight interplay. But Gorham believes the partnership kicked hardest on the boards. "The album takes, they're a little slower and more pedestrian,

"It was the masculine struggle of who's gonna be the dominant person... Well, the dominant person was Phil!" SCOTT GORHAM

2. Gorham admired Brian Robertson's playing and acted as peacemaker when the impetuous 'Robbo' and Phil Lynott butted heads. But in the end, Phil was the man in charge – and Robertson had to go

whereas on *Live And Dangerous* [1978], we kicked it up a gear. The song that Robbo really stamped his personality on was *Rosalie*. It's one of his simpler solos, but he really got his point across. While he was playing that, I was playing all the high parts – and the most bitching chords you can ever imagine in your life [laughs]!"

Yet the musical harmony didn't extend to band relations. While Gorham deferred to Lynott, Robertson never accepted the hierarchy. "Brian didn't like to take orders," sighs Gorham,

clashing his fists together. "It was the masculine struggle of who's gonna be the dominant person. Well, we all knew who the dominant person was. It was Phil! 'Dude, he was the guy who hired your ass! He's already got three albums under his belt. This is your first album, so why are you coming out with the attitude? Come on, settle down.' Well, he did for a while, then he kicked off again."

Anything could set Robertson off. "I remember our first radio show. We'd just had two weeks off and Robbo had grown a beard. Phil says, 'I'm the only one with facial hair, man – you gotta shave that thing off.' Of course, Brian's going, 'Fuck you, man!' 'Well, if you don't, you're out of the band!' How trivial can you get? So Robbo says, 'All right, I'm quitting the band!' And I'm going, 'Whoa, I just quit my band, put all my eggs in this Thin Lizzy basket, and now we're breaking up over a fucking beard...?!'"

By 1978, even Robertson's sublime playing couldn't stop the axe dropping. "He got back into the band for *Bad Reputation* [1977]," recalls Gorham of the Scotsman's last stand. "I had left a whole load of parts for him. He did most of it. But then he said something to Phil, and that was it. Phil had had enough. It was like, 'Scott, I told you he was gonna do this – he's out.' I'm like, 'Okay, man.' I couldn't say anything at that point. I'd already got Robbo back into the band and now he'd done it again. It was a real shame."

ART ATTACK!

Scott showcases his latest artworks

Back in issue 513, Scott Gorham unveiled the top-secret surrealist pencil sketches he'd worked on while touring with Lizzy. Now, buoyed by the glowing response to that first wave of drawings, the guitarist is set to share a new series. What can he tell us?

"I've got, like, 40 years' worth of stuff. But – and you'll hear this from a lot of people in the art world – not everything you want to show people. But I'd say my success rate is maybe one out of five, so I'm hoping that's a good ratio. At the end of April, we're putting out four new images [pictured right] and seeing what people think. A couple will be brand-new, there'll be one from the 80s and another one from the 90s. I'm trying to span the decades a little bit because I like the idea that we can all do these things at different times in our lives."

Check out Scott Gorham's latest artworks at www.scottgorhamworld.com



PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

JET SETTING

Midge Ure, the Live Aid orchestrator and Ultravox synth-pop pioneer, looks back at his trial by fire with Thin Lizzy – and why he told Phil Lynott: “I’m not the guy you should be asking”

Words Naomi Baker

In July 1979, Thin Lizzy were riding high following the release of ninth studio album, *Black Rose: A Rock Legend*, and taking what many felt was their best shot at breaking the US. Gary Moore’s mid-tour departure (see page 60) was not in the script.

When he walked out for the third and final time, they needed to find a rapid replacement to complete their dates with Journey. They turned to a guitarist who, today, might seem an unlikely choice. “I thought Phil was out of his fucking mind,” Scott remembers. “‘Midge Ure? He’s a keyboard player!’”

“He was really brave, I have to admit. And I’ll tell you, at the end of the night, when Midge got introduced and Phil explained what he had done, the audience just exploded. He got this huge ovation, which he really deserved. And he did play really good guitar.”

Midge Ure was at work in his London studio when Lizzy leader Lynott called from Arkansas. “My initial reaction was, ‘You’ve got the wrong number. I’m not the guy you should be asking,’” says Ure. “I went back to my little flat and there was a plane ticket, a bunch of cassettes, a setlist and an itinerary saying, ‘A car will pick you up in the morning and take you to Heathrow.’ I found out they’d put me on Concorde, so I had no time to learn any of the songs!”

What were your first steps to learning the Thin Lizzy tracks?

“A ghetto blaster and big headphones. It was pre-Walkman. I sat on Concorde, sipping vintage Dom Perignon – which I’d never had before in my life – trying to get the structures in my head.

“The first time I touched a guitar to learn the chord sequences was in the hotel room with Scott Gorham. Every song had a guitar harmony to go with it. There was no rehearsal – we ran through some songs at soundcheck the next day: ‘You’ve got that; it’ll be fine. Get changed, get on and do your set.’ It was petrifying. Utterly petrifying. Thin Lizzy were a big band and I’d never been to America before.

“Musically, my first impression was, ‘God, they’re loud!’ We had two massive Marshall stacks each. When you stood in front of your stack you couldn’t hear anybody else. I had to keep going over to Brian to check I was in time. It was an emotional turmoil of fear and excitement – just bizarre.”

How was the atmosphere within Lizzy?

“Panic, more than anything. *Black Rose* was a really important record. It’s very difficult to promote an album that’s just covered in Gary Moore when you’re a three-piece without him.

“I had turned up with a Yamaha SG-2000. I did the first few shows with

that until, unbeknownst to me, it was deemed not cool enough for a band like Thin Lizzy to have a Japanese guitar. They were fantastic guitars, and still are, but it was suggested I use a very old Les Paul Junior, which obviously looked the part. I looked like I’d been beamed down from *Star Trek*, standing on stage with these guys with their studs and armbands, flicking their hair – there I was, with my pointy sideburns, sucking my cheeks in!”

Why do you think Phil chose you to replace Gary Moore?

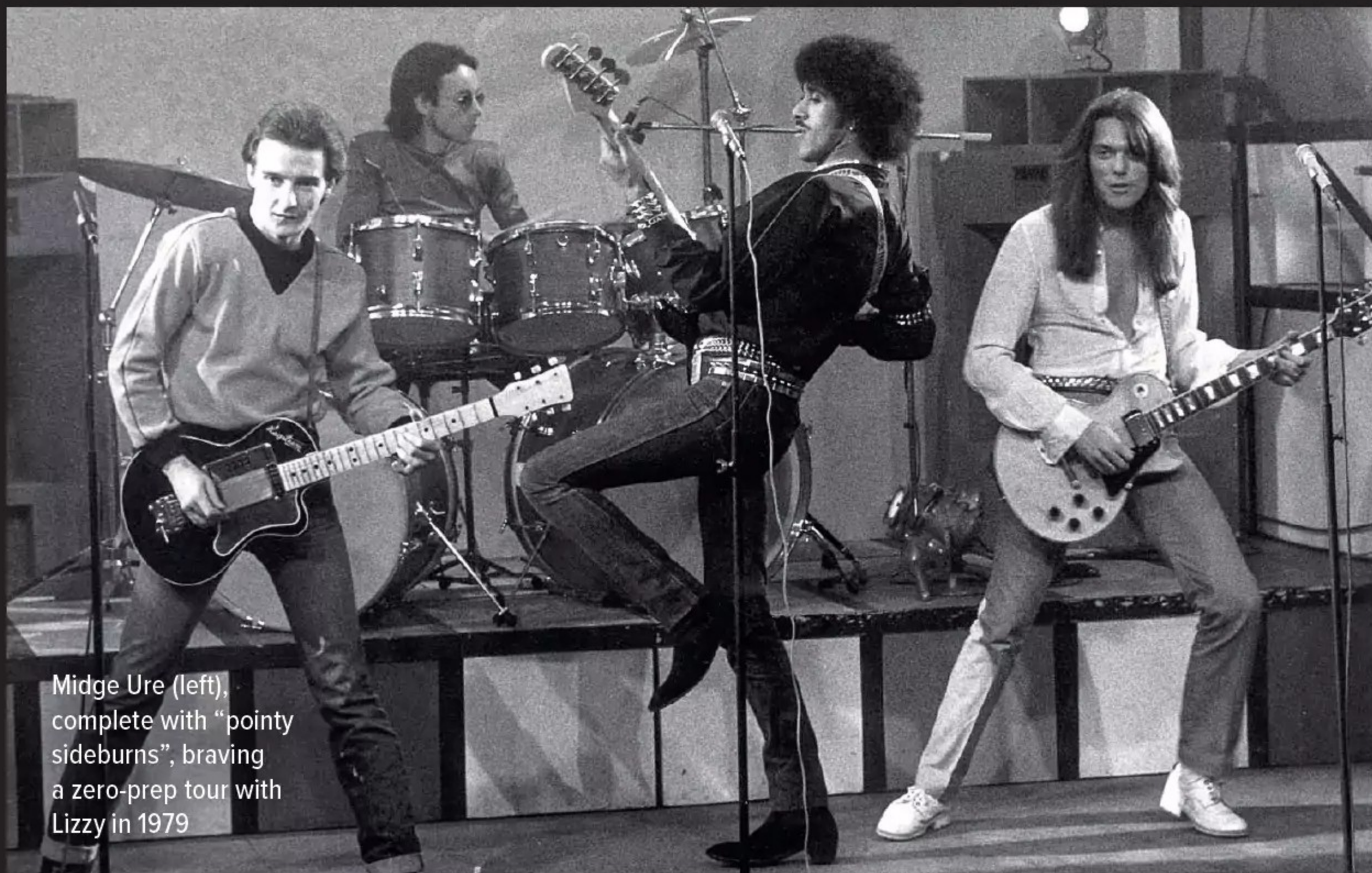
“I found out many years later from Scott that Philip had convinced the guys I knew all the songs. Scott said he’d never seen anyone thrown so deep into the deep end, having to learn an hour’s worth of material on the plane, and learning it well enough to get on stage in front of 30,000 people and play all these harmony guitar parts. *Black Rose* was the only track we couldn’t play live. We spent three weeks trying to learn it, but nobody was fast enough to do those Irish jig-type licks – which was a real skill.”

How did playing in Lizzy shape you?

“It gave me confidence as a guitarist, but it was odd because it wasn’t my music. My heart laid in Ultravox. We all took turns playing cassettes in the limo. They’d be playing ZZ Top and Bob Seger – very American stuff – and I’m saying, ‘Have you heard Kraftwerk?’ Poor Scott would be sitting there pulling his hair out. But Philip would go, ‘Hold on a second, what’s this?’ He was a magpie – he always wanted to be associated with what was happening at the time.

“It made me more money than I’d ever seen in my entire life, and that gave me the wherewithal to get Ultravox up and running. I think I was better as a fan – I felt more comfortable watching Lizzy, rather than being up there doing it. My head was full of electronic synthesizers and combinations of guitars.

“Lizzy were an incredibly important band. Whether you’re a rock musician or not, you cannot deny that Philip had a unique voice, he was a great songwriter, and that Lizzy live were one of the best things you could ever possibly see.”



Midge Ure (left), complete with “pointy sideburns”, braving a zero-prep tour with Lizzy in 1979

SOUND AS A BELL

When the Irish band were a folksy blues three-piece, it was Eric Bell who defined Thin Lizzy on their 1971 self-titled debut and early 70s follow-ups, *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage* and *Vagabonds Of The Western World*

Words Andrew Daly

In 1969, a colourful encounter between Phil Lynott and Eric Bell in a Dublin club sowed the seeds for the formation of the original three-piece Thin Lizzy line-up, with Lynott's long-time friend and previous bandmate Brian Downey on drums. Bell proved to be a consummate songsmith with licks for days. He also provided unforgettable tone, demonstrated on iconic tracks like *The Rocker* and *Whiskey In The Jar* – later to be covered by Metallica on *Garage Inc* in 1998.

But Bell was hampered by drugs and alcohol. During a New Year's Eve show in Dublin in 1973, he stopped the show, threw his Strat in the air, tipped over his amps and then collapsed. He quit the band the next day, ushering in Thin Lizzy's hard rock-based era.

Asked if he regrets how things ended, Bell says: "I did at first, but the passing of time has changed my mind. If I'd stayed,

I'd be dead, like fucking hundreds of other musicians. It got to a point where I was smoking dope and drinking while recording and playing live. I had to stop... I had to walk away. I have no regrets."

How did you meet Phil Lynott and form Thin Lizzy?

"I was at a club amid my first LSD trip. There was this band playing, which had Phil as the singer, though he wasn't playing bass. I was sitting there watching and the LSD began to kick in – but I could tell Phil was special. He had these impressive vocal chops and great charisma. I thought to myself, 'Man, if only I could find a guy like that.'

"So when they took a break, Phil went to the dressing room and I followed him. He said, 'Can I help you?' I said, 'I'm looking to form a three-piece band.' At this point, I was laughing at everything I saw around the room. Phil looked at me

like I'd just escaped an asylum and asked, 'Are you okay?' I said, 'It's my first trip on acid,' and we kept talking. He told me about a drummer called Brian Downey and he said to go to the Zodiac Club and find him there.

"As I was leaving, Phil said, 'I want to play bass and I want to write my own songs.' I said, 'Yeah? Okay – quit your band.' From there we met for a rehearsal; it was very shaky, but I knew there was something there and we stuck with it."

What was it like working with Phil on the first Thin Lizzy record?

"We took a lot of risks; I'd only known Phil for about six weeks then. I remember sitting in the pub and he said, 'Fancy getting a house together to work on music?' Many bands were doing that and we figured it was easier than going into a rehearsal space. We got this space in Dublin and many of the earliest Thin Lizzy songs were written there."

After Thin Lizzy, the band moved from Ireland to London for *Shades Of A Blue Orphanage*. Why?

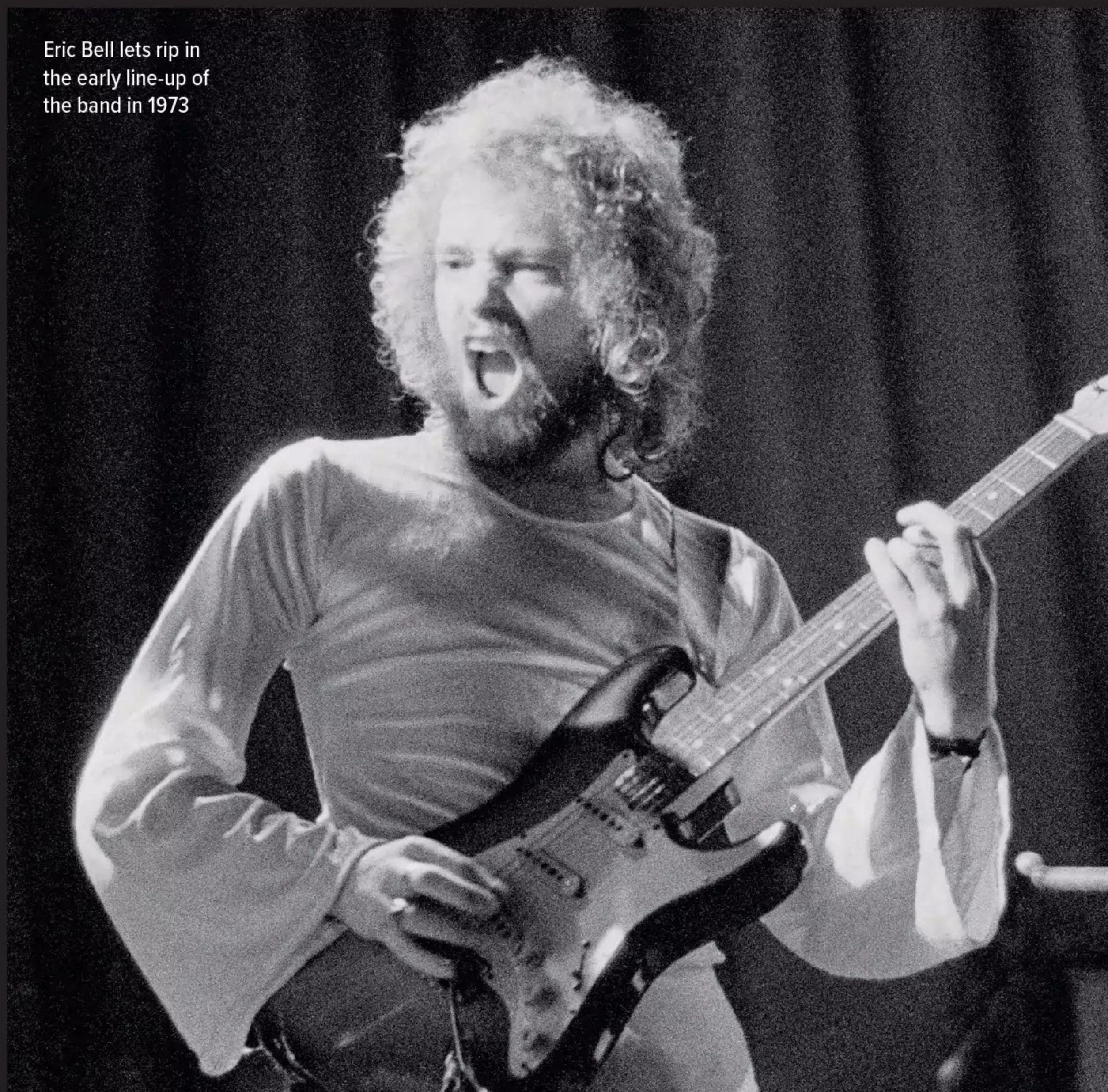
"We'd begun to cause some waves around Ireland. We went from having no-one at gigs to having a huge line out the door. I took it for granted, but we kept getting bigger. Our manager said to us, 'There's nothing more here for you – you've got to move to London.'

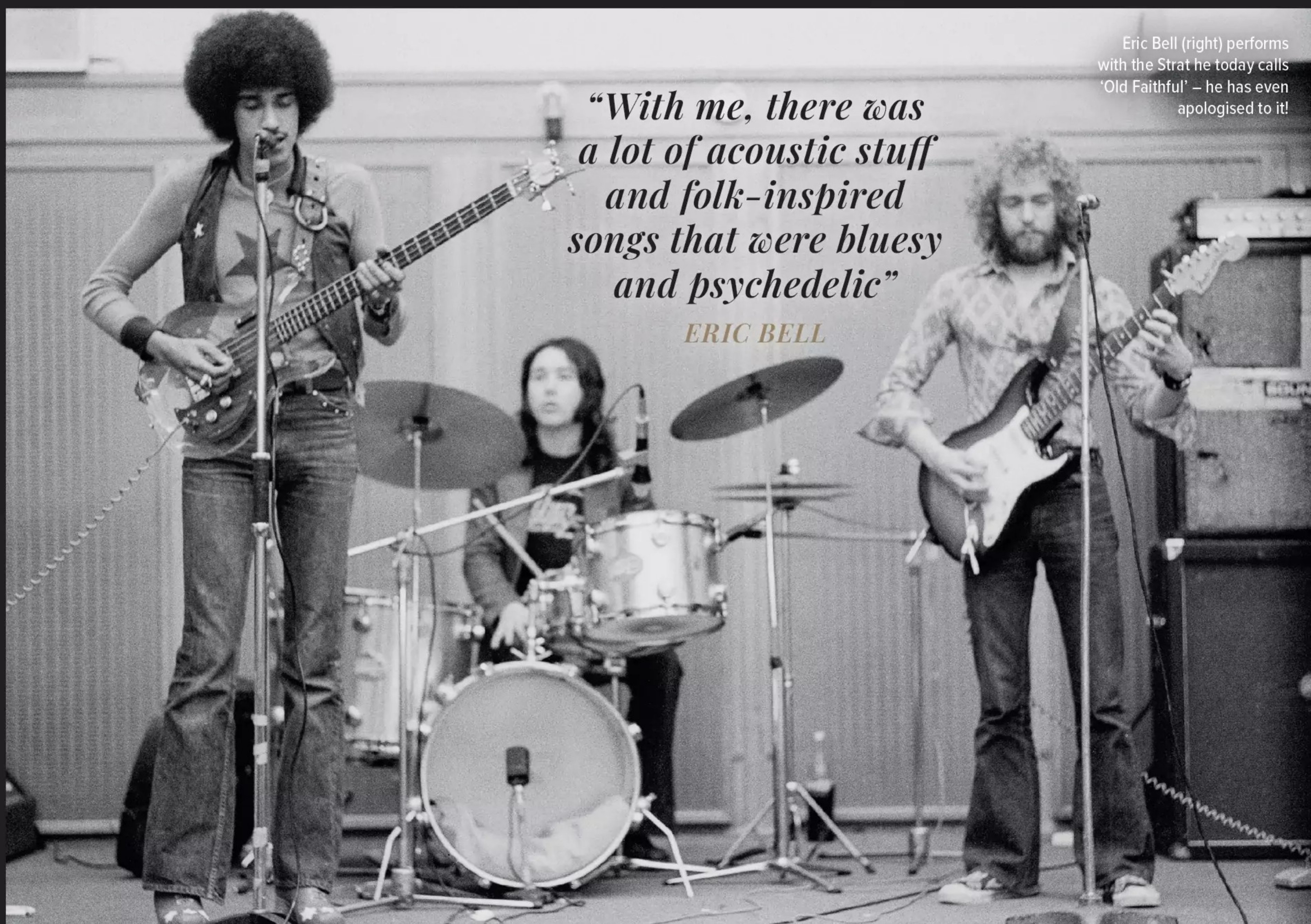
"So we went and started playing six nights a week. But no-one knew who we were. We started from the bottom all over again and that's when we went in to do the second record. The thing was that we didn't have enough songs, and since we were working so hard, we didn't have time to arrange things. The second record was literally made up on the spot."

***Whiskey In The Jar* was released as a single in late '72. Tell us about the recording.**

"That was the hardest piece of music I've ever worked on in my life. We'd been messing with it in rehearsal. But I thought, 'This isn't blues. It's not funk. It's not jazz. It's an Irish folk song – and I don't know how to approach it.' [Working up the solo] was unreal. I'd get up each morning, go to the guitar – and

Eric Bell lets rip in the early line-up of the band in 1973





Eric Bell (right) performs with the Strat he today calls 'Old Faithful' – he has even apologised to it!

“With me, there was a lot of acoustic stuff and folk-inspired songs that were bluesy and psychedelic”

ERIC BELL

couldn't think of anything. It went on for weeks, then Phil started calling: 'We need this done!'

"One night we played in Wales and while driving home I was sitting in the back seat. I went into this dreamlike state and started thinking about Irish pipes. I said, 'Right, forget about the guitar. Let's run with this.' I heard Irish pipes in my brain and the solo started forming in my mind. I'd never thought that way before. Once I'd gotten into the song and the solo was underway, I hit it hard as it was happening. It was just one of those special moments where every note worked. It was very unusual."

What gear did you use?

"I had a very strange setup. When I got to London, I had a Vox AC30, but it went missing. I was trying a lot of different amps and I ended up trying a Vox with two PA speakers. I tried a Hiwatt and a Marshall, but I didn't like them. Our manager got me this transistor amp and when I plugged it in Phil said, 'There's no valves!' It had a treble booster that I paired with this echo chamber. I plugged the Strat in, cranked the volume to the edge and off I went."

Vagabonds Of The Western World showed

promise, but it all came crashing down during the band's New Year's Eve show in '73.

"A lot had happened by that point. I was only in my 20s and we'd ended up in London, which I hated. I couldn't handle it being so different from Ireland. I went down a slippery slope of drinking and drugs, and we were hardly making any real money.

"So we get into Belfast, our hometown, and I'm on a lot of drugs before the show at Queen's University. It was sold out and I drank half a bottle of whiskey to calm down. Then it was time to go on – and I couldn't do it. Drinking all the whiskey had me feeling like a giant was smothering me; I could barely raise my arms, let alone play the guitar.

"I said, 'Eric, you should not be doing this gig. You're not capable.' So Phil and Brian launched into the set – and by the third song I was gone. This voice in my head said, 'Get out of here. Leave this situation, or you'll be dead.' Then the voice said, 'Throw the guitar in the air, kick the speaker over and fucking get out.' Before I knew what I was doing, I saw my guitar in the air in slow motion, and I went and pushed my amp over.

"People thought it was an act, but

I collapsed under the stage. And the crew ran over, yelling, 'Get back out there!' But I said, 'No, I've had it. I've left the band.'"

Did you agree with the direction that Phil took Thin Lizzy?

"It was a different band. With me, there was a lot of acoustic stuff and folk-inspired songs that were bluesy and psychedelic. But Phil leaned on harder stuff with Brian [Robertson] and Scott Gorham in the band. Don't get me wrong – those albums were excellent, just not how it might have been. Thin Lizzy became a superb band, just a completely different one than I was in."

Do you still have the Strat you tossed into the air during your final show with Thin Lizzy in 1973?

"I do! I have other guitars, but my main one is the same Strat I used with Thin Lizzy. I've had it for about 50 years and I play it daily. I call it 'Old Faithful' because it never lets me down. I had a drunken conversation with it one night where I said, 'I'm sorry I threw you up in the air in Belfast. Can you please forgive me?' I believe it has."

GARY MOORE

1974, 1977, 1978-1979

Moore's on/off relationship with Lizzy is one of the great flirtations in rock 'n' roll, the storied Belfast guitarist passing by like a meteor for three blink-and-miss-it shifts in the 70s. Moore was a master technician who pre-dated Gorham's tenure (and played on the sublime *Still In Love With You* from 74's *Nightlife*), so did the Californian ever feel threatened by his return? It's the only time he shows a flicker of irritation.

3. Gary Moore and Scott Gorham combining the might of their Les Pauls at the Memorial Auditorium in Sacramento, California, in 1977

"Gary would attack the guitar with different velocities to bring out different tones. He was so inventive" SCOTT GORHAM

"Y'know, I've been asked that before and actually I don't get that question. I was *thrilled* that this guy was gonna come into the band – because I knew what he could do. I knew that, once again, here was a guy I could feed off and learn some really great shit off of him, right? Gary was one of those absolute natural-born guitar players."

Just as important, as the band embarked on 1977's US tour supporting Queen, was that Moore had two functioning hands – Robertson having ruled himself out after a brawl at The Marquee. "Because Gary had played with Lizzy before, he knew the songs," reasons Gorham, "and if you threw something new at him, he was gonna get it really quickly. Which is what we needed. Because Robbo had busted his hand, we were on the plane and we were like, 'Gary, we gotta get this shit done, man!' And he did."

Live shots from the period show both players jousting on Les Pauls in front of a wall of Marshalls. "Yeah, Gary was already playing his Peter Green Les Paul, and I'd finally got my 1957 Les Paul, which I bought in Boston," says Gorham. "Every once in a while, he had an SG he would pull out. But 90 per cent of the time, it was the two

Les Pauls. You have to remember, with the Queen tour, we only had 45 minutes, so there's not a lot of switching guitars, detunings and all that crap. It was just like, 'Boom – let's go!'

"Pairing Les Pauls works because they both have similar sounds," he continues. "The difference comes from the way the player attacks the strings. Gary was great with that. He'd attack the guitar with different velocities to bring out different tones. He was so inventive. I remember, he came up to me one day and said, 'Check this out – doesn't this sound like bagpipes?' I was like, 'Goddamn, it does! What are you gonna use that for?' And he said, 'Nothing, I just wanted to see if I could do it.' I don't think Gary really liked repeating himself every night on tour, but you kind of have to in those situations."

Without guitars in their hands, however, Gorham says it was harder to bond with the Irishman. "I can see why people would say Gary was a hard guy to get to know. If Phil and I were going to a club and Gary came out with us, he'd sit on his own and wouldn't engage. After a while, he stopped coming out. He just stayed in the

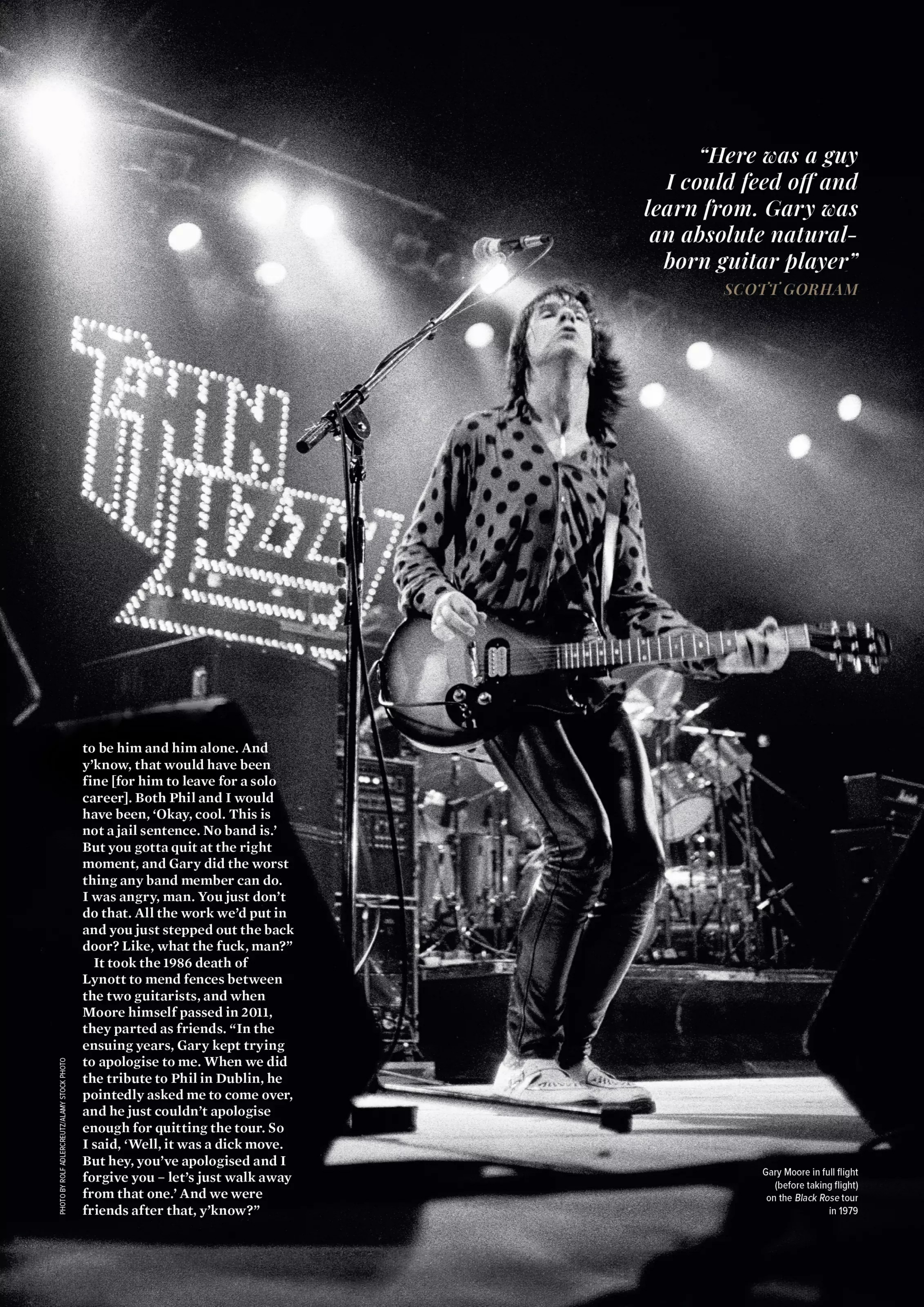
hotel. It was always me and Phil hanging out and he might have felt a little excluded."

In the studio, Moore made his defining mark on 1979's *Black Rose: A Rock Legend*. "My favourite track has gotta be *Black Rose*," says Gorham. "Gary came up with that whole middle section. I've played it with other guitar players and they just couldn't handle it, John Sykes being one of them. There's a whole ton of harmony work going on. You've gotta be on your game to pull that song off. There's no resting point. Once you hear the '1-2-3-4', you're in it, man! *Waiting For An Alibi* is another one. I took the solo on that, but it was Gary who came up with the little melody at the end. I'll admit, when I first heard it, I went, 'Goddammit Gary, we're gonna have to pull that off every night!'"

Plainly, there was gas in the tank. But Moore's third and final exit left a sour taste, the Irishman quitting midway through a US tour in July 1979. Lizzy never regained their Stateside momentum and Gorham was justifiably furious. "I think, towards the end there, Gary really did want to play all the guitars," he reflects. "He just wanted it



PHOTO BY LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



*"Here was a guy
I could feed off and
learn from. Gary was
an absolute natural-
born guitar player"*

SCOTT GORHAM

to be him and him alone. And y'know, that would have been fine [for him to leave for a solo career]. Both Phil and I would have been, 'Okay, cool. This is not a jail sentence. No band is.' But you gotta quit at the right moment, and Gary did the worst thing any band member can do. I was angry, man. You just don't do that. All the work we'd put in and you just stepped out the back door? Like, what the fuck, man?"

It took the 1986 death of Lynott to mend fences between the two guitarists, and when Moore himself passed in 2011, they parted as friends. "In the ensuing years, Gary kept trying to apologise to me. When we did the tribute to Phil in Dublin, he pointedly asked me to come over, and he just couldn't apologise enough for quitting the tour. So I said, 'Well, it was a dick move. But hey, you've apologised and I forgive you – let's just walk away from that one.' And we were friends after that, y'know?"

Gary Moore in full flight
(before taking flight)
on the *Black Rose* tour
in 1979

JOHN SYKES

1982-1983, 1996-2009

Lizzy rolled with the punches on 1980's *Chinatown* and 1981's *Renegade* (both featuring the bluesier Snowy White on guitar). But in 1982, Gorham called a crisis meeting. "I told Phil we had to stop this whole thing. The drug addictions. Phil losing his voice. The mistakes we were now making on stage: that really hurt because we were a band that just did not make mistakes, then you hear a recording and you go, 'What the hell was that?' So I said, 'Let's wrap this thing up. Let's get our shit together and when we both get healthy, we'll hit everybody over the head with a fucking sledgehammer.'"

4. Latter-day Lizzy: John Sykes and Scott Gorham on stage at in Norwich in 2006. Many years after Phil Lynott's death, Sykes fronted a revivalist line-up of the band for a time, pictured in action here

Instead, the bandleader made a counter-offer. "Phil says, 'Let's do one more album and world tour. I know this kid. He's really good. He's with Tygers Of Pan Tang.' I'd heard the name in magazines but never heard anything they'd recorded. Phil says, 'I promise you, you're gonna like him, and if you don't, we'll look for somebody else.'"

"So John Sykes comes down and I couldn't fault him in any way. I really wanted to say, 'See, there's nobody out there, so we gotta walk away from this.' But I couldn't. He was a great player. He was a one-guitar guy: never, ever did I see him play anything but his black Les Paul. And he looked great on stage, too. So what was not to like?"

"John brought in that metal edge. He had a fiery style, and I stepped up my sound to match his" SCOTT GORHAM

While the songs for 1983's *Thunder And Lightning* were complete (barring the Sykes co-write *Cold Sweat*), the new boy quickly asserted himself with a fierce vibrato and shrieking harmonics that pushed Lizzy in a new direction. "We were not a metal band," reflects Gorham. "But John brought in that metal edge. He had a fiery style, and I stepped up my sound to match his. Really, his strength was the quickness. He wasn't about subtleties. Every track he wanted faster. He'd turn around to Brian Downey and say, 'Hey man, can you kick it up a couple?' And I'd have to say, 'John, it's getting out of control.' He wanted to show everybody just how fast he was. But he was an excellent player, no doubt about that. Our best track together was *Cold Sweat*. But there was no middle ground with *Thunder And Lightning*. Lizzy fans loved it or hated it."



PHOTO BY RICHARD ECCLESTONE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

A black and white photograph of Phil Syles, a member of the band Thin Lizzy, performing on stage. He is captured in a dynamic pose, leaning forward and playing a dark-colored electric guitar. He has long, wavy, light-colored hair and is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt. The background is dark, with several bright stage lights visible, creating a high-contrast, energetic atmosphere. The lighting highlights his hair and the details of the guitar.

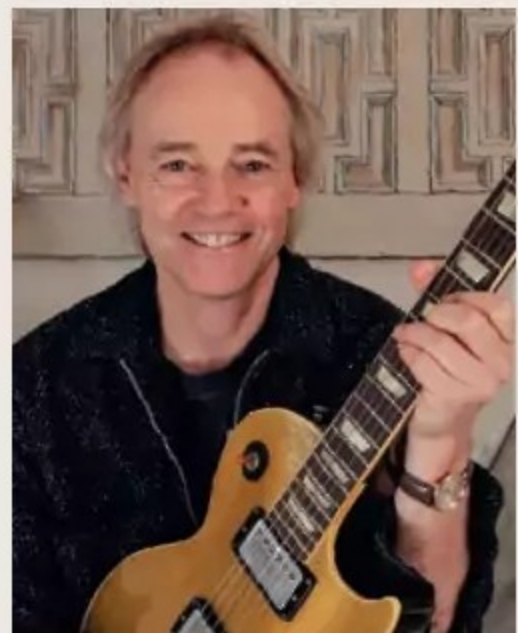
*“John’s strength
was the quickness.
He wasn’t about
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he wanted faster”*

SCOTT GORHAM

Syles performing with a
rejuvenated Thin Lizzy –
the band was buoyed by
his energy

THEY ALSO SERVED

Scott Gorham on four more Lizzy guitar partners



SNOWY WHITE (1980-1982)

"I liked Snowy a lot. I also liked his playing. He was a much bluesier player than all the rest of the

guys. For us to ask him to rock it up, it was a bit of a stretch for him. Not that he couldn't do it. But his comfort zone was really based around the blues feel.

"Chinatown was my favourite track we did because that was his riff. We were just in the rehearsal room one day and he was playing that and I said, 'Hey man, that's kinda cool.' 'Yeah, I've been beating this one around for a

"I loved playing with all these guys – I could watch what they were doing and build my own curriculum"

SCOTT GORHAM

while.' I said, 'Well, let's try to get something together.' We got Phil in and that's how it happened. Both he and I play lead guitar: he played the first solo, I play the second one.

"Snowy says he left because he was too quiet for Thin Lizzy? Oh yeah. Like you wouldn't believe. Phil had to force Snowy to move on stage. He was always the background guy, never a spotlight kinda person."

PHOTO BY SIMON LEES



Richard Fortus and Scott Gorham duking it out on a 'pile-driver' of a tour

PHOTO BY WILL IRELAND/CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE



VIV CAMPBELL (2010-2011)

"Vivian was the guy who helped me get that last version of Lizzy going. I had no idea who to get on

that right-hand side. And then I get a phone call from Joe Elliott from Def Leppard. He says, 'Scott, I hear you're putting a band together. Vivian would like to know if you would consider him being in Thin Lizzy for a while.' I went, 'Are you kidding me? Hell yeah!' And that freed me up to start thinking, 'Okay, I'll get Marco Mendoza on bass, this other guy on drums...' So Vivian was a great starter for me. I've always admired his guitar playing. And I always liked him as a guy, too."

PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON



RICHARD FORTUS (2011)

"Richard somehow got my phone number and called me up. And I said, 'Y'know, Richard,

I really do know your pedigree and how good you are. I'll tell you what: Vivian's gotta go back on tour with Def Leppard – can you fly to blah-blah-blah city and we'll have two days of rehearsal and then pile-drive straight into the tour?' He said, 'Absolutely.' I sent him the setlist and a plane ticket and that was Richard Fortus in the band for the next two months or so. It was a really good experience. He's a great player, too."

PHOTO BY REED R. RADCLIFFE



DAMON JOHNSON (2011-2019)

"Damon's a really great player. If he's being really honest, he'd be more on the country-rock side of

things, if he's going to be really comfortable. But he can play the heavier stuff, too. He's a really well-rounded player. The only problem with Damon is that he's so fucking tall. I said to him, 'Damon, when you come over to my side of the stage, spread your legs, okay? Make yourself a little shorter.' He was also the only other Thin Lizzy guitar player that played golf. So he and I could go out and play golf together."

PHOTO BY KEVIN NIXON

Either way, Lynott's death meant that 12th album became Lizzy's studio swansong (a status it holds to this day). As far as Gorham was concerned, without their talismanic frontman, Lizzy was over as a touring outfit, too. But in the mid-90s, Sykes pitched his former wingman an initially jarring idea. "We both sang background, but I'd never heard John sing solo. I had no idea he had three solo albums. I listened to them and I thought, 'Hey, where's he been keeping this?' So I said, 'Okay, I think we can give this a shot. I'm still not sure if this is the right thing to do, but let's see what happens.'"

Even with considerable pedigree in the line-up, remembers Gorham, the first day felt off. "I remember being in that studio and nobody wanted to pick up a guitar, in case this was not going to work out. I finally said, 'Fuck it, I've

"I'm waiting for the right player. I don't want to break the chain of great guitarists coming through Thin Lizzy" **SCOTT GORHAM**

flown 6,000 miles, let's get into this. We'll start out with *Jailbreak*, okay? If it's shit, then we'll just pack up. So we played *Jailbreak* and at the end, we looked at each other and said, 'Actually, that sounded pretty damn good.' Before we knew it, we had a full set that everybody felt confident in."

While some fans never accepted the switch, the Sykes-fronted Lizzy lasted until July 2009 – when this career journeyman rolled on for a stuttering solo career, while the band drafted gunslingers like Viv Campbell, Richard Fortus and Damon Johnson. When Sykes died of cancer in December 2024,

5. Keeper of the flame: Scott Gorham has been the backbone of the band through victory and tragedy – and he isn't ready to quit yet, either

Gorham felt a terrible sense of déjà vu. "I got so many requests: 'Hey, Scott, let's do an interview.' 'No thanks, it's too soon.' The same thing happened when Phil died. I didn't want to go through all that again. I kinda wish I hadn't been such a prick about it and done some of these interviews, for John's sake."

Where does that leave Lizzy in 2025? Four decades since the last studio material – and with no live dates in the diary – a betting man would say the fabled Irish band is all over. Don't be so sure, smiles Gorham. "I'm waiting for the right calibre of player. I can't just pick somebody off the line. For me, there's gotta be something special about them. I don't want to break the chain of great guitar players coming through Thin Lizzy. I know they're out there. So hopefully, it's not gonna take too long for something to happen..." **20**



PHOTO BY PHIL BARKER



Solid Gold

In 1965, Eric Clapton and Michael Bloomfield unwittingly saved the archetypal Les Paul Standard from total extinction. The market was the would-be killer, but the murder weapon was the guitar you see before you.

Join us as we chart the rise — and rise — of the Gibson SG

By Mick Taylor

YOU COULDN'T MAKE it up. Take a trip to 1960, and sit at a table in Kalamazoo, Michigan. You work for Gibson and you're looking at — or at least talking about — what will turn out to be the Holy Grail of electric guitars, the 1958-1960 sunburst Les Paul Standard. Honduras mahogany, big leaf maple, Brazilian

rosewood, PAF pickups — timeless, aching beauty.

But the financial picture for this guitar isn't so pretty. You revived it in 1957 with humbucking pickups, again in '58 with the sunburst finish. Sales peaked in 1959, but you've shipped fewer than 1,800 bursts in total. Your biggest-selling guitars are the lower-priced, slab-bodied Les Paul Junior

and Melody Maker. What's more, you're doubling the size of your factory and you need to get it working to capacity. The next decision taken by your boss, Ted McCarty — with some help from Bloomfield and Clapton — ensures firstly that those original bursts will sell for a million dollars one day, and more importantly, it creates yet another legendary Gibson solidbody.

SG Origins

MCCARTY WAS GIBSON’S president between 1950 and 1966 and was ultimately responsible for the most important electric guitar designs in the company’s history. The SG’s development was part of a wider restructuring in the electric guitar line through the late 1950s and early 1960s. With hindsight, the decision to radically morph the Les Paul Standard into what we now know as the SG might look like madness. At the time, and in the context of what was happening in the market, however, it was the obvious move. Gibson’s legacy of high-craft, archtop instruments was getting new electric life via the hollowbody ES-175 and revolutionary ES-335 thinline semi of 1958. Meanwhile the trend for more modern-minded, feedback-busting solidbody electrics for younger rock ’n’ roll players got a shot in the arm with the Flying V and Explorer of the same year — well ahead of their time and selling poorly as a result. Less radical but just as important, in 1958 came Gibson’s first double-cutaway solidbody, the Les Paul Junior, which would prove pivotal in the SG’s genesis.

For 1961, then, McCarty took the single-cutaway Les Paul Standard’s 60mm thick body and slimmed it considerably, did away with the carved maple top and left a simple slab mahogany body already popularised by the Junior and Melody Maker. The shape was resculpted to a more aggressive, modernist outline, offering twin-cutaways and unrestricted access to the very last of its 22 frets. With the chunk of wood gone between the 16th and 21st/22nd frets on the bass side, the neck would also prove more unstable; “flappy” or “whippy” and very easy to bend in and out of tune, perhaps the SG’s most notable idiosyncrasy, loved and loathed equally. Indeed, the neck itself was slimmer than the 1960 Les Paul model.

Retained from the previous models was most of the hardware and electronics complement — the first models shipped with the distinctly odd, sideways action “Gibson Deluxe Vibrato” — and the overall effect on tone was a brighter, harder-edged sound with less apparent low end response. It was certainly different — evidence,

“A guy could kill himself on those sharp horns. It was too thin, and they had moved the front pickup away from the fingerboard so they could fit my name there. The neck was too skinny... So I called Gibson and asked them to take my name off the thing. It wasn’t my design”

LES PAUL, FROM *AMERICAN GUITARS: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY*

assuming more were needed, that McCarty was moving forward fearlessly.

Losing Les

LES PAUL, BY all accounts, wasn’t enamoured with his new signature guitar. As Tony Bacon explains in his book *50 Years of the Gibson Les Paul*, and indeed Walter Carter in *The Gibson Electric Guitar Book* (both Backbeat Books), the superstar’s contract with Gibson was up for renewal in 1962 or 1963, depending on who’s telling the story. Waning popularity in the charts, Les’s impending divorce with Mary Ford and his general dissatisfaction with the new design meant that by 1963 the contract hadn’t been renewed and Paul, almost unthinkably in hindsight, was no longer officially associated with the Gibson company. As it turned out, he wouldn’t be again until 1968 when Gibson reintroduced the original Les Paul shape, having realized that a handful of world-changing players were lusting after those old bursts. The new guitar, meanwhile, became the SG — Solid Guitar — and so it would remain for ever more.

Over the years, the SG has been subject to plenty of revisions, changes and tweaks. Like Fender’s celebrated Stratocaster, Telecaster and indeed the very guitar from which it was spawned, it has survived mid-Sixties stylistic tinkering, 1970s corporate meltdown and 1980s metal-driven excesses. What prevails in the hearts of most guitar enthusiasts is that ’61-’63 classic spec; the Cherry Standard, Juniors and Specials and the white three-pickup Custom that we’ll forever associate with a man named Jimi Hendrix.

Happy Mistake

NOW, NEARLY 65 years later, who could have

guessed that such a potentially colossal mistake — evolving the super-plush single-cut Les Paul Standard into a stripped-down, twin-horn rocker — would net the most desirable electric guitar in history for Gibson, right alongside its rebellious, outlandish sibling? Exciting, visceral and thoroughly modern, players who saw it first couldn’t help but be seduced by its sharp lines and unbridled playing potential. In the hands of Angus Young through Tony Iommi to Frank Zappa and beyond, the SG has come to hold a unique place, both tonally and visually, in rock ’n’ roll history. Long live the Solid Guitar. May you never grow up!

The First SGs
The Standard, Custom and Junior models

WHEN THE SG/LES Paul first appeared in 1961, there were two models. The Standard (\$265) had a pair of humbuckers, two controls per pickup, crown inlays in a bound rosewood ’board and sideways-action vibrato. The Custom (\$395) was the top of the line, with gold hardware, three humbuckers, a bound ebony fingerboard and a bound headstock.

Later that year, the Junior (\$147.50, single-pickup) and Special (\$210, dual-pickup) were added, featuring a one-piece wraparound bridge/tailpiece and P90 pickups. They had unbound rosewood fingerboards with dot inlays.

Gibson tweaked the design over the years, most notably adding the enlarged pickguard on the Custom and Standard in 1966, which held the pickups, rather than them being mounted directly to the body. — Mick Taylor

“With an SG, I can let out my visceral, animalistic side as a player. Honestly, that’s difficult for me to attain with anything else... Seeing those British Invasion guys up there playing an SG made me want to be that guy. I knew it was what I wanted to do.”

JAKE KISZKA



Making the (Double) Cut

A handy guide to the 12 (or so) greatest players ever to make a Gibson SG sing

By Mick Taylor with Joel McIver

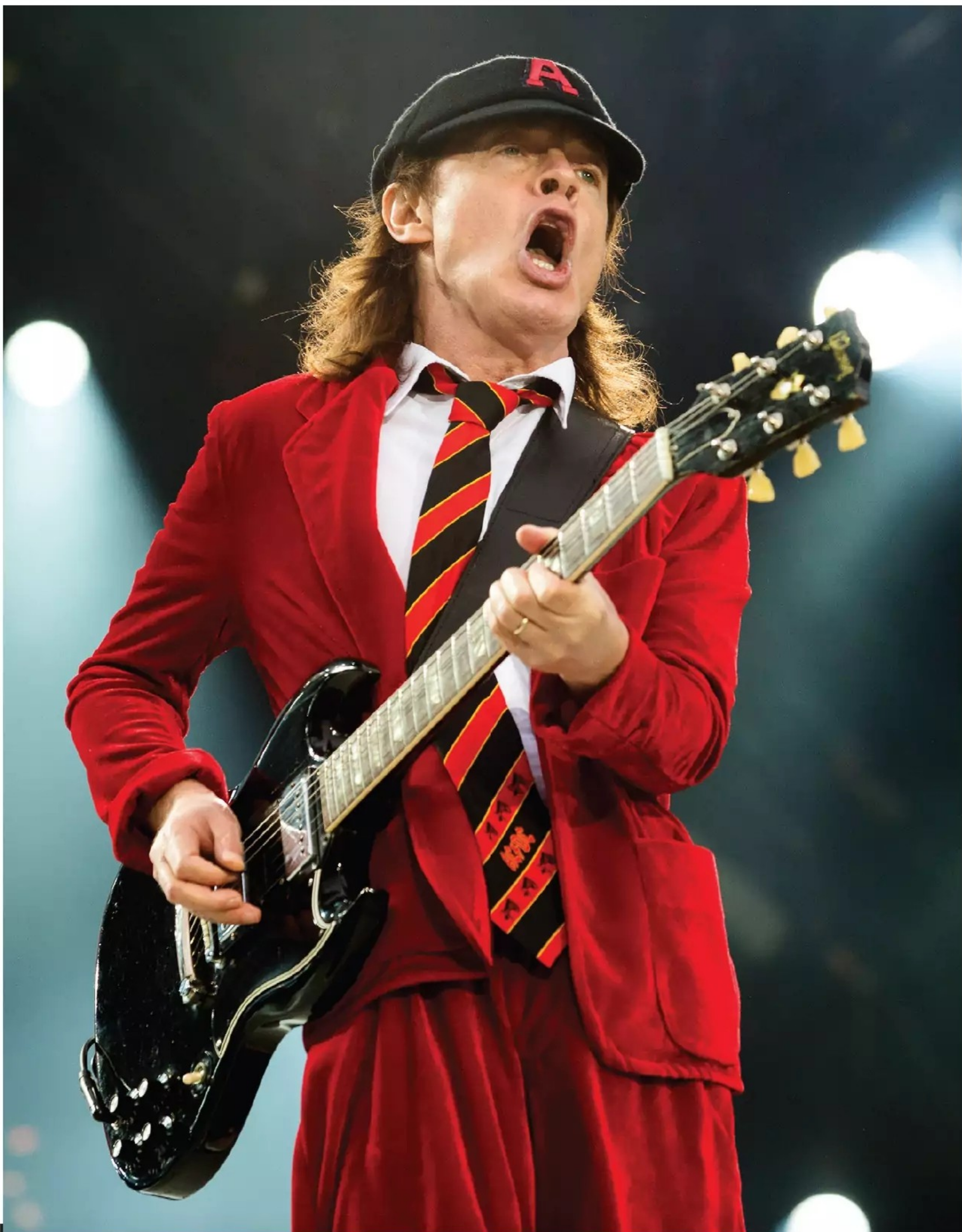
Angus Young

AC/DC'S LEAD GUITARIST — yes indeed, the gentleman on last issue's cover — favours the Gibson SG for its light weight — useful for high-voltage guitar heroics — and also because his vintage SG Standard (with its Lyre vibrato removed) has an uncommonly thin neck. But regardless of the exact reasons behind it, Young is truly dedicated to the SG.

"The guitar I consistently use has always been the same guitar, the Gibson SG," Young said in 2020. "Everyone always asks me what year [the guitar] is. You know, I've heard somebody say, 'It's a 1970s Gibson.' Then other people say, 'It's a bit earlier than that.' I don't know what year it is, but it couldn't have been [from] past 1970, because that's when I got it! [Laughs] And I've got a few other guitars. One is a black SG — I think there's a photo of it from *Back in Black*. I have another SG that's maybe a '68 or '69 that I used on *Highway to Hell*. But the main, most consistent one is the one I've always had. It's got lightning bolts on the fretboard that, I don't know, it was getting repaired and some guy put them in. I said, 'What the hell is that?' And I didn't have time to go, 'Can you put it back the way it was?'" [Laughs]

On stage, Young's sound is the archetypal roar of vintage pickups through Marshall stacks, without a pedal in sight. Angus in full flow remains one of the premier sonic experiences in all the classic rock kingdom, as proven by footage from any of their 2025 shows.

HEAR IT HERE: "Shot in the Dark" (AC/DC, *Power Up*, 2020)



ROSS GILMORE/REDFERNS



George Harrison

IN 1966, AROUND the same time John Lennon and George Harrison were following Paul McCartney's lead and adopting the Epiphone Casino, George also took delivery of a 1964 SG Standard [pictured in 2004]. It was his main guitar on *Revolver*, featured on some later recordings and was used sporadically for live work in 1966, before he gave it to Pete Ham of Badfinger circa 1969. Guitar-playing Beatles fans who want to recreate Harrison's circa-'66 mojo should check out one of Gibson's current offerings, the SG Standard '61 Faded Maestro Vibrola Vintage Cherry. HEAR IT HERE: "Hey Bulldog" (The Beatles, *Yellow Submarine*, 1969)

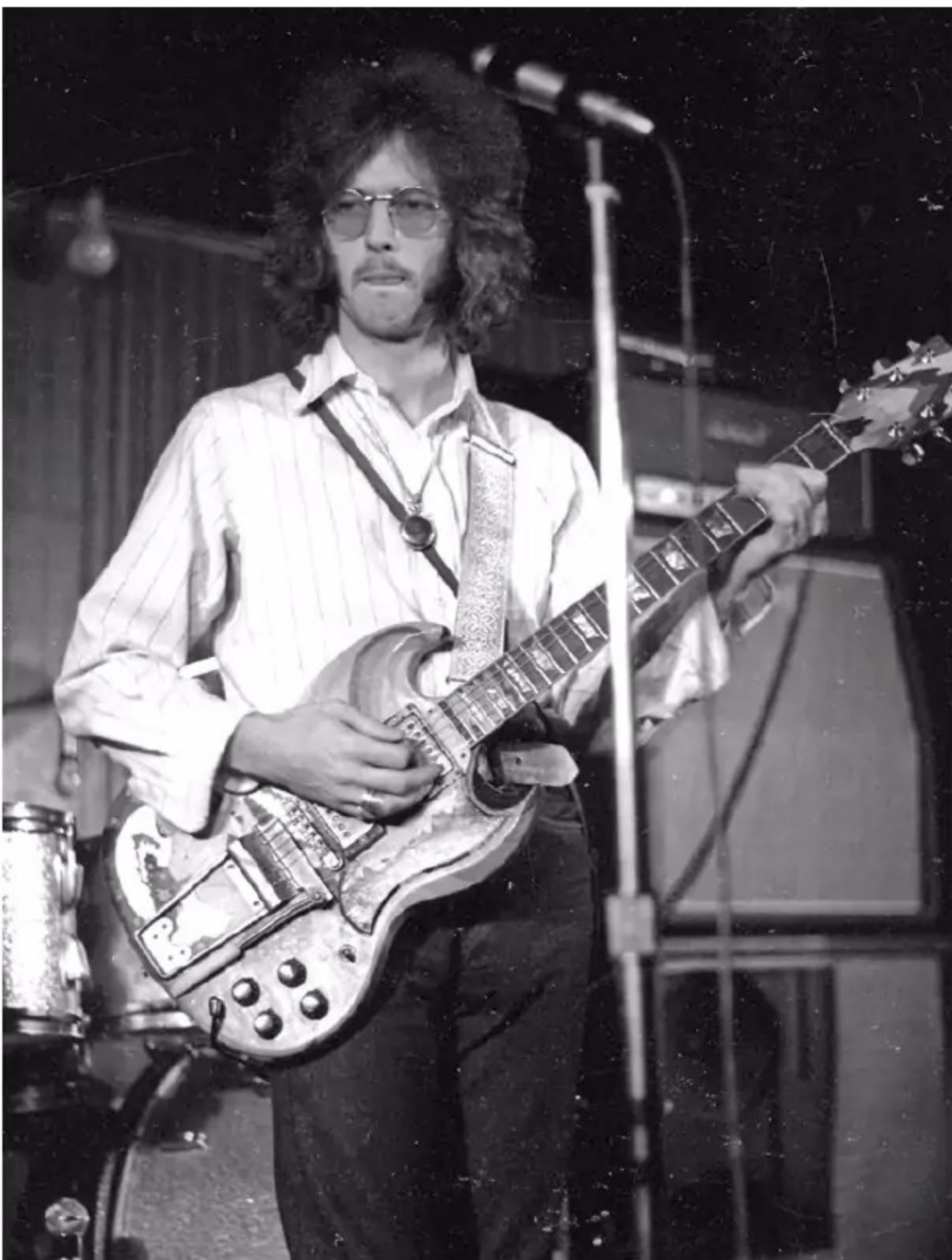


Derek Trucks

THE SLIDE SUPREMO is synonymous with his 1961 Custom Reissue SG, which was built in 2000. He chose the model because when he was gigging at the tender age of nine, he found a Les Paul to be too heavy. "I also saw a picture of Duane Allman with an SG, and that look has always stuck with me," he told the gang over at Gibson's website. HEAR IT HERE: "Down Don't Bother Me" (The Derek Trucks Band, *Already Free*, 2009)

Eric Clapton

DURING THE TRIUMPHANT Cream era, between 1967 and the band's demise in late 1968, Clapton brandished and recorded with a 1964 SG Standard that was to become one of the most iconic guitars in history. Inspired by the work they'd done for the Beatles, Clapton commissioned Simon Posthuma and Marijke Koger, known as Dutch artist collective and band the Fool, to "psychedelicize" the SG prior to the band's 1967 U.S. tour. The following year, either Clapton or George Harrison loaned it to Apple Records recording artist Jackie Lomax, who sold it to Todd Rundgren in 1972 for a bargain \$500. Rundgren renamed it "Sunny" and eventually auctioned it in 2000 for \$150,000. HEAR IT HERE: "Sunshine of Your Love" (Cream, *Disraeli Gears*, 1967)



Pete Townshend

THE WHO'S PETE Townshend favored (in terms of smashing them to smithereens) Cherry SG Specials with P90s into enormous Hiwatt Custom 100 DR 103 amps between late 1968 and 1971 — the era that included the classic *Live at Leeds*, one of the greatest live albums of all time. He first played an SG Special live in July 1968 and bought his first one from Manny's Music on West 48th Street in New York City. HEAR IT HERE: "Young Man Blues" (The Who, *Live at Leeds*, 1970)



Sister Rosetta Tharpe

PERFORMING FROM AGE four onwards, "Little Rosetta Nubin, the singing and guitar playing miracle" was a gospel sensation. A conduit for jazz, blues and all the music she was exposed to during her showbiz upbringing, she became a huge star in the late 1930s. Her style was an influence on many of the pioneers of rock 'n' roll, and footage of her on Chicago's 1962 *TV Gospel Time* show proves why. Clutching an immaculate-looking Polar White 1961 Les Paul/SG Custom and peeling off dextrous picked bends and doublestops through a cranked Gibson GA-8 Discoverer amp, her performance is testament to an unearthly talent. HEAR IT HERE: "Up Above My Head" (TV *Gospel Time* performance)

Robby Krieger

IF YOU HAVEN'T heard them in a while, listen to the Doors — who are celebrating their 60th anniversary this year — and pay attention to Robby Krieger's sinuous blending of diverse blues, jazz, rock, exotic flamenco and Indian styles. Also notice his unusual fingerpicking-only technique; and, of course, the fluid tones he wrangled from his 1964 SG Special with P90s, mostly through Fender Twins. HEAR IT HERE: "Peace Frog" (The Doors, *Morrison Hotel*, 1970 — transcribed in this issue)



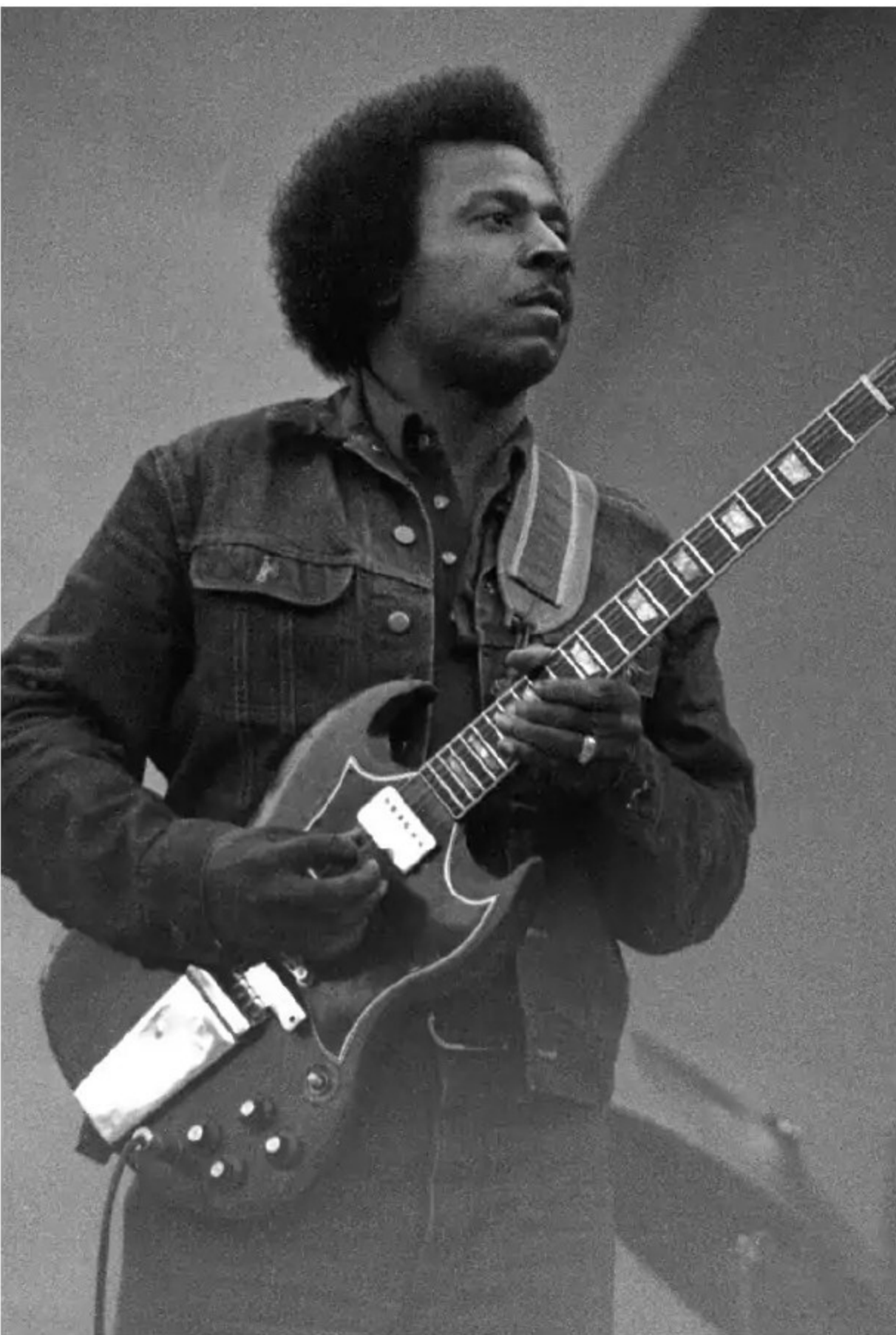
Frank Marino

THE MAHOGANY RUSH main man is a true "guitarist's guitar player" who is rarely afforded the respect his powerful tone and superb Hendrix-influenced lead playing deserve. He's been widely renowned for tonehound tendencies, modding amps and pedals (which he also builds over at Frank Marino Audio) and sporting gargantuan pedalboards — but his beloved 1961 Les Paul SG has always been the essential link in the signal chain. HEAR IT HERE: "Land of 1,000 Nights" (Mahogany Rush, *Strange Universe*, 1975)



Lonnie Brooks

THE LATE BLUES maestro Lee Baker Jr. didn't nickname himself "Guitar Jr." for nothing. A 30-year solo artist under his other stage name, Lonnie Brooks, he combined Chicago and Louisiana blues with R&B, wielding a chestnut-brown SG (among other models over the decades) to create a slick, energetic sound that his devotees labeled "voodoo blues." He found success in Europe as well as with domestic audiences; a career high point came when he jammed with Eric Clapton in Chicago in 1993. Brooks also co-wrote the *Blues for Dummies* book in 1998 and appeared in films such as *Blues Brothers 2000*. In his later years, he played a truly sumptuous white Custom Shop SG with gold hardware. HEAR IT HERE: "TV Mama" (Lonnie Brooks, *Turn On the Night*, 1981)

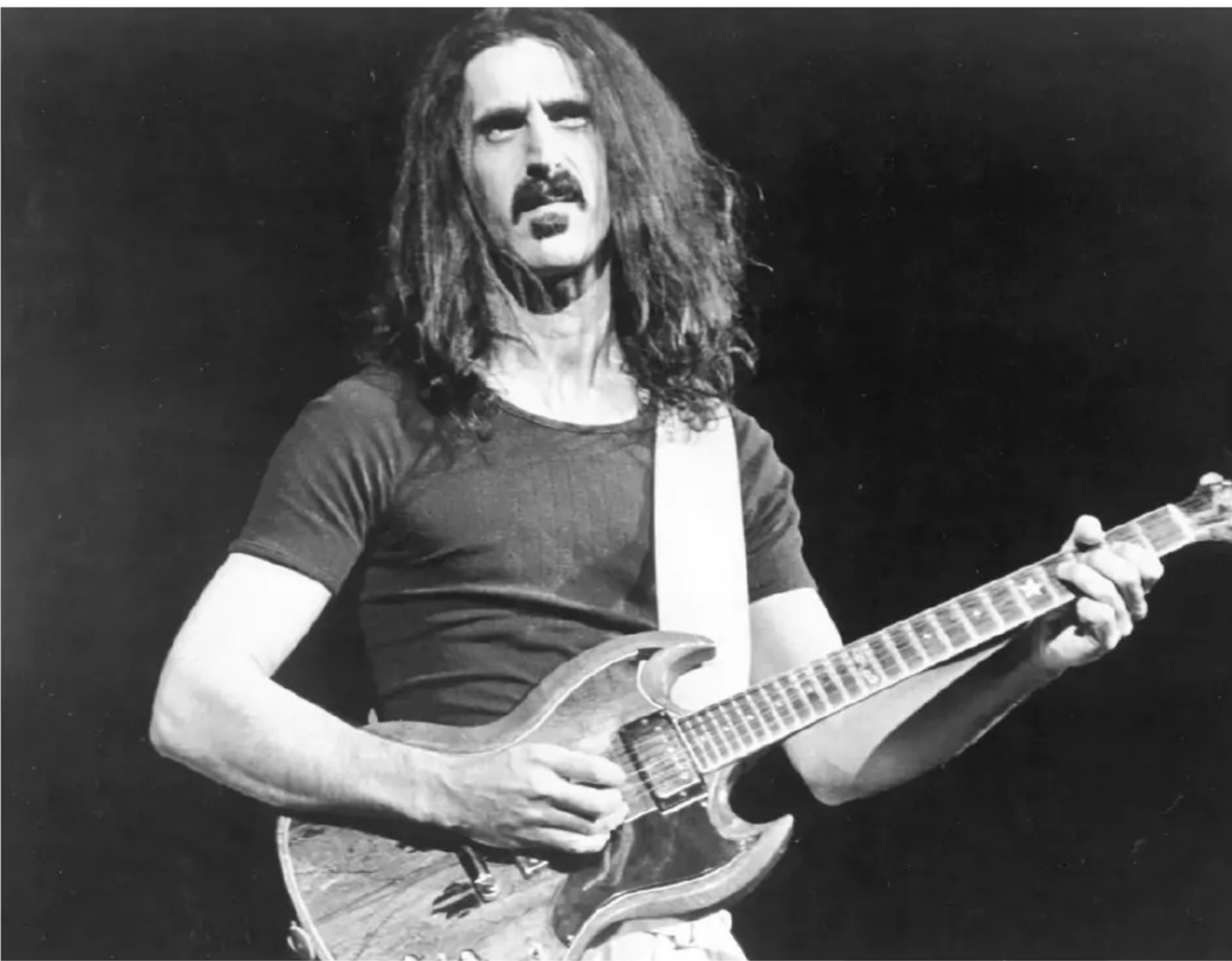


CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE, GUS STEWART/REDFERNS, AL PEREIRA/GETTY IMAGES,



Tony Iommi

SG SIGNATURE ARTIST Tony Iommi’s red 1965 SG Special with P90s, named “Monkey,” was drafted in as a replacement for his Strat, which developed a faulty neck pickup during the recording sessions for Black Sabbath’s eponymous debut. He replaced the pickups with lower-powered specimens, filed the frets down, raised the action, down-tuned the strings, cranked his Laney’s and *voilà* — heavy metal was summoned forth from the void. HEAR IT HERE: “Paranoid” (Black Sabbath, *Paranoid*, 1970)



Frank Zappa

ZAPPA USED TWO main SGs during the Seventies — an SG with a black full-body pickguard and stripped headstock nicknamed “Roxy” and a walnut mongrel nicknamed “Baby Snakes.” Both were heavily modified; Baby Snakes had a non-Gibson neck, a built-in preamp, coil taps, phase selectors and an onboard Dan Armstrong Green Ringer fuzz/octaver. According to legend, at one point he used .007-gauge E strings and incredibly low action. HEAR IT HERE: “Baby Snakes” (*Baby Snakes* soundtrack, 1977)



Ian MacKaye

“I THINK I probably should have been a horn player. It’s all horns for me,” Fugazi and Minor Threat main-man Ian MacKaye told *GW* in 2020. “I always hear horns, these melodic lines, and I try to do them with a guitar. It’s hard.” MacKaye has frequently attempted this tricky task on a pair of SGs, one with a natural finish and one in sparkling Alpine White, both bought in the mid Eighties and repaired after onstage breakages. As Mackaye told us, he asked expert luthier Steve Melkisetian to replace the DiMarzio Super Distortion pickups at the treble position with PRS Chainsaw pickups, after his sweat from his performances caused the DiMarzios to malfunction. HEAR IT HERE: “Waiting Room” (Fugazi, *Fugazi*, 1988)

KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS

And let us not forget...

The legacy of the SG is intact in the hands of these three guitarists, who've risen to the top over the past decade

Samantha Fish

"MY MAIN GUITAR is a Gibson SG," Kansas City singer-songwriter Samantha Fish told our sibling mag *Guitar World*. "I find it's really versatile, and it's something I feel very comfortable playing." Her choice is perfect for her musical approach, which blends rootsy rock with blues elements, a sound packed into a dozen live, studio, solo and collaborative albums. Check out her slide playing, delivered on an Arctic White SG with a standard action height so that Fish can play regular picked solos without switching instruments. **HEAR IT HERE:** "Fire" (Live) on YouTube



Jake Kiszka

GRETA VAN FLEET and Mirador guitarist Jake Kiszka doesn't just play his SG: he practically inhabits it. "With an SG, I can let out my visceral, animalistic side as a player," he said in 2023. "Honestly, that's difficult for me to attain with anything else." First introduced to the sleek looks and chunky tones of the SG through British guitar heroes of the 1960s, Kiszka was eager to deploy the same instrument on his classic rock-inspired band's three albums to date. "Seeing those British Invasion guys up there playing an SG made me want to be that guy," he said. "I knew it was what I wanted to do." **HEAR IT HERE:** "Highway Tune" (Live) on YouTube



Grace Bowers

"I HAVE THREE SGs," Nashville's award-winning guitarist Grace Bowers said, adding that her 1961 model is her favorite. "At first, I started playing SGs because they look cool and they're light-weight," she adds. "Then I discovered how I had full access to the neck, which I didn't have on a Les Paul." Although she's only 18 as we write this, Bowers has already played her '61 alongside Dolly Parton, Tyler Childers, Lainey Wilson, Susan Tedeschi and Christone "Kingfish" Ingram. Her debut album, *Wine On Venus*, by Grace Bowers & the Hodge Podge, drew praise for its earthy but technique-heavy playing, a promising hint at continued success to come. **HEAR IT HERE:** "Tell Me Why U Do That" (Live) on YouTube

Richard Bienstock contributed to this story.

ANDREW BENGE/REDFERNS, SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES, HANNAH LANEY

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LAST OF THE INDEPENDENTS

*Fierce, tender and defiantly independent, **The Pretenders** are rock's rebels without a clause in the contract. Four decades and dozens of huge hits into their career, they still do exactly – and only – what they want. **Chrissie Hynde**'s high-wattage charisma and breathtaking voice are part of the equation. But so are a fistful of effortless, irresistible guitar hooks that make you reach for rewind every time a Pretenders track plays to the fade. With a stripped-down, rock 'n' roll live album, **Kick 'Em Where It Hurts**, out earlier this year, we join Chrissie and guitarist **James Walbourne** to find out why 'holding the fort for bands' remains their mission*

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Joby Sessions

The Pretenders are the black cat of rock music. They go where they want, without seeking approval, yet are more enduringly loved than many trend-chasing acts that have come and gone during the four decades that they've been in business. Bad luck has crossed their path once or twice over the years, too, notably with the tragically early death of guitarist James Honeyman-Scott, whose influence is still felt in the band's music today, many incarnations on from the original 1978 line-up to which he belonged.

To this day, the band's musical DNA is pure mercury – you could read their music as punk for romantics or pop for rebels, or simply tough yet tender-hearted rock 'n' roll that speaks with the force that honesty always commands. And did we say that you can find some of the best guitar playing you'll hear anywhere in their recent recordings, thanks to guitarist James Walbourne? We did now. We join Chrissie and James, who today form the songwriting

1. Chrissie Hynde and James Walbourne performing with The Pretenders in Spain in 2024 – they are careful to preserve the spontaneity, interaction and energy of a club-rock band, even when playing larger venues

nucleus of the group – a musical partnership that has thrived for many years now – to find out what the gang, unchained, is up to next...

What's your working relationship like recently?

Chrissie Hynde: "It has changed a lot. I can knock out lyrics when I wake up – but I started only with the guitar and coming up with a riff – some basic bullshit that

"[Playing the club circuit post-lockdown] made us feel like a band again and informed the way we were writing" **CHRISSIE HYNDE**

would inform what the song was going to be about, just from what it sounded like. But James has a great melodic sense. So I can send him a lyric and he can send something back that I hadn't thought of at all that's very melodic. So that has made me even more lazy on the guitar than I was anyway [laughs].

"The thing is, I resisted trying to write anything with James, for the first I don't know how

many years we've been working together, because I knew he was great on stage and I knew he was a real hotshot guitar hero, so that's mission accomplished already.

I thought, 'What if we do try to write together and it just doesn't work?' I thought it could kind of fuck things up a little bit. It really scared me for years."

James Walbourne: "I had no confidence, back then, to write, either – especially collaboration. I very rarely do that. So when we first ventured to collaborate, I was just sitting at home one day and I think Chrissie maybe sent me a lyric or something.

It was that song, *You Can't Hurt A Fool*. I just did a little recording on my phone [of a possible chord sequence on guitar] and I thought, 'Oh, fuck it,' and sent it to Chrissie. That was the first one we started. It just blossomed from there really quickly, but it's that thing of not being scared to send it and relinquish all hold over the song."

Chrissie: "I think 99 per cent of anything I've sent him, he has sent back [with a suggested



PHOTO BY ALDARA ZARRAO/REDPERNS/GETTY IMAGES

“I see it very much as my position in a band is to shine a light on the guitar player. To me, a band is about the electric guitars”

CHRISSIE HYNDE

Chrissie Hynde says the electric guitar is still the keystone of a great band – and gives guitarists who work with her an admirably free hand to express themselves and The Pretenders’ songs



PHOTO BY GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

melody] and I'm like, 'Amazing.' There have been a couple weird moments, but..."

James: "Chrissie's lyrics are fantastic. If something speaks to me straightaway, then the melody will come out straight – it's almost pretty instant with some of them, which is kind of amazing to me. It would just stem from that, really. Then I just go through them and send them to Chrissie."

Chrissie, what do you like – and what don't you like – in a guitarist that you're working with?

Chrissie: "Well, first of all they have to be much, much better than me. I just get the job done, so I see it very much as my position in a band is to shine a light on the guitar player because, to me, a band is about the guitar player, primarily. That's what I loved right from the beginning. It's the unit of it, but it still is about electric guitars."

"So it has to be someone that can carry the whole thing, that has a kind of unique sound because The Pretenders' sound started with James Honeyman-

Scott. The guitar players I've had subsequently have all been big Jimmy Scott fans, so they have really taken a lot from his sound. That has given it a continuity, which I haven't gone for on purpose, but anyone who's going to entertain the idea of playing with me is going to be a James Honeyman-Scott fan, so they already like that kind of sound."

The Pretenders, from album to album, always sound completely distinctive – regardless of who's on guitar. Why is that?

Chrissie: "It's all because of Jimmy Scott."

Do you feel he set the tone for the whole of The Pretenders' career that followed, guitar wise?

Chrissie: "Yeah. Also, you know... I'm not going to be self-effacing, but I'm not a great musician, I know that. But what I *am* good at..."

James: "Yeah, but hold on a minute. See, I hear this and I can't actually... because that's quite a load of bollocks because you are a great musician and you say that too often. You do yourself down –

2. Chrissie Hynde on stage with the first line-up of The Pretenders, with James Honeyman-Scott (right) on guitar. His on-point playing influenced all who followed him in later incarnations of the band, including James

because Chrissie's guitar playing holds the band together and it's fantastic. It's the rhythm playing, it's unique in a great way."

Chrissie: "Well, because when I first started playing, I was too shy to go with the guys in the art room and play so I just had this foresight, like most people who end up writing songs, just to be on my own and write something

***"It was Chrissie and James Honeyman-Scott, that was the sound. It wasn't just one [person], it was two"* JAMES WALBOURNE**

I could sing to because I wasn't good enough to play along with the radio. So I could only really sing if I was playing. For years, I needed that."

James: "Chrissie's playing really shapes the sounds of a record, especially the early ones. It was Chrissie and James Honeyman-Scott, that was the sound. It wasn't just one, it was two. It was definitely a shared thing.."

Chrissie: "Well, there was one

James Walbourne has an incredible feel for rock 'n' roll guitar with his playing running the gamut of country, rockabilly, R&B and blues – and his '63 SG Junior sounds killer



“I’ve played in lots of bands in the past, but Chrissie was the first person, really, that never told me what to play at all”

JAMES WALBOURNE

time with Jimmy Scott where we did a show somewhere, I don’t know where it was and, for some reason, I kind of stopped playing and got more handheld [with the vocal mic]. I had never done that before. I really enjoyed that show and I thought, ‘This is fucking great.’ I remember really being pleased and I never felt like that after shows. I always felt that I wasn’t really very good.

“I’m not going to put myself down – but maybe most people feel like that, so it’s not unique to me. Anyway, I did this handheld stuff and I came off and I thought, ‘That was amazing.’ I just felt more in the pocket and everything. So when we came off, I thought Jimmy was going to go, ‘Nice one,’ and he looks at me and he goes, ‘Don’t you ever fucking do that again.’ I don’t think I’d ever seen him really angry at me before. It was the only time I remember him really pissed off at me”

James: “Well, that goes to show how important your parts are.”

Chrissie: “Yeah. I didn’t get it at all.”

James: “As a guitar player, if you’re in a four-piece band and the other guitar goes out, it’s horrible – it’s not fun. You play off each other.”

James, do you have any personal rules regarding what kind of guitar playing works in the context of The Pretenders?

James: “No.”

Do you do what just feels natural over the music?

James: “Yeah.”

Chrissie, do you ever veto any guitar parts that James comes up with?

Chrissie: “No, not the top parts. I think one thing that probably is

my strong point is orchestrating [the whole song]. So I can kind of sit back and listen and get a feel for what works and what doesn't. Also, I'm good at breakdowns and laying out certain things, or if we need to extend a part because I hear it differently. I don't count; I'll hear it more in terms of when I feel it's right... so, you know, I'm just good at putting it [all] together."

James: "Absolutely. Also, I've played in lots of bands in the past, but Chrissie was the first person, really, that never told me what to play at all. Because I've been in bands where people tell you what to play – and it's like, 'Just do it your fucking self, then! What am I doing here?' [laughs] Really, it was the first time ever."

Chrissie: "Wow."

James: "It was a breath of fresh air and, in that way, it was very unique. Chrissie was like, 'Just go and do your thing.'"

Chrissie: "Yeah. I mean, I don't know that much about football. James is really the football fan,

3. Robbie McIntosh had an important role in coining some of The Pretenders' most famous riffs during his tenure as guitarist

but even in the early days, when I was a Joe Jordan fan, watching Manchester United, I got it. The job when you're on that pitch is to set the other guy up to get the ball in the net. That's my mentality on stage: 'Don't look at me.' Okay, I know I'm singing and I'm like the main attraction for some of you, but what it really is about is for me to make him look

"Chrissie's lyrics are fantastic. If something speaks to me, then the melody will come out pretty instantly" **JAMES WALBOURNE**

good. That's how I feel a band works. When you're watching a band, you don't want to just focus on one person.

"That's why it doesn't work in stadiums on big screens because you've got a camera looking right up your snout and you're only seeing one person who's, like, 50 yards away from the other person. You might as well stay at home and watch it on TV. So we always made sure that we're the

same distance apart on stage [as we would be] if we were playing in a club. It doesn't matter how big the stage is."

Chrissie, you're best known for playing that Ice Blue Telecaster – how did you come by it?

Chrissie: "I got it in the early days, somewhere in New York City, Manny's or one of those places – I can't even remember who I was with, maybe Jimmy, I don't know. The guy had two Teles and I wanted to get one. One was a blue one and one had the original finish. Because I come from a punk mentality – and I really do have it – I don't like collectors' items and all that. So the guy in the shop said, 'Well, this one has the original finish, the white one, so it's going to be worth more.' I said, 'Give me the blue one.' So that's where I first got my blue one."

"Over the years, in the early days, a guitar company would come and I'd go into a soundcheck and there'd be all these cases open with different guitars, a whole line of them, and



PHOTO BY PAUL BERGEN/PREFERNES/GETTY IMAGES



Chrissie's Ice Blue Tele has become something of an unintentional part of her stage presence: here, she holds Fender's recent replica of her original refinished guitar bought in New York – and she uses the replicas on tour

“When I listen to other bands, I think, ‘You aren’t a fucking guitar hero, [James Walbourne is] a guitar hero!’”

CHRISSIE HYNDE

they’d say, ‘Choose one. We’ll give you a guitar.’ I’d be like, ‘No, thanks. I have a guitar.’ ‘But you can have any of these,’ they’d tell me – but I’d always say, ‘No, I’m okay with my guitar.’ It was always like that.

“Later, when people said, ‘You can get a signature guitar,’ I did all these sketches and I’d be thinking, ‘I wonder if I want a black one, I wonder if I want this. Maybe I can have that.’ But in the end, I thought, ‘I don’t even fucking want a guitar. I like my guitar.’ So I said, ‘If you want to make me a signature guitar, just copy the one I’ve got. There you go. That’s it.’ So they pretty much copied it exactly, except I sort of defied the experts and let them put on some modern machineheads because any real guitar nerd would say, ‘No, you’ve got to have vintage machineheads,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, but if I’m in a hotel...’ I can’t even string the guitar any more, to be honest. I have to get someone else to do it, I can’t remember how it’s done. In the early days, I changed the machineheads on my SG, but now I can’t even change a string. But that’s the only difference.

“Actually, my initials are on the back, that’s one difference. Then, on the strap, there’s a deputy sheriff’s badge, which Viggo Mortensen gave me because I was such a fan of *Appaloosa*, the film. I met him and I went on about it so much, probably. I’ve seen the film so many times. Then I went on tour and my friend took me to see Viggo reciting *The Waste Land* by TS Eliot. Afterward, I collared him and said, ‘Can we talk about *Appaloosa*?’ Anyway, after that my friend said, ‘Oh, Viggo Mortensen wanted your address,’ and I said, ‘Amazing,’ and she goes, ‘Can I give it to



PHOTO BY KI PRICE/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

him?’ I said, ‘Yeah, but I’m on tour,’ and she goes, ‘Well, I’ll have him send whatever it is to me.’ I said, ‘Yeah, fine.’ So I thought, ‘Wow, how cool.’

“Anyway, I finally see her after the tour and she goes, ‘Oh, this is from Viggo and it’s the sheriff’s badge from *Appaloosa* that he wore in the film.’ That went right on my guitar strap! So when they did the signature guitar, I said, ‘And you have to put a sheriff’s badge on there...’ I wanted to say thank you very much, Fender, for making that guitar because it is fantastic. Now, I take that one on the road, the signature model – you played one, didn’t you?”

James: “Yeah, it’s brilliant. The neck’s great.”

Chrissie: “I took about three different guitars that I liked, made sure the neck was right and then just had them do it like the blue one, the original one. Actually, I have one more story about my signature guitar that I’d like to tell...”

“I was in Paris and I walked by a guitar shop. I was staying in Paris at the time. I didn’t have

a guitar because I won’t carry anything. Anyway, I walked by this shop and at the back of the shop, I saw the Chrissie Hynde signature guitar. I thought, ‘Fucking hell, there’s my guitar. Great.’ So I walked in and I said, ‘Can I get that guitar, the one at the end there?’ The guy said, ‘Yeah,’ put it in the case and gave it to me. I went to pay for it and I gave my credit card. He looked at the name on the credit card and then he looked up at me [laughs]. He said, ‘Oh, can I have a selfie with you?’ and I said, ‘Yeah, if you carry the guitar across the street’ [laughs] and he did.”

James, what Pretenders songs do you enjoy playing the most, as a guitarist?

James: “That’s interesting. Well... oh, God.”

Chrissie: “Our new ones, probably, that you wrote.”

James: “The new ones that I wrote [laughs]. Thank you for that! Yeah, I enjoy playing those, but there’s also the old ones. Because when I first joined the

4. James Walbourne in action alongside Chrissie in Liverpool in 2023. James has also played with The Pogues, but his first gig with The Pretenders, in Palm Springs, was a trial by fire: with no time for rehearsal and all the band’s gear lost by an airline, he passed the test with flying colours

band, Chrissie said to me, ‘I don’t want you to play what’s on the record,’ which was music to my ears because, quite honestly, I find it difficult to be constrained by those sort of things, but, obviously, with those older songs, there are parts you have to play. You can’t play *Back On The Chain Gang* without playing the riff...”

Chrissie: “Which was Billy Bremner’s riff...”

James: “Things like that, and a lot

“When you’re watching a band, you don’t want to just focus on one person – that’s my mentality on stage” **CHRISSIE HYNDE**

of the famous parts of the song, you have to keep, but I certainly didn’t learn them verbatim. All the major hooks and everything, of course. But something like *Mystery Achievement* is a great one from the older songs because they’re just great parts and you can really get into them. Oh, what’s the other one? I’ve been playing it for about two years... *Time The Avenger*,



“The guy said, ‘This one has the original white finish, so it’s going to be worth more.’ I said, ‘Give me the blue one’”

CHRISSIE HYNDE

5. Chrissie’s current Fender signature model features her initials on the neckplate and also a badge on the strap that takes its inspiration from the film *Appaloosa*



that's great.

Chrissie: "Oh, that's Jimmy Scott."

James: "It's great because they're almost like Northern soul riffs on them, really, you know? Then a bit of punk guitar and very melodic."

The little staccato riff that trips along on *Don't Get Me Wrong* is perfect like that.

Chrissie: "That was Robbie

"Chrissie's guitar playing holds the band together and it's fantastic. It's the rhythm playing, it's unique" JAMES WALBOURNE

McIntosh. I would like to say, a lot of these songs, I now feel it is wrong for me to claim credit because I would write a song on the guitar, take it to the band, and then they would [add their own contributions] – that's how it always worked. They would embellish it with their own sounds. That's why it wasn't called the Chrissie Hynde group, it was called The Pretenders. But then, over the years as it

6. Chrissie on stage with her original Tele in 1994 in Dublin. Despite pop hooks, the band is emphatically a rock 'n' roll guitar outfit

7. James uses a '66 Tele, refinished in Candy Apple Red, for many of his Pretenders gigs, but he's not afraid to mix it up with many other guitars when gigging

evolved, I realised that the guitar riff is... it's a tricky thing with songwriting because if someone comes up with just a title and that triggers off a song, they have a credit, but if you've already written the song and you take it to them and they embellish it, it's like you took the finished song and they [simply added further details].

"So, now, if I were to go back on it, I would think, well, Billy Bremner had such a significant part on *Back On The Chain Gang* and Robbie McIntosh... I mean, he played on *Middle Of The Road* and *2000 Miles* and stuff. Adam Seymour had significant parts on anything he played on. I'm sorry, guys, you know?"

James: "But that's guitar players, you know – that's just how it works. We know that."

Chrissie: "The germ of the thing belongs to the [original writer], but then the way people embellish it and produce it and put it together – that's the difference between a band and a solo artist, probably, if I had to define it."

Tell us about the new live album.

Chrissie: "After lockdown, I insisted on playing clubs because I felt like I was at club level [as a performer] after not doing anything for so long. It was against the advice of the powers that be, true, but I knew that – just psychologically, for whatever reason – I had to do that. And I said, 'Look, if you can't find us any gigs, we'll just do some pre-shows.' And miraculously, some gigs appeared. I said to my manager, 'You know, Ian, I don't really care if I break even.' He goes, 'Yeah, but if you don't break even, I can't pay my staff.' So I said, 'Oh, of course.' I don't think in business terms.

"So we did a whole tour of clubs, and then when we played *The Social* here in London, our agent came down and my manager – they stood back and they went, 'Okay, we get it now. We get it now.' Because what you get in the club with the band, you don't get it anywhere else. And if a band is playing only stadiums and arenas, if they want to do a club, it becomes a special show.



Bowers & Wilkins



Hear True.

Great sound has the power to lift every moment.
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But I thought, ‘No, we’re not doing that. This is us.’”

James: “One night we played this mega-dome somewhere. And the next night would be the 7th St Entry in Minneapolis, which holds about 200 people at a push. And so it was a very strange tour.”

Chrissie: “But what it did for us is it made us feel like a band again, so we kind of knew what we were doing. And it informed the way we were writing...”

James: “And we hated each other at the end of it [laughs]. So we really did a good job.”

Chrissie: “A theatre is a great size. In the early days, I didn’t like them because people were sitting and I thought you had to stand up. And now I don’t give a shit – sit down, just watch the show, whatever. It gives the band the possibility to have a lot of light and shade or nuance within the set, which I think is really important, so we can do some sort of ballads.”

James: “But the main reason we did the clubs was because, leading up to Covid, we played a lot of gigs where we had to do the hits – we played with Fleetwood Mac, we did a lot of stuff. So by the time that Covid happened and the lockdown happened, it needed to change and that was the catalyst.”

Chrissie: “We talked about it a lot – of course, everyone wants to hear the songs. You know, if I went to see David Bowie, I’d have wanted him to do *Changes*. If he doesn’t, I’ll go home and, you know, cry. But then, on the other hand, I never wanted to play *Brass In Pocket* for the rest of my life – and I’m not going to. You have to split the difference and give the audience what they want, but also you have to do what you want: that’s why they liked you in the first place because you did what you want. So you have to bring it back.

“That brings me up to why we did the live album. Because the live album is just what our monitor [mix] recorded. In our live show, there’s what you might call deep cuts, songs that we’ve done for the last two years – but the main audience won’t know it because they were never hits. It was never on the radio. If we

8



8. James’s 1963 SG Junior is a huge-sounding guitar and, despite his high-energy playing style, he says it stays in tune remarkably well!

put it out in some way, if we do go out again, we can do these songs and they’re more familiar because people want what they’re familiar with. A case in point is that song *The Losing* [from the 2002 album, *Loose Screw*].”

James: “Some of those songs like

“Everyone wants to hear the [hits]... but I never want to play ‘Brass In Pocket’ for the rest of my life” **CHRISSIE HYNDE**

The Losing might have – with the greatest of respect – suffered from some of the production at the time...”

Chrissie: “Oh, big-time.”

James: “So we stripped it back to how a four-piece rock ‘n’ roll

band would do it. The song really came out to where you think, ‘Fuck me, that’s a great song.’ Which might have got lost in translation, before.”

Chrissie: “I mean, James’s playing on *Thumbelina* – which is an older Pretenders song – [is incredible]. The live album is called *Kick ‘Em Where It Hurts*, and the reason for that is because I’m so fierce about my guitar hero [James] that when I listen to other bands, I’m thinking, ‘You aren’t a fucking guitar hero, that’s a guitar hero!’ And so when I listen to some of the other guitar players out there, that’s what I thought: ‘You call yourself a band? *This* is a band.’” 

The new live album from The Pretenders, *Kick ‘Em Where It Hurts*, is available now <https://thepretenders.tnstor.es>

BLUES SCALE LICKS



This issue **Simon Barnard** shows how adding one chromatic note to the scale can dramatically spice up your standard Minor Pentatonic licks.



Dimebag played ferocious Blues scale licks in his metal solos

ABILITY RATING

★★★★★ Moderate

Info

Key: E Minor

Tempo: Various

<https://bit.ly/4a7AmPe>

Will improve your

✓ Blues scale shapes

✓ Legato playing

✓ Alternate picking

The Blues Scale is a hexatonic scale, which means it has six notes. Essentially, the Blues Scale is a Minor Pentatonic with the addition of a $\flat 5$ interval in between its 4th and 5th degrees. The $\flat 5$ goes by many names, including blue note, tritone or, more sinisterly, diabolus in musica, which translates as the 'devil in music'. Its addition adds a certain amount of tension and colour to the existing Pentatonic scale, creating a familiar yet distinctly different sound.

When using this scale, the phrasing is very important. For example, landing on and sustaining the $\flat 5$ can create a clash with the

harmony. Several players, including Dimebag Darrell, do this intentionally in their playing to create this dissonance. However, for the most part, the $\flat 5$ is used as a passing note, bridging the gap between its consonant perfect 4th and 5th neighbours, which sit a semitone either side.

Although called the Blues Scale, it's actually found in a variety of music styles. Within blues, the $\flat 5$ works as an excellent passing note. But the $\flat 5$'s dissonance lends itself well to genres such as heavy metal, with Tony Iommi and Black Sabbath using the interval to great effect on the self-titled track from their 1970 debut album. The song's opening guitar riff, with the addition of the $\flat 5$ interval, helped create the perfect sonic soundscape for the band's dark and haunting imagery. Since Black Sabbath's debut release, other rock and blues guitarists have used the Blues scale to forge their own sound. Cream's Sunshine Of Your Love and Led Zeppelin's

Heartbreaker both use the Blues scale as part of the main riffs to these songs, in both instances as a chromatic passing note between 4th and 5th of the Minor Pentatonic. The aforementioned Dimebag Darrell from Pantera used the interval a great deal. The opening tritone licks at the start of the Cowboys From Hell solo is a good example, as are the syncopated blues-rock style riffs that feature earlier on in the track. The main riff to Metallica's Enter Sandman is another fantastic example of a song that leans on the dissonance of the $\flat 5$ to create its dark, menacing sound. George Harrison's solo on When I Saw Her Standing There even starts on the $\flat 5$, which is pretty unusual but it works. And jazz-blues guitarists like Robben Ford and Kenny Burrell employ it to great effect, too.

One simple method to let the Blues scale insinuate new life into your playing is to take some of your usual Minor Pentatonic licks and replace the 5th interval with the $\flat 5$ th. This easy method is a surefire way of making your favourite licks sound more interesting. Our examples and study piece should give you some ideas of how the Blues scale can inject spice into your playing, as always with reference to a few key guitarists' styles. 

Check out the audio component at **bit.**

ly/4a7AmPe, courtesy of Guitar Techniques



Get the Tone

As this is a technique and theory article it doesn't rely on any particular guitar style or sound. However, as we always say, it makes no sense when trying to perfect new ideas to drench your playing in too much distortion, delay, flange or any other effect. So go for light to medium overdrive with just a touch of delay to maintain the articulation of the notes.



TRACK RECORD Black Sabbath's self-titled song shows how the $\flat 5$ th can be used to menacing effect, while Sunshine Of Your Love by Cream uses it as a chromatic hook in its iconic riff. Pantera's Cowboys From Hell features the $\flat 5$ in its two main riffs and also during Dimebag Darrell's blazing solo. Peter Green craftily slipped a $\flat 5$ into the riff of Oh Well (Part 1), and Kenny Burrell is a great fan of its sound in jazz.

STUDY PIECE

Bars 1-9 This opening Blues Scale riff using the open sixth string as a pedal tone. Watch your timing for the first two bars before the kick drum enters at **bar 6**.

Bars 10-13 The solo kicks off with some alternate picked lines. Aim for a consistent pick attack and even phrasing, particularly during the triplet section. The solo continues from **bars 14-17** although here using legato technique.

Again, phrasing is very important here, and arguably more challenging with less input from the picking hand. **Bars 18-21** close the piece with another pedal tone idea, although this time using alternate picking on the first string. The slippery closing lick starting in **bar 20** can be challenging to play while maintaining even phrasing and accuracy, so slow it down if need be.

$\text{♩} = 170$ E5 Play 3 times

9 12 15 18

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PLAY BETTER SOLOS!



This month **Jon Bishop** is looking to supercharge your soloing and add interest to your lead work. If you feel it's time to explore some new ideas then look no further.

ABILITY RATING

Moderate ★★☆☆☆

Info <https://bit.ly/4a7AmPe>

Key C Tempo 135bpm

Will improve your...
 ✓ Stylistic awareness ✓ Lead feel and phrasing
 ✓ Articulations and finger vibrato

Welcome to this month's feature centred on playing better solos. In it we aim to identify core techniques and soloing concepts with a view to supercharging your vocabulary. There are 15, four-bar examples to study complete with backing tracks to practice with.

We have split the examples into three sections, each with five examples. The first section is based around technique. Section two is more music theory based and the third section concentrates on taste and feel.

Each example is four bars long and there's a two-bar drum break to allow you time to prepare for the next example. As an added extra there are two 16-bar jam solos to learn, again with a corresponding backing track. The jam solos will help you to contextualise what you have worked on, and also provide a canvass to come up with your own ideas. We have linked and adapted the examples to create functioning jams so you

can see how smaller bits of vocabulary can be pieced together to create a real-world solo.

To keep things simple all of the examples are in the key of C. We have catered for both Major and Minor soloing so the main scales in use are C Minor Pentatonic (C-E_b-F-G-B_b) for the C Minor examples and jam, and C Major Pentatonic (C-D-E-G-A) for the C Major examples and jam. The ideas have been notated with a C Major or C Minor key signature so you can clearly see the various note choices and chord/scale relationships.

The main focus of this feature is to work on enhancing various articulations and embellishments, but it's good to be mindful of using the correct Major and Minor Pentatonic scales in just the right places to fit the underlying chords.

Some of the many ways we can add interest to the notes and phrases include string bending, sliding into notes, various types of harmonics, finger vibrato, and

whammy bar vibrato. There's also whammy bar manipulation, including slide guitar emulation and vocal style phrasing, plus hammer-ons and pull-offs including legato phrasing. You'll also encounter finger tapping using both fretting and picking hands, and of course one of the most important aspects of all, rhythm.

Each of the 15 examples has been designed to highlight a key technique or articulation type and many of these examples are in the style of famous players that helped to progress the world of lead guitar playing to where it is today.

If you are working on a new technique or concept it is well worth taking your time and starting slowly. Rushing forward can be a false economy in the long run.

All of the examples and jam tracks are fully tabbed with the demonstration solos muted so you can play along. It would be most challenging to learn all 15 examples and then stitch the relevant pieces together to play the jam tracks note for note, so why not first have a go at constructing or improvising your own ideas using some of the techniques and concepts in this article.

In gym training they say there's no gain without pain. While playing guitar should never be painful, the point of this article is to help you bone up on things you might find tricky, so try some of the concepts that are more alien to you, as well as those that fall easily under the fingers. Have fun! 🎸

Check out the audio at bit.ly/4a7AmPe courtesy of Guitar Techniques

Jeff Beck was a hugely inspiring soloist; listen to *Where Were You and Nadia* and be blown away!



Get the Tone

To get the sound for this month's article we used a bridge humbucker and a thick overdrive, with a little touch of reverb and delay. That said, almost any guitar, pickup selection, amp tone and effects can be used here, although don't go too extreme as you want to hear your notes and articulations clearly. Conjure up a tone that inspires you to play expressively.

DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES



Carlos Santana is well known for being highly expressive



TRACK RECORD We have featured guitar players such as Jeff Beck, Carlos Santana, Steve Lukather, Jimmy Page, Neal Schon and Eric Clapton as each one solos with rich articulations and embellishments. The following albums are highly recommended: Eric Clapton, *The Cream Of Eric Clapton*; Jeff Beck, *Emotion And Commotion*; Toto, *Toto IV*; Santana, *Supernatural*; Led Zeppelin II and Journey - *Escape*.

EXAMPLE 5: STEVE LUKATHER STYLE STRING BENDS AND SLIDES

When string bending with a floating vibrato the other strings decrease in pitch the more you bend the string up. This makes bends with double-stops tricky as the other strings go flat. So Lukather will bend the string with his third finger, hold the bend and fret a note above on the same string with his fourth finger.

[illegible]

TRACK 2 - THEORY FOCUSED

EXAMPLE 6: ARPEGGIO SUBSTITUTION

For this example we are using the G Minor 7 arpeggio over a Cm9 chord. This arpeggio substitution provides a cool, C Minor 9 type sound. For the F Minor 9 chord we simply resolve the lick by playing the F Minor 7 arpeggio.

EXAMPLE 7: PENTATONIC SUBSTITUTION

Here we are using G Minor Pentatonic over the Cm9 chord. This Pentatonic substitution provides a cool, C Minor 11 type sound. Again when moving to the F Minor 9 chord we simply resolve the lick by playing the F Minor Pentatonic scale. It's the kind of approach that David Gilmour has used in the past.

Bridge Pickup
With Overdrive

1

EXAMPLE 8: PATTERN PLAYING

Adding patterns into scale runs is a great way to add interest. For this idea you play C Minor Pentatonic in descending groups of six. Eric Johnson has been hugely influential with his Pentatonic patterns. Our lick is relatively easy to play and you can experiment with using other groupings such as 3, 4 and 5.

Bridge Pick Up With Overdrive

1

EXAMPLE 9: STRING SKIPPING

Skipping strings is a great way to create ear-grabbing ideas with relative ease. Our example uses C Minor Pentatonic as a base. A simple descending pattern can be added and you can continue this type of idea as long as you want. To finish the lick we move to a string skipping fingering for the F Minor 7 arpeggio.

EXAMPLE 10: CHROMATIC NOTES

Adding chromatic notes is a surefire way to add colour and it also helps with creating smooth lines. We have added popular chromatic notes such as the diminished 5th (♭5 = blue note) and Minor 9th to create colour and tension. David Gilmour, Robben Ford, Jimmy Page, Larry Carlton and Alvin Lee excel at this.

TRACK 3 - TASTE AND FEEL FOCUSED

EXAMPLE 11: SLASH - PICKED NOTES AND LEGATO NOTES

Guitarists like Guns N' Roses axe man Slash, have played emotive melodies that complement the song. Our lick here is simple, yet effective.

EXAMPLE 12: STEVE LUKATHER - BEING MELODIC WITH MOTIFS

Guitarists like Steve Lukather, David Gilmour, and Brian May are masters of including melodic motifs. A great way to write melodies is to sing or whistle them first. This ensures the melody has more chance of being memorable (hence The Old Grey Whistle Test term!).

EXAMPLE 13: ERIC CLAPTON STYLE HIGH-REGISTER PLAYING

The high-register of the guitar sounds great and adds excitement to any solo. Eric Clapton is no stranger to playing up 'the dusty end' and our example cashes in on some ear grabbing large string bends right up as far as a 22-fret guitar will allow.

Bridge

Tempo: ♩ = 135

Chords: Cm9, Fm9

Bridge Pickup With Overdrive

BU BU BD BU RP BD BU BU

22(23) 22(23)(22) 20 22(25) (25)(23) 18(20) 18 16 18 16 18(20) 18 16 18 16 17

1

EXAMPLE 14: JOE SATRIANI TAPPING AND LEGATO

For this example we are adding in a bit of flash. Tapping and legato are great techniques for adding those fast and fluid sounding runs. To provide a punctuation point, the harmonic on the 5th fret, third string (a high G note) is sounded then dropped down with a whammy bar doop. The scooped high C note ends the phrase!

[illegible]

EXAMPLE 15: CARLOS SANTANA SYNCOPATED PHRASING OFF THE DOWNBEAT

Players like Carlos Santana add interest to their phrases by using rhythmic syncopation (playing off the beat). Our example sounds a little less obvious as it starts on the off-beat of beat 1. This is followed by interesting rhythms that cash in on a richly syncopated feel.

MINOR KEY JAM

PLAYING NOTES

Our Minor jam links together four of the licks from examples 11 to 15 to create a functional demonstration solo. We have added and also re-phrased certain licks so they work best within the context of this solo. **Bars 1-6:** Here we are starting with the Santana style idea from example 15. **Bars 7-10:** This is followed with the

Slash-style idea from example 11. **Bars 11-14:** Next up we are using the Steve Lukather style idea from example 12. **Bars 14-end:** To finish off we link together the Eric Clapton style high register soloing from example 13 with the Joe Satriani style run from example 15.

Musical score for guitar, showing measures 1 through 15. The score includes a treble clef staff and a six-string guitar staff (E, B, G, D, A, E). The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 135$. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4.

The score is divided into measures, with fret numbers and techniques indicated below the guitar staff. Chord symbols (Cm9, Fm9) are placed above the treble staff.

Measure 1: Treble staff: Bridge Pickup With Overdrive. Guitar staff: Fret 2.

Measure 2: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 10 (11), (10) 8.

Measure 3: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 11 (13) (11) (13).

Measure 4: Treble staff: Fm9. Guitar staff: Fret 8 11 9/10, 11 8 10 8 10 7.

Measure 5: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 8 7 10 8 10.

Measure 6: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 8 10 8 10 8 10 12.

Measure 7: Treble staff: Fm9. Guitar staff: Fret 8 6 8 11 (13) 8 11.

Measure 8: Treble staff: Fm9. Guitar staff: Fret 11 (13) 11 (13) 11 (13) 11 (13).

Measure 9: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 11 (15) (13) 11, 13 13.

Measure 10: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 15 (18), 15 14 13 16 (18).

Measure 11: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 13 15 13 14 13 16 13 16 13 15.

Measure 12: Treble staff: Fm9. Guitar staff: Fret 13 18 18 18.

Measure 13: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 18 20 20.

Measure 14: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 22 (23) 22 (23) (22) 20 22 (25).

Measure 15: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret (25) (23).

Measure 16: Treble staff: Fm9. Guitar staff: Fret 13 11 8 12 10 8 13 11 8 12 10 8 12 10 8 12 10 8 12 10 8.

Measure 17: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 0 5.

Measure 18: Treble staff: Cm9. Guitar staff: Fret 20.

Techniques indicated include: Bridge Pickup With Overdrive, BU (Bend Up), BD (Bend Down), RP (Rapid Pick), NH (Natural Harmonic), Doop, Scoop w/bar, and 8va (Octave).

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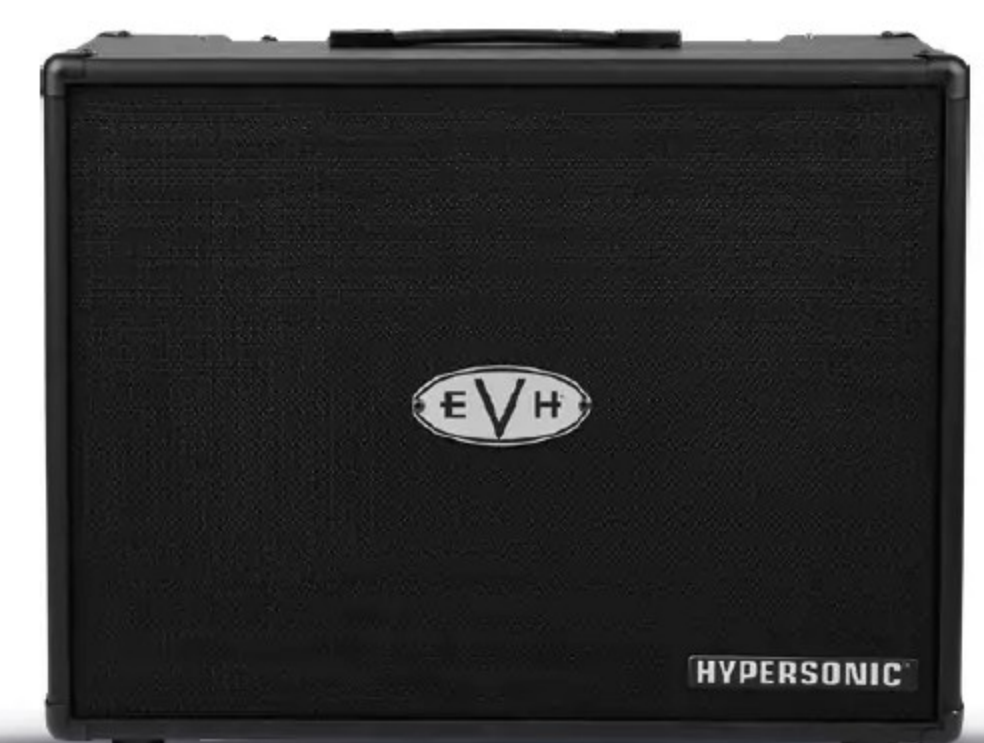
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Nut& Saddle ____ Genuine Bone
Nut Width ____ 1 3/4" (45mm) - Grand Auditorium
1 11/16" (43mm) - OM Cutaway
Machineheads ____ Vintage open gear (18:1 Ratio)
Electronics ____ Fishman® Presys VT
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String ____ Elixir® Phosphor Bronze
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Light 012-053
Colour ____ Natural Semi Gloss (NSG)
Black Top Semi Gloss (BTSG)

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SPECIAL FEATURE

Tomorrow Never Knows

ORIGINALLY CALLED 'THE VOID', THE GROUNDBREAKING SONG
FOUND **THE BEATLES** EXPLORING HIGHER PLANES OF CONSCIOUSNESS
- AND LEANING ON THE STUDIO MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.



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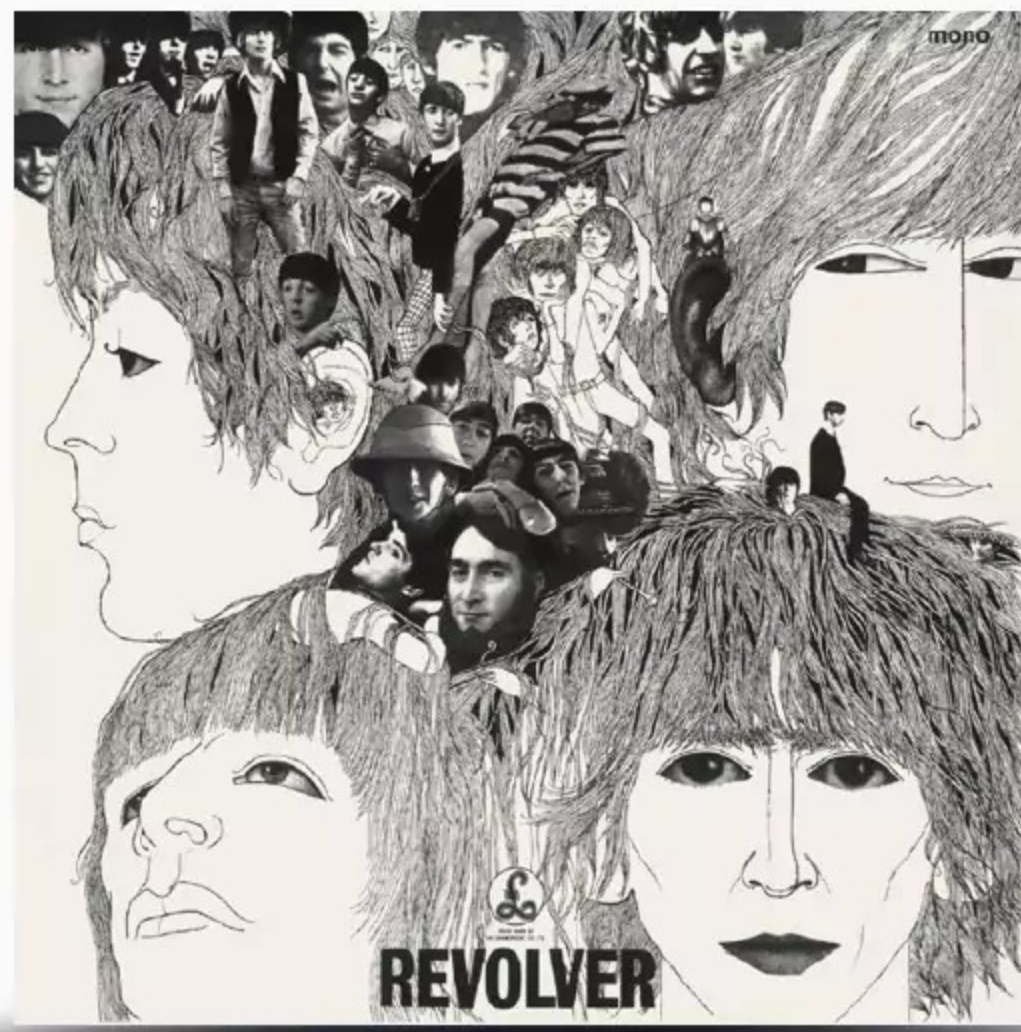
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STUDIO AS INSTRUMENT

How one Beatles track spawned a recording technique revolution

ORIGINALLY CALLED 'THE VOID', THE GROUNDBREAKING SONG FOUND **THE FAB FOUR** EXPLORING HIGHER PLANES OF CONSCIOUSNESS - AND LEANING ON THE STUDIO MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.

Words Andy Price

The 1960s were a decade of quite astonishing change. The conservatism and austerity of the postwar period was besieged by the blooming of pop culture - and a new era of self-expression began to flower in the heads of a generation. By 1966, culture, fashion, art and comedy were undergoing a giddy renaissance, yet it was pop music that was the prime mover.

Nothing exemplified this as clearly as the sonic evolution of the Beatles. Since their explosion into the public consciousness a scant three years earlier, the Fab Four had demonstrated an aptitude for pop songwriting. Now, curiosity - and competition - had spurred them to deviate away from the thematic norms of pop songwriting (i.e. love, relationships and relentless positivity).

On their sixth studio album, *Rubber Soul* in 1965, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr had widened their musical scope significantly. Edging away from the dictates of pop commerce, *Rubber Soul* rippled with more mature themes - and a more varied instrumental palette. But it was 1966's

Revolver that really instigated the Beatles' pioneering second stage. One track in particular is undoubtedly a firm contender for being the most groundbreaking in the history of recorded music. *Tomorrow Never Knows* was the very first track to be cut for the album, and contained multitudes of technical innovations. It sounded unlike anything anyone had ever heard before. And yet, it resonated with the era perfectly.

Accompanying their desire to be more creatively ambitious, the heavy demands of touring internationally had also started to take their toll on the four young men, then still in their mid-twenties. While by 1965, the Beatles were regularly filling out football and baseball stadiums in the US, the increased stress of the security implications, a gruelling schedule and sheer volume of their often-hysterical audiences led to increased dissatisfaction. Behind the closed doors of their studio, Abbey Road (then known as EMI Recording Studios), the Beatles found a safe haven. It was calm ground on which they could focus on their core passion with freedom and support.

Inspired by the politically-charged and self-reflective writing of Bob Dylan, the neo-philosophy of the fomenting

acid culture and the unbridled sonic adventurousness of the Beach Boys, the Beatles were driven to challenge themselves as songwriters. Partly excited by the potential of the studio, the group were also wary of being left behind as pop's inexorable pace quickened. They wanted to be taken more seriously as artists, as opposed to the conveyors of pop confectionary that some more 'cerebral' commentators regarded them as.

Revolver demolished the notion that the Beatles were a passing fad. It re-framed them as music's most intrepid pioneers, while at the same time, the biggest entertainment fixture on the planet.

Revolver's final track was recorded first, and was borne out of a particularly strange starting point. Originally dubbed 'Mark I' and later 'The Void' - *Tomorrow Never Knows* was inspired by Lennon's mind-expanding perusal of psychedelic drug advocate Timothy Leary's 'The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead'. An attempt to transcend the physical world and unlock the potential of the mind, Lennon was in thrall to Leary's trendy, acid-centered teachings.

"[Timothy] Leary was the one who was going round saying, 'Take it, take it, take it,' and we followed his instructions in *The Book of the Dead*, his how-to-take-a-trip book," Lennon told Hunter Davies in his 1968 authorised biography. "I did it just like he said in the book, and then I wrote 'Tomorrow Never Knows,' which is almost the first acid song, 'Lay down all thought, surrender to the void'."

While the obvious acid-infused subtext was a pretty provocative theme, it was the attempt to musically mould Lennon's psychedelically inspired concept into a listenable form that would prove a head-scratcher. But realising his vision would usher in several innovations that are now studio production norms.

Convening at Abbey Road to begin making *Tomorrow Never Knows* at 8pm on April 6th 1966, the foundations of the track were - as Paul recalled in the Beatles Anthology - Lennon strumming 'rather earnestly' on the chord of C while he reeled off his mantra-like lyric. This modal nucleus underlined the Eastern-influenced form he wanted the track to reflect.

Coupled with the Beatles' desire to expand, there was also a serendipitous changing of personnel at Abbey Road itself. Replacing outgoing head engineer Norman Smith came Geoff Emerick. The 20 year-old junior engineer had been in their producer George Martin's team since 1964, so knew the boys well. Suddenly promoted to chief engineer at a time when the Beatles' demands were becoming increasingly more unconventional, Emerick - younger than the Beatles - was thrilled by the challenges coming his way, and was just as buoyed by the potential of the recording studio.

Critical to *Tomorrow Never Knows'* sound was its underlying rhythmic throb, supplied by Ringo Starr's relentless, drum loop-like pattern. The sound of which was carefully wrangled by Emerick and Starr. Many now-norms of drum recording were first put to use during the making of this track. A key one was the damping (and close-mic'ing and compression) of the 22-inch bass drum of Starr's Ludwig Black Oyster Pearl kit.

"There was this woollen sweater with four necks that they had received from a fan," Emerick told Andy Babuik in *The Beatles Gear*. "It was around the studio, so I stuffed it into the bass drum to deaden the sound. I moved the bass drum microphone very close to the drum itself, which really wasn't considered the thing to do at the time. We then ran the kit sound through a Fairchild 660 valve compressor."

The resulting brilliance, definition and oomph of the sound resulted in the close-mic'ing of a dampened bass drum



to become a standard practice from this moment on.

Using AKG D19C mics for the drum overheads and an AKG D20 for that ingenious bass drum capture, Emerick and Starr's kit-recording fastidiousness (which also found Starr balancing a cigarette packet atop his snare to rein in its resonances) resulted in the perfect central pulse for the track. The sound - and style of Starr's repeating drum pattern - would prove influential for decades to come. It foreshadowed the structural centrality of drum loops in dance music years later, while its tight repetitiveness prefigured the era of sample-based production. Although of course, Ringo wasn't actually playing a loop - he had to lock into that groove for the duration of the track's runtime.

Years later, in a 2015 interview with Paul Zollo, Starr recalled that his son - upon first hearing the track - believed it to be a drum loop; "Zak, years and years ago said 'Oh, and that loop you had.' And I said 'Loop? Loops?'," remembered Ringo.

"I said 'Phone this number,' and he phoned the number, and George Martin said 'Yes?' Zak went 'Well, is that a loop?' and George Martin had to tell my boy, 'Look Zak, we didn't have loops in those days. Your dad had a great time!'"

Ringo's contribution to the track went beyond that iconic drum part. As with *A Hard Day's Night* and *Eight Days a Week*, the title - *Tomorrow Never Knows* - stemmed from another of his wry malapropisms. The

original uttering of the phrase happened during an interview in 1964 in response to a journalist asking him about his hair being surreptitiously cut at the British Embassy during their first US visit. Lennon thought it struck the right balance of profound and playful to mask the track's heavier subtext.

Locking in with Starr's beat, McCartney's bass part was (unusually for him) static and grounded. Fastening his Rickenbacker 4001S bass to the note of C in ostinato form, McCartney supplied a steady palpitation that tightly latched to Starr's drum part, providing a neat bedrock for the more extraordinary additions that were to follow. With the rhythm section in-place, the real magic of *Tomorrow Never Knows* had a springboard from which to launch.

Bolstering the track's C-note drone was a Hammond organ. Its sustained chord sound was output through a Leslie speaker cabinet, cradling the musical information in pad-like form. But it was the decision to incorporate tape loops into the mix - a suggestion of Paul McCartney - that elevated the track into a new domain. McCartney had, on the quiet, been an avid tape-loop experimentalist. He remembered years later that his interest in the field had tended to be overshadowed by Lennon's prominence on the band's more outré tracks; "What's often said of me is that I'm the guy who wrote 'Yesterday'," Paul told *Wired* in 2011. "But I'm also a guy who was really interested in tape loops, electronics and avant-garde music. That just doesn't get



out there on a wide level.”

For *Tomorrow Never Knows*, there were five main loops, all of which had been stretched or manipulated in some way. Firstly there was a seagull-like sound that appears near the track’s beginning and conclusion. This chirpy effect was actually a recording of McCartney’s own laughter, sped up to emulate a joyous bird in flight. Then there were some reversed and looped strings in B flat major (which, when played over the C, gave an impression of polytonality). There was the sound of a mellotron on its ‘Flute’ setting and another on its ‘Strings’ setting, as well as a recording of a sitar-type sound - actually a tamboura - that opens the track, which played an ascending phrase.

Output via five BTR 3 tape machines, these carefully selected loops were each hand-operated by an individual technician. Taking their cues from the musique concrète approaches of visionaries like Karlheinz Stockhausen, the Beatles had the idea to live-mix and ‘perform’ these samples during the final mix of the track.

The ever-enthused Emerick gleefully took to the task of setting this up. As he remembered in his extraordinary memoir, *Here, There and Everywhere*, “What followed next was a scene that could have come out of a science fiction movie - or a Monty Python sketch.

“Every tape machine in every studio was commandeered and every available EMI employee was given the task of holding a

pencil or glass to give the loops the proper tensioning. In many instances, this meant they had to be standing out in the hallway, looking quite sheepish. Most of those people didn’t have a clue what we were doing; they probably thought we were daft.”

Emerick and Martin rode the faders in the studio, with the Beatles barking instructions as to which tape loops should be raised and lowered. “With each fader carrying a different loop, the mixing desk acted like a synthesizer,” Emerick recalled in *Here, There and Everywhere*. “We played it like a musical instrument, too, carefully overdubbing textures to the prerecorded backing track.”

This out-there approach to manipulating disparate sound sources was way ahead of its time, and - being that it was tracked and manipulated live - was impossible to reproduce afterwards. But the resulting tape-mix was burnt into the final version of *Tomorrow Never Knows* forever.

Complementing these loops, a zig-zagging guitar line from Harrison was injected into the mix, but to match the track’s vortex-like arrangement, it was reversed. The idea of backwards guitar solos had first arisen during the recording of another *Revolver* standout, I’m Only Sleeping, when the tape had been loaded incorrectly into a tape machine and produced a suitably yawning-esque sound. Backwards guitar was suddenly a creative texture that the Beatles could draw on. Within *Tomorrow Never Knows*, George’s guitar part (which was played on an Epiphone Casino routed through a Leslie cabinet) gave the impression of a winding shimmering entity. It was the aural equivalent of bending time and space.

While its sonics were certainly unlike anything heard before, at the heart of *Tomorrow Never Knows* was Lennon’s prophet-like vocal, instructing listeners to surrender to the void and open their minds to a new universe beyond our perception. Lennon conceived of a vocal that sounded as profound as its lyric, wanting the characteristics of a monk chanting atop a mountain. He proposed quite an outlandish idea for capturing the right kind of vocal quality he was imagining.

“He suggested we suspend him from a rope in the middle of the studio ceiling, put a mike in the middle of the floor, give him a push and he’d sing as he went around and around,” Geoff recalled in *The Beatles Recording Sessions*.

Instead of this potentially dangerous idea, Emerick pondered a more down-to-earth solution. As he recalled in his autobiography, “The studio’s Hammond organ was hooked up to a system called a Leslie - a large wooden

box that contained an amp and two sets of revolving speakers, one that carried low bass frequencies and the other that carried high treble frequencies; it was the effect of those spinning speakers that was largely responsible for the characteristic Hammond organ sound.”

Geoff had the - then-radical - idea to route the vocal signal through the Leslie.

“In my mind, I could almost hear what John’s voice might sound like if it were coming from a Leslie. It would take a little time to set up, but I thought it might just give him what he was after.”

Patching in the signal, Emerick then committed the audio of the mic’d-up Leslie cabinet to tape, and created an effected version of Lennon’s vocal that sounded suitably supernatural. “Lennon’s voice sounded like it never had before, eerily disconnected, distant yet compelling,” recalled Emerick. “The effect seemed to perfectly complement the esoteric lyrics he was chanting. Everyone in the control room - including George Harrison - looked stunned.”

Geoff continues, “Through the glass we could see John begin smiling. At the end of the first verse, he gave an exuberant thumbs-up and McCartney and Harrison began slapping each other on the back. ‘It’s the Dalai Lennon!’ Paul shouted.”

Tomorrow Never Knows’ successful Leslie experiment prefigured the solidification of ADT (Automatic Double Tracking) later in the *Revolver* sessions, though the track itself didn’t feature it.

So, let’s run those innovations back shall we? *Tomorrow Never Knows* was the first significant pop track to feature a tightly compressed, dampened bass drum, it was the first to incorporate a hand-manipulated tape loop collage, triggered at random and in a performative-manner in the studio. It was among the first Beatle tracks to sport backwards guitar, the first to feature an unheard-of vocal-doubling and effecting process (laying the groundwork for Automatic Double Tracking later in the album sessions - another future fixture) and the first British pop track to orient itself around a non-Western musical form.

That’s quite the forward-thinking production process. It’d be worth talking about, even if the results weren’t spellbinding. But the song was - and remains - one of the Beatles’ most cherished accomplishments. *Tomorrow Never Knows* was a veritable atom bomb of possibility. It exploded a twin revolution in the minds of listeners. It showed that pop music could be a bigger, bolder and more bountiful thing than previously imagined. In the hands of the Beatles, pop could be existential. 

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KRK Systems Kreate 5

KRK have a new affordable monitor range designed to help you create.

Review by **Jon Musgrave**

RRP \$329 **CONTACT** Jands **PHONE** 02 9582 0909 **WEB** jands.com.au

KRK Systems has earned a reputation as one of the most consistent studio monitor manufacturers, with its instantly recognisable yellow cone monitors regularly seen across the globe. Both its Rokit and V Series ranges have gradually developed over time alongside a solid selection of subwoofers and headphones. Meanwhile in recent times the GoAux series has provided two ultra portable designs.

Kreate is KRK's new competitively priced range and features three models - Kreate 3, Kreate 5 and Kreate 8. The Kreate 3s are available as a pair (\$359), and the Kreate 5 and Kreate 8 individually (\$329 and \$439 per speaker respectively).

The Kreate 5 we have for review is a 2-way rear ported powered monitor. It features a 5" LF unit and 1" HF unit. Rear audio connectivity is both balanced (TRS or XLR) and unbalanced (RCA phono). The Kreate 5 also supports Bluetooth, and you'll find the blue backlit pairing button just

above the RCA inputs.

Kreate 5 is powered by regular mains with the illuminated KRK logo indicating they are powered up. Each unit includes twin onboard amps - Class D for LF and Class A/B for HF - with precision limiters. On the back panel you'll find the System Level control alongside HF Level (+1dB, flat, -1dB, -2dB) and LF Level (+2dB, flat, -1dB, -2dB) adjustment.

Unlike some of the smaller monitors, such as KRK's own GoAux, each Kreate 5 unit is self-contained, with the compact size making them suitable for a more modest surround setups. That said, with no mounting threads, you'll need to choose clamp-style wall mounts.

Kreate K5 is a very straightforward and traditional design. What's more, with the bass port on the back, it's very compact - 26cm tall, including the 4mm factory fitted foam isolation pad. It's also good to see a proper selection of inputs, and worth noting, you can use the unbalanced input and one of the balanced connections simultaneously. Once paired, the Bluetooth connection can also be used simultaneously, so you can stream from a mobile device without upsetting your main studio feed. Handy.

The EQ options are simple to use with the notched knobs making matching each side very easy, even if you're reaching over the speakers to adjust them. Setting the level meanwhile is assisted by the detented knob. Although there are no specified EQ frequencies, the frequency curve indicates changes from about 2kHz upwards (HF) to 300Hz downwards (LF). Either way, the changes are gentle, and don't attempt the more drastic room and desk correction we

sometimes see.

With the EQ flat, our first impressions are very positive. There's a slight overall sweetening, which is more noticeable in the high frequencies. And the mid-range is not as upfront as many monitors. This achieves an overall tonality that sits between a traditional monitor and a listening-tuned hi-fi design. Meanwhile, the smooth tweeter waveguides help deliver a broad sweet spot. Taking a look at the response curve reveals a small dip centred on 3kHz, a small boost centred on about 15kHz, and a gradual tail off in the lows with the -10dB point just below 50Hz. In use, we noticed the low frequency tail off from about 56Hz downwards.

The rear bass port design means the Kreate 5 works best a little distance away from the back wall. The EQ does offer some help in reducing low-frequency build-up from corners and walls, but is not drastic. Even so, we positioned them about 30cm from the rear wall (not a corner) and found the -1dB LF setting sufficed. The HF EQ, meanwhile, allows some tweaking for taste.

Verdict

Overall, it would be great if the Kreate 5 had a little more LF EQ flexibility, even though it's not a deal breaker. If you're after an honest pair of compact, affordable monitors, these are easy to set up, offer flexible connectivity and work very well for production and more general listening duties. 

PROS Very compact enclosure; Great value; Flexible choice of inputs; Reliable sound delivery
CONS EQ tweaking options a bit limited





Fender Standard Series Stratocaster

The Standard Series Tele held up brilliantly last issue - how does its stablemate fare?

Review by **Paul Riario**

RRP \$999 **CONTACT** Fender **WEB** au.fender.com

At this point, Fender's core instruments have become the equivalent of classic novels like *Moby-Dick* and *On the Road*, which are refreshed nearly every other year for new audiences to digest. It's almost ironic that a "The Standard Is Set" sticker on this review Stratocaster's pickguard reads to me as window dressing because, as much as I want to believe that, I'm fairly certain there'll eventually be yet another revision to this Standard Series' Strat in some shape or form. Don't get me wrong; in no way am I cynically punching down at the brilliance of a Strat or Fender's attempt to reach more musicians with a revamped and well-built guitar at an affordable price point every so often. The bigger point I'm illustrating is that Fender's consistent tinkering with their legacy instruments — like this latest Standard Series Strat — has led to improved player-centric versions that never get lost in translation.

Fender's Standard Series is the inexpensive and introductory starting line of Fender's multiple guitar designs. Below that is the Squier brand, or you can move up in features and price points to Fender's Player II Series or beyond in other series. Regardless, what's more important is how Fender has made its Standard Series base models all the more appealing with touched-up playability and better

“Fender's consistent tinkering with their legacy instruments — like this latest Standard Series Strat — has led to improved player-centric versions that never get lost in translation.”

hardware and pickups. In hand, this is the quintessential bare-bones “Standard Strat” with all the familiar curves on its midweight poplar body and the traditional bolt-on maple neck and fingerboard sporting the vintage standard of 21 frets. There are no fancy performance enhancements like a sculpted heel; however, the neck's modern C-shape is carved to a shallower profile and satin-finished, allowing for a comfortably pleasant grip across it. Likewise, chording and soloing are easily accomplished by its medium jumbo frets and a relatively flat 9.5-inch fingerboard radius. Notable upgrades include a 2-point synchronized tremolo bridge with satin chrome saddles and three Fender Standard ceramic single-coil pickups. Everything else is pretty much “Strat-customary” with a white pickguard, one volume and two tone controls, a 5-way pickup selector and sealed Fender diecast tuners. The guitar comes in Olympic White, 3-Color Sunburst and Aqua Marine Metallic gloss polyurethane finishes. This one arrived in a striking Candy Cola color that plays on the classic Candy Apple Red finish with deeper red hues. Finally, a noticeable transition is Fender's spaghetti logo on its headstock, which is all black here.

There's no overlooking that this Stratocaster is primed for beginners and intermediate players as evidenced by its approachable price and being strung with a lighter gauge of strings (.009-.042), which will make bending and chording more approachable for non-calloused fingers. That's not to undercut the beauty of its inherent utility or the many ways more experienced players can dial in or slightly modify this Strat to go toe-to-toe with other costly guitars. Speaking of that, I fine-tuned its setup to meet my needs, and what's practical is that any playability tweaks are accomplished with ease compared to Fender's vintage-spec models where you have to know what you're doing. The truss

rod is located at the headstock so neck adjustments are a cinch to make and to optimize the setup I simply screwed the two-point vibrato system down a notch for closer action to the fingerboard without having to lower the saddles. Also, the satin chrome block steel saddles are a welcome addition in durability and provide a smoother feel against the palm of your picking hand. But, the guitar could use a bit of filing at the nut and better tuners for tuning stability when using the vibrato. Despite that, the guitar plays as well as any of my other numerous Strats, and the neck feels incredibly comfortable with bigger frets and a flat fingerboard to execute any agile fretwork.

Fender's higher-output ceramic magnet pickups are a welcome addition to this Standard model, giving this guitar a little more crackle and pop in its single-coil snap. Neither too hot nor too weak in output, the pickups dish out punchier glassy tones with well-rounded edginess through my bevy of vintage combos and hi-gain amps. Even the in-between 2- and 4-positions on the pickup selector sound firm delivering that classic Strat quack without the 60-cycle hum. That's why it's easy for me to say this is exactly the “Standard” many players expect when they're in the market for a classic Fender Stratocaster.

Verdict

The Fender Standard Series Stratocaster ticks all the boxes in build quality, upgraded playability and punchy single-coil tones, making it an elevated introductory Strat for many discriminating players. **89**

PROS New Standard Strat ceramic pickups dish out higher output for crunchy tones and punchy single-coil spank.

CONS Players may want to upgrade components or pickups to suit stylistic needs.



Jackson Pro Series LeeMalia LM-1987

The year's most anticipated metal guitar arrives. Is it worth getting all offset about?

Review by **Jonathan Horsley**

RRP \$1,799 **CONTACT** Jackson Guitars **WEB** au.jacksonguitars.com

Not every metal guitarist needs to string a piece of medieval weaponry up with a set of D'Addario 0.009s to have a good time. Lee Malia doesn't. When the Bring Me The Horizon guitarist signed up with Jackson, he wanted a signature guitar with a classic vibe — something more than just “another color variant” — and he ended up with a guitar with no sharp edges, the LM-87.

If the LM-87 looks familiar, it's because it has the body and headstock shape of an early Nineties Charvel/Jackson Surfcaster, a cult semi-hollow that was — until recently — lost to history. But this is quite a different beast. First of all, the LM-87 has a solid okoume body with a glued-in maple neck (the Surfcaster is a bolt-on), and it comes with a custom-wound humbucker at the bridge and a P90 at the neck. The TOM-style bridge isn't that unusual for Jackson, but the tailpiece with

the fine tuners is. It reminds us of the Gibson TP6 tailpiece on B.B. King's Lucille. Malia complements that heavy-duty bridge/tailpiece ordnance with a set of die-cast locking tuners, which have a nice enough action.

Malia's choice of okoume makes sense. He wanted a lighter instrument; this weighs in well under 8 lbs. and is nicely balanced. The Black open-pore finish reveals all the grain underneath. Malia also wanted it to be affordable, so there are some concessions to economic reality.

Where you might find Luminlay side dot inlays on some Pro Series models, such as Diamond Rowe's signature model, here we have simple oversized side dot markers on cream binding. We've got an amaranth fingerboard, not rosewood, and 22 jumbo frets with “Shark-Eye” block inlays. The LM-87 might be an unorthodox Jackson, but

it is on-brand with the performance and sound. It is quick by anyone's standards. The 12” to 16” compound radius ‘board feels just like a Jackson, i.e. shreddable, like a contemporary metal guitar, with little to get in the way of accessing all of the fingerboard (besides ability).

It's difficult to

recall another production-line Jackson with a P90/humbucker pairing, but this is par for the course for Malia's signature models with Epiphone. The bridge humbucker does the heavy lifting. Some would've gone with an active design, especially if tuning down to G, but really, at full bore, with a Blackstar tube amp dimed and a Fulltone OCD in front — not a million miles away from Malia's desert island rig (a Marshall JCM800 and a Klon) — there's ample heat for the gnarliest metal riffs, with that kind of ragged quality at the extremes making it sound more aggressive. The coil-split is useful in the sense that it's there, and it's another core voicing, but, as is often the case on mid-priced instruments, it's a bit weak. There is nothing weak about the P90. It's the kind of pickup we'd be happy to find at the bridge, too. Like all good P90s, it can do sweet cleans but has the personality to give the humbucker a run for its money. Give it some fuzz, EQ it just right, and it's gnarly punk nirvana.

Verdict

Imaginatively spec'd, very agreeably priced and worthy of the hype. It's probably this year's best metal guitar so far, even if it lacks the pointy edges to prove it. **ag**

PROS Clever specs, sensible price; Cool vintage aesthetic but with state-of-the-art playability; Great metal tones and a lot more besides

CONS Gigbag is worth upgrading; Coil-tap isn't that excitin





Cort G250 SE

The sleeper model returns for another lap around the stage.

Review by **Paul Riario**

RRP \$559 **CONTACT** Dynamic Music **WEB** dynamicmusic.com.au

Whether you're a novice, a shredder or even a dabbler, there's a guitar that Cort can quickly curate for you. How so? Just head over to Cort's comprehensive website and you'll find a trio of dropdown menus that will generate the ideal guitar for your needs. While this sounds like I'm shilling for them, rest assured, I have no skin in the game; Cort has done just fine selling a dizzying amount of guitars, basses and acoustics without my help. What I can say is I've reviewed a few of the firm's guitars in the shredder and the more contemporary categories — the KX700 Evertune and the G290 FAT II, respectively — and both were genuinely outstanding instruments. Once again, I had the opportunity to check out Cort's latest modern classic, the G250 SE, which ticks all the boxes in a pleasing double-cutaway design with an HSS pickup configuration that's invitingly impressive in playability and tone. But you know what's bonkers? It comes with an affordable price tag that makes scooping one up all the more enticing.

Build Quality

The G250 SE has the familiar double-cutaway curves found on typical overseas S-style guitars with the slightly elongated upper horn. What sets it apart from others is the fact that its basswood body is slightly asymmetrical, making it appealing to many players digging on the trendier offset designs. From there, the guitar shares the same aesthetic as other S-styles by having

a three-ply vintage black pickguard framing its attractive appearance in four muted and lacquered finishes of Ocean Blue Grey, Olive Dark Green, Vivid Burgundy and Black. Roasted maple necks with their tried-and-true stability and golden brown hues are currently “de rigueur,” and Cort is on point offering it here as the guitar's bolted-on choice at no additional charge. The guitar does away with the common squared-off neck heel and replaces it with a smoothly beveled one for an effortless approach past the 15th fret. Also, the slim, C-profile neck is finished in satin with 22 medium jumbo frets and black dot inlays and features a 25½” scale length.

“From fit to finish, it's staggering how good this guitar feels and sounds, making it nearly impossible to fault”

The G250 SE's vintage voice is powered by Cort's Voiced Tone pickups with a VTH-59 bridge humbucker paired with two VTS-63 single coil pickups, controls for volume and tone (with coil-tap) and a five-way selector switch. The guitar floats a two-point vibrato bridge with steel bent saddles, but you'll need to be judicious in your vibrato throw to not go out of tune because the guitar comes with die-cast (non-locking) tuners.

Performance & Sounds

It used to be that guitars with pinpoint playability and minimal upgrades in hardware and electronics would be straddling the \$1000-1500 mark, but now — at around half the price — the G250 SE seriously competes with those instruments and exceeds all expectations. From fit

to finish, it's staggering how good this guitar feels and sounds, making it nearly impossible to fault. Setup was fairly good, but, as an experienced player, I made some minor adjustments in dropping the action by lowering the two-point vibrato bridge and a slight truss rod tweak of the neck. Playability felt effortless on its floating bridge in combination with the player-friendly carve on its roasted neck. Cort's Voiced Tone pickups are somewhat vintage-flavored, as evidenced by their mid-output and neutral tonal coloration. You can argue they lack the complexity or fuller-bodied tones of other popular brands, but what you'll hear instead is a prominent glassy sparkle from the single coils and a firm, chunky bite from the humbucker. The coil-tapped bridge makes an audible difference in tone without losing output, and when you factor in the combined brightness of bolt-on construction and a roasted maple neck, the guitar's overall sound snaps with biting clarity.

Verdict

A true modern classic with a price that's within reach for many players, Cort's G250 SE raises the bar in quality for a double cutaway guitar with player-centric upgrades. Whether it serves as your main guitar or as a backup, the G250 SE is a solid workhorse and a real joy to play. 

PROS Affordable in price and high in quality; Roasted maple neck ensures stability and reliability; Player-friendly neck profile and medium jumbo frets provide easy playability; Cort's mid-output Voiced Tone pickups produce brighter clarity and snap; Two-point vibrato is smooth and solid

CONS None at this price



Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom 1962 ES-335 Reissue

Ted McCarty's finest creation gets the Epiphone 'Inspired By' treatment. Featuring Gibson USA Custombuckers, real rosewood fingerboard and top-notch hardware, expectations are high. Review by **Neville Marten**

RRP \$2,499 (inc hard case) **CONTACT** Australis **WEB** www.australismusic.com.au

Any guitarist that doesn't know the Gibson ES-335 story must have been living on planet Zog for the past 67 years. Therefore we won't insult you with a full-on history and description. Let's simply remind ourselves of how this legendary model's semi-hollow – laminated thinline construction with solid centre section, two deep cutaways and a set of powerful humbucking pickups – made it one of the best-sounding, most versatile and nicest playing guitars of all time. It's up there as one of the coolest lookers, too.

As we've seen for some time now, Epiphone loves to get in on the act. And some of the instruments we've plugged in and played in recent years, especially the Joe Bonamassa models and these 'Inspired By Gibson Custom' offerings, have been mightily impressive. The fact that they consistently fit Gibson USA pickups, and use top-flight hardware and electrics gives them an advantage over much of the competition in this hotly contested sector.

For this new 1962 Reissue, Epiphone offers the two most popular ES-335 colours: Sixties Cherry and Vintage Burst. And featuring as it does the Gibson-style 'open book' headstock shape it takes a second or two to realise it's actually not the genuine article. Timber-wise, it gets pretty close, too. A cream-bound,

laminated maple and poplar semi-hollow body with solid maple centre section is mated to a one-piece mahogany neck with bound genuine rosewood fingerboard and mother-of-pearl small block inlays.

Where Epiphone has the potential to trump the competition is, of course, in its use of parent company Gibson's pickups. Here, they're the most excellent Custombuckers, said to offer tones redolent of the Patent Applied For double-coils fitted to ES-335s from 1958 until '62 and even sometimes beyond. Electronics and hardware are the good stuff, too, with CTS pots, Black Beauty paper-in-oil capacitors, genuine Gibson ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, and Gibson lightweight aluminium Historic Reissue stud tailpiece. Tuners are Epiphone Deluxe 'Kluson' type with keystone buttons, while the knobs are period-correct top-hat with silver reflectors. With 22 medium jumbo frets making up the final piece of the puzzle, our 1962 ES-335 Reissue looks ready to rock.

Epiphone calls this neck the 1960s SlimTaper C-shape. Not to be confused with the scarily skinny necks found on ES-335s of the previous year (this reviewer owned one and it would give an Ibanez 'dinky' a run for its money), the SlimTaper boasts an elegant shallow C profile with a depth of around 20.5mm at the 1st fret and 22.5mm at the 12th. It's a happy

compromise between super slim and, say, the Les Paul's '59 profile that's a chunkier affair.

Although the general setup is excellent, with a perfect action height for comfortable, buzz-free playing, the fret ends are a little sharp in places, especially further up the neck. It's a minor annoyance but one that could be easily fixed at final setup with a few minutes' more attention. To play devil's advocate, though, it could also be as a result of slight fingerboard shrinkage after leaving the factory in China. Some guitarists won't want to tackle a job like this themselves, so if you try one and love it, but it suffers the same minor malaise, ask nicely and the store's technician will do it for you. Other than that we can't fault the playing experience. At 3.75kg the guitar is not overly heavy, and ES-335s balance superbly on a strap or in your lap, so this one has all the model's positives going for it.

That's equally true when it comes to sounds. It's pure ES-335 from the moment you plug in. The bridge pickup played clean puts us in mind of Robert White's famous riff on The Temptations' My Girl. Although White played it on his Gibson L-5 jazz box, both tones have the same characterful honk. It's a great tone, too, for clanging open chords, or George Harrison-style riffy rundowns.

Flip across to the neck and we're in 'thick Strat' or 'light jazz guitar' territory. Again, it's a versatile set of sounds that benefits from the ES-335's oft-touted 'airiness'. It's certainly distinct from a Les Paul. And then we have that quacky middle position. Is it a bit Tele? A bit Gretsch? Possibly both, but there's a twang to it that you could easily hear on a Monkees' record. And that's only the clean tones!

Think of the legions of ES-335 players that have dug dirty, dark and graunchy tones from their semis. From Clapton to Warren Haynes, Eric Johnson to Gary Moore, Alvin Lee to JoBo, Chuck Berry to Larry Carlton, it's a salubrious list and all those sounds live here. The pots taper gradually, so balancing the pickup selections as well as riding the controls offers a wealth of totally believable rock, pop, jazz and blues voices. You won't be disappointed.

Verdict

In many ways the semi is ideal for the Epi treatment. Essentially, it's a plywood box, so it's not reliant on the pure vibrations of Brazilian rosewood and Adirondack spruce on a pricey acoustic. But it still possesses that aforementioned airiness, which, combined with the solid maple centre block here, provides perhaps the ultimate mix of sonic subtlety and brutal brawn.

It's the authenticity of the tones we love most. Even plugging it into a humble little Yamaha THR10 amp begets a wondrous palette of sounds that makes you forget the fact that one of these will cost you a fifth of what you'd pay for something with the Gibson Murphy Lab moniker on it. **au**

PROS The look is great and the tones are exemplary; totally authentic and way more expensive-feeling than the guitar's meagre price tag would suggest

CONS Several sharp fret ends, but they certainly didn't destroy the playing experience and would be a quick and easy fix



Fenech VT Camphor Laurel Auditorium & VT Professional Blackwood Dread D78

Aussie hand-built acoustics incorporating premium tonewoods and sharp design. Review by **David Mead**

RRP \$3,499 & \$4,499 **CONTACT** Fenech Guitars **WEB** <https://fenechguitars.com.au>

We were introduced to Fenech's guitars at this year's NAMM Show in January, where they were added to our shopping list of instruments we'd like to take a closer look at. A few months later and here we are with two contrasting models from the Fenech range, and it's been an interesting time getting to know them.

A quick tour of Fenech's backstory – we take a deeper dive in the interview on page 10 – circles around Aaron Fenech, whose workshop is in Queensland. Aaron began with an apprenticeship in automotive engineering, moving on to carpentry. After completing a BSc in environmental science, oceanography, material science and engineering, his passion for music soon led him to taking on instrument repairs, blossoming later into instrument building and the creation of Fenech Guitars in 2016.

In the years that have followed, the brand has become known for the use of lesser-

known exotic timbers, a finite understanding of acoustic guitar building that embraces style and sophistication along with superior tone. Since opening the workshop doors, an assembled cast of players have taken to using guitars from the Fenech range, although the guitars themselves are not that well known this side of the globe.

Fenech has a custom shop, where all instruments are bench-made to customers' requirements, but Aaron's team of highly skilled luthiers also make a standard range of instruments that end up at retail outlets. Such is the case here, where our two review samples are representative of an extensive range of variations on a central theme. One dreadnought, one Auditorium. Let's move in for a better look.

We'll begin by looking at the VT Camphor Laurel Auditorium and kick off by saying that if you were associating 'Camphor' with camphorated oil and its use in both medicine

and aromatherapy, you'd be dead right. There was definitely that distinctive scent when we first opened the guitar case and it has since filled the room with its menthol-like bouquet. Camphor laurel is certainly a wood we haven't come across before and a little research revealed that its highly figured appearance is complemented by tonal characteristics that boast a crisp, warm midrange with a good proportion of bass. Something we'll confirm or deny when we get to the play test a little later on. Meanwhile, we have to admit that this little Auditorium scores highly for visual appearance, which is something to bear in mind if figured wood is on your wishlist.

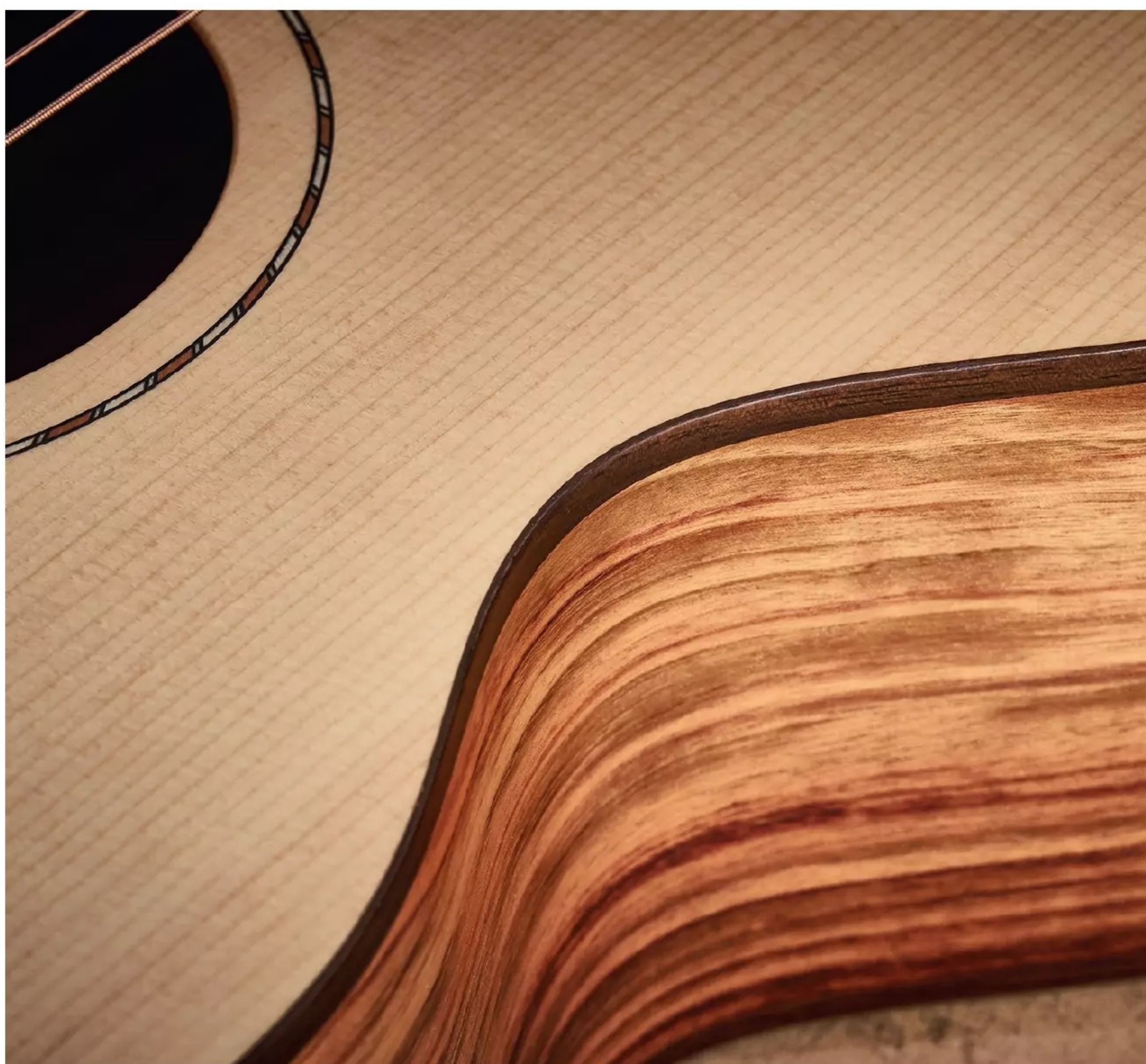
It's always interesting to see what a manufacturer says about its own instruments, and in the case of the Camphor Laurel Auditorium, Fenech reports that its "Auditorium model is a culmination of years of experience making and voicing smaller-body guitars to produce exceptional volume and tone. Although similar in size to a classic OM, our design differs aesthetically, allowing for a sweeter and more modern blend of curves, and tonally by producing an articulate voice with rich overtones while retaining an impressive midrange response and focused projection." We'd have to agree that the actual size of this Auditorium model is closer to an OM, with an upper bout measuring 280mm, a lower bout at 381mm and a depth varying from 100mm at the neck joint and 120mm at the tail end. Meanwhile, its air of compactness is accentuated by a tight 220mm waist.

The soundboard here is Sitka spruce, which is still very pale in appearance, but the years will see this journey on to that classic amber hue. The furnishings on the guitar's topside are refreshingly simple, with a subtle rosette and a faux tortoiseshell pickguard. Ebony is the choice for the bridge (with a compensated saddle and bridge pins courtesy of Tusq), and the same timber is used for the fingerboard, with circular mother-of-pearl position markers. The neck is a finely crafted one-piece mahogany affair with a volute at the base the headstock, which itself bears a set of Gotoh tuners.

In terms of stage readiness, the Camphor Laurel comes fitted with the excellent LR Baggs Element VTC pickup system, with its volume and tone controls tucked away on the player's side of the soundhole.

Switching over to the VT Professional Blackwood now, it's apparent from the offset that the same quality of workmanship and 'simple but functional' design ethos exists here, too. This time the star of the tonewood show is Australian blackwood, and the Oz variety is one of a few similarly named woods on the world stage and shouldn't, for instance, be confused with African blackwood, which is a member of the rosewood family (*Dalbergia Melanoxylon*), while Australian blackwood is a form of acacia (*Acacia Melanoxylon*). It has a look similar to mahogany, or perhaps a lightly shaded Indian rosewood. In terms of what we can expect tonally from this particular timber, it is known for its warm midrange and is often compared to koa in this respect. A little known fact is that Australian blackwood's heartwood fluoresces under blacklight. Who knew?

Fenech's VT Professional range – VT stands for 'Volume and Tone', incidentally – is slightly higher up the ladder in terms of fixtures and fittings, but we find Sitka spruce once again for



the top wood, with one-piece mahogany for the neck and ebony for the fingerboard, this time with oblong mother-of-pearl position markers and upgraded Gotoh tuners with vintage-style buttons.

The dreadnought style is iconic in the acoustic guitar world, and Fenech has very sensibly left the formula alone, telling us: “Our version of this beauty has become renowned for producing a guitar with spades of low-end power, a sweet throaty midrange and brilliant trebles. It’s this unique combination of balance and power mixed with exceptional note separation that makes this guitar a must-have for any guitarist’s collection.” Once again, it certainly looks like it means business in its demure and understated way and so it’s time to take both these instruments out for a spin and see what we find...

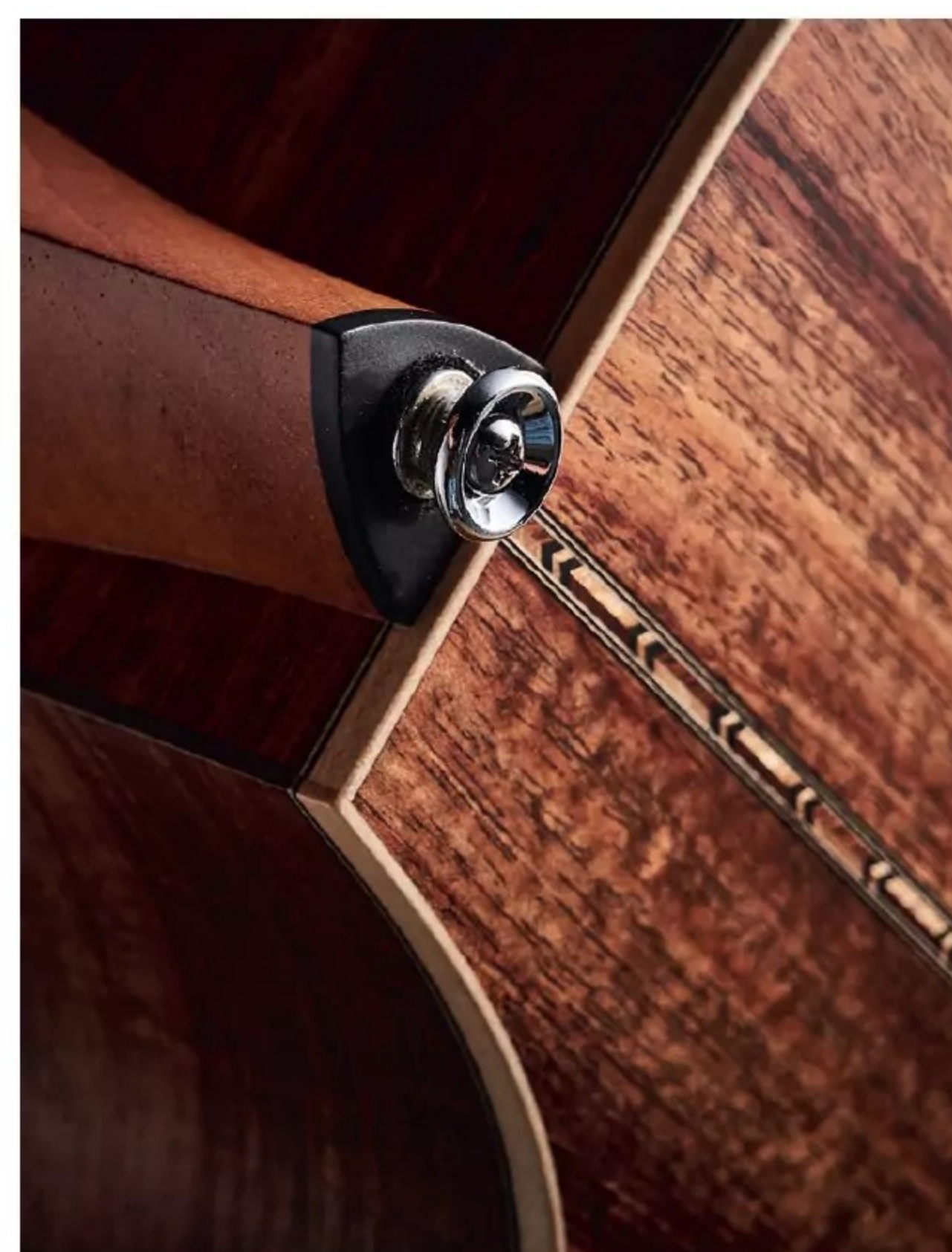
Feel & Sounds

Returning firstly to the Camphor Laurel, the guitar is perfectly balanced in the hand, with a great-feeling neck, the profile of which is that



midway point between chunk and slimness, with neatly manicured and finely polished frets. With the ‘Volume And Tone’ prefix in mind, we took our first strum and were rewarded with just that: an amazing amount of volume from such a trim body shape. The whole frequency spectrum is very well represented, too, with a very good amount of growl to the bass end but shimmering, shiny trebles as well. And everything Fenech says about the warm midrange characteristics of the camphor laurel is right on the money. It really is an engagingly friendly instrument to play – not too big for sofa noodles but just about right for any stage setting with a voice that flies in the face of its body size. We can sum it up by saying it’s a fingerpicker’s delight.

Back to the D78 and we anticipated more of the same and were not disappointed. The bigger body size means a bigger bottom-end, but there’s all the fullness you’d expect from a dread and also something extra in the form of depth and breadth. Digging in with a hard strum, there’s a boisterous energy that



remains toneful without ever becoming harsh. Lighten up on the right hand and you’re on a more subtle soundstage, with everything neatly drawn back, frequency-wise, but still fully represented. A singer-songwriter would delight in the power and tone present here.

As you might suspect, firing up the LR Baggs VTC on both added yet another blade to their Swiss Army knife set of tonal attributes. The D78 positively sang with the kind of richness and fullness that only a dread can give, and the Camphor Laurel proved to be a little fireball, too, with all the note separation and clarity you’d expect from a really good OM/auditorium.

Verdict

It’s amazing how sometimes you can take an unfamiliar make of acoustic guitar and befriend it almost immediately. The warm wash of top-class tone we experienced from both these guitars was impossible to resist and we found ourselves playing for fun, above and beyond what was necessary for writing this review. And that speaks volumes. Both models are imbued with a high degree of playability and an easy ride, neither of them putting up a fight in any respect, which is exactly what you want before taking the stage with an instrument.

Fenech might still be a new name this side of the world, but we suspect that it will quickly become one that is on every serious player’s want list! 🎸

FENECH VT CAMPHOR LAUREL AUDITORIUM

PROS Well made, attractively spec’d guitar and some great tones at a price point that is very reasonable indeed

CONS Not every player wants the wildness of the wood – or the subtle fragrance of camphor

FENECH VT PROFESSIONAL BLACKWOOD DREAD D78

PROS A dread to be reckoned with: all the power, volume and tone you’d expect from this iconic body size

CONS Perhaps the newness of the brand name on these shores might deter shoppers who are hoping to maintain a higher resale price



Marshall 1959 Modified and Marshall JCM800 Modified 100-watt head

The gatekeepers at Marshall have finally unlocked beast mode, releasing two brand-new Modified high-gain amps. Time to plug in!
Review by **Martin Smith**

RRP Marshall 1959 \$6,999, Marshall JCM800 \$5,999 **CONTACT** Marshall Amplification **WEB** www.marshall.com

We have all surely fallen at some point for the majestic tones coaxed from Marshall amps since the early 60s, with each generation's guitar hero finding new and innovative ways to expand the Marshall sound while the designs themselves remained largely unchanged since their inception.

Towards the late 70s a hotter, more fluid guitar sound began to emerge from the US. Tinkering technicians such as Jose Arredondo and Lee Jackson had begun developing hot-rodding techniques to achieve a variety of goals – increased gain being chief among them. These jacked-up tones would dominate the airwaves for a good decade until the buzz and fuzz of grunge brought slacker aesthetics to the fore. However, the modded-Marshall sound never went away and still represents a hot slice of the amplifier market.

Meanwhile, Marshall ignored such fads, happier to conserve and reproduce its heritage offerings. That is, until now. With a fresh energy and player-focused attitude at Marshall HQ, our stalwart monolith heads have finally been tricked out with tried-and-tested mods appropriate to the model.

Looking every inch the definition of rock legends, both amps are made as solidly as we've come to expect with each featuring period-correct birch ply cabinets and appropriate vinyl patterns. Both amps, in fact, begin life as stock hand-wired 1959 and JCM800 models respectively, before receiving

their individual modifications. This also makes for ease of serviceability, something of a high priority for a brand who supplies the backline for a large proportion of the music industry.

In the case of the hand-wired 1959 'Plexi' amplifier, the modifications allow for a two-way clipping circuit, Bright cap and a master volume – eminently sensible additions considered *de rigueur* for any Marshall on steroids. The amp relies on power section saturation for a large part of its signature sound and is therefore not an ideal candidate for an effects loop, hence its omission. For the JCM800 we now have two clipping options (OD I and II), a midrange boost and a Tight switch. We also have an effects loop on the rear alongside level and bypass switches.

The JCM lives up to its reputation as the defining rock amp of the 80s. Its muscular and present character is given all-new gain and tone-shaping options here via the midrange boost switch. Moving through the range of the preamp level control, it's great to be reminded just how versatile this circuit can be. A semi-acoustic brings out a rounded jazz tone from the low input that is both present and warm. However, with all the restraint of a child at Christmas, a super-S has to be plunged into the high input – and the glory shines out.

The already transcendent saturation we're greeted with by 7 on the preamp level is enough for fluid modern soloing and metal rhythms. Flicking the overdrive circuit into

action with OD 1, we bring up the sustain up by an appreciable amount. OD 2 continues on with a further boost of the same type. Quite transparent in effect – more like an extension to the preamp gain level, rather than the sound of extra circuitry – the gain mods in this amp do, in fact, utilise its own inherent topology, instead of extra diodes or transistors.

The midrange boost offers a well-judged push that's not a million miles from a Tube Screamer's frequency range: Strats rejoice! If things get muddy using seven-string guitars and drop tunings, the bottom-end can be defined by employing that Tight switch: a high-pass filter that relieves the valves of their heavier chores, allowing them to produce faster transients and harmonics.

Now, for the hand-wired 1959 – confusingly released in 1964 – the kerrang and crunch of the 80s is still a thing of the future. Instead, the more open and less maximised sound here with plenty of vibrant top-end invites more of a classic approach. The 'Plexi' has always had the power to roar when the volume is raised, but now we have a choice of two spicy gain-boosting options to get us into that zone at lower master levels.

In clip position 1, the diode-based circuitry provides crunch with a recognisable sharp edge, while position 2's transistor-based clipping smooths out the midrange, which not only sounds incredible but also feels effortless to play. It's a great place to start for early Van Halen tones, for instance. The pre tone-stack master volume appears to give a little extra range to the EQ controls, too, allowing for extra tonal tweakability.

In both cases, once the traditional master and gain levels start to reach full peak, the effect of the mod-switching becomes less apparent due to power section distortion. But by that point the party is likely in full swing. Using a correctly rated power attenuator can be yet another way to access the final dizzying echelons of gain from these amps.

Verdict

With these modifications Marshall brings the sound of the gods down to the volume-restricted reality of us mere mortals. Between the instant gratification of the JCM800 and gain-injected classicisms of the 1959, Marshall has delivered steroidal boosts that manage to magnify the individual characters of the amps without losing any of their sonic signature. Their prices put them in line with boutique amps such as the Friedman Plex. However, their unmistakable midrange crunch has Marshall written through it like a stick of, well, rock! Sometimes, only the real thing will do.

MARSHALL 1959 MODIFIED

PROS Diode or transistor-boost option for two classic mod styles; pre tone-stack master volume gives more power to tone stack

CONS A power-scaling option would keep power-stage saturation for which the amp is famed

MARSHALL JCM800 MODIFIED

PROS Same great JCM800 but mods offer up natural-sounding gain and tonal options; British-built and traditionally serviceable construction

CONS The Mid-Shift mod switch is quite subtle



Walrus Audio Canvas Rehearsal

Walrus Audio's new utility pedal is designed to sit at the end of your pedalboard and deliver silent practice options
Review by **Trevor Curwen**

RRP \$399 **CONTACT** Walrus **WEB** www.walrusaudio.com

The latest of Walrus Audio's rapidly expanding Canvas range of utility items is the Canvas Rehearsal, which the company is promoting as an all-in-one rehearsal tool. Its basic remit is that it allows you to plug in and listen to your instrument through headphones or a connected sound system, playing along to its built-in metronome and/or any tracks you care to send into it through a mini-jack stereo input or wirelessly via Bluetooth. While you can plug a guitar straight in, the natural place for the unit is at the end of a chain of effects pedals to give you a more inspiring sound, particularly so if there's an amp-in-a-box pedal involved. Walrus Audio sees the Canvas Rehearsal as the ideal companion for the guitarist with a pedalboard who wants to practise or work up new material.

The footswitch stops and starts the metronome, and you can set its tempo via the rotary encoder by using the Tap button that flashes at the set tempo or via the footswitch in tap tempo mode. The encoder can also deliver a choice of four time signatures, a range of divisions for the tap tempo, and turn on an accent at the beginning of each measure. There's also control via MIDI.

Getting external music into the unit is as simple as pairing it with your streaming device via Bluetooth or running a mini-jack stereo cable in for a physical connection. Three small knobs mix the guitar/metronome/music blend that you hear in your headphones – just set a mix that works for you and turn up the large HP knob to set the overall volume, which, incidentally, we needed to set quite high to get a reasonable vibe going through our particular 'phones.

Playing along to streamed music works a treat and, while a straight dry click would not necessarily be everyone's favoured rhythmic practice choice, it's a useful facility. And with various options available as to what you send out of the main outputs, it could be sent to a rehearsal room PA as an aid to band practice.

Verdict

There are various ways to take care of private practice needs, and Walrus Audio's Canvas Rehearsal expands that range of options. As a practical widget with a specific feature set that will have definite appeal to some players, it could be a useful adjunct to your pedalboard. 

PROS Compact size; metronome tap tempo; wireless and physical music streaming; headphone and standard jack output options

CONS A bit pricey for what it is; we'd have liked to have more headphone volume



Zoom MultiStomp Looper and Drive

Zoom's new pedals are redefining what an effects pedal can be.

Review by Steve Henderson

RRP Zoom MultiStomp MS-90LP+ (\$359) and MS-200D+ (\$279)

CONTACT Dynamic Music 02 9939 1299 **WEB** www.dynamicmusic.com.au

The clever folk at Zoom continue to amaze us (and challenge the industry) with just how much high quality tech they can squeeze into so little real estate. Back in 1990, the industry was astounded when they released their 9001 multi-effects unit. There were other multi-effects around but Zoom's had a smaller footprint than today's mobile phones. Zoom's latest effects units, the size of a standard compact pedal, are no less amazing, demonstrating that their idea of what a stomp box should do is quite a leap from tradition.

The Zoom MS-90LP+ looper is both analogue and digital, with dual AD converters and 32-bit float technology. Aside from the actual looping, there's plenty of other stuff: a built-in drum machine with 68 rhythm patterns that will sync with your loop; stereo ins and stereo outs (the outs can be split to feed loop and rhythm discretely); a coloured LCD display so you know at a glance where you're at with the switching and within the loop; MIDI in and out, that will sync to a MIDI source, such as drummer's MIDI click; a USB-C port for importing loops or powering the device, a 9v port, and space for two AA batteries.

“The sound is, of course, pristine and demonstrates Zoom's experience with their great mic pres in their various recording and live music devices.”

The physical design is kind of Boss-like, in that the controls you don't want to accidentally step on are recessed from harm. The foot-accessible controls are cleverly grouped for easy access: record/play (the “normal” footswitch) and stop/clear, rhythm on/off, loop effects, and undo (what they call “cross key switches”). The loop effects are things like Reverse, Half Speed and Double Speed, and these options are selectable by a recessed knob. The pedal will store 100 loops with up to 90 minutes per loop, but with a total loop storage of 13 hours. I'm not sure when you'll need a 90 minute loop but it's there if you do.

For context, I've been using loopers since 1989, starting with the Boomerang Phrase Sampler, which was great for its time, followed by the Boss Loop Station. But the Zoom Looper condenses tech into a single pedal like never before. Operating the Zoom is simple and becomes intuitive after just a few minutes. Clearing a loop is the only function that requires a “hold” – everything else is one click and with no latency. The sound is, of course, pristine and demonstrates Zoom's experience with their great mic pres in their various recording and live music devices. Having the “undo” function so accessible is great, especially if you're a teacher who uses a looper for short chord phrases in class.

Layering loops is a breeze and they quantise perfectly. Preselecting a loop effect, like Reverse, and clicking the Loop FX button is fast and simple: it's backwards and perfectly in sync. Hit the Rhythm button and it, too, is perfectly synced to your loop. For the soloist, duo, or the teacher who wants

to up their game, this looper makes it so-o-o easy.

The Zoom MS-200D+ is loaded with gain-based sounds: drives, distortions, boosts and preamps. It has 36 classics and 164 new gain-based effects to tweak and generally personalise. Also, there's 250 custom patch locations to create your own combinations, easily accessed on-the-fly via the upper cross key switches. Hold the on/off button for a chromatic tuner and there you have it.

Well, not quite. Zoom's “Handy Guitar Lab” is an ever-growing library of new tones that can be installed via the USB-C port. The various sounds can be combined in series or parallel – try using two low-gain drives in series, for example: very cool. They can be sequenced so that you can go from crunchy distortion to a Santana-approved overdrive to a wicked fuzz with the push of a single button each time – no more tap dancing. The screen changes colour depending on the effect (the overdrives are yellow, the distortions are orange, etc) so you always know where you are. And everything can be edited with those recessed knobs.

The emulations of classic effects are super cool and immediately recognisable. You'll find customisable classic tones (like a TS-style drive, or a Boogie or Diezel drive channel, or some Marshall crunch) but look beyond that to the weirder stuff like the Shaker Fuzz or the Nebula Distortion. Combine them and switch them around. If you're into more experimental sounds, this is for you. Fed into a couple of old Fender combos, the MS-200 offered up authentic tones that demonstrate just how far we've come with replicating our favourites. The Zoom's low gain drives gave a nice clip to the signal while readily cleaning up with the guitar's volume knob. The various high gain distortions have some real bite and crunch. Feed these into the on-board EQ and you have real tone-shaping power. Being a bit of a nut for Boogie amps, I found the Mk.1 and Mk.3 emulations very convincing. The Marshall sounds were equally cool. There's even a couple of noise gates to kill any pickup buzz. This pedal will save you a heap of space (and weight) on your pedal board.

There's a whole lot to love about these Zoom pedals. The on-board options are quite extraordinary and each pedal can be fine-tuned to the player's preferences. The MultiStomp pedals are built to last, with metal bodies and robust switches, and anything that shouldn't be stepped won't be. It's clear that Zoom have done their homework – not just in the sounds but also in the realm of player accessibility. They are super-easy to use, offer heaps of very usable sounds, and there's a confident, pro feel about everything. Zoom may just be changing the way we think about both multi-effects and the single pedals. 

PROS Excellent build quality; Excellent facilities; Versatile applications; Small footprint; Quiet operation

CONS None



Strymon EC-1 Single Head dTape Echo

Strymon's standalone emulation of an Echoplex offers a host of adjustable parameters to tailor your sound. Review by **Trevor Curwen**

RRP \$449 **CONTACT** Amber Technology **WEB** www.ambertech.com.au

The Echoplex single-head tape echo is right up there in the pantheon of iconic guitar effects, not just for its obvious echo functionality but also the sound of its preamp, used by players like Jimmy Page and EVH, to enhance guitar tone with or without the echo. Strymon has previously released pedals offering the tape echo sound – in particular the twin-footswitch El Capistan that features three different tape echo types, including single-head – but the company has now released a smaller pedal, the EC-1, which puts the focus solely on that single-head sound, building on the algorithm and the 'dTape' technology used in El Capistan.

Where other popular tape echoes worked by having a fixed-position recording head and several fixed-position playback heads, the Echoplex had just a single-playback head (hence the single-head classification), but it had a moveable recording head that slid on a rail so that the distance between the two heads determined the delay time, the tape speed being constant. It was available in different iterations over the years, most notably the EP-2 with a valve preamp, and the long-running solid-state EP-3.

Strymon has modelled the new pedal on a unit in its possession: an EP-2 that was modded by the legendary technician Cesar Diaz for a warmer sound that is closer in frequency response to an EP-3 – effectively, says Strymon, putting the best aspects of the various vintage Echoplex models into a single unit.

In Use

The EC-1 pedal has TRS jacks and you can set it for mono operation, mono in/stereo out or full stereo via a three-position switch on its rear panel, taking it beyond the capabilities of an original mono Echoplex. It has a simple hands-on control surface, though it does have a few secondary functions that involve holding down the footswitch while turning a knob – one of which is selecting the preamp sound. It's possible to use the pedal's preamp solely for its tone-shaping capabilities if you keep the Mix knob at zero for a purely dry sound. There are two different preamps available as well as a 'preamp off' setting: an original EP-3 preamp with accentuated highs will give an enhanced presence to your sound, while the modded preamp (the default option) offers a more balanced frequency response that fattens things up nicely. Both feel good to play through, and in addition you can set a volume boost up to a maximum of 6dB.

The actual echo is adjusted by the usual delay Time, dry/wet Mix and Repeats knobs that you'd find on any delay pedal, but you also get three choices for how the signal hits the virtual tape if you want a more saturated sound. The Low setting represents unity gain with optimised tape bias and will give you the cleanest sound. Medium increases the saturation with a 6dB input signal boost and increased tape bias, and the High setting's 12dB boost and higher bias deliver the crustiest repeats. Working really well in conjunction with all this is the Tape Age control, which

progressively subdues the repeats' top-end.

Plenty of variation, then, to tweak the sonics to best suit your needs, but in all cases the repeats blend really well with guitar sound, the trail fading away organically with a tonal degradation that ensures they don't get in the way of your playing. What's more, there's a sweet segment on the Repeats knob's travel that allows you to employ a really long chain of repeats before it reaches the point where they spiral off into oscillation.

Further sonic adjustment is available from the Mechanics knob, which replicates the common mechanical idiosyncrasies of a tape delay as well as instances of out and out broken behaviour. At lower levels, there's tasty pitch modulation as it reproduces a tape transport's wow and flutter, running from a frisson of interest to a washy sound. As you advance the knob beyond its mid-point those fluctuations are reduced and added to by faster disturbances reminiscent of tape crinkle and splices, and capstan slippage. Towards the end of the knob travel you get the wow and flutter added in more prominently until you get the sonics of a well-knackered unit, which will be anathema to some, as players with tape echo machines usually strive to keep them in tip-top condition.

The point, though, has to be that it's good to have all of these options. If you use an original tape echo machine, you get the sound that is dependent on the tape and the machine's condition at that moment in time. But, here, you can benefit from large amounts of variation to carve out the consistent, exact sound you need. That, an expanded delay range and stereo options make this a really evolved take on the Echoplex.

Hands-off functions include tap tempo with a choice of four tap divisions, from the pedal itself (Tap Tempo mode is entered by holding down the footswitch) or by adding an external footswitch. You can also sync the pedal to a MIDI clock signal. In fact, MIDI is fully implemented in the pedal, giving you control of parameters and access to a massive 300 presets. The addition of an expression pedal is supported for parameter changes or you can add a footswitch, not just for tap tempo but also to provide infinite delay repeats by holding down the switch.

Verdict

There are any amount of all-singing, all-dancing multi-delay pedals around, not least Strymon's own excellent TimeLine, but often these are overkill when it comes to the essential gear most guitarists would need to get through a gig. More often than not a simple delay with the basic controls will do the trick, and the EC-1 not only fits that bill, it also sounds wonderful. This pedal offers loads of subtle variation on a sound that has a real connection to the past, and its stereo option makes it more compatible with modern rigs. What you're getting here is a perfect melding of vintage sound with modern practicality. 

PROS Compact size; accurate emulation of Echoplex sound; stereo operation; range of adjustable parameters; tap tempo; MIDI

CONS The secondary functions can be a faff

Fender Jazzmaster

1958–1980/1985–PRESENT

CATEGORY: SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR

By CHRIS GILL

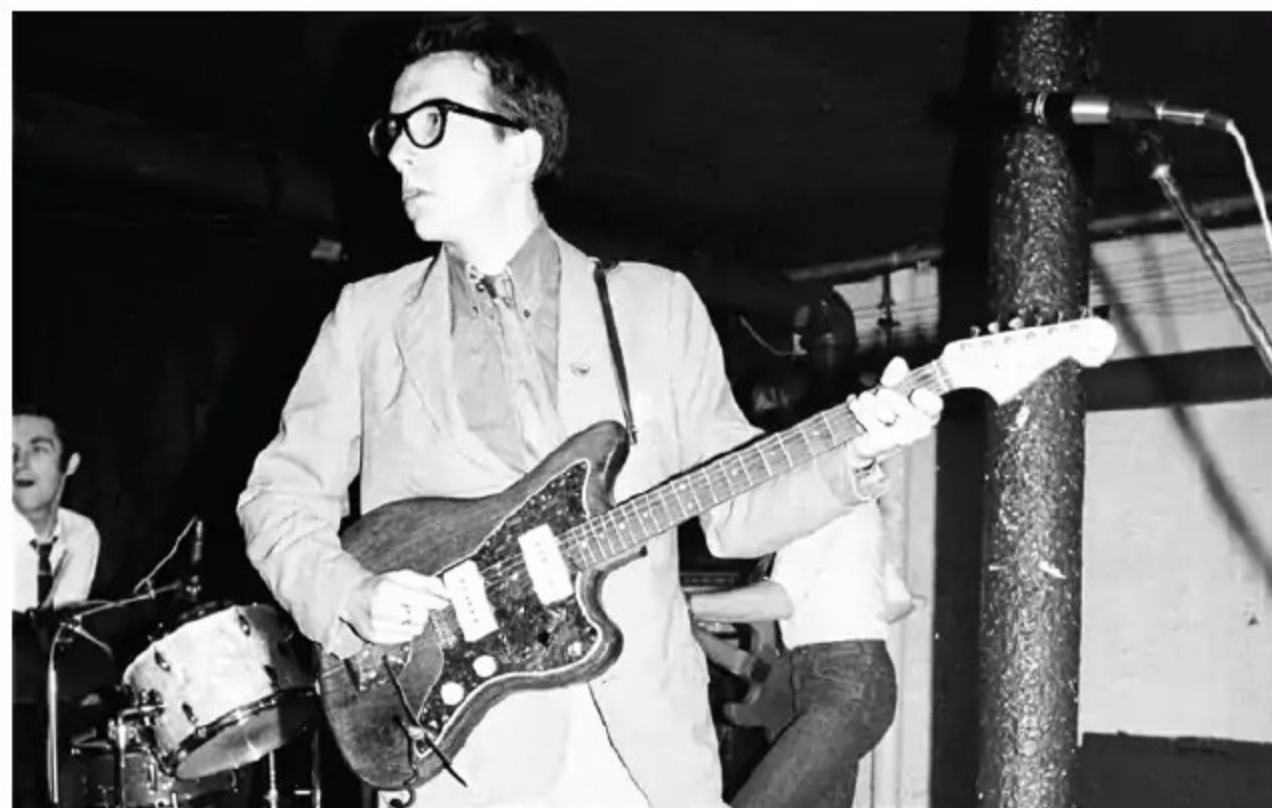
LEO FENDER WAS quite pleased with the success of Fender's Telecaster and Stratocaster electric guitars during the Fifties. However, he wasn't thrilled that his inventions were embraced more fervently by rock 'n' roll and blues players than they were by his favored country and western musicians. Furthermore, he was somewhat disgusted that he played an indirect role in the growing popularity of the newfangled radical and rambunctious sounds that were taking over radio airwaves.

In an attempt to appeal to a more "respectable" group of musicians, Leo and his designers developed a brand-new flagship model aimed at jazz guitarists. He even named it the "Jazzmaster" so everyone would know exactly who it was designed for.

Unfortunately, jazz players felt somewhat lukewarm about the Jazzmaster upon its introduction in 1958, with Joe Pass being one of the few jazz guitarists of note who actually adopted the model during its early run. Instead, the Jazzmaster became a hit with the instrumental surf rock phenomenon that started to emerge around the same time.

At its original retail price of (US) \$329.50, the Jazzmaster cost \$55 more than a Stratocaster with a "synchronized tremolo" bridge. Gibson's hollowbody archtop ES-175 with two pickups — a model highly favored by jazz players — was four dollars cheaper. The ES-335 (\$279.50), Les Paul Standard (\$265) and the Gretsch Double Anniversary (\$310) also cost less. Despite its off-putting expensive retail price, the Jazzmaster became successful enough to remain in production until 1980, when it was officially discontinued, although the last Jazzmaster actually shipped in 1982. In Japan where surf music never died, the Jazzmaster came back to life in 1985, when Fujigen Gakki made reissues for Fender Japan. USA-based production of the Jazzmaster resumed in 1999, and the model has remained a fixture of the Fender lineup ever since.

The Jazzmaster delivers a very distinct, twangy tone that may have missed the mark for traditional jazz but found favor among guitarists seeking a brash sound that stands out from the norm. Its soapbar-style pickups may look similar to Gibson P90s, but the construction is notably different. The P90 has a large bar magnet under the coil and adjustable pole pieces. The Jazzmaster pickup has magnetized non-adjustable pole pieces instead of a bar magnet. Also, the Jazzmaster coil is wide and flat, while the P90 coil is narrow and tall. Both pickups typically have similar resistance around 7- to 8k ohms, but



LEFT: Elvis Costello with his Fender Jazzmaster (and a couple of the Attractions) in the late Seventies

RIGHT: A Fender Road Worn '60s Jazzmaster photographed in 2015

the Jazzmaster has notably lower output and much brighter tone with nasal mids, jangly upper midrange and spiky treble.

Another notable quirk of the Jazzmaster design is its springy-feeling floating tremolo with an ingenious mechanism that locks the strings for non-vibrato playing or maintaining tuning when a string breaks. The "dual" electronic circuit is unorthodox as well, featuring separate "lead" and "rhythm" settings selected via a slide switch on the upper bout. The lead circuit is somewhat standard, providing master volume and master tone controls and a three-way pickup selector toggle switch, although the pots are 1meg ohms rather than Fender's typical 250k ohm pots, which contributes to the Jazzmaster's bright, twangy character. The rhythm circuit engages only the neck pickup and a pair of thumb-roller master volume and master tone controls with 500k ohm pots. This setting is somewhat darker, more subdued and arguably "jazzier."

With its super-cool space-age angular offset body design, the Jazzmaster has always appealed to players who prefer to go against the grain. The Ventures were prominent users amongst numerous Jazzmaster-wielding surf rock bands during the early Sixties. During the Seventies, the Jazzmaster re-emerged on the punk and new wave scene in the hands of players like Elvis Costello, Tom Verlaine (Television), Robert Smith (the Cure) and Ric Ocasek (the Cars). From the Eighties and beyond, the Jazzmaster has appealed to grunge, alternative, shoegaze and other rebellious genres via iconoclastic players and bands like J Mascis, Kevin Shields, Nels Cline, Troy Van Leeuwen, Thom Yorke, Sonic Youth, Yo La Tengo and Arctic Monkeys. Slipknot's Jim Root has given the Jazzmaster metal credibility, although his are so heavily modified that they're really Jazzmasters in body shape only. Good ol' Leo would probably be pleased to know that country artist Chris Stapleton also plays a Jazzmaster, although he'd tell him to get a haircut and shave his beard. 



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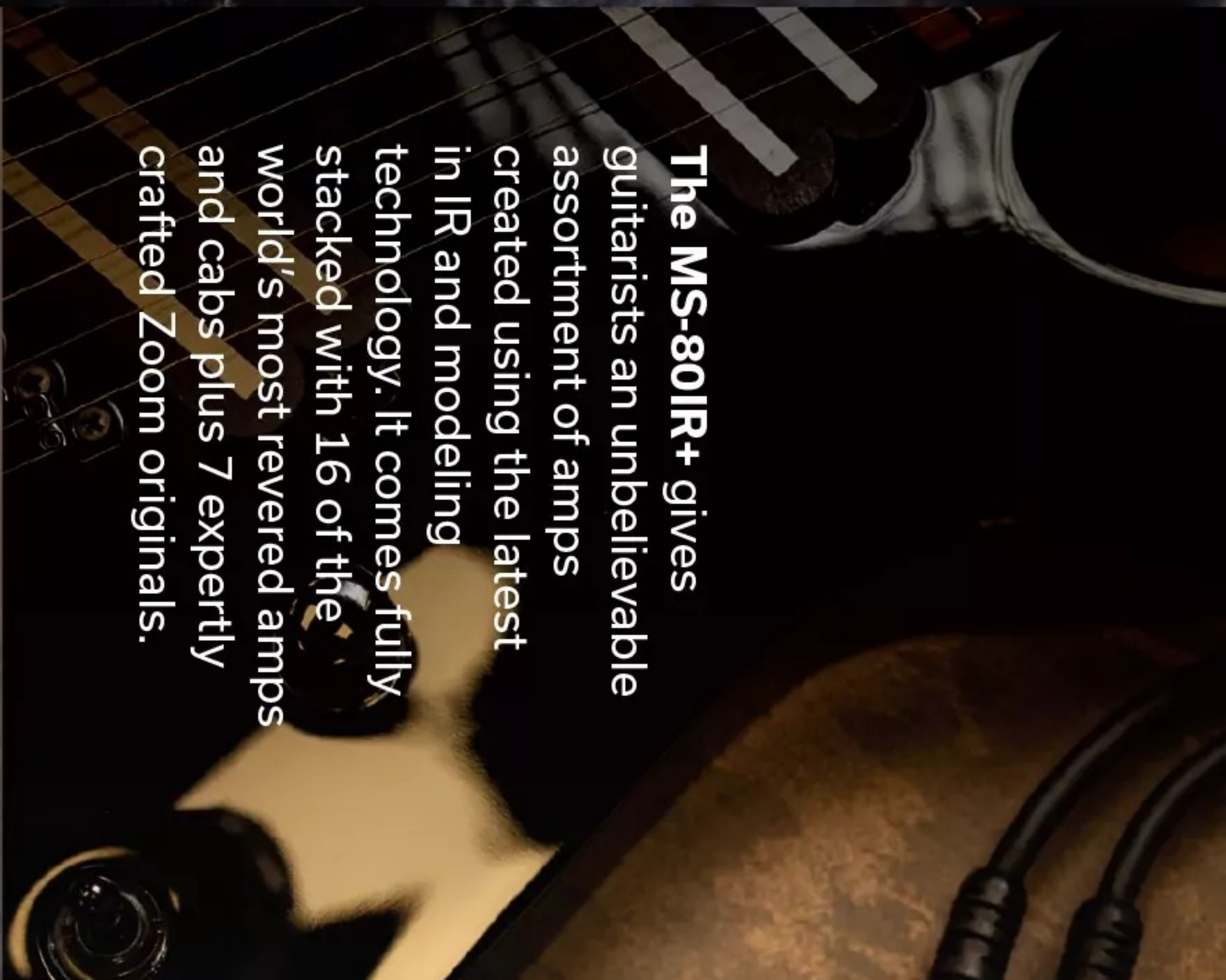
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