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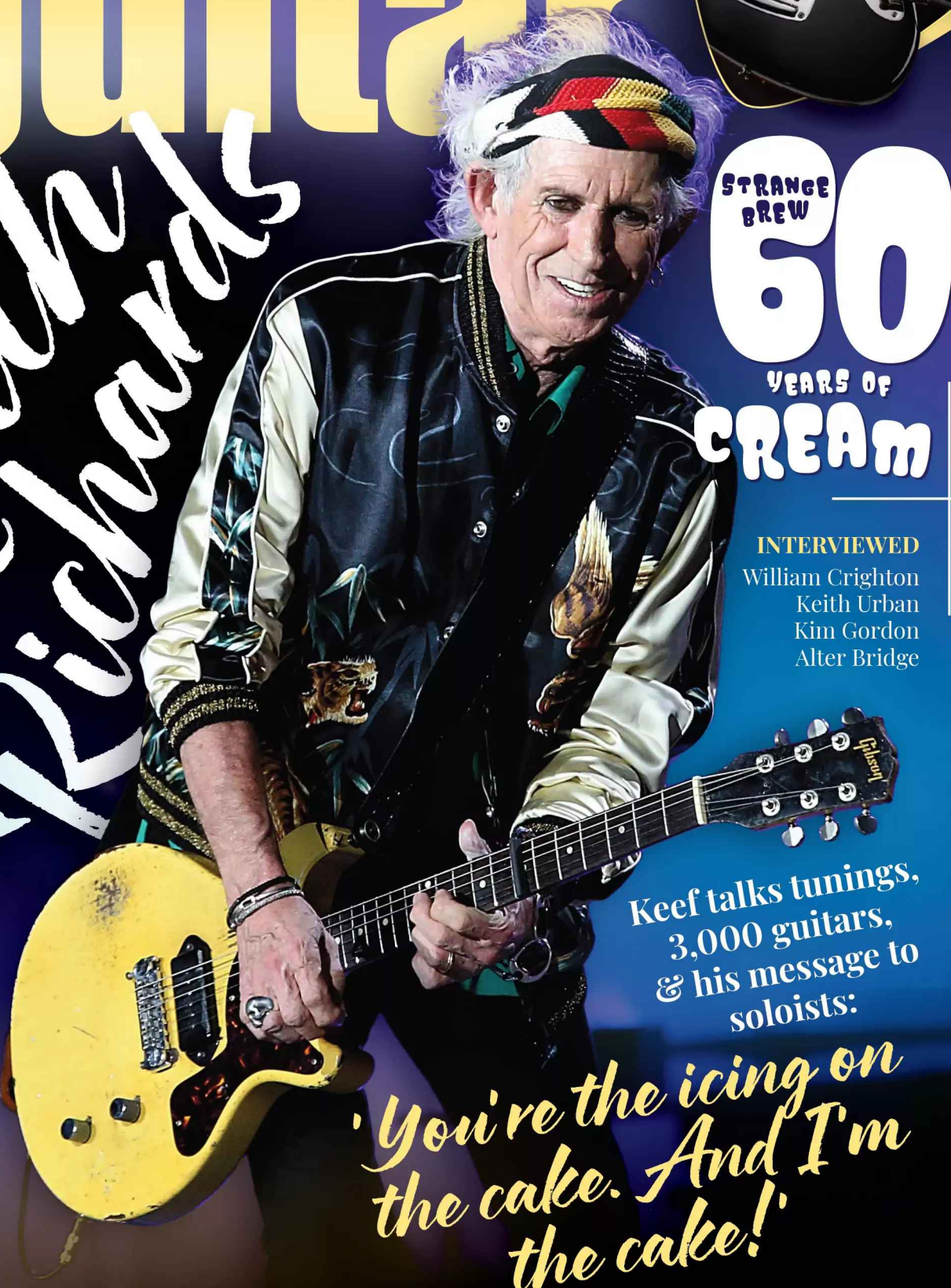


AUSTRALIAN

THE REAL PLAYERS PICK

guitar

Keith Richards



STRANGE BREW
60
YEARS OF
CREAM

INTERVIEWED
William Crighton
Keith Urban
Kim Gordon
Alter Bridge

Keef talks tunings,
3,000 guitars,
& his message to
soloists:

*You're the icing on
the cake. And I'm
the cake!*

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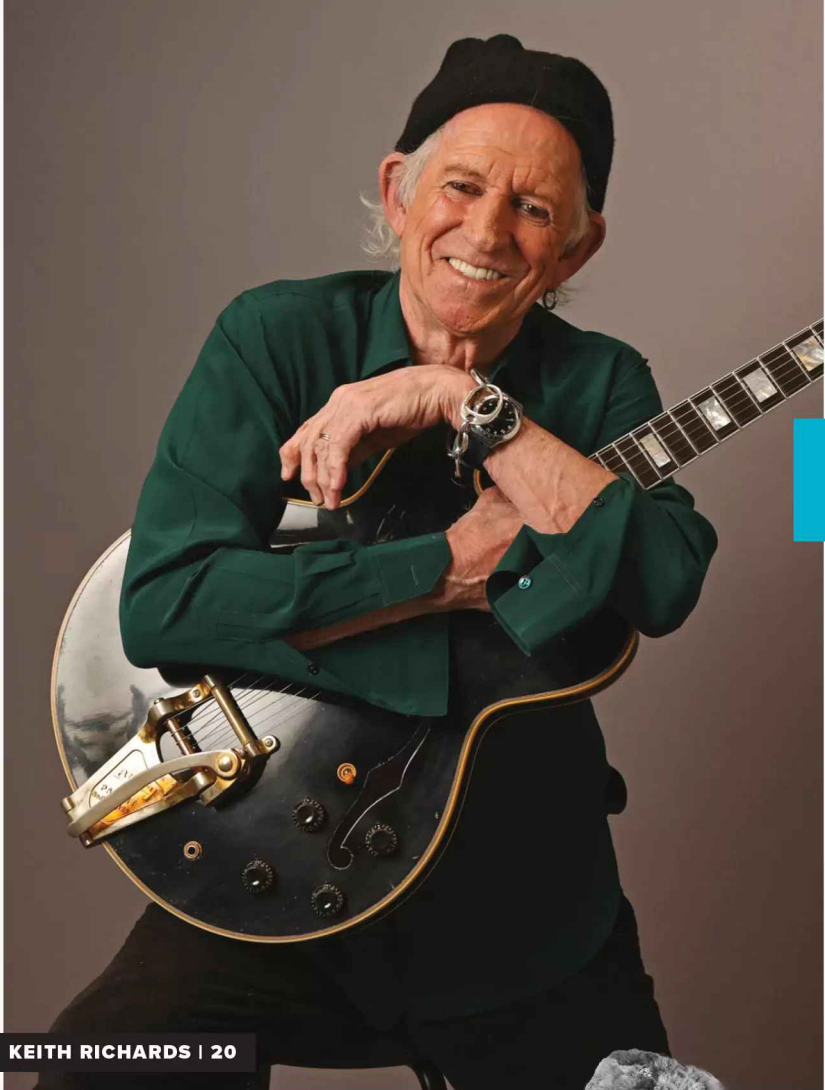
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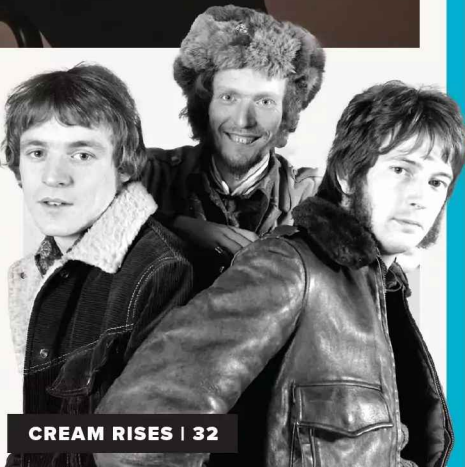


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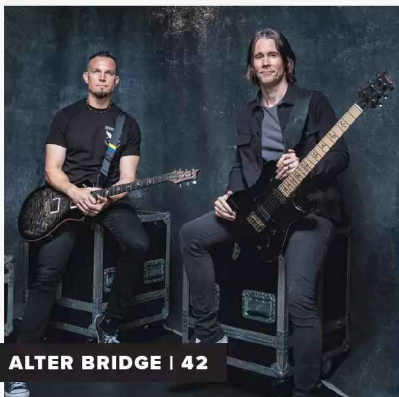


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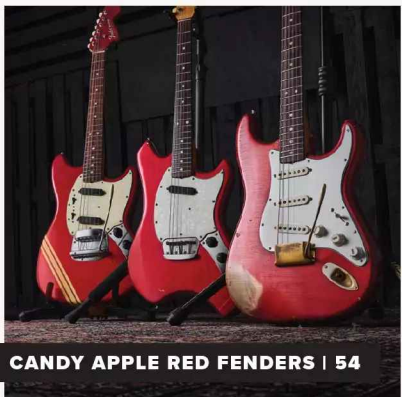
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JASON KEMPINI/GETTY IMAGES



Joe Bonamassa rethinks his massive guitar collection a year after L.A. wildfires

Joe Bonamassa has an enviable collection that includes hundreds of axes and amps. Among them are numerous original Gibson Les Paul 'bursts, rare Fender Strats in original custom colors and a mint 1958 Gibson Korina Flying V he purchased for more than US\$400,000. There's also his legendary "Skinnerburst" 1959 Les Paul, and Tommy Bolin's 1960 "Bolin Burst" Les Paul. He reportedly has more than 1,000 instruments in Nerdville, his home / museum, including over 600 guitars.

But Bonamassa says he's putting the brakes on his collection. "As far as acquiring stuff, I've really slowed down, because there's a saturation point," he tells the No Cover Charge podcast. "I'd like to get to the stuff that I own and discover the sounds that I can get out of those pieces, before it just starts piling up and piling up."

He says the turning point came in January 2025, when the Los Angeles wildfires threatened Nerdville. He was out having dinner when he learned the winds were driving the fires in the direction of his home, leading to an evacuation order that prompted him to grab his most valuable pieces.

Fortunately, his home wasn't harmed, and the wildfires helped him gain perspective on what it means to own so many rare instruments. "You never want to go into a situation ... where you're pulling out cases and have no recollection of when, where, or how you acquired it," he says. **ELIZABETH SWANN**

Fender celebrates three decades of the Hot Rod Deluxe with a stunning anniversary edition

Fender sure knows how to give its favourite guitar amps a glow up to mark a special anniversary, and has just treated the Hot Rod Deluxe to a limited edition makeover that marks 30 years of the much-loved 40-watt combo.

If you have been following these launches closely, you'll notice something familiar about the 30th Anniversary Hot Rod Deluxe – it comes with the same western-style textured vinyl covering and that vintage '50s-style grille cloth, looking just as the 30th Anniversary Blues Junior IV did last year. And there's an anniversary badge and a vintage leather handle to complete the look.

The similarities between these tube amps don't end there, either. This, too, has had a fresh speaker, with Fender swapping out the



ANDREW LIPOVSKY/NBCU PHOTO BANK/RECU/UNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES



Jack White's surprising reason why he avoided the guitars everyone else was playing

Some purists believe you shouldn't mess with classic gear combinations. But Jack White wanted no part of them.

In fact, he says he "decidedly hated" the most iconic electric guitars of all. Speaking in a new interview with Reverb, White recalled how, as a teenager searching for his own voice, he rejected Stratocasters, Les Pauls and other widely used instruments — not out of rebellion for its own sake, but out of a desire to escape what they represented.

"In my late teens," he says, "I decidedly hated anything to do with Stratocasters, Les Pauls, [or] any of the common instruments that you see everybody use. I thought it's so overused, and so indicative of 'white boy blues' if you had a Stratocaster.

"I would rather try to find something that didn't have any connotations already thrown on it. So I was attracted to Silvertones and Airlines and things that you just didn't see on TV or on videos."

White instead embraced pawnshop oddities, most famously his fiberglass-bodied 1964 Montgomery Ward **PHIL WELLER**

original's 12" Celestion A-type speaker for a G12M-65 Creamback, both ceramic speakers, but the latter has a more "vocal" midrange, not to mention a heritage that goes way back to classic rock's formative days of Beck, Clapton et al.

And just as Fender took the opportunity to make some tweaks to the Blues Junior's circuit, here we have some refinements to the preamp in pursuit of "increased overdriven note definition" and the spring reverb has

been modded to make it smoother. These modifications worked gangbusters on the Blues Junior so we'll be intrigued to hear how it sounds on this 40-watt platform. It's out now for \$2,299.

JONATHAN HORSLEY



BUSH PSYCHEDELIA

William Crighton's fourth studio album *Colonial Drift* is an eminently strange but compelling amalgam of hard country rock and more experimental elements. Crighton sits down with Australian Guitar to pull it apart.

BY SHAUN PRESCOTT

JULIEANNE CRIGHTON



William Crighton's songs feel loosely aligned to the tradition of country rock, but anyone averse to that style – or anyone protective of it – will likely be shocked by the way Crighton approaches it. Crighton has plied his “bush psych” sensibility across four albums, culminating in 2026's *Colonial Drift*, which sounds like Steve Earle by way of Godspeed You! Black Emperor. The Hoodoo Gurus' Dave Faulkner considered Crighton's 2018 LP *Empire* as “the best album of 2018, domestic or international”. It's bracing stuff: you won't receive it ambivalently.

But what is bush psych? “The feeling of connection and experimentation influenced by the soundscape of the bush in all seasons and weather,” Crighton says, “from lyrical songs about our history to psychedelic experimentations and wild sounds. Always evolving, always changing.”

Crighton - who was born in Dubbo, but nowadays resides in the Hunter - recorded *Colonial Drift* in part at Jim Moginie's Oceanic studio, with creative input from his wife Julieanna Crighton and the late Rob Hirst. We sat down with Crighton to talk about its creation, gestation, his collaborations, and more.

How did the landscape of the Central West, and Dubbo itself, influence your approach to music and writing as a young man?

I was born in Dubbo, but we left that area when I was one. I did spend time in the Central West as a kid, but I mainly

grew up in the Riverina area (Wiradjuri Country). Muddy rivers, long plains that stretch out to meet rocky hills, big purple and red sunsets. Lots of birds and animals too. Space and long drives. The wildlife soundscapes of dawn and dusk — whether it be a kookaburra calling before a storm, a big flock of white cockatoos swarming and screeching around an old river gum, or the low hum of a distant diesel engine, even the roar of the pub when you'd ride your bike past the open door as a kid. All of it's in me, one way or another, in everything I do.

Nowadays you live in the Hunter Region. How has that part of the world affected your outlook, and your approach to songwriting?

Life's changed a lot since moving up here to the Hunter (Awabakal). Not as much time as I had as a kid, now that I have kids of my own. Where we are at the moment, the eastern side of the Watagans, is equally as inspiring as down there. I spend a lot of time in Yengo and the Watagans and love getting on the rivers around here too. I also like being able to get in the ocean a bit more.

Going bush is directly inspiring, but it also forces you to take the time to listen,

think, process, and conceptualise things that maybe you don't get time for in other scenarios. I love listening to the soundscape around me wherever I am; it affects my songwriting and production quite a bit.

The Hunter is where Julieanne, my wife, is from, and she is overwhelmingly my main songwriting collaborator. There's also a great music community up here, with Dashville at the forefront of that. I don't know how all of the above has affected my songwriting, but I'm sure it has.

“Going bush is directly inspiring, but it also forces you to take the time to listen, think, process, and conceptualise things that maybe you don't get time for in other scenarios.”

***Water and Dust* was recorded for the most part at Jim Moginie's studio, Oceanic. What's the deal with *Colonial Drift*? Was it a similar situation?**

This album was recorded across four studios. The live band tracking was done at The Grove by Damien Charles and at my home studio by Christopher Dale, Luke Davison, and me. Some extra things were done at Oceanic with Jim and Rob, Church St Studios by Luke Davison, and Jeff Lang's studio in Melbourne. There's also some soundscape stuff that was recorded on phones and other portable recorders.

How do you feel about this new record, now that it's complete? Was it challenging work? Did it come naturally?

It's always a weird one — getting to the end of a record. A part of you is proud, excited, and invigorated, and another part of you can be tired, over it, and ready to start something completely new. For me, it's a bit of both. But I have to say, overwhelmingly I feel a sense of pride for *Colonial Drift* as a body of work, and I feel grateful to everyone who contributed to it.

Everyone involved stepped it up on this record, and that was an exciting and inspiring journey to be a part of. There were challenges, but we overcame them. It was a very natural-feeling process. I make music with friends and family for the most part, so there's a level of comfort that gives everyone licence to be as explorative as they like.

There's an explosiveness and spaciousness on this record that feels like a rural electrical storm. Does that sense of scale exist in the songs when you're writing them, before they've been tracked, layered, etcetera?

I would say that's more in the arrangement and production choices. We wanted to achieve a sonic texture across all songs that not only "served" the song, but also resembled the environment we're living in.

There are some genuinely strange sounds on this record, far from what I'm used to hearing on a country-leaning rock record. 'Poor Ned' comes to mind: what's that sound, or instrument, after the choruses? And what was the thinking behind its inclusion?

That's "bush psych". Christopher Dale was messing around with the Prophet synth, moving through sounds, and that sound stuck. He then doubled it with an old organ. Damo (Damien Charles) manipulated the sound a bit further, and the sound you hear is the result. The bush can make you whacky, especially if you're running from a few coppers who are shooting at you. We were channelling that.

'Beautiful Country' has some fascinating treatment of electric guitar. To my ears, the way it's sampled and heavily manipulated oddly resembles the accompanying didgeridoo. Did you write this one entirely in the studio?

I wrote the bones of this one in the caravan one afternoon at our old place in Bellbird. It was very synth-heavy. Luke Davison and I were jamming a few weeks (or months?) after that in my little studio with just electric and drums and came up with a more refined feel and structure for it. I think the drums on there are from the very first time we jammed it.

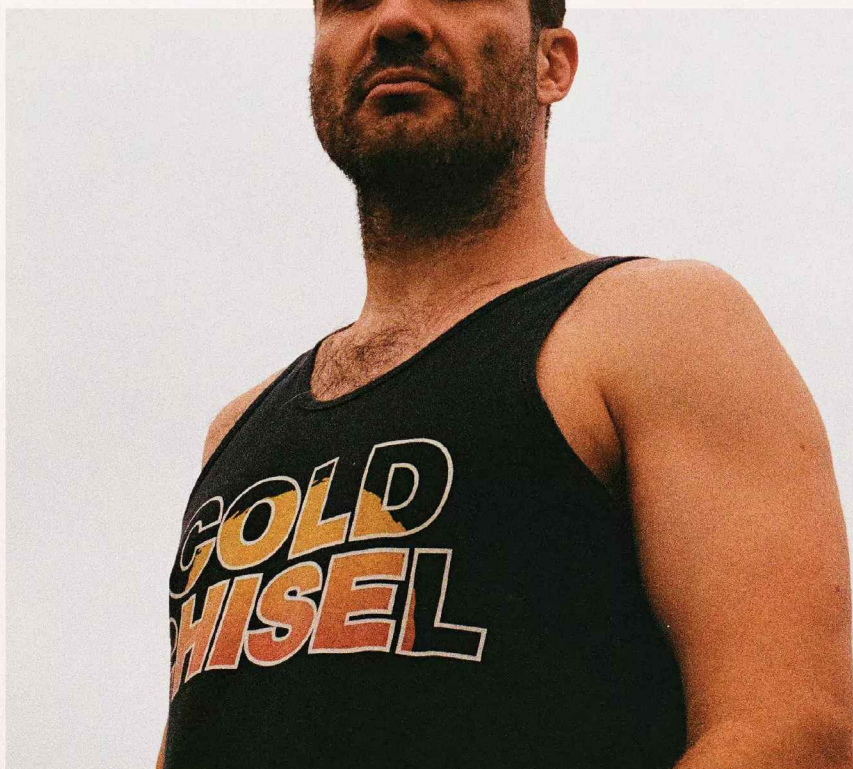
Jeff Lang added some nylon string, which I chopped up and made the riff out of. I wanted a glitchy tech sound to juxtapose the electrics I'd done and the beautiful lap steel he had done. We wanted to bring out some classic corrugated iron and chain sounds for the bridge, so one afternoon when I went into the gaol (Jules and I run a music program in prison for inmates), Luke and Chrisso spent the time recording those sounds from old bits of stuff they found around the yard. I was stoked when I heard it later

I'm capable of, and sometimes the idea outruns one's capability. I guess we'll see.

Colonial Drift was co-written with your wife, Julianne Crighton. To your mind, how does her input affect the tone of the record?

Julianne's input adds another whole dimension to the album. It wouldn't be the same without her. In my opinion, her lyric writing rivals any of my heroes. She's also a vital editor and filter of what I write.

Songs like 'Sex, Death



that night.

The yidaki played by our dear mate William Barton really added a great emotional weight and rhythm to the song too. The song works solo on an acoustic guitar, but we wanted to create more of a soundscape that matches the feeling you get when you're moving through this country. Jules and I finished the lyrics as the song evolved.

Is "rock music" critical to your approach to writing? Could you see yourself wandering further down the path of 'Beautiful Country' and beyond?

Not critical to my approach at all. Might sound like a pretentious wanker, but to me a song takes me down whatever path it takes me down. A song also takes on a new life every time I play it if I don't get in the way. That said, I'm only capable of what

and Choices' from this album and 'Killara' from *Water and Dust*, where I'd originally written too many verses, she has helped me get rid of the fat and also contributed some one-liners that end up being my favourites of the song.

For *Colonial Drift*, we worked as one brain a lot. A good example of this, and one of my favourite moments, was when I was trying to work out and sing the bridge for 'Further Down the Road'. I had some vocal rhythms and a bit of a melody, but nothing really in the way of lyrics. I was going around in circles a bit when she came into the room and handed me a piece of paper with some lyrics — I added a couple of words, and then we sang it, and that's the take you hear on the recording.

Another moment was when she handed me the second verse of 'WarZone' in its entirety. I thought, "Bloody hell, that's a

world in a verse.” Sonically, her voice adds a unique flavour to the album, both when she’s singing lyrics and in the interplay between her and Jeff Lang’s guitar when she’s not.

The late, great Rob Hirst also had a hand in *Colonial Drift*. How did collaboration with Hirst play out? What were some of the qualities he brought to the songs?

I can’t speak highly enough of Rob. He’s one of the most talented and gracious people I’ve ever encountered, and it was a bloody great honour to have known and worked with him. He was a mate and a

we went down to Jim Moginie’s studio, Oceanic. Despite the horrible situation he was going through, he was his usual positive, powerful, and vibrant self. Both Jules and I learned a lot from him. One example is ‘WarZone’. We had cut it at The Grove and it was sounding pretty good to my ear, but in the haze of making a record I had forgotten some things. When we pulled the session up at Oceanic, he said, “William, that’s not how we wrote it... it’s major, not minor there...” (or something to that effect). I felt like a complete idiot, but in his positive, comforting, no-bullshit way he said something like, “Go with me, let’s get it up to scratch.”

Of course, we were up for it. So under

opportunity. We’d met when I toured with Lukas Nelson, and at the time of sending him ‘WarZone’ he was playing with my hero, Neil Young. He was flat stick in rehearsals with Neil Young, but he made it happen. I was stoked with the result.

I sent it to Rob for approval and he was incredibly happy with the whole thing. We’d got there in the end. To sum it up, though, this album definitely wouldn’t be the same without Rob’s spirit. Even when he wasn’t on a track, the things we’d learned from him influenced things as if he were there.

Julianne and I got news of his passing an hour before we were set to record the video for ‘WarZone’. His voice and spirit are all over that record, and he’ll influence me for the rest of my life in one way or another.

What do you listen to at home? What’s on high rotation lately?

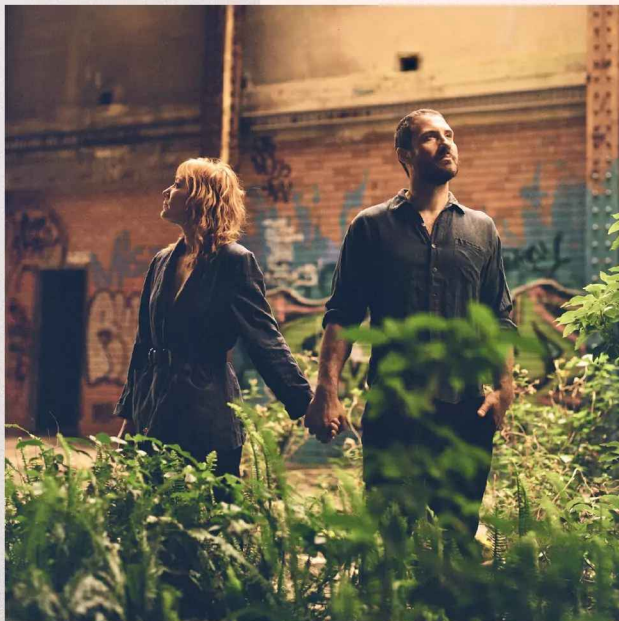
Jules and I have been running a prison music program for about eight years. As a result of that, I find myself immersed in all kinds of music. At the moment, I’m working up a soul music set with the boys in gaol, so I’m immersed in soul from the mid-’50s to the ’70s — Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Sam Cooke, Percy Sledge, Aretha Franklin. All of the classics. Not sure what it’ll be next week.

What guitars, amps, and pedals were your go-tos on *Colonial Drift*?

My go-to pedals for this record were spring reverb, an MXR Phase 90, and a purple overdrive pedal I’ve had for years. It’s made by a bloke in Canada, but all of the writing has rubbed off and I can’t remember the name of the pedal or his name. It’s decent, though.

Jeff Lang had a great pedal rig there too — he always pulls an incredible tone, and I’m always learning from him. CJ Stranger, who also played on a bunch of tracks, always pulls interesting sounds; his setup was impressive too.

As far as amps go, I used a Fender Bandmaster, Fender Twin, and an AC30. I used CJ’s Gibson SG on a couple of tracks, as well as my Tomkins electric that Al [Tompkins] made for me when I was 18. He was such a great luthier, and his guitars sound uniquely Aussie, I reckon. I was very sad to hear of his passing in January. I used my old brass resonator on a few tracks too — Langy set it up real nice. Martin, Takamine, and Gibson acoustics were the go-tos. The Martin was used the most because it had the sound we were after. 🎸



mentor to me. We worked together for the first time on *Water & Dust*, writing and recording “Stand” amongst other things, and we talked about collaborating more whilst I was supporting the Oils on their final tour through Europe. When I began working on this latest record, Rob mentioned he had started a couple of songs with Julianne and me in mind. We got together once every couple of months and kicked around those ideas, as well as ideas we had. Two songs, ‘Horizon’ and ‘WarZone’, ended up on the album. Rob had an incredible sense of melody and also identified fat in a song like no one I’ve ever worked with. He was a big fan of The Monkees and bands of that era, which all had very concise arrangements, and of course the Oils’ material never has any “fat”.

When it came time to record his parts,

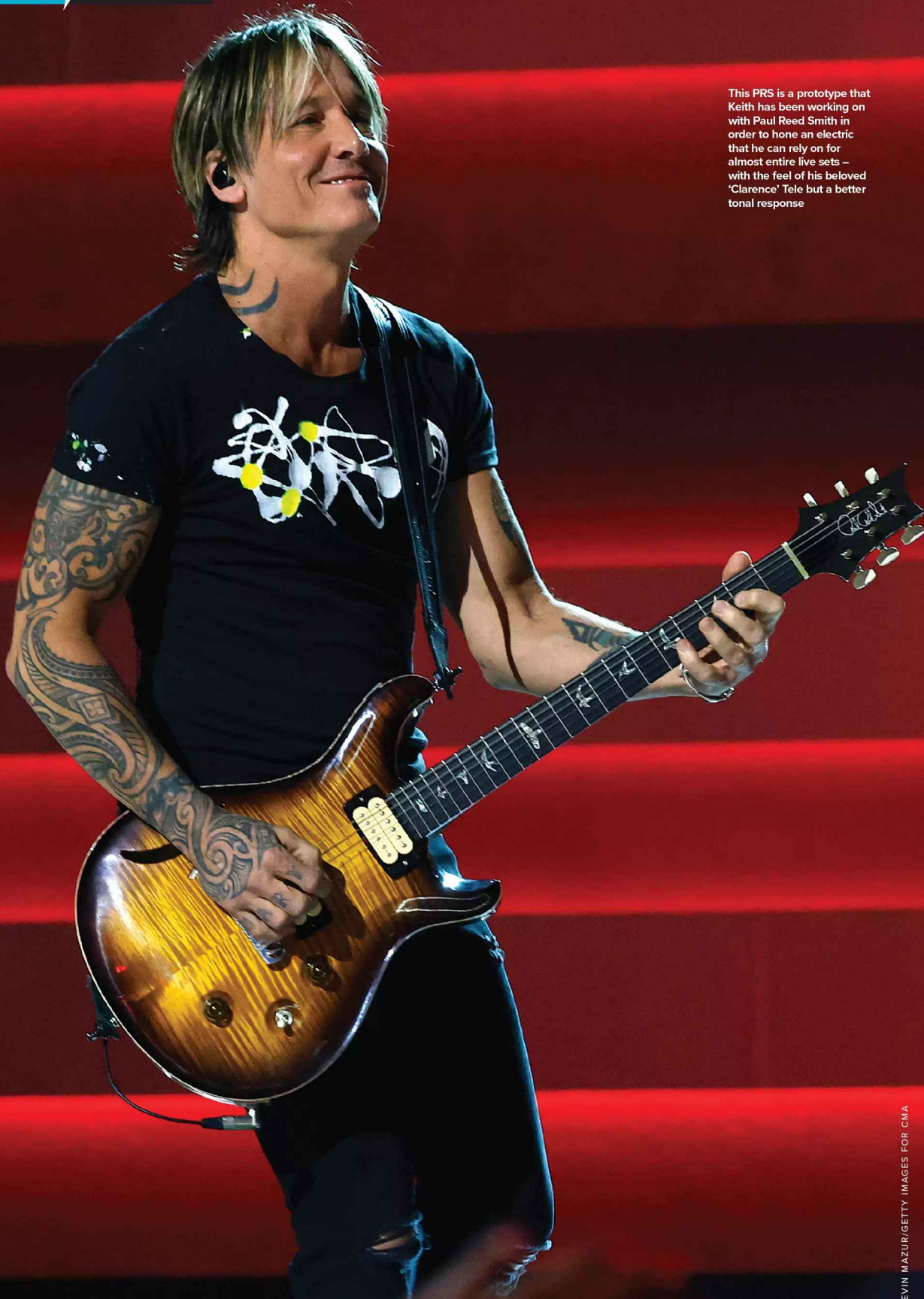
his guidance, we stripped off the bass, drums, and rhythm guitars. As usual, we had recorded it live and not to a click when we put it down at The Grove, so there were a few challenges, but under Rob’s guidance - and with some “Moginie” electrics - the song began to take a new shape. The original vocal, intro, and outro still worked, so we rebuilt the track to that and Rob put down his BVs.

We left Oceanic that day with a much stronger song, but it didn’t have any drums or bass and we all knew it needed them. I told Rob I’d figure that out; he jokingly said, “Don’t forget.” Determined to bring the song to the completion it deserved, I called up my bandmate Luke Davison and he was up for the challenge and nailed it. Originally there was upright bass on it (which is still in the bridge section), but now the verses needed electric bass. I’d been wanting to get Corey McCormick on a track or two for a while, so I thought this would be a good



William Crighton’s *Colonial Drift* releases on vinyl and CD on March 20 and is available from store.williamcrightonmusic.com.au.

The *Colonial Drift* album tour starts on April 11; see more info online.



This PRS is a prototype that Keith has been working on with Paul Reed Smith in order to hone an electric that he can rely on for almost entire live sets – with the feel of his beloved ‘Clarence’ Tele but a better tonal response

PHOTO BY KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR CMA



Keith Urban

The country superstar shares his love for Dumbles, writing riffs on cheap guitars, and the Nocaster once owned by Cinderella's Tom Keifer that's "worth every cent"

BY JOE MATERA

Do not read the following interview if you are suffering from G.A.S. because Keith Urban is an enabler of unnecessary gear procurement.

He's got the Gear Acquisition Syndrome bad, and in this interview detailing his life in guitars, amps and pedals, he talks about some super-rare aspirational vintage pieces – that Nocaster, huh? – but also explains why every guitar has got something to it.

And sometimes, that crappy tone is so 'wrong' that it just be right. Just ask the Stooges.

What was the first serious guitar you bought with your own money?

"I guess, to me, they're all serious! That's all relative because my first guitar was an Ibanez copy, and it was 146 bucks. At the time, because I was nine years old, that was way more money than I had, so that was serious [laughs]. Aside from that, the first one that comes to mind would be a 1982 Fender Strat in Candy Apple Red. It was the actual 'STRAT' model that they made for a short period; I bought that when I was 15, and it was close to \$1,000, which was

massive money for me at the time."

What was the last guitar you bought, and why?

"I haven't bought one in a while, but I bought a 1972 Fender Mustang bass, so it wasn't a guitar but a bass. I love playing bass as well and write quite a bit with bass guitar – and I've been known to play it on a few of my records, depending on the song."

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've ever had when buying guitars?

"Boy, that's Joe Bonamassa territory, there, isn't it? [laughs] Well, Tom Keifer from Cinderella, for some reason, sold his Nocaster. I was at Gruhn's many, many years ago. I played it, fell in love with it and bought it. Right now, I can't remember what I paid for it; it wasn't cheap. I absolutely love that guitar, so that's definitely one that I feel was worth every cent. It's just an unusually great guitar with probably, hands down, the most ferocious, dynamic pickups I've ever heard in a Telecaster. It's all original. The whole thing is original – everything, you know?

Well, maybe not the frets and so forth... but the electronics, hardware and everything else. It's amazing. I don't know why Tom sold it; maybe it served its purpose in his life, like they do, and it was time for someone else to own it. I'm very grateful to have it and be its current custodian."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse you've ever had after buying gear?

"I haven't had buyer's remorse, but I've had missed-out remorse! I was at Carter's [Carter Vintage Guitar in Nashville] many, many years ago, and they had David Lindley's snakeskin-wrapped [Dumble] Steel String Singer, which is so iconic. I didn't buy it and I've regretted it ever since. I know where it is and it's gone through the roof in value – and it's not because of that, I just really wish I had bought that amp. I would still own it and I'm sure I'd be playing it. It's one of those funny things where common sense said to me, 'That's a lot of money to spend on an amp. Don't be doing that.' But God, I wish I'd spent the money."



This heavily worn 1964 Stratocaster has long been a fixture in Keith's rig. He leaves a capo on the 1st fret of its thin, fast neck

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go of?

"Yeah, for whatever reason, I had a black Squier Stratocaster through the 80s when I was playing in my cover band. It wasn't a special guitar, but I just put up a lot of miles on it and really loved it. I don't know why I sold it, I probably traded it in for something, but I wish I hadn't done that. It's because of the sentimental value for me with that guitar.

"So I haven't had that happen in a while, though I was about to sell a guitar recently and I reneged on it. I went, 'No, I don't really want to sell this one.' It was a '58 'Burst. Weirdly enough, I hadn't played it in a while. I pulled it out, played it and I'd forgotten how beautiful the neck was. It's an unusual shape for a '58 - it's not as fat as normal '58 'Bursts. It feels a little... just slightly leaner for a '58. It's not like a '59 slim, but it's not a fat '58; it sort of fits in between, which to me is like Goldilocks. It just had such a beautiful neck. I played it for about 10 minutes before I was putting it in the case to take it to the guy who was coming to buy it. I did put it back in the case, but then called the guy, and said, 'I'm so sorry, I'm not selling this.'"

What's your best buying tip for anyone looking for their ultimate guitar?

"Oh, that's a good one! Well, play it for one. Can you afford it? That's another. I don't know... I think maybe it's about bonding with something. That's all it is for

me. I usually base it on if I pick it up and play it, and a riff or something comes out of the guitar that I've never played before, I get very excited about that particularly. It happens on really cheap guitars, too. I've walked into stores and found fairly cheap guitars, you know, for a couple hundred bucks, and kind of gone, 'Wow, I've never played that riff before.' Then maybe another riff comes out of it, and I go, 'This guitar's got some stuff in it.' So I've bought guitars based on that."

"A good guitar is the one that you're inspired to play, even if it means the guitar fights you; fighting creates inspiration"

When was the last time you stopped and looked in a guitar shop window or browsed online, and what were you looking at?

"I haven't been to a guitar shop in a while, although I do love going. I'll just wander around looking at things that grab my eye. It can be vintage, new, solidbody, hollowbody, anything - or any brand. I've got no brand loyalty, anything's up for grabs. Any guitar's got some inspiration in it."

If forced to make a choice, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?


"The guitar comes first, but... Man, that's a great question. I was going to try to give

an answer, and I was like, 'You don't believe that, Keith' [laughs]. Because, really, either one works. I mean, first, we have to define what 'good' means because that's such a relative thing. To me, 'good' is something that pulls something out of me that feels and sounds really good. Regardless of how much it is, what brand it is or anything about it, to me, that's a good guitar. That beats tone, even because the tone could be shitty and that's actually part of the character of the guitar you just played.

It's like if Iggy and The Stooges or the MC5 played a high-quality '58 Les Paul - it wouldn't work, you know? It's all relative to what you're trying to get out of the thing. A good guitar is the one

that you're inspired to play, even if it means the guitar fights you; fighting creates inspiration."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would it be and why?

"Single coils. It's what I cut my teeth on. I just personally think there's more total character in a single coil. I'd rather have a low-output single coil and then just crank the amp. That would be my preference." 



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LOST CLASSICS

The Sisters of Mercy

Guitarists Wayne Hussey and Gary Marx look back at the U.K. rockers' darkly compelling 1985 debut, *First and Last and Always*

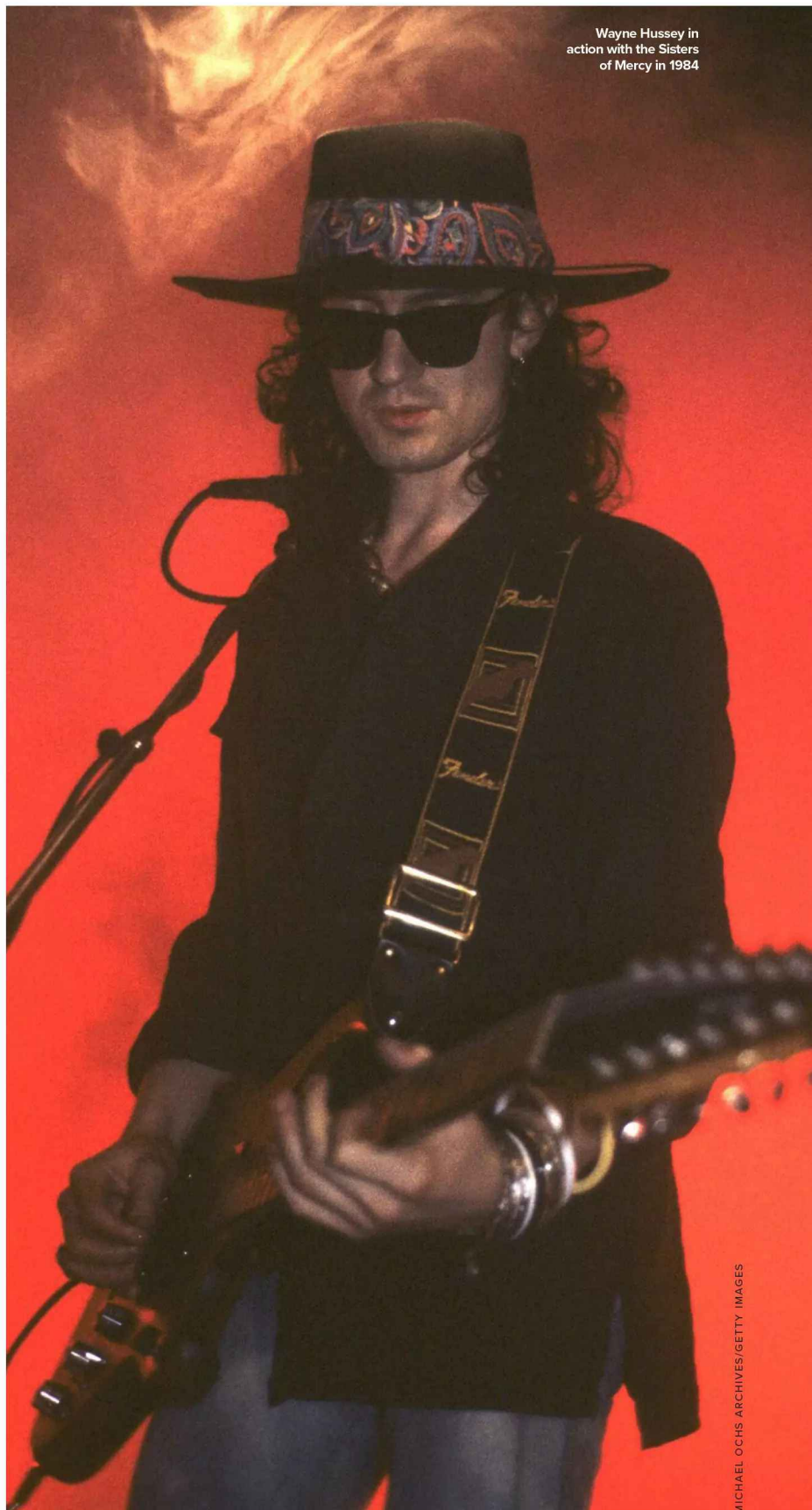
BY JOEL MCIVER

Like their counterparts in the grunge movement, every goth band denies being a goth band. In the case of the Sisters of Mercy, the masters of doom who first came up with the somber, post-punk template that has fuelled a thousand goth bands since the Eighties, that denial is complete — at least if you ask their leader, Andrew Eldritch. When we sat down with the British band's former guitarists Wayne Hussey and Gary Marx, however, they're a bit more relaxed about the goth tag: for them, the sole album that they made with Eldritch is simply a guitar-loaded classic.

Recorded in 1984 in the English cities of Manchester and Reading by Hussey and Marx plus vocalist Eldritch, bassist Craig Adams and a drum machine nicknamed Doktor Avalanche, *First and Last and Always* was plagued with logistical difficulties. Eldritch suffered from ill-health during the sessions and was even hospitalized at one point; he was unable to come up with lyrics until long after the backing tracks were recorded; and his habit of working at night while the others recorded by day led to conflict, too. Certain band members' enthusiastic consumption of amphetamines didn't help matters, either.

Still, the album was eventually released by the Warner subsidiary WEA on March 11, 1985, reaching Number 14 in the U.K. and doing moderately well in Europe. The singles "Walk Away," "No Time to Cry" and a U.S. radio release of "Black Planet" all did decent business, too. The none-more-atmospheric anthem "Marian (Version)" and the title cut are still essential listens for fans of mid-Eighties rock, but the album remains of cult rather than widespread appeal due to its introspective, relatively lo-fi vibe.

This lineup of the Sisters of Mercy split in 1985, with Hussey and Adams going on to form the Mission and Marx to establish Ghost Dance, leaving Eldritch to lead a version of the Sisters to



Wayne Hussey in action with the Sisters of Mercy in 1984

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

this day: his relationship with his band's alumni is mostly cordial, if distant. The albums the Sisters have subsequently recorded — *Floodland* (1987) and *Vision Thing* (1990) — sounded markedly more polished than their brilliant but raw debut. *First and Last and Always* is still many goth purists' favorite LP for that reason.

What gear did you use on the album?

WAYNE HUSSEY: All I used at the time was a Roland JC-60 Jazz Chorus, an Aria 12-string, a Fender Telecaster and a Fender acoustic. That was it. I had some Boss pedals — a phaser, a compressor and a distortion — plus an old Electro-Harmonix Memory Man Deluxe.

GARY MARX: A lot of my guitars were battered after being played live, and they didn't have the best intonation, so I hired a Fender Telecaster. Pretty much everything I played, I played clean, straight into the desk, and whatever was done to the tones afterwards was just left to the producer, Dave Allen.

HUSSEY: I also used an autoharp on a few tracks, doubling the guitar riffs to give them an extra, bell-like shimmer. When we went to one of the studios to do some mixing, they had a Leslie speaker there, so I thought, "I'm going to try this."



I played through it on "Amphetamine Logic" — all those big, choppy chords went through a Leslie.

How did you split up the guitar parts?

HUSSEY: Whoever came up with the basic tune of a song would base it around a guitar riff or bass line. You would do a little four-track demo and take it to everybody else, and they would learn the parts, and if they had any ideas, they would add them.

MARX: The way the album turned out was that Wayne wrote all of the first side and I wrote the other, more or less.

HUSSEY: Gary wrote half of the album and I wrote half of the album. It was unusual for Eldritch to allow that, because he'd previously written pretty much everything in the Sisters.

The Aria 12-string gave the album a very specific character. Was anyone else playing 12-strings in rock at the time?

Hussey: Very few. I was aware of the Byrds, of course, and maybe Will Sergeant of Echo & the Bunnymen had a 12-string. It brought a bigger jangle and shininess. You approach playing guitar differently with a 12-string. I'm not a chugger; I like arpeggios. If I can't think of anything



[from left] Andrew Eldritch, Craig Adams, Wayne Hussey and Gary Marx at WEA Records in London

IMAGO / FUTURE IMAGE

good to play, then I'll leave space. That's something a lot of guitarists can't do, I think.

Why did you choose an Aria?

HUSSEY: I couldn't afford a Rickenbacker or a Fender. I've got a nice 1966 Fender 12-string now, but I played the Aria back then because it was decent and cheap. It looked pretty horrible, so I stuck duct tape all over it, with slogans on it. One thing I will say about that guitar is that the amount of different tones you can get with it is amazing, because it's got three toggle switches. I have a beautiful signature Schecter 12-string [Corsair-12], which Michael Ciravolo, Schecter's president, suggested when the Mission were getting back together in 2011 for 25th-anniversary shows. I'd been using a Gretsch White Falcon on stage before that, so when I retired it, Michael and I came up with the idea of my signature 12-string with lipstick pickups and coil taps.

We're told that *First and Last and Always* was slow and difficult to record.

MARX: Yes, but not at first; getting the music down was good fun. There was a real feeling of creativity, and most of the tunes were already written, although Wayne did write a couple in the studio.

HUSSEY: I can't speak for Eldritch, but it's well known that he was having some problems at the time.

MARX: What became difficult very quickly was that there wasn't a vocal to give us the full shape of the songs, so we were tinkering a little bit with the backing tracks, putting things in which

"I was still quite green as a guitar player, so I didn't always like the studio because it exposed your playing," Gary Marx says



On the Faders

Legendary producer David Allen, who has also worked with the Cure, Depeche Mode, the Human League and Neneh Cherry, looks back on *First and Last and Always*

BY AMIT SHARMA

What was your objective with *First and Last and Always*?

This may sound deluded, but I thought at the time that it was a completely seminal record. In my mind, I was making something like the fucking Velvet Underground — something no one had heard before — partly because I was probably one of the most experienced people in Britain with drum machines.

Why was this album so difficult to make?

It would have all been all right if we hadn't all been sitting around and fucking about, waiting for the lyrics. I'd come in at noon and

Wayne would have already put down some drum tracks and some bass and was doing guitars. I'd spend the afternoon working on those, and he'd leave at 7 p.m. and we'd be saying, "What a great, productive day!" But then Eldritch pops up and goes, "No, I don't like it; it's shit." It wasn't helpful. He'd criticize the way Gary played guitar, and be running everybody down.

How did you balance the two guitarists?

Wayne's a bit more of a noise merchant, with all the pedals. It's just classic, isn't it? You've got two guitarists and you want them to play different guitars and go through

different amps, so you'd land on Gibson and Marshall down one side and Fender down the other.

How does the album stand up to you now?

No one really knew what the fuck they were doing on this album, but it's great because it's imperfect. You can hear all sorts of mistakes in the songs that make you think, "How did that get under the radar?" But that's what's great about it. There's a tension there between the shitness and the gloriousness that is what it's all about.

Joel McIver

we wouldn't have done if a vocal had been there.

Still, the guitar parts complement each other really well.

MARX: It's because Wayne was so savvy, and I wasn't! Each of his songs was built around his idea of which effects he was going to use. Maybe he was going to put his 12-string on it, or add acoustic on the chorus, and all these kinds of things — whereas I just threw bits that I liked on top of each track. If I'd been left to my own devices, the whole album would have been a wall of fuzz guitars.

HUSSEY: I think Gary would agree, and probably Dave Allen, too, that I was the Sisters' best musician, simply because I'd had a lot more experience than the rest of them, so I brought more color to the music. Their songs were kind of monochrome before I joined — and some of the Sisters' early records sound really great for that reason — but I know Eldritch wanted to be broader in appeal.

MARX: I was still quite green as a guitar player, so I didn't always like the studio because it exposed your playing. In the early days when we just got in a room together and played live, we kicked up a real wall of noise because there was a lot more distortion involved. I was a little bit hidden, and I enjoyed that. Once we were tracking, though, you could put the fader up and could hear exactly what you were playing. I didn't really like that, and I was a little bit intimidated by the process.

The only real chorus on the record is in the title track. Did you write that in a commercial frame of mind, Gary?

MARX: No, the word "commercial" was never in my mind when we were making music. It's just that some parts would suggest themselves as being more catchy than others. "First and Last and Always" was an example of that; it always had that catchy kind of anthemic thing about it.

You both quit the Sisters in 1985. Why?

MARX: I'll be frank, we had a lot of problems going in; my relationship with Eldritch was already pretty strained. I still wanted this album to be great, though, even if it might prove to be the end for me.

HUSSEY: It was a constant intellectual tussle, and in the end I couldn't be bothered. What we were getting out of it wasn't worth it, and I don't mean that in terms of monetary recompense; I mean in terms of artistic fulfillment. I wrote a bunch of tunes for the second Sisters album, but nearly all of them ended up on the first Mission album, because Eldritch

"I've got a nice 1966 Fender 12-string now, but I played the Aria back then because it was decent and cheap. It looked pretty horrible, so I stuck duct tape all over it, with slogans on it."

didn't want to use any of them. It's not that he didn't like them. I think it was a reaction to him not doing anything apart from writing lyrics on *First and Last and Always*, and I think with the second album, he wanted to do it all himself, like he'd done before I joined.

Was the split amicable?

HUSSEY: It was at first. He asked me if I would play on the next record and I said, "Yeah, of course." But it all went a bit sour and a bit nasty. Eldritch likes a battle; he thrives on confrontation. Mind you, I went to see the Sisters around 1991, and at the aftershow he told me I was the best guitarist he'd ever worked with, which was nice of him. I've seen him a few times after that, but not in the last 20 years or so.

MARX: I expect Eldritch is a better man nowadays than he was back then, and that he would admit he was a bit out of control in 1985.

How does the album sound to you today?

MARX: I would love it if someone remixed the damn thing, rather than messing about with a remaster. I don't

think the mix is great, because it fell in between what Eldritch might have wanted and what Dave was trying to get, and neither of them were satisfied.

HUSSEY: The album is good for its time. I don't think there's a weak song on it. It definitely captures something, even though it was quite stressful to make.

Which of the songs stand out to you?

HUSSEY: With "Marian (Version)," there was some alchemy at work there, for sure. I listen to it now and those guitar sounds chime beautifully — they were very special. I don't know how, because that song was completely off the cuff.

Tell us how Billy Corgan reintroduced you to the album.

HUSSEY: Billy is a big fan of the Sisters and also a big fan of my guitar

playing, I think, as much as anything else. He got in touch and asked if I'd played *First and Last and Always* recently. I said I hadn't played it in years, and he said, "You need to play it again." I put the CD on in the car and I was pleasantly surprised. After this much time, I'd forgotten all the trouble and strife that surrounded it.

You also played the songs with Billy, didn't you?

HUSSEY: Yes, when he invited me and Craig up to his house in Chicago for a week. The day we arrived was the day David Bowie died [January 10, 2016]. Billy wanted to play those early songs, and he had all the gear. I asked for a Roland JC-60 and a Roland GP8 multi-effects, and Craig got an Ampeg, and there was even the right drum machine. We started playing and said, "Yeah, that's it — that's the sound of *First and Last and Always*!"

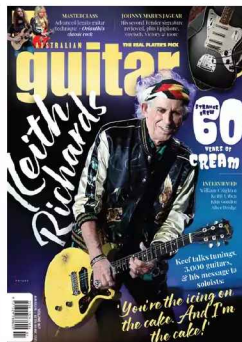


First and Last and Always: 40th Anniversary Edition is out now. Hussey tours with the Mission (themissionukband.com).

Marx's albums, *Green Ginger Jive* and *Sad Songs for Anthony*, are out now.

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[from left] John McEntire,
Dan Bitney, Jeff Parker,
Douglas McCombs and
John Hernon

Tortoise

Douglas McCombs and Jeff Parker make long-awaited contact with their luxurious new album, *Touch*

BY ADAM KOVAC

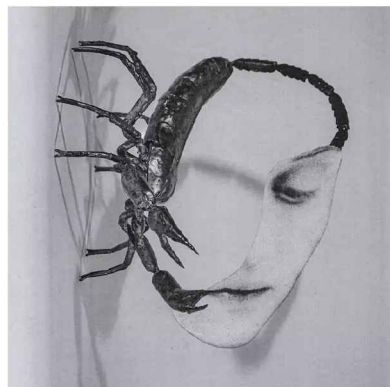
Maybe it's trite to say that a band called Tortoise needs to go slow to win the race, but there's a good reason for it; nine years passed between the last two releases for the post-rock pioneers. Fortunately, fans' patience was rewarded with last year's *Touch*, which had all the band's hallmark sounds — the textured guitar melodies, the occasionally jazzy chord work, the little riffs that reveal increasing complexity on repeat listens.

It's the result of a methodical recording schedule that kicked off in late 2021 with a session in Portland. The quintet, whose members dabble in numerous side and solo projects, would meet up every six months or so there, in Los Angeles, or in Chicago, laying down new ideas until they felt they had a coherent record. To achieve that cohesion, the instrumental band focused on its ability to generate memorable, if unconventional, melodies.

"Sometimes we start with only a melody, without any specific chordal structure," guitarist/bassist Douglas McCombs says. "I personally write a lot of things like that; I start with the melody, and then I start sketching what the chord structure would be underneath that melody. That's where

the interesting things in Tortoise happen, because somebody else's idea of what the structure of the song might be could be drastically different and more interesting."

For McCombs' part, he turned to his usual staples to generate his sonic contributions. He's long been associated with both the Fender Jazzmaster and Bass VI, as well as the Precision Bass. But this time he also messed around with some new toys, including a Temple Devices pedal he describes as "the preamp section of



a Dictaphone tape recorder-type thing."

"It's got that quality I've always admired," he says. "We used to do that a lot in mixing with Tortoise; we had this recorder thing for dictation, and we'd basically run different tracks through it occasionally to whatever that quality is. I don't want to call it lo-fi, because that's a dumb term."

There's plenty of interesting guitar playing on the album, courtesy of McCombs and Jeff Parker. As thousands of guitarists stuck in a pentatonic rut can tell you, after decades of playing it can be hard not to fall back into a comfort zone. In Tortoise, avoiding the usual guitar sounds and riffs is key to making the whole thing work.

"Jeff and I have developed things we're comfortable doing. His [method] is more based on a deep knowledge of harmony and melody, and trying to move away from certain clichés of guitar playing. My thing is more intuitive and about struggling to play something interesting yet also not cliché."

The guitarists' methodical work has paid off, resulting in music that is anything but over-familiar. Maybe their slow pace is the key to that success, after all. **80**



The Collect Pond's Danny Moffat [left] and Ben Bonadies do their thing

The Collect Pond

A New Zealand jangle-pop-inspired Boston post-punk band that shares its name with a putrid body of water in 19th-century Lower Manhattan? What's not to love!

BY JOE BOSSO

Nineties music journalists coined the term "shoegaze" as a pejorative to describe bands such as Ride and My Bloody Valentine whose members were overly fixated on their effects pedals. Nowadays, musicians wear the tag proudly, perhaps none so much as singer-guitarist Danny Moffat, who leads the shoegaze-as-hell Boston-based outfit the Collect Pond.

"To me, 'shoegaze' means you have an aggressive wall of sound and you're being very creative with layers of guitars, all of which is good," Moffat says. "Plus, we tend to mix the vocals a little low, which is a shoegaze hallmark. We're influenced by the whole scene, and we're influencing it right back."

Moffat and company (guitarist-bassist Ben Bonadies, keyboardist Roger Maranan and drummer Chris Anthony) have concocted something of a lo-fi masterpiece with their third album, *Absence of Something*. There's thrashy rave-ups ("Modern Con," "Cemetery Man"), jangle and jagged gems ("Every Little Thing Is the Same," "Net 30 Invoice") and even a couple of whacked tone poems ("You Could Murder Again," "Revolution"), all set to

AXOLOGY

Guitars

Fender Jaguar, Telecaster and Stratocaster

Amps

Marshall JCM900, Egnator Tourmaster 4100

Effects

Boss DS-1 Distortion, BF-3 flanger, MXR Phase 90, Way Huge Swollen Pickle

Moffat's introspective lyrics. "I tend to write about very personal things, like unfortunate roommate situations," he says.

Moffat pens the tunes, but he marvels at the unexpected ways his bandmates can improve the material. "I showed them 'Every Little Thing Is the Same,' and I played it down-up, down-up on the guitar," he says. "I don't think Ben can play upstrokes. He plays down-down-down like Johnny Ramone. But it was the perfect thing for that song; it sounded way better that way."

Born with a rare spinal condition called spina bifida, Moffat has faced his share of challenges. "I'm often in pain, so I can't play heavy guitars or stand for long periods of time," he says. Even playing typical barre chords has proved to be painful; pressure on his arm or wrist shoots right to his spine. Then one day a friend showed him how Jimi Hendrix would stretch his thumb around the neck of the guitar to play bass notes on the sixth string. "That changed everything for me," Moffat says. "I was like, 'It doesn't hurt. I could play like this all day long. And it sounds great!'" **BW**



KEVIN MAZUR



Stoone Freee

One drops everything when offered an out-of-the-blue interview with Keith Richards. One also picks up pearls of wisdom about his new ES-355, “ornery” Chuck Berry and what can only be described as, um, guitar lust

BY JOEL MCIVER

“THIS IS KEITH” is a pretty mundane phrase, but when you answer your phone and you hear those three simple words growled at you by the most distinguished rhythm guitarist of all time, they make a lasting impression. The 30-minute interview that follows is no less impactful. Even at 82 years old, Keith Richards is in devilish form, prone to laughing hysterically at his own jokes, dropping clusters of F-bombs, mocking some of our more naive questions and generally behaving like the snaggle-toothed Captain Jack Sparrow caricature that all Rolling Stones fans recognize and

appreciate. Talking to him, you don’t feel like you’re in the company of some godlike rock star; you feel like you’re backstage at a Stones show, laughing it up over life’s more surreal and stupid moments.

Still, Richards, who was infamously labeled “mad, bad and dangerous to know” more than half a century ago — and with good reason (you already know the coke, heroin and switchblade anecdotes) — is a mellower character these days than the terrifying Glimmer Twin persona of decades past. He’s a well-spoken fellow; you can still hear traces of the suburban London accent that he shares with his fellow Stone Mick Jagger as he talks enthusiastically

and at length about all things guitar. He’s a committed lover of his instrument — almost literally, by the sound of it — and is especially keen to discuss his latest signature model, the Gibson Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector’s Edition.

Built by hand at Gibson’s custom shop in Nashville and available in a limited run of 150 units, 50 of which are signed on the F-hole label and headstock and 100 on the label only, this guitar comes in at a mind-bogglingly expensive \$29,999 and \$19,999 respectively, in other words too expensive for you and me; well, maybe you but definitely me.

The point of the new ES-355 model is



The Stones in 1978. "There's something between us," Richards says of Ronnie Wood [left]. "It was the same with me and Mick Taylor and with Brian Jones"

that Richards' original, which has been 3D-scanned by Gibson to make the new version a millimetrically-identical copy, occupies a rare spot in guitar history; he used it (among other guitars) to record the Stones' seminal *Sticky Fingers* and *Exile On Main St.* albums in 1971 and '72, and has used it on every Stones tour since 1997. If you ever get your hands on one, count yourself lucky.

The same adjective applies to Richards himself. He's still in pretty good shape despite an early-career adherence to the rock 'n' roll lifestyle that few could possibly survive; he's an acknowledged legend in his own lifetime; and he still wants to be better at what he does. I was expecting him to be pretty jaded at the prospect of yet another guitar-related interview, but the opposite turned out to be true. You'll enjoy the chat that follows, even if your relationship with your instrument isn't quite as intimate as his.

Hello, Keith. Are you at home in Connecticut?

I am, yes. We're absolutely snowed in. Nobody can get here except a man with a snowplow. He's working away right now. I quite like it, because it means I can't get out.

This new Gibson ES-355 of yours is pretty tasty, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah! What a surprise, and what a fuckin' honor. I tell you, when they came at me with this one, I was like, "How can I refuse?" It was a shock to me at first,

“When I started playing, the idea of even owning a Gibson was pretty much out of the picture”

because when I started, the idea of even owning a Gibson was pretty much out of the picture.

There are only 150 of them. How many of them are Gibson giving you?

Oh look, I have enough guitars already.

Is it true you have 3,000 guitars in your personal collection?

It's something like that. You can call my guitar man, Pierre de Beauport, if you want the exact number, but it's around there. But it's not like I go around buying them or anything; a lot of these guitars have been given to me. I've never seen them all. I actually only use about... well, the working number is about 15 guitars in the rack, for different sounds and whatever. But the other 2,900, I don't know. They're taken care of, though. I mean, this is a prime collection.

“I very rarely play with stiffs! I’ve been lucky to play with the best. Little Richard, Scotty Moore... Should I go on?”

here, I’ll come in underneath,” and there was a beautiful little ballet going on. That’s amazing, and that’s what makes it worth doing, you know — this interconnection between musicians.

When it works, it seems almost telepathic.
Yeah, it is kinda telepathic, in a way. I suppose. You can put that word on it. [Shouts] Ronnie! [Laughs] And it’s something you don’t wanna fuck with. Once it’s there, you don’t talk about it amongst yourselves. It’s an unspoken reliance upon each other, which is a beautiful thing.

You mentioned Brian Jones, who we rarely discuss as a guitarist. What was his playing like?

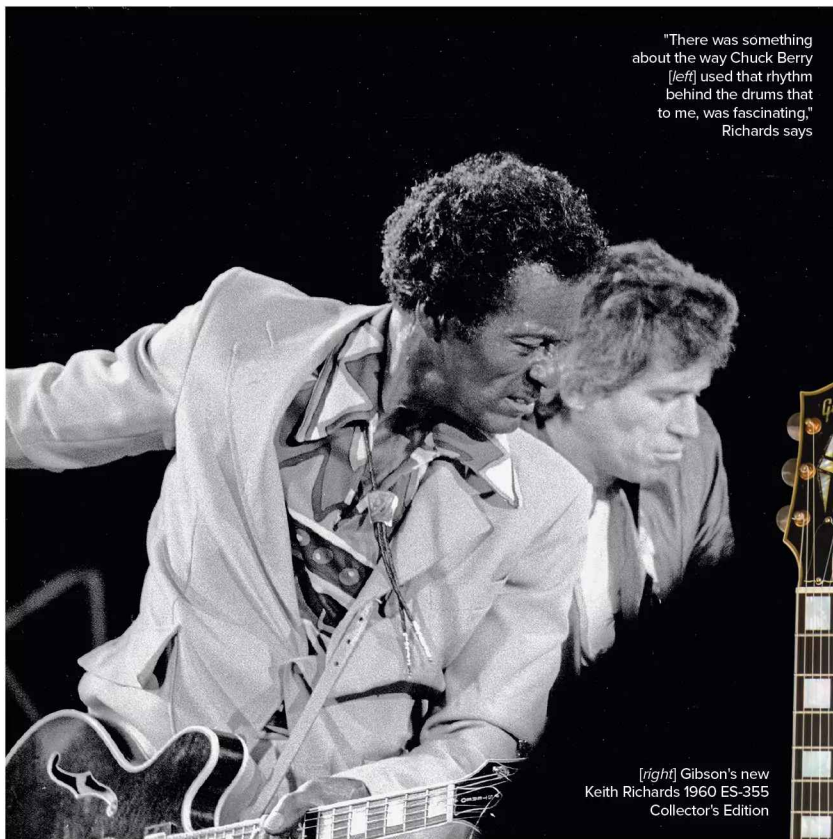
Personally, he was the first steel slide player I heard. His middle name could have been Elmore, because he used to just play Elmore James stuff. He was really, really in front of that game, and that’s what I really admired about him when we first started playing together. This band was started by a piano player, Ian Stewart, and he had Brian with him. Once I heard Brian playing Elmore James, I thought, “I’ve found a guy here who I can mess with,” and then we got into Jimmy Reed stuff and, of course, Muddy Waters, all of that... I wouldn’t call it a university education. [Laughs]

Have you ever played with a guitarist who couldn’t groove?

I very rarely play with stiffs! I’ve been lucky to play with the best. Listen, I’ve played with the guys I grew up listening to. Little Richard, Scotty Moore. Jesus Christ, should I go on? [Laughs]

Did you know John Mayall?

“There was something about the way Chuck Berry [left] used that rhythm behind the drums that to me, was fascinating,” Richards says



[right] Gibson’s new Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector’s Edition

You’re known for putting groove into your playing and hanging back behind the beat.

It’s actually nothing you can put into words, because it’s just the way I feel the rhythm. I always say that I can only do this because I’ve been blessed with the best drummers in the world. I have the luxury of knowing that the guy knows what he’s doing, you know.

Were you the first guitar player to bring that swing to rock music?

Well, if you think about it, it’s the other way around. Rock music came out of swing music. You listen to any of the old Thirties and Forties big bands; they’re playing as much rock ‘n’ roll as Bill Haley or Little Richard. The essence of a lot of it was in those big bands and their rhythm sections.

You played with Chuck Berry in the Eighties. What was he like?

Chuck, as a person, was an ornery old fucker — a lovable, ornery old fucker.

Why do you admire his guitar playing?

The same thing you’re talking about; there was something about the way he used that rhythm behind the drums that, to me, was

fascinating. He said to me, “I was just playing with the right guys, [bassist] Willie Dixon and [pianist] Johnnie Johnson.” And that’s the way I feel about the way I play — lucky to play with the right guys. We’re talking about a mysterious thing, a thing called feel, a thing called groove. Luckily you can’t put your finger on it, you know. But I try! [Laughs]

Is the way you weave lead and rhythm parts playing with Ronnie Wood an unspoken thing?

Oh, absolutely. There’s something between us. It was the same with me and with Mick Taylor, and also with Brian Jones, back at the beginning. You’d meet the right guys and automatically they knew that “You take over





Richards on acoustic in 1984. "You can't become an electric guitar player without knowing where the damn thing comes from," he says

I had great admiration for John. He was such a scholarly guy about it. John was sort of a shadowy figure. A lot of those guys came out of the folk music scene, as it was known at the time, because for some weird reason in those early years, there were hierarchies between traditional jazz and folk music. You know, people got fussy about shit. Anyway, it was amazing to me that these guys were dying to play music that comes from thousands of miles away and that it resonated with them. Therefore the resonance continues; music is about resonance.

Did you like the British folk guitarists?

Yeah, I did listen to them, and they were good pickers, you know. Wizz Jones used to come round to my house and hang out for a few free cigarettes and show you a lick or two. Do you remember Wizz Jones? He was an incredible guy. I really actually admired those guys. Bert Jansch was fuckin' amazing. And unrecognized, really, for how great they were.

When you got into open-G tuning on five strings, it seemed to change your whole view of guitar playing.

It did, actually, and anybody that tries to get into it, it changes their fucking mind, too. [Laughs] Because it is a really strange setup, especially if you're used to six-string guitars. You have to reconfigure everything, and you realize you've restricted yourself to five strings and three open notes [GDGBD], you know. You have to

learn to play the chords. I figured it out. It's still fascinating. I'm still rambling around in there, looking for stuff.

Is the objective of the partial chords you often play to strip the music down?

Yeah, basically, because with five strings in open G, your bottom string is a G, so you're immediately stripping away a whole load of possibilities of being Jimi Hendrix. [Laughs] Also, if you get into it, you find a million other things people haven't explored before, or at least, very few of us have. For me, it started off as an interesting sort of experiment and then I suddenly found that, hey, this is the stuff.

You mentioned Hendrix. Did you ever want to be a virtuoso soloist yourself?

No, I have never really wanted to go down that path. I mean, with solos, I admire the virtuoso and the technique and the nimbleness, but at the end of the day, what are you soloing over? You're the icing on the cake. And I'm the cake!

So what did you think of the Sunset Strip shredders that got big in the Eighties?

[Laughs] I laughed my fuckin' head off! Like, "Oh my God, what have we spawned?"

"If you love the thing and feel like playing it, just dig in and find out yourself"

They were skilled players, though.

Yeah, they were good pickers, and they had a hit record here and there, but that's pop music. Look, as long as you've got something to solo over, then go. But that never appealed to me. What appeals to me is what's going on underneath. What I really do love is two or three guitars playing together, because that's what fascinates me. Just one guy soloing means nothing much to me. Right?

Do you play fewer notes these days?

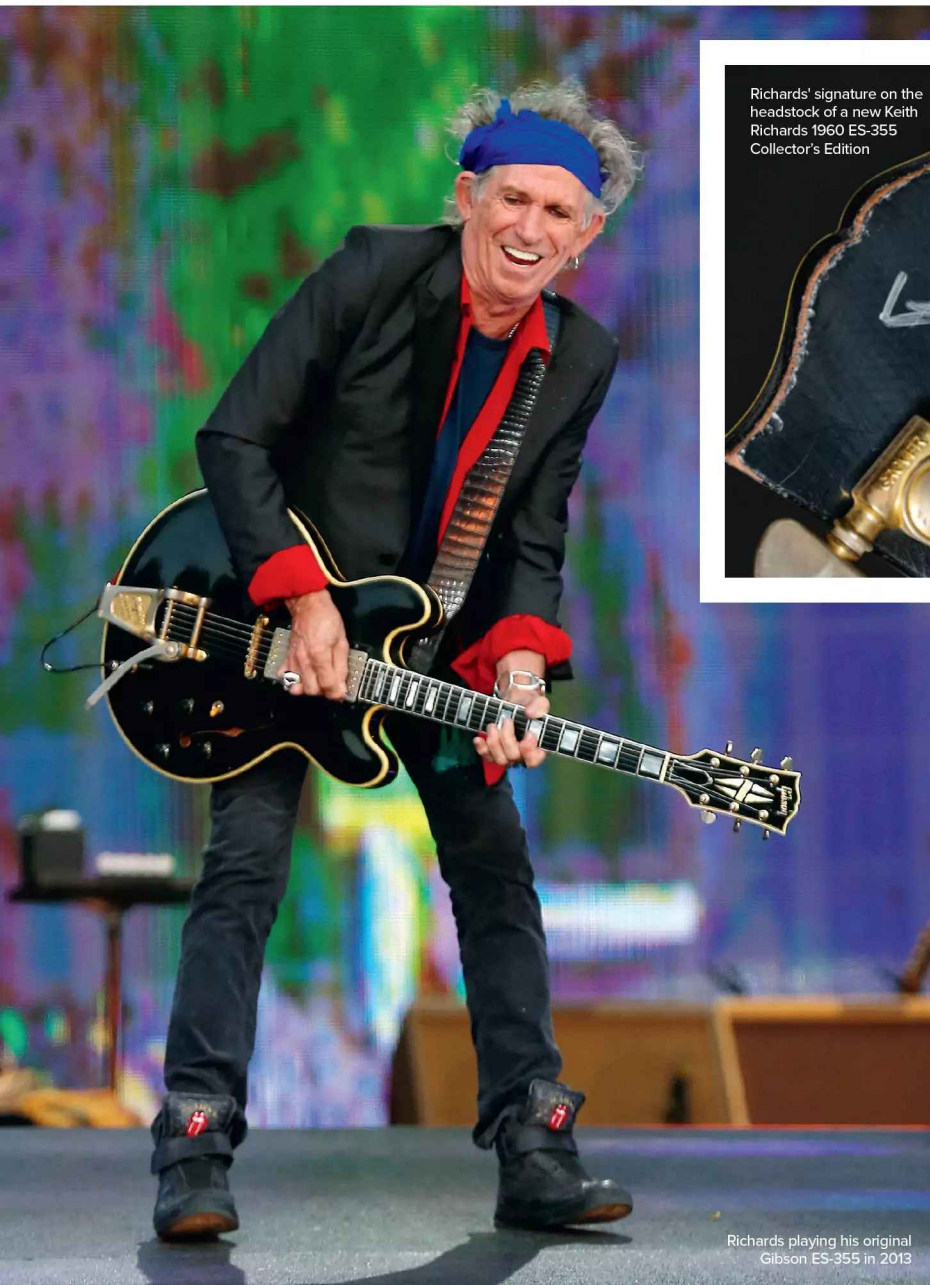
Yes, I do, because I'm not as fast as I used to be. [Laughs] I tell you what, at my age, what I find most interesting about the guitar is you can compensate for certain disabilities and nimbleness and find other ways of getting around the problem, and it still teaches you another thing — you never stop learning with the damn thing. I love it and it's my friend forever. If I had to, I'd fuck it.

Noted. Are your hands holding up OK at age 82?

Well, I do have arthritis and very large knuckles. They don't hurt, but it does get in the way sometimes. I'm going for a wider fingerboard for that reason.

Do you warm your hands up before a show?

I sit on 'em. No, I do have one of those hand pumps, you know. I'm really lax, quite honestly. I just look at my hands and my



Richards' signature on the headstock of a new Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector's Edition

Richards playing his original Gibson ES-355 in 2013

Have you got any advice for our younger readers about guitar playing?

I cannot give you any advice, kids. If you love the thing and feel like playing it, just dig in and find out yourself. It's a great pal, and when there's nothing else around, there's always a guitar. It becomes a friend, a real deep friend, and also a challenge. It looks at you across the room and leers at you. [Laughs] "Come on, you ain't got nothing out of me yet."

It's been 11 years since your last solo album. Will you do another one?

I'm thinking about it. I never plan these things. [Rolling Stones drummer] Steve Jordan and I were having a chat about it the other day, and usually you start by just saying, "Let's go in and cut a track or two." Sometimes that's what happens, and other times you say, "Hey, here's another one, and here's another one." So I'm not counting it out.

Are you still inspired to write songs?

Oh, God, long may they come. They come out of nowhere. They come out of babies' mouths, they come out of a car crash; you never know. Everything's a song.

They say the best songs come when you're feeling anger and frustration. Is that true in your experience?

Anger and frustration help for a while, but you'll never make a living at it.

What makes you happy these days?

Well, breathing. [Laughs] No, this winter my grandkids have been around. They're all ones and twos and threes; it's fascinating to watch. I'm starting to get the hang of it, you know. Over this winter, they've been my inspiration.

What are your goals at this point?

To make it to the next winter! 🍻

hands look at me, and we say, "Well, let's see what we can do today." And that's the way I play guitar. I look at it and I say, "We've got nothing else to do. Come here. I love you!" [Laughs]

What's your favorite song ever?

What, just one? Oh man, you're sticking me against the wall. You're killing me here.

It's what we do.

Yeah! I gotta go with Robert Johnson's "Come On in My Kitchen." It's all there — originality, everything. It's fantastic.

And if you could only play one guitar for the rest of your life, which would it be?

Whoa... you're a firing squad, ain't ya? I

have a little black Gibson looking at me right now, a 1936 acoustic, broken, battered. I'd keep that one with me.

You've often said acoustic playing is at the heart of what you do.

Well, you can't become an electric guitar player without knowing where the damn thing comes from. If you don't get the basics, where do you think you're going to end up? [Laughs]

Are you still learning as a guitar player?

Who isn't? That's the beauty of the thing. My teacher never stops teaching. I've been at it for years now and he still knows more than me.

SIMONE JOYNER/GETTY IMAGES, GIBSON

Keith Richards: A Life in Guitars

Micawber, Malcolm, Sonny — in the world of Keith Richards, even his guitars are characters. But there's more to his collection than these famous Teles. Thousands more...

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

When considering “Keith Richards the guitar player,” what’s the first guitar you think of? For many of us, it might just be a Fender Telecaster, perhaps “Micawber,” Richards’ Number 1, the 1953 Blackguard with five strings and a Frankenstein spec, a battered Butterscotch Blonde forever slung at a 45-degree angle from Richards’ hip. Or perhaps it’s “Malcolm,” a ’54 model in natural finish that has similarly been augmented, five-strings, left in open tunings. Then there’s the black 1975 Fender Telecaster Custom, which made its debut — as did Keith’s latest foil, the Faces’ Ronnie Wood — on the Stones’ Tour of the Americas ’75, or Sonny, his ’67 Sunburst Tele. But let’s dial it back to the beginning because these Teles tell only a small part of the Keith Richards story.

EARLY DAYS: 1960-’64

The population of Richards’ guitar collection is estimated to range between 1,000 and 3,000, but — just like the rest of us — he had to start somewhere. His mother got him a Rosetti acoustic when he

was around 13. 10 pounds was a good amount of money in 1959, but it proved a shrewd investment. Richards was confronted with traditional Spanish number “Malagueña” early on; taught by his grandfather, it was the first song Richards learned. Thus the acoustic would become key, not only to Richards’ playing style but his entire guitar philosophy. He often speaks of the acoustic’s purity. Learn to work it, and only then can you appreciate what it takes to use the electric.

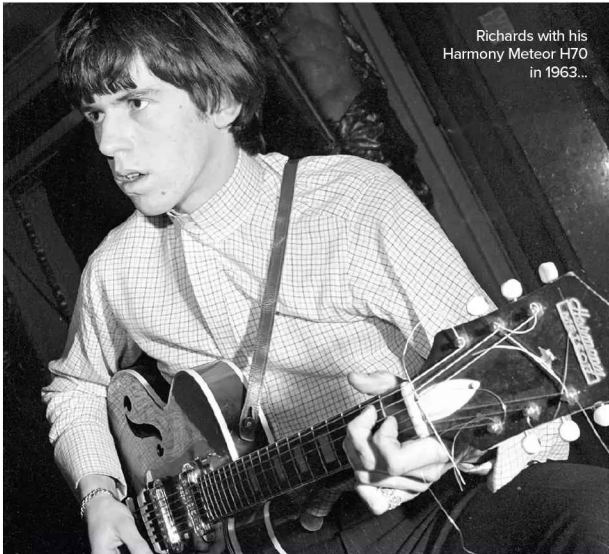
As Richards says, “The electric guitar? All they did was put a phone in it. But it was the right phone at the right time.” For a band with an electric pulse, it is remarkable that so many occasions have called for the acoustic guitar.

When the Rolling Stones parked

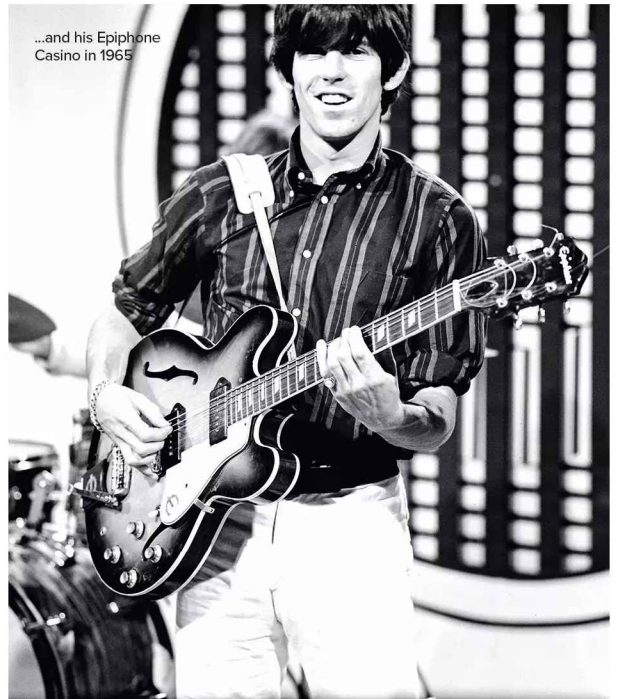
“Most people used open tuning basically just for slide. But I wanted to use it for rhythm guitar”

themselves in London’s Regent Street Studios in January 1964 to record their debut album, Richards’ electric of choice was a Harmony Meteor H70 he had bought the previous year. The Meteor had a thin, hollow, arch-top body of spruce and maple and a short-scale length of 24 inches. A pair of gold-foil DeArmond pickups gave the Meteor a raw tone that would become part of the soundtrack to the Sixties. The Kinks’ Dave Davies is playing one on “You Really Got Me.”

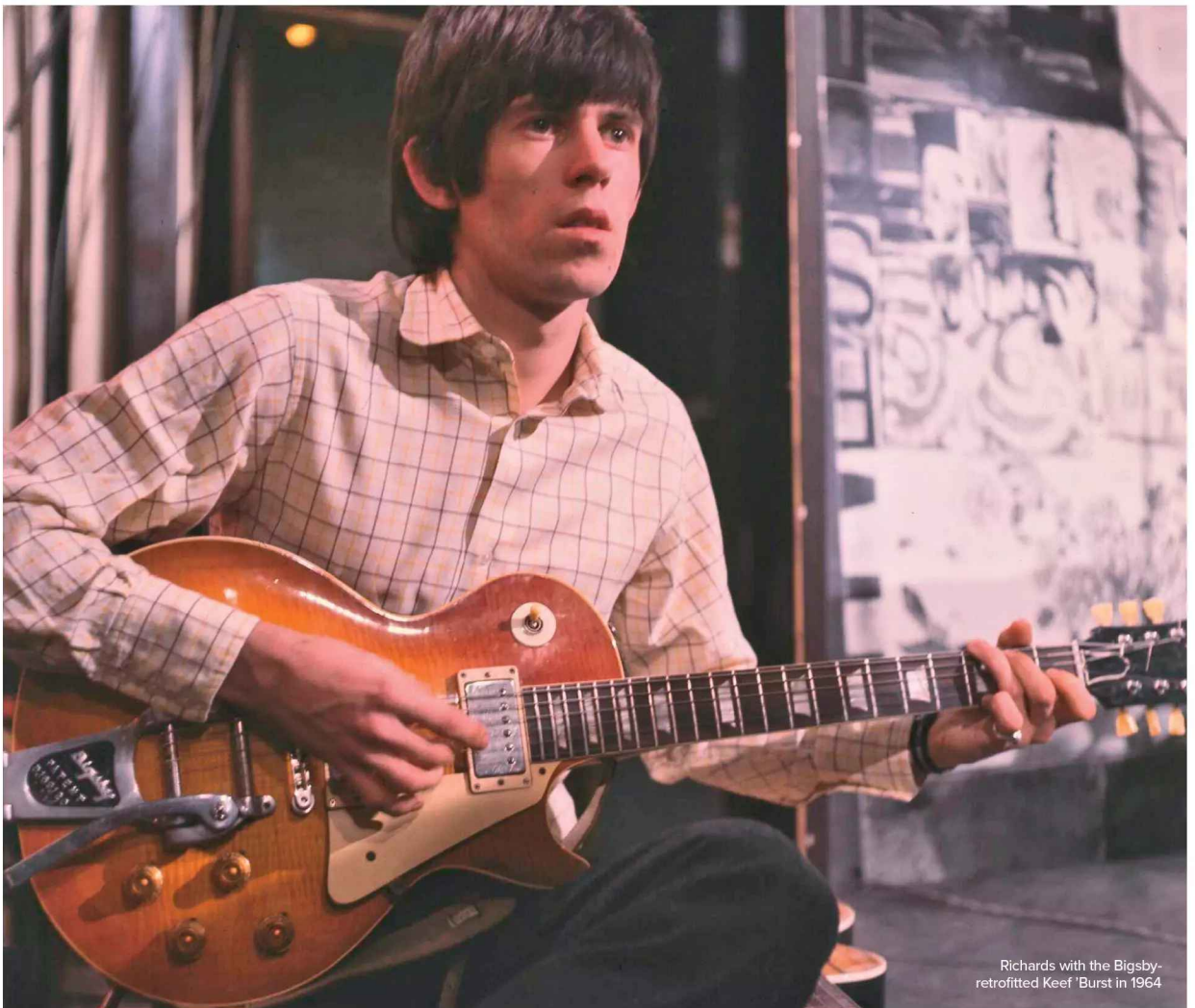
The Stones’ self-titled debut showcased the Meteor, but it was his 1963 Harmony H1270 12-string acoustic on “Tell Me (You’re Coming Back)” that suggested the Stones weren’t just another beat combo. A 12-string jumbo, the H1270 was an early studio star for the Stones. Richards used it on “Not Fade Away,” “Good Times, Bad Times” and “Play with Fire.” On “Tell Me (You’re Coming Back),” Richards let the 12-string and vocals bleed into one mic. Using as little separation as possible would become a leitmotif of the Stones’ future recording sessions. As would the 12-string; its woozy, chorusing quality would jive just as well on the Stones’ more psychedelic



Richards with his
Harmony Meteor H70
in 1963...



...and his Epiphone
Casino in 1965



Richards with the Bigsby-
retrofitted Keef 'Burst in 1964

JEFF HOCHBERG/GETTY IMAGES - STANLEY BIELECKI/ASP/GETTY IMAGES TV TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES



The Ampeg Dan Armstrong in 1968

jams as it did on the bone-dry directness of “Not Fade Away.”

In 2004, Richards’ H1270 was sold at auction for \$33,460, but if you scour the internet you could pick up a vintage Sixties model with an aftermarket L.R. Baggs pickup for around \$600. Richards’ Meteor was joined by a Kalamazoo-era 1962 Epiphone Casino as the Stones’ career took off. The doublecut archtop had a fully hollow build of laminate maple and birch and featured a pair of P90s and a tune-o-matic bridge. If the first two albums were handled by hollow-bodies, Richards would turn to a heavyweight when it came to recording *Out of Our Heads*.

THE KEEF 'BURST, “SATISFACTION” AND THE ROAD TO '69

The 1959 Les Paul Standard is the Holy Grail for Gibson aficionados — and it’s priced accordingly in six-figures on the vintage market. The Keef Burst, which Richards took receipt of some time in '64, was retro-fitted with a Bigsby vibrato. He sold it to Mick Taylor in 1967, only for it to return to the band when Taylor replaced Brian Jones in 1969. Its final destination is shrouded in mystery, with a collector rumored to have paid more than a million dollars for it, but we do know that the late 'Burst maven Bernie Marsden once owned it, telling *Guitarist* magazine, “You know the famous one I let go because it wasn’t as good as the Beast? That was the Keith Richards one! It’s not that it was bad. I already had one — the Beast — and I got offered double the money I’d paid for the Keith 'Burst in 1974. I

didn’t know it would become a million-dollar guitar.”

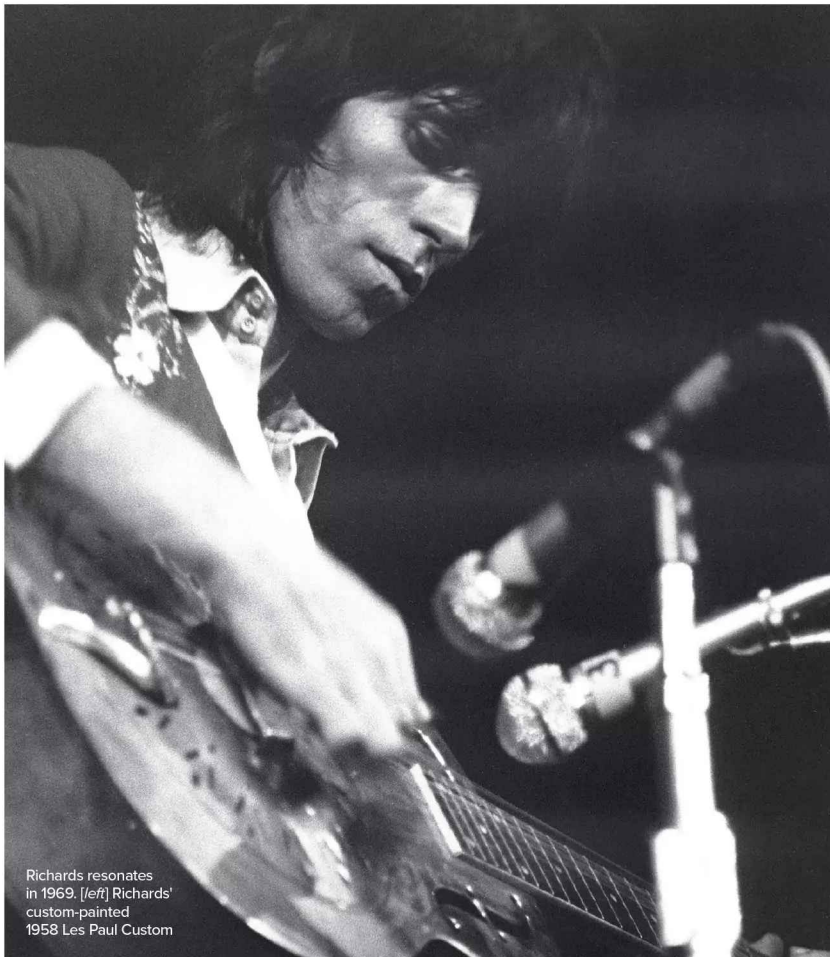
The Keef 'Burst ushered in a changing of the guard for Richards’ recording guitars. It first made an appearance on the Stones’ '64 tour, popping up on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Richards leaned on it heavily for the *Out of Our Heads* sessions, which assumed huge cultural significance as soon as Richards pressed one of Gibson’s new-fangled Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone pedals into action for the “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” riff. He had always maintained it was a horn part, and kismet played its part with the arrival of the fuzz pedal.

“The way Otis Redding ended up doing it is probably closer to my original conception for the song,” he told *Guitar World*. “It’s an obvious horn riff. And when this new Fuzz Tone pedal arrived in the studio from the local dealership or something, I said, “This is good. It’s got a bit of sustain, so I can use it to sketch out the horn line.”

If the band had hitherto mined American R&B, blues and early rock 'n' roll for inspiration, 1966 saw the release of *Aftermath*, the Stones’ first album of all-original material. There was now a sense of danger about the band. Richards was enjoying an open relationship with his guitars, pursuing new sounds. An electric 12-string appeared on “Mother’s Little Helper,” some “gashed-up job” that he played slide on. Richards also was pictured on the cover of the April 1966 issue of *Beat Instrumental* with a Guild M-65 Freshman, a lightweight hollowbody with a bound maple top and mahogany back and sides.

While a spruce-topped Gibson Heritage had been a regular companion on TV spots, come the mid-Sixties, Gibson’s most brightly feathered dreadnought, the Hummingbird, flew in through his window and left its mark on wax, most notably on

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS; NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS



Richards resonates in 1969. [left] Richards' custom-painted 1958 Les Paul Custom

“On ‘Street Fighting Man,’ there’s one six-string and one five-string acoustic, both in open tunings”

Move,” and a Martin D12-20 12-string with a DeArmond pickup in the soundhole. He’d use a korina Gibson Flying V at the free Hyde Park show, but that would soon disappear.

In 1969, there was a sense that oblivion was on their trail, but somehow they held it together. The guitars? Not so much. When tracking “Gimme Shelter” during the *Let It Bleed* sessions, Richards used a borrowed Maton Supreme Electric 777, an ES-150-style electric, and it would turn out to be the last act in its story.

“At the very last note of the take, the whole neck fell off,” Richards told *Guitar World*. “You can hear it on the original track. That guitar had just that one little quality for that specific thing. In a way, it was quite poetic that it died at the end of the track.”

FENDER “MICAWBER” TELE: KEEF’S NUMBER ONE

Everyone would like to, and many have tried, but nobody plays the Telecaster quite like Keith Richards. He made the black-guard Tele the coolest guitar on the planet. But, if the Telecaster is the ultimate rock ‘n’ roll guitar, perhaps it was inevitable it would find its way into Richards’ hands.

“Jumpin’ Jack Flash” and “Street Fighting Man.”

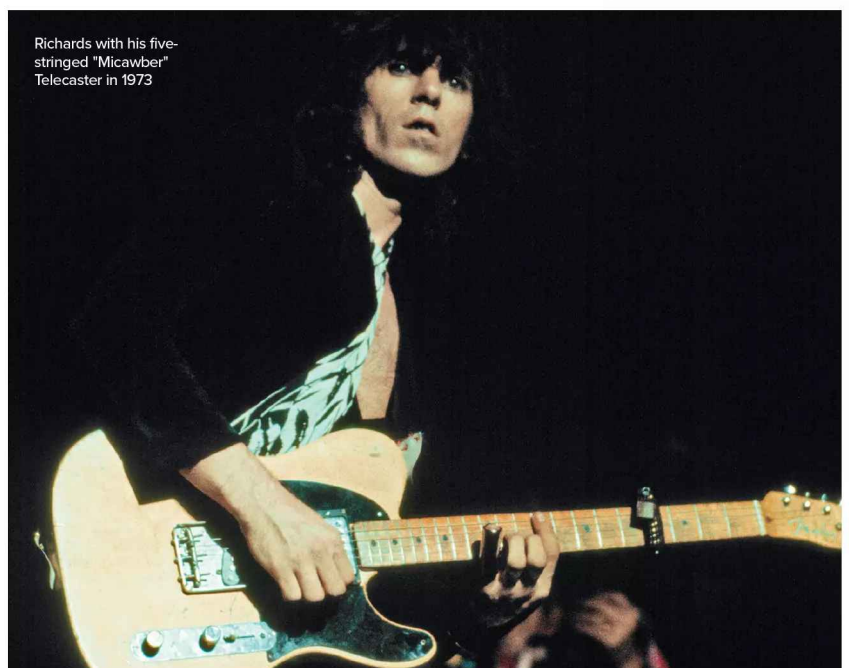
“On ‘Street Fighting Man,’ there’s one six-string and one five-string acoustic,” Richards told *Guitar World*. “They’re both in open tunings, but then there’s a lot of capo work.” The Stones at their most propulsive, “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” was recorded with a Hummingbird sharing the mix with another acoustic in Nashville tuning. Richards used his Phillips or Norelco cassette recorders to compress them, changing their character; it was as though the acoustics were resisting their physical limitations.

“I played a Gibson Hummingbird tuned to either open E or open D with a capo,” Richards said. “I added another guitar over the top, but tuned to Nashville tuning.”

On occasion, he’d play a Gibson Firebird and had started playing a 1958 Les Paul Custom with a custom graphic. This, after all, was the Sixties, and they were gathering pace. By the time the band were to hit the U.S. for the 1969 tour, which resulted in controversy, craziness, bloodshed at Altamont and one of the finest live recordings in rock history, Richards had a lot to choose from.

Live, the see-through but super-heavy Ampeg Dan Armstrong Plexi entered

rotation, as did a newly acquired 1969 Gibson ES-355TD-SV stereo. Also live, Richards used a 1930s National Style O resonator on “Prodigal Son” and “You Gotta



Richards with his five-stringed “Micawber” Telecaster in 1973

TOM COPI/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

"Around the same time I was getting into Telecasters, I was experimenting with open tunings," Richards told *Guitar World* in 2002. "I don't know why. Maybe it was because around that time, 1967, we started having time off that we didn't know what to do with. So I started to experiment with tunings.

"Most people used open tuning basically just for slide. Nobody used it for anything else. But I wanted to use it for rhythm guitar... Of all the guitars, the Telecaster really lent itself well to a dry, rhythm, five-string drone thing. In a way, that tuning kept me developing as a guitarist."

Micawber is his most-famous Telecaster. A 1950s Tele in Butterscotch Blonde, it was a 27th birthday present from Eric Clapton and soon found itself decamped to Nellcôte as the Stones took shelter from the U.K. taxman under the hot sun in the South of France. *Exile on Main St.* was brewing, and Micawber was there from the ground up. That's when the toolbox came out. The low E string was removed as Richards continued his exploration into open-G tunings. Further modifications changed the menu.

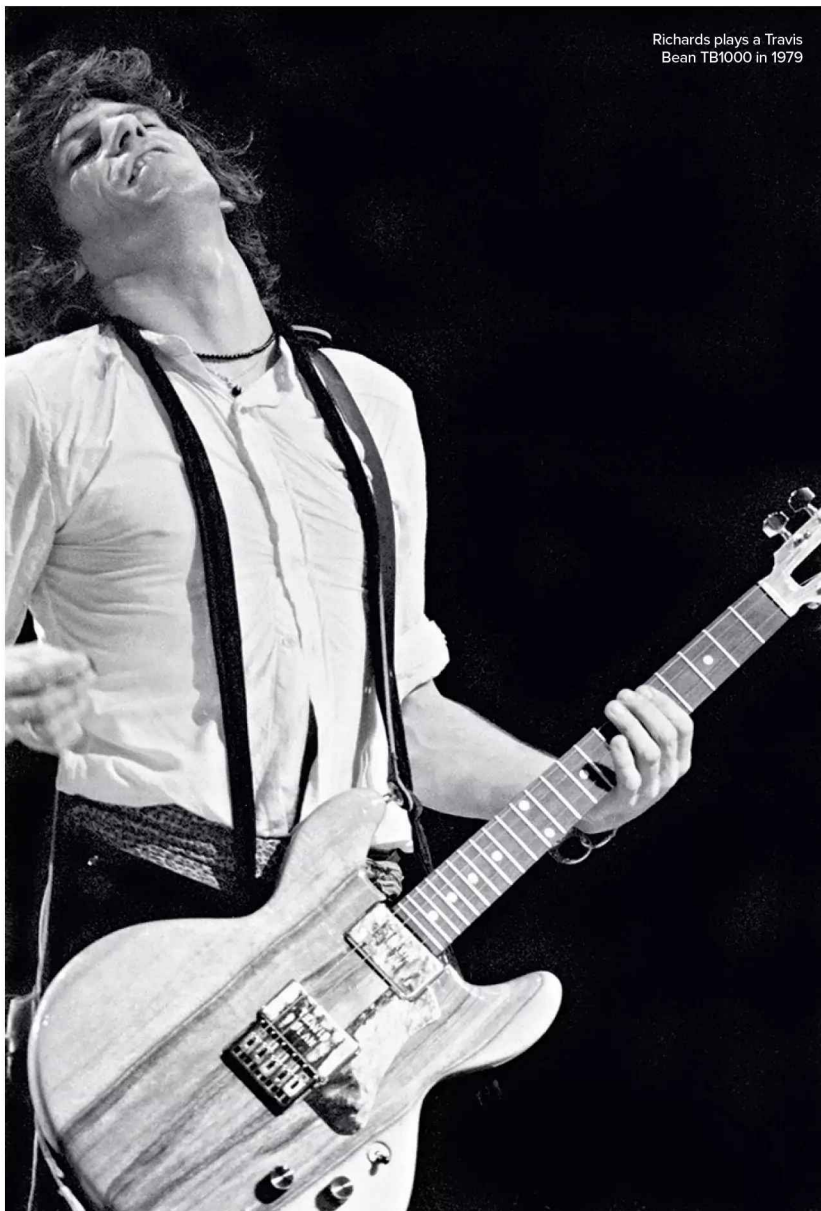
A Gibson PAF humbucker was installed at the neck, a pedal-steel pickup at the bridge. Fundamentally a '54 Tele with a '52 Esquire neck, Micawber (which takes its name from Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*) is a triumph of Richards' "whatever works" ethos, but it arguably kick-started the aftermarket for Fender modifications.

In the Eighties, Richards' tech, Alan Morgan, sourced a brass bridge plate and saddles to make it more roadworthy. With no saddle for the sixth string, Richards' number one Telecaster is a specialist instrument tuned GDGBD for songs such as "Brown Sugar," "Honky Tonk Women" and "Can't You Hear Me Knocking."

THE 1970S AND THE ERA OF MODIFICATION

Turning 27, a cursed age for any musician of the era, deserved some celebration. It was Eric Clapton who did the honors, gifting Richards the 1953 Fender Tele that would be retooled and renamed as Micawber. Others soon followed. Richards sought out new ways of articulating rock 'n' roll in the electric guitar's most primitive dialects. Take the Gibson Les Paul Junior, aka "Dice." Finished in TV Yellow, this primordial doublecut would become a regular onstage by the decade's end, using it notably on "Midnight Rambler," a live highlight that was often previously performed with the Dan Armstrong.

He'd later play a Junior with a Tele when



Richards plays a Travis Bean TB1000 in 1979

ED PERLSTEIN/REDFERNS

recording "Start Me Up" in 1981. Travis Bean guitars, with their aluminium necks, caught Richards' attention. If you don't suffer from motion sickness, you can check out the promo video for "She's So Cold" to see Richards with a black TB500 (one of 351 produced).

In 1974, he started using a singlecut Zemaitis with skull-and-bone graphics. As with the Telecasters, Richards nixed the low E. The Zemaitis, aka "Macabre," housed a single PAF humbucker at the bridge and, again, offered Richards the simple pleasures of an electric guitar with nothing in the way.

Richards has never been a big Strat player, but he does own a Mary Kaye Strat, and through the Eighties and Nineties played the next best thing, a Music Man Silhouette. Some of Richards' guitars rarely see the light of day, such as his Gibson

ES-350, a big-boned jazz-box with a natural finish and with the all-important Chuck Berry connection. "I'd be too afraid to take it onstage," he said during an Ask Keith Q&A from 2003. "I'd be afraid of breaking it by making a silly move, and it's a big guitar. I love it for the studio and in the dressing room. It has such a beautiful sound."

The ES-350 makes rare public appearances, and was used in 1990 to record "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atom Bomb on Me" with Watts, Bobby Keys, Bernard Fowler, Chuck Leavell and the Uptown Horns, a track that turned up on the Charles Mingus tribute, *Weird Nightmare*.

Looking at Micawber, Malcolm and Sonny, and seeing the road miles on them, it's understandable that some of that good stuff is saved for the studio. A Rolling Stones show is not the place for tender mercies. 🎸

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CREAM RISES

60 years ago history was made and the rulebook rewritten when Clapton, Bruce and Baker united to form one of the most influential supergroups in British music

Words Marc Roberty



By the mid-60s, as jazz bands slowly faded from the front pages of the music press, they were gradually replaced with rhythm and blues bands. One such band featured Graham Bond, a complicated figure and musical innovator who would go on to inadvertently pave the way for many bands over the next few decades. We go back to the beginning – including the bust-ups and band-member swaps – to detail the rise of one of Britain's most revered supergroups.

THE NAME'S BOND

Bond started his career in jazz, playing with Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated. He left the outfit in 1962 and formed the Graham Bond Quartet with Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce, both from Alexis's band, along with guitarist John McLaughlin. By the mid-60s Bond decided to move toward the more-successful blues scene, keeping members of the quartet together and adding Dick Heckstall-Smith to the line-up. Dick replaced Bond on sax as Bond switched over to Hammond organ and vocals. As the Graham Bond Organisation, they very quickly established themselves, and released their first album in February 1965.

Ginger went to visit Jack to find out if he would be interested in putting the past behind them and joining the band

By this time, drugs had become an issue for the band, and Bond, in particular, found it difficult to deal with the associated problems. On top of that there were a lot of arguments between Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, sometimes getting violent. A stressed Bond decided to hand over leadership to Ginger Baker, who saw this as a perfect opportunity to fire Jack Bruce. The band limped on as a three-piece, but the magic had gone. Although Ginger stayed in the band for a time, he decided to quit when Bond's increased drug habits made him too unreliable.

Ginger was now at a loose end and was keen to form a band, and



1. Hailing from Manfred Mann, The Graham Bond Organisation and The Bluesbreakers respectively, Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton pose for an early press shot

2. An appearance on TV's *Ready Steady Go!* on 1 November '66 to promote the band's first single release, *Wrapping Paper*

set about finding like-minded musicians. He was already familiar with Eric Clapton and his guitar playing when they frequently met on the London club scene, and so he wanted to approach him first. It's worth knowing that at that time graffiti would often be spotted in London proclaiming that 'Clapton is God', such was the strength of his loyal following.

Part of the reason for Eric's popularity was the tone he achieved with his beloved 1959 sunburst Gibson Les Paul played through a Marshall JTM45 amp. He had bought the guitar from the Lew Davis shop in London's Charing Cross Road in 1965 with money he earned playing with John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers from 1965 to 1966. It was the album cover of Freddie King's *Let's Hide Away And Dance Away* that influenced him to buy the guitar, even though Freddie was, in fact, holding a Goldtop.

A NEW TRIO

Ginger went to see The Bluesbreakers at a gig at the Town Hall in Oxford on 13 May 1966 and asked if it would be okay to have a jam. Ginger and Eric had an immediate musical chemistry and got on well, too. After the show, Ginger gave Eric a lift home and asked him if he would be interested in joining the new band he was forming. By this point, Eric

was tiring of copying his blues heroes and he, too, was looking for new opportunities. It didn't take long to make a decision, but his only condition was that Jack Bruce would have to be in the band. Eric had no knowledge of the past tensions between Jack and Ginger.

Ginger was taken aback but highly respected Jack's musicianship – he could see the potential for the three members coming together as a band. After some persuading from his wife, Ginger went to visit Jack to find out if he would be interested in putting the past behind them and joining the band.

At the time, Jack was under contract with the group Manfred Mann but was not happy at the pop direction they were pursuing. Jack was also familiar with Eric and his guitar playing as he was also in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers for a short period in during late 1965. Both he and Eric enjoyed the experience of playing together, and later even recorded a few tracks for a blues compilation album, *What's Shakin'*, for the Elektra label in March 1966. Jack was in and Ginger immediately suggested Robert Stigwood as their manager, having known him from his time with Graham Bond.

The three musicians wanted to be collaborative, rather than act as three soloists competing with each other. Originally, Eric



PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Clapton had visions of being the lead singer but conceded that Jack had a far more powerful voice with a wealth of experience behind him. Eric considered the band to be 'the top of the milk' in terms of musicianship, and suggested it made sense to call themselves 'The Cream'.

Initial rehearsals took place at Ginger's ground floor maisonette in Neasden, North London, before moving to St Anne's Brondesbury Church Hall in West Kilburn. As soon they started to jam, all three felt the magic. They instinctively knew they were on to something.

Melody Maker's Chris Welch was at the hall and during a break joined the band at a cafe opposite. Robert Stigwood attended the rehearsals and asked Chris if he thought they were any good. Luckily, he said yes. Had he said he wasn't that moved, it could have been the end of the band before they even started. However, Stigwood did have a contribution and that was the band should simply call themselves 'Cream'.

A few days in, Eric's beloved 'Beano' Les Paul was stolen from the rehearsal hall. His distinctive

As soon they started to jam, all three felt the magic. They instinctively knew they were on to something

leather guitar strap with the names of his blues heroes carved on was attached to the guitar; that was also gone. With a view of getting the public's help, Eric gave interviews in the music press, sharing details of the guitar as well as mentioning the carved names: Buddy Guy, Big Maceo and Otis Rush. With that information, it would be easy to detect the stolen items should anyone try to sell them.

As for the guitar, Eric described it, precisely to *Record Mirror* as "a Les Paul Standard, five or six years old, small and solid. It has one cutaway and is a red-gold colour with Grover machineheads. The back is very scratched and there are several cigarette burns on the front".

It's worth noting that toward the end of 1965, Eric had removed the metal pickup covers to reveal the bobbins: double-white at the neck, double-black at the

bridge. In early 1966, he told *Beat Instrumental*: "You've probably heard about me taking the covers off my pickups: this is something I would definitely recommend for any guitarist. The improvement, sound-wise, is unbelievable."

To this day, despite rumoured sightings on the East Coast of America, nothing ever materialised. Later, Eric confirmed this Les Paul was the best he'd ever had. Although he also had a Gibson ES-335 from his time with The Yardbirds, he loved the sound achieved with the Les Paul. So for the first few months of Cream he borrowed a Les Paul, possibly from Keith Richards, before buying another 'Burst from Andy Summers.

To twist the knife further, his original Les Paul case was later stolen from a Cream show at Klooks Kleek. Eric surmised that the person responsible for taking his guitar had now come back for the original case. Perhaps the most surprising piece of information was that Eric seriously considered getting a Rickenbacker shortly after the theft, as Les Paul guitars were hard to find at the time. It would

3. Ginger Baker initiated the idea of forming Cream, first enlisting Eric Clapton and then, after a little persuasion, his former Graham Bond bandmate, Jack Bruce

4. After a successful first rehearsal at Ginger Baker's maisonette, Clapton is credited with inadvertently giving the band its name by declaring: "We're the top of the milk!"



Clapton told 'Beat Instrumental': "Taking the covers off [your] pickups is something I recommend. The improvement is unbelievable"

seem a strange decision as the sound would have been very different from a Les Paul.

WAXING HISTORY

Stigwood set about organising press releases, tour dates and recording studio time for a single and album. The biggest issue was that Ginger and Eric were not songwriters. But Jack was a good composer and joined forces with lyricist and beat-poet Pete Brown for a selection of collaborative songs to feature on Cream's first album. It was a mix of pop numbers with a selection of well-chosen blues covers.

They spent three days in August 1966 recording at Rayrik Sound Studios in Chalk Farm with a view to getting an all-important single in the record shops and hopefully the charts. The studio was relatively primitive and better suited to demo recordings, but during their time there they recorded four songs: *Coffee Song*, *Beauty Queen*, *You Make Me Feel* and *Wrapping Paper*.

After much deliberation they decided to release *Wrapping Paper*, a somewhat bland and presumably unrepresentative song with no commercial appeal. It was more a whimsical music-hall folly than a blues or pop number, at least as far as the public were concerned. *Coffee Song* had also been considered for release but lost out.

It was disappointing and Stigwood's label, Reaction, pulled 10,000 copies from shops as



There were several highlights, including Ginger's epic drum solo in 'Toad', which drove the crowd crazy and demanding more

5. Live footage of the band is very rare, with most TV appearances being mimed, as in the photo above. However, the farewell concert was filmed and remains the only real testament to what Cream sounded like on the concert stage

6. The UK version of *Fresh Cream* featured distinctive typography that differed from the US and Europe covers

they could not give the single away. Eric tried to explain to *Record Mirror* at the time: "I'm tired of being called a specialist musician. People thought Cream was going to be a blues band, but it's not – it's a pop group, really."

Eric also told *Melody Maker's* Chris Welch: "Most people have formed the impression of us as three solo musicians clashing with each other. We want to cancel that idea and be a group that plays together."

WHIPPED CREAM

Cream's tour started with a warm-up show on 29 July 1966 at the famous Twisted Wheel in Manchester, with another set in the early hours of 30 July. The next day, they played the 6th National Jazz and Blues Festival at the Royal Windsor Racecourse in Berkshire – their official debut. They played a 40-minute set in the pouring rain, but despite the weather, some 10,000 fans cheered the band on through the electrifying and powerful set. There were several highlights, including Ginger's epic drum solo in *Toad*, which drove the crowd crazy and demanding more.

The tour carried on throughout the year around the UK, and the band often played two shows a

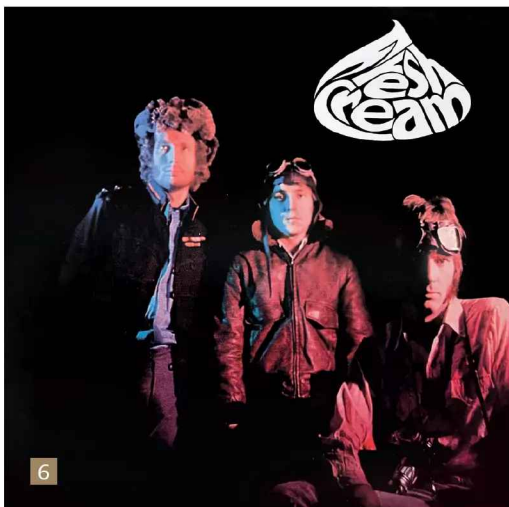
night. Cream were not known to invite guests on stage with them, but there was one exception during a show on 1 October 1966 at the Regent Street Polytechnic in London. Jimi Hendrix, the new kid on the block, asked if he could jam on a couple of numbers. Eric and Jimi admired each other, so although Ginger was not so keen, the band allowed the guitarist to come on. They played a powerful version of Howlin' Wolf's *Killing Floor* to the delight of the crowd. As word spread about the jam that evening, the glowing reputation of both Cream and Hendrix were now a done deal.

The recording sessions for *Fresh Cream*, the band's debut album, were fitted in during rare days off on the tour, at Ryemuse Studios in Mayfair. *I Feel Free*, backed with N.S.U., was released as their second single as a taster to the album in December 1966. Completely different in feel to the first single, it screamed 'pop' song and went as high as No 11 in the UK charts, creating plenty of anticipation for the album.

The album cover varied with different typefaces for the UK, Europe and the US. Another change was the addition of the UK single *I Feel Free* to the later US release in 1967, replacing *Spoonful*, meanwhile Europe had the benefit of having *Wrapping Paper* and *The Coffee Song* added as a bonus. Perhaps the most exciting release was reserved for the French market, though, where Polydor released a four-track EP containing a unique take of *Cat's Squirrel* with a totally different guitar solo by Eric. Needless to say this grew to be a major collectors' item over the years. Luckily, it is now readily available on the deluxe editions of the album at a reasonable price compared with the original EP.

In the days before social media, bands would promote their records by doing radio sessions for the BBC as well as appearing on popular youth-orientated television shows such as *Ready Steady Go!*. Cream's many BBC Radio sessions sealed the deal on their popularity, and over the years their debut album has grown in stature and remains an essential album to this day.

PHOTO BY MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



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FULL-FAT TONE

The history of Eric Clapton's guitars during Cream's brief but influential existence – from *Fresh Cream* to *Goodbye* – reveals an intriguing mix of instruments but also offers up a mystery or two

Words Neville Marten





PHOTO BY DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

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1. A rare pic of Clapton playing his sunburst Firebird I at Chastain Park Amphitheatre, Atlanta, in October '68. This guitar also featured in the first set of the band's farewell gig at the Albert Hall a month later

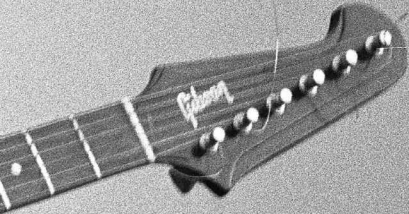


PHOTO BY MARK PRATER

2. The Firebird I also made an appearance when Cream played New York's Madison Square Garden on 2 November 1968

We know the guitars Eric Clapton played in Cream. All of them Gibson: the 'Beano' Les Paul, the 'Fool' SG, the cherry red ES-335 and the sunburst Firebird I. While that list is, of course, correct, dig a little deeper and a few oddities and anomalies poke their heads above the parapet. But as with anything musically historical, evidence is often vague or contradictory, so what follows here is as close as we can get with the sources available.

With Clapton only just having left John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, the 'Beano' Les Paul was predictably his instrument of choice in early Cream rehearsals. It was used at the band's initial get-together at Ginger Baker's flat in Neasden, Northwest London in mid-July 1966, and the 'secret' two-set gig at the Twisted Wheel in Manchester, over the evening and early hours of 29 and 30 July respectively. Sadly, though this guitar, with its recognisable double-cream open-topped neck humbucker and all-black bridge pickup, was stolen soon after.

Eric then played some early Cream shows, including the

Windsor Jazz and Blues Festival on 31 July, on a Bigsby-equipped '59 Les Paul. From what we can gather, The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards loaned his Satisfaction Les Paul to Eric for some gigs and recording, then in 1967 Keith (or some say the band's keyboard player, Ian Stewart) sold it to Mick Taylor. Taylor used it during his tenure with The Bluesbreakers and, somewhat ironically, when he was conscripted into The Stones in 1969. It's almost certain that the guitar also appeared on Cream's debut album, *Fresh Cream*.

It currently resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Met). Taylor has asserted it to be his own Les Paul that was stolen in the legendary heist of Stones guitars at Villa Nellcôte, in Villefranche-sur-Mer on the French Riviera, and is in dispute with The Met. Meanwhile, the museum claims its provenance is well documented and that the guitar was never officially owned by Taylor.

Clapton's Bluesbreakers Les Paul had been purchased for a meagre £80 after Andy Summers, later of The Police and owner of a Les Paul that Eric had



3. 'The Fool' SG had undergone some changes when it was sold at Julien's Auctions in 2023

Eric loved The Fool SG's 'access all areas' neck and full-fat, fruity tones; he played it extensively until mid-1968

coveted, had tipped him off about another's whereabouts. Upon the theft of this instrument, Clapton contacted Summers to see if he could purloin his original Standard, most likely a 1960 model as Eric's first LP was also thought to have been (although some say Eric's was a '59). He has commented on how he liked its slim neck, a characteristic of 1960 models. Summers recalled: "Knowing that I had the other one, Eric starts calling me and asking if I would sell it. I'd moved on to the Fender Telecaster by then, and also there was something wrong with my Les Paul; the back pickup wasn't working. He was offering me £200 for it, more than twice what I'd paid for it."

Apparently, Clapton didn't have the bridge pickup fixed. It seems he used it and Richards' Bigsby Les Paul on the Fresh Cream album sessions. These began in early August 1966. It seems the 'Summersburst' suffered a headstock break and was eventually sold or stolen.

On 16 August 1966 Cream played London's legendary Marquee club, and Eric is pictured playing a cherry red 1960 Les Paul Special double-cutaway with twin P-90s. He tells the audience that it's a new guitar and he's only just getting used to it. Was this a stop-gap (some say it was borrowed) between the 'Beano' Les Paul stolen in rehearsals and getting the Andy Summers guitar?

PLAYING THE FOOL

Clapton's most famous Gibson and the one he was most

4. Clapton's 1964 'Fool' SG Standard was given the psychedelic treatment by Dutch artists Marijke Koger and Simon Posthuma

5. EC plays the Bigsby-equipped Les Paul at the band's first official live appearance at the 1966 Windsor Jazz And Blues Festival

6. Jack and Eric's thunderous live assault was powered by twin Marshall 100-watt stacks – one in use and one as a spare

photographed with in Cream is undoubtedly his 1964 SG Standard. Nicknamed the 'Fool' after the Dutch art syndicate led by Simon Posthuma and Marijke Koger who gave it its psychedelic paint job, the guitar underwent several changes during Clapton's ownership of it. The Maestro Vibrola's 'lyre' chrome coverplate was removed, presumably to display the Fool's artwork underneath. And although EC may have occasionally used the Vibrola for some light chord wobble (White Room, perhaps?), usually he preferred the arm swept back out of the way, especially when playing live. Later, he would remove it completely.

The Fool SG debuted on 25 March 1967 at the RKO Theatre in

Manhattan. Eric loved its 'access all areas' neck and full-fat, fruity tones, and played it extensively until mid-1968, including on the brilliant live Crossroads and Spoonful from Wheels Of Fire.

On Cream's demise, Eric gave the guitar to George Harrison, who in turn presented it to Apple-signing Jackie Lomax. Lomax later passed it on to guitarist/producer Todd Rundgren (who produced Meatloaf's Bat Out Of Hell among many others). The Fool SG sold for a staggering £1.023 million (\$1.95 million) on 16 November 2023.

Another Les Paul that Clapton obtained during this time was a three-pickup, black Gibson Les Paul Custom, which he bought in Manny's Music in New York,

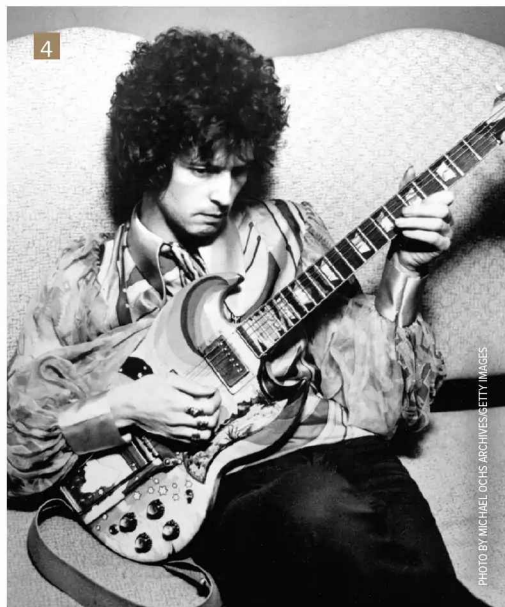


PHOTO BY MICHAEL DUCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

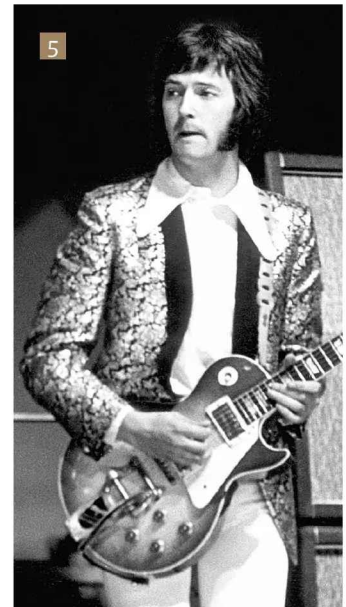


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIEN'S AUCTIONS



6

STACK 'EM HIGH A CLOSE-UP ON CLAPTON'S AMPS IN CREAM

It's well known that during his brief tenure as a Bluesbreaker, Eric Clapton got switched on to Marshall amplifiers. Initially using a 100-watt 1959 JMP45 half-stack, he persuaded Jim Marshall to create a 'combination amp and speakers' (combo) that could fit in the boot of his car. This Jim did, and its use on the John Mayall album *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* confirmed EC as a dedicated fan of the brand, then based at 76 Uxbridge Road, Hanwell, West London. It also lent this combo the nickname 'Bluesbreaker', which Marshall itself adopted on later reissues of the 1962 2x12 model.

At the time of Cream's formation in July 1966, Eric returned to the JTM45 100-watt head and single tall-front cab, and used it on *Fresh Cream* alongside Keith Richards' Bigsby Les Paul and his own ex-Andy Summers 'Burst (with the non-functional bridge pickup).

As Cream transformed into a world-conquering live behemoth, the band found itself performing to ever-larger crowds at ever-larger venues, so both Clapton and bassist Jack Bruce upgraded to full-blown 4x12 stacks. Before long even this wasn't enough and each player doubled it to twin 100-watt heads driving four 4x12 cabinets (one main rig, one spare). Thus Eric's live Cream setup

comprised two 1959 100-watt Super 100 (JTM45/100) heads atop an array of two angled 1960 A speaker cabs, riding two 1960 B 'tall-bottom, straight-front' enclosures. The earliest of these featured pinstripe grille cloth, while later versions adopted the more familiar basketweave. Initially, Cream's cabs came loaded with Celestion G12M T1221 20-watt 'Greenback' 75Hz speakers, but these were soon after upgraded to the more robust 25-watt 'H' versions due to the sheer volume required and in order to minimise failures.

Despite Cream's hectic touring schedule between late July 1966 and the band's final shows in London during November 1968, their Marshalls remained incredibly reliable. Both Clapton and Bruce's use of one main stack and the second as a spare meant that the amps were kept in prime condition. Eric's live technician at the time was Bruce McCaskill who, along with tour manager Bob Adcock, would have performed basic servicing such as valve changes or replacing the occasional component. Overall, though, despite the relentless thrashing to which Cream's amplifiers were subjected, they proved largely bulletproof, leading to a reputation that made Marshall the go-to brand for rock bands thereafter.

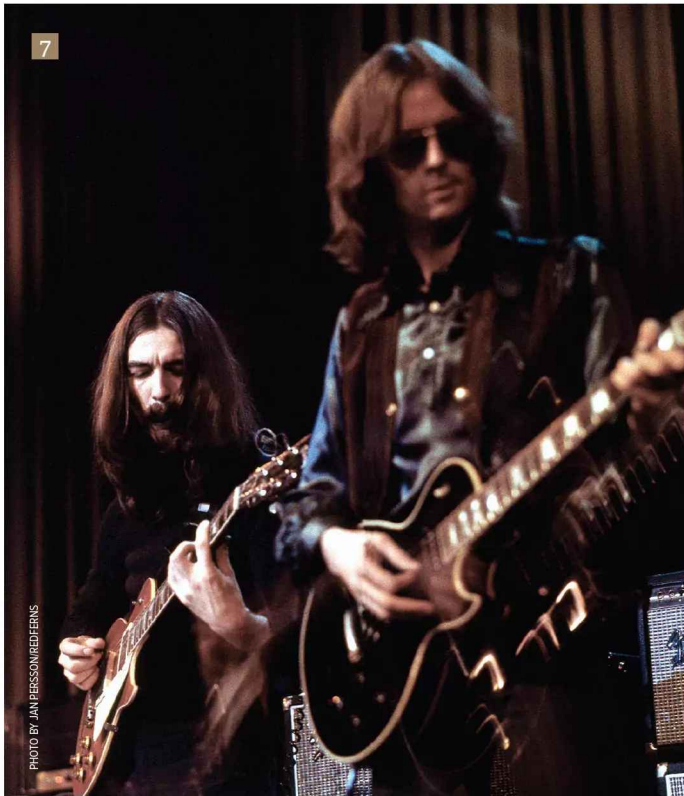


PHOTO BY JAN PERSON/REDFERNS

March 1967. Eric would often play this guitar during his Blind Faith period, but it also appeared on the album *Disraeli Gears*, released in November 1967.

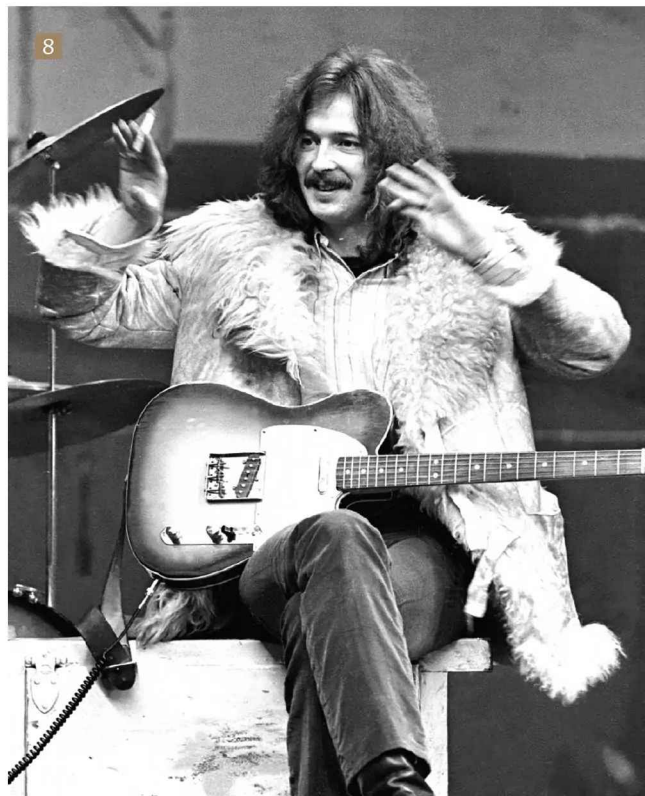
Other instruments for the recordings include the Fool SG, and one or two unspecified electric 12-strings for the Byrds-like *Dance The Night Away*. These were possibly a Fender Electric XII and/or Rickenbacker 12-string. There's no evidence to suggest it, but it would be lovely to think that George Harrison gifted Eric one of his Ricky 12s.

A more surprising guitar owned and played by Clapton in Cream was a Danelectro DC-59 Shorthorn, similar to the one played by Jimmy Page. Eric later used it in Blind Faith with what looks like a sponge-effect paint job, but he was pictured playing the original black-and-white Dano with Cream at the Swan pub in Birmingham, May 1967.

For Blind Faith's free debut concert in Hyde Park on 7 June 1969, Clapton sported a 1962 bound-bodied Fender Custom Telecaster with a small-headstock maple Stratocaster

7. Eric on stage with George Harrison during a Delaney & Bonnie show in 1969. Clapton is playing the Les Paul Custom that he bought in NYC in '67 and George is playing 'Lucy', the refinished '57 Les Paul gifted to him by EC

8. Another rare pic of Clapton on the set of the film *Det Var En Lørdag (It Was A Saturday Night)* using a hybrid Telecaster – seen later when Blind Faith played in Hyde Park in 1969 – which, at the time, sported a large-headstock rosewood Strat neck



neck. This was actually the neck from his Layla Strat, 'Brownie'. However, Eric had acquired the Tele in early 1968, and appeared playing it with Cream in the Danish film *Det Var En Lørdag (It Was A Saturday Night)*. Interestingly, in the film the same Tele body sported a post-CBS large-headstock, rosewood-'board Strat neck. Whether it was ever played on a Cream album, we can't say.

Clapton bought another Les Paul, originally a 1957 Goldtop that had been refinished in see-through cherry red by its second owner, Rick Derringer (Johnny and Edgar Winter, Steely Dan), who got it from Lovin' Spoonful guitarist John Sebastian. It's not known whether he ever used it in Cream, but Eric famously gave the instrument to George Harrison and then played the solo on The Beatles' *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* on it. Harrison christened the guitar 'Lucy' after American comedienne Lucille Ball, and used it for his solo on *Something*.

Clapton also acquired a 1953 Les Paul Goldtop around this

time and played it with Cream at Hunter College Auditorium, New York City on 29 March 1968. A Gibson guitar that Clapton enjoyed during this same year, but was not often photographed with, was his sunburst 1964 Firebird I. This instrument remained in the touring arsenal until Cream's final shows on 25 and 26 November at London's Royal Albert Hall. The Firebird featured on the first of these shows, and the ES-335 on the second. Eric is said to have bought the guitar on 13 April 1968, remarking that he loved the guitar's bright and articulate single bridge pickup. He notably used it for his blistering intro and solos in the live rendition of *Sitting On Top Of The World* from the band's farewell album *Goodbye*.

Another Les Paul that surfaced during Cream's dying days was a 1958 Les Paul known as the 'Darkburst'. Eric played it on some 1968 US Cream concerts, but in 1969 while Free was supporting Blind Faith on a few US shows, traded it to Paul Kossoff for his Les Paul Custom.



9. A sad farewell: Cream perform live on stage at the Royal Albert Hall on 26 November 1968, the band's last gig together before the reunion at the same venue in 2005

10. At the farewell gig Eric played his Firebird I during the first show that night and his cherry red 1964 ES-335 at the second

It ended up with that band's singer, Paul Rodgers, who later sold it at auction, with Clapton verifying its provenance.

SEEING RED

We've left Eric's cherry red 1964 ES-335 until last, not only because it was the final six-string he played with Cream at the 26 November Royal Albert Hall farewell concert, but also because questions abound regarding the guitar's past. Did Clapton really buy it new in 1964 while in The Yardbirds, as he has proposed? The fact that there are no photos of Eric with the guitar either in The Yardbirds, with John Mayall, or at any time prior to his last run of Cream shows suggests not.

Would he have borrowed guitars for gigs and albums had he owned this rather special guitar? Telemaster Jerry Donahue is adamant that this is not the case and that he personally sold Eric the ES-335 while working at Selmer's music store in London in 1968. Jerry asserts it was bought for the Royal Albert Hall farewell

concerts. This story seems plausible, even though it flies in the face of auction records and what many, including Clapton himself, believe. Whatever the case, the guitar sold at Christie's in New York in 2004 for \$847,500 (\$1,2 million).

Gibson has released modern recreations of Clapton's 'Beano' Les Paul, the 'Fool' SG, Firebird I, 'Lucy' Les Paul and ES-335. There has been a Danelectro remake of the painted Blind Faith Shorthorn, and Fender even released a Blind Faith bound-bodied Tele-Strat. Such is the esteem in which Clapton's Cream guitars are held, today these instruments exchange hands for eye-watering sums.

So, that's the story of Eric Clapton's guitars from the short but extraordinary, musically spectacular period between July 1966 and November 1968. While the details of some of the guitars might remain sketchy, one thing we know for certain is we'll never see a combination of such talents - Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker - again. **80**

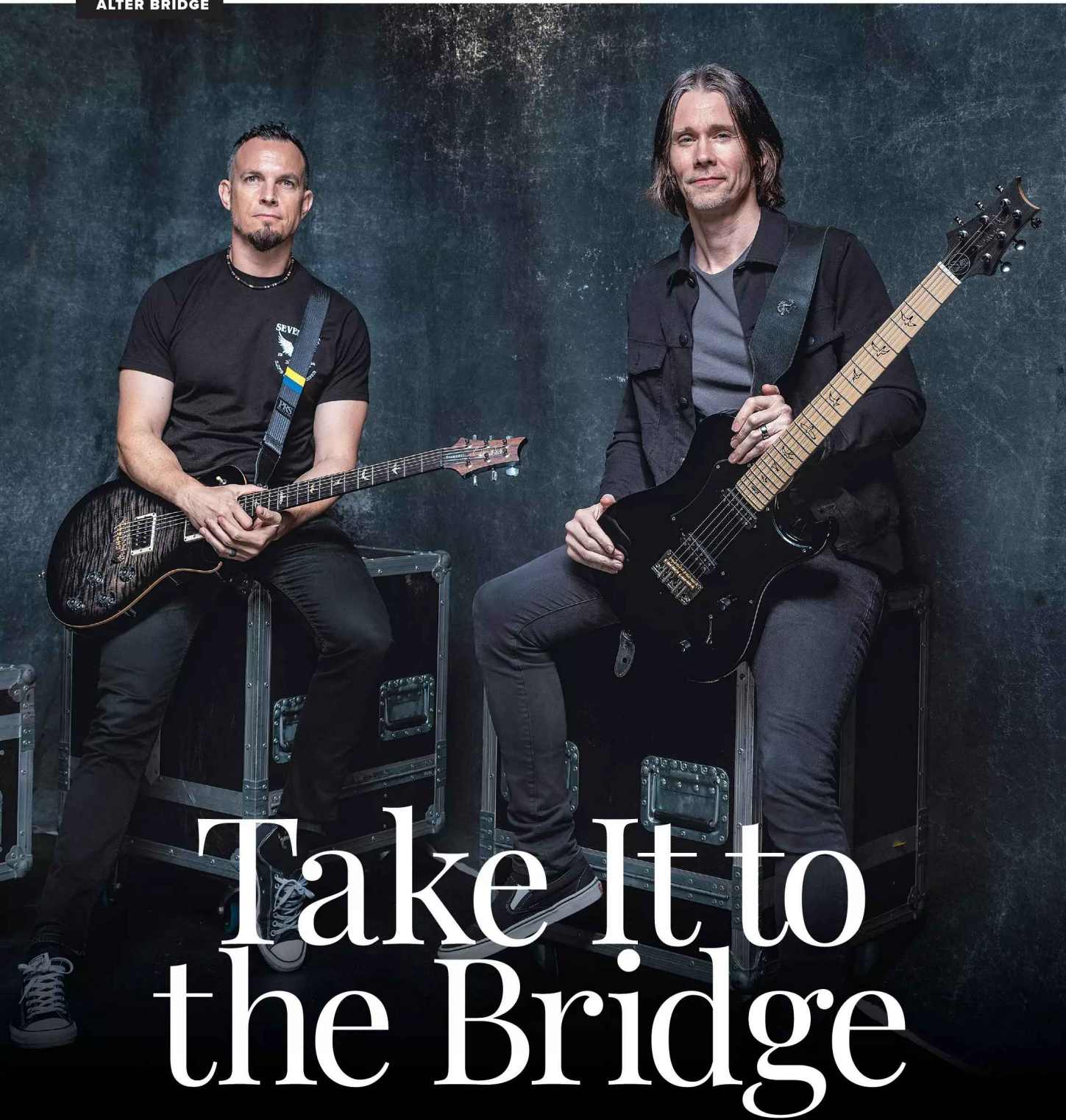


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PHOTO BY JAN PERSSON/REDFERNS GETTY IMAGES

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PHOTO BY ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS GETTY IMAGES



Take It to the Bridge

When it came to tracking their new album, Alter Bridge found themselves in a truly inspirational environment — L.A.'s 5150 Studios, the late Eddie Van Halen's legendary creative space

BY GREGORY ADAMS

TWO DECADES AND eight albums into Alter Bridge's lauded career, the hard rockers are pulling off a first in 2026 — they're embracing the definitiveness of a self-titled album. While you could argue 2010's AB III almost did this — at least typographically — there's a to-the-point toughness behind the band's new, eponymous 12-song statement that fully fortifies what Myles Kennedy and Mark Tremonti have been working on together since 2004. And it all comes down to the sickness of the riff.

"The essence of the band has always been to build the song on a good, solid, heavy riff and then balance it with a certain melodic sense and a certain depth of the lyrics," vocalist-guitarist Kennedy says of the Alter Bridge aesthetic. "But from record to record, we kind of lean one way or the other — like maybe we incorporate some Eighties synths as a texture."

He reiterates of Alter Bridge, though: "You're not going to have any keyboard extravaganzas on this. This is a straight-ahead hard-rock record. So it felt appropriate — as far as the self-titled approach goes."

Sure enough, Alter Bridge delivers tunefully brawny anthems by the boatload. Close to four years on from their seventh album, *Pawns & Kings* — and following Tremonti's recent arena-conquering Creed reunion tours, as well as albums from his eponymous metal outfit and Kennedy's solo project — the band broke a long silence last summer with the release of their deep, D-chunking "Silent Divide." Beyond its infectiously swampy groove, the single features solo sections that contrast Kennedy's kinetic vibrato skills with Tremonti's famous fretboard dexterity.

Both players explain that they brought their A-game to L.A.'s iconic 5150 Studios, where they recorded the album at the behest of longtime friend, collaborator and tourmate Wolfgang Van Halen. Kennedy and Tremonti were wowed by the magnitude of making music within the hallowed walls of Eddie Van Halen's home studio. Inspired by the room's rich history — and with the help of one in-house EVH 5150 III head — Alter Bridge put their all into the album's hard-swung screechers ("What Lies Within") and gloom-crested arpeggio attacks ("Scales Are Falling").

"It made us want to be better musicians and take advantage of the moment we had," Tremonti says of the setting. "When you have your guitar in your hand and you're playing in that studio in the same spot those guys played in, there's no slop coming out. It's got to be on point. You've got to man up, you know? You've got to band up when you're in that situation."

In "Silent Divide," Myles, you've got these really decadent string slides coming out of the second chorus, right before Mark switches into that galloping bridge.

MYLES KENNEDY: That's something that I got from — rest his soul — John Sykes. He was a big influence for me, and he was the master of the string slide. When we're recording, [producer] Elvis [Baskette] always says, "Do more of that string-sliding stuff," and I don't really think anything of it. It's just been in my DNA for 30 years. But we leaned in for "Silent Divide." Like, let's be unapologetic about it!

There's a lot of dynamism between you and Mark's respective approaches to soloing; the two leads you bring to "Silent Divide" reflect this. How do you see your respective styles complementing the other's?



KENNEDY: I always try to sing the guitar solos. I'm generally singing along with them as I'm playing them. I don't know if you're familiar with Oscar Peterson, the piano player, but that was something I used to love on those old jazz records. You could hear Oscar singing every note. I like to incorporate certain techniques and punctuate things with a flurry of notes, but I really lean into the melodic thing. Mark loves learning new tricks and runs. I think that's the main difference, and that's maybe why we complement each other; we have enough of a different approach where you can kind of tell who's who.

MARK TREMONTI: I think Myles has a very soothing way of playing. Some of my favorite vibrato I've ever heard is Myles on the guitar. I grew up more on the speed metal side of things. He listened to metal, but early on he dove deeper into jazz, which really helped his playing. He's very good at improvisation. He has a lot of moments where he writes beforehand, but he also has a lot of moments where he's just improvising in the studio, whereas I like to come in fully prepared

with a written solo.

How did you come to record this album at 5150?

KENNEDY: Wolf was incredibly kind enough to bring that offer up with our manager. We were like, "Really?" We knew the history of all the incredible music that had been made there. Just the fact that he trusted us enough to come in and not totally ruin the legacy really meant a lot. When we all showed up, we were very cognizant of that, and we wanted to honor the situation. If you know you're going into this sacred ground where all these incredible riffs have been constructed and recorded, the last thing you want to do is show up empty-handed. It was definitely fuel for the creative fire.

Did Wolf have any stipulations for you coming into 5150? Like, "You can come in here, so long as you punch a werewolf in the face in my music video," as you did in Mammoth's "The End" music video?

KENNEDY: Right? [Laughs] "Yeah, you can record here, but you have to sit in a makeup chair for two hours and turn into a zombie." Getting to do that was awesome. So much fun. But yeah, I think the only thing was "Please, don't play 'Eruption.'" He didn't say that, but I wasn't going to do that.

Was all the gear at 5150 at your disposal?

KENNEDY: There were pieces of gear there they had set out, but nothing super iconic. We weren't tracking with Frankenstein. Have I held Frankenstein? Yes. Was it a total, Excalibur-level experience? I don't even know how to articulate that, but I got emotional — that was a pretty special moment. But as far as amps and whatnot, there was a 50-watt 5150 III that we used when we were doing pre-production, so I plugged into that. I had it set up because I couldn't fly out my Diezels. I fell in love with that amp, and it became a big part of the sound. I ended up marrying it with the [Diezel] VH4 when I was actually tracking.

TREMONTI: I thought [the 5150 III] sounded so good, especially mixed with what I was using, which was my signature PRS head. I loved it so much that I got one; they were nice enough to give me one, and I took it on the last tour we did. So now it's a part of my sound. It's given me a new appreciation for 50-watt heads. As long as I've been playing guitar, and as long as I've collected amplifiers, I don't think I've ever owned a 50-watt head — maybe a single 1x12 combo that was 50 watts. I never appreciated how aggressive a 50-watt head is. When you pair it with 100-watt heads, it's got a certain character — a bite that cuts through the mix. But it's not harsh.

ALTER BRIDGE

Alter Bridge's PRS-fortified Myles Kennedy (left) and Mark Tremonti perform in Edinburgh, Scotland, June 6, 2023



Did any Van Halen vibes seep into these songs?

KENNEDY: Without a doubt. The riff for “Silent Divide” has definitely got an Eighties vibe. Mark kept comparing it to an old Judas Priest riff, but with the way I keep coming back to that chugging on the low D, I think of a riff like “Unchained.” Those were such important riffs for me. Does it sound like “Unchained”? No, but there’s definitely that element there.

TREMONTI: I try to explain to people that 5150 Studios isn’t some sterile environment where they’re cleaning up for the next band to come in. It was pretty much left the way [Van Halen] used it last. Wolfie has a great Neve console in there now, but it’s pretty much the same letters on the kitchen fridge; there’s the 5150 necklace hanging over the door — all the cool stuff that was there when those guys were there. We by no means sound like Van Halen in any way or form.

But you can feel the spirit of the band and Eddie in that room.

One characteristic to your solos on this record, Mark — whether on “Rue the Day,” “Silent Divide” or “Power Down” — is that heavy, wah-filtered tonality. When we spoke with you around your last Tremonti record, *The End Will Show You How*, you were prototyping your own line of pedals behind the scenes, including wahs. Are any of those on the record?

TREMONTI: No, that’s the Morley wah. I’m still dabbling with trying to get some stuff together. It’s going to be called Tremonti Audio Company, but there’s such great stuff out there [already]. I’m a picky guy, so I gotta make sure it’s right before we do it.

Pardon the pun, but what else lies within this record, gear-wise?

KENNEDY: Guitar-wise, I’m just using my signature models. On this

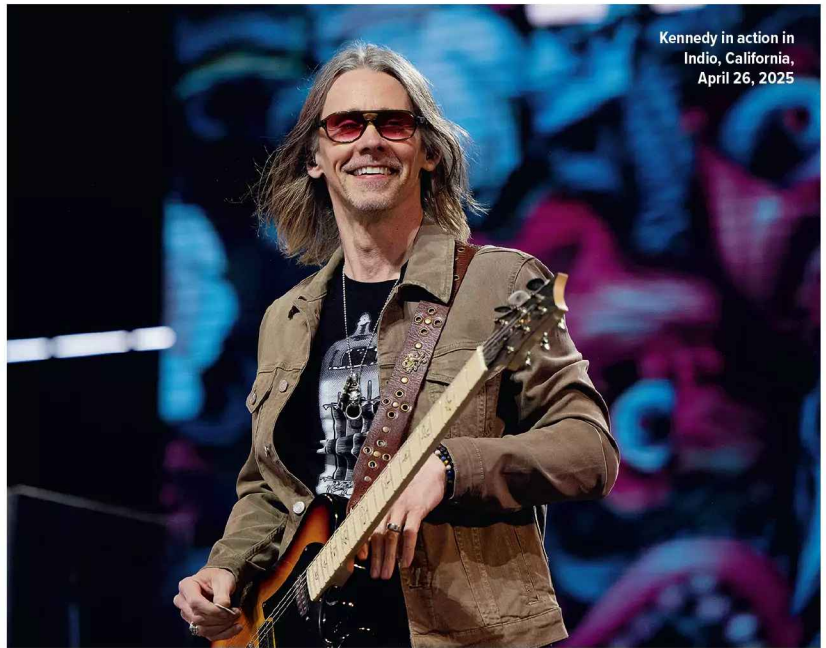
record, there were probably two or three, depending on what the tuning was, that were just off the rack. No changes, just stock MK signatures from PRS, and they worked out great.

TREMONTI: I just used my signature model. PRS always gives us a handful of guitars we can play in the studio, and then fans can buy the actual studio-recorded guitars. But there was one that they sent over that I really loved and I kept. There’s also a baritone we used on “Rue the Day.”

Getting back to the heavy riff, how did you come about the doom-waltzing feel of “What Lies Within”?

TREMONTI: That’s in open D5, which is one of my favorite alternate tunings. I had that riff and chorus sitting around. I put the demo together with all those parts on there and left the melodies in the verses up to Myles’ interpretation.

KENNEDY: I came up with a little



Kennedy in action in
Indio, California,
April 26, 2025

like, “Oh yeah, I love playing this!” and you see the smiles on everybody’s faces. I think that’s why we’ve had a 20-year-plus career with the same members, because we’re all open-minded enough to go out and do other projects before coming back together.

KENNEDY: It seems like the longer we do it, the more that dynamic is solidified — there’s this level of comfort. It’s the same way I look at why we continue to use Elvis as our producer, where you know how it’s going to play out and you trust everybody’s instincts. With Mark and me, part of the reason it’s really worked since day one is because we realize we’re kindred spirits who are obsessed with writing music. You never feel like you’re having to pull someone along.

Are you ever able to fully power down?

TREMONTI: I love to do this. When I want to power down, what’s better than sitting around and playing guitar? It’s not relaxing to practice sweep arpeggios or that kind of thing, but sitting down with a guitar and writing and improvising — that’s relaxing. I don’t power down in the typical sense of, “I’m going to sit on the couch and watch TV.” I like going to bed at night thinking, “I did something today. I wrote this part or practiced this or that.” That makes me feel good. If I go to bed going, “I just wasted a day,” it bugs me.

KENNEDY: “Power Down” is written from the perspective of, “Take some time to stop and smell the roses.” Given what we’ve been talking about, that’s something I’ve really been working at the last few years. It got to a point where I was never home. I realized life was just passing me by. Though the life I was living was all music and touring

the world — and I don’t want to sound like I’m complaining — there are other responsibilities I have as a partner, family member and dog owner. I wanted to be around more and take this all in, because this side of life is great.

Referring back to the chorus of “Power Down,” how would you describe the Alter Bridge experience these days?

KENNEDY: It couldn’t be better. I’m at this stage in life where I feel like all the boxes have been checked. I’m very grateful for that. At this point, it really is just a matter of continuing to revel in what this has all turned into and just savor and enjoy it. When I was younger, that wasn’t the mindset. I was hungry and sometimes frustrated and kind of lost in my own head and ego. I feel there’s been this shift, and it really is beautiful. I love it. I recommend it. Gratitude is the attitude.

TREMONTI: I couldn’t ask for anything else. First and foremost, I’ve got a family that is the best, and the most supportive circle of friends. I spent a lot of time in the beginning of my career worrying that I wouldn’t amount to anything. You’re just dying to be a musician, then once you become a professional, you’re worrying it’s going to end. People are telling you you’re going to be a one-hit wonder, and then people are telling you you’re going to have a sophomore slump, or that tastes in the music scene are changing and you’re no longer relevant — you hear these things every day in the music business. But halfway through the Alter Bridge records, I was finally at peace with my career. Like, as long as I keep on writing — not just phoning it in, but putting all my heart and soul into this — I can do this as long as I want. I get to do what I love! 🎸

alternate melody, a little octave part. The way we marry those two concepts has really become a thing since the record we put out about 10 years ago, [2016’s] *The Last Hero*, where he’ll have this kind of chugging, driving riff and then I’ll put on an octave thing in an eighth- or 16-note pattern, just to move it along.

You’re both prolific workers and writers. To paraphrase Myles’ lyrics on “Power Down,” you don’t necessarily slow the overall pace, but you’re not always at it with Alter Bridge, specifically. What are the things you notice about each other once you get back together?

TREMONTI: Just how much of a powerful singer Myles is. When we play in these multiple bands, it keeps it all fresh. I couldn’t imagine being in one band now. I think it would start getting stale, and you would kind of take it for granted. So, when you come back to playing these songs you haven’t done in three years, it’s



K I M G O R D O N

Returning with solo album *Play Me* – a stinging broadside against the modern age – the alt-rock talisman remembers the “shitty guitars” and renegade tunings of her 80s breakout with Sonic Youth

Words Henry Yates

A certain trepidation is natural before an interview with Kim Gordon. Despite all evidence to the contrary – the reams of historic shots of her killing it on a Thunderbird and Jazzmaster with alt-rock pioneers Sonic Youth – the 72 year old famously doesn't consider herself a musician. What's more, it's dangerously feasible that she didn't fret a note on her new solo album, *Play Me*, which would leave us with 40 minutes to talk about the weather. Add to that Gordon's slightly icy reputation among journalists back in Sonic Youth's early 90s heyday (to be clear, she was never nasty, just too damn cool to do the promotional dance, and desperate to get away).

Luckily, neither doomsday scenario comes to pass. Joining the video call from New York, Gordon is friendly, witty, thoughtful and proud of *Play Me*'s socio-political battlecries (on which she *did* play, thank God). And if she's bemused to learn the name of this publication – “I'm really an artist that plays music, that's what's so funny about doing interviews for guitar magazines” – then she's happy to humour us.

Listening to *Play Me*, it feels like there are no rules. Was that how it felt to make it?

“Yeah, it felt pretty free. I was like, ‘Oh, I love krautrock, let's have a krautrock beat.’ Sometimes I'd come in with lyrics, like, a page with things scribbled all over it, but I didn't know exactly how it was gonna fit. I guess I really trust Justin [Raisen, producer]. This is our third record now and he just wants to keep going. It's not the way I grew up playing music, y'know? In Sonic Youth, eventually, we did have friends who we let in to work on fixing our records, but it was such a different process.”

It sounds like you're looking around at the world on songs like *Post Empire* or *Dirty Tech*. What's keeping you awake at night?

“Everything is so fucked-up right now. The whole AI thing is just such a nightmare. People are so seduced by technology. It's being rammed down our throats and even the people making it don't even know what it is, y'know? People don't realise it takes enormous water resources and it's going to make everyone's electricity more expensive. It's just crazy that people are so greedy they don't care about destroying the world.”

The album ends with the vitriolic *ByeBye25!* and you sound pleased to be rid of it. But what are your hopes and fears for 2026?

"I guess I hope the Democrats kill in the midterms and we regain the House and Senate. I just hope there's some good news. Can music still be a vehicle for social change? I don't want to say 'no'. I think it can bring people together. You never know what can happen. It's so funny how Trump keeps using music by different artists, then they end up suing him. What is he thinking? Like, does someone else just pick the music?"

"I accidentally fell into playing music, like a lot of people in the post-punk era. I really just aspired to be an artist"

The instrumentation on this new record doesn't sound like standard bass and guitar. How did you approach it?

"I didn't play any of the bass, actually – Justin played that. He also played whatever melodic guitar there is and then I played all the kind of dissonant guitar stuff. Basically, I just improvised with a bunch of different pedals and a little Fender tweed amp. On *Dirty Tech*, the guitar is super minimal and I'm unplugging the lead from a distortion box and plugging it back in, that kind of trick. There was one pedal I used a lot on *Not Today*. I can't remember the name of the company – I'm so bad at tech stuff – but it's like a double Memory Man, this weird, swirly circular delay. And it's way fucked-up."

1. Pictured here in the 90s with Sonic Youth, Kim Gordon describes her prior band and solo work as "totally different"



PHOTO BY CHRIS CARROLL/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

You're such an iconic bassist, though. How come you didn't want to play on this album?

"I mean, I haven't played bass since the last Sonic Youth gig [2011]. I have this improv guitar duo with Bill Nace called Body/Head, and it's just much more satisfying to improvise on a guitar. You can just get so many more textures and sounds.

"I never really saw myself as a bassist. I always played with the pick, punk-rock style. And when I first started playing music, I played guitar. But then I would play basslines on the guitar, so it made sense to just play the bass. But I don't have any sense of identity as a bass player, strangely enough.

"I mean, I'll give Justin some direction. For one song I put out last year, *Bangin' On The Freeway*, I played a bassline and sent it to him, and then he had his sister-in-law – [Eva Gardner of The Mars Volta, who has toured with P!nk, Gwen Stefani and Cher] who's also a bassist – record it on eight different basses or something. Then we cut all of that up and it was just the most fucked-up rhythmic thing. So I'm more interested in ideas than actually having to play the bass, y'know?"

You've long been associated with Jazzmasters. Is that what you used on *Play Me*?

"Yeah, it's the same one I always use. I forget the year – it might be 2009 or 2010 – but it's one of the Mexican Jazzmasters. I have other guitars, but that's really the only one I play. I'm actually doing a signature guitar for Fender and it's based on that Jazzmaster. My amazing guitar tech, Salar Rajabnik, he helped me through the process and did a lot of research. The signature model took a really long time. We finally got Fender to use Seymour Duncan pickups."

It's said you hadn't actually played an instrument until you were 27?

"Yeah, that's true. I mean, I was in this kind of 'noise' garage band in school in Toronto when I was younger. But basically, yeah, not really. I mean, my brother and I would improvise in the living room with an African drum and a gong and this upright piano, and just kinda jump around. But no musical training. But Patti Smith and Debbie Harry didn't start playing music til they were, like, 28. So I always felt older than everyone else, but because of that, I actually didn't feel like it was a big deal. I really moved to New York to do art. I kind of accidentally fell into playing music, like a lot of people in the post-punk era. I really just aspired to be an artist."

When Sonic Youth started out in the early 80s, did you have a vision for the band?

"Without sounding pretentious, we did want to make something that was different. But it's not like we really talked about it. We just took our influences. The music was forged from each of our personalities. There was such a high bar set by No Wave music, which was also kind of nihilistic. So we were influenced by Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. Rhys had worked with La Monte Young, and so he knew about alternate tunings and putting all the instruments in 'E', things like that. Same with Glenn. And both Thurston [Moore] and Lee [Ranaldo, Sonic Youth guitarists] had played with Glenn. So we definitely knew the power of that, and that was part of our vocabulary."

2. The bass forms a big part in Kim's musical history, but she admits that she hasn't played in over a decade.

"It's just much more satisfying to improvise on a guitar," she tells us. "You can just get so many more textures and sounds"

"The Thunderbird was hard to play... the balancing is a bit awkward. But it does feel like it's kind of a weapon"

Sonic Youth were pioneers of alternate tunings...

"I think, in the beginning, we just had shitty guitars and so they didn't sound good in regular tunings doing powerchords anyway. Then Thurston stuck a drum stick under his guitar strings, for the song that became *The Burning Spear*, and he was using it to almost make a percussive sound. The funny thing about guitar is the electricity, and how it's affected by how you move with it. It's almost like a dance to me. It's very visceral."

How was your musical headspace different working on *Play Me*, relative to *Sonic Youth*?

"In *Sonic Youth*, there was a lot of sitting around jamming until things start getting arranged. Even if Thurston came in with the riff, we'd then all make up parts and work through the structure. It was almost like songwriting by committee, but as a band, as opposed to [manufactured pop]. *Play Me* is just me and Justin. No-one else has to agree. It's much simpler with just one other person, y'know?"

How did you approach your bass parts when you were in *Sonic Youth*?

"Because Lee and Thurston played in alternate tunings, I was really making up stuff by listening. Sometimes I would have to play a root note for a song, and that was always the least interesting part to me because I'm a creative person. I used a lot of open strings. I like minimal bass parts, so that's mostly what I played."



PHOTO BY AURORA ROSEPATRICK MCMULLAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Do you still have your old '76 Thunderbird IV from back in the day? And why that guitar?

"I have it somewhere. Why the Thunderbird? Didn't The Runaways use it? And I think the bass player in Alice Cooper had one. It was incredibly hard to play. The neck is really thin, which makes it easier, but the balancing is a little bit awkward. But it really does feel like it's kind of a weapon or something because the neck is so long."

Do you still feel the guitar has some juice left in it?

"Yeah, sure. I mean, I like working with limitations. I remember in Sonic Youth, as a band first going to England, people hated us. It was that idea of, like [disgusted], 'Oh, you're playing guitar?' Because everything was about synthesizers: 'That's so old-fashioned.' It's just kind of funny how everything changes.

"I do have a vocabulary of technique, I guess, that I built up from playing for so long. But the fun of it for me is that I don't know [much] about music. J Mascis from Dinosaur Jr and I did a gig together once. It was just the two of us, and it was a party for Marc Jacobs or something. I was in some kind of open D tuning. And I said, 'Okay, I'm just gonna drone on this and you do what you do.' And I guess I also did some vocalising of some sort. But my friends were there and they said, 'Actually, that really worked.' So it's kind of interesting."

What is the guitar to you now? A magic wand? A paintbrush? Just a tool to get the job done?

"It's kind of a paintbrush. I mean, I've made a few art films with a guitar. I did one in downtown L.A., kind of


rubbing it on corporate buildings. And then I did one in my house that was based on a Chantal Akerman film, where I have the guitar and it's plugged into a small amp that you can't see. I'm doing domestic chores like cooking and washing the bathtub and eating with my daughter, with the guitar just banging around, but I'm sort of ignoring it. I guess I see the guitar as an extension of the body, in a certain way."

"The funny thing about guitar is the electricity, and how it's affected by how you move with it. It's almost like a dance"

Are you more inspired by visual artists than musicians?

"I still hang out more with art people and I'm more aligned with the art world than the bass-playing world. I guess I think about art – or movies – more than I think about music. Music is something that's fun to do."

Does it ever amuse you that you've made such an impact on rock 'n' roll, without necessarily meaning to?

"I have a little bit of imposter syndrome about it, actually. I enjoy it. But I don't want to think about it or all the stuff around it. What people think of me, I don't know." 

3. Kim Gordon sees music as a means to express her artistic voice, and *Play Me* finds her creating dissonant guitar lines with her Jazzmaster, while producer and co-writer Justin Raisen handles the guitar melodies and bass guitar parts



Kim Gordon's latest album, *Play Me*, is released on 13 March on Matador Records
<https://kimaltheagordon.com>

Cort

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CANDY APPLE RED



CANDY APPLE RED FENDERS

Candy Apple Red was reputedly Leo's favourite finish and, as this small selection from a very large collection proves, it looks fantastic on any Fender guitar

Words Huw Price Photography Phil Barker



Much like Gibson's 1950s sunbursts, the look of vintage Candy Apple Red Fenders varies considerably. We'll be discussing the reasons for that later as we examine six examples from a collection of around 50 that will be coming up for sale in the UK at Gardiner Houlgate over its next few guitar auctions.

Auctioneer Luke Hobbs tells us: "They're not all great guitars because, probability-wise, that's never going to happen – but the thing the owner really wanted was at least one example of every model in Candy Apple Red. Another issue with some of these guitars is that

the owner was a serial buffer, so in some cases he flattened the finishes down and made the lacquer checking less pronounced than it should be."

Candy Apple Red is one of those colours that divides opinions – most guitarists either love it or they quite like it. So, before examining each of these guitars in detail, let's check out the origins of the finish and discuss how the application method differs from Fender's other metallic custom colours.

From the early 1960s onwards, Fender offered a fairly wide choice of custom colours. Some are vanishingly rare and genuine vintage examples are seldom seen, while others are almost as common

as sunbursts. Of the 21 factory custom colours Fender listed during the 1960s (not including the sparkle and metal flake finishes and one-off specials), 12 were metallic.

One of those metallic finishes was Candy Apple Red, but the process of applying it differed significantly and it created a toffee-apple lustre. Most Fender colours were inspired by automotive trends and are associated with specific US car manufacturers. Candy Apple Red stood out because it came from the hot-rod scene and the method of application was developed by a car customiser called Joe Bailon.

His candy painting process, which

CANDY APPLE RED



This 1966 Jaguar is an all original example with gold hardware and a matching headstock, but some prefer to remove the press-up foam string mute

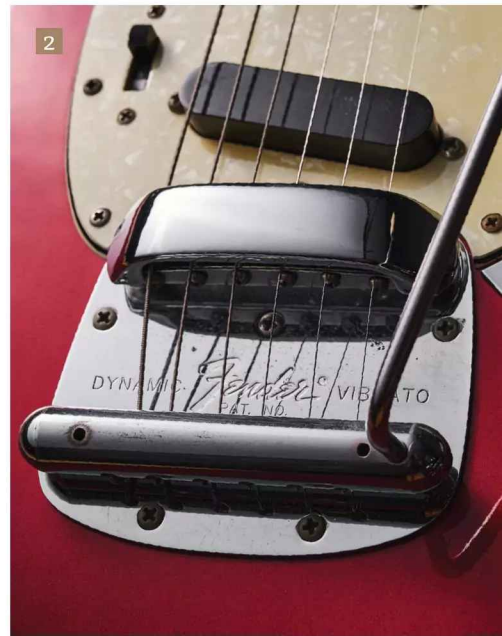




1

1. The distinctive stripes on Fender's Competition models were supposedly inspired by the racing livery of Carroll Shelby's hot-rodded Ford Mustangs

2. It may be Fender's most rudimentary design, but with a careful setup Mustang vibratos are fairly decent. This model also features two three-way pickup switches



2

Many players have come to appreciate the Mustang's easy-playing charms, especially in the wake of Kurt Cobain

Fender adopted, was developed over a 10-year period, and Bailon began applying it to custom builds in 1956. All of Fender's other metallic finishes were mixed and applied in the same manner as Gibson's gold finishes, with metal powder mixed into coloured lacquer. Fender would usually, but not always, apply a white base coat and then spray Lucite acrylic metallic colour coats on top before building the thickness with clear nitrocellulose lacquer.

In 1963, Candy Apple Red replaced the then-unpopular Shell Pink in Fender's custom colour chart. Fender typically began by applying a white base coat, which was then oversprayed in silver. At that time, Fender's silver of choice was a Chevrolet colour called Inca Silver, and it seems probable that's what they would have used for Candy Apple Red. The red component was the same transparent red that was used

for sunbursts and it was applied straight over the silver. This provided depth, with the metallic silver glowing through the red and the topcoats of clear nitrocellulose or poly, depending on whether the guitar was sprayed pre or post mid-1968.

A change was made to the formula when CBS took over in 1965 and Inca Silver was quietly dropped. Rather than continue to buy it especially for Candy Apple Red paint orders, the factory began spraying gold instead. Firemist Gold replaced Shoreline Gold in 1965, so it is most likely the gold that Fender applied until Candy Apple Red was withdrawn in 1973.

1966 Jaguar

This is one of the guitars that has maybe been over-polished, but, otherwise, Luke tells us, "it checks out as a really good honest guitar". It combines play-worn gold hardware with an off-white three-ply pickguard, and the foam mute is still mounted on the bridge. Besides what might be an added strap-button screw hole on the lower bout, the finish retains a strong colour and, given that this guitar was clearly played, it's still in largely undamaged condition. The back of the neck also retains its finish and isn't worn or discoloured.

The matching headstock is a standout feature, with its gold-plated string tree, fully intact decal and a set of F-stamped

tuners. The original factory shim is still present in the neck pocket, and the paint stick shadow reveals that Fender applied a semi-opaque yellow stain prior to spraying the white base coat and colour coats.

By 1966, Fender's offset necks were being fitted out with pearloid marker blocks and fretboard binding. Fender necks weren't squared off at the body end, so there was no need for a mitre or butt joint; Fender simply wrapped the binding around, allowing the job to be done using a single strip of binding. Here, the fret ribs are in great shape, and Fender even cut nibs around the nut.

Lifting the pickguard reveals the original pickups and fully intact multi-coloured wiring, switches, components and potentiometers that are dated the 34th week of 1966. The shield plate remains taped to the underside of the pickguard and the finish is only a hair darker, so this Jaguar has barely faded. It weighs 3.85kg (8.5lb) and comes with its original case containing the factory leather strap and hang tags.

1970 Competition Mustang

First introduced in 1964, Fender's Mustang was a 'student' model, which was available with two shorter-than-standard necks – 21 frets with a 571.5mm (22.5-inch) scale and 22 frets with a 610mm (24-inch) scale.

CANDY APPLE RED



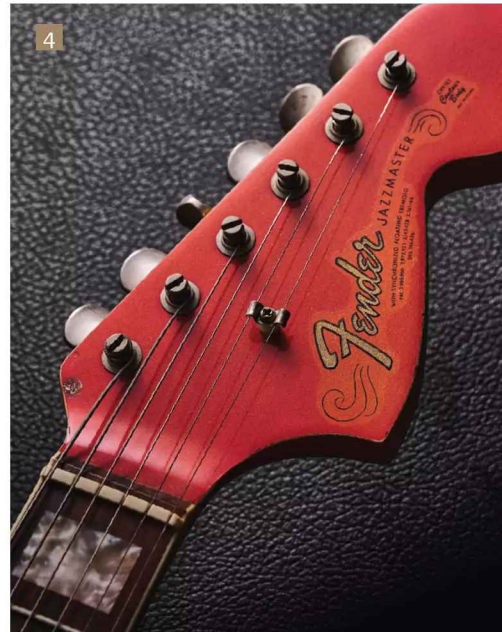
Fender devised this guitar (variously called the Swinger) to use up surplus parts, and because they never settled on a name, the ambiguous headstock decal makes this Fender's second but far less desirable 'Nocaster' model





3. The faded Candy Apple Red finish looks fantastic on this model, and the bound neck with block markers typifies 1966 Jazzmasters

4. A matching headstock is always a desirable extra with any Fender custom colour, but this one has a tiny cigarette burn. Note the orange tone under the decal



The transparent red was applied straight over the silver. This provided depth, with the metallic silver glowing through

Besides the finish, this 22-fret example's standout feature is the 'Competition' stripes. They were almost certainly inspired by the special paintwork applied to Carroll Shelby's hot-rodded racing version of the Ford Mustang, and Fender's 'Competition' colours also included dark blue, red and orange.

Competition Mustangs were produced from 1969 until 1973. This one has some minor surface scratches and dents, along with a drop-filled ding on the top and a superficial lacquer crack on the back running half the length of the body. The colour remains dark and vibrant, and the overall condition attests to the toughness of poly finishes as much as minimal use.

For a 'student' model, the Mustang is pretty well equipped, with two pickups and a vibrato. There's a three-way switch assigned to each pickup that turns them off and engages them both in and out of

'phase'. Here, the 1970 date-stamped 250k volume and tone pots are still intact, along with the original 0.05µF ceramic tone capacitor. However, the switches are a bit on the intermittent side. The October 1970 neck still has its original frets and, besides a small dent and a slightly bent top E tuner shaft, it's almost devoid of playwear.

In recent years, many players have come to appreciate the Mustang's easy-playing charms, especially in the wake of Kurt Cobain, so they are no longer as affordable as they once were. This one weighs 3.35kg (7.4lb) and comes with an original Victoria hard case.

Swinger/Musiclander/Arrow

This fairly obscure Fender was also a 'student' model and is known by various names. It was concocted as a way of using up leftover Bass V bodies and Musicmaster hardware, and production estimates range between 250 and 600. Apparently, they were all assembled in 1969, but neck and potentiometer dates are often earlier.

On this example, the potentiometers are from the 42nd week of 1966, and the short-scale neck has a 1966 date stamp and a very slim profile. The body was refinished by Clive Brown a long time ago and it's not certain that the (now deceased) owner was made aware of that when he bought the guitar from a dealer. The overall condition

is fairly good, with original frets, fully functioning electronics and an original Victoria hard case.

1966 Jazzmaster

Of all the Jazzmasters in the collection, this is Luke Hobbs' personal favourite due to the finish fading. During the 1950s and 1960s, most guitar manufacturers struggled with red pigments that lost intensity when exposed to UV light, but the fading that would have been grounds for warranty claims when the guitars were new is now highly prized by many vintage-guitar enthusiasts. The extent of the fading on this late-1966 Jazzmaster is apparent even without looking under the pickguard, where the finish retains a more intense vibrancy. With gold beneath, the exposed areas have softened to a lighter red with a hint of orange. The back is slightly less faded, and in all other regards the guitar is in extremely good condition.

There appears to be no hardware corrosion, and the bound neck retains its original nibbed frets and an unmarked Indian rosewood fretboard. The only obviously noticeable blemish is a cigarette burn on the headstock face, which shares the same faded Candy Apple Red as the body. Interestingly, the area under the logo looks even more orange thanks to the yellowed decal.

CANDY APPLE RED



The finish has been subjected to a few touch-ups, but this lightweight '66 Tele retains all its original features, including a play-worn 'ashtray' bridge cover





5. Although it looks the part, this '66 Strat has been refinished and it's possible that the hardware has been either re-plated or replaced over the years

6. While 1966 Stratocaster headstocks were larger than pre-CBS models, Fender was still applying transitional decals from the CBS takeover period



The wiring is completely intact, with the original masking-tape pieces securing the wires flat against the shield plate. Besides the serial number, there are various pieces of information that pinpoint the manufacturing date to late 1966. The potentiometers are from the eighth week of 1966, but the neck date reads 13NOV66B and the handwritten dates on the grey-bottom pickups are 11/17/66 and 12/6/66 – in American-date style.

With its original case and a body weight of 3.61kg (8lb), we think this Jazzmaster is a real high light of the collection.

1966 Telecaster

Luke considers this particular Telecaster to be “basically all good”. The finish has survived well, although it’s clear numerous drop-fills have been carried out in order to camouflage dents, and there is some armwear. Similarly, the neck finish shows that the guitar has been used with some light surface wear.

The transitional decal is in fairly good shape and the double-line Klusons tuners remain fitted, along with the original pickups. The potentiometers are both replacements, with the volume and tone dating to 1984 and 1986 respectively. The instrument also has a relatively recent paper-in-oil tone capacitor, but the switch appears to be original.

If you like heavily worn vintage Fenders with copious lacquer-checking and beautiful fading, this Strat is the stuff of dreams

The jury is out on whether the neck has been refretted, but the frets retain plenty of life. The hardware is in good condition with only very light rusting and tarnishing that doesn’t affect functionality. Its Fender case is from the 1970s, but the guitar weighs a mere 3.65kg (8lb) and, according to Luke, it “sounds incredible”.

1966 Stratocaster

If you like the look of heavily worn vintage Fenders with armwear on the lower bout, copious lateral lacquer-checking, beautiful fading and ‘tan lines’ around the pickguard, this 1966 Stratocaster is the stuff of dreams. The irony is that it may be the least original of the bunch.

A Strat from this era should have a paint-stick shadow in the neck cavity revealing yellow stain, as we can observe on the Telecaster, Jaguar and Jazzmaster. But besides a bit of red stain, this Strat’s

neck pocket is bare wood. The finish in the pickup and control cavities appears excessively thick, and the wood fibres lining the worm rout are caked in lacquer. The solder also looks a bit shiny and reworked around the ground wire connections on the volume potentiometer.

All things considered, Luke believes that the body was refinished a very long time ago. Clive Brown has identified all the guitars in the collection that he refinished, but he didn’t mention this one. It certainly looks the part, but Clive would have done the neck pocket correctly.

The potentiometers are dated mid-1966, the pickups all have hand-written dates from early November 1966, and the neck is date stamped September 1966. The fretboard shows some playwear, and the neck has been refretted with chunkier wire, but the ends are slightly protruding and need to be chased back.

Luke is unconvinced the gold bridge parts or pickup and pickguard screws are correct because the plating is so intact. It’s possible they have been replaced or replated, but if the looks and 3.49kg (7.8lb) weight appeal, it’s a tempting player-grade Strat that may be relatively affordable. 🎸

With thanks to Luke Hobbs and Gardiner Houlgate for showing us this collection

<https://guitar-auctions.co.uk>

Orianthi

Martin Cooper checks out the style of a guitarist who has fans in high places, from Michael Jackson to Alice Cooper and beyond!



Orianthi should have played on Michael Jackson's *This Is It* shows

attention of Paul Reed Smith, which led to her playing PRS guitars, which she has done ever since. If we add TV commercials and performing at Eric Clapton's Crossroads festival to her CV, plus various other tours and shows, we'll find that she has already had an incredibly full career, even though still only in her mid 30s.

Orianthi's playing style is pure classic rock. She began playing piano at just three, before starting on guitar at only six years of age. She first came to public attention in 2009, playing guitar for Carrie Underwood at the Grammy awards, and has been on an upward trajectory ever since.

She released her most recent album, 'O' on the Frontiers label, which was produced by the legendary Marti Frederiksen.

Our track this month is also pure classic rock. We're in E minor (E-F#-G-A-B-C-D), and the rhythm part doesn't stray from this key, even though the B5 powerchord hints at B Major (B-D#-F#), the fifth chord built from E Harmonic Minor (E-F#-G-A-B-C-D#). There's also a C# in the solo which pushes it into E Dorian (E-F#-G-A-B-C#-D), with a nod towards E Minor Blues (E-G-A-Bb-B-D) due to the inclusion of a Bb note.

The rest of the solo is E Minor Pentatonic (E-G-A-B-D) fayre, and although the above info is good to know it's unlikely Orianthi would think of it this way. **RM**

Get the Tone

Orianthi plays PRS guitars, so aim for a humbucking pickup sound if possible. If using single-coils, it may be good to roll some treble off and increase preamp gain on the amp or drive pedal. Orianthi tends to favour high-gain amplifiers such as EVH and Mesa Boogie, so again aim for a good amount of preamp distortion, plus ambient reverb or delay.

Ability Rating Moderate



Info <https://bit.ly/3BvSmVy>

Key Em **Tempo** 95bpm

Will improve your...

- ✓ Rock rhythm playing
- ✓ Legato and picked notes
- ✓ Theory knowledge

Born in Australia to Greek parents, Orianthi Panagaris has played for rock and pop legends such as Alice Cooper, for whom she toured as part of the band, and Michael

Jackson. Orianthi was was rehearsing for Jackson's 'This Is It' shows when the singer died in 2009. She has also recorded with Steve Vai, Dave Stewart and Michael Bolton, as well as recording an album with ex-Bon Jovi guitarist Richie Sambora. Orianthi has been named one of the greatest ever female guitarists by Elle magazine and in 2010 was voted Breakthrough Guitarist Of The Year by Guitar International magazine.

Her first gig was with Steve Vai when she was just 15, and when she played with Carlos Santana in Adelaide it brought her to the



TRACK RECORD Orianthi's breakthrough album *Believe*, released in 2009, included the songs *According To You*, and *Highly Strung* which features a guitar duet with Steve Vai. Her most recent album *O* features the songs *Rescue Me* and *Sorry*. Her collaboration with Richie Sambora led to the 2018 album *Radio Free America*, released under the artist name RSO and featuring the singles *Masterpiece* and *Rise*.

EXAMPLE 1 ORIANTHI RHYTHM

Make sure you retain the space that's built into the track ; although there are single-note phrases and powerchords taking up a lot of the air, there are also plenty of rests to allow the drums to be given prominence and to help the track breathe.

♩ = 95

RHYTHM GUITAR

E5 **Am N.C.**

Am N.C. **B5** **C5** **B5**

E5 **D5** **A5**

E5 **D5** **A5**

B5 **E5** **Play 4 times**

The score is written for a rhythm guitar in 4/4 time with a tempo of 95 bpm. It consists of five systems of music. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a guitar staff with five lines (E, B, G, D, A). Chord diagrams are provided for various chords: E5, Am N.C., B5, C5, D5, and A5. Fret numbers are indicated below the guitar staff, often with slash marks indicating bends or specific phrasing. The score includes several triplet patterns and powerchords. Measure numbers 1, 5, 9, 11, 15, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, and 29 are marked at the beginning of their respective systems.

EXAMPLE 1 ORIANTHI SOLO

The solo has some speedy 16th-note triplet phrases featuring legato - hammer-ons and pull-offs - plus alternate picking and quite a few bends. Make sure the transition from picked to legato notes sounds seamless, and that the bends are in tune and in time.

♩ = 95

B5

E5

LEAD GUITAR

E
B
G
D
A
E

19

12 12 14 15 12 14 12 12 14 15 12 12

20

E
B
G
D
A
E

BU BU

15-(17) 15-(17)

6 6 6 6

15 12 15 12 15 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12

22

E
B
G
D
A
E

1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4

12-14 12-14 12-14 12-14 12-14

12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 14

24

E
B
G
D
A
E

BU BD BU BD

14-(15)(14) 12-14-12 14-(16)(14)-12 14-12 14-12-14

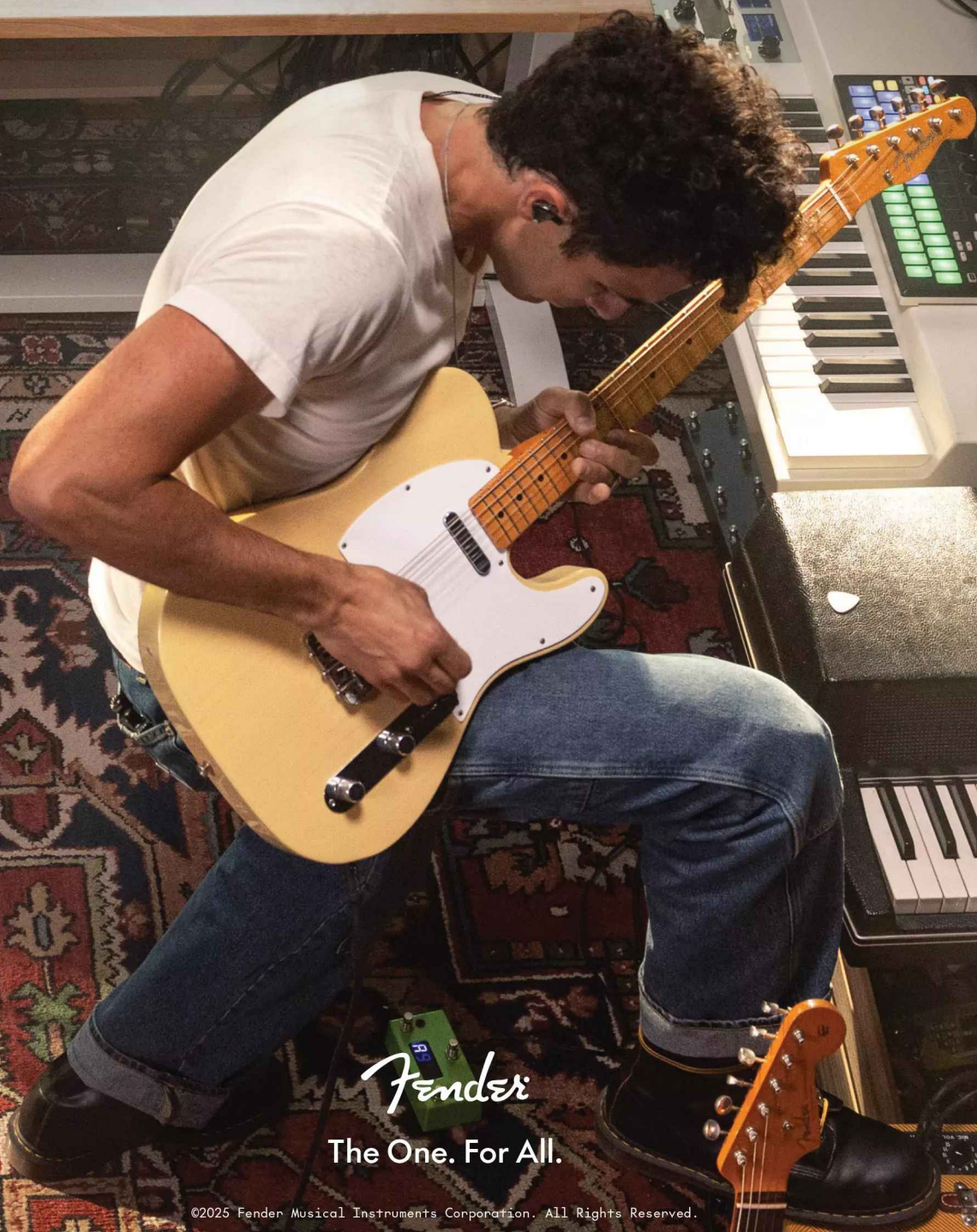
12 12 14-12 12-14 14 12 14 12 14

1/4 1/4

27

LIMITED EDITION VINTERA® II ROAD WORN®

Vintage style for the modern era.



Marc Scibilia plays the VINTERA® II ROAD WORN® 60s TELECASTER in Florida.

Fender

The One. For All.

60 Years Of Legato

For this in-depth lesson Jamie Humphries offers five tracks that follow the evolution of legato guitar technique from the 70s to the present day.

Legato is a 'must have' technique when developing your skills as a guitarist. It's a way to play smooth, fluid lines, as opposed to the more regimented and percussive sound of alternate picking. Legato is performed with hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides played with the fretting hand. It can produce long, flowing runs, often associated with instruments such as saxophone. It's not uncommon to hear jazz and fusion guitarists using legato to mimic their wind instrument brethren, while rock guitarists use it to execute smooth runs over extended positions at high speed.

The technique has evolved greatly over the past 60 years, with guitarists forever exploring and pushing boundaries. The 1970s saw huge changes in guitar post Hendrix and Clapton. Jimmy Page, Paul Kossoff and others had been employing legato in fairly basic form, using blues-based Pentatonic ideas, but in 1978 rock guitar was reinvented overnight, with the release of Van Halen 1. Eddie Van Halen applied legato to rock guitar in a way that had not been seen before. Eddie discovered that by using tapping he could play three-notes-per-string licks and 'movable shapes' to create all manner of tonalities. He could produce wide Pentatonic licks and arpeggios, or play Clapton-inspired lead lines, adding extra notes with his tapping finger. This album laid the foundations for even more technically impressive playing.

Through the late 70s and into the 80s,

Eddie's impact was the catalyst for huge developments in rock. It was the dawn of 'shred'. Steve Vai and Joe Satriani sounded 'schooled' and refined. They employed legato as a way of traversing the neck through all the positions of the scale system, enabling them to play incredibly fast over standard and modal progressions. Paul Gilbert's string-skipping with legato produced unorthodox sounding licks, and was a more manageable way of sequencing arpeggios. But perhaps the Daddy of legato is Allan Holdsworth. Holdsworth played almost exclusively this way, executing wide stretches, arpeggios, and endless fluid lines at impossible speed. His approach to playing 'outside' had a huge impact on Van Halen; check out Eddie's solo on Drop Dead Legs. Other notable legato players from this era include Richie Kotzen, Reb Beach and Nuno Bettencourt.

During the 1990s guitarists pushed legato technique to even higher levels. Rusty Cooley and Ron Thal applied wide stretches and string skipping to Pentatonic licks, producing terrifyingly fast lines, while Thal and Brett Garsed developed four-notes-per-string techniques for even greater speed. Garsed used a hybrid picking approach that enabled him to emphasise rhythmic subdivisions; legato players typically played across the beat, whereas Brett's rhythmic emphasis aligned more with alternate picking. Dream Theater's John Petrucci popularised legato sequences embellished with

Ability Rating Moderate/Advanced



Info <https://bit.ly/GTMAG331>

Key Various **Tempo** Various

Will improve your...

- ✓ Extended scale runs and lines
- ✓ Fretting-hand stamina and strength
- ✓ Licks and melodic vocabulary

tapping and sliding.

Into the 2000's and we have players like Guthrie Govan. Guthrie is a master of all techniques, and can play a multitude of styles to an extraordinary level. His lines are extremely precise, often embellished with chromatic passing notes, or wide stretched string skips with tapping. Other noughties stand-outs include SlipKnot's Jim Root and Mattias Al Eklundh.

Today, YouTube has become a huge resource for guitarists, and a great vehicle for showcasing players. Tom Quayle is one of the most popular guitarists within the online guitar community. He has developed new approaches and uses legato to perform sequences within his runs. He tunes his guitar in 4ths, which enables him to ascend and descend scales without having to change position. It's a great example of how Tom has refined his style around the legato approach, and he is one of many players that are constantly pushing the boundaries of this and many other guitar techniques. Some other great modern players you might like to check out are: Nick Johnston, Danielle Gottardo and the incredible Max Ostro. 🎸

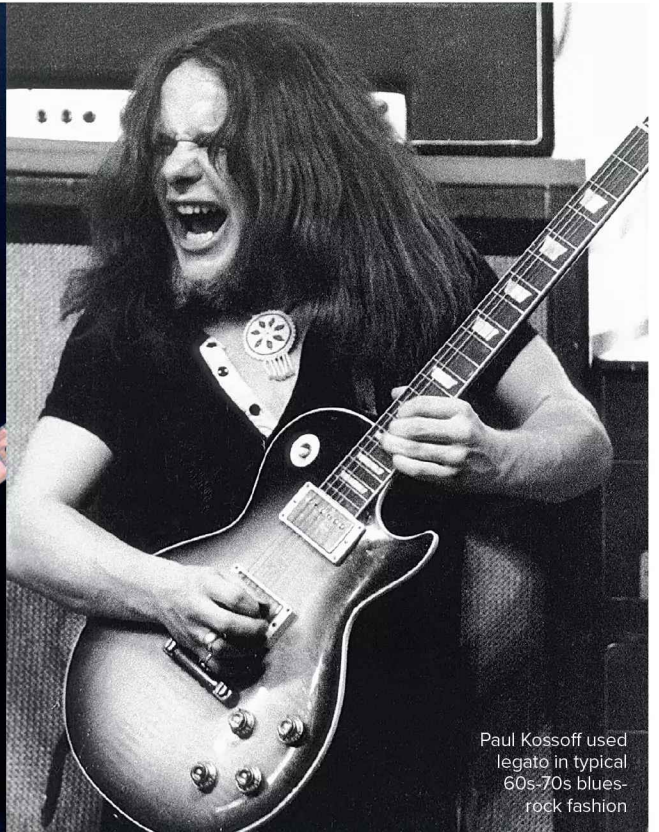
TECHNIQUE FOCUS Legato technique

To maintain a fluid technique it's important to stay relaxed. There are two main moves you will need for legato; a hammer-on, where you sound a note by hammering the finger onto the string, and the pull-off, where you pull the finger away from the string. This is a little harder to achieve although we also see the even trickier 'hammer-on from nowhere', where you sound the first note of a run when changing strings without picking. Keep your fingers no more than a few millimetres from the strings for a more economical technique. Basic finger exercises will help with stamina, but also work on different combinations of fretting-hand fingers, as this will help to develop independence. It's also important to practise things like three-notes-per-string whole-tone stretches, as well as even wider ones, like stacked tone-and-a-half exercises. The three-notes-per-string scale system lends itself well to legato playing, enabling you to cross the strings with consistent three-finger patterns. Work on an even and constant dynamic level, too, as you don't want drops in volume depending on what finger is making contact with the string, or differences in dynamic level between hammer-ons and pull-offs. I would also suggest levelling the dynamics between the first picked note and any upcoming hammer-ons or pull-offs - try picking slightly softer so the first picked note doesn't jump out. Sometimes when descending a run of pull-offs, don't pick at all, but sound the first note on each string with a hammer-on. This results in a very smooth and slippery legato style.

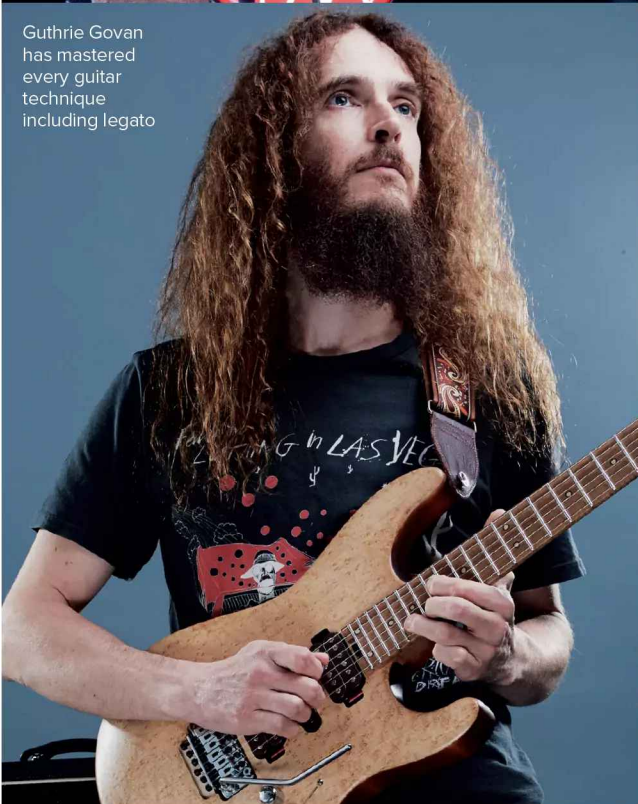




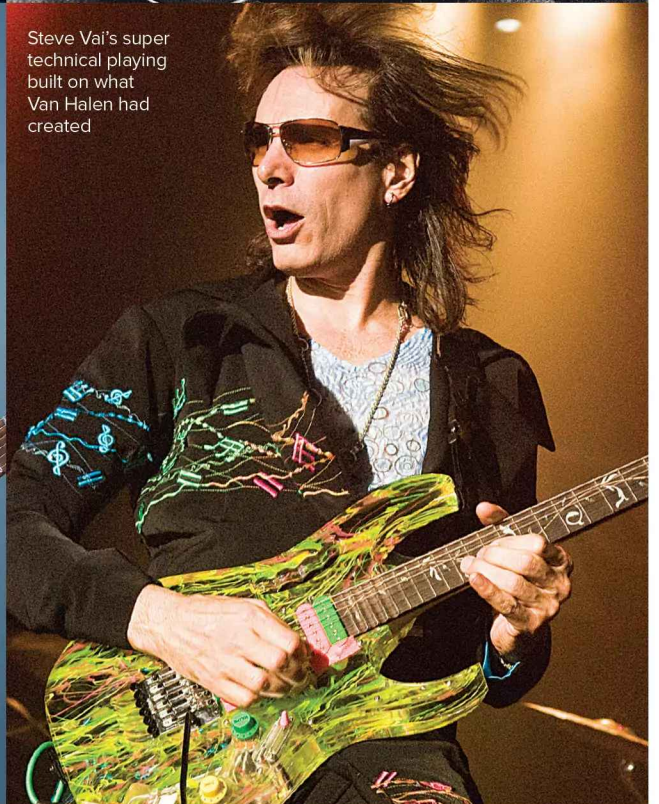
Van Halen's debut album turned rock guitar on its head virtually overnight



Paul Kossoff used legato in typical 60s-70s blues-rock fashion



Guthrie Govan has mastered every guitar technique including legato



Steve Vai's super technical playing built on what Van Halen had created

GRAHAM LOWE / PAUL NATKIN / JORDI VIDAL / GETTY IMAGES



TRACK RECORD Check out these great examples of legato playing. It Bites - Once Around The World; Van Halen - Van Halen 1; Guthrie Govan - Erotic Cakes; Joe Satriani - Flying In A Blue Dream; Steve Vai - Passion And Warfare, Allan Holdsworth - I.O.U., Metal Fatigue and Secrets, Ritchie Kotzen - Eponymous and Fever Dream; Extreme - Pornograffitti; Mr Big - Eponymous; Brett Garsed - Big Sky.

EXAMPLE 1 1970S LEGATO

Our first track has its feet firmly planted in 70s hard rock and metal. The clear inspiration for this track was game-changing early Van Halen.

[Bars 1-4] We kick off with some typical EVH-inspired licks. The first utilises the whammy bar, scooping into the notes as we initially hammer on. Bars 3-4 include a typical Eddie-style Pentatonic phrase showing his Clapton influence. Look out for the 'hammer-on from nowhere' at the 14th fret, third string.

[Bars 5-8] These licks are inspired by Dave Murray. This section includes fast trills, as well as a descending figure that includes hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides.

[Bars 9-12] More Van Halen inspired licks, similar to those heard in that most famous piece! The first lick uses odd note groupings, and includes the open second string. We conclude with a typical three-notes-per-string figure.

The score is divided into several systems, each with a bass staff showing fret numbers and a treble staff showing notes and articulation.
 - **System 1 (Bar 1):** Treble clef, notes E5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Bass staff: 5-3-0-5, 3-0-5, 3-0-5, 3-0. Includes 'scoop' markings and a 'BU' (bend) marking.
 - **System 2 (Bar 3):** Treble clef, notes E5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Bass staff: 12-15-12, 12-15-12, 12-15-12, 12-15-12, 12-15-12, 12-15-12. Includes a '14' fret box.
 - **System 3 (Bar 5):** Treble clef, notes E5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Bass staff: 12-14, 9, 12-14-12, 11-12-11, 9, 11-9, 7, 9-7, 5, 7-5, 4, 5-4, 2, 4, 4. Includes '3:2' markings.
 - **System 4 (Bar 9):** Treble clef, notes E5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Bass staff: 5-8-5-0, 5-8-5-0, 5-8-5-0, 5-8-5-0, 5-8-5-0, 5-8-5-0, 8-10. Includes 'BU' marking.
 - **System 5 (Bar 11):** Treble clef, notes E5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Bass staff: 5-7-5-4, 5-7-5-4, 4-5-7-5-4, 7, 5-7, 7. Includes '3' markings.

EXAMPLE 1 1970S LEGATO

[Bars 13-16] These licks are in the style of Pato's Ollie Halsall, who was an influence on both Alvin Lee and Allan Holdsworth. This lick includes some arpeggios that climb chromatically adding an outside tonality to the solo. We conclude this section with some wide-stretch string-skipping phrases.

[Bars 17-20] Even more Van Halen goodness, kicking off with an example of Eddie's wide stretch shapes that he often employed in

his solos. We conclude with his signature 'Falling down the stairs and landing on your feet' approach with a shape that's consistent across the neck.

[Bars 21-23] We conclude our first solo with more Van Halen licks, kicking off with a much used idea that builds intensity as it climbs the top two strings using typical three-notes-per-string fingerings.

The musical score consists of four systems of guitar notation. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a six-string guitar staff. System 1 (bars 13-16) shows arpeggios with triplets and wide-stretch string-skipping. System 2 (bars 17-20) includes a '8va' section with a '5' fret and wide-stretch shapes. System 3 (bars 19-20) features a 'doop' technique and wide-stretch shapes. System 4 (bars 21-23) features a '6' fret and wide-stretch shapes. Chord symbols C5, D5, E5, G5, B5, and C5 are indicated above the treble staff. Performance techniques like BU, RP, BD, scoop, and doop are marked. Fingering numbers are provided for many notes.

EXAMPLE 2 1980S LEGATO

This example is a solo inspired by the shred guitarists of the 80s. The inspiration for this backing track was Extreme, Mr Big and Zakk Wylde. [Bars 1-5] We kick off with a Joe Satriani inspired legato phrase, similar to ideas heard on Flying In A Blue Dream. Notice how the lick includes held notes followed by fast flurries and position shifts. This lick is very demanding as you only pick once at the very beginning of the phrase. [Bars 6-9] These bars include a position shifting lick inspired by both

Joe Satriani and Steve Vai. Pay attention to the position shifts performed with slides. This lick is based around the F# Aeolian mode, the sixth mode of the A Major scale.

[Bars 10-13] And Paul Gilbert has joined the solo! We continue with some signature position shifting legato patterns on the top two strings. Notice how this lick is rhythmically organised, and great for the timing and synchronisation.

♩ = 150

F#m7

1

4

6

8

11

C#m7

F#m7

EXAMPLE 2 1980S LEGATO

[Bars 14-17] This Paul Gilbert style Pentatonic string skipping lick is very demanding, so take care when jumping strings. When performed accurately it will produce a wide intervallic sound. We conclude this section with a Richie Kotzen inspired wide stretch Blues scale lick. This lick is embellished with tapped notes for added Richie style intensity. [Bars 18-22] Now here's a string skipping and tapping arpeggio figure in the style of Nuno Bettencourt, which follows the accompanying chords. Again take care when crossing the strings, and make sure you sound

the strings with fretting-hand hammer-ons. We conclude these bars with a classic stretching Pentatonic/Blues scale lick in the style of the great Zakk Wylde.

[Bars 22-25] A great example of how Paul Gilbert uses legato to perform smooth and clean arpeggios with the fretting hand. We end with an 'outside' shape-based lick inspired by Allan Holdsworth and Shawn Lane. Take care with this figure as it includes stacked Minor 3rds, so good fretting-hand positioning is vital.

EXAMPLE 3 1990S LEGATO

For this 90s inspired track inspiration was sourced from Dream Theater and 90s Shrapnel Records instrumental rock and fusion players. This track differs from the others as it features key changes, modulating between E Dorian and E Lydian.

[Bars 1-3] We introduce our solo with a lick inspired by Rusty Cooley, Derek Taylor, Ron Thal and Darren Householder. It features wide stretch E Minor Pentatonic fingerings that also include string skipping. We also shift position maintaining three-notes-per-string patterns. The lick

also include tapping embellishment. Take care with this one as it's very demanding.

[Bars 4-8] Here's our first modulation, shifting to E Lydian, so remember, your scale shapes have changed from the first section. This section is pure John Petrucci, with a four-notes-per-string fretting-hand pattern with an additional tapped note. Yes, five-notes-per-string! This lick produces fast, smooth flurries.

♩ = 120

Em11

1

2

4

6

7

EXAMPLE 3 1990S LEGATO

[Bars 9-12] Some Ron Thal inspired licks now, starting with a multi-finger string-skipped tapped arpeggio figure. We are back to E Dorian, and for this lick I suggest tapping with the second and third fingers of your picking hand. Again take care when skipping strings. We conclude with a fast five-note depending chromatic scale lick, that implements tapping. [Bars 13-16] And back to E Lydian. This lick is inspired by Brett Garsed, although it doesn't include hybrid picking, but feel free to experiment!

The idea of this lick is to include chromatic embellishment as well as four-notes-per-string fingerings to create a smooth, fluid sound. [Bars 17-21] We conclude our solo with a melodic legato and tapping figure inspired by Meshuggah's Fredrik Thordendal. Yet more key changes, starting in A Lydian, before modulating to C Lydian, D Mixolydian, and resolving to E Major.

Em11

Emaj13

A5

C5 D5 E5 w/bar

EXAMPLE 4 2000S LEGATO

For this 2000's style track Richie Kotzen was a primary influence as well as Guthrie Govan's playing on his *Erotic Cakes* album. This track is based around A Aeolian, mode six of C Major, with the final section gravitating towards A Dorian, mode two of G Major.

[Bars 1-3] Things kick off with a classic Guthrie Govan style melody that demonstrates his creative use of legato. This lick implements wide stretches, slides and positions shifts creating a wonderfully slippery sound!

[Bars 4-6] See how Guthrie embellishes runs with chromatic passing

notes, often using his first, second and third fingers. The lick concludes with a bendy lick with positional slides into our next phrase, which starts at the end of bar 6.

[Bars 7-8] Here's a monstrous Guthrie lick, using four-notes-per-string fingerings, chromatic passing tones and tapping. This lick ascends the first string and once again results in a very fluid sound. Take care with the separation of the notes with the fretting hand, as well as those position shifts.

Am7 Bm7 Em9 Gsus2

1

Am7 Bm7 Em7

3

Am7 Bm7 Em9 Gsus2

5

Am7 Bm7 Em7

7

Am7 Bm7 Em9 Gsus2

9

EXAMPLE 4 2000S LEGATO

[Bars 9-12] Jim Root's style of legato is more traditional, using three-notes-per-string patterns, and repeating figures. This lick also includes the E Harmonic Minor scale as well as some Diminished phrasing.

[Bars 13-16] More Guthrie goodness, his use of wide stretch patterns embellished with legato performing smooth, clean arpeggios. Take care with the final three-octave Em7 arpeggio which makes use of string skipping. You will have to execute the first note of each group with a fretting hand hammer-on.

[Bars 17-20] Swedish guitarist Mattias Al Eklundh inspired this section, which starts with some dissonance produced by a harmonic and a fretted note a semitone apart. Then we have an unusual sounding lick that uses legato, while gently touching the harmonic at the 12th fret with your picking hand's second finger. We carry on with fast positional shifting legato lines performed with the picking-hand fingers for a slightly softer tone. We conclude with fast legato flurries, which require care as you only strike the first note - so stay relaxed.

Am7 Bm7 Em7 ^{8va}

E
B
G
D
A
E

(8va) Am7 Bm7 Em9 Gsus2

E
B
G
D
A
E

Am7 Bm7 Em7 A Riff

E
B
G
D
A
E

AH

E
B
G
D
A
E

Am7

E
B
G
D
A
E

EXAMPLE 5 PRESENT DAY LEGATO

A modern melodic ballad style in the key of E Major, and its diatonic modes.

[Bars 1-5] We start with some Tom Quayle style lines. Again I have not used hybrid picking for this section, but do so if you prefer. After setting the tone with some melodic licks, bar 5 introduces a fast legato sequence that crosses all six strings. Each grouping of notes is performed on a specific beat.

[Bars 7-9] This lick nods to Marco Sfogli, with a 32nd-note

descending figure with string skipping. Take care here, and build the speed up gradually.

[Bars 10-13] We begin with an ascending maj7th arpeggio that concludes with some two-handed tapping, then conclude with an ascending F#m7 arpeggio employing multi-fingered tapping. This arpeggio relies on a strong fretting hand to sound the notes when crossing strings, tapping the additional notes with the picking hand's first and third fingers.

E

$\text{♩} = 90$

E B G D A E

1

C#m7

E B G D A E

4

E

E B G D A E

6

C#m

E B G D A E

8

A sus2

E B G D A E

10

EXAMPLE 5 PRESENT DAY LEGATO

[Bars 14-19] For this Tom Quayle style idea I have included a slightly slower lick to demonstrate how Tom uses different fretting finger combinations when building runs. This is great practice for finger independence and accuracy. We conclude with a figure that adds chromatic passing notes to a B Mixolydian line.

[Bars 19-22] Another idea inspired by Marco Sfogli, with a very angular

sounding wide stretch pattern. The tricky thing here is the stretch, so take care with the position of your fretting hand.

[Bars 23-25] We end the lesson with another Tom Quayle type pattern. This would benefit from Tom's '4ths' tuning, but I wanted to include a pattern that stayed in one position of the neck. Asgaign, look out for the string skipping!

F#m7add11 **Asus2**

E B G D A E

12

A/B **B w/bar** **E**

E B G D A E

15

C#m7

E B G D A E

19

E **BU BD**

E B G D A E

21

E add9

E B G D A E

23

HOT GEAR



1

Fishman Airlock
RRP: \$TBC • dynamicmusic.com.au

AirLock is Fishman's wireless instrument system that connects any pickup-equipped instrument to your amp or recording setup. Guitar, bass, violin, keyboards – just plug in and play with no cables, no limits. AirLock delivers true analog cable tone, not simulated. Your pickups, your amp, your carefully crafted sound remains exactly as it should be, just without the wire connecting them. Advanced interference management adapts to your environment. Coffee shops, crowded venues, WiFi-heavy spaces – AirLock cuts through the noise while other systems drop out.

2

Gretsch Broadkaster LX
Figured Center Block With
String-Thru Bigsby
RRP: \$4,999 • au.fender.com

The Professional Collection combines Gretsch's sound with modern performance features that deliver an enhanced playing experience. Featuring flagship pickups and electronics, these guitars are designed for powerful sound, total versatility, and exceptional control. Professional Collection Broadkaster LX Center Block guitars provide modern Gretsch tone with exceptional performance. Featuring the powerful Pro Twin Six humbucking pickups, a redesigned Channel Core center block, deeper cutaways for improved upper fret access, and a stunning flame maple body, the Broadkaster LX Figured guitars are designed for full-spectrum sound at high volume, providing the flexibility and control you need to explore new sonic territories.



2



3

3

Phil Jones Bass BP-200
Compact Bass Amp Head
RRP: \$899 • egm.net.au

The BP-200 bass amplifier from Phil Jones Bass redefines tone to go in a no compromise, high performance 200 Watt design that can fit into a backpack for the gigging, studio, and practicing bassist on the go. The BP-200 is packed with the features and inspirational PJB tone that musicians have come to expect while its size, weight and price make it the ultimate in affordable portable bass amps.

4

Squier Mini Stratocaster
RRP: \$369 • au.fender.com

The Squier Mini Stratocaster is the perfect companion for players seeking a reduced-size instrument with classic styling and familiar Fender tone. Highlights include a thin and lightweight body, an easy-to-play "C"-shaped neck profile, a trio of Squier single-coil pickups with 5-way switching for sonic variety, and a hardtail bridge for solid tuning stability.

6

5



5

Phil Jones Bass PJB-C17
cabinet
RRP: \$525 • egm.net.au

Phil Jones Bass have added a new cabinet to their prolific product lineup. The PJB-C17 Cabinet is a 100 watt speaker cabinet with a single seven inch speaker and a three inch tweeter. It's the perfect pairing with a PJB-BP-200 head. PJB is King of the small, portable, light weight, fused digital ground-breaking technology, tone candy with plenty of pepper and super cool.

6

Cort KX600 infinite
RRP: \$2,199 • dynamicmusic.com.au

Long sustain, modern tone, and boutique feel — in a guitar built for players who demand more. The KX600 Infinite combines neck-thru construction, Fishman Fluence Modern pickups, and a roasted maple/walnut neck for precision, power, and playability that's hard to find without going custom. Designed with input from Neil Zaza, it's ready for the stage, the studio, or wherever you push your sound.



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UP TO
12 HRS
OF RUN TIME¹

BATTERY-POWERED CONVENIENCE

EVERSE 8 is powered by a custom-designed high-capacity Li-ion battery pack, fully optimized for audio use and providing plentiful power for up to 12 hours of run time. Protection circuitry reduces the risk of your battery discharging to such a low voltage that it can no longer be recharged – for example, after long periods in storage. Tool-free screws make removing the battery pack effortless. Uncompromising sound quality, unplugged.



IP43-RATED WEATHERIZED DESIGN²

In combination with the rugged polypropylene enclosure, use of the included weatherized input cover allows EVERSE 8 to meet the IP43 rating (water resistant for splashes and light rain) when running on battery power and while Bluetooth® streaming. Built-in feet with no-skid rubber pads ensure the system stays put. Bring EVERSE 8 outside for busking, marching band practice, or the backyard BBQ – wherever you need a PA, whatever the forecast.



electrovoice.com | [#EVERSE8](https://twitter.com/EVERSE8)

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¹The EVERSE 8 battery pack will provide 12+ hours at 95 dB SPL average with typical program material, or 6+ hours at maximum output level before limit indication.
²Always use the supplied weatherized input cover, or the Electro-Voice approved accessory rain resistant cover in wet or damp environments.

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ROCK 'N' ROLL

On the Recording of John Lennon's Ill-Fated Covers Album

Recorded under threat of a lawsuit, while in the midst of his infamous "Lost Weekend", Rock 'n' Roll was the craziest ride of the Beatle's career – featuring top players and a gun-wielding Phil Spector.

WORDS BY JACKSON MAXWELL

2026 UPDATE

Shure microphones sorted & explained

Our pick of the best recording mics from the biggest name in the game

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John Lennon performs onstage in Madison Square Garden, New York, on November 28, 1974.

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ROCK 'N' ROLL

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Recorded under threat of a lawsuit, while in the midst of his infamous "Lost Weekend", *Rock 'n' Roll* was the craziest ride of the Beatle's career – featuring top players and a gun-wielding Phil Spector.

WORDS BY JACKSON MAXWELL

Back in 1998, on the eve of the release of the extensive John Lennon Anthology box set – which featured four discs of previously unreleased material – our pals at *Guitar World* gathered a number of the Beatle's closest collaborators, including Yoko Ono, to discuss the ups and downs of his solo career. The ups were legion, of course – the

raw fury of John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band; *Imagine*, whose piano-led, plea-to-humanity title track became arguably as synonymous with the man as any of the songs he penned for the Beatles; *Double Fantasy*, a thoroughly contemporary, and later incredibly bittersweet, document of a man who had finally found peace.

But there were, by the admissions of their own creators, some lower ebbs – the inconsistent, in some cases very-poorly-aged, *Sometime in New York City* comes to mind.

Then there was *Rock 'n' Roll*, the 1975 covers album Lennon recorded under threat of a lawsuit, while in the midst of his infamous "Lost Weekend", a period of separation from his beloved



Yoko Ono.

Said legal threat came from Morris Levy, Chuck Berry's music publisher, over Lennon's lifting of a line from Chuck Berry's 'You Can't Catch Me' on the Beatles' 'Come Together'. If Lennon recorded an album with a few other songs Levy controlled the publishing for, the latter suggested, there'd be no lawsuit. It was under those less than creatively inspirational circumstances, in 1973, that Lennon gathered a who's who of West Coast session greats at A&M Studios in Hollywood.

"The sessions could have been absolutely brilliant," drummer Jim Keltner said, "but toward the end of each evening, it would just waste away because of the drinking and the drugs all of us were taking, including Phil [Spector, the album's producer]. By the end of the night, John would be singing all slow and slurry.

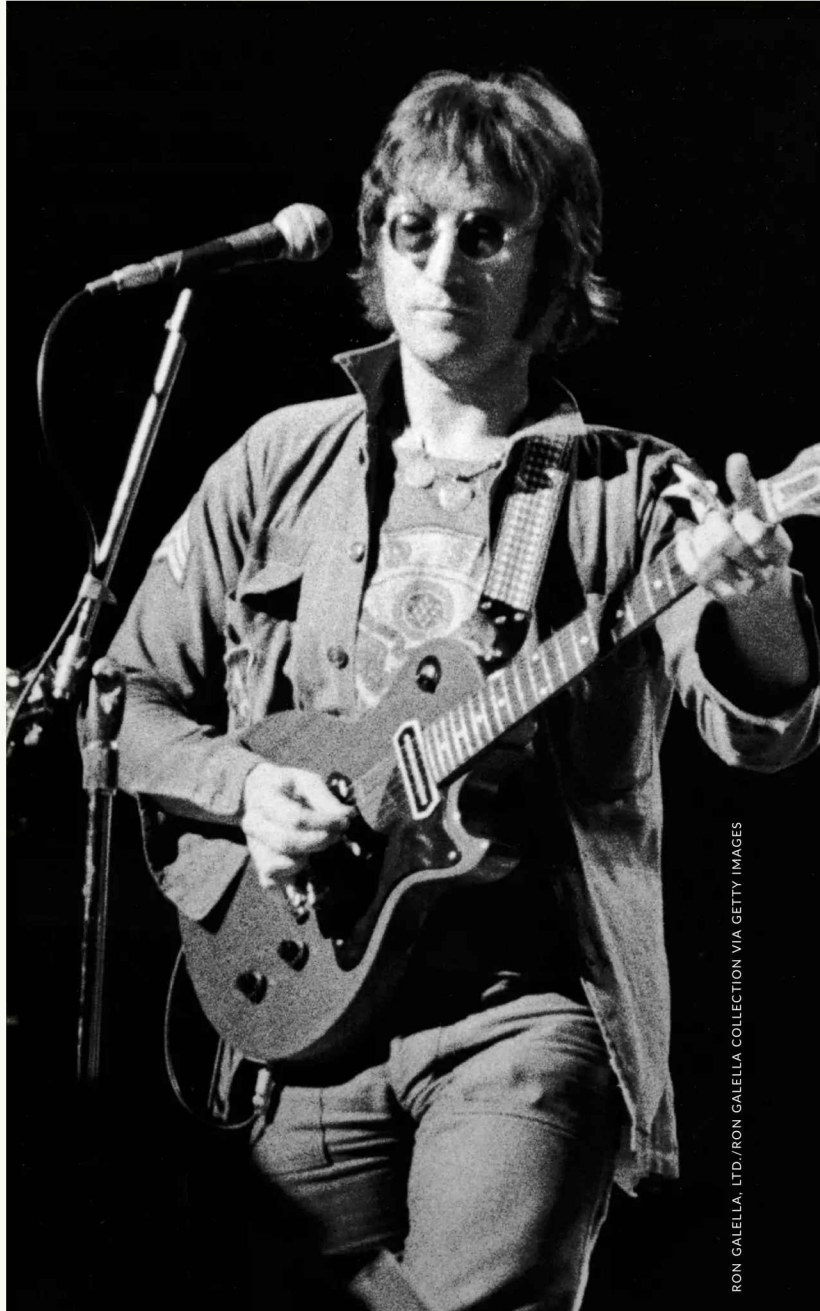
"Just Because' [the album's closing track] is a perfect example of that. It started off early in the evening with a really great tempo, great feel, good vocal. And by the time it was done, it was just a real parody of a drunken John Lennon with a bunch of drunk musicians all playing live."

The drinking was even worse outside the confines of the studio. One of the session aces employed on *Rock 'n' Roll* was the late guitarist Jesse Ed Davis, who more than enjoyed the rampant hijinks.

"Jesse was John's partner in crime, only because Jesse was an unmarried guy who loved trouble," Keltner recalled. "He was crazy himself. He would always volunteer to be with John, like, 'I'll take care of him; don't worry.' Because, amazingly enough, John didn't have a bodyguard in LA – unlike Phil.

"But this one evening Jesse drafted me to help him with John, saying, 'Get in the car with us. You take one side

RIGHT: AUGUST 30: John Lennon performs at Live In New York City Benefit Concert on August 30, 1973 at Madison Square Garden in New York City.



RON GALELLA, LTD./RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES

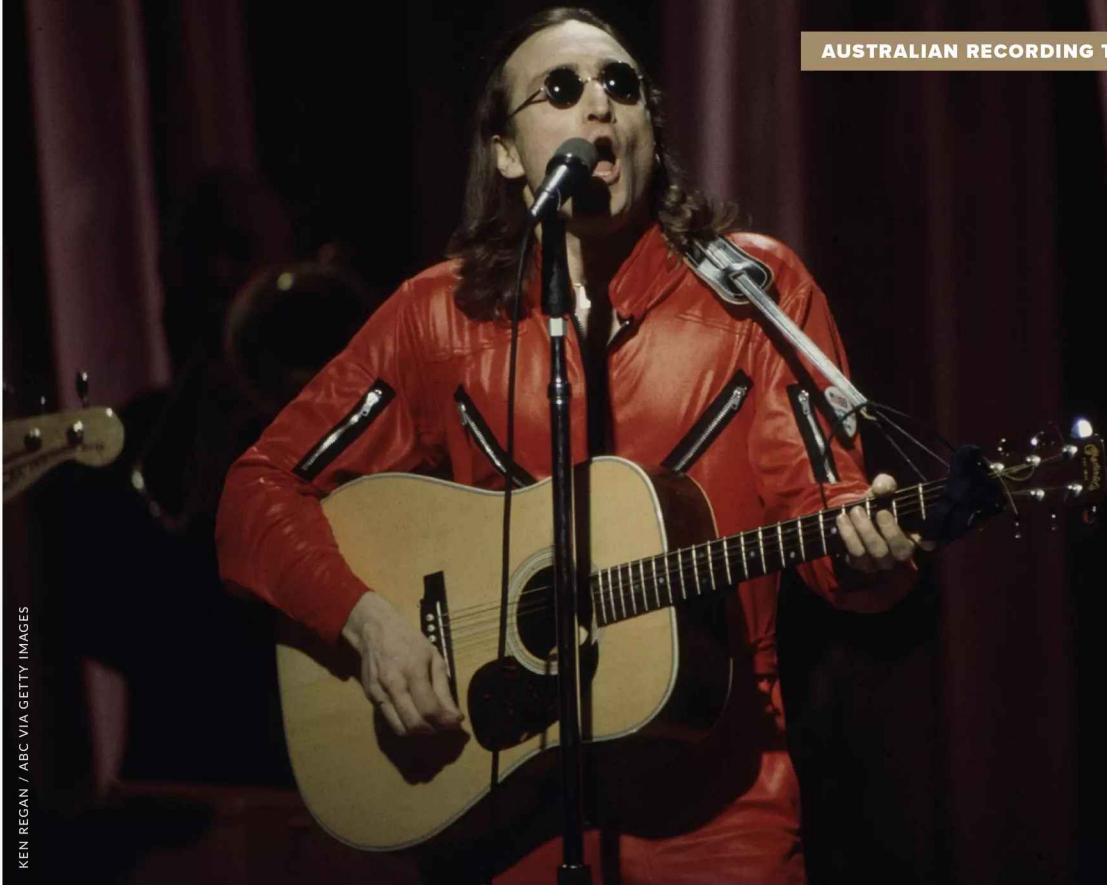
and I'll take the other.' Because John was starting to freak out."

Booze and cars – never a good mix. "He was so drunk that he was yelling and screaming at everybody," Keltner said. "He was yelling, 'Yoko!' at the top of his lungs. Somebody put May [Pang, Lennon's then-girlfriend] in John's lawyer's car. And I was in the back of this Cadillac with John in the middle and Jesse on the other side, and we were trying to hold him down. Because he was trying to kick the windows out of the car.

"He had these big cowboy boots on. John was very strong when he was

drunk. He shoved me down to the floor of the car and was pulling my hair and just kicking the windows. He was shoving and hitting Jesse. And the whole time he's yelling at the top of his lungs, 'Yoko! I want Yoko!' And screaming, 'You know who the fuck I am?' He was just out of it completely."

Though that particular episode luckily ended without further harm, the album's recording was made even more tumultuous by Phil Spector. The great producer's mental health was already precipitously declining, and with it came the rise of his well-documented obsession with firearms.



KEN REGAN / ABC VIA GETTY IMAGES

“He was shoving and hitting Jesse. And the whole time he’s yelling at the top of his lungs, ‘Yoko! I want Yoko!’ And screaming, ‘You know who the fuck I am?’”

Of course, that combination would later end in tragedy.

“We got kicked out of the Record Plant [Studios, where the sessions had moved] because Phil shot his gun off in the canteen,” Keltner said. “He shot his gun at the floor and it ricocheted up into the ceiling. Gary Kellgren and Chris Stone, the studio owners, both decided that was that. We were outta there.”

This behavior, coupled with Spector’s famously controlling nature behind the boards, soured his relationship with Lennon, and the troubled LA sessions collapsed entirely.

As if the album’s gestation wasn’t crazy enough as is, Spector then absconded with the tapes – it would be months before Lennon could get them back. Yoko Ono, with whom Lennon was still in touch, had felt from the outset that the project wasn’t in her husband’s best interest, a viewpoint he would, understandably, come to share.

“I told John it wouldn’t work,” Ono said. “He said when he was in LA, ‘I think I’m gonna do this thing with Phil.’ I said, ‘John, I don’t think you should do that.’ He said, ‘Don’t worry about it, don’t worry.’ But I just knew it wasn’t going to work. And of course he called me later and said, ‘Yeah, you were right – again.’”

By late 1974, Lennon had returned

to New York, straightened himself out, and gotten another original album (*Walls and Bridges*) out of his system. With the threat of a lawsuit still hanging over his head, though, he got another set of crack, first-call players together (including some, like Keltner and Davis, who had played with him during the album’s shambolic early sessions the previous year) and had another go at a host of the ‘50s-era standards he and his Beatles bandmates had cut their teeth on.

For all the tumult, *Rock ‘n’ Roll* proved to be mildly successful, though it would be the penultimate solo album Lennon released during his lifetime.

Most importantly, though, it helped pave the way for Lennon’s reunion with Ono. He would remain in New York City for the rest of his life, settling comfortably into the role of a dutiful husband and father to his son Sean – born later in 1975 – before he met his tragic end on December 8, 1980.

Looking back on *Rock ‘n’ Roll* in a Rolling Stone interview in 1975, Lennon said, “It started in ‘73 with Phil and fell apart. I ended up as part of mad drunk scenes in Los Angeles and I finally finished it off on me own. And there was still problems with it up to the minute it came out. I can’t begin to say, it’s just barmy; there’s a jinx on that album.”



VINNIE ZUFFANTE/GETTY IMAGES

Shure microphones sorted & explained

Our pick of the best recording mics from the biggest name in the game – and what you should do with them.

Review by **Chris Corfield**

Since 1925, this great American brand has been behind everything from Presidential addresses to conference calls, and from music festivals to YouTube reaction videos. That's a great legacy, but due to the many and varied Shure models available, you might wonder which is suited to your purpose. So below we've rounded up our favourite Shure microphones to help you choose the right mic for your needs. From straightforward vocal mics to feature-filled podcast options, there's a Shure mic to suit almost any application. Let's take a look.



Shure SM7B

Best for voice recording

If you've watched a vlog, or listened to a podcast, in the last 10 years, then the chances are you've already experienced the aural delights of the Shure SM7B. This is a heavyweight vocal microphone, designed specifically to give your recordings that professional broadcast sheen. To achieve this, the SM7B has built-in frequency response filters, which do a great job at boosting or attenuating certain frequencies, meaning they don't require major surgery once you get them into your computer. Its cardioid polar pattern also effectively cuts off-axis noise, meaning it can focus all its power solely on capturing your voice. You will, however, require an audio interface or mixer to use the SM7B, as it only has an XLR connection. However, for the ultimate in top-tier vocal performance, it's hard to recommend anything else.

Type Cardioid Connectivity XLR

Features Bass rolloff and presence boost controls, internal air suspension, pop filter



Shure MV7

Best for laptop recordings

Turning its attention to the growing content creation market, and the vlogs, podcasts and streaming setups popping up in bedrooms and home studios the world over, Shure launched the MV7. This is arguably the best microphone for people who don't want to learn about microphones, as in, they want to plug something in and for it to sound great. In less capable hands, this could have led to a dumbed-down, stripped back approach but with the MV7, Shure has another classic on its hands. Sure, there are ways in which they've simplified the overall user-experience, from handy presets in the accompanying app through to the on-microphone touch controls. But underneath that layer of help there's still a high quality, superb sounding dynamic microphone that will meet the standard of any user in a variety of applications. We like the option of using USB or XLR to record - naturally you'll need USB to access the MOTIV app - while the build quality and durability is the same as we've come to expect from Shure.

Type Cardioid Connectivity XLR, USB

Features Complementary MOTIV app, touch controls



“We’ve rounded up our favourite Shure microphones to help you choose the right mic for your needs. From straightforward vocal mics to feature-filled podcast options, there’s a Shure mic to suit almost any application.”



Shure SH55

Best for performing

The Shure SH55 is known to many as the ‘Elvis’ mic, on account of its association with The King himself. It’s easy to see why it’s proven popular over the years, offering vocalists a trusted tool which delivers on the vocal front while also looking extremely cool. The cardioid polar pattern means it focuses directly on the sound coming from the performer’s mouth, while rejecting noise outside that axis, making it ideal for live performance over studio work. The SH55 is not, it must be said, a toy. It is solidly built, and weighs over 600g so is better suited to being housed on a stand, but with that weight comes a degree of heft in the results it provides.

Type Cardioid **Connectivity** XLR

Features Shock mount, on/off switch



Shure SM57

Best for recording guitar amps

Recording instruments, in our experience, is more an art form than a science. Different instruments, from the snares, toms and kicks of an acoustic drum set through to the force of a raging valve amplifier, will yield different results and there is no right answer. However, one thing that rings true for any producer, is the place a trusty Shure SM57 will hold in their heart. Equally at home recording on a live stage as it is in a studio, the SM57 laughs in the face of excessive volume, and delivers the most consistent, usable results you’ll get in any setting. Taking guitar amps as an example; a typical setup will employ two (or more) mics. A condenser, to pick up the nuance and unique character of an amp, and then almost always an SM57 pressed up against the grille to capture the quiet-to-loud dynamics of the performance. It’s a potent combo, and one that has been used on countless records over the years. As with its vocal-focused brother, the SM58, you’ll struggle to find a pro studio anywhere that doesn’t rely on the veteran SM57 for recording instruments.

Type Cardioid **Connectivity** XLR

Features Tailored frequency response, built-in wind and pop filter



Shure SM58

Best for live vocals

If you were to enter any live music venue, there’s more than a high chance you’ll be able to find at least one Shure SM58 vocal microphone. From the largest stadiums, to the grimmest underground clubs, the SM58 has been trusted to deliver exceptional vocal-forward performances for decades. Some users rate the slightly tweaked frequency response, designed to trim some of the mids while accentuating desirable upper and lower frequencies. Some users marvel at its relative low cost, which makes it a viable option for anybody on any budget. For most, however, it’s the fact that - barring acts of god - you’re going to have a very difficult time trying to break one of these. You’ll struggle to find anyone who regrets owning at least one Shure SM58.

Type Cardioid **Connectivity** XLR

Features Tailored frequency response, built-in wind and pop filter

Fender Johnny Marr Signature Special Jaguar

It's been 13 years since we saw the first Johnny Marr Jaguar, and with little fanfare his second signature landed at the end of 2025. What's changed?

Review by **Dave Burrluck**

Johnny Marr's first Fender signature was a celebration of the Jaguar but also with a hint of, 'okay, let's fix the bits that don't work'. This new Special Jaguar follow-up doesn't really change the sentiment except for the obvious addition of three lipstick pickups (that we associate with Danelectro, of course), which replace the custom-wound Bare Knuckle Jaguar-style pickups of the original.

You're certainly not going to mix up the iterations; the lipsticks' unique appearance in their domed split-tube chromed covers almost adds a boutique-style mash-up vibe. The bright plating also matches the guitar's lower control plate and upper shoulder 'rhythm circuit' plate, plus the additional treble-side chrome plate, which originally held three slide switches to switch each pickup on/off, and the classic 'strangle' switch, which mounts the four-way lever

switch for pickup selection here.

It's not the only change as, like the original, there's no rhythm circuit: that bass-side chromed plate holds the 'universal' bright switch and another bright switch for the lever switch position 4 (bridge and neck in series). On our new model the addition is the lowest-placed third switch, a three-position switch specifically for the middle pickup: off, on and solo'd.

Pickup and control changes aside, the guitar follows the original JM Jaguar with its all-nitrocellulose gloss finish, although this time the only colour offered is black. Its offset body is still alder and also features subtly enhanced body contours, while the maple neck retains its vintage style with the body-end truss rod adjustment and a profile based on Johnny's 1965 Jaguar, like the original.

While vintage-style 'small' frets are

retained, this time they're on a more modern 241mm (9.5-inch) radiused rosewood 'board; the first version used the original 184mm (7.25-inch) camber.

Another area that Johnny tweaked was the classic offset bridge and vibrato tailpiece. The former swaps the individual threaded-rod height-adjustable saddles for the Mustang style, which uses three different-diameter solid-brass barrels (each with a central string groove) to create the string camber, which can't move. The original signature had wider vintage-style string spacing of 56.5mm; here that's narrowed to 52.5mm and, as a result, the outer strings sit in a little more.

Another tweak is the nylon 'locks' for the bridge's needle-point height-adjustment screws, which stop the screws moving as the originals tend to. Here, these are stainless steel and larger in diameter than the standard Fender screws. There's also another nylon collar for the push-in vibrato arm, which means it's not only tight-fitting, but it stays put where you want it and is also really responsive to the lightest of touches.

Many of the tweaks for the original guitar - and that feature on this new Special, too - were conceived with the help of the late Bill Puplett, Johnny's long-time repair person of choice. For example, Johnny shares that it was Bill who suggested swapping to Kent Armstrong lipstick pickups for this Special. Meanwhile, the hardware tweaks, such as those bridge-post locks and

NEIL GODWIN



the vibrato arm stabilisation, were conceived by engineer John Moore of Staytrem fame.

Feel & Sounds

Offsets can be heavy thanks to their enlarged bodies, and this sample isn't the lightest we've played, though it is trimmer than the original 2012 sample we had for evaluation. Strapped on, it has a very centred balance and, while it has that shorter scale, it doesn't feel small. It's a very comfortable feel. The same can be said for the neck profile, which is quite full in the hand, even in lower positions where it's a lot thinner, depth-wise, at 21mm than it is by the 12th fret, where it measures 25mm. This vintage-style profile is also structurally very sound and there's zero neck-flex here.

You really need to get your head around the expansive possibilities that the array of switches offer – particularly before you head off to a gig. First of all, it might have three pickups like a Stratocaster, but you can also run it as a two-pickup 'Telecaster' (like the original JM Jaguar), and that depends on where you set the lower-placed three-position push-switch on the bass-side panel. Pushed up towards the headstock, the middle pickup is out of circuit so the four-way switch on the treble side gives us bridge, both, neck, and neck and bridge in series like a Telecaster, with the four-way switch series mod. Move that lower push-switch to its centre position and the middle pickup is now added to the first three selector-switch positions, creating bridge and middle, all three, and neck and middle, while the previous series sound is now just the middle pickup. Finally, with the switch pushed down towards the bridge, the middle pickup is solo'd in all positions of the four-way switch.

Then we have the two bass-cut switches: the universal bright switch (the top one) moves left to right, or treble to bass side. In the treble-side position it's bypassed; in the



bass-side position it's active on all selections on the four-way selector. The middle switch is another bright-switch, but for the bridge/neck series sound. To add to the confusion this switch moves north to south, or up and down: in up position it's on; in down it's off.

To warm up our test amp, we use a '69 Telecaster with its long-serving Fender Custom Shop pickups and four-way lever switch to add the bridge/neck series voice. And the Special sounds a little polite in comparison. That's no bad thing, though, as the lipstick voices have something of a purity to them. There's a lot of attack, but at the bridge there's a relatively smooth high-end. The snap continues with the neck pickup, although it's a fuller and richer sound, of course. Quickly soloing the middle pickup – and, yes, it sits nicely between those two extremes – it's easy to hear why Johnny Marr wanted to effectively highlight this voice.

Bridge and neck in series is the biggest voice on the guitar, but it only appears with the middle pickup out of circuit. Switching the middle pickup to on (but not solo'd) we get bridge and middle (in parallel), which adds some Strat-y bounce. Likewise, neck and middle while all-three on (again in parallel) is a subtle shade in between: all three selections are a little softer sounding. We're beginning to feel spoiled for choice. The two bass-cut bright switches obviously thin out the low-end and enhance the honk.

If you're after articulate clean jangle and chime, well, this is your vehicle, not least with some – or quite a lot of – modulation. But while that may be a major draw, the Special works extremely well with some much more gained sounds, like a good Danelectro, from spluttery fuzz to heavier and much heavier voicings. Here, again, those bass-cut switches really work, tightening the low-end, and are a great tool for band playing and recording, helping to focus the sound.

One thing to note is that the tone control

– which is wired a little differently from standard, and has a lower value capacitor – gives a very usable range and seems to slightly reduce the volume as it's initially rolled back. Subtle, yes, but another useful sonic-shaping tool.

Verdict

It certainly does what it says on the tin. This really is a Johnny Marr tool with all the brightness and articulation his style demands, but it's far, far from limited to our man in terms of its potential use. It also builds on the sonic options of his first signature: there's a bit more Strat in here, plus that 'all round' middle pickup, which can be solo'd. Yet dig a

little deeper and there's a lot more to enjoy, especially when you get your head around the switching options, not to mention the very usable tone control, which does a pretty usable jazz-box impersonation when rolled down, before you turn it back up and launch into Spaghetti Western twang. It loves a pedalboard, too, and takes on yet another character with fuzz and overdrives.

At the time of writing (at the end of 2025), it is the most expensive USA production Jaguar – nearly double the price of the recently introduced Professional Classic – so its considerable appeal will be somewhat limited, but it remains a beautifully crafted piece with very sensible upgrades and those stellar sounds. A serious outlay, then, but also a very serious and considered pro-level and quite unique instrument. 🎸

Pros Very tidy build; nitro finish; expanded sounds from the three lipstick pickups and additional switching; superb vibrato/bridge improvements; very stable, tuning-wise

Cons No idea what 'Limited' means; you'll need to learn what the switches do; considerable outlay at over \$5,000

RRP \$5,499

Contact Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
Web au.fender.com



Cort G200SE

Once again, Cort closes the gap between quality and affordability.

Review by **Steve Henderson**

Cort Guitars is at it again. Just when you thought you didn't need another guitar, their new G200SE arrives and demonstrates just how much value can be squeezed into a simple, affordable package. While the Cort range broadens a little from time to time, their new instruments always represent functional developments and not just a broadening of colour choices or the addition of some "clever" feature that nobody ever really uses.

The G200SE has a budget-level price tag but definitely has some pro features that set it apart from the similarly-priced competition. It's a Strat-style instrument but with a slim off-set waist, giving it a very familiar but more elegant vibe. And the cool continues with a limited colour palette (Scarlet Red, Aged Cream, and Seafoam Green) that all suggest a vintage attitude. A very modern feature is the torrefied maple neck and fingerboard, roasted to remove the moisture content for a lighter feel and a snappier, more resonant tone. Every little thing contributes to the end result and torrefaction is now being utilised by guitar builders on all levels of instruments.

The SE's 22-fret neck is satin finished and has a super-comfy, modern "C" feel along its 25.5" scale. The fretboard radius is 9.45" – pretty much halfway between Fender and Gibson vintage specs, and about what Fender is using today. It makes for a good compromise for smooth single note lines that won't fret out when you bend a note, as well as big, clean rhythm tones. The neck is bolted to the body with four bolts and no plate, and the body behind the neck pocket is chamfered along two planes to allow for better upper fret access. Even the bolts are recessed. Anchoring the strings at one end are simple die-cast tuners

(no locking anything) with one (yay!) string tree and, at the other end, a vibrato bridge that is the typical works-well-so-why-mess-with-it Fender system (their miss-named "tremolo"), fitted with three springs. I found it too tight but removing the middle spring opened up all that feel I was looking for and it works as expected.

The body is poplar, a great alternative to ash or alder and significantly lighter, and it's chamfered in all the right places. Unplugged, it rings clear and loud. This type of "lively" body often means that feedback might be an issue, but I couldn't get the SE to howl with anything but stupid-high volume – and who plays that loud these days. Through a Mk.IV Boogie into either a vintage 412 (the one with the metal grill) or a custom 212 (with G12-65s), the resonance was completely controlled and quite tactile. I also plugged into a 1970 Deluxe Reverb (gorgeous clean tones) and a Cort CM30R, their small solid-state 10" combo – my go-to amp when I'm too lazy to lug other stuff to a rehearsal. The SE sounded bright and snappy while still retaining a tonal depth that was surprisingly authentic.

The humbucker has plenty of grunt – loads of output with a smooth midrange focus. But then, the single coils are pretty hot too, almost as loud as the humbucker. If you want that woody, SRV front pickup tone, it's here in spades; if you're after Bonamassa's bridge pickup bite, you'll get it. Interestingly, the "in between" sounds (position 2 and 4) that we all love so much, usually produce a drop in level, because of the various frequencies that are cancelled, but the SE offers almost a full output with these settings. I don't know how they did that but it's very handy. You can switch between Sultans of Swing and Money For Nothing in an

instant, without having to adjust your volume – just step on the drive pedal.

Verdict

Cort demonstrates that affordable doesn't mean cheap. There's just nothing missing here. The G200SE displays superb build quality that exudes confidence. It has a tight neck socket for that roasted neck. It has flawless fretwork on that roasted fingerboard and neck. The body work and spray job are equally flawless. I removed the scratchplate for an inside look: everything was neat and tidy, way better than a more famous brand (!!!), and the electronic components were first rate.

Best of all, the G200SE plays beautifully right along the neck, and upper fret access is excellent thanks to all that heel contouring and the generous treble cutaway. This is a well-made guitar by any standard: a pro-level instrument with a budget ticket. You could pay three or four times the price and not get a better guitar. If you're a pro, here's your affordable backup instrument (that may get used more than you think right now); if you're a hobbyist, look no further; if you're a beginner, you'll be learning on a guitar that is WAY better than most of us started with. Cort's G200SE raises the bar on budget instruments, offering amazing value without sacrificing quality. ▶

Pros Superb build quality; Plays and sounds great; Plenty of tonal options; Pro features and stage ready

Cons None

RRP \$499.00

Contact Dynamic Music

Web dynamicmusic.com.au





Gretsch Limited Edition Abbey Road RS201 Studiomatic

Gretsch packs the legendary studio magic of Abbey Road Studios into a guitar that's also pleasantly playable and competitively priced

Review by **Daryl Robertson**

For the first time ever, legendary London recording studio Abbey Road has partnered with a guitar maker, and the result is an instrument that promises to deliver studio-grade sound before your signal even hits a single pedal, amp or audio interface.

The centerpiece is an all-new electronic circuit inspired by EMI's legendary Rumble filter, originally designed in the 1950s to eliminate unwanted low-end rumble from historic recordings. Now, that filtering power is at your fingertips, giving players unprecedented control to sculpt a polished, record-ready tone straight out of the guitar.

The visually striking burgundy case not only offers robust protection, but also sets the tone for what's inside, channeling the storied atmosphere of Abbey Road itself; think of it as your own ticket to ride into musical history. The attention to detail is immediately apparent, with the case's light-blue lining

nodding to the underpaint of those legendary Abbey Road doors.

The guitar itself makes a stunning first impression. The classic Walnut finish is deep, rich and beautifully applied, highlighting the wood grain and shimmering under studio spotlights. Pair that with the bound ebony fingerboard and gilded gold hardware, and you've got a guitar dripping with vintage mojo.

More importantly, the build quality lives up to the impressive visuals. Hardware feels solid and reassuring, from the Bigsby vibrato to the strap locks, and the parallel-braced maple body is both resonant and sturdy.

One of the first things you notice when picking it up is the exceptionally comfortable neck. Gretsch opted for a classic C-profile that feels just right in the hand — not too chunky for fast lead lines, but substantial enough to anchor big chords and complex fingerings.

The smooth-bound ebony fingerboard and

well-dressed frets add to the premium feel, gliding under your fingers whether you're playing up high or digging in for rhythm work.

At the heart of the Studiomatic's sonic identity lies its groundbreaking rumble circuit, inspired by the EMI-designed low-frequency filter used at Abbey Road since the 1950s. Originally developed to eliminate unwanted subsonic noise from classic recordings, this circuit has been reimagined for guitar, giving players direct access to Abbey Road's signature clarity and polish.

The rumble circuit is more than a mere high-pass filter. It's a dual-mode system, selectable via an elegant rotary switch on the upper bout. Each mode subtly reshapes the instrument's low-frequency response, allowing you to tailor your tone, whether you're after vintage jangle, focused punch or full-bodied warmth.

With the circuit bypassed, the sound is completely open and natural. Here, the Studiomatic's custom Filter'Tron pickups shine, delivering classic Gretsch chime and bite with a vibrant midrange and crisp top end and an almost boomy low end. This setting is full of dynamic response, the kind of sound that lets your picking nuances and fingerstyle details ring out, perfect for everything from Beatles-style clean arpeggios to more modern, articulate lead work.

Switch to the second mode, and the rumble circuit engages Abbey Road's famous 100Hz high-pass filter. This is where the magic really happens. The low end tightens up, eliminating any muddiness and pushing your sound forward in a mix. Chords become more defined, bass frequencies are controlled, and every note retains clarity. It is particularly evident when it was introduced to our favorite Big Muff fuzz pedal. It's the secret weapon for recording guitar tracks that sit perfectly in a dense mix, just like the studio greats did. You'll notice how this mode lets your playing cut through, with a sense of air and detail.

The custom-wound Filter'Tron pickups are remarkable in their own right. Voiced in collaboration with Abbey Road's engineers, they possess a lively attack and a sweet, singing sustain. Add some overdrive, and the Studiomatic roars to life. The pickups retain character, never becoming muddy or thumpy.

Verdict

This guitar is a love letter to one of the most famous recording studios of all time. Every detail feels thoughtfully designed, and thankfully, it has the playability and sound to match. Okay, most people won't need the more extreme setting of the onboard Rumble circuit, but it will certainly come in handy for some. 🎸

Pros Stunning looks; Studio-ready tone straight from the guitar; Comes with a unique case

Cons The second setting on the Rumble Filter might be too thin-sounding for many players; Bigsby takes a while to settle in

RRP \$2,999

Contact Gretsch

Web gretschguitars.com



Epiphone Explorer 80s EMG

Is this the ultimate unofficial guitar tribute for Metallica fans?

Review by **Matt McCracken**

The image of James Hetfield donning his all-white Explorer, carved with the words “So what,” is an iconic one in metal history — and the 1984 model was largely used to record Metallica’s second album, *Ride the Lightning*, that same year. It was a favorite of Hetfield’s until he got his ESP endorsement in 1987. Despite this, there’s never actually been an official Gibson Explorer made bearing Papa Het’s moniker, and that remains the case with this Epiphone Explorer 80s EMG. Some might feel this is a Hetfield Explorer in all but name; however, Hetfield is not a Gibson signature artist like his bandmate Kirk Hammett. This is more of a firm nod fans will very much appreciate, ourselves included.

It features a rosewood fingerboard and all-mahogany body and neck construction with the usual set neck, and a SlimTaper ‘60s neck profile. Mini die-cast tuners adorn a hockey stick-style headstock with a LockTone tune-o-matic bridge with LockTone stop bar at the opposing end.

The control layout is different from your typical Explorer guitar, giving you a master

volume for each pickup and a single master tone knob. The 3-way pickup selector is also next to the tone knobs, whereas typically on Explorers it’s located at the upper bout, giving you control over a pair of EMG 81/60s humbuckers — Hetfield used Gibson Dirty Fingers humbuckers in his ‘So what’ model until around the...And Justice for All era.

Taking the Explorer 80s EMG out of the Epiphone premium softcase, it’s a nice weight at just shy of 5kg/11lb., and although the Classic White finish isn’t quite as yellow as Hetfield’s original guitar (which is fair enough considering this isn’t a signature model), there are no immediately obvious blemishes or bits of dirt in it. On closer examination, we do spot a very faint crack in the finish where the cutaway meets the neck, which is a common issue with Explorer-style guitars and others with set necks. It’s absolutely tiny, though, and you’d be hard-pressed to spot it unless you were going over it with a fine tooth comb like we did.

After fitting a 9-volt battery for the active EMG pickups (it doesn’t come with

one) we excitedly sat down with it to start immediately downpicking palm muted power chord riffs. The ‘60s SlimTaper neck still feels quite chunky in our hand, certainly not what you’d expect to find on any “shred guitar,” but the 24.75” scale makes it feel decidedly quick in hand, with no time passing before we’re jamming Hetfield’s solo part from “Master of Puppets.”

Tuning stability feels rock solid once it’s settled, and despite abusing it with some hefty bends, we find we seldom have to retune after the first half an hour or so. We do find the stock 10-46 strings are a bit light for our, ahem, heavy-handed playing style, and we can imagine a lot of metal players would swap these for something a bit heavier. We also used it to track in the studio, and it held up take after take, which is certainly reassuring.

Plugging the Explorer into a Neural DSP Quad Cortex, we feel obliged to start with a JCM800 model, and boy does it sound good. The EMG active humbuckers — the classic Hetfield preference of a standard 81 model in the bridge and 60 in the neck before they were refined further with his signature set — are an iconic metal tone, and their surgical precision is perfect for chugging power chords. We find there’s a much lighter touch required than the passive pickups we’re used to, and the sustain is absolutely incredible.

EMG newcomers, be warned; there’s a downside to the precise nature of the pickups. When we switch to a Fender Twin, the clinical nature of the EMGs makes them feel very inorganic. The decreased dynamic range makes arpeggios of open chords quite nice, as everything is very even with the naturally compressed tone, but when trying to play more dynamic pieces, we find there’s a lack of subtlety with them.

For Hetfield fans, though, this guitar is a no-brainer. It delivers the look and playability, and all for a very good price. Whether you want to carve your own lewd slogans into it or just pick up a distinctive-looking guitar, it’s a great choice. Don’t expect to be playing dynamic blues licks or jazz. If you’re all about precision metal tones, though, you can’t go wrong with such iconic humbuckers.

Verdict

If you want a guitar to play all kinds of heavy music, the Epiphone Explorer 80s EMG is one that’ll let you do it with aplomb. It’s a great guitar for laying down precision metal rhythms and searing lead licks. It’s not subtle, but it’s not trying to be. 🎸

Pros Perfect for all types of heavy guitar playing; Neck profile is thick but still feels comfortable; EMG pickups deliver incredible sustain and surgical tone for metal; Despite the large size it’s surprisingly well balanced on a strap

Cons The EMGs make it quite a one-trick pony, but it’s a great trick!

RRP \$2,099

Contact Epiphone

Web gibson.com

JBL BandBox Trio

JBL's debut amp combines room-shaking volume with the ability to dismantle your favorite tracks in real time

Review by **Matt McCracken**

The JBL BandBox Trio is yet another guitar product that's leveraging the power of AI to offer musicians a better practice tool — but it comes with a headline-grabbing USP. At its core, it's a mashup of a smart practice amp and a PA speaker, plus it can separate and isolate a song's bass, guitar, drums and vocals in real time — and all from streamed audio.

The Trio (there's also a smaller Solo model) offers four channels, microphone connectivity and a companion phone app with which you can access a myriad of practice tools like a pitch shifter, looper and metronome. Outputting a hefty 135W RMS via a 1x 6.5-inch woofer and 2 x 25mm silk dome tweeters, the Trio boasts a frequency response of 50 Hz to 20 kHz, so it'll sound great playing your favorite tracks at volume. A built-in battery allows you to play it on the go, with a charge time of around three hours and a playtime of up to 10 hours, depending on what you're doing. You also can run it with a traditional IEC cable.

The BandBox's top panel is dominated by an LCD screen with five rotary encoders below. In the middle is a channel and mixer select menu — and a dedicated button for “stem AI.” To the right is a large master encoder and the power-on button. On the back, from right to left, we have two combo-XLR inputs with switches for mic or line level sources, an instrument input, a Bluetooth button for connecting devices, an aux and USB-C input and, finally, an output section with a 1/4-inch direct out and a 1/8-inch headphone output.

After a pain-free connection to our phone via Bluetooth, pressing the “channel 3” button brings up a selection of guitar presets with 22 models, each with controls for drive, bass, mid, treble and volume available to select. Turning the large encoder runs the gamut of sounds from compressed clean to industrial metal, so there's plenty of flexibility. There are then two acoustic guitar sounds and two bass guitar presets, with the final and 27th

sound being a bypassed setting, allowing you to plug in an amp modeler or another line-level instrument.

Hitting the orange-encircled “stem AI” button brings up a new menu, with a button to adjust whether it's on or off, with settings for drum volume, vocal volume, “others” and a pitch-shift option that goes from -5 to +5 — which is useful for vocalists finding a key they're comfortable in.

We start by playing a song from our phone, going for Radiohead's “Paranoid Android” because it's a complex mix with a lot going on, and therefore hopefully a challenge for the onboard stem splitter.

It does well, but it's not perfect. It's great at removing the drums, because most of their information is transient rather than tonal, but it finds it hard to distinguish between melodic elements that occupy the same space. That means vocals, guitars, synths and sometimes the bass can get taken out or occasionally pop back in when you're not expecting. The same with elements further back in the mix, like backing vocals or additional percussion.

If you want to practice guitar, however, it's amazing. Dialing down the “other” knob, which removes melodic, non-vocal information, we can play along using the built-in amp models quickly and easily. It works well for a variety of tracks, so we try our hand at Turnstile's “Real Thing” and CCR's “Ramble Tamble.” It's immediately easy to see just how powerful stem splitting can be for the guitarist who wants to practice.

The quality isn't good enough to record or play live with — unless you're using a song with a simple arrangement. But for jamming along and practicing at home, players who are filling in with other bands or guitarists playing in cover bands, it's an invaluable tool for honing skills and learning songs quickly.

Verdict

One of the best AI practice tools we've ever used in the stem-splitting function. It's an unexpected but successful venture into the world of guitar amp simulation for JBL, and very much the equal of the smart-amp establishment. Great as it is, its use might be limited for guitarists, who might be better off with the Solo model. 🎸

Pros Offers plenty of volume for guitar players; Surprisingly good onboard amp and effects models; AI stem splitting tool is incredibly useful for home practice; Plenty of connectivity options and USB recording out

Cons Very bass-heavy for a guitar amp; you'll need to tweak; The companion app felt a little clunky, and the tuner wasn't great

RRP \$799.95

Contact JBL

Web jbl.com.au





Yamaha JR1

Is this pint-sized dreadnought Yamaha's ultimate beginner acoustic?

Review by **Ross Holder**

The Yamaha JR1 is a half-sized, miniature dreadnought-style acoustic guitar, and this little strummer provides plenty of bang for its buck. Yamaha invented the JR, or Junior, range to target two players: the typically small beginner and the travel guitarist. By being an affordable half-sized guitar, it checks both of those boxes with aplomb.

Many affordable guitars for kids often look anemic, unfinished and almost like they need a dose of vitamin D — but not the JR1. With a tinted gloss top, rosewood bridge and tortoise-style pickguard, this guitar looks very handsome. Far from being an afterthought, Yamaha has acknowledged that even beginners want a good-looking acoustic, so this puppy gets top points from us.

In terms of build quality, the JR1 feels very Yamaha: solid, reliable and designed to be genuinely usable. Our review model is spotless. It's set up well out of the box, feels durable in the hands and is even in tune. The neck is pleasantly smooth, with what feels like a standard C-shaped profile and either a rosewood or walnut fingerboard (depending on what Yamaha had in the factory that day).

Attention to detail is often where affordable guitars fall short. Sharp fret ends are a bugbear, so it's one of the first things we look for, and the JR1 passed respectably.

There is a bit of fret overhang, but nothing too crazy; it's well within acceptable parameters at this price point. Tuning machines can also disappoint on beginner guitars, but when we finally had to tune this guitar, the vintage-style covered chrome machines were smooth and accurate and didn't slip.

Playing some simple cowboy chords, the type a beginner will learn early on, the JR1 proved a comfortable companion. Its slim neck profile will be a great platform for small hands to learn on, and the smooth finish won't get sticky or uncomfortable.

Having a 540mm scale length with a small nut, the string spacing is quite tight for bigger hands. However, if you're buying this for a young beginner or have smaller hands yourself, it shouldn't be a problem. The frets aren't full-sized, so bear that in mind if you're looking for a travel guitar and have larger hands. Although a bit cramped, it does make chord stretches much easier.

The miniature dreadnought-style body is well balanced, and we foresee a very comfortable playing experience for learners, as the lower bout doesn't dig into your right arm the way some full-sized dreadnoughts do.

Of course, a guitar this size will lean toward the boxier side in terms of sound

character, and the mid-range is definitely prominent, but Yamaha's trademark clarity and brightness are alive and well in the JR1. There's plenty of note separation, with encouraging sustain and articulation that will make beginners and travel guitarists very happy. We do miss a bit of low-end oomph with a miniature body, but having that expectation is unreasonable. If you banish the desire for any real bass thump, there's a lot of enjoyment to be had in the sounds you can coax out of this thing.

Verdict

Affordable, well-built and far more playable than its half-size frame suggests, the Yamaha JR1 is a brilliant option for young beginners and travel-minded players. ▶

Pros Comfortable slim neck that's great for small hands; Well-balanced miniature dreadnought body; Reliable Yamaha build quality and hardware; Included gig bag for lessons or road trips

Cons The tone can be a bit boxy; Tight string spacing may feel cramped for larger hands

RRP \$200-\$250

Contact Yamaha

Web au.yamaha.com

Victory MKX Lunch Box Head

Victory's most advanced compact amp to date promises huge tone-potential in a lunchbox-sized package. We're feeling hungry...

Review by **Martin Smith**

The MK range from which this amp spawned, was designated as the Victory's "ultimate, no-compromise amplifier collection". Feature-packed and fully hand-crafted, these amps can certainly be considered premium: the MK Overdrive model for instance, weighs in at the not inconsiderable price of around US\$5,500. Since it was most likely out of reach for less fiscally blessed players, Victory cleverly found a way to cater for this end of the market by way of its compact and portable lunchbox-style amps. Indeed, it is to the MK family lunchbox that we eagerly turn our attention.

Emerging from a smart padded gigbag is a stout and study enamelled unit, with its heat-dissipating – and somewhat militaristic – semi-perforated steel chassis housing an eye-opening array of front-panel controls. The MKX is festooned with two rows of controls, the top row for the Clean channel and the bottom row for the two overdrive channels, which share a common tone stack after the individual gain controls. The reverb and master controls take the last millimetres of front-panel real estate, though we do still have the Resonance and Presence controls, which can be found nestling on the rear panel alongside the helpful bias points, speaker outputs and the series, non-switchable effects loop. Finally, the mains power is integrated into the rear IEC socket, while the front-panel standby controls the wattage selection between the 50 watts of full power or the nine watts' reduced power output.

Armed with a small armada of guitars and cabinets, we commenced our sonic inspection with the Clean channel. Martin has expressed that his goal was to offer a fully independent Clean channel, rather than a shared topology with potential compromises. Our Stratocaster's single-coil pickups appreciated the benefit, being rendered with a depth and gentle natural compression that made licks and even lead parts hold their own. Speaker-wise, the company is known to use Celestion Vintage 30s for their balance of traditional tone with improved high-end clarity, and we found this to be the case for achieving some clean sparkle on the MKX. The rear-mounted Presence control further enhanced the top-end excitement appreciably.

Sometimes a new piece of gear can unlock fresh musical possibilities, and this amp's Clean channel brings a solid fluidity that can be heard on many contemporary guitar-orientated recordings. Unlike the design ethos of many of the more historic brands, reproducing the vintage character that created their success, the Victory clean here doesn't particularly evoke specific historic references. If pushed to choose a closest match on the colour chart of amps, perhaps shades of Vox are subtly detectable. The onboard and footswitchable two-position



reverb continues the theme of studio-grade sonics without historic baggage. Reverb position I yields a shorter, less dense sound that Victory suggests is more spring-like. It's not particularly splashy or metallic as springs often are, but that lends itself particularly well to the style of this amplifier. Reverb position II has more of a larger, plate-like quality.

The OD I channel lunges forward with a punchy, responsive authority, and a gain range from light 'edge of break-up' through to JCM levels. It does an excellent job of conjuring the Marshall-esque crunch, with a nod more to the later metal-face Marshall sound, rather than the earlier 'Plexi' tones.

Diving into what may be considered as this amp's main course, the OD II channel, it becomes immediately clear why Martin Kidd's designs are a favourite of many a virtuoso. The response is lightning-fast and mid-forward, and both fast-picking and legato styles sound equally forthright and impressive. When you're ready to hold that yearning bend, there's glorious harmonic feedback aplenty for that forever sustain, given a sufficiency of master volume juice.

In the rhythm department, those crushing, heavy drop-tuned riffs will sound every bit as impressive as you'd expect, perhaps with a little midrange cut. If a little more depth is required from a thinner-sounding guitar, the Resonance control has you covered. Overall, the tone has a smooth, rich midrange character that flatters many guitar styles, especially fusion and legato, but the Presence control adds all the aggressive bite to the fore.

In a stage context, the pair of included double footswitches allows for channel

selection, master volume and reverb options, which covers most of what players may wish to switch, with the exception of the effects loop status. For home use, low-power mode reduces the output to nine watts, which means you can enjoy its full overdriven roar at whisper-quiet levels.

Verdict

This amp will appeal to high-gain players without unlimited budgets, and if you've had your eye on the MK50 head but couldn't justify the cost, this one's tailor-made for you. It brings forth versatility, portability and controllability. Price-wise, it does reside at the higher end for lunchbox-style amps, but then it's worth noting that it offers more in terms of wattage and channel count than most. It doesn't, however, have cab-emulated output facilities, and the two double footswitches – each with a separate cable – are perhaps a bit of a faff for a compact package. But if it's rich, flattering overdrive combined with scaled-down size and cost that you value, the MKX could indeed prove victorious. 🍷

Pros Three switchable channels with additional master volume controllability; selectable high/low output; onboard digital reverb

Cons Two footswitches, each with its own cable, seems a little cumbersome; a Bright switch for the Clean channel would be a useful addition for darker-sounding speakers and guitars

RRP \$3,499

Contact Victory Amplification
Web www.victoryamps.com

Fender Studio Pro 8

Is this the DAW every guitarist has been waiting for?

Review by Phil Weller

Following the October 2024 launch of Studio One 7, which introduced AI-powered tools like stem separation, Global Transpose and tempo detection, Fender Studio Pro 8 gets a clean aesthetic and workflow refresh, along with other key features, including Studio Verb, a reverb effect with different room modes and a spectral display. Biggest of all? Amp and effects models drawn from Fender's Tone Master Pro.

There's also a great consideration for how the software will be used with every session. Chord Assistant is another new tool, recommending chords to users as they thrash out ideas, which will be welcome news to those with second-rate theory knowledge, and an AI conversion tool for turning audio files (be they recorded or imported) into editable MIDI notes, and notation software making for a powerful one-stop shop.

Fender's modus operandi with Studio Pro 8 is for a DAW ecosystem that puts the guitar at its heart, and so pretty much every detail is built with that in mind. The general workflow leverages a signal chain-like system, with its new Channel Overview panel, giving a snapshot of what's going on.

Another great feature is Replace within the Mustang and Rumble amp and effects suite. If we've picked our amp and now want to shoot out a range of fuzz pedals to go before it, clicking Replace when the pedal is selected allows us to then cycle through the range of options, making it really easy to find the fuzz.

Fender Pro Studio comes with a lot of free instruments and plugins, but it's the guitar

amp suite that draws us in. After a quick trawl through its pretty vast collection of amps — which is far from exclusive to Fenders — it's clear that what we get here is a hefty sample of the Tone Master Pro's sonic delights, and there's a lot to love.

The Fender Twin combo is, unsurprisingly, a wonderful pedal platform, its clean, neutral tones easily mouldable to being a shimmering ambient tone with smatterings of delay, reverb and chorus.

For us, the most fun was had messing with the surprise additions, and they were all very responsive to our pick attack. Among them is the Excelsior, the wacky-looking, retro-futuristic combo Fender brought out in 2012 as part of its "Pawn Shop Special," and its caked in Fifties edge-of-breakup, bright, spanky, but not without a bit of balls kind of tones. We went from zero to Dave Davies on a Charvel San Dimas, even with its Fishman Fluence humbuckers set on the modern voicing. Cranking the gain also gives that "cracked speaker" sound.

Upon discovering there were both a Vox AC30 and a Rangemaster-style treble booster, our excitement peaked, and dialing in a tone akin to Rory Gallagher's "Shadow Play" was quick, easy, and made pinch harmonics an utter delight.

What we did find was that the metal offerings, from its takes on the 5150 and Bogner Uberschall, were a little cliché; they're geared for classic rather than modern metal. They had gain galore, it was hard to dial that in for rhythm without getting too fluffy. The

Friedman BE-100 was the pick of the bunch for us here, and we had some success pushing a rockier amp like an Eighties Marshall, but if you're used to getting your core amp sounds from the likes of Universal Audio and Neural DSP, you might not be tempted to drop them yet.

Effects-wise, there is so much to get lost in, with our highlights including the presence of a Big Muff, Memory Man Delay and an EG7 Graphic EQ, in lieu of the amps having EQs as standard. We'd also like to give a quick shout-out to the Studio Verb plugin, which brings incredible, immersive reverbs to the fore, offering a little more Pink Floyd etherealness to whatever tones we dial in.

Verdict

At long last, a DAW puts the guitar at the heart of its operations while packing it with versatile, high-quality amps and effects, plus a swathe of songwriting and band-life-assisting features built for the creative guitarist's everyday needs. 🎸

Pros Really easy to use; Built-in plugins are great quality; Recordings to MIDI conversion is a next-level tool for creativity

Cons Search features within the Mustang and Rumble amp sims would be great; Customizable parameters on the Channel Overview would also help workflow

RRP \$349 (perpetual licence);

\$30 (monthly)

Contact Fender

Web au.fender.com



EarthQuaker Devices ZEQD Pre-Tube Preamp Pedal

This collaboration is exactly what the doctor ordered for modern guitarists suffering from a serious case of digital fatigue

Review by **Daryl Robertson**

When two Ohio-based guitar companies get together, good things tend to happen. Case in point: the ZEQD-Pre is a collaboration between EarthQuaker Devices and Dr. Z Amplification, aiming to bring genuine tube tone to your pedalboard in a surprisingly versatile package. This stomp is the latest bit of guitar gear that's taking aim at the slew of digital devices that seem to have become part and parcel of being a guitarist in 2026.

The result is something a bit different from your typical preamp pedal. Built around an EF86 tube, this stomp promises the high headroom and pristine cleans Dr. Z is known

for. The ZEQD-Pre is an all-analog design that can serve as a clean boost, a direct recording solution, a headphone practice amp or all three at once. All pretty impressive considering there isn't a lick of digital trickery in sight.

At its core, the pedal is refreshingly straightforward, with very little in the way of dials or switches. There's a passive three-band EQ, volume control, and a boost switch that bypasses the EQ entirely to really let the tube do its thing. Where things get interesting is the I/O. With a standard output for your amp, a balanced XLR for direct recording or going

ampless on stage, and a headphone jack with built-in analog cabinet simulation, the ZEQD-Pre is ready for just about any scenario you can throw at it. Even better, all outputs work simultaneously, making it a genuinely useful studio tool.

Like anything from Ohio pedal titans EarthQuaker Devices, the ZEQD-Pre feels robust and rugged; there's a real heft to this unit that we appreciate. It's no mini enclosure, but it's still smaller than a vintage Big Muff, and you need that real estate to pack in all the technological wizardry happening under the hood.

This unit is ridiculously easy to use, too. No digital menus to navigate, no hidden functions requiring a PhD to unlock, just grab your favorite guitar, plug in and you're off to the races. Whether you're setting up for practice, tracking in the studio or heading to a gig, the EQD ZEQD-Pre adapts without any fuss. The beauty of this setup is its versatility. One minute you're woodshedding at home, the next you're in the studio running that same signal straight into the interface via XLR, then you're hitting the stage for a three-hour set with the same setup. No reconfiguring, no menu diving; just grab and go.

Big, loud and pristine — that's what's on offer with the ZEQD-Pre. The EF86 tube is often described as hi-fi, and honestly, that's the perfect way to describe what's coming out of this thing. As Dr. Z himself puts it, "You hit this pedal on, and your amp just becomes huge," and he's not kidding. There's a three-dimensional quality to the sound, a sense of space and clarity that makes everything feel more present and alive.

This pedal more than delivers that touch sensitivity we look for. Its frequency response means harmonic richness without sacrificing definition, giving you that full-spectrum clarity from deep lows to sparkling highs that Dr. Z amps are famous for.

Verdict

Simple to use, built like a tank and, thankfully, with the tone to boot, both Dr. Z and EarthQuaker Devices should be proud of this fantastic little pedal. We can easily see this stomp becoming the beating heart of the rig of guitarists tired of the digital age. 🎸

Pros Versatile I/O arrangement; Massive amount of headroom; Convincing all-analog cab sim; Can really take pedals well

Cons The boost can be a little bass-heavy; May be too clean for some users

RRP \$659

Contact Yamaha

Web au.yamaha.com

“This unit is ridiculously easy to use, too. No digital menus to navigate, no hidden functions requiring a PhD to unlock, just grab your favorite guitar, plug in and you're off to the races.”



POWER  TOOLS

Diezel VH4

1992-present

CATEGORY AMPLIFIER HEAD

BY CHRIS GILL



For fans of high-gain amps, 1992 was a breakthrough year unlike any other (previously or since). This period saw the introduction of the peavey 5150, Mesa Boogie Dual Rectifier, Bogner Ecstasy, VHT Pitbull Ultra Lead and other contenders, along with the Engl Savage 120 arriving in early 1993. All of these were game-changing models that still play a major role in the sound of rock and metal guitar.

Perhaps the most outlandish amp to make its bow during 1992 was the Diezel VH4 — a 100-watt beast driven by four EL34 or KT77 power tubes and featuring four truly independent channels, each with its own preamp section and 12AX7 preamp tubes (a total of seven). With its individually voiced Clean, Crunch, Mega and Lead channels, each with its own set of gain, volume, treble, middle and bass controls and send/return inserts, the VH4 essentially offers four preamps in a single package. These are housed along with a power amp with its own master volume, presence (centered at 4kHz) and deep (centered at 90kHz) controls, plus serial and parallel effect loops, the latter with a front-mounted volume knob as well.

One of the more complicated features of the VH4's design is that a MIDI controller is essential for live performance channel switching, but the inclusion of MIDI In and Thru jacks also allowed guitarists to easily incorporate the amp in a sophisticated rig with other MIDI devices like preamps and effects, or even other amps.

The genius of the VH4's overall design was how it provided relatively simple, no-nonsense operation

SUGGESTED SETTINGS

Tool Deep Rhythm

MEGA CHANNEL**Gain:** 4.5**Volume:** 5.5**Treble:** 8.5**Middle:** 10**Bass:** 8


Creedence Clean

CLEAN CHANNEL**Gain:** 6**Volume:** 5**Treble:** 6**Middle:** 5**Bass:** 5

“John Fogerty uses the Clean channel of a Diezel VH4 to replicate the sounds of his old Kustom amps when performing CCR classics”

that made it easy for any guitarist to dial in desired sounds while delivering instant access to four very distinct tones. The slanted configuration of each channel's control knobs is eye-catching but also functional, helping to avoid confusion when dialing in tones for each channel. However, the VH4 was not the typical “everyman” chameleon amp that many multi-channel amps aspire to be. It has its own unique tonal character and textures that never attempt to emulate popular Fender and Marshall sounds, but rather improve upon them or go beyond them.

The Mega channel, in particular, has played a major role in heavy guitar tones since the early Nineties with its huge, focused bass, lower midrange punch and searing treble. This is the channel that players like James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett, Muse's Matt Bellamy, Tool's Adam Jones, Dave Mustaine and Korn's Munky and Head have frequently relied on to craft thick, harmonically complex rhythm guitar tones, particularly when using down-tuned guitars. Eighties shredders like Warren DeMartini, Chris Impellitteri and George Lynch have also turned to the Diezel VH4 for modernized rhythm tones and sustaining leads, often preferring the smooth, compressed high-gain textures of its Lead channel.

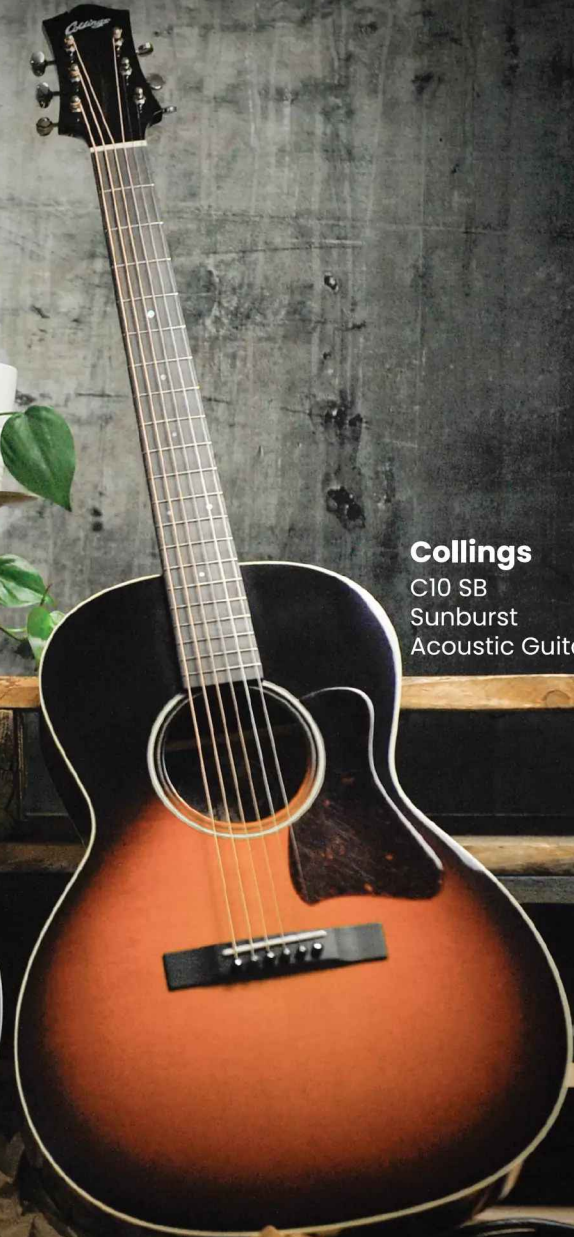
Unlike many high-gain amps, the VH4 also delivers bluesy overdrive and crisp clean tones. In fact, John Fogerty uses the Clean channel of a Diezel VH4 on stage to replicate the crystalline sounds of his old Kustom K200A amps when performing Creedence Clearwater Revival classics. 

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