

HISTORY LESSON
George Michael's **Gretsch Synchromatic Model 160**



15 PAGES OF TECHNIQUE
The origins of **Eddie Van Halen**, plus **Buckethead**

AUSTRALIAN

guitar

THE REAL PLAYER'S PICK

VOL170 AUS $12.95 | NZ $13.90 (INC. GST)

CERTIFIED GUITAR PLAYERS

TOMMY EMMANUEL ON CHET ATKINS

DEEP ON GRETA VAN FLEET

*"If you're not p**sing someone off, you're probably not making great art"*

"I THINK OF MYSELF AS A GUITARIST, REALLY"

McCARTNEY ON SIX STRINGS

THE BEATLES' BASSIST & HIS SECRET OBSESSION

NO NONSENSE, NO OVERTHINKING

NEUROSIS ON STEVE ALBINI





Reviews
JACKSON, **FENDER**, GIBSON, **CORT**, MARTIN, **ORANGE**, EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

Interviews
ANTHRAX | **JAMES IVANYI** PEARSON INSTRUMENTS
+ MORE

ISSN 1329-7686
9 771329 768605 10

FUTURE



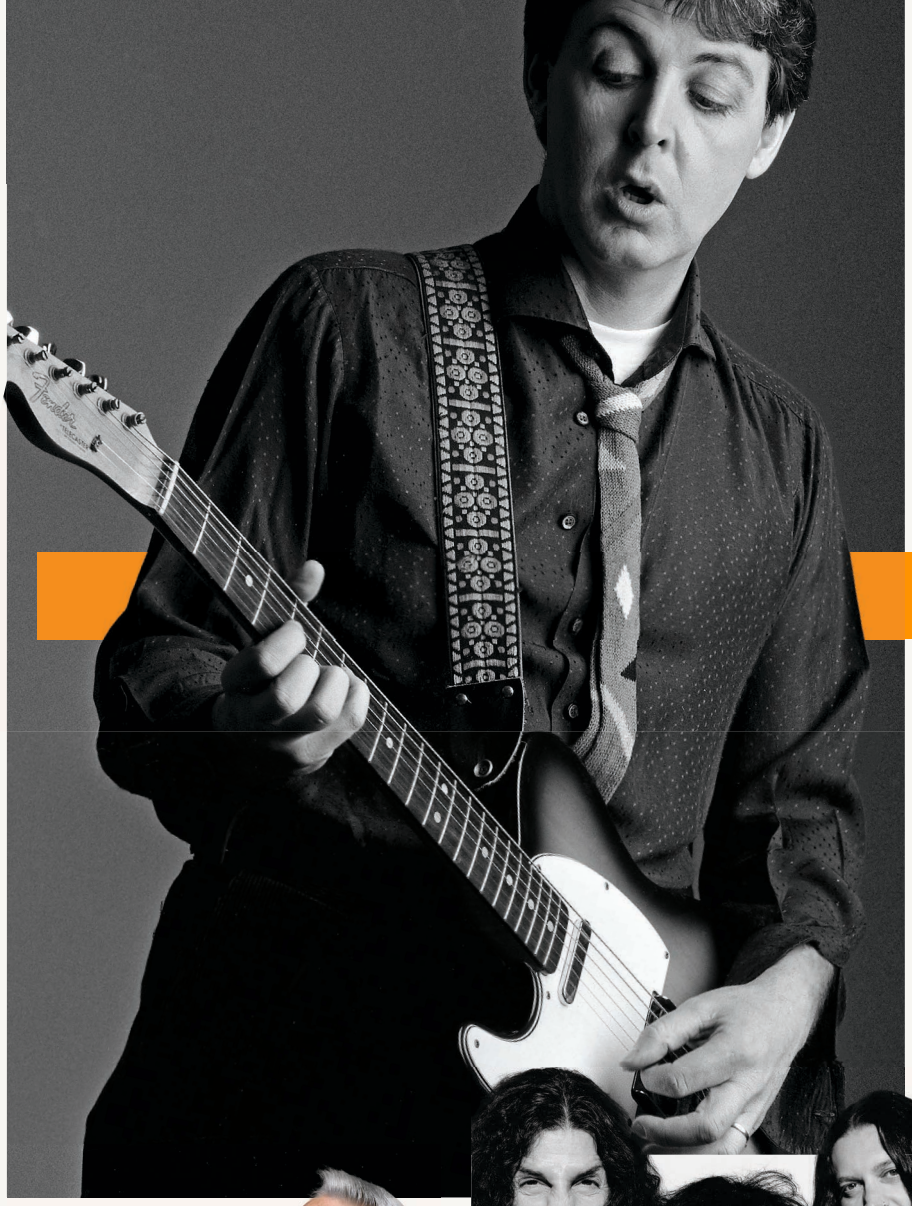
SIGNATURE IV MONARKH™ SC & III PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS® BASS V

Jackson®

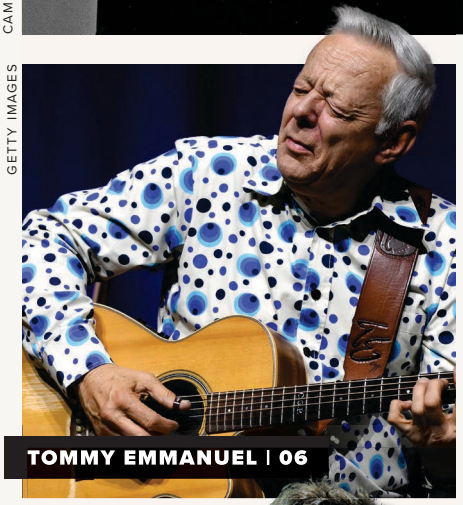
SHOP NOW: JACKSONGUITARS.COM/COLLECTIONS/SLEEP-TOKEN

CHARVEL®

©2026 Jackson/Charvel Manufacturing, Inc. All rights reserved.

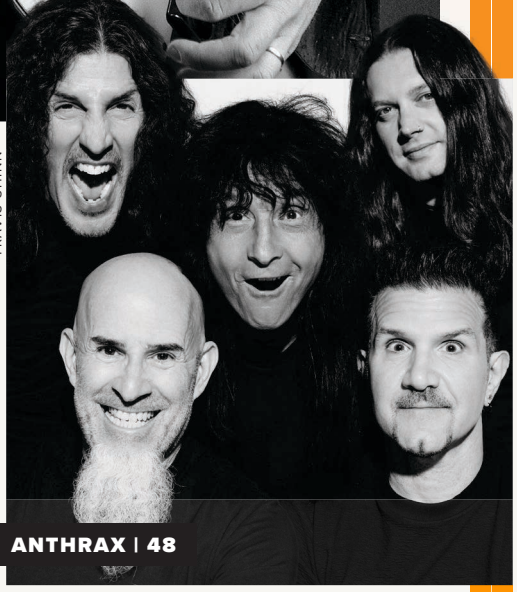


CAMERA PRESS / CLIVE ARROWSMITH



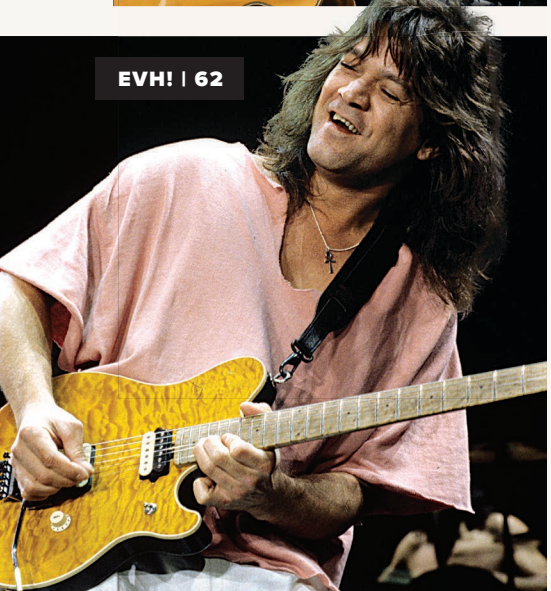
GETTY IMAGES

TOMMY EMMANUEL | 06



TRAVIS SHINN

ANTHRAX | 48



EVH! | 62



TIM MOSENFELDER / GETTY IMAGES
BOBBY COCHRAN

NEUROSIS | 83

Tune Ups

06 Tommy Emmanuel / Chet Atkins
09 Cashier
10 James Norbert Ivanyi
12 Jam Pedals / King Gizz
14 Pearson Instruments
16 Funkadelic
18 Protest the Hero

Cover features

20 McCartney on six strings

Features

38 Greta Van Fleet
48 Anthrax
56 Gretsch Synchromatic Model 160

Regulars

05 News
78 Hot Gear
98 Power Tools

Lessons

62 The roots of EVH!
74 Buckethead

Australian Recording Technique

83 Neurosis on Steve Albini
87 EV Everse 8

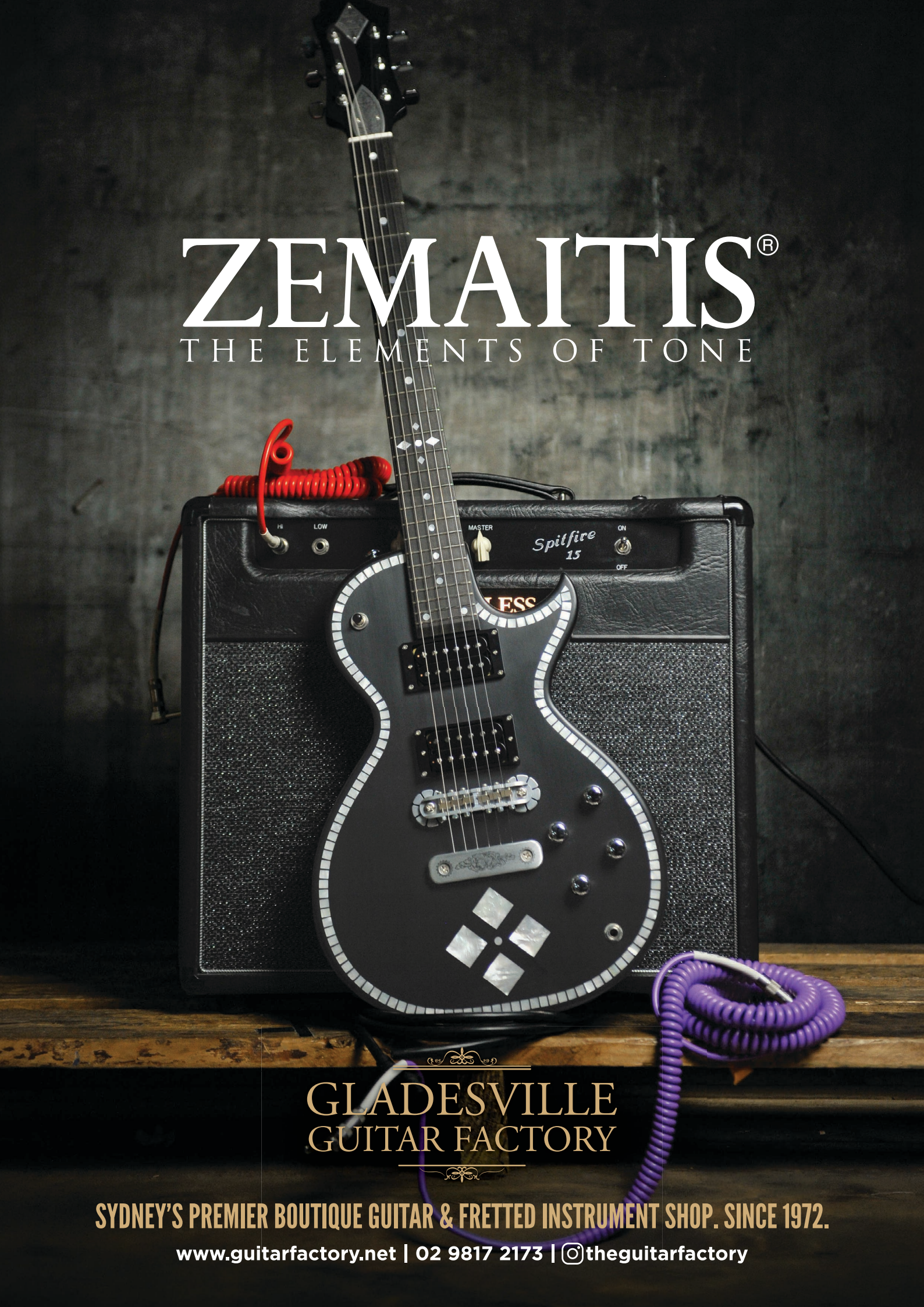
Reviews

88 Jackson Pro Plus Signature Sleep Token IV Monarkh SC
90 Gibson Victory Floyd Rose
91 Cort CM40B and CM150B MK2
92 Martin Shawn Mendes 000-10E
93 Orange OR60
94 Fender '62 Deluxe
96 EarthQuaker Devices Sunn O))) HalfLife Octave Distortion + Booster
97 JBL Easysing + Easysing Mini



Never miss an issue. Subscribe now

Subscribe at **www.techmags.com.au**
Free delivery across Australia


ZEMAITIS®
THE ELEMENTS OF TONE
Hi
LOW
MASTER
Spitfire
15
ON
OFF
GLADESVILLE
GUITAR FACTORY
SYDNEY'S PREMIER BOUTIQUE GUITAR & FRETTED INSTRUMENT SHOP. SINCE 1972.
www.guitarfactory.net | 02 9817 2173 | theguitarfactory

COVER PIC: CAMERA PRESS / CLIVE ARROWSMITH



SUBSCRIPTIONS

techmags.com.au or call
+61 2 8227 6486
PO Box 161, Hornsby, NSW 1630

EDITORIAL

EDITOR Shaun Prescott
GROUP ART DIRECTOR Troy Coleman

CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Bird • Joe Bosso
Andrew Daly • Chris Gill
Steve Henderson • Joel McIver
Amit Sharma • Charlie Wilkins
Stuart Williams • Henry Yates

ADVERTISING

NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER
Lewis Preece
EMAIL lewis.preece@futurenet.com

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

All contents ©2026 Future Publishing Australia or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

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

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

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

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

Chief executive **Kevin Li Ying**
Non-executive chairman **Mark Brooker**
Chief financial officer
Sharjeel Suleman
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244



Fender says it's solved single-coil hum issues with a new breakthrough

Fender might have finally found the solution to single-coil hum with a new passive system that could have a major impact on your playing experience.

Single-coil pickups have been a huge part of Fender's electric guitar legacy, but their inherent humming has always been a drawback. Granted, there have been plenty of single-coil innovations over the years tasked with solving the same problem. Fender has its own Noiseless Pickup range, for example. But with its new Silent System, Fender reckons it's got the perfect solution.

The system is making its debut in Limited Edition American Professional Classic Stratocaster and Telecaster models, and it swerves from the usual noiseless pickup approach we're well used to after 80 years of problem-solving.

Instead, the Silent System is a passive, battery-free system built into the guitars, and it's designed to cater for "almost any pickup installed," meaning aftermarket mods shouldn't break the silence.

The system tucks discreetly underneath the pickguard, so these two new models look no different on the outside. Take the pickguard off, and you'll find a fairly uncanny arch-shaped cavity, with a route to the pickup selector, controls, and pickups themselves. What exact science is going on here remains a closely guarded secret, but the system lies in waiting, ready to snuff out any unwanted hiss.

PHIL WELLER



GETTY

Johnny Marr's guitars including several iconic Smiths guitars – sells for almost $7m at auction

Nearly 100 of Johnny Marr's history-lavished guitars have sold for £4 million at auction. The official sum of £3,649,280, or $6,870,150 in Australian dollars, was achieved after a five-hour Christie's auction and included buyers from 34 countries – showing how far the Smiths guitarist's reach spans.

The lot included a bizarre nine-pickup Stratocaster, his 1982 Rickenbacker 330 Jetglo (which also moonlighted in Oasis), and the 1960 Cherry Red ES-355, used as a bargaining chip to get the indie band to sign to US label Sire Records.

The history and prestige of those instruments were reflected in their respective sale prices, totalling over £500,000 (approx. $950,000). The Rickenbacker fetched £358,400 ($674,790), the ES-335 went for £204,800 ($385,594), and the bonkers Strat smashed its £10k estimate by going for £38,400 ($72,294).

Three other guitars reached triple-figure sums. The 1984 Gibson Les Paul that starred in the music video for the Smiths' 1985 track The Boy With The Thorn In His Side sold for £204,800 (approx. $386,000). His custom Roger Giffin T-Style, in its standout green finish, went for £121,600 (approx. $229,000). It is also tied to the Smiths' music video history via Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now and the Meat is Murder album more broadly.

Rounding out the trio is a 1963 Epiphone Casino, which was tuned up to F# and paired with a Fender Twin Reverb for the iconic main guitar track of How Soon Is Now. Estimated to sell for just £30,000, the hammer eventually went down at £102,400 (approx. $193,000).

PHIL WELLER

Nearly 40% of music released in July used AI

Here's a sign of the times if ever there was one: according to a new survey almost 40% of new music released globally last month used AI in its creation.

That jaw-dropping stat has come from a new survey by SubmitHub, an online platform that allows users to submit music to playlists and blogs. They analysed over a million pieces of music – a huge sample size - and using their own AI music detector, SH Labs, found that 23.2% of them were fully AI-generated. Almost a quarter.

In addition to that 15.3% were found to have used elements of AI-generated audio that had been "modified or processed" by humans.

SH Labs was unveiled by the platform in June, but it may be that the software – which is also used by Bandcamp and Traxsource - is too over-officious in its detection. SubmitHub has said that 31% of artists whose music was deemed to contain AI when released this year maintain they had not used any AI tools when asked by the platform.

Either SH Labs is unfairly fingering a whole load of tracks for using AI, or there are some producers who are too ashamed to admit they're using it. Or, perhaps, there's a bit of both going on.

In a statement, SubmitHub's founder Jason Grishkoff said: "I think the path forward for AI music is disclosure. People should be able to decide for themselves whether they want to engage with AI-generated music. Our job is to give them enough information to make that choice."

BETH SIMPSON

TUNE-UP NEWS+NOTES



Emmanuel on Chet

Tommy Emmanuel was just 11 when he found solace in Chet Atkins' albums. Years later, the guitarist appeared in a dream and taught him the technique he couldn't figure out in waking life

BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

Tommy Emmanuel was just 11 when his father died. In the aftermath, he found solace in the music of Chet Atkins, a guitar hero who would become, in effect, a surrogate father.

"My father had just passed away, and I would live inside Chet's albums. He was my world," the acoustic guitar marvel says. But listening to Atkins' music was not enough. Emmanuel wanted to reach the man who had given him so much comfort, and so the young Australian guitarist wrote to his hero.

"I wrote a letter telling him that I was his big fan in Australia, and that I was trying to play like him," he continues. "He wrote back and sent me a nice photograph, and we stayed in touch."

Atkins remained a constant presence in Emmanuel's thoughts. The young guitarist was particularly fascinated by the way Atkins could make his electric guitar sound almost like a harp, weaving harmonics and natural notes together to create something that seemed, to Emmanuel, almost impossible to reproduce.

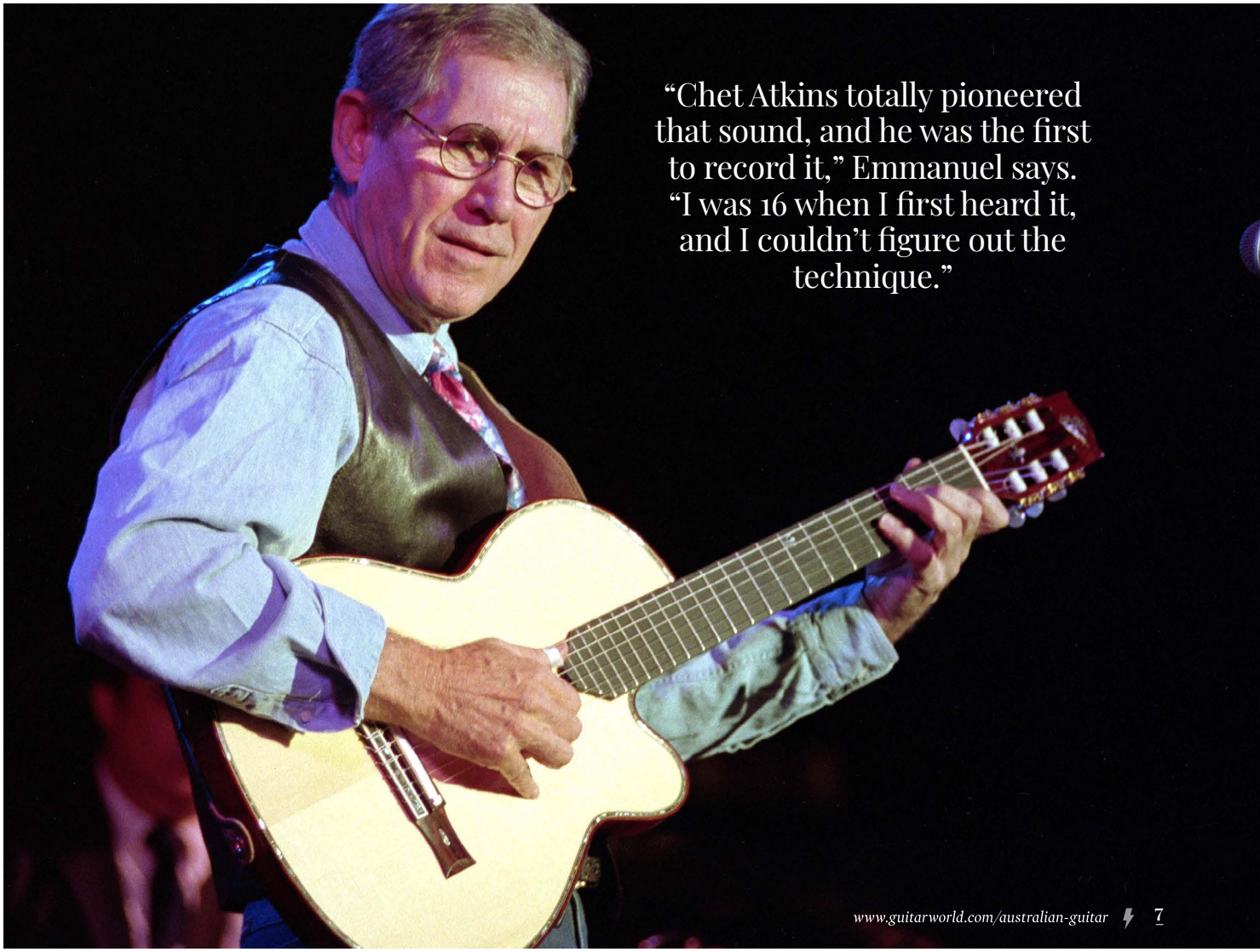
"Chet Atkins totally pioneered that sound, and he was the first to record it," Emmanuel says. "I was 16 when I first heard it, and I couldn't figure out the technique."

The answer came to Emmanuel in a dream. "I had a dream where Chet came out with his red guitar, and he showed me how," he says. "When I woke up the next morning, I got my guitar and I figured it out by remembering the dream. It was as if my subconscious worked it out and told my conscious self how to do it."

The technique involves reaching the picking hand over the fretboard and pinching out harmonics by placing the index finger at a harmonic location on the same string as a fretted note below, then plucking with the thumb — all while incorporating natural notes on other strings.

It is a demanding technique, one that requires the player to make several things happen at once while maintaining enough control to allow every note to speak. Emmanuel eventually heard Lenny Breau — whom Atkins discovered and championed in the 1960s — perform it and realized just how far the technique could be taken.

"Lenny took it to a level that no one else has reached ever since," he says. "It is a beautiful technique, and the key is



"Chet Atkins totally pioneered that sound, and he was the first to record it," Emmanuel says. "I was 16 when I first heard it, and I couldn't figure out the technique."

GETTY IMAGES



"Many players don't sound clear, like a bell. They sound fuzzy from being too focused on the right hand without having a strong enough foundation from the left hand."

making sure the harmonic and natural notes ring out with bell-like qualities together. When you do it at speed, the ear shouldn't know which one is which. They should all blend together.

"The further your thumb is away from your index finger when you pluck down, the more note you'll get out of the harmonic. You want the string to speak, but if your index finger and thumb are too close together you'll choke the sound out of the harmonic. You've got to concentrate. It requires great strength in your left hand to hold down positions with real control and clarity."

Emmanuel uses the technique liberally in his performance of Somewhere Over the Rainbow. And as he explains, there is no shortcut to mastering it.

"You've got to practice until your hand aches like hell," Emmanuel says. "Many players don't sound clear, like a bell. They sound fuzzy from being too focused on the right hand without having a strong enough foundation from the left hand."

All the while, Atkins remained at the top of Emmanuel's mind. Seven years after first contacting the guitar master, the young guitarist found another way to



reach him.

"When I was about 18, a friend recorded me playing in his lounge room, and sent the tape to Chet. I got a mysterious letter out of the blue from Chet that included his office address and phone number. It said, 'When you come to America, call me, and we'll get together.' I couldn't believe it."

Emmanuel eventually made the journey to America, relocating from Australia to Nashville in 1997. Two years later, Atkins honored him with the title of Certified Guitar Player, recognizing his lifetime contribution to the art of fingerpicking. For Emmanuel, the moment represented something far more profound than a professional accolade. The man whose records had once given solace to a grieving 11-year-old was now standing before him, acknowledging him as one of the world's great fingerstyle guitarists.

"I was stunned and so moved by this gesture of appreciation from my hero," Emmanuel wrote on Facebook. "And as he handed it to me, he said, 'Don't let your kids play with it, they'll drop it on their toes!'

"It was a great night in my life. I played 'Guitar Boogie' with its composer, Arthur Smith, 'Windy and Warm' with Chet and Paul Yandell, a spirited set with my brother, Phil, and finished the night out jamming with all my pals at the Chet Convention. Ahhh, those were the days!"

GETTY IMAGES



Cashier

How an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff fuzz — and a killer boost from rapper/singer Frank Ocean — are changing the trajectory of these Louisiana shoegaze/post-hardcore grungers

BY JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

"Frank who?"

Kylie gaspard is describing her inbox flooding with DMs from her friends about a guy named Frank sharing "Beginner," a song by her alt-rock band Cashier.

"They were like, 'Frank Ocean!'," says Gaspard, vocalist of the Lafayette, Louisiana-based band. "He listened halfway through, took a picture and posted it. I think it's in a Rolls Royce. [It's] really crazy, super surreal and really awesome. He's everything."

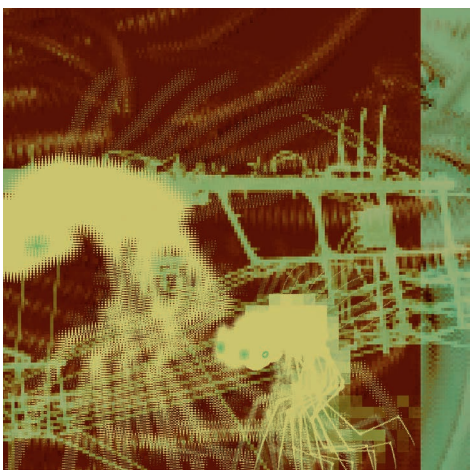
"He's one of the best artists of the past 15 years, for sure," says Cashier lead guitarist Jo Perillo.

A star like Frank Ocean discovering and sharing one of Cashier's songs validated their DIY philosophy. "It made me feel like we could pop off doing it ourselves," Gaspard says. "It's definitely reaffirming," Perillo agrees.

Cashier wasn't always the alternative rock, shoegaze-leaning band that caught the ear of big-time celebrities. Before Covid, they were a textural indie rock band that Perillo says sounded like Alex G. Then the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff fuzz pedal showed up.

"I feel like that's like the sound of Cashier," Perillo says. "We both have a Big Muff and a [ProCo] Rat. Basically, the Rat is like the normal sound. I have my Big Muff after and Kylie has hers before it, but just for the heavier parts. My always-on is the Fuck Overdrive by this pedal company called SmallSound/BigSound that doesn't exist anymore."

The other key piece of gear that helped push the band toward their heavy sound is a Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster. Borrowed from a friend, Perillo's Jazzmaster became Cashier's version of Metallica's EMG pickups or Kurt Cobain's Small Clone.



"I've been borrowing it for seven years very graciously from a friend," Perillo says with a laugh. "She just told me, 'You can keep using it.' It's a great guitar. I feel like it enabled Cashier to come into its own because I didn't really have a very rock-sounding guitar."

It's these things combined that's helped the band achieve the sound that they have on The Weight, their debut on the Philadelphia-based label Julia's War Recordings. The EP is a departure from their shoegaze-influenced singles. "Shoegaze is such an umbrella term now," Gaspard says. "On The Weight, we're more obviously alt-rock. The songs don't have much meat to them."

So what's next for the band?

"Hopefully the EP and our singles can feed everyone enough [for now]," Gaspard says. "Contractually, next year there will be an LP. I have a deadline, so I can get it done." AG

OLIVIA PERILLO



The gear that shaped me

BY JAMES NORBERT IVANYI

Sydney prog guitar master James Norbert Ivanyi issued his fourth solo record, *The Phantasm Cozenage*, on August 19. It's a tightly wrought thatchwork of texture and colour drawing from a half-century of prog stylings, while also demonstrating a quality that's increasingly an Ivanyi hallmark: the blistering juxtaposition of full-throttle journeying with calmer – but still churning – melancholy passages.

To celebrate the record, and Ivanyi's new range of signature model guitars with Suhr Guitars, Australian Guitar caught up with Ivanyi to chat about his favourite gear.

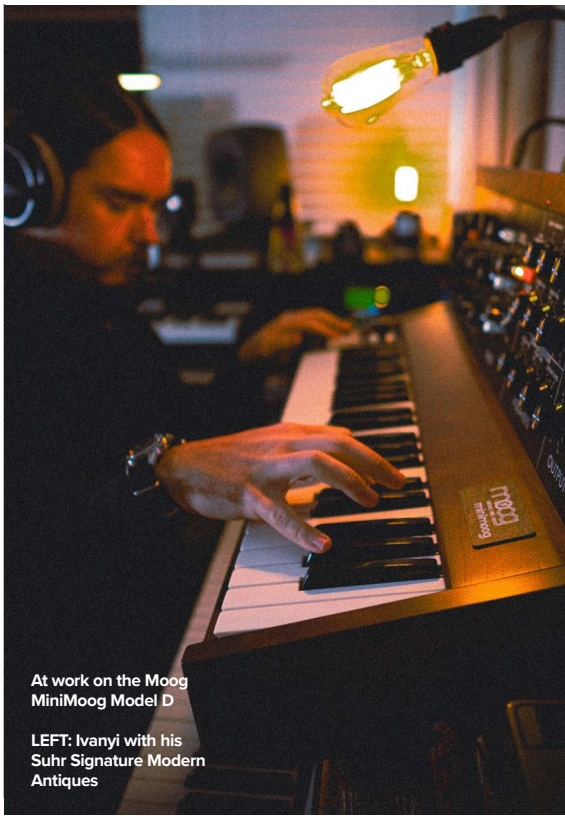
Suhr Signature Modern Antique

My newest Suhr signature series is the perfect 'do it all' guitar that I always reach for in the studio or on stage. It's the perfect combination of modern playability and vintage inspired vibe. It features a light-weight alder body that gives it an incredible resonance and a lively response.

The vintage style bent-saddles also give it a more retro bite, which is perfect for my playing style that often incorporates a lot of hybrid picking and legato lines that need a pronounced transient. Like my black signature model, I see them as utility instruments with simplicity and functionality in mind at all times. They feature a single volume, 3-way selector, push-push for single coil splits, and unique to my model, a volume preset button, which allows you to assign a secondary volume position using the rear trim pot. Perfect for setting up a mid gain or 'sweet-spot' setting with instant recall for the stage or studio alike. The inspiration for this guitar was to take the best of my first signature model, and combine it with the best of my main antique classic. I received them while I was recording the new album, and they feature heavily on all the songs.

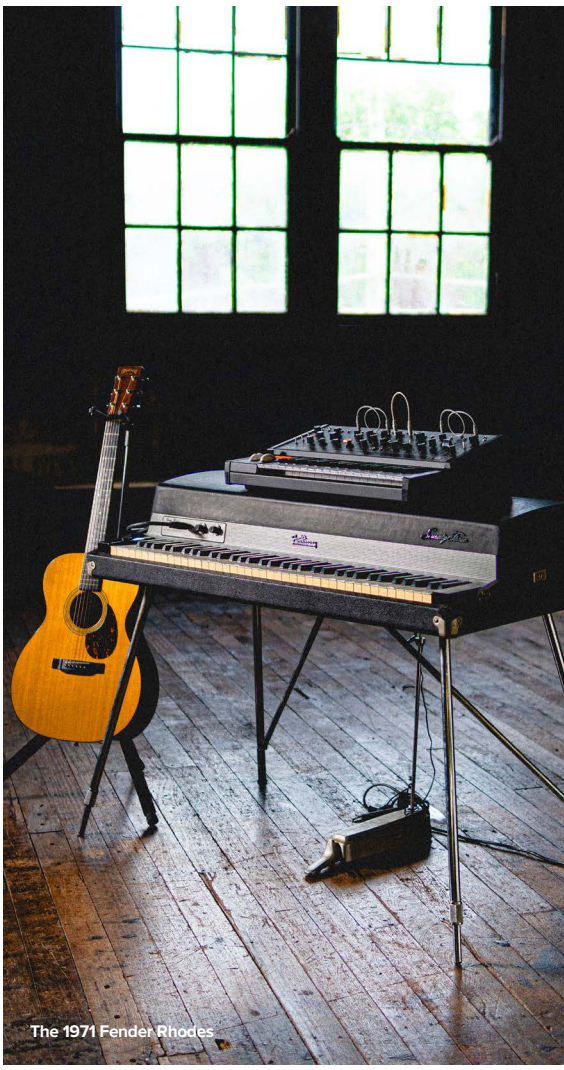
Suhr Custom Classic Antique

This has been my main studio guitar for over 10 years, and is also the first Suhr I owned. It's from the early days of Suhr and is now showing its age beautifully, as I've played it almost daily over the last decade. It's been



At work on the Moog MiniMoog Model D

LEFT: Ivanyi with his Suhr Signature Modern Antiques



The 1971 Fender Rhodes





central on every record I've made since 2014, and to this day is still my 'holy-grail' studio guitar. It has the most inspiring vintage tone, but with a flatter fretboard radius, stainless-steel frets and V60LP and DSV pickups, it does it all effortlessly.

I've experimented with HSS & SSS configurations over the years, but always come back to the HSS config for its versatility in the studio. In late 2025 I took it out one last time for a US clinic tour and to bring it back to the Suhr factory for John to give it a look over and a much needed service. It now has an Olympic White (right) friend for me to take on tour, so she can stay safely at home in the studio, ready for another decade of recording.

Fractal Audio FM9 MKII Turbo

I have been a Fractal artist since 2014, and have had almost every iteration of the legendary modeller since then. Currently I am using the FM9 MKII Turbo both on tour, but also as the central tone and effects hub of my studio. With its incredibly deep routing capabilities, I have all my guitars, amps, synths and electronic keyboards running into it before they hit my DAW. This gives me the flexibility to have isolated signal paths, virtual rigs and FX for each instrument, as well as run my analog amplifiers in the studio with load boxes and IR's & FX directly in the FM9.

Live it gives me infinite amounts of flexibility, whether it's running fully automated via MIDI or laid out like a virtual pedal board with everything I need, it really is the ultimate modeller. Recently I started incorporating the much smaller AM4 into my fly rig, but for most situations the FM9 is my first choice.

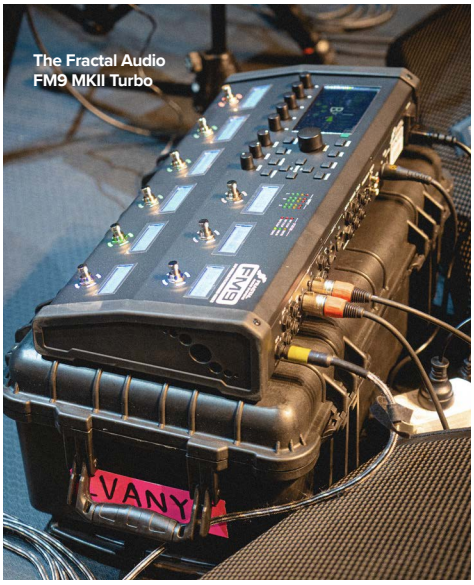
Fender Rhodes

I've always been a huge fan of electric keyboards from the 1960's and 1970's, with the Fender Rhodes being at the very top of that list. I am lucky enough to own a beautiful 1971 Fender Rhodes MK1, which has been the main keyboard on most of my records and an essential part of the writing process.

The early models feature torrington tines, and wooden keys and hammers which give it that famous glassy and dreamy tones that we all know and love. Mine is always at the center of my studio, but has taken a few excursions over the years for sessions, as well as featuring in the video clip for 'The Clairvoyant Coil'. Ever since I heard The Doors as a child, it was always a dream to one day have my own Fender Rhodes, so it is easily one of my most prized instruments and an endless source of inspiration.

Moog MiniMoog Model D

Growing up I was exposed to a lot of progressive rock music from the 1970s, and from the first time I heard the sound of the MiniMoog I was hooked. It's become the main synthesizer you hear on my records,



The Fractal Audio FM9 MKII Turbo

and a central part of my songwriting process. It has the ability to be incredibly simple to use while having infinite options and tweakability. I feel like there is always something new and inspiring to discover with just a few tweaks of the knobs. The much loved single oscillator 'flutey' singing characteristic lead sound is of course one of my favourite 'go to' sounds, but it also has earth shattering bass and fascinating multi-oscillator textures on board.

Being predominantly a guitar player, I find it also incredibly intuitive with its expressive modulation, pitch manipulation and playability. It compliments guitar and rock music beautifully, and I simply couldn't imagine writing my music without it.

The Phantasm Cozenage is available at ***jamesnorbertivanyi.bandcamp.com.***



Ivanyi's Suhr Custom Classic Antiques



From Big Things, Small Things

Stu Mackenzie and Jam Pedals team up to bring you the secret behind his King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard tone.

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

Jam Pedals and Stu Mackenzie have joined forces for an overdrive/distortion pedal that unlocks the small-amp magic of his King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard electric guitar tone.

The Tiny Amp Destroyer is inspired by Mackenzie's utterly unorthodox setup, in which he drives a cheap as chips practice guitar amp with a boost pedal and cleans it up by rolling his volume knob back. It's the sound you hear on albums such as Flight b741, where these poor little amplifiers – in various stages of distress – yield hot yet boxy tones that sound great on a record.

> "it combines the sounds of these transistorised budget amps with a treble booster, presenting them as two independent but stackable drive stages, with a third footswitch activating a treble booster that's voiced after Jam Pedals' Rooster."

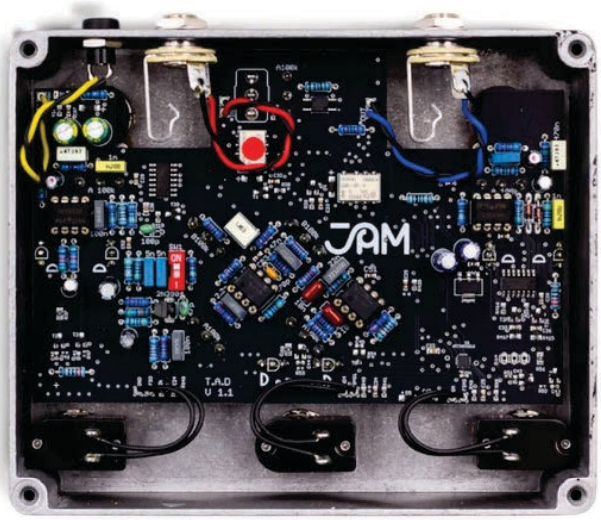
In a sense, Mackenzie's approach is straight out of the Recording Guitar: 101, in which a small amp, typically a compact tube amp combo such as the Fender Champ, would play a starring role. Stick a mic in front of it and you're good to go. Well, Mackenzie's amp choices are not a champ.

He got the idea for using the cheapest, nastiest, and smallest solid-state practice amps he could find when giving guitar lessons.

"I used to teach guitar. I used to teach kids and teenagers when I was a teenager myself," he said in 2024. "People would

OLIVIA PERILLO







Above: Stu McKenzie with King Gizz at the We Love Green Festival in 2024
Left: What it takes to make a pedal that sounds like a breaking amp

always come in with these tiny amps, just the classic thirty-dollar amps you can buy at the pawnshop. It's just the cheapest way to get started with electric guitar, and sometimes these things would sound amazing if you cranked them up loud enough."

Mackenzie went down to the shops and got himself around eight of these little amps, paying between 20 and 30 dollars for each of them. Turning them up until they suffer is how you get them to play nice. If they break, well, that's 30 bucks. No biggie.

"You crank them up to a place where they are not supposed to go, and they are distorting when they are on the clean channel... That is awesome to me," he continued. "A lot of the time it's the speaker that's distorting, and there's something rattling that is not supposed to be rattling, but it's all harmonics and everything. I am hugely into that."

The Tiny Amp Destroyer is not an amp in a box in the strictest sense, like how Peavey put the Decade into a preamp pedal to tap into the rush to nail Josh Homme's tone. "TAD is not an amp in a box," explains Jam Pedals. "It is the sound of the box losing the fight."

But it combines the sounds of these transistorised budget amps with a treble booster, presenting them as two independent but stackable drive stages, with a third footswitch activating a treble booster that's voiced after Jam Pedals' Rooster.

"It tightens the low end, sharpens the attack and changes how both drive stages respond," says the Greek effects brand.

There are all kinds of controls for shaping your sound. It might have been inspired by Mackenzie's rig but it does a lot more. Think of it has two gain voicings, both unruly, one hotter than the other, with Magic and Notch controls for allowing you to dial up the instability or dial in some more conventional drive.

"It makes your massive amp sound tiny, and it's just way better," says Mackenzie. au



The Pearson Omega has an aluminum / stainless steel frame and an exquisitely unique vibe

HEAD(LESS)STRONG

The Pearson Omega is a bold, metal-bodied headless guitar that blends Stratocasters, Les Pauls and Strandbergs – and its 24-year-old creator thinks he'll be outselling his biggest rivals in just five years. Words

BY PHIL WELLER



Strandberg opened the floodgates to a whole new era for the electric guitar. Headless, ergonomic designs are threatening to become the new normal. But New Zealander Dom Pearson, the brains behind Pearson guitars, believes the company has "shot itself in the foot" with its business model. And he has eyes on its throne.

By 2031 he intends to outsell the Swedes and perpetuate his belief that headless guitars are the future. The days of headstocks and industry giants, he thinks, are numbered, and the Pearson Omega – a bizarre-looking metal build with insane upper fret access – is him putting his money where his mouth is.

"From a playability standpoint, headless guitars are objectively superior," he says. "The only reason headstocks are still popular is because of the culture. The next generation are watching TikTok, and they're seeing all these crazy headless guitars. When they're 60-year-old dentists with money for a vintage guitar, they're going to want a Strandberg, not a Fender. Les Pauls will be collectible art pieces.

"Maybe I'm just young and delusional, but I would bet on headless guitars, and that's what I'm doing with business."

In his early teens he bought knock-off guitar bodies, borrowed his dad's woodworking tools, sand them down and spec them with Chinese parts. His first fully original build was carbon



The Omega comes in Metallic Silver, Sparkling Magnetite, and Scarlett Red (pictured)





fiber, drawing on his uncle's experience of making bike frames from the same material. Raw aluminum has since proven more affordable, and just as malleable.

"You can't do anything interesting with wood anymore," he states. "It's all been done. And I don't believe in the tonewood debate."

Pearson assembles the guitars himself. Their powder-coated bodies are machined locally in New Zealand. Modern C- and Strat-style necks are custom-made in China, with standard and multi-scale options available.

The modified Hipshot bridge design is bolstered by a Gotoh/Floyd Rose locking nut. It's wired in with easily-replaceable OEM Alnico 2 humbuckers with dedicated coil-split switches, a three-way selector, plus A500K pots sourced for Korea. He makes around 80 instruments a month.

There's a wicked attention to detail, too. The Pearson headstock is compatible with wall-mounted stands and there's a subtle body cut for traditional stands, countering a Strandberg setback. The strap weaves through the guitar's open-plan body, which means strap locks aren't needed, and it hugs the player's form better.

The Omega dials back some of the absurdities of his earlier builds, like the purposefully alien Hyper B. It's a guitar built for the future, without severing all ties with the past.

"I wanted a Stratocaster neck with Les Paul pickups and a Strandberg body," Pearson says. "I know there's a market for a Strandberg Boden, but I know there's also a massive market for a Boden that has more traditional attributes."

Ibanez has recognized that, hence its Quest series of guitars, replacing Strandberg's trapezoidal EndurNeck with its Wizard profiles. The Omega aims to be even more accessible. "The Hyper B was about how weird and wacky I could get," Pearson says.

"It got a lot of hate – that was half the plan. The Omega is me asking, 'How can I build 1,000 guitars a week?' I'm thinking about mass scalability, because I want people from all over the world playing them."

He also feels the Omega's price gives it the advantage. At US$1,075, it's slightly cheaper than Ibanez's Q Series, and nearly US$100 less than the Strandberg Essential. Moreover, he doesn't want to fall into similar preconceptions of who his builds are for.

"Strandberg really pigeonholed themselves with prog metal," he says. "I want to be broader – I want jazz and blues players to play the Omega. I want to see it in Taylor Swift's hands. I need that for the brand."

Crucially, he's backing the industry to shift in his favor. "Ibanez saw it was losing out on a market because of Strandberg," he says of the firm's pivot into headless builds. "Fender and Gibson are going to start dying out; they're so driven by shareholders they're not going to take any risks. Smaller companies are moving the needle.

"But Strandberg is owned by private equity now, so I don't think they're interested in selling 100,000 guitars a year; they want to stay niche. That's how I'm gonna overtake them. I'm thinking massive scale, affordable workhorse guitars."

His ambitions are lofty, but with Paul Masvidal already showing an interest in the firm, and Plini's interest piqued, Pearson might not be building these guitars on his own for much longer.

Find out more at ***pearsoninstruments.com.***



LOST CLASSICS

Funkadelic

From raiding Aerosmith's backline to guest solos by stray smackheads, "Kidd Funkadelic" — aka Michael Hampton — recalls the inspired chaos behind 1975's Let's Take It to the Stage

BY ANDREW DALY



The Funkadelic gang circa 1977, including Bootsy Collins [standing, far left] and Michael Hampton [in hat, near center right]

ALAMY, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

When Michael Hampton, who, due to his young age compared to his P-Funk bandmates, was nicknamed Kidd Funkadelic, recorded 1975's Take It to the Stage, he was barely 20 — but he quickly settled into the funk collective, and the good times soon rolled.

"Once I got in the band and out on the road, I just practiced and played," Hampton says. "When we got into the studio, maybe I'd bump into a few beers and just kick it and have a good time."

With this, Hampton admits he "couldn't tell you the actual process," mainly because Funkadelic was a collective of free-spirited, drug-using, hard-partying musicians looking for nothing more than a groove to accent their good times.

"Those guys were older than me," Hampton says. "They were putting it together. There was probably a lot of 'paperwork' I missed out on. [Laughs] But, hey, I'd rather have the few brain cells that I've got left than worry about any of that!"

Like most of Funkadelic's Seventies output, Let's Take It to the Stage was — and still is — a banger with lots of guitar heroics to spare.

"We saw it as like a battle of the bands, you know, that type of relationship," Hampton says. "We always tried to do our best on tour. That's where 'Let's take it to the stage!' came from. We'd be like, 'Let's do this sucker!' We were like a funk mob, just doing our best to smoke the stage and outdo whatever other band was coming."

Now 69, Hampton isn't a "Kidd" anymore, but he fills up with youthful energy when he looks back on Funkadelic's halcyon era.

"It means something to me on the groove trip," he says. "If you don't like it, take your dead ass home, you know? [Laughs] Shit, I still love that stuff. I love playing it. When I do, I pull out the best equipment, so that whatever I use will be louder and funkier. We still say, 'Let's take it to the stage,' you know? It still represents us. It's about having fun and that competition, which is alright by me."

How did the sessions for Stage kick off?

We went up to Michigan United Sound, which was near Wayne State University's campus in Detroit. We stayed across the street at a little motel, and that was where we came up with a lot of stuff. I'd have to listen to the album to remember exactly what happened and where, but I do remember that.

Can you remember the first song that you recorded?

That woulda been "Be My Beach." I actually did the sessions for Let's Take It to the Stage the same day I did the first sessions for Bootsy Collins' first album, Stretchin' Out [1976].



SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

Given the free-spirited nature of Funkadelic — and your playing — what was your general approach?

I had no idea where we were going. [Laughs] I don't know what the process was because there wasn't one! We went in there, said, "We're gonna record this song," and we just did it. No one ever approached me formally and was like, "This song is gonna be on this album, and we're gonna do it this way..." We just did a lot of sessions for both albums, and they picked out the best stuff that made sense for the albums.

So you had no idea if you were recording a track for Funkadelic or Bootsy?

It wound up as a process of elimination. Everybody was just recording all the time, 24/7. It was like one giant shift; you'd get back up, go over there, play, do it, hang out, kick it, put some parts on and then come back out. It's hard to even know who played on what track, to be honest with you.

That checks out, as the credits on P-Funk albums are always murky at best.

A lot of things went undocumented. I'd have to listen to try and figure out who played with me on this or that track. There might be a log out there somewhere that had that, but I don't know. I'd go in there early in the morning and be on this or that song, but things changed so often, and the process was fluid.

Who plays guitar on "Good to Your Earhole," which features a ton of ripping guitar?

I know that one, man. That's Eddie Hazel! I didn't play the foundation of that or anything. Everybody was recording, and Eddie probably went in there, did his thing and probably did some singing because he was a great singer, too. That's the story there.

According to George Clinton, a "smack addict" wandered into the studio, laid down the solo for "Get Off Your Ass and Jam" and was paid $50. Is that true?

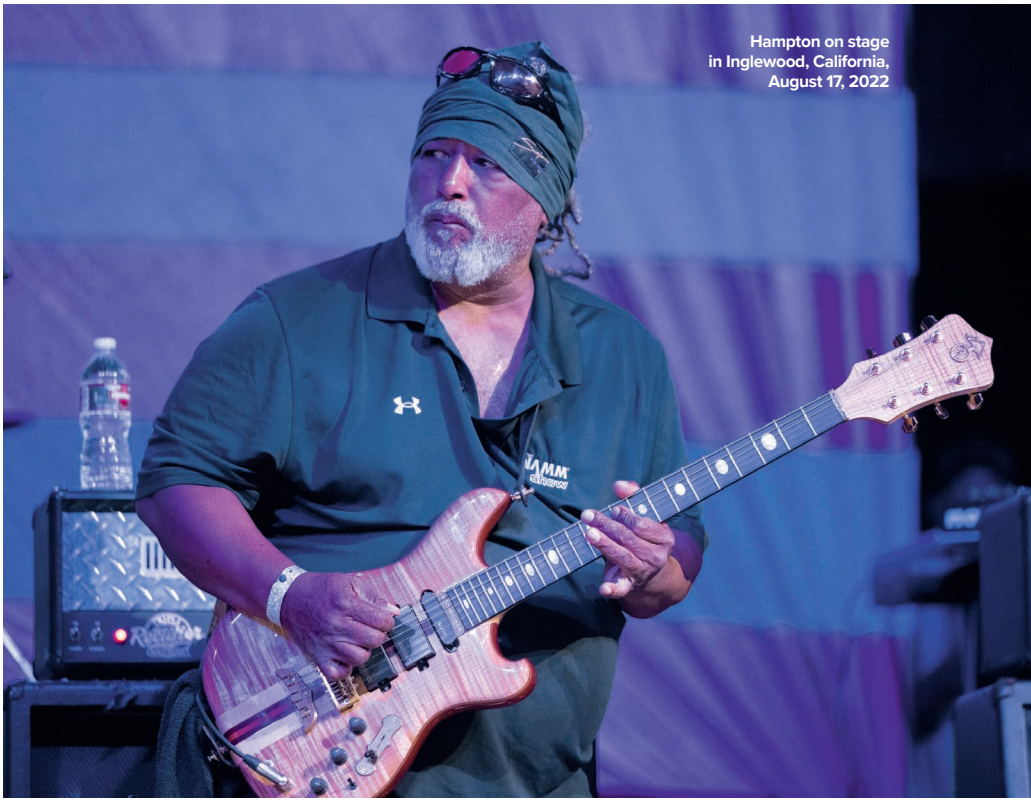
I heard a story like that, but I don't wanna say the guy who did it was a smack addict, you know? [Laughs]

Paul Warren of Rare Earth has claimed that the solo on "Get Off Your Ass and Jam" was, in fact, him. Should we put the "smack addict" rumor to rest once and for all?

Yeah, I don't know! Maybe it was a guy on smack who got paid $50. But let's just roll with what George Clinton said. [Laughs] So, yeah, sure, the original story is probably true.

Did you play on "Get Off Your Ass and Jam" too?

I did the loop when the song starts off.



Hampton on stage in Inglewood, California, August 17, 2022

"I still love playing Funkadelic stuff. When I do, I pull out the best equipment, so that whatever I use will be louder and funkier"

They looped it real fast, and then I'm in the back doing some whammy stuff later on. And it's funny because I think Tupac Shakur sampled that in one of his tracks [1993's "Holler If Ya Hear Me"]. Somebody sent it to me. They broke it down, and it's like three notes running; he made all these beats and different time signatures. It was a cool sample.

What gear were you working with?

We had a lot of Marshall amps. And we had the old backline from Aerosmith, which were Music Man amps, and Crown power amplifiers. So, yeah, we were using Aerosmith's old equipment.

How did Funkadelic end up with Aerosmith's gear?

That's a good question! [Laughs] There was a guy called "Rabbit" who we coulda asked, but I don't know about any of that, man. I don't wanna drop any names, but I just heard that's where we got the Music Man and Crown stuff. I'm not quite sure if we borrowed them, if it was an actual purchase or a trade, but there were a lot of things going on back in the day with roadies and things like that, so who knows about the actual transaction.

Is that to say maybe a side deal took place between roadies?

Well, there were some guys that worked with Aerosmith that were actually techs, and they were working with us, too. I don't know because I didn't see the guys, and I didn't talk to anybody that did the deal. I just know that we wound up with it, and that's what was used. They worked, I plugged in, and that's how it was!

What guitars did you use on the album?

I had an old Gibson L6-S. I kept it all original, and that's the guitar I used a lot back then. I also had a Les Paul and an old Framus that was kind of Les Paul-shaped [probably a 10600]. I had that guitar worked on; it had these weird augmented pickups where the coil and the wire wrapped around them made crazy sounds. I ended up having DiMarzio pickups put in there instead. And then I had an Alembic guitar that I bedazzled with rhinestones, mirrors and shit. [Laughs] Oh, and I had my B.C. Rich Bich.

How do you view the album's legacy?

Some people just have their favorites, but it doesn't matter to me too much. It's about how well you play. Once somebody gets into it, that's what matters. But it's funny because I had no idea people would like it so much. You play the songs, rehearse them and do the shows, but you don't know it's gonna be something that loops on forever. ag



Protest the Hero's Tim MacMillar [left] and Luke Hoskin



SANDRA LEE LAYDEN

Within You, Without You

Protest the Hero's Luke Hoskin and Tim MacMillar on the strange — yet oddly endearing — "It takes a village" approach to recording, touring and covering each other's blazing guitar parts

BY GREGORY ADAMS

As the lone studio guitarist on protest the hero's new within album — the canadian progressive-metal veterans' first in six years — Luke Hoskin multi-tracked wizardly scale runs and dizzyingly arpeggiated harmonies by the boatful. Hoskin admits he loves guitar heroics, and it's been a major part of the act's sound over the past couple of decades. Despite this, the writing phase of Within found the shredder scaling back his most masochistic whims — not for his own sake, but rather for fellow co-founder Tim MacMillar and touring member Ben Davis, the two guitarists tasked with actually recreating Hoskin's fretboard bedlam on stage. After he sent out the first few demos, his bandmates politely asked him to chill.

"It was definitely a check. Like, 'That is too fast... the bpm needs to come back on that,'" he says, explaining that he also excised a few ripping but ultimately unnecessary sections that would've got buried beneath the roaring vibrato of vocalist Rody Walker. "I got a lot of feedback from Tim and Rody, and it was a reminder to think about Ben, who has to carry the torch live. You have to exercise some restraint; you can't go nuts and be like, 'I never have to be in front of an audience doing this.'"

Within remains a knuckle-busting endeavor. "Mouthpiece," "Fishhook" and "Grandfather's Axe" offer an ambitious and often blistering splatter of progressive heaviness, pure-speed pop-punk-isms and power-metal bombast. Up until formally retiring from the road in 2021, Hoskin would have been hitting those licks on stage with MacMillar. But a few years back — despite his show experience with Protest the Hero — a towering sense of anxiety began to grip the guitarist whenever he thought about performing live. Hoskin hasn't toured with the band since before they put out 2020's Palimpsest. He's totally fine with that — thriving, even.

"Part of the reason for me leaving is that I stopped loving performing," he says, reiterating that his passion lies with writing and recording. "I did the live side for a long time, because I thought it was a necessary part to facilitate me being able to write music."

Hoskin, MacMillar and Walker have been together since they were teenagers, initially forming in Whitby, Ontario, under the name Happy Go Lucky in 1999 before rebranding as Protest the Hero in 2001. They wanted to keep up the creative connection, which is how Hoskin arrived at the idea of continuing with two distinct versions of the Protest the Hero. For Within, the studio band included chief songwriter and guitarist Hoskin, bassist Cameron McLelland and drummer Nathan Bulla. MacMillar and Davis are the guitar tandem on the road, and they're supported by the rhythm section of bassist Henry Selva and drummer Matt Kidby. Walker handles vocals for both entities.

"The band was so receptive about having a two-pronged approach," Hoskin says with relief, "I felt like, "Oh, cool, I don't have to completely exit altogether."

Still, there's a natural downside to having Hoskin off the road; MacMillar is bummed to no longer be traveling the world with one of his best buds, who just so happens to kill on guitar. Davis, of fellow Canadian progressive unit the Kindred, stepped into the fold as their live lead guitarist in 2022. "Those were big shoes to fill," MacMillar says. "We got really lucky that we found someone who could knock it out of the park live."

> ""The only way is to embrace the talents of all the brilliant people we know"
> LUKE HOSKIN"

Davis has been devoted to locking into the lines as laid out by Hoskin's dexterous studio performances. Hoskin tried to keep track of his playing throughout the sessions while mapping things out through Guitar Pro software; he also runs sheet music publishing company Sheet Happens, and a member of his team went through the recording stems to double check the accuracy of the tabs.

While Hoskin and Davis share a fretboard aesthetic, MacMillar jokes that the guitarists' similarities extend beyond their playing. "Ben kind of looks like a smaller version of Luke, so on his first tour people thought it was Luke. And we gave him Luke's signature [Ibanez LHM1] guitar to play as well, so people would come up and be like, 'Hey Luke, good job!'"

The Within sessions found the studio band tracking their parts at various home-recording spaces around Canada and the U.S. Armed with a grip of Evertune-loaded Ibanez guitars, Hoskin recorded his parts in Boulder, Colorado, under the supervision of Good Tiger member Derya Nagle. Through his hands, the album flows from shred-locked complexity ("Mouthpiece") toward orchestral passages peppered with polyrhythmic natural harmonics ("i. above").

Punk is also a huge part of Protest the Hero's latest LP. The lyrics to "Liberty Spike" recall the days when they would head to their local mall to buy NOFX and Pennywise T-shirts. The chord-forward, speed-barrier-pushing melodicism of "Fishhook" is indebted to their love of Canadian punk progressives Propagandhi. "That's one of the pillars of what we do — fast, fun and melodic," Hoskin says of the influence, MacMillar confirming of the track's hectic pace, "'Fishhook' is at 190 bpm, that fast spot where there's a lot of 16th note palm-muting."

Hoskin continues: "We idolized those bands and learned everything we could about what they were doing and how they were approaching songwriting. I grew out of that at some point and got more into metal. I came back to punk in my late twenties realizing the songcraft is unbelievable."

A more self-referential moment on the album arrives with "Grandfather's Axe," an "all fucking throttle" bang-out that finds vocalist Walker challenging his bandmates to step up their game, in-song ("Play that fuckin' riff, you dickhead/I wanna hear it sing"). Its title alludes to the Theseus paradox, an ages-old philosophical question around whether or not a boat that's been stripped and rebuilt one piece at a time remains the same ship over time. "It's an analogy for the band," Hoskin theologizes.

In obvious ways, Protest the Hero are not the same band they used to be. It's been more than a quarter century since they formed, and members have come and gone since the early Noughties. The current two-lineup approach means both iterations experience their time in Protest the Hero in vastly different ways. It's perhaps the spirit of friendship that ties things together and keeps the progsters afloat.

"The term 'It takes a village' keeps coming up... I think the future of the band is a village," Hoskin says while not only contemplating the path forward with Protest the Hero's two lineups, but the friends and collaborators that are helping the band plug along behind the scenes. In other words, there's a lot of people helping right the ship.

Hoskin concludes with gratitude, "The only way it can exist is to embrace the help and talents of all the brilliant people that we know."

McCartney on Six Strings

He's one of the most celebrated bassists in rock history. But throughout the Beatles years, the guitar remained Paul McCartney's secret obsession.

BY DAMON ORION

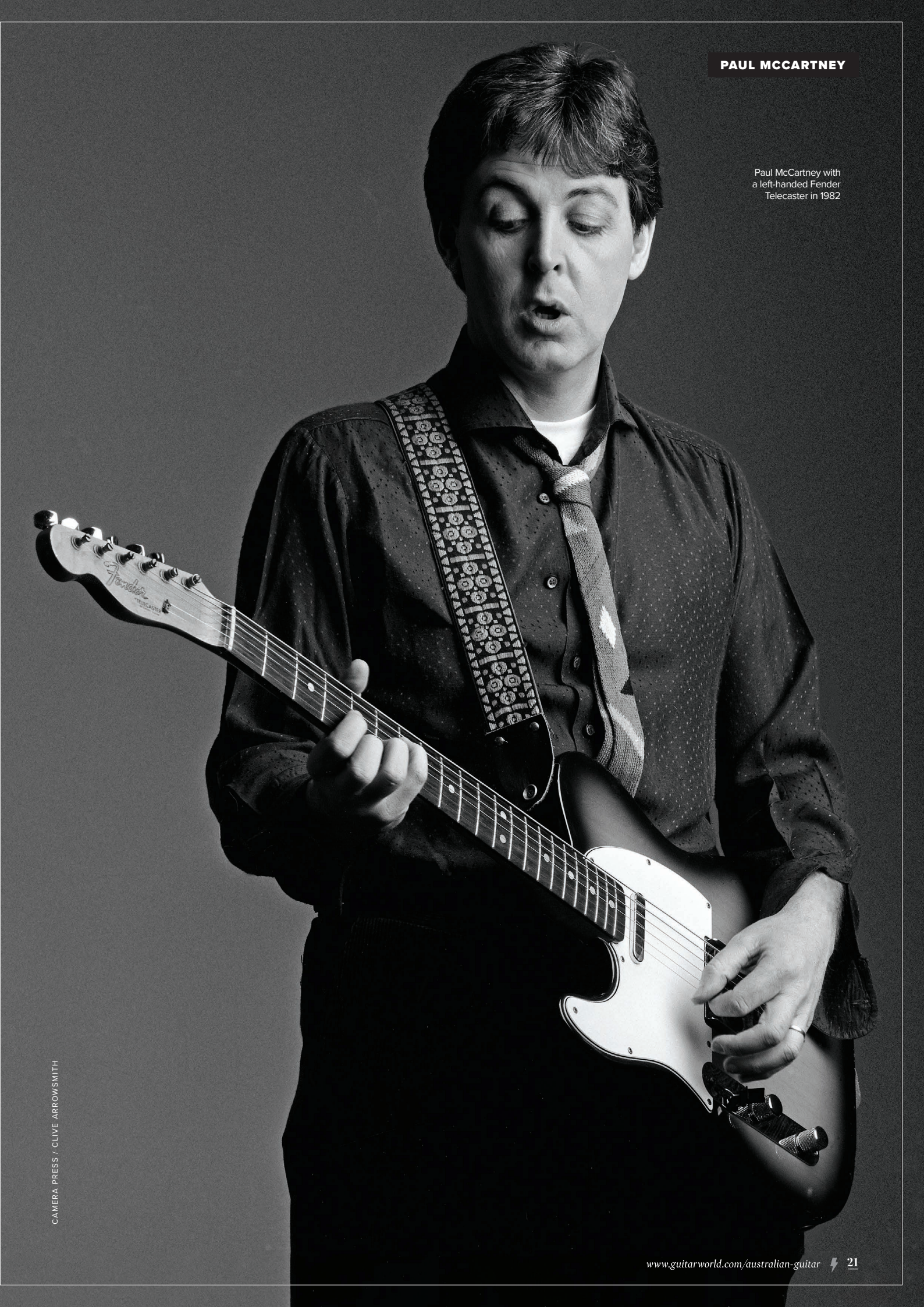
JOHN LENNON ONCE called the Beatles' "Ticket to Ride" "one of the earliest heavy metal records made." Try to imagine that song pumping through the house speakers before a Morbid Angel show, and you might conclude that Lennon's statement was a bit of a stretch. Still, the song's lumbering groove and droning riff were unusually heavy for 1965, especially within a pop landscape dominated by tracks like "Wooly Bully" and "Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter."

"Ticket to Ride" was groundbreaking for another reason, though; It was the first Beatles record to feature Paul McCartney on lead guitar. He'd quietly slipped some gentle acoustic strumming into "I'll Follow the Sun" the previous year, but "Ticket to Ride" was different. His electric leads enthusiastically leaped across the divides between the song's bridges and verses, then returned to playfully bob and weave throughout the outro, introducing listeners to a side of McCartney most fans barely realized existed.

"I guess I think of myself as a guitar player, really," he said in 1990. "If I couldn't have any other instrument, I would have to have an acoustic guitar."

To the general public, McCartney is, of course, all about that bass. Publications from *Rolling Stone* to *Bass Player* have routinely ranked him as one of the greatest bassists ever, and four-string giants like Flea, Geddy Lee, John Paul Jones, Chris Squire and Sting have extolled his inventive, melodic approach to the instrument.

So why in Mother Mary's name does he primarily identify as a guitarist? To answer that question, we need to head back to 1950s Liverpool, to the modest home on Forthlin Road where a teenage Paul McCartney's six-string obsession began.



Paul McCartney with a left-handed Fender Telecaster in 1982

CAMERA PRESS / CLIVE ARROWSMITH



McCartney with a most-likely borrowed nylon-string guitar in London in 1967

Home to Us

Music filled the McCartney household long before Paul ever touched a guitar. His father James was a skilled trumpeter and pianist who led Jim Mac's Jazz Band in the 1920s. An old photo of that group would eventually inspire the concept of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Family sing-alongs were common in the McCartney home, with Jim providing piano accompaniment as Paul's aunties grew progressively tipsier. "My dad was very musical, and I used to listen to a lot of what he did," the former Beatle told Steven Colbert. "I always think of it like my computer got loaded with a lot of data from all the songs I heard, and so when I finally came to write, I kind of printed it all out."

In the front room of the McCartney homestead stood an upright piano that Jim bought from a shop owned by the father of the Beatles' future manager, Brian Epstein. Jim initially encouraged Paul to take piano lessons, but like his dad, McCartney the Younger preferred learning by ear. He famously never learned music theory or note reading.

Paul's first guitar was a Framus Zenith 17 acoustic — a right-handed model that posed obvious problems for the left-handed teenager. Then he spotted a photo of country singer Slim Whitman playing a restrung guitar upside down. Following his example, McCartney reversed the strings on his instrument. Having already learned a few basic guitar chords from his school buddy Ian James, he set about teaching himself to play by slowing down records and copying what he heard.

When McCartney's mother Mary died of breast cancer in 1956, music became his sanctuary. In *The Macs*, his brother Mike remembered that when Paul picked up a guitar, "he would get lost in another world. It was useless talking to him. In fact, I had better conversations with brick walls around this period."

According to *The Beatles: All These Years*, McCartney often disappeared into the bathroom with his guitar. "The fine acoustics of the toilet area was always very appealing to me," he recalled. "Dad would shout, 'Paul, get off that toilet!' And I'd say, 'I'm practicing!'"

Rock Minors

The seeds of a worldwide musical revolution were sown inside a Liverpool school bus. There, two youngsters with guitars on their minds — McCartney and George Harrison — bonded over their shared love of rock 'n' roll.

"Eventually we made a guitar together," Paul later told *Uncut*. "It turned out more like a Hawaiian guitar."

The Future Fabs progressed as musicians by studying chord charts together and, as Harrison stated in *The Beatles: The Authorised Biography*, "pinching anything from any other lad who could do better." At one point, they even traveled by bus across Liverpool to meet a man who knew how to play a B7 chord.

Like Harrison, McCartney found inspiration in guitarists like Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and Carl Perkins. Outside of rock 'n' roll, country music virtuoso Chet Atkins sparked his interest in fingerpicking, while skiffle and folk players helped shape his rhythm guitar style.

> "I think of myself as a guitar player, really. If I couldn't have any other instrument, I'd have a guitar"

"I was a bit of a magpie, really, picking up various styles and gradually assimilating them," McCartney told *Guitar World Acoustic* in 2007.

At age 15, McCartney impressed a 16-year-old John Lennon with his performances of Eddie Cochran's "Twenty Flight Rock," Gene Vincent's "Be-Bop-a-Lula" and a Little Richard medley. "He could obviously play the guitar," Lennon later said. "I half thought to myself, 'He's as good as me.'"

Before inviting McCartney to be the lead guitarist in his group, the Quarrymen, Lennon was playing banjo chords he'd learned from his mother Julia. As a lefty, McCartney provided a mirror image to Lennon while teaching him proper guitar chords. "It's funny; John learned upside down, too, because of me — because mine was the only other guitar around for him if he broke a string or he didn't have his," he told *Guitar Player*.

Even after persuading Lennon to make Harrison a member of the Quarrymen, McCartney continued to play guitar in the group until 1961. At that time, he and his bandmates, now known collectively as the Beatles, were putting in their proverbial 10,000 hours in Hamburg, Germany. When original bassist Stu Sutcliffe left the fold, it fell on Paul, the most versatile instrumentalist of the bunch, to fill the void.

"None of us wanted to be the bass player," he later admitted. "In our minds, it was the fat guy in the group who nearly always played the bass, and he stood at the back."

McCartney's background as a guitarist informed his bass playing, particularly as he and the band evolved. Rather than merely anchoring the rhythm, he chose notes — and, on occasion, bass chords — that complemented the vocals and guitars with melody and counterpoint, almost using the bass as a second lead instrument.

Still, even as the bass became his calling card and Beatlemania swept the planet, his love affair with the guitar was far from over.

Playing the Casino Card

Cut to late 1964, when a happy accident — or kismet — launched a wave of glorious feedback from John Lennon's amp at Abbey Road Studios. The Beatles, now the biggest band in the world, knew an epiphany when they heard it. The wasp-in-a-sitar buzz at the start of "I Feel Fine" became the first known recording of guitar feedback being deliberately harnessed in rock music.

Smitten with the sound, McCartney quickly purchased an ax that would yield

MARK HAYWARD ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

maximum howl — a 1962 Epiphone Casino ES-230TD with a sunburst finish and Bigsby tremolo. It would prove to be his go-to electric guitar throughout his run with the Beatles and beyond.

Paul's new Epiphone made its studio debut on "Ticket to Ride," released as a single in April 1965. A few months later, that song reappeared on the hook-packed *Help!* album, which arguably marked the first phase of the *Wizard of Oz*-like transition of the Beatles' music from black and white to color. Elsewhere on *Help!*, McCartney threaded electric guitar leads throughout "Another Girl" and doubled George's notes an octave up on the solo to "The Night Before."

The *Help!* sessions also gave Paul the chance to break in a right-handed Epiphone Texan FT-79 acoustic he'd recently bought. He cut "I've Just Seen a Face" and "Yesterday" on the same day, June 14, 1965. The latter tune exemplifies his unique fingerpicking style, also heard on later compositions like "Blackbird" and "Mother Nature's Son." As he explained to *Guitar World Acoustic*, "I just hit the bass string [*with my thumb*] and sort of flick the high strings... It's my own goofball version of fingerpicking."



The Beatles at Abbey Road Studios in 1967 with John Lennon's Epiphone Casino in the foreground; everyone in the band (except Ringo) owned a Casino

MARK HAYWARD ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Laying Rubber

Four scant months after the release of *Help!*, the Beatles dropped *Rubber Soul*, underscoring both the band's light-speed evolution and its freakish ability to crank out brilliant music in *A Hard Day's Night*-style fast-forward motion. The British version of *Rubber Soul* opened with "Drive My Car," a bouncy, Stax/Motown-inspired number equipped with an infectious guitar solo courtesy of Mr. McCartney.

The acoustic-based "Michelle" revealed another side of Paul's guitar playing. He has often recounted how, as a teen, he "enigmatically" sat at parties in a black, collar-necked shirt, singing French-sounding nonsense words while fingerpicking this chic little guitar part. As he bluntly told Conan O'Brien, he did this in the hopes that the ladies "would think I was a French person and would want me to go to bed with them."

Sadly, his Pepé Le Pew act never quite worked out the way he wanted. On the bright side, it eventually yielded a gem of a song. As McCartney recounted to *Guitar World Acoustic*, "Years later, John said, 'Remember that French thing you used to do? We should stick some words on that.'" Thus, "Michelle" was born, authentic French phrases and all.

While that song's vocal originated from Paul's attempts to pass himself off as a Frenchman, its guitar part was an emulation of a man as American as spray cheese on chicken-fried steak: Mister Guitar, aka Chet Atkins.

> "John learned upside down, too, because mine was the only other guitar around if he didn't have his"

"There is a song he did called 'Trambone' with a repetitive top line, and he played a bass line whilst playing a melody," McCartney explained in *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now*. "This was an innovation for us; even though classical guitarists had played it, no rock 'n' roll guitarists had... I wanted to write something with a melody and a bass line on it, so I did."

Atkins would bring things full circle in 1966 with his album *Chet Atkins Picks on the Beatles*, which included an inspired cover of "Michelle." Guitar enthusiasts are encouraged to check it out, along with "Trambone." If that should lead anyone down a Chet Atkins rabbit hole, don't say we didn't warn you.

McCartney told *Guitar World Acoustic* that he learned the F7♯9 chord in "Michelle" from a Liverpool music shop salesman named Jim Gretty. "All the guys who worked in that store were jazz guys; they had to play jazz well if they wanted to hold down their jobs."

He recalled being in the guitar shop with George Harrison when Gretty struck an F7♯9. "We said, 'Wow! What was that, man?' And he answered, 'It's just basically an F, but you barre the top two strings at the fourth fret with your little finger.'"

History snuck in through the bathroom window that day; 7♯9 chords would later surface in the Fab Four's covers of "Till There Was You" and "Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby," then in originals like "The Word," "Taxman" and "Sexy Sadie." After getting the Beatles bump, the 7♯9 would help define Jimi Hendrix's sound, and successive generations of rock players would deploy it as they shot to thrill and raged against the machine.

Backwards to the Future

By 1966, the sound of McCartney's guitar was becoming a familiar presence on Beatles records. He laid down the ballsy, overdriven "Paperback Writer" riff just a few days after he and his bandmates recorded "Got to Get You into My Life," whose end section contains a guitar passage that shares some DNA with that riff.

In "And Your Bird Can Sing," Paul and George's playful, crisp-toned leads darted around like twin stunt flyers locked in tandem. Up to that point, harmonized dual-guitar leads were unheard-of in mainstream rock music. Soon after, groups like the Allman Brothers Band, Queen and Thin Lizzy began following the Beatles' lead. Flash forward to the early Eighties and

Iron Maiden and Judas Priest would send intermeshing guitar leads flying like eagles from their amps.

No less innovative was "I'm Only Sleeping," widely regarded as the first recorded example of backwards guitar in popular music. As audio engineer Geoff Emerick has written, after Harrison played the main solo, McCartney "joined him to play the backwards outro in a bizarre duet." This led the charge for Hendrix, the Byrds, Jimmy Page and other artists who would ornament their music with reversed guitar sounds.

Backwards leads aside, McCartney's most celebrated guitar work from this period was markedly straightforward. Besides playing rhythm guitar on the stunning "Here, There and Everywhere," he delivered what many consider his finest guitar solo in "Taxman." "It was the early Jimi Hendrix days, and I was trying to persuade George to do something like that, feedback-y and crazy," he told *Rolling Stone*. "And I was showing him what I wanted, and he said, 'Well, you do it.'"

Besides Hendrix, Paul's raucous lead guitar on "Taxman" nodded to blues guitarists like Eric Clapton, B.B. King, Buddy Guy and Albert King. Author Ian MacDonald (as well as one or two *Guitar World* writers over the years) has also named Jeff Beck's solo in the Yardbirds' "Shapes of Things" as "the probable inspiration" for McCartney's performance.

Played on the Casino through an overdriven Vox, the "Taxman" solo is a Day-Glo splatter-paint pastiche of blues, rock and Indian styles. It is rumored to have reincarnated in backwards form on the one-chord, 500-microgram mind-melter "Tomorrow Never Knows."

Seasoning *Pepper*

A brief, jagged interjection at the end of "Strawberry Fields Forever" was the last emission the public would hear from Paul's Casino for a short while. His guitar of choice on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was an instrument he had acquired during the *Revolver* sessions, a single-pickup 1964 Esquire with a sunburst finish and rosewood fretboard.

On *Sgt. Pepper*'s title cut, he paired the Esquire with a Vox Conqueror. His playing, while simple, was indispensable to the song. After welcoming the audience to the show with his sharp leads in the intro, he bolstered the first verse with punchy fifth-chord stabs on the upper strings. When the chorus arrived, his meaty power chords added heft and grit to the song's explosive lift. Then he stitched a series of inverted arpeggios into the second verse, creating a secondary melody that was, and is, sheer magic.



McCartney runs through his "Step Inside Love" — on guitar — with Cilla Black in January 1968

Paul used the Esquire again on "Good Morning Good Morning." To this day, his solo is as much a wake-up call as the alarm clock that breaks the reverie in *Sgt. Pepper*'s closer, "A Day in the Life." Its Eastern-tinged legato licks hearken back to his work on "Taxman," hitting like a splash of cold water at dawn.

According to Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn, McCartney played the Esquire through a Selmer amp on his spacey guitar solo in "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!" Paul's lead was recorded at half-speed and sped up to capture that inhaling-nitrous-oxide-at-the-fairgrounds feel.

Bach Bird, Fly

Some sources credit George Harrison with all the guitar work on *Magical Mystery Tour*'s "Flying." Others maintain that he and Paul both played guitar on the track. Supporting the latter claim, a fingerpicked run that begins approximately 21 seconds into the song sounds curiously similar to the intro of McCartney's later composition "Goodbye," a hit for Mary Hopkin in 1969.

Besides playing lead guitar on cuts like "Back in the U.S.S.R.," "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" and "Helter Skelter," McCartney made profuse use of his freshly purchased Martin D-28 acoustic on 1968's *The Beatles* (informally known as the White Album). Its warm resonance enriched tracks like "Rocky Raccoon," "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," "Mother Nature's Son," "Wild Honey Pie," the criminally underappreciated "I Will" and the ad-libbed "Can You Take Me Back?" section of "Cry Baby Cry."

> "I was showing George what I wanted, something feedback-y and crazy, and he said, 'Well, you do it'"

And then there's "Blackbird," whose roots lie in a Bach piece that McCartney and Harrison wrestled with as schoolboys: "Bourrée in E Minor" [*see the sidebar lesson on page 41*]. They never got past the first few measures, but the composer's use of contrary motion made a lasting enough impression on Paul to give rise to one of his most beloved works. McCartney's intuitive use of compound thirds and chromatic voice leading makes for a beautiful and unforgettable guitar part. "Blackbird" has become a favorite among guitar players of every generation... and the bane of guitar shop employees condemned to hear it on endless repeat.

It's Getting Very Near the End

As he did in the band's early days, Macca increasingly focused on bass rather than guitar during the Beatles' final stage. He did, however, play acoustic and electric guitar on "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," and his Martin helped shape the sound of "Two of Us," "Maggie Mae" and "Her Majesty."

Though 1970's *Let It Be* was released after the band's dissolution, 1969's *Abbey Road* was the last album the Beatles recorded together. Its parting shot, "The End," was the only song to feature solos from all four Beatles. In the three-guitarist relay race near the song's end, McCartney took the first, fourth and seventh lead breaks, often jumping across intervals rather than playing consecutive scalar notes.

After saying their individual farewells via their instruments, the group left the world with a pithy couplet: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." The song's final moments conjure images of the musicians rising into the clouds as one, singing a final angelic harmony as they wave goodbye in slow motion. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more perfect closing statement from a band.

In one last pioneering act, the Beatles inadvertently capped off *Abbey Road* with history's first hidden album track, not counting the sound collage in the run-out groove of the *Sgt. Pepper* record. The inclusion of "Her Majesty" was the result of an editing error, but in retrospect, it can be heard as almost deliberately anticlimactic. It's as though after the band members have taken their bows and left the stage, McCartney has poked his head out from behind the curtain to amicably stick his tongue out at us, reminding us that things aren't so serious after all. Life goes on, and in the end, a band is just a band... even if it happens to be the most pivotal rock band ever to walk the Earth.

LARRY ELLIS/DAILY EXPRESS/EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES

Take This Pair of Strings and Learn to Fly

Examining Paul McCartney's "two-finger" magic as heard in the Beatles' "Blackbird"

BY DALE TURNER

FIG. 1 C major scale in "10ths" intervals

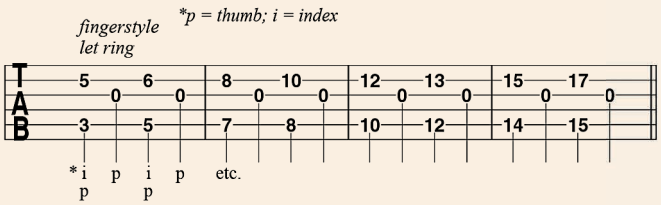


FIG. 2

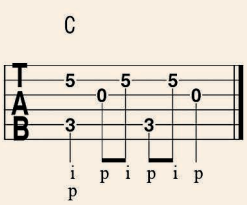


FIG. 3

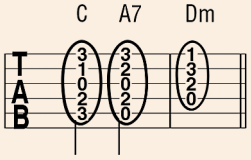


FIG. 4

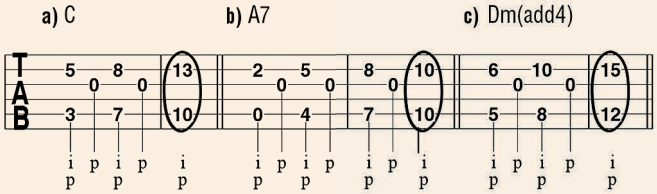
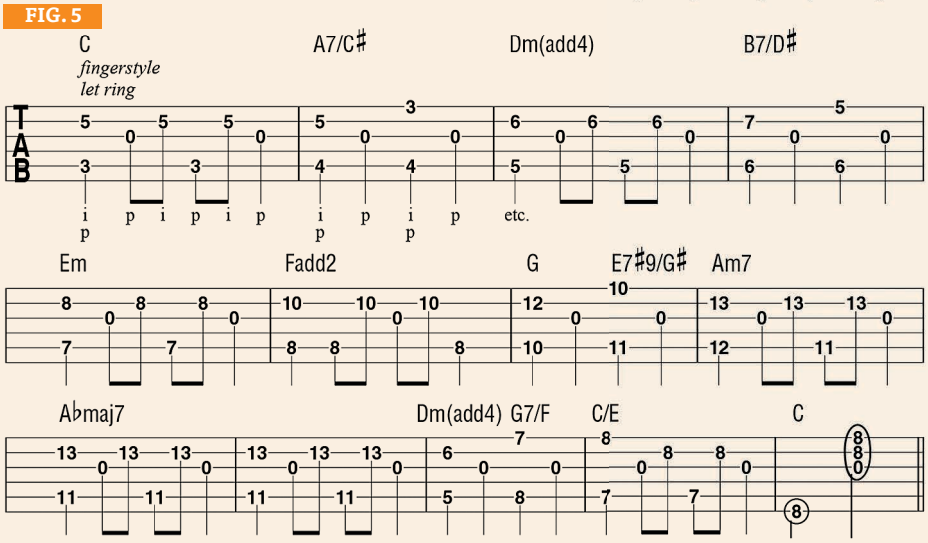


FIG. 5



THOUGH CREDITED TO John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "Blackbird" is solely a McCartney composition, recorded as a solo performance (Macca accompanying his own voice, plucking his Martin D-28) and released on 1968's *The Beatles*. Guitaristically speaking, the song's roots/inspiration trace back to McCartney's early experimentation with a well-known piece from J.S. Bach's Lute Suite, titled "Bourée in E Minor," which McCartney woodshedded in his youth (A transcription of "Bourée in E Minor" appears in our February 2026 issue). Lyrically, the song was written in reaction to the unfortunate escalating racial tension present in the U.S. during the late Sixties. To this day, "Blackbird" is one of the most commonly requested songs (from student to teacher) of fledgling fingerstyle acoustic guitarists.

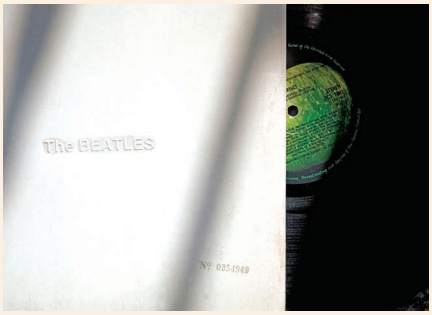
Throughout "Blackbird," McCartney uses his pick-hand thumb (p) and index finger (i) to pick his strings, while fretting only two notes (mostly on the A and B strings) and plucking the open G string on the eighth-note upbeats.

For the basics, have a look at **FIGURE 1**. Begin by fretting C (A string, 3rd fret) and E (B string, 5th fret) with your index finger and pinkie, respectively. Pick the two strings together with your pick-hand thumb and index finger. These two notes form what's called a major 10th interval, which is a major 3rd plus an octave, and imply a C major chord (C, E, G). As the figure unfolds, this shape, fretted with the same two fingers, is shifted up the neck, with the notes' spacing modified slightly to accommodate the asymmetric intervallic structure of the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B), with a sequence of major and minor 10ths, as you would have when harmonizing the scale in 3rds — major, minor, minor, major, major, minor, minor. Thumbpick the open G string in between each successive shape.

When he's not playing parts similar to the previous example, McCartney plays passages not unlike **FIGURE 2**. In this "busier" groove, as your thumb alternates between the A and G strings, your pick hand's index finger strikes notes on the B string between thumbpicked notes.

Now let's look at how McCartney's moveable two-note shapes can imply a chord progression. In the following examples, we'll extract two notes at a time from stock chord shapes you're likely already familiar with, such as those shown in **FIGURE 3**. Then we'll find different places on the neck to play these note pairs (on the A and B strings, exclusively) and pick them, McCartney-style.

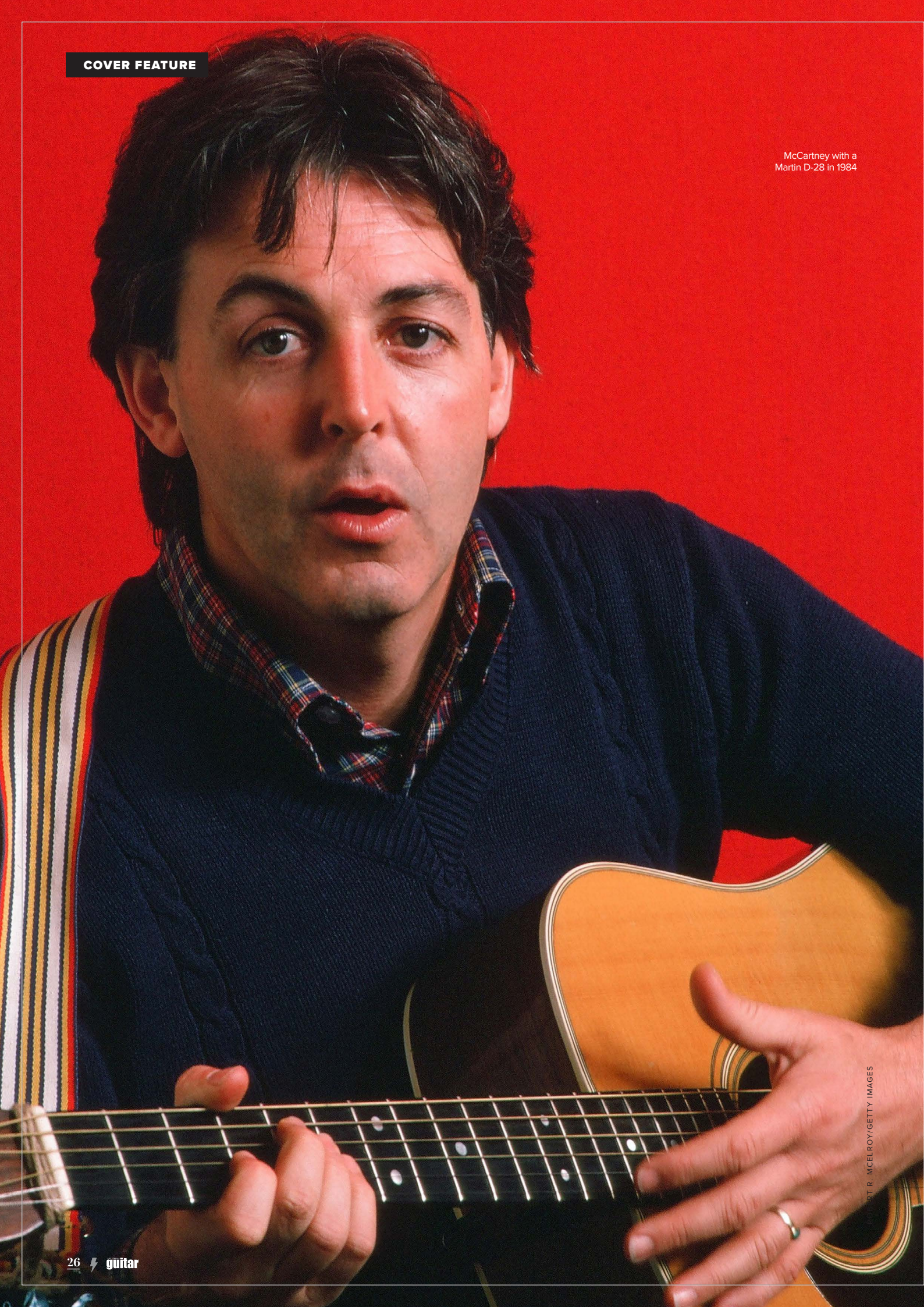
To illustrate, in **FIGURE 4a**, three different pairs of chord tones from C (C, E, G) are fretted along these two strings, picked in conjunction with the open G string; fret the notes with your outer fingers — 1 and 4. A7 (A, C♯, E, G) gets a similar treatment in **FIGURE 4b**. Note that this chord comprises four different notes, yielding an extra shape at the end of the example: G (5th string, 10th fret,) and A (2nd string, 10th fret), fretted with the ring finger and pinkie. For Dm (D, F, A), after you locate its chord tones on the 5th and 2nd strings, pick its three resultant shapes in **FIGURE 4c**.



JEFFREY BLACKLER/ALAMY

Once you learn the note names in your favorite chords and can find them on the neck, as long as the open G string tonally 'agrees with' the chord or key you're playing in, you can experiment reshaping any progression — whether it's your own song or a cover — using McCartney's resourceful technique and approach. **FIGURE 5** does this in an expanded progression incorporating a variety of chords. Notice the new shape, involving notes on the 1st string, introduced in bars 2, 4, 7 and 10 (on beat 2). For these, fret the 5th- and 1st-string notes with your middle and index fingers, respectively. The passage ends with an interesting C voicing, the result of shifting the physical shape of a common open G chord five frets up the neck to imply C.

For a video of this lesson, visit guitarworld.com/october2026



McCartney with a Martin D-28 in 1984

ROBERT R. MCELROY/GETTY IMAGES

Earning Your Wings

Need a crash course in guitar badassery? Welcome to McCartney University. Behold the best and brightest six-string performances from Sir Paul's entire post-Beatles studio catalog (starring a McCartney, a McCullough, a McCulloch and a McIntosh).

BY DAMON ORION

YOU'D BE MORE likely to see a mosh pit at a Dave Matthews concert than a list of all-time greatest bassists that didn't include Paul McCartney. With all the recognition McCartney gets for his bass chops — not to mention his songwriting genius — it's easy to forget that he started his journey with the Beatles as a guitarist. Only when Stu Sutcliffe stepped down as the band's bassist in 1961 did the 19-year-old, baby-faced Paul reluctantly trade six strings for four.

Even after switching to bass, McCartney couldn't keep his hands off the guitar. Try to imagine Beatles tunes like "Yesterday," "Blackbird" or "Michelle" without his gentle acoustic artistry. For that matter, try to picture "Paperback Writer" without his fuzzed-out electric guitar riff, or "Ticket to Ride" without the melodies he wrenched from his Epiphone Casino, or "The End" without his sharp, expressive leads, or the intro to "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" without the proud six-string proclamations he launched through a Vox Conqueror from his Fender Esquire, or "Taxman" without his solo's blotter-art swirl of blues-rock and Indian influences... Shall we go on?

After the Beatles disbanded, the Former Fab leaned in harder, plastering albums like *McCartney* and *McCartney II* and Wings' *Band on the Run* with his distinctive guitar work. His array of equipment broadened over time, but his Epiphone Casino, Vox amps and go-to acoustics — a Martin D-28 and an Epiphone Texan FT-79 — stayed close to both his heart and his hands.

Realizing that even he can't play bass and guitar at the same time, McCartney has taken legions of gifted guitarists under his wings (yeah, we said it) throughout his career. From Wings alumni like Denny Laine, Henry McCullough and Jimmy McCulloch to more recent collaborators such as Robbie McIntosh (no, you don't have to have a last name starting with "Mc" to play guitar with the Big Mac, but it helps) and current band members Rusty Anderson and Brian Ray, these players have all enriched McCartney's music with their skill and creativity. In turn, they've learned crucial lessons in musicianship, stage presence, band dynamics and music-biz politics while enrolled at "McCartney University," as guitarist Laurence Juber calls it.

Juber, who stepped away from a successful career as a studio musician to join Wings in 1978, says he and his bandmates had an abundance of artistic freedom under Paul's leadership. "We were encouraged to really think of it as a band," he says. "There were very few occasions when he gave me something specific to play. That would be when something was written into his concept of a song, whether it was a riff on the live 'Coming Up' single or those figures in [*Wings B-side*] 'Daytime Nighttime Suffering.'"

Trying to spotlight every standout guitar performance in a body of work this vast — especially one so rich in contributions from world-class musicians — is like trying to cram every item in a restaurant into a to-go box. We'd love to list every deserving candidate, such as Pete Townshend's feisty leads on "Angry" from 1986's *Press to Play*... or the harmonized solo that closes out "Alligator" from *New* (2013), or Jimmy McCulloch's leads on "The Note You Never Wrote" (*Wings at the Speed of Sound*, 1976), or Lloyd Green's adroit pedal steel quips on the 1974 "Junior's Farm" B-side "Sally G"... Well, hell, if we don't stop there, the list of honorable mentions is going to be longer than the round-up itself.

With that caveat out of the way, let the rock show begin. Here, in chronological order, are our picks for the guitar highlights from the great Sir Paul's post-Beatles studio catalog. May they provide newcomers with a six-string-centric entry point to the hallowed halls of Maccademia, and may they inspire longtime fans to go back and listen to what the man played.

"Maybe I'm Amazed"

McCartney (1970)

With a little help from Linda on backing vocals, the ever-industrious Mr. McCartney recorded every track of this soaring proto-power ballad in a single day. His rhythm guitar playing is sparse and unobtrusive, accentuating the song's emotional peaks without crowding his vocal. Still, there's a quiet ingenuity at work here; in the latter half of the song, McCartney builds intensity by fretting chords without fully depressing the strings. Combined with palm-muting, this creates a percussive sound with just a whisper of harmony. Paul uses this technique to craft a rhythm not dissimilar to the one his ultimate guitar hero, Jimi Hendrix, played in the intro to "Are You



Too many people? John Wayne [right] hands Grammy awards to Paul and Linda McCartney in 1971



Jimmy McCulloch in 1976 and [below] Henry McCullough in 1972

Experienced?" Within the context of the song, it sounds like he's sending a love note to his new bride in Morse code. Also noteworthy are the song's twin guitar solos — loose variations on the vocal melody that he decorates with slides, hammer-ons and swiftly released ghost bends. While largely alike, the two solos diverge at the last instant. In the first, McCartney colors outside diatonic lines with childlike glee, but in the second, he stays loyal to conventional tonality. Midway through each solo, he adds an arpeggiated rhythm track much like a passage from the Beatles' "You Never Give Me Your Money," which still bore the scent of fresh paint when "Maybe I'm Amazed" was released.

"Too Many People"

Ram (1971)

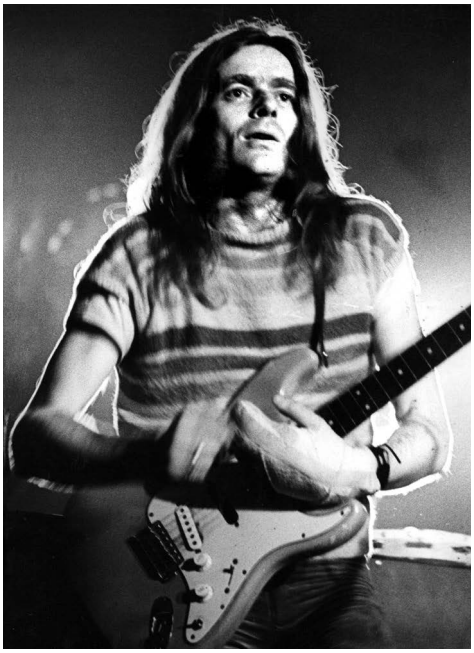
One of McCartney's finest post-Beatles works, "Too Many People" cloaks unusually bitter sentiments in a melody sweeter than buttercream. Paul wastes no time setting the hook, driving the intro with insistent downstrokes on an acoustic guitar tuned a whole step south of standard. This detuning allows a droning A string (sounding as G) to underpin a shifting series of dyads on the D and G strings.

After the vocals take hold, the guitar temporarily recedes into the background. Then the guitarist plants a bomb in the bridge: a simple, catchy melody that fills the space between the sung lines. Mid-song, cowbell and shakers help propel a momentum-building electric solo. In the verse that follows, the cowbell pairs with animalistic guitar wails to foster the pastoral atmosphere suggested by the album's cover. A second solo bites harder than the first, as if echoing the little jabs at John and Yoko in the song's lyrics. Debate persists over whether McCartney or the late session player Hugh McCracken handled at least one of the leads in this song. However, beatlesbible.com credits McCartney with overdubbing both solos in a single take. Either way, the sharp-edged lead guitar at the song's end hints that a formidable set of fangs lurks beneath this sheep's clothing.

"My Love"

Red Rose Speedway (1973)

In a statement on former Wings guitarist Henry McCullough's death in 2016, Paul McCartney described the solo on this recording as "a classic that [*McCullough*] made up on the spot in front of a live orchestra." McCartney, who had initially composed a different solo for the song, tells the origin story of McCullough's lead in the book *Wings: The Story of a Band on the Run*: "Just before the session, Henry came over to me, leaned down and whispered in my ear. He said, 'Do you mind if I try something else on the solo?'... I had to have faith, and boy, was it rewarded."



In *Band on the Run: A History of Paul McCartney and Wings*, McCullough claimed this was the first time a member of Wings had challenged the former Beatle. Granted, his nightly improvisations of the "My Love" solo throughout Wings' 1972 tour probably gave him the head start he needed to nail his single-take performance at Abbey Road Studios. Still, this lead, likely played on a goldtop Les Paul with P90s, is sensitive and unforced, briefly echoing George Harrison's most tender musical moments without lapsing into imitation. McCartney has named it as McCullough's finest moment with Wings, and McCullough called it a "one-take wonder" and a "gift from God."

"Junior's Farm"

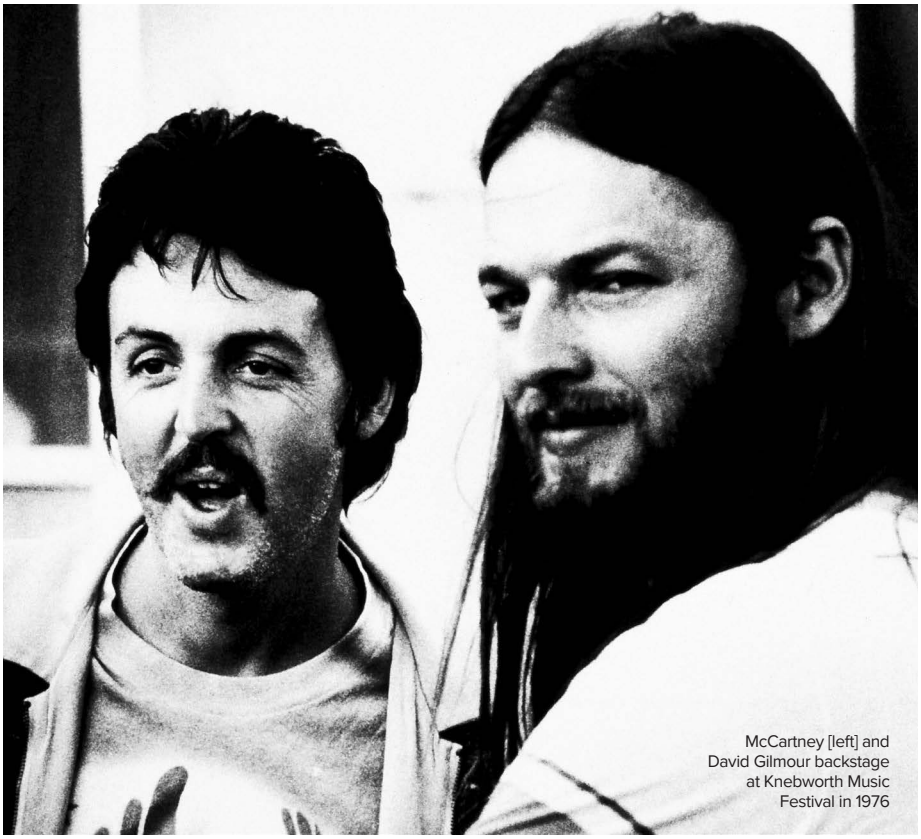
Non-album single (1974)

With 1966's "And Your Bird Can Sing," Paul McCartney and George Harrison slipped harmonized lead guitar into the rock lexicon through the f-holes of their Epiphone Casinos. By 1974, acts like UFO, the Allman Brothers Band and Queen had embraced this device, bejeweling their songs with gleaming dual-guitar leads.

Toward the end of that year, Paul McCartney & Wings released "Junior's Farm," the band's final output on Apple Records. The song barrels in with an anthemic guitar line harmonized mostly in thirds, similar in spirit to the triumphant major-key fanfare that would later parade through Thin Lizzy's "The Boys Are Back in Town." "Junior's Farm" also serves as a coming-out party for Scottish guitarist

ABC PHOTO ARCHIVES/DISNEY GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT CONTENT VIA GETTY IMAGES, MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES, GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Jimmy McCulloch, the former child prodigy who played on Thunderclap Newman's U.K. Number 1 hit "Something in the Air" at age 15. McCartney's shout of "Take me down, Jimmy!" is unmistakably reminiscent of "Get Back" ("Get back, Loretta!"), as is the instrumental break that follows. However, in contrast to John Lennon's straightforward lead (yes, "Get Back" is a rare example of Lennon playing lead guitar on a Beatles tune), McCulloch studs his solo with flashy ostinato runs and a double-stop that he gooses into a screaming dissonance. He burns through the song with confidence and finesse, then embeds some deceptively simple-sounding arpeggios in the coda, his deft picking camouflaged by the band's harmonized vocals.



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

McCartney [left] and David Gilmour backstage at Knebworth Music Festival in 1976

"Spin It On" and "To You"

Back to the Egg (1979)

The title of Wings' final record, *Back to the Egg*, reflects the back-to-basics ethos that permeated that album's creation. "We were basically recording in a barn in Scotland, so we didn't have any of the sophistication of being at Abbey Road or one of the other London studios," Laurence Juber says. One of the guitarist's most prominent memories from those sessions is of working out the leads for the punk/rockabilly-influenced "Spin It On," one of the first songs recorded for the album. McCartney sat with him in the control room, encouraging him to come up with licks "that fit the title in terms of the 'spin' aspect of things. Paul brought stuff out of me that I didn't necessarily know that I could do. When you're sitting eye-to-eye with a Beatle, one tries to rise to the occasion." And that Juber did, spinning speedy legato runs and screeching bends that beg for swear words of appreciation. His tone came from a 1963 Stratocaster plugged into a Mesa Boogie Mark II — the same rig he used to far different effect on "To You," which finds him plowing straight through the roadblock of the song's key signature. "Paul was in the control room manipulating an Eventide Harmonizer while I was improvising, so I was hearing notes in the headphones that were transposed from what I was actually playing," he says. "That led me to play outside of the changes." The result was a harmonized (and disharmonized) solo that stands triumphantly at the junction of consonance and dissonance. Juber calls the effect "weirdly satisfying"; we call it glorious.

In a 2012 interview for the webzine *Something Else!*, the guitarist described his solo on "To You" as "a precursor to what Trevor Rabin did on [*Yes'*] 'Owner of a Lonely Heart.'" Elsewhere on *Back to the Egg*, Juber used an ARP Avatar guitar synthesizer and, on occasion, an EBow. More recently, he recorded *One Wing*, an album consisting of selections from McCartney's post-Beatles work. This year saw the release of *I've Got a Feeling... LJ is Still Playing the Beatles!*, Juber's fifth collection of Fab Four tunes adapted for solo guitar.

"No More Lonely Nights"

Give My Regards to Broad Street (1984)

Before lighting up "No More Lonely Nights" with a pair of inspired solos, Pink Floyd's prodigious axeman, David Gilmour, played on a couple of tunes from *Back to the Egg* ("Rockestra Theme" and "So Glad to See You Here") as part of a "rockestra" that also included GOATs like Pete Townshend, John Bonham and John Paul Jones. However, whereas Gilmour blended stealthily with the ensemble on those tracks, he is recognizable from note one of his first solo on "Lonely Nights." Gilmour plays a melody as hummable and lyrical as the song itself. His sustained ending note morphs into a pinch harmonic that stings like a bite of live hornet pizza. At the song's end, his second solo starts as a reiteration of the first, but an upward modulation seems to bring out the snarl in him. He spray-paints the song's outro with screaming bent notes, surly double-stops and sneering whammy bar flourishes.

The-paulmccartney-project.com quotes Gilmour as saying, "In one three-hour session with a band, we learnt [*'No More Lonely Nights'*] and put it down, and Paul played piano and sang the lead vocal live, and I put the guitar solo down, bang." In a 1984 interview for *Guitar Player*, he said the gear he used for this session was a stripped-down version of his live rig. According to gilmourish.com, that full rig comprised — among other things — an array of Stratocasters, a Mesa Boogie Mark 1 60w head, four MXR Digital Delay effects racks, an assembly of Fender Concert combo amps and a slew of Boss pedals. Gilmour would go on to contribute characteristically outstanding performances to Paul's *Flowers in the Dirt* and *Run Devil Run* (from 1989 and 1999, respectively) and the song "I Love This House," which first appeared on McCartney's radio show *Oobu Joobu* in 1995. That said, his work on "No More Lonely Nights" gets our vote for Best in Show.

"Good Times Coming / Feel the Sun"

Press to Play (1986)

How is it possible for a guitar solo to be simultaneously pleasant and abrasive, stiff and flowing, jagged and smooth, jarring and melodic, mechanical and friendly, angular and sinuous? Somehow Carlos Alomar reconciles these seeming opposites in "Good Times Coming." With its thick, heavily processed tone, abrupt stops and aggressive whammy bar dives, his lead on this song sounds like a PG-13 reboot of Robert Fripp's R-rated playing on "Fashion" by David Bowie. While we're on that subject, Alomar also appeared on "Fashion,"

but he played the clean, funky rhythm part on that track, while former 10cc multi-instrumentalist Eric Stewart fulfilled that role on "Good Times Coming." Stewart's syncopated chord stabs, nimble fills and muted 32nd-note flurries are worth the price of admission all by themselves. Stick around for the transition to "Feel the Sun," which illuminates McCartney's knack for stitching song scraps together seamlessly. Culminating with a bright guitar melody, this bouncy little piece wouldn't need its cheerful lyrics to impart the feeling that the sun has just broken through, and the good times have arrived.

"Peace in the Neighbourhood"

Off the Ground (1993)

The recording of "Peace in the Neighbourhood" (yes, that's the British spelling) that made it to the *Off the Ground* album was originally intended as a rehearsal take, but the band couldn't recapture its loose feel on subsequent passes.

"That was a good one for me, that guitar outro," guitarist Robbie McIntosh commented in the tour book for McCartney's New World Tour. "We were rehearsing, arsing about, really, so I wasn't thinking, 'Woo! I've got the chance to show off now!' It was aimless in a way, and yet it ended up sounding quite nice." While not lacking in technique, his solo glides with a relaxed smoothness that only a seasoned player can conjure when he's not trying overly hard.

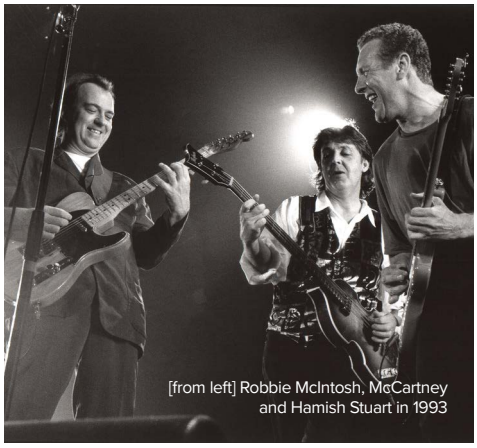
McIntosh brings the same verve and professionalism to *Off the Ground* that he has displayed in his work with artists like the Pretenders, John Mayer, Joe Cocker and Roger Daltrey. Other morsels of guitar goodness on the album: the slide work on "Biker Like an Icon" and the title track, the solo on "Looking for Changes" and the honky-tonk blues leads on "Get Out of My Way."

"House of Wax"

Memory Almost Full (2007)

Paul's dreamlike lyrics on this tune border on the Dylanesque, depicting lightning striking a house of wax, poets spilling out to the street and thunder drowning a trumpet's blast.

The song reaches its emotional apex during a second solo filled with quick alternate picking, wailing bends and flashy legato licks. In the final moments of "House of Wax," the lead guitar seems to portray the lightning in the song's lyrics as drummer Abe Laboriel Jr. brings the thunder. Some online sources claim that longtime McCartney guitarist Rusty Anderson is the player who bottled this lightning, but *Memory Almost Full*'s producer, David Kahne, recalls being in the control room when McCartney improvised



[from left] Robbie McIntosh, McCartney and Hamish Stuart in 1993

the lead: "I had this weird moment, because it reminded me of the solo in 'Taxman.' It has that same chaotic, loose, all-over-the-place [*feel*], almost like the tape wasn't on, but it works so well and sits in the track perfectly."

Apparently, these kinds of lightning-bolt moments aren't uncommon when you're working with McCartney. "He does something that makes you think, 'How did he do that? Where did that come from?" Kahne says. To borrow from this song's lyrics, the answer to that question is "buried deep below a thousand layers." Whatever its origin, this spontaneous blast of electricity could melt steel, let alone wax.

"Long Tailed Winter Bird"

McCartney III (2020)

Bluebirds, blackbirds, skylarks and wrens have all winged their way through McCartney's music over the years. In 2020, he continued that tradition by composing an acoustic guitar-based piece called "Winter Bird" for an animated short film.

"I liked what I did so much that once I'd finished the film bit, which was less than a minute in length, I then thought, 'OK, let's keep going,'" he told *NME*. McCartney created an elongated version of "Winter Bird," adding drums, Höfner bass, vocals, recorder, harmonium and extra layers of guitar.

"Winter Bird" and its long-tailed counterpart eventually bookended *McCartney III*, which was recorded during the Covid lockdown. In both tunes, McCartney zigzags between fretted notes and the open E string. At times, the second and seventh notes of the E harmonic minor scale momentarily clash with the root note, creating exotic dissonances. Is it one of the best guitar licks of 2020? The jury is story out on that one, but it's a certainly compelling listen, bearing an air of mystery and a badass groove that continues to hum in the listener's bones after this winter bird has flown.



McCartney with his Epiphone Texan in 2011

"As You Lie There"

The Boys of Dungeon Lane (2026)

Sixty-two years after the Beatles struck the famous "May we have your attention, please?" chord that kicked off their *A Hard Day's Night* album, Sir Paul used an equally unusual guitar voicing to draw listeners into the first track from this year's *The Boys of Dungeon Lane*. The quirky, harmonically jarring arpeggio at the beginning of "As You Lie There" — either a D13♭9 (no 3rd) or a Cm(maj7)/D (no 5th), depending on who you ask — makes a disconcerting first impression. While using his acoustic guitar's open D string as a recurring pedal tone, McCartney then moves the top note of the arpeggiated chord down a whole step, bringing a shaky sense of relief, as the chord changes to a slightly less dissonant but still restless D7♭9. A shift to a relatively stable-sounding second-inversion G chord, G/D, provides grounding and familiarity, and a revelation that we're in the key of G, but its open D bass note warns us not to get too cozy.

Capping off the four-bar phrase, a melodic staccato hop down G major pentatonic scale, doubled two octaves lower on bass, outlines the home chord and takes us back to the start of the progression. For those whose eyes glaze over at the sight of flat symbols and Roman numerals, suffice to say that it's a cool, offbeat mix of sweet and unsettling sounds, setting the perfect tone for a song that's equal parts light and shade.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS, LESTER COHEN/WIREIMAGE. KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE

AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL SERIES

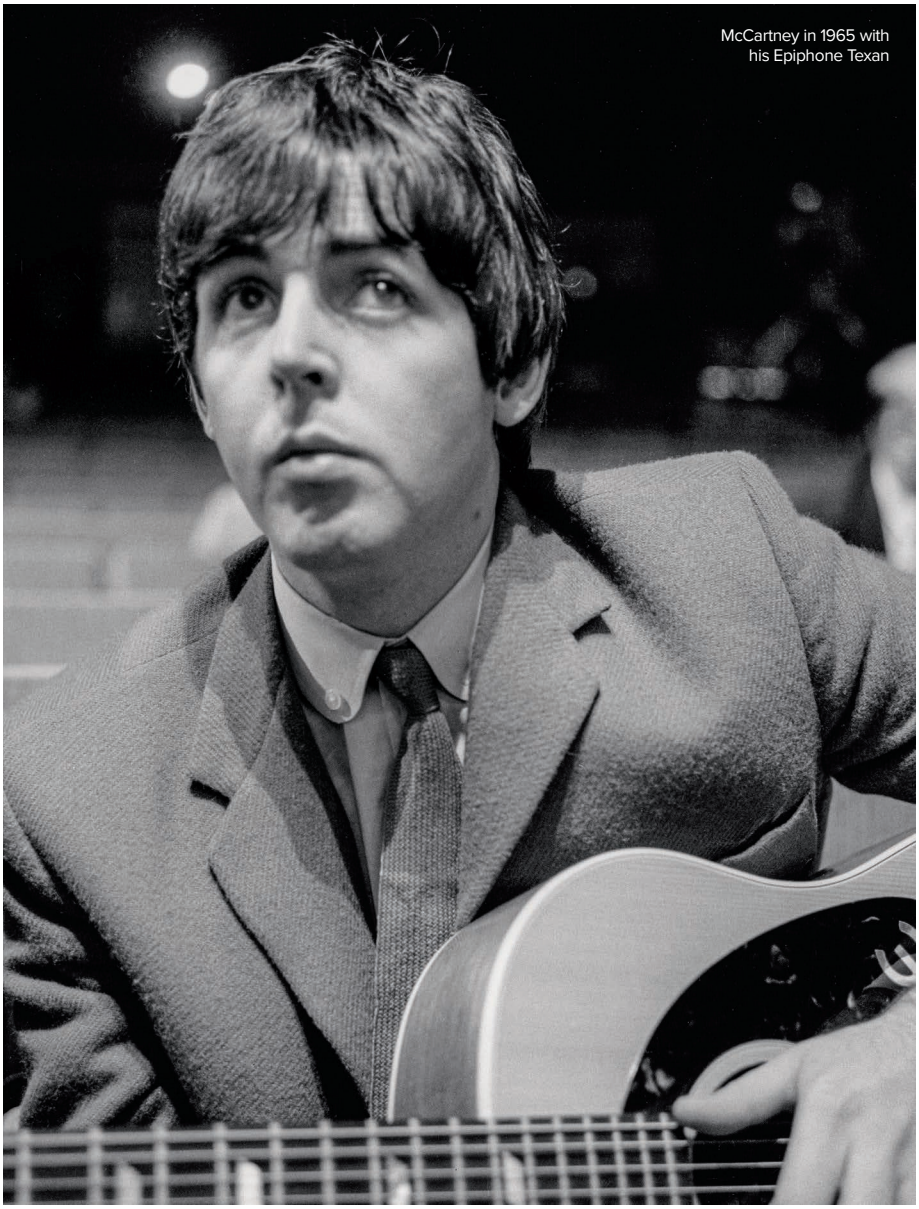
HOTSHOT™ TELECASTER® in Three-Tone Sunburst with TONE MASTER® DELUXE REVERB®



Fender®

The One. For All.

©2026 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved.



McCartney in 1965 with his Epiphone Texan

Paul Is Gear

The guitars that have shaped McCartney's sound — yesterday and today

BY DAMON ORION

LET'S NOT KID ourselves; one instrument and one alone will forever be tied to Paul McCartney in the minds of the masses — the Höfner 500/1 Violin Bass. It is to Macca what the Frankenstein guitar is to Eddie Van Halen, practically serving as an emoji for the man himself.

Be that as it may, the Höfner is just one of many instruments McCartney calls his own. That, of course, includes a host of guitars he has embraced throughout nearly seven decades of playing.

Paul has never been a gearhead or a self-styled guitar hero. From the moment he traded his trumpet for a Framus Zenith 17 acoustic as a teen, he has used the guitar as a tool for self-accompaniment, not for instrumental acrobatics or deep dives into the mechanics of sound manipulation. Nor has he made it a priority to accumulate the most expensive or sought-after instruments.

"The terrible thing about me is that I got locked in a mindset that I picked up from my dad," he once told *Guitar World Acoustic*. "He really ground it in me to never be in debt, because while we weren't on the poverty line, there wasn't much money to go around."

Even after all the sweet Beatle cash started rolling in, that mentality led the Cute One to continue choosing economy-class guitars over luxury gear. That said, when you're Sir Paul McCartney, loved ones and admirers tend to give you an extravagant instrument here and there. Over time, that has helped him build a collection that reflects both his modest background and his present-day status as musical royalty.

Here, from the unassuming to the lavish, are six of the guitars most central to McCartney and his artistry.

1964 Epiphone Texan FT-79N

The Texan acoustic has been one of Macca's pet instruments for more than six decades. It's the guitar he used not only to write and record "Yesterday," but also to play said song in an *Ed Sullivan Show* performance that fairly shifted the Earth's crust. Much later, it helped bring solo cuts like "Calico Skies" and "Jenny Wren" to life.

The FT-79N (N for "Natural," as in "natural finish") is a close cousin of the Gibson J-45, but at 25.5 inches, it's significantly longer. It has a slope-shouldered dreadnought body, a spruce top, parallelogram-shaped fret inlays and mahogany back, sides and neck.

Restrung and flipped upside-down for left-handed use, McCartney's Texan still bears the Detroit Red Wings sticker he was given when Wings played Red Wings Stadium in 1976 (see page 63). Depicting a wheel with two wings, that emblem held

DAILY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY IMAGES

obvious appeal for a man with a winged band and a heart like a wheel.

In 2004, McCartney worked with Gibson to create a signature replica of the Texan. While not radically different from the original, the updated instrument offered some fancy new frills. Not the least of these were an embroidered case and, in some cases, a soundhole label signed by the Big Mac himself.



McCartney with his Ovation during Wings' 1976 U.S. tour

1962 Epiphone Casino ES-230TD

"If I had to pick one electric guitar, this would be it," McCartney has said of his fully hollow thinline Casino. Equipped with a Bigsby tremolo and an early Gibson-design headstock, it's the axe that helped send his playing on tunes like "Taxman" and "Paperback Writer" into the red.

According to legend, McCartney bought his Casino in late 1964 on the advice of his close friend John Mayall, leader of the Bluesbreakers. In photographs taken backstage at the Hammersmith Odeon in December '64, it still appears to be set up for right-handed playing. Paul would soon modify it for lefty use by changing its nut and bridge and installing a strap button on its upper treble bout.

Following McCartney's lead, John Lennon and George Harrison quickly purchased their own Casinos. Not coincidentally, sales of the instrument nearly doubled between 1965 and 1966. The folk musician Donovan would later convince Harrison and Lennon to sand the finishes off their Epiphones for improved tone, but McCartney opted to preserve his guitar's sunburst lacquer. To this day, the Casino remains one of his most cherished companions, original finish and all.

1964 Fender Esquire

As a more affordable precursor to the Telecaster, the Fender Esquire offered just one single-coil bridge pickup, with a three-way pickup switch serving as a tone selector. After taking one of these utilitarian instruments home while the Beatles were cooking up *Revolver*, McCartney turned it into a left-handed guitar in his usual way: by restringing it and moving the strap button to the upper cutaway horn. Featuring a sunburst finish, maple neck and rosewood fretboard, it was his favored guitar on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. On songs like "Good Morning Good Morning" and the title track, its raw, cutting tone imbued his performances with a kick that threatened to send turntable arms flying.



McCartney's 1964 Epiphone Casino, photographed in 2010

1967 Martin D-28

With its dreadnought body, solid Sitka spruce top, rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck and ebony fretboard and bridge, the D-28 is an ordinary-looking acoustic with an above-average sound. The combination of spruce and rosewood helps give it a full-bodied voice, powerful projection and a crystalline top end.

Shortly after acquiring his Martin in 1968, Macca put it to use on Beatles cuts like "Blackbird" and "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da." It has stood the test of time, enhancing solo works such as 2005's *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard* and popping up in McCartney's current-day live sets.

Ovation 1619-4 Custom Legend

In the early Seventies, Macca stepped back onto the concert stage after a long absence. By the middle of the decade, he and Wings were helping inflate the airbrushed zeppelin we now call arena rock. The new aesthetic demanded new sounds, as offered by the Ovation acoustic-electric guitar.

There's some dispute over whether Paul's Ovation is a Custom Balladeer or a Custom Legend. However, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's Paul McCartney and Wings Exhibit unambiguously identifies it as a 1619-4 Custom Acoustic, part of Ovation's Custom Legend series. It has a rounded back made of Lyrachord, an undersaddle piezo pickup system, a solid sitka spruce top, an ebony fingerboard and a neck made of a five-piece mahogany/maple laminate.

1957 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop

Fifties Les Pauls are already highly prized, but left-handed models are among the rarest of beasts... and when one of them happens to be a goldtop owned by pop music's Mozart, it might as well emit rays of white light and a heavenly hum when its case is opened.

McCartney's Les Paul has a Tune-o-matic bridge, which became a feature of the goldtop in 1955. In 1957, Gibson started equipping goldtops with dual-coil PAF humbuckers rather than single-coil P90s, giving this instrument a punchy tone, expanded dynamic range and greater responsiveness to attack.

Not to be confused with the coveted '57 Les Paul that Brian Ray has been known to play during Macca's live sets, McCartney's goldtop is said to be a gift from his late wife Linda. This is a golden ax fit for a knight, demonstrating just how far he's come from the "smoky bars and cheap guitars" he looks back on in his new song "Days We Left Behind."



McCartney with his goldtop in 1988

NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, RINO PETROSINO/MONDADORI PORTFOLIO VIA GETTY IMAGES



Laurence Juber in action with Wings in late 1979

Wings Over Easy

Laurence Juber — the last remaining Wings lead guitarist (a weird thing to say, but it's true) — revisits the making of the band's final album, 1979's Back to the Egg

BY ANDREW DALY

LAURENCE JUBER GREW up a Beatles fan, which isn't uncommon, especially among the generation of British musicians born in the early Fifties.

"When I started playing guitar in November 1963, it was during the breaking wave of Beatlemania in the U.K.," Juber says. "The Beatles had an impact, but so did the Shadows, the Rolling Stones, the Animals and other British Invasion bands. My focus was on being a studio musician — once I learned that it was an actual career path."

That career path got rolling pretty quickly, as Juber, a versatile player with a knack for laying back and choosing the right gear, became an in-demand session guitarist. His first brush with the Beatles' universe came when he hooked up with their producer, George Martin, for Cleo Laine's 1976 album, *Born on a Friday*.

"George was the first real record producer I worked with — and an icon," Juber says. "His manner in the studio was relaxed and encouraging."

It's very possible that Martin's relaxed demeanor rubbed off on Juber; still, the guitarist admits to feeling nervous when he joined Paul McCartney's successful post-Beatles band, Wings, in 1978, replacing Jimmy McCulloch, who had been fired for drunken misbehavior. "Recording was my day-to-day experience," Juber says. "Being on stage with a Beatle was a different perspective."

In the case of *Back to the Egg*, the 1979 Wings album on which Juber played (along with another new member, drummer Steve Holley), perspective is everything. Some of its reviews were negative, perhaps because the LP represented the tail end of a band that was a spent force after eight years of ups and downs. Then again, there are some fabulous moments, like "Rockestra Theme," which bagged a Grammy, plus "Spin It On," "Getting Closer," "Arrow Through Me" and "After the Ball/Million Miles."

There was a missed opportunity, though, with "Goodnight Tonight," one of Wings' last hits. Although it was recorded during the *Back to the Egg* sessions, it didn't appear on the album, robbing the LP of the pop single it needed to take it over the edge.

What led to your joining Wings? Longtime Wings guitarist Denny Laine had a hand in it, right?
I was very active in London as a session guitarist in the mid-Seventies. I was playing lead guitar on a TV show with David Essex. Denny was a guest, performing the Moody Blues hit "Go Now!" [*Editor's note: Laine was in the Moody Blues from 1964-66*]. He liked my playing and recommended me to Paul and Linda McCartney.

What were Paul's expectations of you going into the studio, and what do you think he liked about your playing?
The basic expectation was that we were forming a new incarnation of Wings and to think of it as a band. I think my versatility was an asset. My predecessors were fine rock players, but Paul was looking for a more comprehensive approach to the guitar.

What was the studio like, and what gear did you use?
We started *Back to the Egg* on the farm in Scotland, where the studio was basically a barn with a mobile recording truck. It was quite basic but functional. My go-to electric guitars at the time were a mid-Seventies Gibson Les Paul Custom, a '63 Fender Strat and a mid-Seventies maple-board Strat. For acoustics, I had a Martin D-28 and some Ovations. I had been using a Music Man amp, but we also had some small old Fenders and a Mesa Boogie.

PETE STILL/REDFERNS

Paul is on the record as suggesting he wanted to record an up-tempo album influenced by things other than the previous Wings albums. Is that how you remember it?
The musical zeitgeist was changing, punk was in the air and new wave was around the corner. Our co-producer Chris Thomas was in between doing the Sex Pistols and the Pretenders.

What was it like putting together "To You," "Spin It On," "Old Siam, Sir" and "Arrow Through Me"?
The first tunes we recorded were "To You," "Spin It On" and "Old Siam, Sir." "To You" was interesting, as Paul played a Zemaitis acoustic bass on the track. For the solo, I was playing the '63 Strat through the Mesa Boogie. Paul was in the control room manipulating an Eventide harmonizer while I was improvising, so I was hearing notes in the headphones that were transposed from what I was actually playing. That led me to play outside of the changes... weirdly satisfying. The "Spin It On" solo was done in the control room with the same gear. Paul and I sat eye to eye, and I learned his strengths as a producer while he coaxed a punk-rockabilly-like solo out of me. "Arrow Through Me" had a whole different sensibility and was keyboard- and horn-driven.

How about "Rockestra Theme," "Winter Rose/Love Awake" and "The Broadcast"?
"Winter Rose" was started in Scotland. I played an Ovation nylon-string direct with a pickup that alternated the strings left and right in the stereo spread. "Love Awake" was recorded in our second studio, which was a medieval castle [*Lympne Castle in Kent*]. I played bass when we cut the track, while Paul and Denny played acoustics. I figured Paul would replace the bass, but he said he liked my part. When I rerecorded it, he knelt on the floor in front of me and gave me picking tips. It was pretty cool getting a bass lesson from Macca. I overdubbed the harmonic cascades near the end with an Ovation Adamas.

"The Broadcast" was also done at the castle. Paul played a Tele copy with a Gizmotron prototype, plus a Mellotron for strings. I played my Seventies Strat with a Roland pickup through an Arp Avatar guitar synth with a string-type patch. I used that setup on "Reception," too, doubling the lead guitar with a horn patch.

We demoed "Rockestra Theme" at the castle but recorded it with the full Rockestra band in Studio Two at Abbey Road. That was quite a session — being in the guitar section with Denny Laine, Hank Marvin, David Gilmour and Pete Townshend.

And then there's "After the Ball," which has a brief outro solo made up of longer solos played by Denny, Paul and you.
Also done at the castle. I recall playing a Gibson ES-335 Dot, the same one that's in the "Goodnight Tonight" music video. I forget which amp I used. That guitar also was on "Baby's Request" — and that's curious since I had a Gibson Super 400 [*archtop*], which would have been the more obvious choice. I think I played it through a 50-watt Hiwatt. The tone was right.

What did you think of Back to the Egg the first time you heard it?
I thought it turned out quite well — the fans liked it. Other than "Rockestra Theme" and a few other spots, Denny mostly played acoustic guitar and contributed to the backing vocals. The sound of Paul, Linda and Denny singing together still gives me chills. In the 2026 *Man on the Run* documentary, the director, Morgan Neville, very effectively used some of the *Back to the Egg* tracks as underscore. Hearing the music in a Dolby Atmos mix made me want to hear the whole album that way.

Some of the reviews for Back to the Egg were negative, which is interesting because, as you said, fans tend to love it. How did the reviews affect everyone?
Not all the reviews were negative — just the ones Paul reacted to. It went platinum in the U.S. and was more successful than some other Wings projects. The album would likely have sold better if the hit single from that period, "Goodnight Tonight," had been on it.

Why was "Goodnight Tonight" omitted?
The Beatles' singles in the U.K. weren't on the albums, and Paul had the notion of standalone singles giving the fans extra value. It didn't really work the same way in the U.S., where labels depended on singles as the primary promotional tool. I don't know if he regretted not putting the single on the album. "Goodnight Tonight" and its B-side, "Daytime Nighttime Suffering," were added to the CD release. Paul generally seems to move on to the next project without reflecting much on the previous releases.

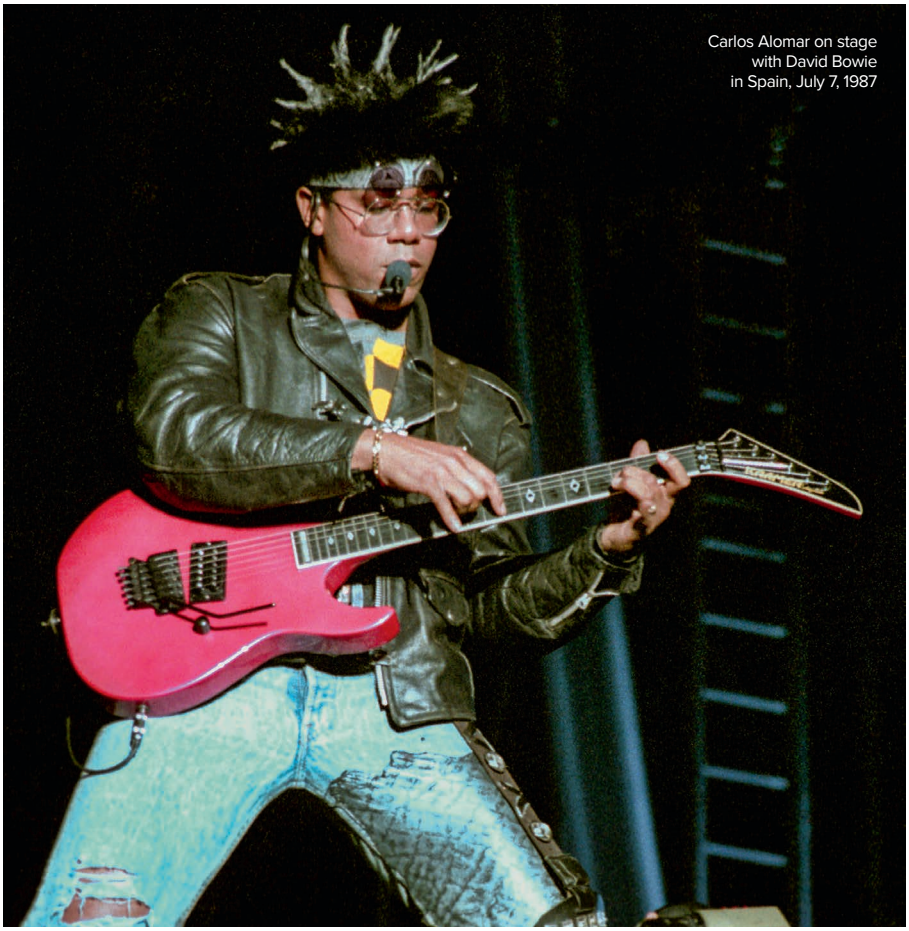


Some fans also wonder why Denny Laine's "Weep for Love" wasn't included on the album.
It wasn't recorded for *Back to the Egg*; the album was already finished. It was recorded at Lympne Castle, May 23, 1979, during the period we were filming the video special [*also called* Back to the Egg]. We had the mobile studio and did some extra recording on days we weren't filming. Steve plays the percussion groove. Paul is playing the bass guitar with a drumstick. I played the tremolo electric guitar and both of the harmony solo parts.

How do you think the album stands up?
It occupies a unique spot in Paul's artistic timeline — a slightly different dimension. [*Laughs*] I'm gratified. It's nice to get some peer recognition, but the real satisfaction is reaching people with music. Over the years, it's been reevaluated and recognized on its own musical terms, especially among musicians and musical artists, and "Rockestra Theme" won the first Grammy awarded for Best Rock Instrumental Performance in 1980.

How do you view your time with Wings?
I look at it as getting my "master's degree from McCartney University." [*Laughs*] It was a great musical experience, an education in the business of music, plus it gave me a launching pad to develop the next phase of my life and career. The Japanese bust was unfortunate [*Editor's note: McCartney was arrested in Tokyo in January 1980 for attempting to smuggle around 7.5 ounces of marijuana into Japan*]. It functionally put an end to the touring band. Subsequently, Wings' live version of "Coming Up" went to Number 1 in the U.S.

What advice would you offer a guitarist stepping into a similar situation?
For professional freelance players, be a musician — study the masters, take care of business and be on time and well-prepared for the gig. In the studio world, you never know what you might be called on to play. For performing artists, life on the road can be hard and, for solo performers, quite solitary. But it develops chops, style-refining opportunities and audience interaction.



Carlos Alomar on stage with David Bowie in Spain, July 7, 1987

Play Mates

Bowie favorite Carlos Alomar on how to bond with ex-Beatles — and the making of Paul McCartney's 1986 album, Press to Play

BY ANDREW DALY

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED to find a pop or rock guitarist who came of age in the Sixties who isn't a fan of the Beatles. Carlos Alomar is no different. This is why, despite years spent working with James Brown, Chuck Berry, David Bowie, Brian Eno, Iggy Pop and Mick Jagger, Alomar was slack-jawed at the chance to work with Paul McCartney on his 1986 record, *Press to Play*.

"It was truly a wish-come-true moment," Alomar says. "I'm not sure why Paul liked my playing, but maybe my success with David Bowie, Iggy Pop, John Lennon, Mick Jagger, Duran Duran and others might have tickled his curiosity."

This seems a good time to remind you that, in 1976, Alomar actually co-wrote a song — "Fame" from Bowie's *Young Americans* — with Lennon, putting him in rare company with McCartney. And yes, Alomar also shares that co-write with the one and only Bowie. But, regardless of how or why it happened, Alomar lent his unique brand of rhythm playing (and a bit of lead) to McCartney tracks like "Press," "Pretty Little Head," "Stranglehold" and "Only Love Remains," all of which turn 40 years old this summer.

"The fact that I was included with such notable musicians who have played with Paul was awesome in itself," Alomar says. "Paul was gracious enough to allow me to always complete my musical ideas, and then he'd simply say, 'Great! Let's try another song.' Many of my tracks were first takes."

That said, while he and McCartney got on well during the *Press to Play* sessions, they haven't seen one another since. "I departed the same way I arrived," Alomar says. "Happy and knowing I had just served Sir Paul McCartney. Paul, in turn, met a Puerto Rican Buddhist rocker who satisfied his curiosity and gave him stories to remember!"

What led to your being called to play on Press to Play?

Like most musicians, it always starts with a call to action. I got a call from producer Hugh Padgham, whom I'd met when he produced David Bowie's *Tonight* [1984]. He was now producing Paul and wanted to know my availability. Paul had laid down some guitar parts, but Hugh felt that a "finishing" session with me would complete the tracks. At first, the answer from Paul was, "No." But a little later, I received a call confirming that, on second thought, Paul thought it was a good idea. So off I went to meet my second Beatle.

What was it like meeting Paul?

It was unreal to meet another Beatle. [*Laughs*] I'd already worked with John and Yoko, and my wife, vocalist Robin Clark, worked on Ringo Starr's 1977 album, *Ringo the 4th*. So — to us — George Harrison was the only missing member.

Paul is known to be pretty chill. What was he like while bantering and relaxing?

He was the most regular guy I'd ever met. Almost a farmer, the kind of guy that frequents the local pub, no pretense whatsoever... a lovely chap. And I was in a friendly "home" environment as well. His wife, Linda, was there; his daughters, they were all there! But here's my real first impression. When I arrived, Paul invited me up to his study. There, a comfortable high-back velvety chair invited me into its warm embrace. We talked. Paul was super intrigued by my stories about being on the R&B chitlin' circuit tours. We talked about Bowie, James Brown, the Apollo Theater and Harlem. Quite honestly, my curiosity as a Buddhist prompted me to ask about the Beatles and the Maharishi Mahesh

JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS



"I might have slobbered a little as I stood in front of all this vintage Beatles gear," Alomar says

GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY IMAGES

Yogi. That time in their career had always intrigued me.

While listening, Paul turned his back to me slightly to get something. What emerged was a perfectly rolled Jamaican "carrot" ganja joint. [*Laugh*] We talked and talked, and time stood still. Finally, I said, "Maybe I should listen to some of the tracks before it gets too late — or we get too wasted." That's when we headed down to his Hogg Hill Mill studio [*in East Sussex, England*].

What was Hogg Hill Mill like, and what gear did you bring in?

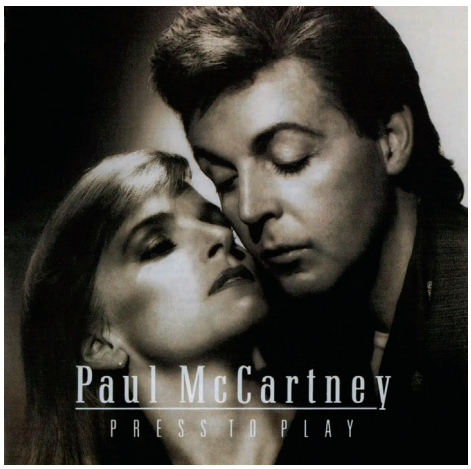
I brought my favorite Strat, thinking it might be stylish enough to create whatever I'd need. And yes, maybe I'd get an offer to try one from the studio. But it wasn't really a plan… more like a wish. [*Laughs*] But since you asked, I'll tell you this. While maneuvering the corridors to his studio, we came across an enclosed glass studio room. My gait stalled while the vision of what lay within froze me instantly. I felt a slight lip-drool. I might have slobbered a little as I stood in front of all this vintage Beatles gear. I'm talking about his Hofner basses, Vox amps, Mellotrons and a Beatles-logo drum kit. There was so much gear that it was impossible to take it all in. It was too much for any musician to endure for too long, so I followed them down the hall, promising myself the luxury of returning to this sacred crypt once again.

Paul and Hugh Padgham produced Press to Play. How did they impact your guitar playing?

Hugh is one of my favorite engineers. He mixes while we're listening. That's really cool. So when I play anything, it already sounds like it's mixed into the record. And he records everything, regardless of what you think. This methodology helps capture great bits of music when you least expect it.

What do you remember about putting together "Press" and "Pretty Little Head"?

We finally got to the studio, and Hugh started playing tracks for me. First song, I said, "Nah! That sounds finished. Next…"



And another, I said, "That one's cool… "Nice guitar work…" Finally, they played "Press." When I listen to the tracks, I try to hear this other [*hypothetical*] guitar player, not me, playing something, you know? I kinda hear it, and then I think, "Damn! Can I play that? So I look over at Hugh and tell him that I hear this digital delay effect on my guitar, and we started setting the timing.

Little did I know, he was recording everything. It appears as the intro to the song before the count-in, which was brilliant. After that, I just used classic call-and-response for the rest of the song. And then it happened — the moment every guitar player wants to hear: "Would you like to take a solo?" I was in heaven. Somebody pinch me! [*Laughs*] Incidentally, we used the same digital delay effect on "Pretty Little Head" in the "Ursa Major" section of the song.

What are your memories of recording "Stranglehold" and "Only Love Remains"?

Not much, because there are some songs that you have to lay in the cut, you know? Like, no signature guitar lines, just accompaniment and tone. For example, when you have a string section playing syncopated stabs and other rhythmic parts, it's best to just play a little acoustic for color. For horns, it's best to follow or get out of the way. Sometimes less is more; don't disturb the groove.

Pete Townshend played on "Angry." Were you in the studio with him?

No. Regrettably, sometimes we are called upon to do overdubs and not the basic rhythm tracks. To that end, I've not met many iconic guitarists that I've shared credits with. I guess the wish list continues.

The first time you heard Press to Play, what were your thoughts?

I loved it — especially the intro to "Press." And I liked that it was the album's sort-of title track. Wish-list — check! Also, remember that the final vocals, some of those spoken voices and other tidbits weren't there when I laid down my tracks. I heard it all for the first time just like everyone else. I love being a fan.

Forty years later, what does Press to Play mean to you, and have you kept in touch with Paul?

It was a pleasure working with Hugh Padgham again, and we're still connected. As for Paul, he and I had a large time. We raised our glasses high, visited Jamaica on the down-low, flew kites on the hilltop and broke bread together as family. Who could ask for more? Although we haven't spoken since, I can always visit him in the inner-chambers of my heart.

Live by the Sword

Greta Van Fleet's detractors are loud as ever — but on new album *Palace for the People*, Jake Kiszka and his Gibson "Excalibur" come out swinging: "If you're not pissing someone off, you're probably not making great art"

WORDS BY **ANDREW DALY** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JEFF FASANO**

THE OBJECTIVE FOR Jake Kiszka is the same as ever — to play guitar-driven rock 'n' roll from the heart. But after years of success with Greta Van Fleet, Kiszka stepped away, formed another mega band in Mirador and, shall we say, expanded his portfolio. Circling back to Kiszka's objective, with his attention back on Greta Van Fleet via a new album, 2026's *Palace for the People*, yeah, it's the same, but with a twist.

"The sonic identity for me, from a guitar perspective with Greta Van Fleet, is to do something much wider than I'd ever done before," Kiszka says. That meant Kiszka needed to take inventory of what the guitar meant to him, what it could do for him and how he'd wield what he calls "Excalibur" in the studio and on stage.

"It's a utility of projection," he says. "It's a vehicle that can take what's in your heart, mind and body, and translate it in some ways." This mindset extended to the rest of Greta Van Fleet while recording *Palace for the People*. Also on the band's mind is the Internet's habit of slogging the band at every step.

Not that this is a hindrance. "It's never really a factor," Kiszka says. "Experientially, we see it as if you're an artist, if you're not pissing someone off, you're probably not making great art."

Greta Van Fleet has certainly done plenty of that. Sure, their social media following is in the millions. The members — brothers Jake, Sam and Josh Kiszka, along with Danny Wagner — have become cultural icons on the backside of hit records, including 2018's *Anthem of the Peaceful Army*, 2021's *The Battle at Garden's Gate* and 2023's *Starcatcher*, but that hasn't stopped people from labeling them as "imitators."

Further complicating matters is the mantle of "saviors of rock 'n' roll" that was unfairly thrust onto the band. And then they delivered the goods — but critics and certain sectors of fans still turned on them. But through it all, Kiszka remained level-headed and is more confident than ever as the band prepares for the post-*Palace* windfall.

"This album is an interesting intersection of our musical journey," Kiszka says. "It just sort of came about through having more worldly influences than ever before. A big part of the project itself was the title. It comes from the Alexandra Palace in north London. The idea was, it's this palace built for the people by the British monarchy, and we thought that was a beautiful concept. It became identifiable, a modus operandi and our philosophy for this record."

Kiszka reflects on his journey like a man beyond his years. He broke in so young, and it seems like he's been around forever, so it's hard to believe he's just 30. Couple


JAKE KISZKA

that with the shots he's taken versus the immediate and ongoing praise, and you have an artist with thicker skin than most.

"No matter what you are, you're fighting an uphill battle," Kiszka says. "The idea, or the objective of the spirit, of the fighter, or the reluctant one, is that in the soul of the artist, we're not only going to climb the mountain, we're going to the summit of the bastard!" [*Laughs*]

Kiszka's laughter reminds us that there's plenty of levity left in his spirit. Coming from the right place from the jump saw to that.

"With music, and specifically the guitar, I really feel like the boy who pulled the sword from the stone," Kiszka says. "And that's beautiful. I guess it's been a self-fulfilling prophecy in some ways, you know? There was hope and destiny that I'd find some sort of freedom through this thing — and that's exactly what happened."

Ironically, that proverbial sword has brought Kiszka everything he could have asked for, but it's also brought the greatest challenges of his life. "I couldn't have imagined it would have happened so young," he says. "There was this explosion; Greta Van Fleet's first record absolutely erupted."

This brings us back to the never-ending cycle of pop culture-driven love and hate that Kiszka and his cohorts experience. But Kiszka is here for all of it. "That just kept going," he says. "It was a rocket, an explosion. It's been an enchanting, wild and frenetic adventure ever since." For Kiszka, it's all about perspective, which can only be gained through the give and take, the push and pull, his career has afforded him.

"To wrap up why we're put here... yeah, there's been a lot of achievements," Kiszka says. "On paper, I guess you could look at it that way. But I think the greatest accomplishment for us so far is the beauty in seeing the lives we've touched, the love we've conveyed to people and the hope we've brought. But all of that comes with great sacrifice, and this is still just the beginning."

That last bit ensures that the rumors that Kiszka is breaking up Greta Van Fleet in favor of Mirador or going solo can be put to rest. If anything, Greta Van Fleet are stronger and more apt to take on a cruel world than ever. "This is who we are," Kiszka says. "We're just the same as everybody else. We've got a beautiful story to tell. All we want to do is bring that love and light to the world."

As for Kiszka personally, who in recent years has seen his success elevate him to A-list status when it comes to six-strings, he's aware of it, but not letting it inflate his ego. "I'm now a piece of the lineage," he says. "I've walked in the footsteps of my heroes. In so many ways, I'm just very grateful, you know? I'm just another guitar player. In some ways, I'm just another guy who fell in love with the guitar and rock 'n' roll."

The last few years have certainly raised the stakes for you. But you're still so young, and it's still early in your journey. Have you taken a step back and thought back to when you first picked up guitar, and what that young kid might have thought about all this?
That's a profound question!

Gotta get you thinking right out of the gate!
Exactly! Let me dissect this... it's interesting. At this point, in achieving the things we've been grateful to achieve, and putting out work that I suppose the world has come to appreciate and herald... that feeling of reciprocation and reaffirmation that what we're doing has a social or popular-culture impact... that's the main thing. It's surprising in so many ways.

Dig into that for me.
When I picked up a guitar when I was a kid, it was this object or artifact... a monolith of freedom and self-expression. Being raised in the place we were raised in [*Frankenmuth, Michigan*], I think when we're all coming up, we're learning who we are, what we're meant to do and where we belong.

And the guitar helped you with that?
There's this sense of great repression in some ways — social confines. To me, the guitar was something no one could take away. I had so much taken away at a young age, and this was sort of a defiance against structure and systems. It was an object of fighting for freedom, like Excalibur or something. I really felt that way.

With that object of freedom, you've made a cache of memorable records. But this is the Internet Age, where artists are peppered with criticism, especially a band like Greta Van Fleet, which has gotten so big so fast. So, while the guitar gave you freedom, it also, ironically, presented challenges for you to navigate at a young age on a big stage.
Brilliant! Another good one. That's interesting, isn't it? The idea of freedom, and, I guess, creation and the idea of dreams, right? Like, everything that surrounds us, in some ways, is brought through this filter of human imagination, with guitars being one of those things.

> "To me, the guitar was something no one could take away. It was an object of fighting for freedom, like Excalibur"

So, that question becomes paradoxical in a sense because the sole reason why I do what I do, why I play guitar and why Greta Van Fleet does what it does is we're trying to bring a sense of imagination, hope and love to a generation through rock 'n' roll.

Have you always seen rock music as a vehicle for that sort of imagination, hope and love?
I guess it's the one that chose us, you know? That's just what we grew up with, so that's the music we play. And in some ways, it's ironic to see the turmoil or the sense of cultural degradation — or even devolution — in the realm of the Internet.

As in keyboard warriors and the like?
It's the lack of, I guess, consequences — or even accountability for things people say. If no one is held accountable, they don't feel an obligation to be sensible or caring. There's no sense of character anymore when it comes to the Internet. It's like this Wild West and free form of shit-talking and spreading hatred... but I guess that sort of applies to everything and everyone.

In that context, your mission, if we can call it that, of spreading imagination, hope and love feels important.
That's why the human experience is so important. That's why music and many other forms of art hold ground so strongly against devices of evil. It's the human experience. When we're all at a concert, we're sharing this emotive collective energy, this consciousness, where everybody feels each other, and there's this emanation of spirit. That polarizes the hypocrisy of the Internet and the hate.

With that comes pressure, which you've managed well over the long haul. But have you ever felt the need to step back and go within? And if so, how did that help you grow?
That's the challenge. Having a sense of soul really does help. I can't speak to those who have walked this path alone because I've done it with my brothers in many ways. That sense of shared experiences and brotherhood, you know, siblinghood, is a support in having a unified mission statement. But there's that point where we as humans — there's this idea of stagnantness, whether it's guitar or any art, that follows us through our journey in life. It always comes to these points where we have to surrender the pieces of us that no longer serve us to reinvent them.

It becomes that mythological story of the phoenix in some ways, like being reborn. Greta Van Fleet has been turning up the road below us for years, and all of a sudden, we had to take a step back. We started when we were kids, so the majority of life has been in the spotlight. I think walking away and returning, so

much of ourselves had changed. So much of the introspection had happened. A sort of rebirth had occurred, and I think we approached our music and returned to our instruments in a very different way.

During that time away, you had success with Mirador, which must have been gratifying. Can you track where you were as a player and songwriter when you returned to Greta Van Fleet after so much success outside it?
It spreads you out a bit further. It expands that conscious thought of approaching something musically. For me, working with other people in Mirador, those guys are all English and European, so the approach to music and their thought process was different.

I'd only ever shared that sort of kinship with my brothers, and in that sense it was a different lens. So, you're always learning something, and that's the object. There's this insatiable lust to try to find something new beyond the horizon. It feels like constantly pushing against the wind. I discovered a lot of that, and I was able to bring some of that self-discovery and new ideas to Greta.

It really felt like a new creation. I think we were surprising each other. Everyone was going, "What if we did this?" And then, it was like, "Where are you even coming from with that idea?" There was a lot of excitement in that. We were sort of trying to impress each other, like we might have when we were teenagers in our parents' garage. [*Laughs*]

Diving into *Palace for the People*, you can hear that. The classic rock riffs are there, but there are underlying prog influences and other new sounds throughout, too.
I would say this record's influence is far more eclectic than anything we've previously recorded. The problem we've always had — which is in opposition to most people's problems — is we've had too much material. That's a good thing in the long run, but it's about pulling apart all these different things. But I'll say this: it's when we put something through the Greta Van Fleet filter that it comes out a certain way. There's always going to be elaborate guitar pieces, riffs, heavy, explosive drums, soaring vocals, and bass and keys that will be interesting and detailed. That's the siphon, so it's about filtering influences through Greta Van Fleet in a way we hadn't done before.

Tell me about "Tear It Down," which features a sort of off-the-rails guitar solo.
Yes. [*Laughs*] Mike Elizondo produced the record, and his studio is battle-ready. There are all these amplifiers strung up on the wall, and cabinets out in an isolated booth. You could press any button, and pretty much activate, or make combinations





of amps, and throw those through any cabinet you want.

And then, there were pedals laid out, like, built into this shelf Mike put together. It almost removed the entire factor of having to find the equipment, pulling it off shelves and finding the sounds. It was really just plugging in and playing with it. It was a really quick workflow for me. It also gave me the ability to just *be*, you know? I probably played more guitars through more amplifiers than any other record I've ever recorded. [*Laughs*] It was very electric, but with "Tear It Down," that was my '61 [*Gibson*] Les Paul SG going through a modern Fender Champ.

And there might have been a Klon [*overdrive*] and some stereo reverb from an EMS outboard. I think I used that on the solo as well — which I've never used before. But I used it a lot across the record. And specifically on the solos, I used a Dan Armstrong Orange Squeezer. I don't know if you've ever seen one before?

"The most singular objective for me is to create things we've never heard before. It's channeling different concepts to push into new territories and not stagnate"

I can't say that I have.
It's like a physical compressor box that I'd stick onto the guitar. Look it up! It's really strange, but Mike had one, and he was like, "Do you want to try this?" I'd used a compressor pedal before, but this was on a whole 'nother level. I think Ry Cooder used that quite a lot when he was playing with John Lee Hooker.

Another memorable track is "Dreams You Told," which has an underlying, almost quasi-Eighties metal-meets-prog vibe. There's a vibe I couldn't quite put my finger on, and that's very different from typical Greta tracks.



Yeah, that's a really strange one. [*Laughs*] That song was written, probably two or three years ago. But I think it was written in the consciousness of the rest of the record, where there were pieces and an arsenal of songs. But yeah, that one started with the riff, as many Greta tracks do. What was interesting was the idea of taking all these alternative concepts and putting them together, and then you had Sam exploring with synthesizers, which was huge. Sam's interpretation brought this edge of modernity to it.

The highest and most singular objective, you know, the mission statement for me as an individual, and with Greta Van Fleet, is to create things we've never heard before. It's channeling different concepts to push into new territories and not stagnate. When we heard that, it was mesmerizing, like, "Boom. We hit the mark."

It's something we've never heard before. I think you're right [*about the sound of the track*], but your interpretation is interesting. I hear it in a certain way, and some of the stuff you said I totally agree with, but some of it I hadn't thought about until now. I think you're totally on it, but it was just a product of combining different ingredients.

Toward the back end of the record, there are two really memorable solos on "So You Stand" and "Call My Own." Both are soaring, but your work on "Call My Own" is atmospheric and casts you in a different light, sonically.

"Call My Own" was an interesting one. It was done on my Telecaster with a B-bender, which has very early T-Top humbuckers. Honestly, most of the solos on this record were done through combo amps, and "Call My Own" was probably an old Magneto, and there was a lot of stereo reverb. That gives everything much more space, where you can put vocals right through the middle. So, there's a lot of stereo slap, and stereo phasers and stereo reverb. If you listen to the record on headphones, you'll get the full effect. [*Laughs*] It's quite radical!

What gear did you use for "Saw You Stand"?

That was my '61, the beloved Number 1 [*Gibson Les Paul SG*]. But that was another one, where, you know, I don't like to take more than a few takes of a solo. Typically, I can somewhat get it early on, but I also sort of design it in my head.

Why is that?

Because there's a separate, I think, for me as a guitar player. I often approach something with an idea I construct in my mind, then have a layout with a map or blueprint and parameters to work within. But then some solos are off the cuff and very much made up in the moment. I think "Saw You Stand" was one of those solos I had already

HIGHWAY TONE

Jake Kiszka's top five tone tips

BY ANDREW DALY

IT GOES WITHOUT saying that Jake Kiszka, the six-string slinger behind the roaring attitude inherent to Greta Van Fleet and Mirador, knows a thing or two about tone. In fact, Kiszka believes he used more toys than ever while recording GVF's latest offering, 2026's *Palace for the People*. It's with that in mind that ßåwe tabbed Kiszka to offer up his top five tone tips. Take it away, Jake...

1. RELY ON THE AMP AND LESS ON PEDALS

There's a purity between playing and the directness from the heart to the hands to the amp. Anything in between maybe distracts from that. When you're first learning to play — and really, in general — you can sort of expand from there, but there's a directness to that, too.

2. START ACOUSTICALLY

My father basically took away my electric guitar when I'd first gotten it, which was quite a bummer. [*Laughs*] I'd just received it, and he was like, "No, no, no..." So, there's some sort of disciplinary action that happened. I thank him for that now because it taught me the foundation. We all want to be Jimi Hendrix or another great guitar hero who played electric guitar, but I would say that starting acoustically, and playing some Bob Dylan or even something rudimentary, is a good foundation for tone.

3. CHOOSE YOUR GUITARS WISELY

There are many different ways of looking at this. There's the guitarist, the guitar player, the collector — and there's the dentist. [*Laughs*] Now, I'm just kidding, but for me, if you're looking at guitar playing for the sake of the "soul of playing," and what can be accomplished through playing the instrument, choose your weapons wisely. For instance, if you have two 12-string guitars and one is a baritone and the other is a straight 12, and then you've got one classical guitar and one parlor guitar... you've one of each of these things because they're all tactile. They all have their own qualities and do something different, but you don't need two of the same thing. So, in some ways, if you're specifically looking at guitar playing for that reason, choose your guitars wisely and love them equally.



4. IF YOU'RE IN THE STUDIO, SPECIFICALLY FOR SOLOS, USE COMBO AMPS

If you're playing a solo that requires more nuance and single strings, as opposed to chord structures and that sort of thing, I would suggest combo amps. I actually would suggest combo amps overall, in general. Period. [*Laughs*] There's just something great about them. And for what they're used for, and for as much as they've been used in the past, I think they've been forgotten about in our generation. So yeah... crank up that little combo amp and play through that. I think they do a lot. They simplify what you're hearing, but they also magnify you as a player and add nuance.

5. PULL THE MIC OFF YOUR AMP

For crying out loud, pull the mic back and embrace the room! Embrace the breathing of it, you know? If you're going to record in that way, if it's guerrilla warfare out there, and you're doing it in your garage or anywhere in your home or whatever space, distance adds depth. Pull the mics off and let the amp breathe.



orchestrated and wasn't improvised. And because it's quite a long solo, if I continued to do takes, it might have sounded too refined for me... maybe too manufactured. It's not about perfection — it's about a vibe. I don't want to play it perfectly. I want to play it from the gut. I want to shoot from the hip. I want it to feel human. So, with "Saw You Stand," I came back the next day and had it in one or two takes; on that second day, that's how it landed.

There is also some great acoustic work on *Palace for the People*. You have a sort of shaggy style, which interweaves really well with your electric tone.

I like it! That's why they call me Shaggy Jake. [*Laughs*] But that's brilliant! What a great term because, yeah... it is a bit shaggy, isn't it? My playing is a bit messy. But I like that because I try not to perfect anything. That's a good question because on this particular record, I tried to take the acoustic element of Greta Van Fleet a little bit further.

On "Boughton Bliss," for example, there's acoustic layering with electrics throughout. But there's moments on the record where it's more prevalent, so I was trying to push that a bit further. And I used a lot of Nashville tuning, some Martin 12-string. And for the solo on "Boughton Bliss," typically, that's something I'd have been inclined to take up with an electric guitar. But instead, I favored a classical guitar with nylon strings, so that was another thing where I pushed into stranger territories.

> "I don't want to play guitar perfectly. I want to play it from the gut. I want to shoot from the hip. I want it to feel human"

Pushing boundaries, having the confidence to lay down solos in fewer takes and owning your sloppiness — in a good way — it all shows the trust you have in yourself and your growing confidence as a player. Have you had time to reflect on that?

That's another good question. You're full of them today! [*Laughs*] It took a long time for me to approach my instrument that way. It took a long time to get my playing to where I'd be able to record something and just let it be what it is. That's a byproduct — and also the essence of — feeling comfortable with your identity as a player.

And that's what's taken me the longest. I've played since I was quite young, and Greta has been going for a decade, so it's been a really long journey from the boy who pulled the sword from the stone, you know, this manifest destiny, to being here now and coming to terms with who I am as a person.

But also, the identity as a guitar player, and how I approach the instrument itself, you know? I've been through some things at this point with Greta, music and life, and I'm strong in my identity. I've been able to just let it be recorded as imperfectly and as humanly as possible, you know, to let it bleed.

All of that has seen you elevate to an A-list




JAKE KISZKA
Gibson



player by most people's accounts.
I don't know... for me, it's the highest honor that, in some ways, maybe... yes, I'm conscious of the fact that perhaps people celebrate my guitar playing. I'm really grateful for that. In some ways, my greatest achievement as a guitar player is that, as a kid, the guitar heroes I looked up to, and the dreams, influence and inspiration they imparted on me and awakened in me — perhaps I could do the same for this generation or the next.

Earlier, we talked about the almighty Internet culture swirling around us. Within that context, Greta Van Fleet — and Jake Kiszka — aren't just musicians or a popular rock band; you've become cultural icons and had tracks in video games, yet people still take a lot of shots. With that, the negative perception doesn't always align with reality. From your perspective, what do people get wrong?
I suppose in a sense... I guess there's the social or political construct or people saying, "There's a lineation between innovation and imitation," right? In many ways, people perceive our sound to be one way, but in reality, it's far more complex and nuanced than that.

Can you dig deeper into that?
I'm not necessarily saying just strictly music, but the story, and who we are as human beings. A lot of people have looked at Greta Van Fleet, and, as you said, there's a lot of controversy on the Internet, which has expedited and proliferated it, where it was a fire in the corner, and now it's a conflagration of some sort. That being said, Greta Van Fleet has become quite a massive thing — to my surprise — in some ways. But we're polarizing, I think, so there's a lot of attention on that. Some said we were the "saviors of rock 'n' roll," or whatever, and I think that's a misconception as well. All of that, I think, is balled up in one, and it makes it sort of an inaccurate representation of us.

So, who are you really?
I think we're a bunch of young guys who grew up in mid-Michigan, in a little town somewhere, and in a garage, we fell in love with American blues and music of all cultures from all places. We fell in love with the idea of manifest destiny and adventure. We became a part of that. People can perceive this as one or another, and there's a lot of attention. Let's say there's a lot of negative commentary that perhaps comes from the evolution

of Greta Van Fleet, and how quickly it exploded and how polarizing it has become. I think that would be something that people misperceive or get wrong.

The "saviors of rock 'n' roll" thing has always been sort of ridiculous to lay on anybody. It's really a label perpetually thrust on young bands, and when they don't deliver — because no one can — it's used against them, just as it has been against Greta Van Fleet. And really, does rock 'n' roll really need saving anyway?
Exactly! It's an interesting thing, man. Because is rock 'n' roll dead? I don't think so. It never truly dies; it just lays in wait, you know? And then it's there for the next generation to pick up.

To be an artist, I think, is to want to be understood. If you *are* understood is another matter entirely. What do you want people to understand about you?
That's a complex question, and it's deserving of a complex answer. Ultimately, do you mean as a human being or an artist?

Both. There's certainly an intersection, if you're an artist, where your humanity overlaps the artistry.
Yeah, absolutely. Perhaps in both senses, as a human being, I'm as imperfect, flawed, ridiculous and mad as anybody else. I'd certainly have to be a little insane, or a little mad, to carry the torch or climb this hill. [*Laughs*] In that sense, I bleed just like everybody else. But I enjoy the human experience, all the pain, all the beauty and all the things I've seen in this lifetime. And so far, all of that has greatly informed the music I create and the guitar I play. All of that has become sort of a manifest. It manifests in myself, in my music and my guitar playing and as an artist overall. I think that's the idea... with all of the good and evil in the world, it's the artist's job, or the modus operandi, to take all those things, internalize them intrinsically and reflect them back onto society.

Sparking not just curiosity within yourself, but within others...
Yeah. In some ways, you question things. Like, how to create what the universe cannot naturally. We take the emptiness of these voids, and we inherently intersect them, sew them back together, and weave them to bring them back to the people. I think that's what we've done. Salvaging what's there culturally, I think, is sort of what Greta Van Fleet is about. But also, as an individual, I think the conveyor of truth is there's a lot of people — and there's no right or wrong with this — who play an instrument, or an artist, and there's some sort of persona in place.

And that's brilliant in so many ways that someone can take a creation and characterize themselves with that. But I will say that, with Greta Van Fleet, and with myself as an individual, I don't so much do that. We truly are who we are on that stage, as much as we are off of it. I'm maybe a personification of myself on that stage — but it's truly me. I play that way. I truly play through my experiences, through my life, my head and my heart. And so, through and through, I suppose that, in part, is who I am. So maybe I'd like to just state that what you see is just the truth.



Where does Greta Van Fleet go from here?
Only up, Andrew! Right to the top! [*Laughs*] I don't know... I just think it's marching forward boldly and gorgeously. We've said it in this interview, but there's been quite a bit achieved at a young age for us. We're young men now, but there's a long, long way to go. And yeah, it's exciting because there's so much to invent, you know? There's so much to create and so much to bend and break. But we've got a lot of surprises for this year for sure — and for the coming years within the musical sphere and realm. And even outside of that as a creative entity. I suppose we're looking forward to all of it.

THE LONG GOODBYE

Cursum Perficio — the first new Anthrax album in 10 years — is Latin for "I complete my journey." Could this be the NYC-spawned thrash titans' final voyage? Anthrax lifers **Scott Ian** and **Charlie Benante** weigh in on returning to sub-four-minute thrash songs and going out "on top like George Costanza"

BY **JON WIEDERHORN**



TRAVIS SHINN

Meet the Anthrax! [*clockwise from center*] Joey Belladonna, Jonathan Donais, Charlie Benante, Scott Ian and Frank Bello

SOON AFTER ULTIMATE Music Cruises Inc. announced that thrash titans Anthrax were headlining their 2026 four-day cruise, 70,000 Tons of Metal, fans scrambled for tickets, paying thousands of dollars for cabins aboard the ship, hoping the two sets the Big Four band played would be highlights of their lives. Maybe they were, but for Anthrax guitarist Scott Ian and drummer and songwriter Charlie Benante, the cruise was one of the lowest points of the year.

"It was everything I didn't want to do, and I got talked into doing it," griped Benante back on February 5, a few days after returning to his home near Chicago. "I ended up getting sick and burned. I was so pissed."

The ship set sail from PortMiami on January 29, and right before their show that night in the indoor theater, Benante was waiting backstage to go on when a smoke machine in the truss overhead malfunctioned, spilling hot oil.

"At first it was like, 'What the hell?,' but before we could get out of the way, it spewed out more. A chunk of it hit my left arm, and I got a second-degree burn."

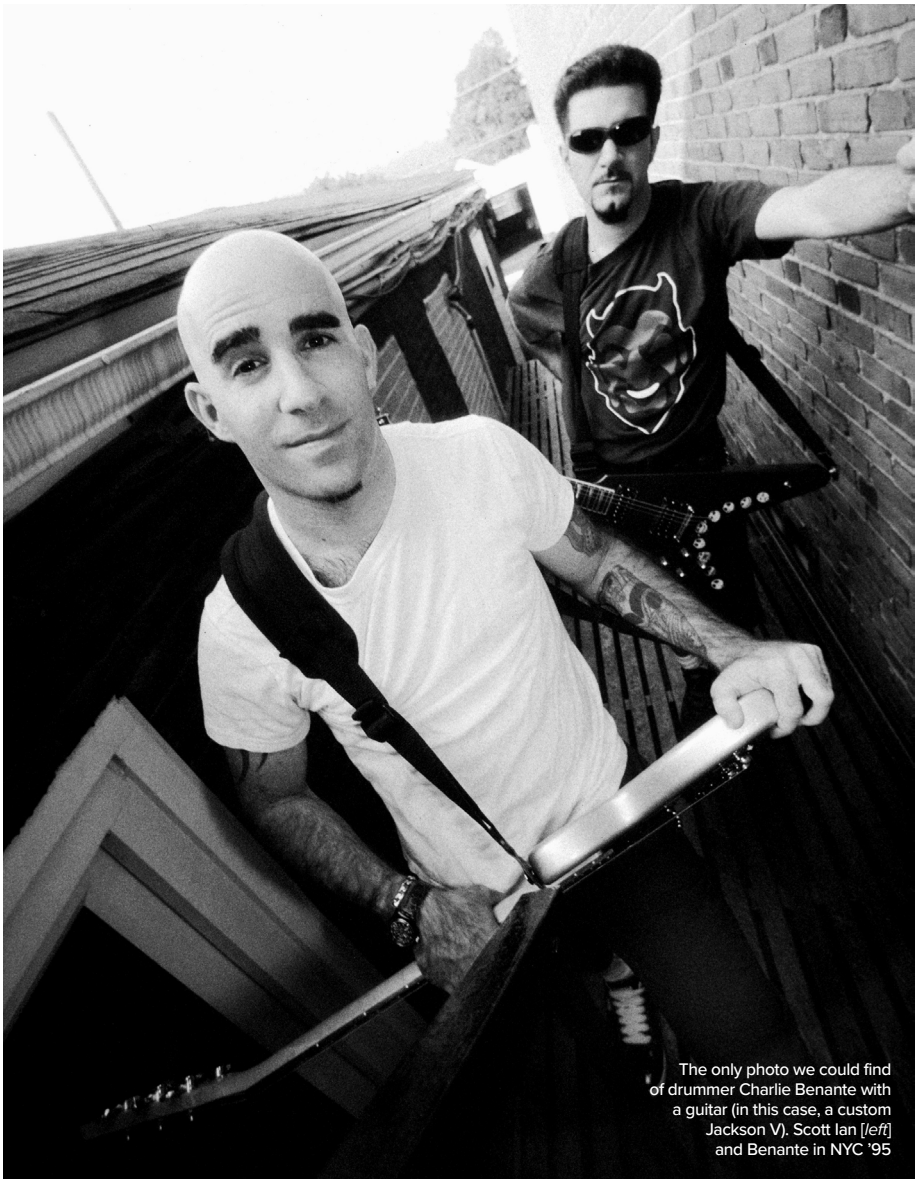
"It took layers of skin off and damaged the 'Not Man' tattoo," Ian says from a Zoom call at his L.A. home.

That's when ill winds really started to blow — literally. As the ship sailed back from the Bahamas to Miami, it passed through a winter weather system and was confronted by freezing temperatures and gale-force winds. That's when Anthrax played a full outdoor set on the pool deck while far less-established European bands, including Dark Tranquillity and Eluveitie, stayed warm in the theater.

"We had to play in below-freezing weather," says Ian, standing and shifting from side to side to find a comfortable position. "They would not move us into the theater, and during the show I was jumping around and I threw out my back because of the cold weather. That boat and that promoter can go to hell for making us play in the cold."

Clearly, Ian is annoyed that Anthrax were the biggest selling point of the cruise by far, yet it seems they were subjected to defective equipment and dangerous weather conditions. He's even more upset about his back pain. He has worked on it for the past few days to no avail and thinks he might need an MRI. He winces and explains what happened during a flight to Argentina for a show with cult experimental band Mr. Bungle right after the 70,000 Tons debacle.

"I had to fly to Buenos Aires, and I was in so much pain," he says. "Any move I made was just lightning bolts. It took me 25 minutes to get out of my seat and go pee. And then I just stood next to my seat for two hours until I had to sit down for landing because I knew sitting down was going to destroy me again. And it did. All because of that fucking boat."



The only photo we could find of drummer Charlie Benante with a guitar (in this case, a custom Jackson V). Scott Ian [*left*] and Benante in NYC '95

> "I wanted to create something nobody's ever heard on an Anthrax record before"
> SCOTT IAN

The cruise confirmed the band's determination to never again get stuck on a sinking ship. During their 45-year career, Anthrax have worked with labels that didn't support them, management companies with which they weren't in sync and booking agents that landed them on head-scratching bills. Now, as they ramp up their schedule for their first album in 10 years, the band are working with a completely new support team.

"We cleaned house, business-wise," Ian says. "It was a long time coming, and we made the changes we needed to make going into this album cycle. It took a while to finalize everything, so we couldn't put the album out until we knew we had the right people and the right plan because what if this is the last record we ever make? We have to give it every chance to succeed."

In the months since the nightmare boat

CATHERINE MCGANN/GETTY IMAGES



Benante [*back behind the kit*] and Ian in 2018. "Scott and I always did the bulk of the writing and the bulk of the work," Benante says

GABE GINSBERG/GETTY IMAGES

trip, Ian's back has healed. The band has opened arena tours for Megadeth and Iron Maiden, headlined dates with Testament and Municipal Waste and played major slots at festivals in the U.S. and Europe. In a metal scene that is embracing thrash at a level not seen since the late Eighties, Anthrax are in a position to retake their place near the top of the metal hierarchy. And *Cursum Perficio* could be the record that will take them there.

The album, their most exciting and energized release since 1987's *Among the Living*, blends barreling speed, nuanced melody, angular precision and creative experimentation into 11 fierce and often furious tracks. There are the militant chugs and skewed, precision riffs of album opener "The Long Goodbye"; the AC/DC-meets-Pantera groove of "Infectious"; the moshpit geometry and stagedive propulsion of "NYC 93"; and the minor-key tremolo-picking and blastbeat rhythms of "Edge of Perfection."

In a strikingly candid conversation triggered as much by pain (physical and emotional) as by a desire to speak truth to power, Ian and Benante address the seemingly endless wait between 2016's *For All Kings* and 2026's *Cursum Perficio*, how playing with other bands helped them up their game, the band's unconventional approach to songwriting, their rehearsal and studio gear of choice, Ian's new signature guitar and the very real possibility that *Cursum Perficio* will be Anthrax's final studio release.

The new album has been called your best release since *Among the Living*...

SCOTT IAN: Well, first of all, we weren't out to make *Among the Living II*. It's not a top-to-bottom, ripping thrash record because that's not who we are. We're a thrash band for sure, but it's a different kind of album because we've never repeated ourselves. I think it's in the vein of our last couple of albums, but it's more intense and more riff-oriented. And certainly, it's heavier than *For All Kings*. There's more intensity on this album than we've had in a long time. But I think it's also the best thing we've done in a long time.

CHARLIE BENANTE: I wanted every song to be individual. I wanted to have different moods, different sounds, stuff we've never done before. I'm not saying this is going to be our last record, but for me, right now I don't want to write another record. So, if this turns out to be our last album, I'm really happy with it. And I've nitpicked the shit out of the songs so much because every time I hear a new album come out from a band, I feel like they're phoning it in. They're like, "That's good enough." I didn't want this to be good enough. I wanted it to be as good as we could possibly make it.

Did you enjoy the creative process, or was it like having a root canal without anesthetic?

BENANTE: If I could do it again, maybe I'd do it differently. We did six songs first and then we took a break, worked on those songs, and then I went and recorded the next six or seven songs. But I've always said I'd rather be in the studio than be on tour because I love creating.

IAN: Doing this album was totally enjoyable because the material was so good. It was so exciting to work on these songs, and that's what keeps my head in the game. Every time we would get another step further with it, I'd be so psyched. The only way it would ever be like pulling teeth

FIST FULL OF METAL

An album-by-album guide to Anthrax's studio output

BY ANDREW DALY



FIST FULL OF METAL
MEGAFORCE, 1984
Anthrax's debut didn't reinvent the proverbial (and very new) thrash wheel, but it's every bit as riffy and heavy as anything else from the era. "Soldiers of Metal" is memorable, as is the cover of Alice Cooper's "I'm Eighteen." But what makes this record stand out is that it's the only one to feature Neil Turbin on vocals and Danny Lilker on bass. What's more, original guitarist Greg Walls, who doesn't play on the record, claimed he "wrote the whole album." All in all, the mighty 'thrax hadn't found their footing yet.
LEAD GUITARIST: Dan Spitz
KEY TRACK: "Soldiers of Metal"



SPREADING THE DISEASE
ISLAND, 1985
Much like *Fist*, the cover of Anthrax's second record featured a random person looking, er, uncomfortable. Also present are tons of massive riffs and chords via Scott Ian and boatloads of shred-heavy solos from Dan Spitz. That's all good, as was the fact that this record kicked off the so-called "classic" Anthrax lineup, featuring Frank Bello on bass and Joey Belladonna on vocals. "Madhouse," "Aftershock" and "Lone Justice" show Anthrax making strides.
LEAD GUITARIST: Dan Spitz
KEY TRACK: "Madhouse"



AMONG THE LIVING
MEGAFORCE, 1987
Here we have the start of Anthrax's halcyon era that earned them "Big Four of Thrash Metal" status. A couple of years of the aforementioned classic lineup pounding the pavement and collecting riffs and hard-charging melodies set to mass destruction led to seething cuts like "Indians," "Caught in a Mosh" and "I Am the Law." It also didn't hurt that guitar-producing legend Eddie Kramer twirled the knobs for this one, leading to further sonic expansion and exploration. What did hurt was that while Anthrax were on tour with



Anthrax during their *Among the Living* days in Chicago, December 5, 1987

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

with Anthrax is if I thought the songs were bad because then, what are you doing? It's pointless.

Charlie, by now most fans realize you write almost all the songs on guitar and then record full demos before the band works on them. Was there a time when that wasn't as well known?

BENANTE: There was, and it's so weird that 40-something years later I'm starting to get recognized for it. I don't want to say it was a dirty little secret. Insiders knew, but on the outside, I wasn't really allowed to talk about it in the interviews. Scott had nothing to do with that, but some of the other guys felt discredited that the drummer was writing all the songs. The problem with that is I don't think it ever dawned on them the effect that it had on me — that I could never speak about it or talk about it.

Did that make you angry or resentful?

BENANTE: It was frustrating because Scott and I always did the bulk of the writing and the bulk of the work. I watch the Go-Go's documentary [*2020's* The Go-Go's] at least once a year because I relate to it so much. At one point the band wants the two primary songwriters to give up the credit and divide it evenly within the band, and when they're talking about it, I go, "That's exactly how I feel." But at the end of the day, my attitude is still all about Anthrax. If I have to take a backseat for it, I'm doing it for the betterment of the band itself. I'm just happy that after all this time, the creativity still comes.

What was the timeline for *Cursum Perficio*?

BENANTE: For me, it's probably been going on since about 2015. I'd make demos and send them to the guys. And then around 2018 we got together in L.A. and started to create the album. Then during Covid I kept coming up with riffs and making demos, knowing that eventually we'd make songs together again.

IAN: Honestly, this record really started being made after the pandemic. That's when we became serious and came up with the album you hear. There are other songs that were there early on that never made it. We tracked drums for three and guitars on a song with a working title of "Bond." I thought it was a killer song, but it never went anywhere. Sometimes that happens. The thing is, people think we've been away for 10 years. We spent three years on a touring cycle on *For All Kings*, then Covid hit, so 2020 and 2021 were out. It was more like a solid three years of in-and-out writing and recording sessions to make this record.

Was there a point where everything clicked into place?

IAN: Charlie sent me a demo for "Edge of Perfection," and that's when I knew we were going to make a great album. It's the best song we've ever written. Even if the rest of the record was shit — which it's totally not! — I knew we would have had our best song on there. And from that point, everything else came into place. To me, a lot of it is very much a love letter to Anthrax fans.

Do Charlie's demos closely resemble the final recorded tracks?

Metallica in 1986, Cliff Burton was killed in a bus crash in Sweden. This is why this record is dedicated to Burton, giving it a bit more juice.

LEAD GUITARIST: Dan Spitz
KEY TRACK: "Caught in a Mosh"



STATE OF EUPHORIA
MEGAFORCE, 1988

Anthrax's fourth record might not have been as critically acclaimed as *Among the Living*. Still, it was their most commercially successful record to date. It's not hard to see why, as the commercially viable vibes intersect with Ian and Spitz's knack for taking punk roots and merging them with traditional metal sensibilities, leading to cuts like "Make Me Laugh" and "Antisocial," which, for many fans' money, are among the band's best songs on their greatest album.

LEAD GUITARIST: Dave Spitz
KEY TRACK: "Antisocial"



PERSISTENCE OF TIME
MEGAFORCE, 1990

So, about the "greatest album" statement from a second ago... fans of Anthrax's 1990 offering might have a word or two to say about that. This record showed maturity and an evolution of musicianship and sound — which was well-timed, as the grunge and alt-rock movement was right around the corner, waiting to pull the rug out from under Eighties rock bands. "Got the Time" (a Joe Jackson cover), "Belly of the Beast" and "In My World" showed growth, leading to a Grammy nomination for Best Metal Performance. But none of this was enough to keep the core lineup together, making this Belladonna's last record with Anthrax until 2011.

LEAD GUITARIST: Dan Spitz
KEY TRACK: "Got the Time"



SOUND OF WHITE NOISE
ELEKTRA, 1993

Ah yes. The start of the John Bush era. Bush was no Belladonna, but this wasn't the Anthrax of old in most respects, as *Sound* saw the band doing what many of their ilk did — make an "alternative metal" album. This was just a fancy way of saying "We're trying to compete with Pearl Jam and Nirvana." Still, Spitz and Ian still tear it up on "Only" and "Black Lodge." That said, if pure thrash is your thing, this album probably isn't for you.

LEAD GUITARIST: Dan Spitz
KEY TRACK: "Only"

IAN: All the parts are there. I always joke around that I'm the editor because his demos will come in, and I'll start listening to the arrangements, and I'll go, "This verse is 30 lines long now and we need to cut it down. And we need a pre-chorus here." But a lot of the ideas on the demos are very fully realized, so it's just a matter of getting into the room and making everything work.

BENANTE: Sometimes it's cool when Scott does a variation of the riff to modify it. I'm always open to that because these guys have to interpret it, too. In the past, I would feel like, let the song be what it wants to be. Don't stifle it. But I think now we're pretty much all on the same page.

Do you work on the longer, more complex songs or the shorter, simpler pieces first?

BENANTE: I just start writing songs without any limitations, but I'll know where the record is going after the sixth song is written. And once I get that vibe, boom, the next five or six come out and they don't sound anything like the first six.

IAN: After we had the first batch of five or six songs, which included "Edge of Perfection," I remember saying, "We've got a lot of these epic six-minute songs. I would really like to write some three-and-a-half, four-minute thrash songs, too." Because I felt like it, and so did Charlie. That's when we did stuff like "NYC 93" and "It's For the Kids." "It's For the Kids" came out of different musical ideas from me, Charlie and Frank. Then, I sat in the house, plugged in a guitar, took all of our parts and put together an arrangement, [*and my son*] Revel engineered it in Logic on his Mac, and it totally worked.

Like several songs, "It's For the Kids" features some crazy, galactic-sounding guitar effects.

IAN: A lot of the weird stuff was me in the studio just wanting to create something nobody's ever heard on an Anthrax record — or maybe on anyone's record — before. I was looking for sounds that are fun and make me laugh. I wanted to make these little segues, so one song would go into the next. I used a bunch of pedals, including the Old Blood Noise Endeavors BL-44 Reverse; Beetronics Zzombee Filtremulator; TC Electronic Chorus, Pitch Modulator & Flanger; Gamechanger Plasma distortion; some Death by Audio stuff; and the Strymon Cloudburst ambient reverb. I used the Cloudburst for the clean intro on "Edge of Perfection" and in the

EDGE OF PERFECTION

Jonathan Donais — Anthrax's lead specialist since 2013 — talks about his role within the group and having to channel his inner Angus Young

BY JON WIEDERHORN

OVER THE DECADES, Anthrax have featured the nimble-fingered talents of lead guitarists Dan Spitz and Rob Caggiano, but Jonathan Donais of Shadows Fall proved a natural successor when he joined the band in 2013. *Cursum Perficio* is only his second studio album with Anthrax, yet it showcases an impressive range of lyrical bends, fluid phrasing and rapid-fire shredding that perfectly complement the band's mix of melody and menace.

Below, Donais discusses his evolving technique, his approach to crafting solos and how he stayed busy while waiting for Anthrax's follow-up to *For All Kings*.

How does your playing on *Cursum* differ from *For All Kings*?

I'd like to think I've grown as a guitar player in 10 years because I still practice a lot. I'm always online checking out lessons, and everything I've picked up over the last decade has worked its way into my playing.

Have you focused on any particular techniques?

I really got into economy picking, which has helped improve my precision because I'm not moving my hand as much, and I can anchor it on the guitar. To me, it sounds a bit cleaner than always doing alternate picking.

Your solos balance melody with some incredibly fast playing.

Some of my favorite guitarists growing up were Alex Skolnick and Yngwie Malmsteen, so playing fast was a huge part of learning guitar. I didn't use many sweeps on the last album, but on this record there are quite a few moments where I use sweep picking and arpeggios.

Do you pre-write leads or build them on the spot?

I'll loop the rhythm track and write piece by piece. Once I get the intro done, I'll think, 'Okay, where do I need to go from here?' Then I'll practice it until I can play it straight through, record it and send it to the guys. Sometimes Scott might say, "We want an Angus Young feel here," and I'll try to channel that into my style. Sometimes it only takes one demo. Other times I might write six leads before they're happy.

What gear did you use?

I use my Dean Signature Exile on all my leads. I recorded with my Kemper using the same lead sound I use live, though I've since switched to a Neural DSP Quad Cortex, which I love. These profilers have gotten so good, and they're affordable, even for bedroom guitarists. They make traveling much easier.

Is it still as exciting to play with Anthrax as it was when you joined?

I love every second of it. I still can't believe I get to play with one of my favorite bands. We did some shows with Megadeth and Exodus, and the teenager inside me was completely freaking out because Anthrax, Megadeth and Exodus were three of my favorite bands from junior high onward.

Did the long gap between albums make you hungry to contribute?

Oh man, it felt like forever. I wasn't there every day, so I didn't know what was going on. The first song I wrote a lead for came in the summer of 2023.

What kept you busy while you were waiting?

I wrote a new Shadows Fall record during that time. After this tour I'm heading back into the studio to finish the remaining leads. I also have another band, Living Wreckage, and we're working on a record. Between all three bands, I'm never bored!

bridge section of "Infectious."

You said "Edge of Perfection" is your best song. Which one is your favorite?
IAN: "NYC 93," maybe, because it's the most personal. It's a snapshot of me in New York City, talking about being there at that time and my experiences, and how fun and how crazy it was. It really captured the mood I was in writing this record.

"The Long Goodbye" is a tribute to your father, who died after a long battle with dementia.
IAN: That was one of the last few tracks we worked on. Charlie had this demo, and something about it reminded me of *Persistence of Time* [*Anthrax's 1990 album*]. I started calling it "Persistence of Memory," literally after the Salvador Dalí painting, because your memories are what really keep things alive. Charlie and I were talking, and he said something about where the time went, and it struck me hard. I started writing words about my dad and losing him. At the last minute, I changed the title to "The Long Goodbye," because it was a key lyric in the song. It was something that someone had said to me while my dad was in the throes of it — that it's the worst because the person has been gone for years, they're not even there anymore. He didn't know who I or my brothers were for years.

That must have been awful.
IAN: It was so strange. We'd sit there and think, "Who does he think we are?" It's just this paradox that is unfathomable. At one point, we were visiting and I was playing guitar in the house. He goes, "Oh, you play guitar. My son plays guitar. He's in a big band. Have you ever heard of Anthrax?" They tell you not to remind or correct people when they're like that because it confuses them, but my brother Jason couldn't help himself.

We walked into the den and my dad was pointing at a picture of me from *Sound of White Noise* [1993] that was inside a gold record plaque on the wall. He goes, "That's my son right there." Jason points at me and says, "Dad, that's Scott; that's him." My dad turned around and looked right at me, but he just couldn't make the connection. There was no ability for him to connect that the guy standing in his house was the son in the photo. He just turned to me and said, "If you keep practicing, maybe someday you'll have one of these on your wall."

I can't even imagine. On a much less-horrible note, "Infectious" feels like a real celebration.
IAN: It came out so great. It's like a doomy

> "Sometimes I'll hear a riff in my head, but it will sound too happy in standard tuning"
> CHARLIE BENANTE

"Back in Black" — a solid four-on-the-floor with this great riff. My rhythm playing usually sits on top of the beat. It's part of the Anthrax sound. So, it was a learning process in the studio for me to get behind the beat to get the right Malcolm Young-style groove. That took me a minute because it would always sound right to me, and then producer Jay Ruston would say, "You're still a little bit on top of it. Pull it back." Then, it feels like I'm lagging behind, but it didn't take long before I got it right and then it was so great.
BENANTE: We love AC/DC. We don't sound like AC/DC, but, oh my god, we want to be AC/DC.

What was the hardest song to play?
IAN: "Watch It Go." That beat and groove Charlie's playing has a weird count, and the guitar picking is relentless. We rehearsed a lot, and we did a lot of pre-production on it so we could play it as a band, but it was not easy.

The song has a guitar part reminiscent of Pantera's "Primal Concrete Sledge."
IAN: We definitely had the riff before Charlie was playing in Pantera, but we didn't have the riff before Pantera wrote "Primal Concrete Sledge." That part is definitely a nod to Dime. I have no problem paying tribute to our buddy. Obviously, Charlie's in that band, so I think it's okay.

Did touring with Pantera have any impact on these songs?
BENANTE: There's probably a song or two that's influenced by me being in Pantera. When Dime and Vinnie were around, we were really close. We talked about music all the time. Me and Dime used to have these 2-in-the-morning calls about bands we loved — like King's X. Darrell used to snap his finger and say, "watch it go," and that always stuck with me. It was just going to be the working title of the song, but Scott liked it and it stuck.

Charlie, what did you use to record the demos?
BENANTE: I used to use a Vox AC30 a lot. I cherish that amp, but in the past couple of years, I've used the Line 6 Helix or AmpliTube. The HeadRush is another one. I can just dial in my own sounds and they're. And I know the tone is going to be



STOMP 442
ELEKTRA, 1995
Yet again, *Stomp 442* saw Anthrax venturing away from what made them... Anthrax. This time, New York's favorite thrash sons dropped the grunge vibes in favor of groove metal, which was in vogue, thanks to Pantera. The record lacks a certain sonic quality because Spitz had left, but Dimebag Darrell was there to lend a hand.
LEAD GUITARISTS: Paul Crook, Dimebag Darrell, Zach Throne, Mike Tempesta
KEY TRACK: "King Size"



VOLUME 8: THE THREAT IS REAL
IGNITION, 1998
For Anthrax's next offering, which marked the end of their major-label days, they tapped into another flavor of the day: nu-metal. Admittedly, it's kind of weird to see one of the so-called "greatest metal bands of all time" endeavoring to compete with Limp Bizkit, but people gotta eat and keep the lights on, right? Anthrax still hadn't hired a proper replacement for Spitz, so Dimebag Darrell popped into the studio to help again, as did Paul Crook. The result is a weird album that features some unique moments, including "Inside Out" and "Born Again Idiot."
LEAD GUITARISTS: Dimebag Darrell, Paul Crook
KEY TRACK: "Inside Out"



WE'VE COME FOR YOU ALL
SANCTUARY, 2003
For Bush's final act with Anthrax, he and his bandmates unfurrowed *We've Come for You All*, which came after a five-year break. And while the Nineties might've been over, what wasn't over was Anthrax's dabbling with alt-metal, groove metal and nu-metal — all in one record! What also wasn't over was Dimebag's involvement, which led to him playing lead on "Strap It On" and "Cadillac Rock Box." This was kind of interesting, as the band had formally hired Rob Caggiano as their full-time lead guitarist. All in all, this record was basically one for the diehards, as it's just too weird. Just ask Roger Daltrey, who provided "additional vocals" on "Taking the Music Back."
LEAD GUITARISTS: Dimebag Darrell, Rob Caggiano
KEY TRACK: "Strap It On"

exactly what I want because I made it.

What guitars did you use?
BENANTE: I have two EVH Stars. One is in standard tuning, and the other is tuned down a half step because sometimes I'll hear a riff in my head and it will sound too happy in standard tuning. I also like to sit around at home or on tour with my Taylor GS Mini and mess around.

Scott, what have you been playing?
IAN: A bunch of my Jackson X King Vs. And also my new Jackson signature. We did a limited edition of my original Not Rhoads that I got back in '82 that I ordered through Sam Ash on West 48th Street in New York. It was custom-shop built, and there's a picture of it on the back of Spreading the Disease. It's a white Randy Rhoads and it has an anarchy sign and says "not" on it. There's just one little difference. It used to say "NYHC," and now it says "SINY" because I don't want to make any claim to the New York hardcore logo. This is my thing — Scott Ian New York. I played it on the video for "It's For the Kids."

What about amps?
IAN: Just my Marshall JCM800 with the TC Electronic Boost in front of it. It's the same tone I've been using forever, and it's balanced with the EVH 5150 because the EVH supply has a bottom end I can't get out of the Marshall. You're hearing the mids from the JCM800 on top, and it's a really clean tone compared to just plugging into an EVH.

***Cursum Perficio* features guitar rhythms in various voicings besides power chords.**
IAN: Being around the guys in Mr. Bungle for six years has opened my caveman world. Outside the basic realm of major and minor, I didn't really know a lot of other stuff. Getting to play with them has definitely made me a better player. And playing a lot of crazy cover songs like Olivia Newton John's "Hopelessly Devoted," I've learned grown-up chords. I still don't know the names of most of them, but I know how to play them, and I'm moving them around the neck now. Also, I learned a lot of cowboy chords playing on and off with [*my wife*] Pearl [*Aday*] over the years. Any time you dip your toes into another genre, it's only going to make you a better musician.

***Cursum Perficio* is Latin for "I complete my journey." That supports speculation that the album will be your last studio release.**
BENANTE: I felt like our journey has come to an end. As I said earlier, this may be the last record that I want to write for the band, and I just had this whole idea of the journey being over. Then there was this Marilyn Monroe documentary I was watching, and one of the tiles in her house said "Cursum perficio," and it translates to "I complete my journey," so that became the album title.

The artwork features characters from the covers of the band's other albums, which supports the idea that this record is an amalgamation of some of your best moments.
BENANTE: That's pretty much what I wanted to do, and it came together like the album title. I was looking to capture the look of those old Harry Houdini posters. Then, I'm watching a six-part documentary series on [*magician*] David Blaine, and in the first episode this piece of art comes up, and it's exactly what I wanted. I paused the credits, found the artist's name, and we contacted him. He ended up doing the cover.

Scott, what does the album title and artwork mean to you? Does it seem like this is the band's final chapter?
IAN: It's up to Charlie whether he wants to write more Anthrax songs. I could keep going. But you know what's crazy? We're going to tour this album for about three years, and by the time we're done, we'll be three years away from our 50th anniversary. I'm not saying for sure, but that would be a cool time to say sayonara and do a big world tour. I'm very much of the mind that you always want to go out on top like George Costanza. But, you know, if *Cursum Perficio* turns out to be our final statement, I'm really happy with it.



WORSHIP MUSIC
MEGAFORCE, 2011
Finally, vocalist Joey Belladonna returned to Anthrax. Along with him came a return to the thrash-oriented sound that made the band famous. This was good news, as the band re-signed with Megaforce/Nuclear Blast Records and experienced some of the best reviews they'd seen in years. As evidenced by songs like "The Devil You Know" and "I'm Alive," Ian and Caggiano seemed to develop a real groove as a guitar duo. Sadly, it wouldn't last.
LEAD GUITARIST: Rob Caggiano
KEY TRACK: "I'm Alive"



FOR ALL KINGS
MEGAFORCE, 2016
While it might not have the chart hits or greatest-hits cachet of Anthrax's Eighties work, *Kings* is in league with the band's classic era. Newcomer Jonathan Donais injected heaping loads of shred and is the band's most talented shredder since Dave Spitz. His flash and ability leave Ian to do what he does best — bludgeon you with riffs and rhythms.
LEAD GUITARIST: Jonathan Donais
KEY TRACK: "Breathing Lightning"



CURSUM PERFICIO
MEGAFORCE, 2026
This brings us to their hyper-delayed and long-awaited return. Why did it take so long? Maybe it was Covid. Maybe it's because Charlie Benante was kicking it with Pantera. Maybe it's because Bello was writing his book. Regardless, it's here, and it captures the band's spirit and edge. Donais and Ian deliver the amp-blowing rage fans have come to love and crave. For us, this album isn't the band's absolute best, but it represents some very good Anthrax. Let's be thankful for that.
LEAD GUITARIST: Jonathan Donais
KEY TRACK: "The Edge of Perfection"

More great mazagines from Future Publishing

Subscribe at **www.techmags.com.au**
Free delivery across Australia













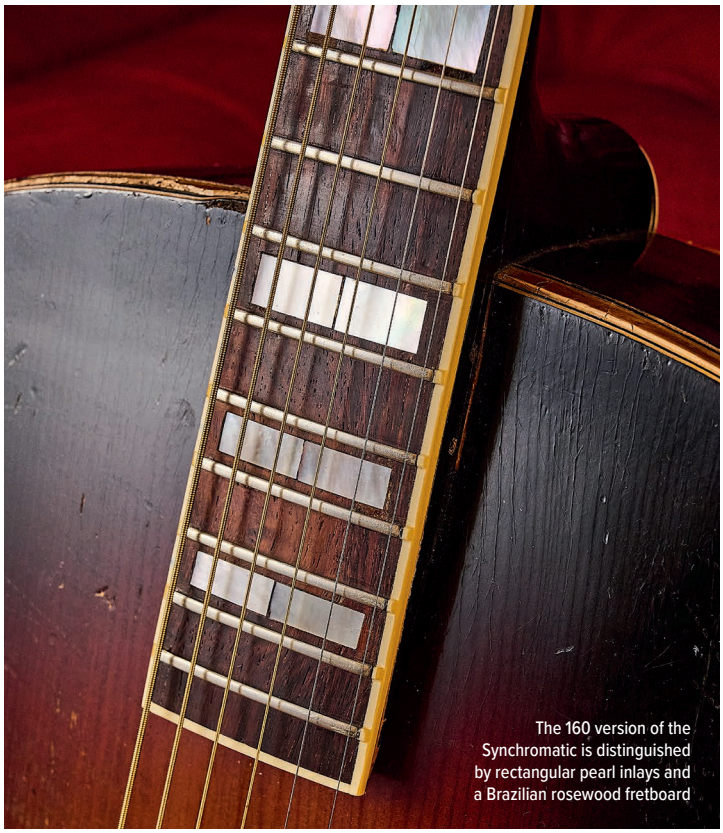
GRETSCH SYNCHROMATIC MODEL 160

Wielded by George Michael in the music video for 1987 single *Faith*, this Gretsch Synchromatic is an icon of 1980s pop culture

Words Huw Price **Photography** Matt Lincoln



Gretsch Synchromatic headstocks varied in shape and this particular style is known as the 'light bulb'


The 160 version of the Synchromatic is distinguished by rectangular pearl inlays and a Brazilian rosewood fretboard


Vintage Gretsches are notorious for disintegrating binding, known as 'binding rot', which is evident all around the body

In the autumn of 1987 George Michael's first solo album was ready for release and a video shoot was scheduled to promote the single *Faith*. Breaking away from Wham!'s wholesome boy band image and reinventing himself as a mature solo artist meant that George needed a new look.

By the late 80s, New Wave and the New Romantics had come and gone, and the damply dark joys of *Twin Peaks* had yet to usher in the grunge era. Whimsical Levi's adverts and blockbuster movies like *Back To The Future* typified the airbrushed and colour-saturated 1950s nostalgia then pervading popular culture. George's plans to revamp his image with torn stonewashed jeans, a black leather biker jacket, aviator shades and a Wurlitzer jukebox made sense – but one vital ingredient was missing.

Shortly before the video shoot George was exploring the Melrose district of Los Angeles when he wandered into a pawn shop and noticed a Gretsch Synchromatic archtop hanging on the wall. Although best known as a singer and songwriter, George could play guitar and bass, but he really bought the Gretsch because he knew it would look perfect in the video.

Sync'ing Up

Gretsch launched its line of Synchromatic models around 1939, highlighting "seven points of supremacy", but Synchromatics never achieved the same kudos as Gibsons, Epiphones, Strombergs or D'Angelicos. All across the range the styling was eye-catching, with a 17-inch wide body, cat's eye soundholes and a distinctive floating bridge with 'stairstep' extensions.

The Synchromatic models also had an asymmetrical neck profile and a 26-inch scale length. The four iterations to choose from were the 400, 300, 200 and bottom of the range 160. George's Synchromatic is a Model 160 with pearl block inlays on a Brazilian rosewood fretboard, with single-ply celluloid binding and chrome-plated hardware.

Gretsch made the Model 160 in two batches with the first running between 1939 and 1943, and the second from 1947 to 1951. The second-generation 160s had a flat-sided headstock shape, rather than the earlier 'lightbulb' profile, and gold hardware. Although we can't pinpoint the exact year, we can say that George's Gretsch came from the first run.

Put To The Sword

In October 2026 George's Gretsch is due to be auctioned by Sworders as part of Faith & Fame: A Personal George Michael Collection. Chairman and head of Art & Antiques, Guy Schooling, describes how Sworders became

FAITH HEALING Huw Price recalls restoring this model for Sworders in 2024

This Gretsch first appeared on your correspondent's radar in the early summer of 1988. I was flying to Greece and bought a copy of *Q* magazine in Gatwick Airport that featured a photo of George and his Synchromatic on the cover. I had never seen one before, but I thought it was a great looking guitar. Fast forward to 2024 and I received a call from Tony Salani at Sworders asking if I'd be willing to undertake some restoration work on the guitar.

In the intervening years I'd become aware of what type of Gretsch it was and I was pretty thrilled when Tony brought it over. Despite years of suboptimal storage conditions, the Synchromatic had held up surprisingly well. The all-important neck joint was still solid, the angle was perfect and none of the glue joints had let go. The top retained a pronounced arch and with no concerning rattles or buzzes when the guitar was played, so I wasn't concerned about issues with the internal braces. Although it looked a bit sorry for itself, there were no structural problems and the body mostly needed a good clean-up.

There were, however, some binding issues; principally, that the fretboard no longer had any. Inside the case was a plastic bag containing a jigsaw puzzle of binding bits, and it soon became apparent that what was left of it was too shrivelled and curled up to be salvaged.

The headstock binding was in far better shape, and while some shrinkage had occurred, it had retained its shape and most of the pieces were just about clinging on. Tony's brief was to preserve originality wherever possible, so, knowing it would always look a bit 'gappy', I set about reglueing them.

Gretsch had attached the binding with animal protein glue, and the binding pieces required little persuasion to pop off the headstock. I scraped off all the old glue from the binding channels and stuck the binding back on, piece by piece, using fish glue. With awkward curved shapes, wrapping surgical tubing around the headstock works far better than clamps. After several stages of glueing, the headstock was almost back to its best.

With the fretboard binding in such poor condition, we reluctantly agreed that replacing it was the only viable option. The trouble was that the ultra-wide binding available to Gretsch in the early 1940s is now extremely difficult to find in the correct colour. I eventually ordered some 2mm wide eggshell cream ABS binding from Eurospruce in Germany.

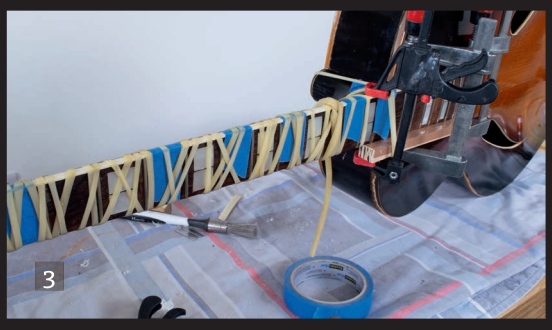
When binding a fretboard that's already been glued onto a neck, the usual practice is to sand off any excess width to create a smooth transition between the wood and binding, and then apply finish. This wasn't an option here as we didn't want to damage any of the original finish. Another layer of complication was that the binding ledge wasn't of a uniform depth, so although the binding lined up fairly well, it wasn't quite wide enough in some areas. To overcome this, I glued strips of rosewood veneer onto the sides of the 'board in the problem areas and carefully sanded it back until the binding sat flush.

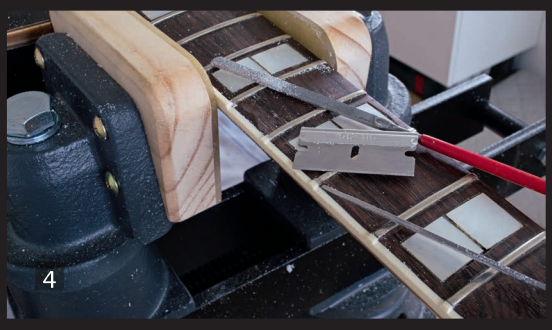
Before glueing the binding, I also had to drill marker dot holes in the area beyond the body join. Once the binding was back on I trimmed it level with the 'board, recreated the fret nibs and installed all the marker dots. To finish off, I masked off the neck and applied some lightly tinted nitrocellulose lacquer over the binding using an airbrush.

For a guitar of its era, George's Gretsch is surprisingly easy to play because the neck feels slim, the action is low and it sounds really good.













1. The surviving pieces of fretboard binding were too deformed to be salvaged so a re-bind was needed to make the guitar playable

2. Rebinding the fretboard begins with the end section, which is scraped flush using a razorblade

3. To glue the new binding, a combination of clamps, low-tack masking tape and surgical tubing was used

4. With the fretboard binding complete, files and scraper blades were used to trim it flush and recreate the fret nibs

5. The headstock binding was in better condition, so each piece could be carefully removed and reattached

6. The headstock binding pieces were reattached individually using fish glue, surgical tubing and masking tape





1. Designed to create even tension across different string gauges, Gretsch's 'Chromatic Tailpiece' was chrome-plated only on the 160 model

2. One of these open-gear Waverly tuners pictured here was subjected to a running repair that became permanent

"The condition and idiosyncrasies of this guitar exactly match those in the video"

GUY SCHOOLING, SWORDERS



A distinctive 'stairstep' floating bridge would have been fitted originally, but this replacement was on the guitar when George bought it

involved: "The vendors had contacted a leading London auction room and spoken to them about the guitar," he says, "but when a serial number couldn't be found, they said they weren't interested. [Our contact] went to meet the vendors and when she saw the guitar she was completely blown away and asked if we could help."

George had gifted the Gretsch to his personal assistant, Siobhan Bailey, who worked with him for over 20 years and who died suddenly from natural causes in 2014. Guy explains how the Gretsch ended up looking a bit sorry for itself: "Following [Siobhan's] untimely and unfortunate death, [her partner] was quite traumatised and he put the guitar and all the memorabilia that comprises our forthcoming sale into his garage. [He was later] persuaded that these things couldn't stay in the garage forever because they would have deteriorated."

It is known that George owned at least two other Gretsch Synchromatic models, and they were used as stage props when he played live. We asked Guy how Sworders was able to establish that this guitar is the actual one featured in the *Faith* video.

"The vendors had always believed it to be the instrument that was in the video. The fact that it had belonged to Siobhan was a great starting point. We then looked at the condition and idiosyncrasies of this guitar and they exactly match those in the video. Some of the plastic trim around the body was missing in the video and is still missing. We were also able to match up marks and cracks in the body, and that's why it was so important not to over-restore the guitar.

"It's taken about three years to get to this point," Guy adds, "but there's no question in our mind that it's the actual guitar, and since George's family agrees, it won't ever be contested. You could say it is now a popular music icon, and because George's leather jacket sold earlier this year for £176,400 (AU$331,447), our auction estimate is £60,000 (AU$112k) to £120,000 (AU$225k)." ag

This guitar is set to be auctioned on 29 October as part of Faith & Fame: A Personal George Michael Collection at Sworders London www.sworder.co.uk

THE FUTURE OF MAGAZINES

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE













Subscribe at **www.techmags.com.au**

Free delivery across Australia | Never miss an issue | Save money

FUTURE

VIDEO & AUDIO https://bit.ly/3MUWVOq

THE ROOTS OF EVH!
Van Halen's Influences

Phil Short uses six immersive studies to dive deeply into the work of the rock guitar master and ask, "Who were the musicians that inspired Eddie Van Halen to play the way he did?"

It's a fascinating question to consider who influenced Eddie Van Halen. How did he develop his unique playing approach? Did he stumble across everything by accident? In this month's feature we attempt to look at who some of those influences were, how they informed Eddie's journey and how he then pushed those ideas forward to a whole new school of players. It is well documented that Eddie was a huge fan of the blues-rock icons of the '60s and '70s, and much of Van Halen's songwriting approach is clearly grounded in this style.

Eddie's most commonly cited early guitar hero is Eric Clapton; in interviews he always cited EC as his great early inspiration, but he was also a great fan of Jimmy Page, Ritchie Blackmore and indeed Allan Holdsworth.

As any fan of Eddie will know, the backbone of his vocabulary lies in a fiery blues-rock vocabulary. Before Van Halen were Van Halen, Eddie was known for being able to play almost every Cream solo note for note, and there are multiple recordings of interviews where he plays the entire Crossroads solo. Infact he is quoted as dedicating his bluesy solo on the song, When It's Love, to Clapton himself, as a tribute to his legacy and influence.

Eddie was also a huge fan of Led Zeppelin, and there's no doubt that they had a big influence on his riff writing and songs. It's also possible to speculate that Jimmy is where Eddie's inspiration for expressive techniques came from. The Heartbreaker solo in particular features many sounds that are staples in Eddie's own arsenal; tapped notes with large bends, pick slides and wide vibrato. If you've not heard it for a while, it's worth digging it out and reminding yourself.

> *"It wasn't just the blues-rockers of his youth that inspired Eddie. He was also captivated by Allan Holdsworth"*

However, it wasn't just the blues-rock players of his youth that inspired Eddie. He was also captivated by jazz-fusion heavyweight, Allan Holdsworth. Allan was an incredibly accomplished legato player and experimented with all sorts of unconventional tonalities. It was his use of wide stretches and symmetrical shapes that created very angular and interesting sounds that caught Eddie's ear, and was something that he tried to emulate in his own way. Many of the scale fingerings he liked to draw on are unconventional and won't be be found in any typical text book, but they make it easier to execute faster lines while also creating unexpected angular sounds that keep things sounding fresh and less exercise based.

Of course we cannot discuss the great Eddie without mentioning his pioneering approach to two-handed tapping. Of course it had been dabbled with by other players as previously mentioned, plus Les Paul and others before him. But Eddie brought into the spotlight an otherwise unheard-of technique that allowed him to play large arpeggio sequences reminiscent of the classical music he first learned in his formative years in Holland. It was also possibly his way of replicating some of the arpeggio approaches he would have heard listening to tracks like Deep Purple's Highway Star - an approach previously only heard on keyboards and not on electric guitar.

Our six studies focus specifically on these particular stylistic and technical influences, with the final piece combing elements from all five approaches.

Ability Rating Advanced

✪✪✪✪✪

Info https://bit.ly/3MUWVOq

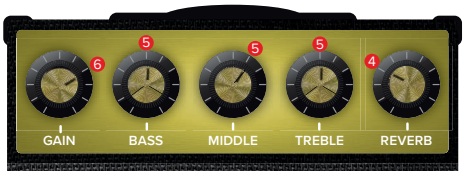
Key Various **Tempo** Various

Will improve your...

- ✔ Ability to combine techniques
- ✔ Legato and tapping
- ✔ Alternate picking control

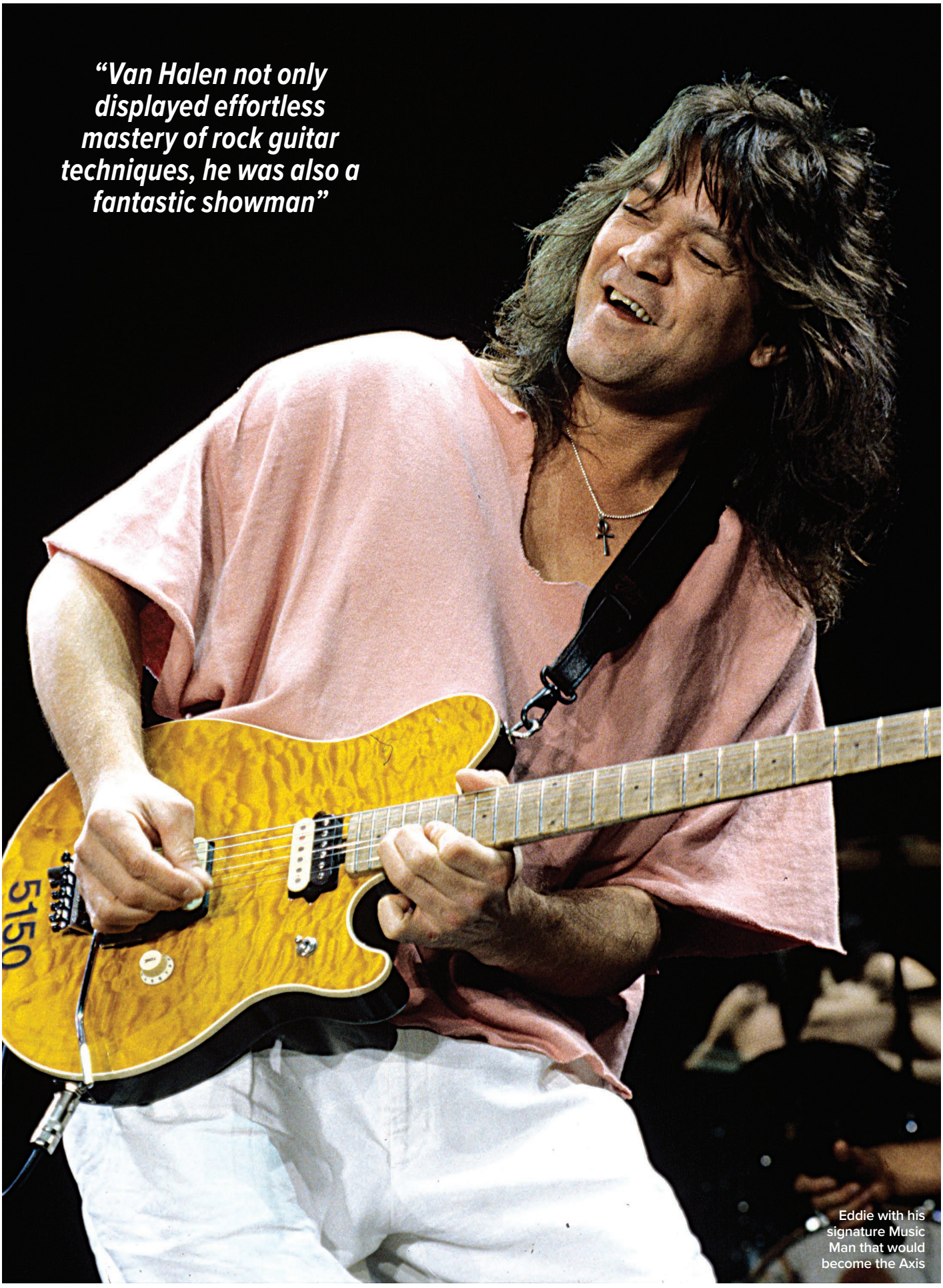
TECHNIQUE FOCUS
EXPRESSION

Eddie used a wide range of techniques, most notably two-handed tapping. But underpinning all the incredible fretboard gymnastics was a robust blues vocabulary and a detailed, expressive delivery. Arguably the most important part of Eddie's sound was the squeaks, pick slides, dive-bombs and tone-wide vibrato. It is these less obvious details that make him stand out among the sea of technically proficient players - even 40 years later. Focus on replicating the expressive qualities you can hear in the recordings. Work on one phrase at a time until you can hear every nuance and detail. This type of focused practice will help you to sound more musical and authentic in the final performance of each study.



Get the Tone

To get close to Eddie's sound, you don't necessarily need a Marshall Plexi or a Peavey 5150. Any good Marshall-esque tone will suffice. The key to Eddie's sound relies heavily on the fire of your delivery. Use less pre-amp gain than you think, then you'll have to put more power into your pick attack and vibrato to get the notes to scream. If using a cleaner amp, go for a strong drive pedal like a Boss SD1 or Fulltone OCD.



"Van Halen not only displayed effortless mastery of rock guitar techniques, he was also a fantastic showman"

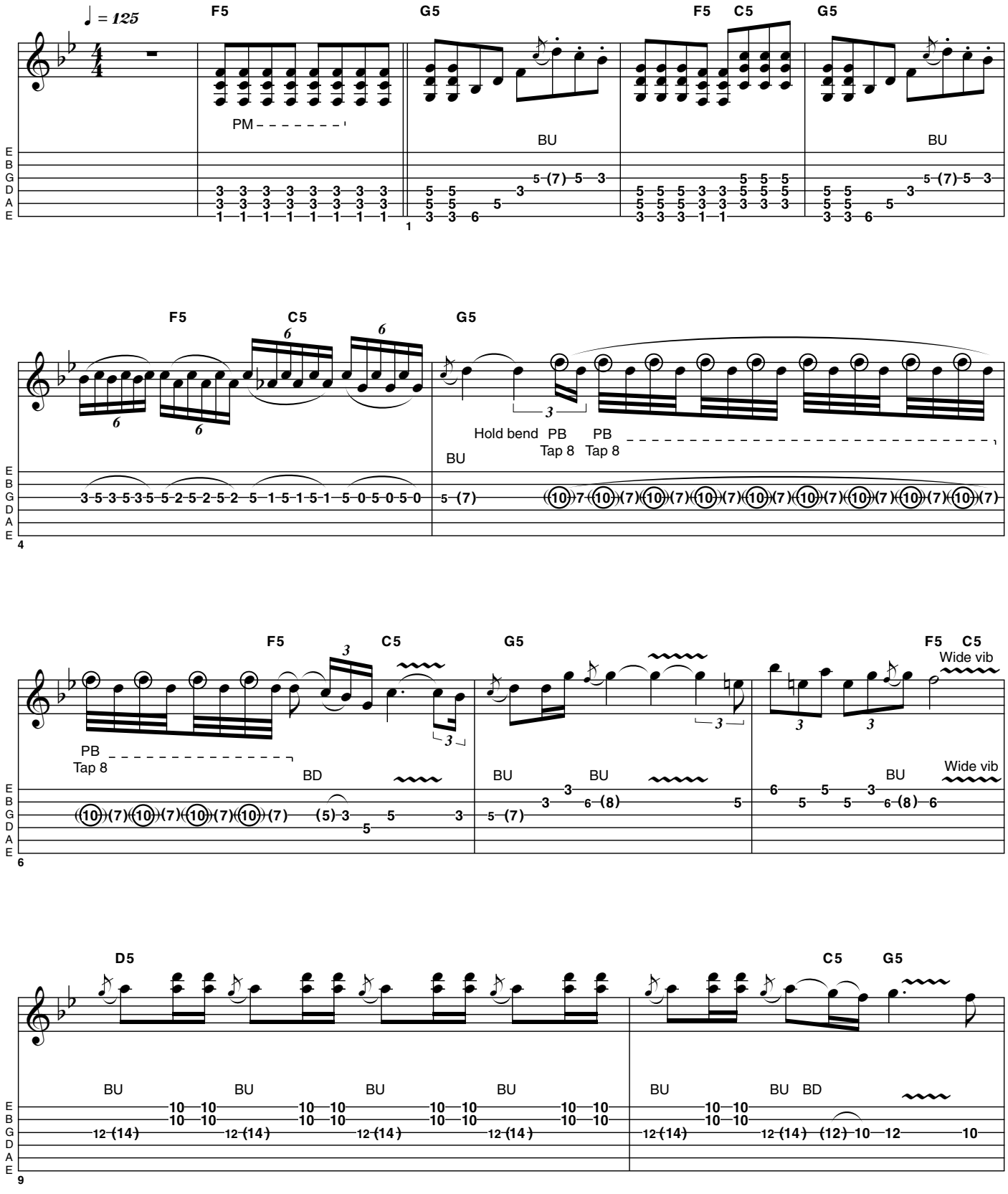
Eddie with his signature Music Man that would become the Axis

TIM MOSENFELDER / GETTY IMAGES

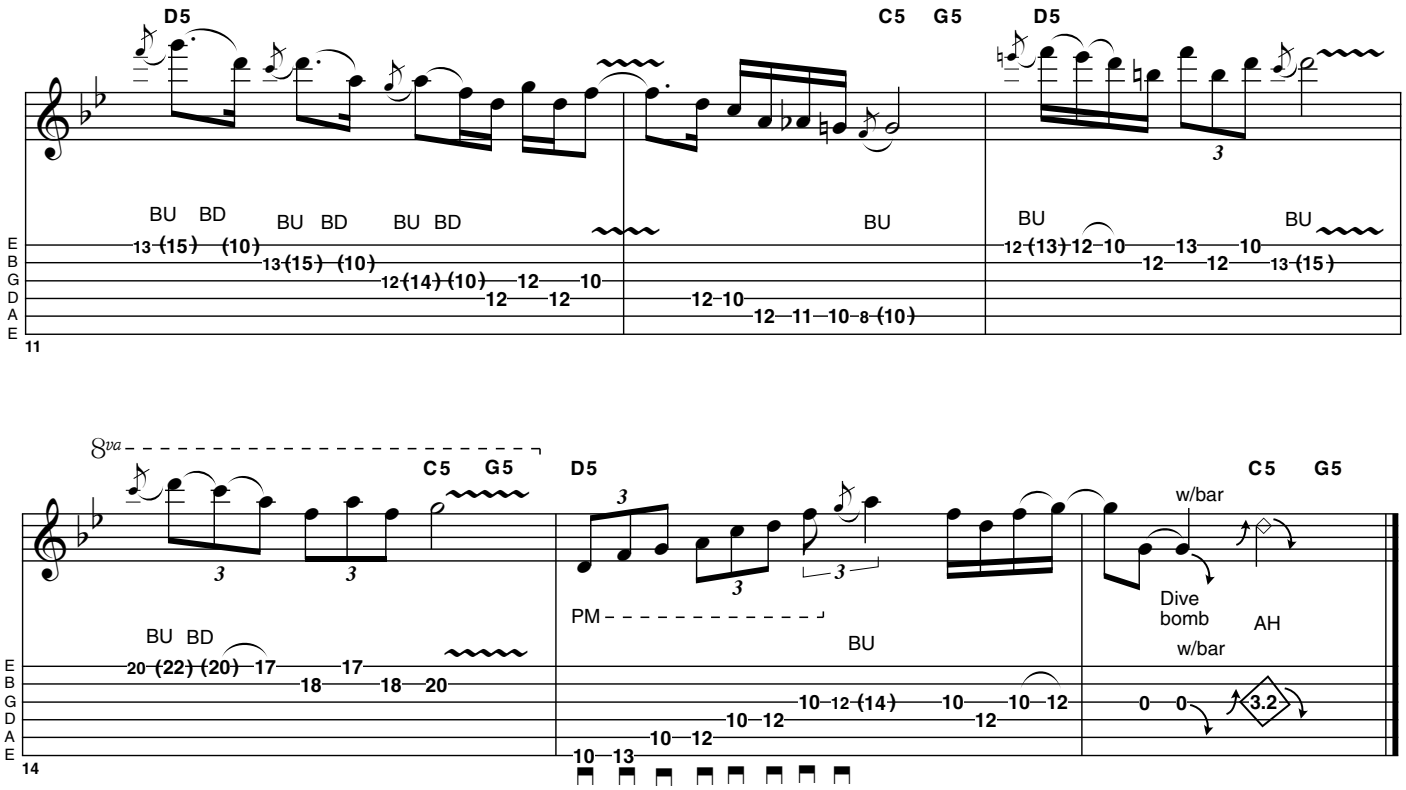
VIDEO & AUDIO https://bit.ly/3MUWVOq

EXAMPLE 1 **POP-ROCK INFLUENCES**

This study tips its hat towards Eddie's '60s songwriting influences ranging from bands like the Kinks (Dave Davies) and The Beatles through to The Who (Pete Townshend). This study is mostly stock blues-rock vocabulary, but with wide vibrato to make it more aggressive and punchy. In bars 4-6 there is a big stretch for the descending hammer-on line. Make sure the thumb on the back of the neck is lined up with your second finger to enable maximum stretch.

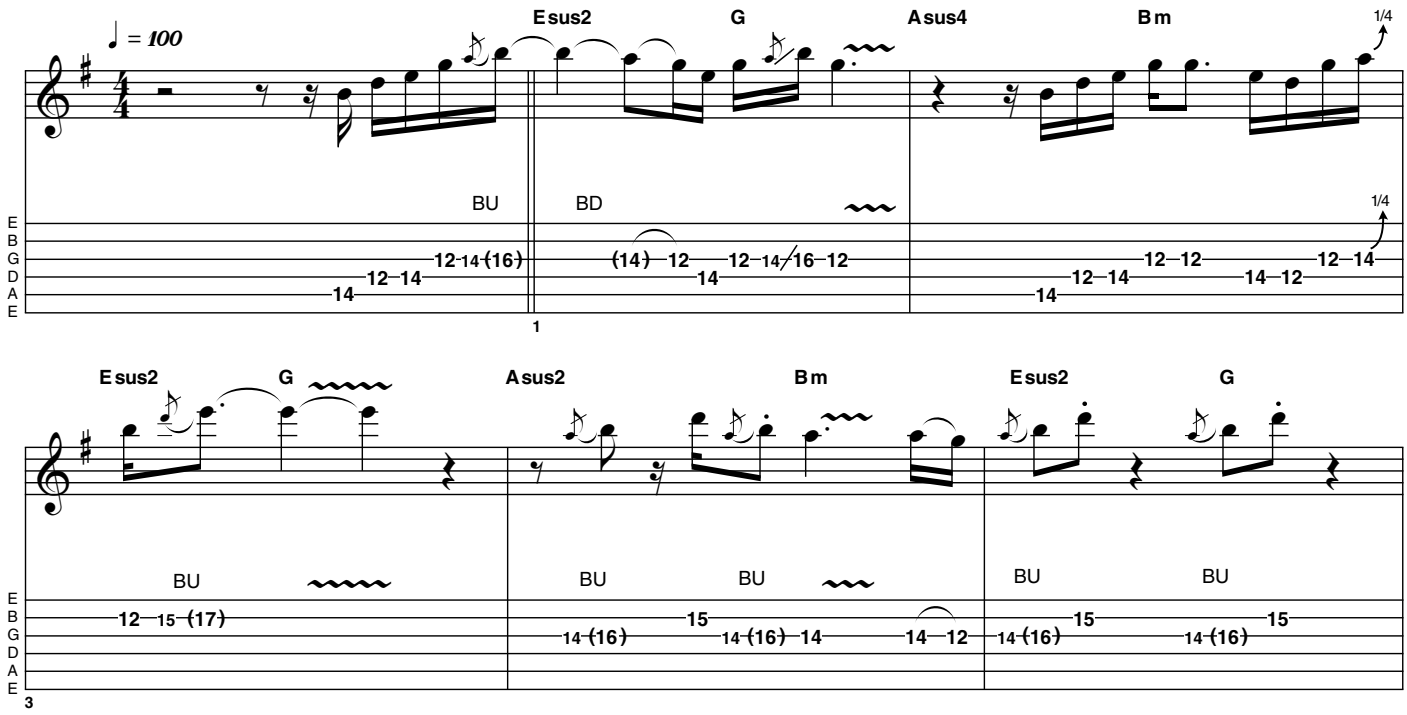


EXAMPLE 1 **POP-ROCK INFLUENCES** ...CONTINUED



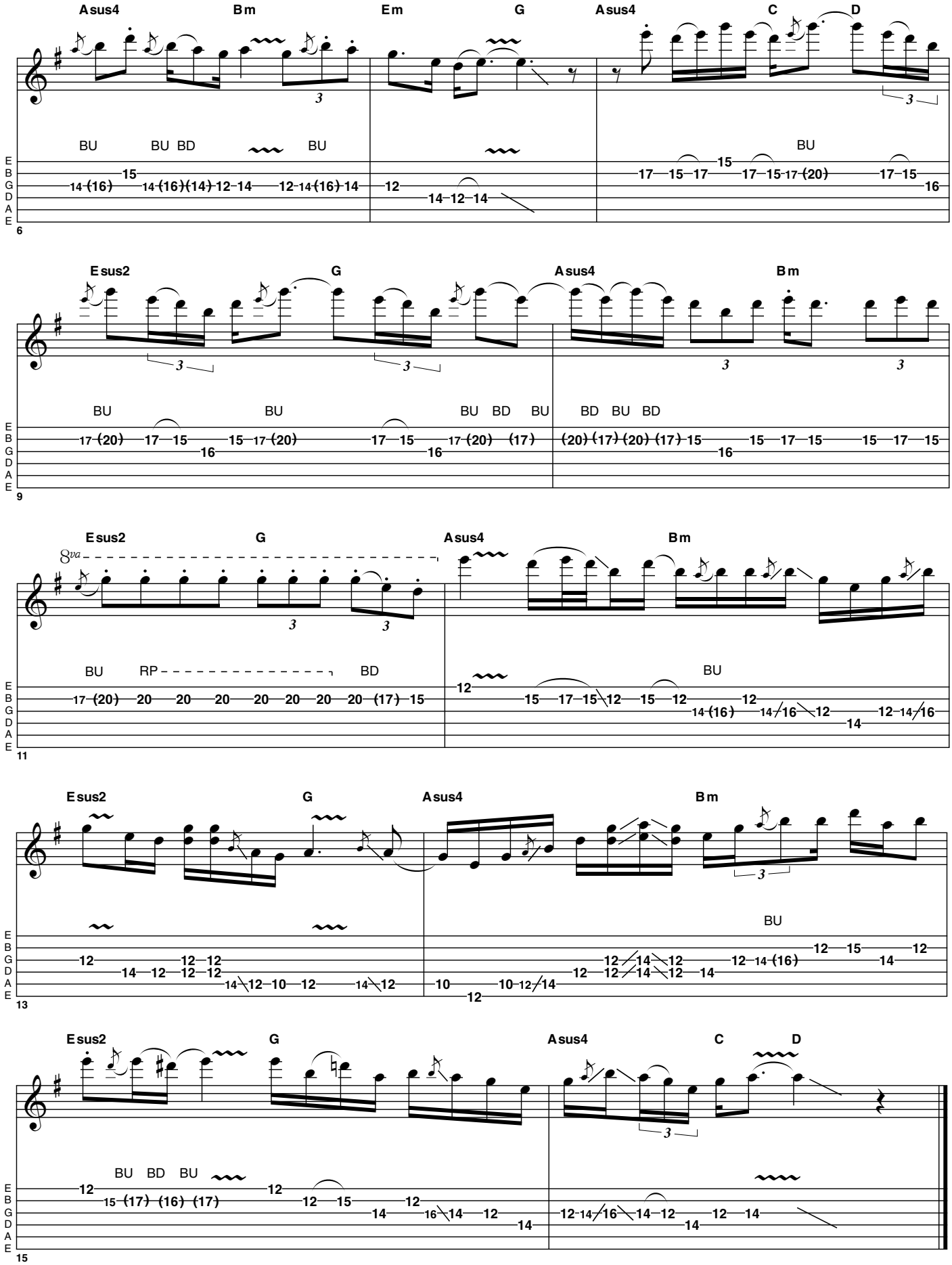
EXAMPLE 2 **ERIC CLAPTON INFLUENCE**

Eddie always spoke about how it was Eric Clapton and not perhaps the more expected Jimi Hendrix that was his number one lead guitar influence. So this study is essentially a blues solo, but with a bit of Eddie's extra edge to the tone and delivery of the more rocky vibrato than that of Clapton. The licks are definitely there though! Look out for the deliberate staccato versus legato notes, as well as the slides in particular to get the solo sounding 'Creamily' authentic.



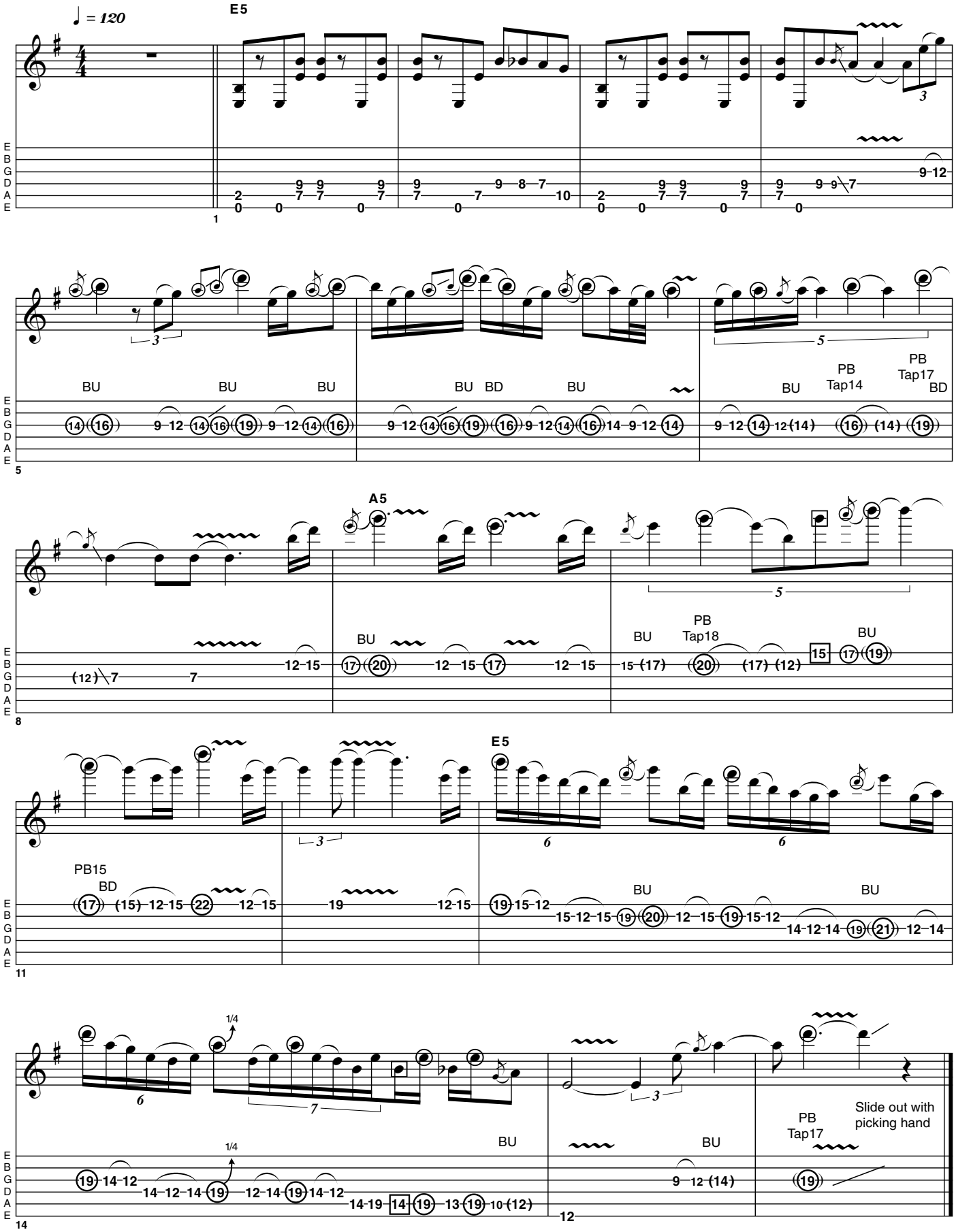
VIDEO & AUDIO https://bit.ly/3MUWVOq

EXAMPLE 2 **ERIC CLAPTON INFLUENCE** ...CONTINUED



EXAMPLE 3 **JIMMY PAGE INFLUENCE**

Here we are purposefully exploring the 'tapped bends' approach that Eddie used a lot. This study is great for developing muscle memory and accuracy when combining bending and tapping techniques. To achieve vibrato with a tapped note, it is the fretting hand that still provides the power and movement. The picking hand follows what the fretting hand is doing. If it's the other way around then vibrato would be more difficult to achieve and control.

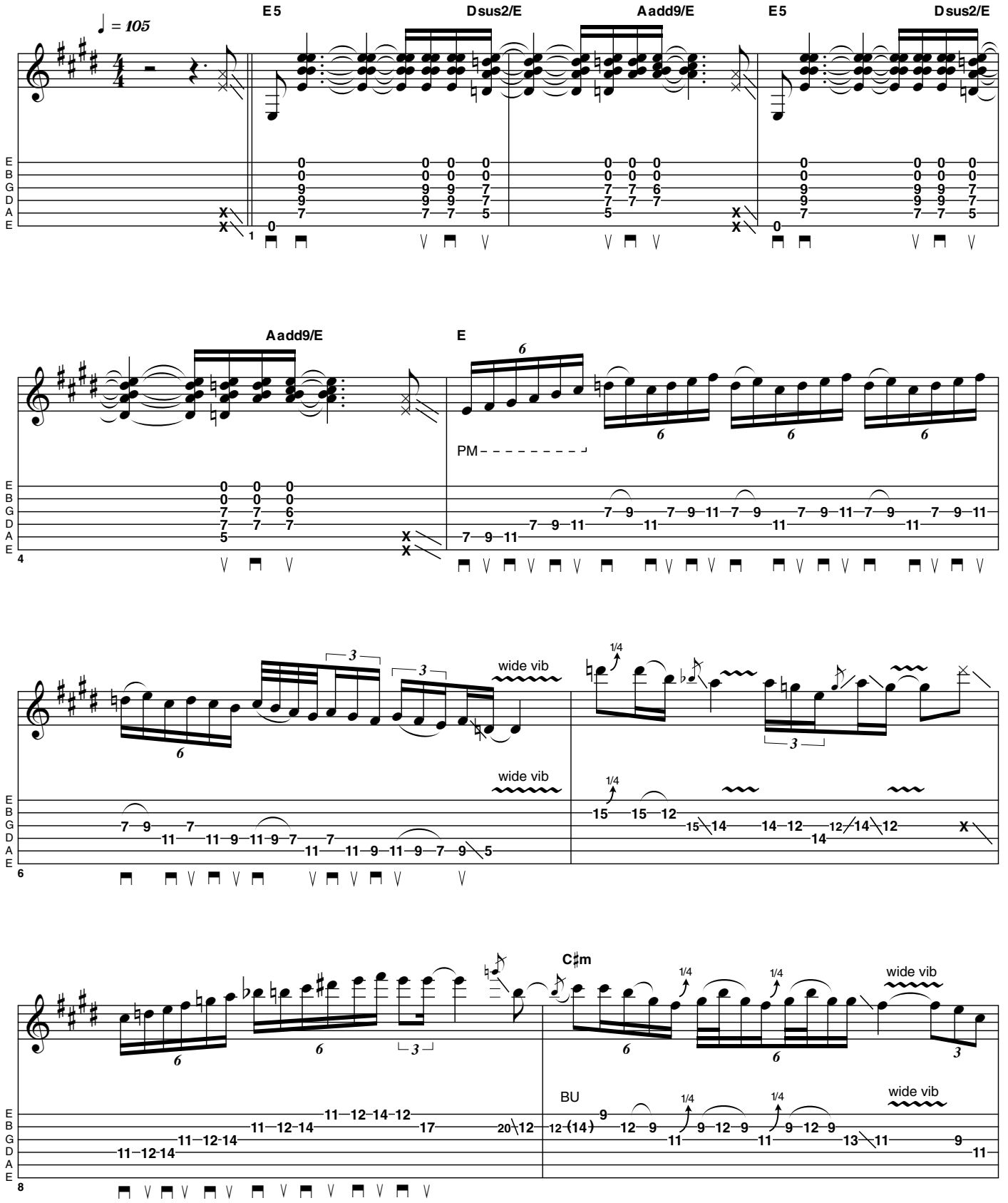


VIDEO & AUDIO https://bit.ly/3MUWVOq

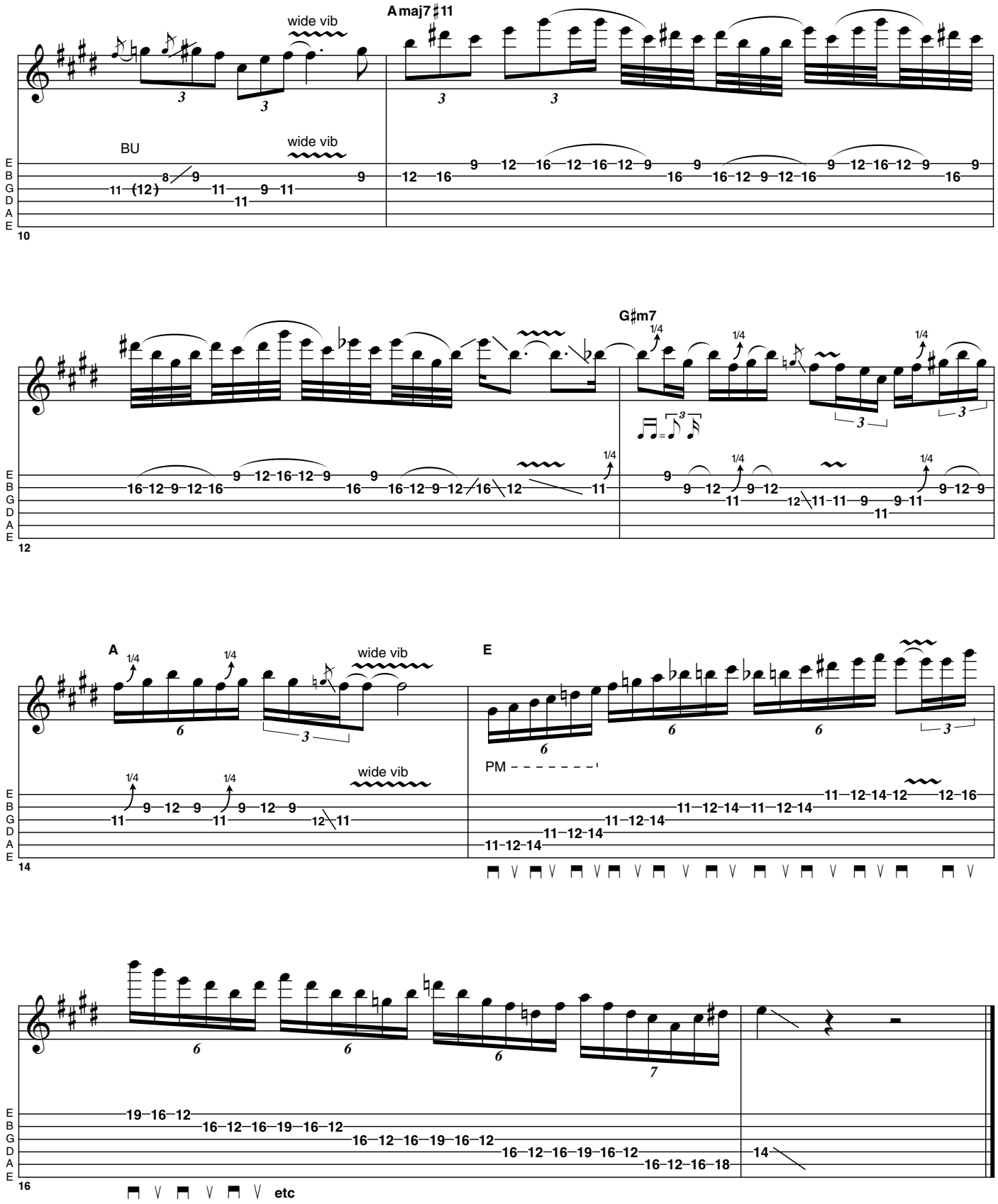
EXAMPLE 4 **ALLAN HOLDSWORTH INFLUENCE**

Here we focus on symmetrical shapes and wide stretches. To make the larger stretches, make sure your thumb is in the middle of your fretting hand on the back of the neck, so your fingers can spread out like a fan.

The picking directions are based on my own approach, but a similar effect can be created with only picking two notes per string and using hammer-ons for the rest. Palm muting creates the staccato attack.

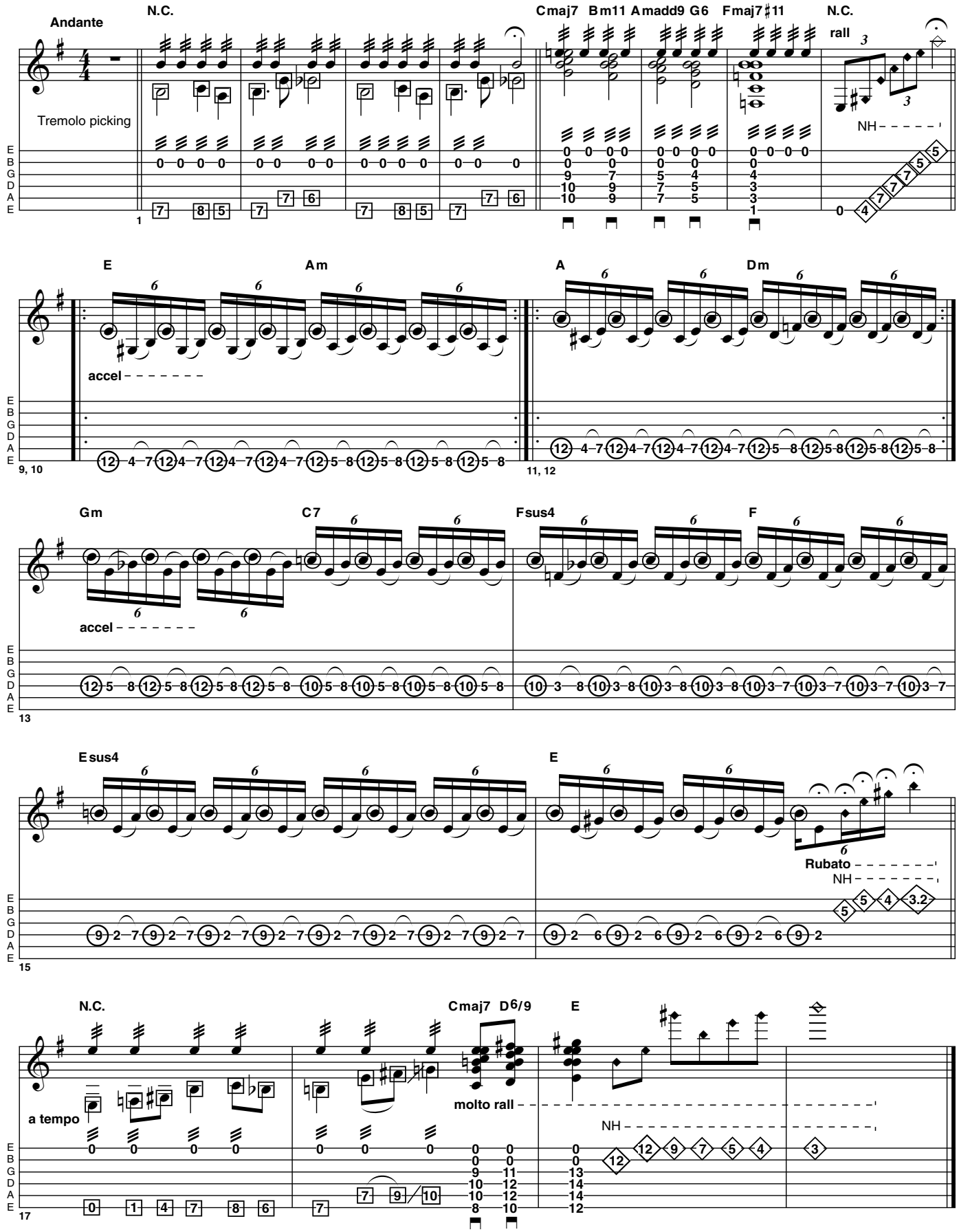


EXAMPLE 4 **ALLAN HOLDSWORTH INFLUENCE** ...CONTINUED



EXAMPLE 5 **CLASSICAL INFLUENCE**

Here's an example of Eddie's approach to emulating a classical guitar performance combined with his signature two-handed tapping approach. The fretting-hand tapping requires a decent amount of attack to get the notes to ring out on an acoustic instrument. The arpeggio section in the middle can just as easily be translated onto electric guitar. If you don't have access to an acoustic why not try those ideas in a higher gain context? They sound immense!



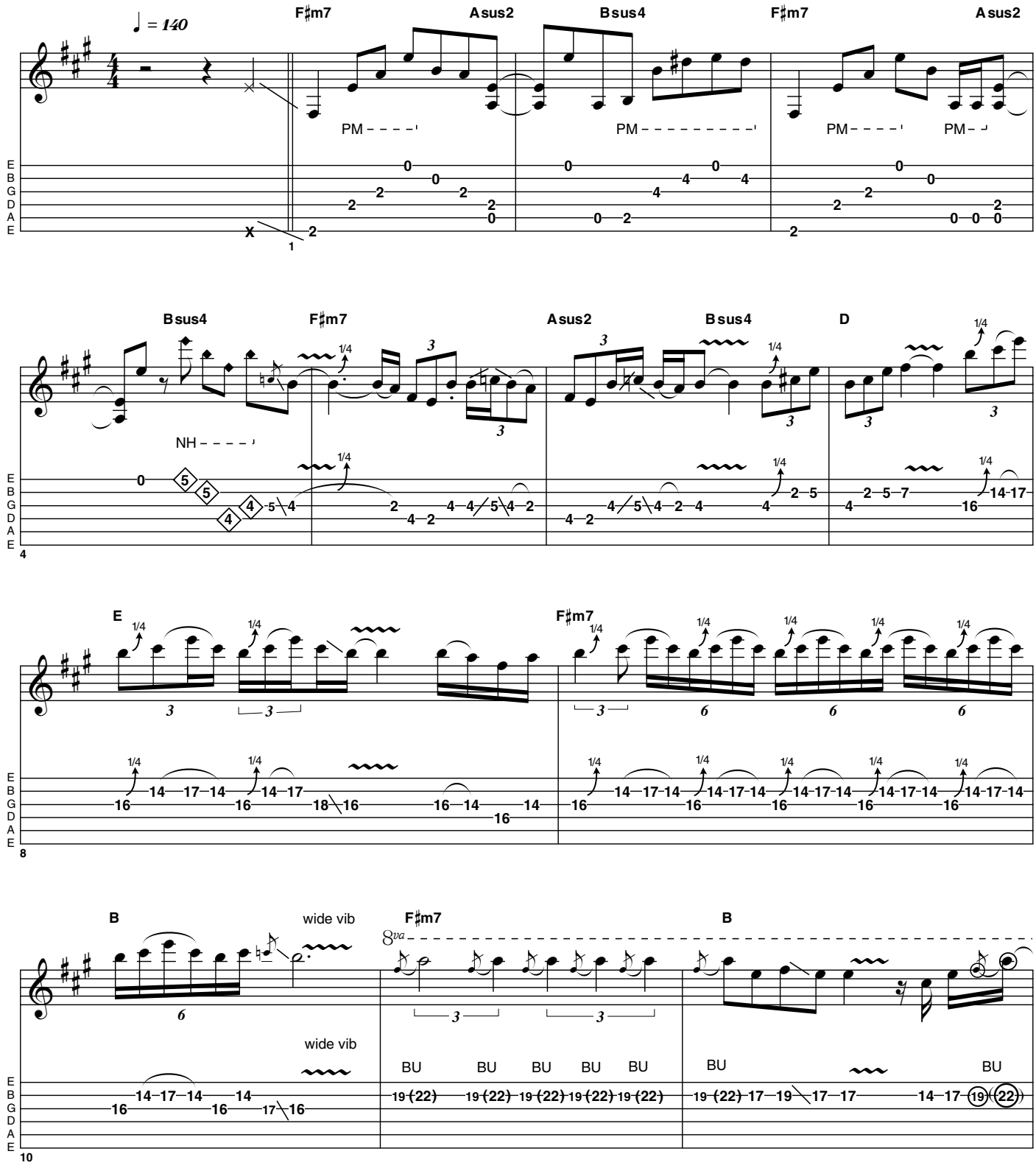
EXAMPLE 6 **INFLUENCES COMBINED**

[Bars 1-4] We open with a '60s/'70s style rhythm part that moves into some stock blues-rock expression in bars 5-8.

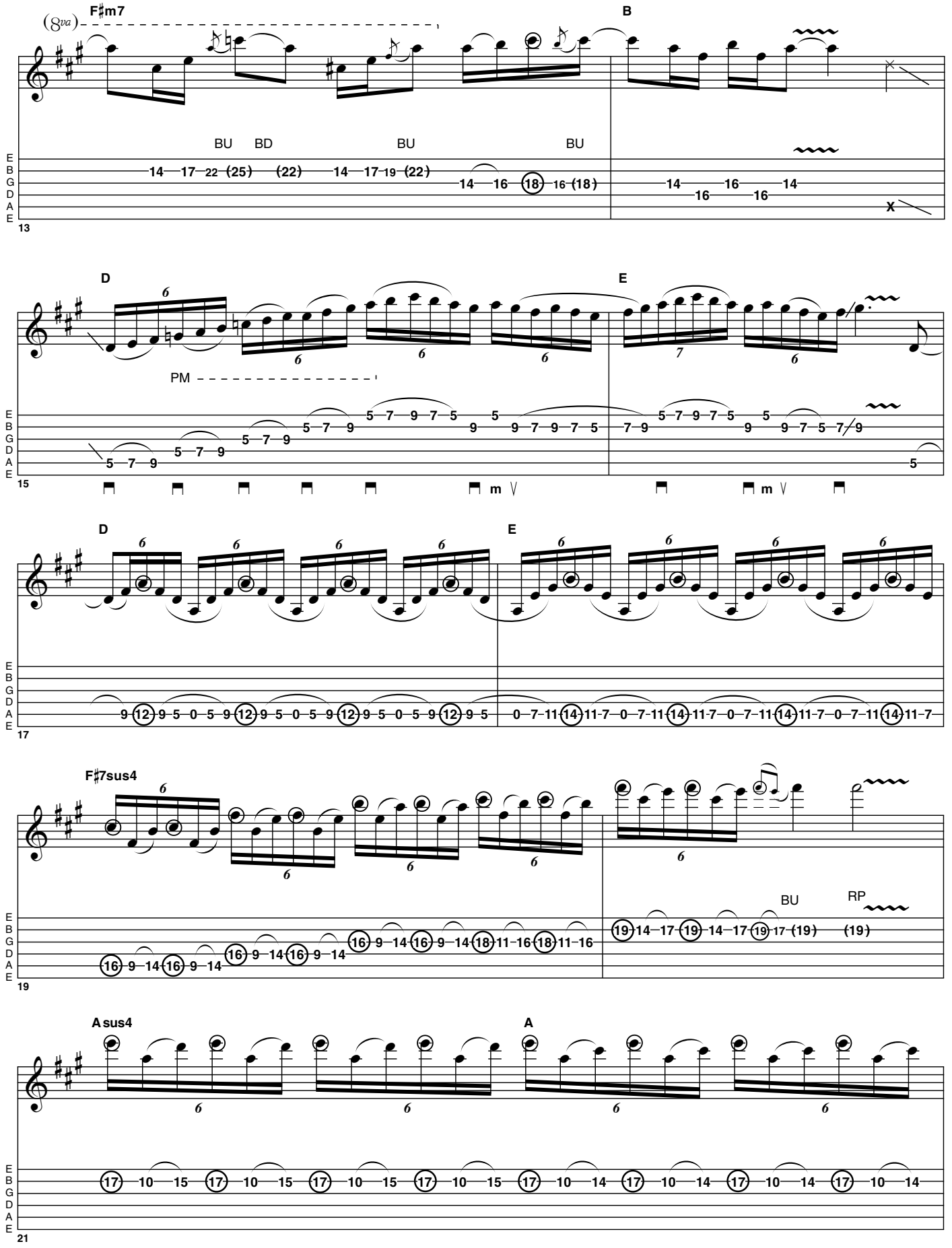
[Bars 9-11] Here we see some Clapton-esque Pentatonic licks resolving in bars 13-14 with some Jimmy Page inspired tapped bends and slides. The first half of the study finishes with a Holdsworth-style symmetrical run in bars 15-16.

[Bars 17-23] The playing in these bars will perhaps be the most challenging to execute. Here we have a long two-handed tapping arpeggio sequence following the chord changes that lead into a final Pentatonic tapping extravaganza. This final tapping sequense combines various elements of all the previous influences, to create a slice of playing that's intended to sound like pure Eddie Van Halen.

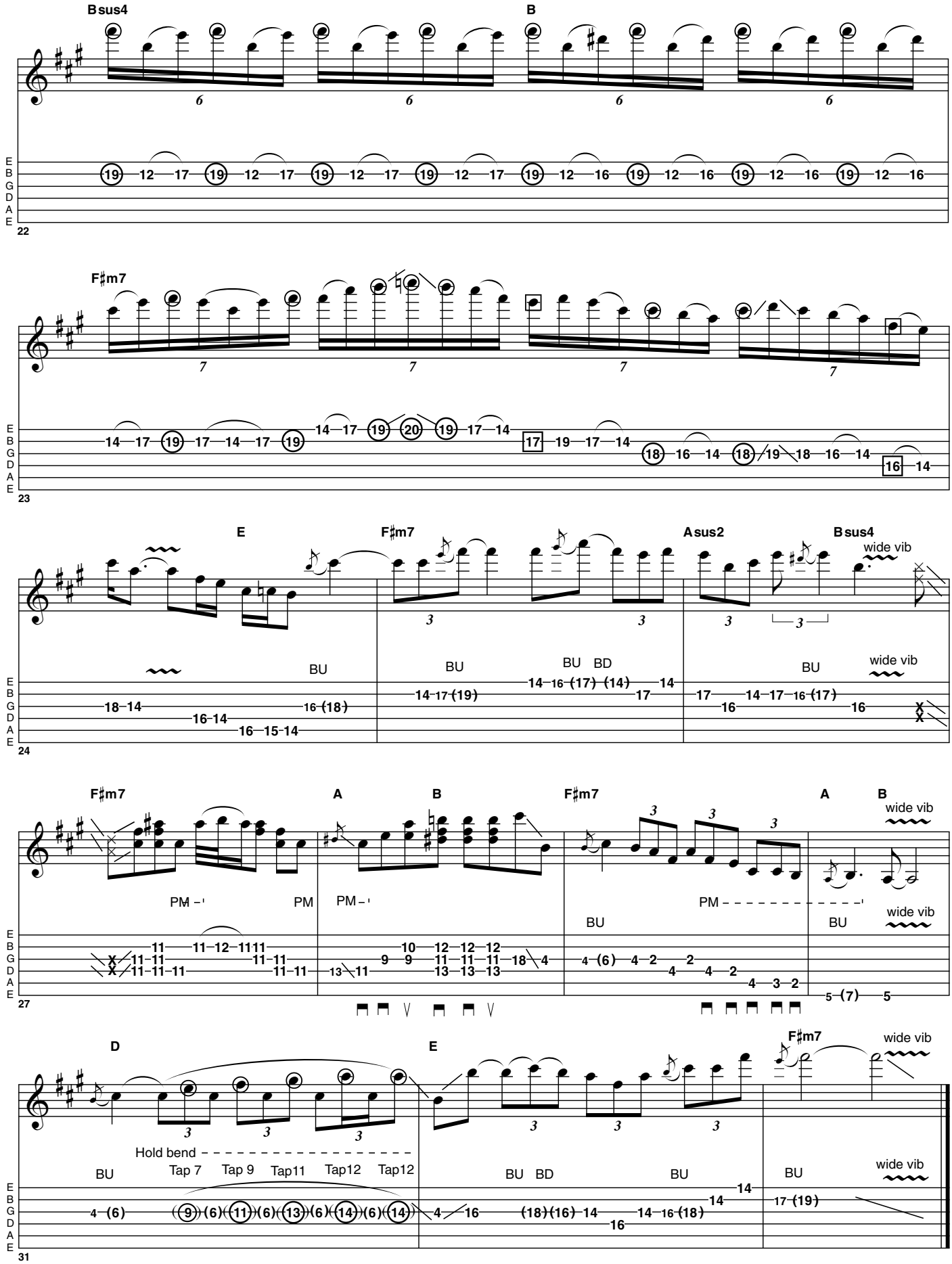
[Bars 23 - 33] The final section of bars 23 - 33 give us some more traditional blues rock inspired vocabulary including the use of some triads in bars 27 - 28, a trademark of Eddie's style. The study rounds off with another combination of bending and tapping technique to bring us to a final flourish in position 1 of minor pentatonic with tone wide vibrato to end.



EXAMPLE 6 **INFLUENCES COMBINED** ...CONTINUED



EXAMPLE 6 **INFLUENCES COMBINED** ...CONTINUED



BUCKETHEAD



Put another feather in your cap, put all your eggs in one basket, but don't count your chickens, as Charlie Griffiths enters Bucketheadland.



Buckethead playing his familiar 'kill switch' Les Paul

Ability Rating Moderate/Advanced

Info https://bit.ly/3MUWVOq

Key Various **Tempo** Various

Will improve your...
- ✔ Multi -fingered tapping
- ✔ Hybrid picking
- ✔ Slapping

Buckethead, born Brian Carroll in 1969 is an enigmatic character and guitar virtuoso. Exploring a wide spectrum of genres, Buckethead's music ranges from metal to avant-garde, experimental to bluesy, ambient and a whole lot more. He is highly proficient and often makes use of unorthodox sounds and techniques, from multi-fingered tapping, to hybrid picking, to slapping and popping, to shredding.

Example 1 is a two-handed tapping idea that alternates the first and second fingers of each hand. You could start by tapping your picking and fretting hands to create an even pulse, then take things one step further by alternating between the first two fingers of each hand. This can be applied to the fretboard as hammer-ons, or in the case of lick 1, as pull-offs. Much of Buckethead's tapping is based around symmetrical shapes moved around the fretboard, so in this example we are using a Half-Whole Diminished sound. Example 3 expands on the idea by applying the technique to three-notes-per-string scales.

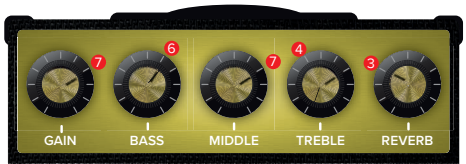
Buckethead calls this 'nubbing' and uses it with one, two, three and four fingers of each hand.

Example 2 is a traditional shred lick. The combination of legato and alternate picking was perhaps garnered from his one-time teacher Paul Gilbert, who originated this sound. It's rhythmically off kilter as it's a three-beat pattern played across bars of 4/4. Displacing licks through the bar is a fantastic way of making you sound less predictable.

Example 4 is a technique Buckethead uses to create rhythmic grooves. It combines notes and percussive sounds that create a constant stream of 16th notes. First, the side of the thumb is used to strike the sixth string against the frets at the top of the neck. Next is a hammer-on, a technique we guitarists we know very well. The third element is the 'pop', a strong, outward pluck of the strings. In between these elements are more subtle muted percussive sounds that add dynamics and groove to the flow of notes.

"Buckethead's music ranges from metal, to avant garde, to experimental, bluesy, ambient and a whole lot more"

Our final example is a hybrid picked finger twister that alternates between the fourth and sixth strings with the pick and second finger. The riff uses contrary motion in that the notes of each string travel in opposite directions. This is a fun finger puzzle to work out and there are different options available. Use a metronome as you build up the speed of each example. AG



Get the Tone

Buckethead uses a variety of tones, but tends to have a less driving sound than many of his peers. Use your bridge pickup but roll the tone down to about halfway, to create a softer tone. Buckethead uses Mesa Triple Rectifier or other big amp, usually into Marshall cabs, so go for power amp volume rather than preamp fizz. Add a touch of reverb to taste.

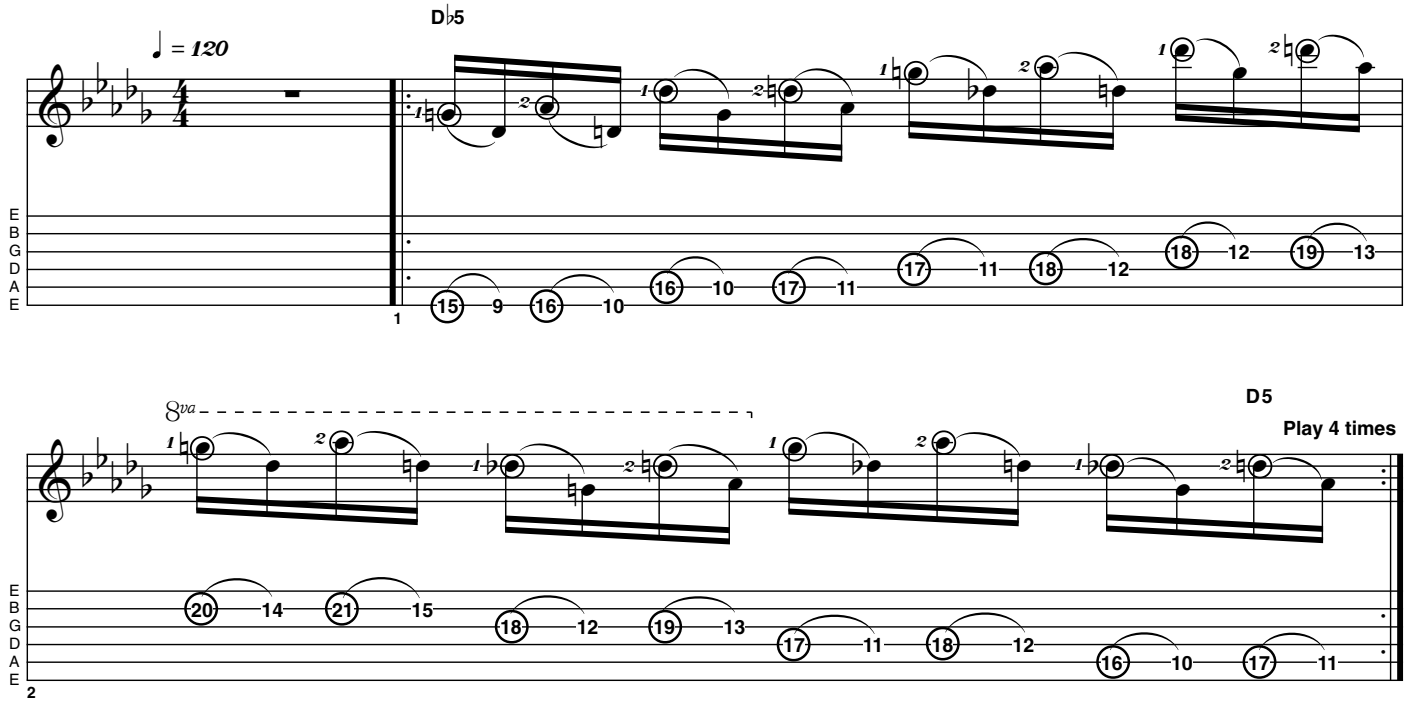


TRACK RECORD He released his first solo album Bucketheadland in 1992, which he has since followed up with over 300 subsequent albums, or 'pikes' as he calls them. Some of his best include Claymation Courtyard which includes the title track plus Chainsaw Slide and Disintegration Mirrors; The Silent Picture Book features Melting Man Part 2, Beam Of Omega and Dweller By The Dark Stream.

MARC ANDREW DELEY / GETTY IMAGES

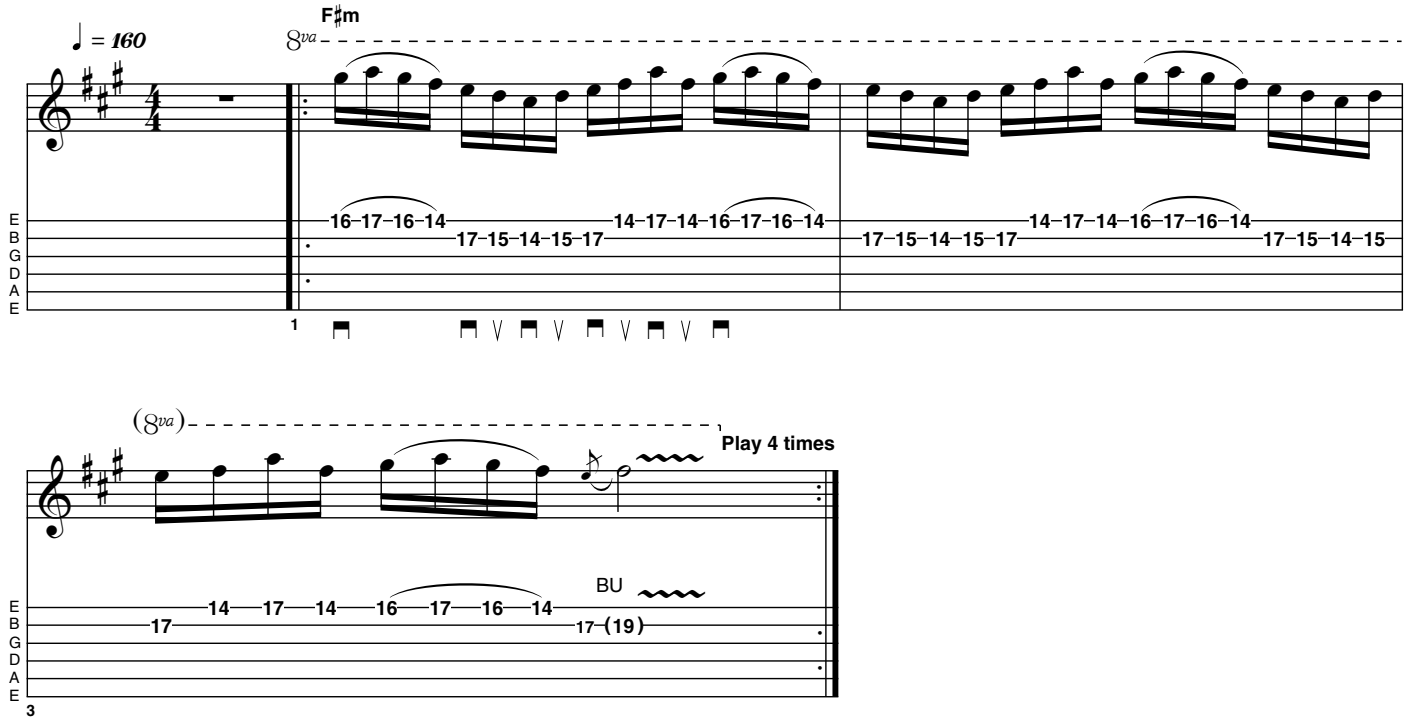
EXAMPLE 1

For this Diminished tapping lick use your first and second picking fingers to tap the 15th, then 16th frets on the sixth string. Using the same two fingers, move up a string at a time in ♭5ths until you reach the second string, then descend. Use fretting hand first and second fingers to mirror the pattern from the 9th fret.



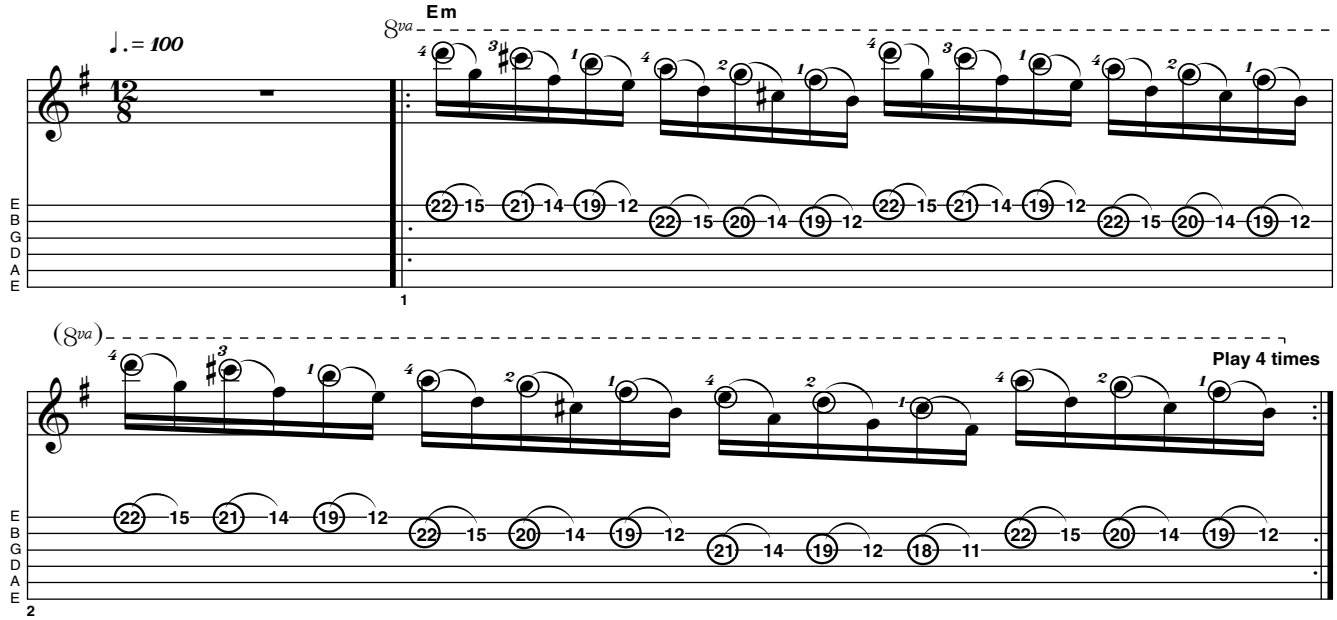
EXAMPLE 2

For this F# Aeolian lick (F#-G#-A-B-C#-D-E) start with a downstroke, then play the following three notes with legato. Move to the second string and use alternate picking, starting and finishing on a downstroke before picking the four notes on the first string 'up, down, up, down'. Now repeat the lick twice more using the same techniques and finish with a tone bend using third finger.



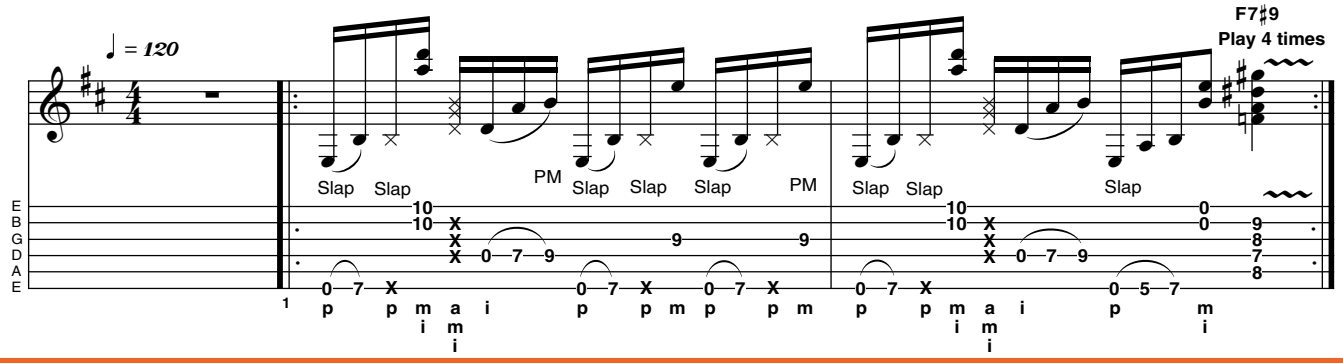
EXAMPLE 3

This lick is based in E Dorian (E-F#-G-A-B-C#-D) and uses two simultaneous scale positions. The fretting hand is at the 12th fret and the tapping hand is at the 19th fret. Use all four fingers of your tapping hand to tap and pull-off each note of the scale. Alternate between your two hands to create a smooth cascade of notes.



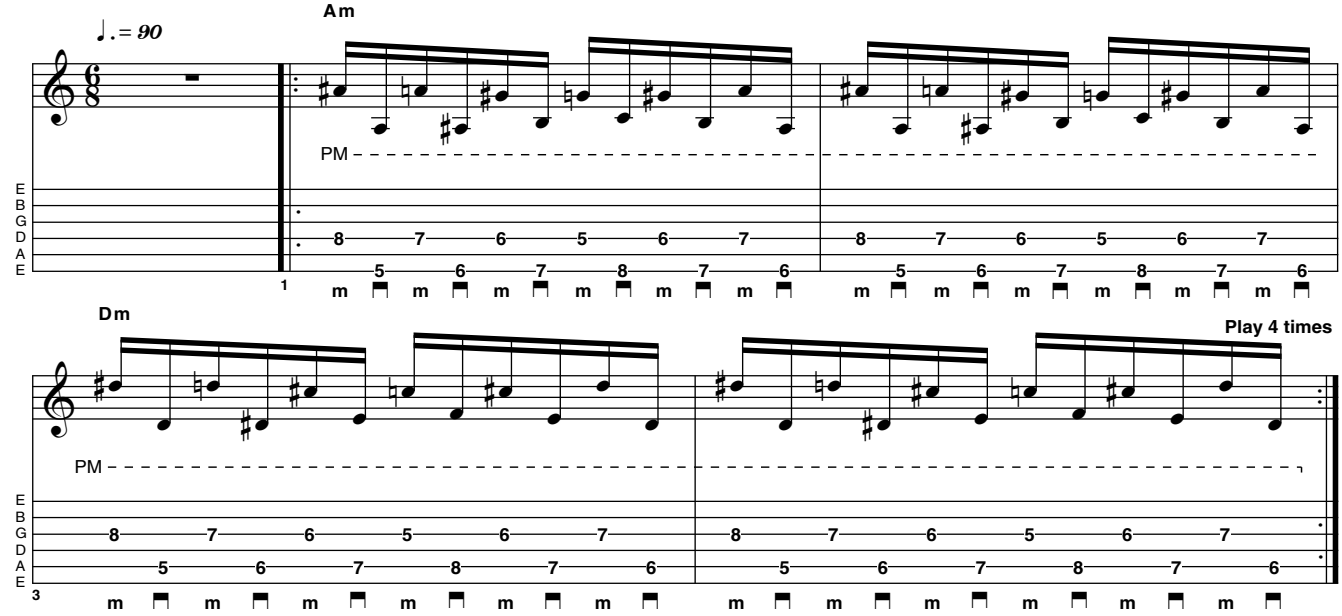
EXAMPLE 4

This riff is based around B Minor Pentatonic (B-D-E-F#-A) and uses open strings too. Rather than using a pick, slap the sixth string and hammer-on to the 7th fret. Next slap the sixth string again for a percussive mute, then use first and second fingers to pluck the 10th-fret notes. Now drop your picking fingers onto the strings to mute them, then pluck the open fourth string with the first finger. Continue this for the rest of the riff then strum the final chord with your thumb.



EXAMPLE 5

This finger twister is played with hybrid picking. Play the sixth string with palm-muted downstrokes throughout and pluck the palm-muted fourth string with your second finger. Alternate between the two strings and aim for totally even 16th-note triplets. The riff itself uses contrary motion; whereas the notes on the sixth string move up and down chromatically, the notes on the fourth string move down, then up.



AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL SERIES

STRATOCASTER® IN OXBLOOD WITH ‘62 DELUXE AMP



Fender®

The One. For All.

©2026 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

HOT GEAR



1

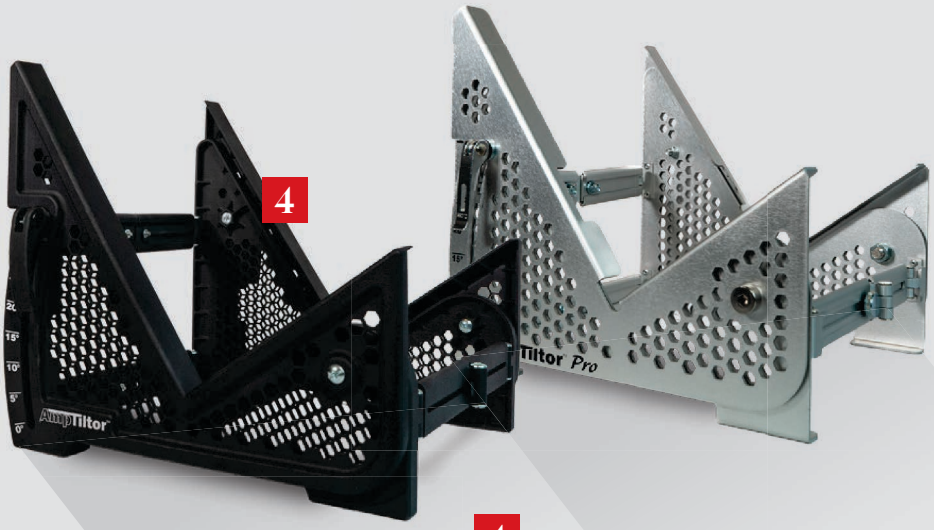
Fender American Professional Stratocaster (Ox Blood)
RRP: $3,049 • au.fender.com

Christmas came early this year, with the return of Fender's flagship line: the American Professional. Packed with updates for the modern player, every refinement feels purposeful. A standout upgrade is the two-point tremolo with ClassicGear™ Radial™ bent-steel saddles, delivering greater sustain, clarity and playing comfort. We're talking seriously premium hardware here. Comfort remains front and centre, with the deep "C" neck, rolled fingerboard edges and sculpted neck heel making it a delight to play for hours on end. The new V-Mod III pickups are equally impressive, balancing vintage warmth with crisp articulation and exceptional note definition. Overall, it's great to see meaningful improvements across feel, tone, material quality and technology, making this range a significant step forward for today's player. Plus, the push-push switch is a bonus, adding pickup combinations not normally found on a Strat!

2

Fender American Professional Hot Shot Telecaster (Sunburst)
RRP: $3,149 • au.fender.com

The Tele just got hotter. Introducing the American Professional HotShot™ Telecaster. Players will benefit from an expanded tonal palette, pairing classic Tele twang with a specially positioned V-Mod III Strat® middle pickup and 5-way switching. The result? Everything from familiar Tele bite to glassy, Strat-inspired tones, all from one guitar making it an adaptable companion with exceptional dynamic range. The new top-load/string-through bridge with slotted compensated brass saddles adds even more flexibility, allowing players to tailor feel and response to their style. Overall, it's a Tele that stays true to its roots, all while pushing versatility further than ever before.



4

AmpTiltor Pro
RRP: $329 • egm.net.au

The AmpTiltor Pro adjustable amp stand is a versatile solution designed to help musicians achieve the perfect angle for sound projection. It's fully adjustable and suitable for a wide range of equipment, including guitar amps, bass amps, monitors and speakers. Available in black and silver, the AmpTiltor Pro is manufactured from aircraft-grade aluminium, providing an excellent combination of strength, durability, and lightweight portability. Its clever flat-pack design makes it easy to transport and store, while the adjustable configuration allows you to quickly find the ideal angle for your setup.



5

Tone City London Bender
RRP: $125 • egm.net.au

Inspired by classic 1970s British fuzz, the London Bender delivers rich mid-range, aggressive sustain and a dynamic harmonic response. The Volume, Tone and Attack controls make it easy to create smooth saturation and cutting high-energy fuzz tones for synths, guitars and electronic setups. This is as close as it gets to a vintage British fuzz.



6

3

Cort KX500 Baritone
RRP: $1,250 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The KX500 Baritone is built for players who live in low tunings, delivering the scale length, string tension, and pickup performance that make every drop feel like home rather than a compromise. The Sentient and Nazgûl pick-ups are the foundation this baritone is built around. The Nazgûl drives with the kind of output and definition that high-gain playing demands, while the Sentient keeps the neck position clear and musical. At 28.03", the KX500 Baritone sits in the range where string tension works in your favor.

6

Cort Retro 304 Bass
RRP: $825
dynamicmusic.com.au

The Retro 304 delivers the warm low-end, defined attack, and easy playability that make a short-scale bass a must-have addition to any collection. Alder, maple, and a purpose-voiced passive pickup work together to produce a vintage tone character that holds up in any playing situation. This is a serious instrument built for players who know exactly what they want from 30 inches.

KATOH

EVOLUTION



EV5

Slim comfortable neck · Radiused fingerboard

Traditional Spanish heel construction

Dual-action adjustable truss rod

Outstanding tone and volume

Gorgeous satin finish

Bone nut and saddle

Padded bag

@katohguitars

@katohguitars

The evolution of the world's favourite instrument

katohguitars.com.au

FIND OUT MORE

AUSTRALIAN recording TECHNIQUE



CAPTURE THE SOUND

How Neurosis nailed their epic sound with Steve Albini

With Albini in the control room, the experimental metal titans learned how to track live and make huge epics in just a week.

GETTY



RATED

Electro-Voice Everse 8

A battery-powered, weatherized gigging speaker for everyone.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

.JANDS

01ST OCTOBER - 31ST DECEMBER 2026

Electro-Voice

BUY TWO, CLAIM A FREE MIC.





EVERSE



EVIVA



ZLX G2

SCAN ME

DISTRIBUTED BY JANDS



BOBBY COCHRAN

How Neurosis nailed their epic sound with Steve Albini

With Albini in the control room, the experimental metal titans learned how to track live and make huge epics in just a week.

WORDS BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

That the late Steve Albini knew how to get a gnarly electric guitar tone down on tape goes without saying. His reputation as underground rock's most reliable chaperone for uncompromising sounds preceded him. He had the audio engineering knowledge to capture all the dynamics in a band's performance. He could give a snare hit a three-dimensional force, summon feedback out of thin air.

Albini's ability to apply his analogue magic to the electric noise of a rock 'n' roll band was exactly the reason why Nirvana hired him for In Utero. What better way to subvert the mainstream than to achieve mass appeal then drop a noise-rock record on an unsuspecting public? Who better to record it?

But the fact that bands returned to him time and time again spoke to the kind of relationship he struck up with them. He knew what they were looking for.

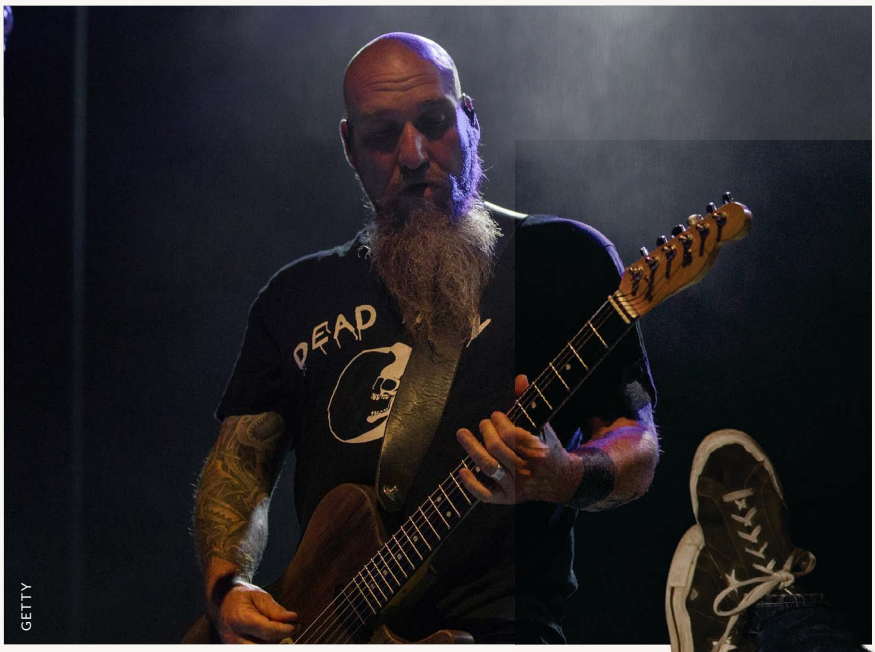
When Neurosis called on Albini in October 1998 to record the follow-up to the epic Through Silver In Blood, they soon realised that their widescreen sound – post-metal, atmospheric sludge, experimental metal or however you want to describe it – could be recorded just like a punk band would. Which was fitting, because this was where they came from, evolving out of the Oakland, CA hardcore and crust scene.

Guitarist/vocalist Steve Von Till recalls the band still being a little raw in the studio when they first met Albini.

"Well, when we were younger, we just didn't know that much about recording," he says. "I mean, I'd done a lot of home recording. We knew the basics. Noah [Landis, synthesizers/samples] had studied recording in school, but, yeah, what we learned from Steve was just that there's no nonsense and just don't overthink it."

Neurosis can be a difficult band to describe. You can hear their influences – Swans, Melvins, Black Sabbath, old-school


GETTY


GETTY


GETTY

anarcho punk and Throbbing Gristle — and yet the only bands who sound like them, or try to, are the bands who they influenced. Over the years, their sound would blossom and expand, growing more dynamic.

Apocalyptic guitars were always in the air, the storm clouds on the horizon, but Neurosis also traffic in slack air, seeding moments of menace and beauty in the near silence, and in psychedelic noises that are hard to attribute to guitar or synths, in the explosive release of the riff. But this evolutionary zeal never took them that far from their roots. Albini's workflow was perfect for that, allowing them to track live from the studio floor.

"We're a band. We rehearse in a room. We don't do this modern fucking one guy at a time, shit. We all set up and we play," says Von Till. "We overdub the vocals – 'cos then we'll play guitar better if we're not trying to sing and play guitar at the same time. [Laughs] Plus, you can sing into a nicer, more sensitive microphone. But we set up as a band and record as a band, in a good sounding room with good microphones, put in the right spot – and there's no bullshit. And with Steve, we learned [that]."

That was one lesson. Another was that a Neurosis album could be recorded and mixed in a week. This came as a shock to Von Till.

"When we first recorded with him – Times Of Grace was the first thing we recorded with Steve – we booked way too much time, 'cos we were just used to all these techniques that wasted time," he says. "These were these kind of bad habits that we learned in our other studio experiences."

Not that those experiences were all bad. On the contrary. Neurosis had shed their skin by the time they met Albini. They had harnessed the great low-end power of sludge riffs, applied them to hypnotic rhythms, making albums such as 1993's Enemy Of The Sun play out as great trippy nightmares, like the acid's gone bad and they'd

attained this great fevered second sight into the post-atomic spiritual rot that has divorced humankind from the natural world we belong to.

"Looking back on it, Enemy Of The Sun was really gratifying to work with Billy Anderson, because we thought we were just quickly recording an EP, and we accidentally made a record, because it was just quick and natural," says Von Till. "It felt great, not fucking around. With Steve, again, [it's] very natural. There's no studio tricks. There's no bullshit. It's a band in a room. It's a good sounding band in a good sounding room, with good mics, put in the right spot."

Neurosis recorded six albums with Albini. They were not the only band to call upon Albini time and time again. The Jesus Lizard, Mogwai, The Wedding Present and Low had many collaborations. But only defunct Montana indie-rockers Silkworm, who briefly reunited for a tribute concert following Albini's death in 2024, and venerable Japanese noise-rock band MONO recorded more music with Albini than Neurosis.

Since 2004, MONO had recorded all of their albums with Albini. MONO's guitarist and principal songwriter Takaakira 'Taka' Goto describes Albini as a "friend and teacher". Electrical Audio held such an emotional pull for MONO – and practical, they have made so many connections there – that they returned to Chicago to track their new album, Snowdrop, their first since losing Albini.

"I could feel a lot of Steve Albini during the recording session," says Goto. "The sound of the studio is his legacy, and each tone, each sound – everything – it's like Steve is here. It's like Steve is always there."

Neurosis's comeback album, An Undying Love For A Burning World, was released without warning on the Spring Equinox through Neurot Recordings. This surprise release also unveiled the band's new lineup, with Aaron Turner [Sumac, ex-Isis] replacing co-founder Scott Kelly on guitars and vocals. Kelly had been fired in 2019 after it emerged he had been engaged in the abuse of his wife and children. Neurosis announced a hiatus in 2022 when this news was made public.



No one saw this record coming. The story of this triumphant second act is one for another day – we spoke to Turner and Von Till about it – but Von Till says the choice of producer was influenced by those experiences with Albini. They wanted someone with a similar ethic, and they found him in Scott Evans of Kowloon Walled City.

"We love the way his records sound," says Von Till. "Aaron had worked with him with Sumac a bit. I did a little bit of solo recording with him on my piano. And he's cut from the same cloth. He's not, like, studio tricks and nonsense, you know? It's very natural. It's just a natural capturing of rock music.

"You want to hear Jason's [Roeder] snare drum like it's Jason's snare drum in your face. You don't want to fix it later. You don't want to record your guitar direct and put it through a bunch of digital bullshit to try to make it sound better later. Just catch it! We spent a lot of time getting our tones right in a room, in practice. Just catch it."

Von Till argues there's a time and a place to use the studio and all its tool kit. There's a time and place to track the parts separately, to apply some post-production to them later and then stitch it all together. For Von Till's solo projects, both under his name and as Harvestman, he might need to have someone send him a part.

He lives out in rural Idaho, under the shadow of the firs. He says it can be hard to get a cellist to drive all the way out there. But rock bands? Show up rehearsed, plug in and turn it up. And find someone like Albini, who knows where to put the microphones.

"I love multi-tracking, and I love the art of multi-tracking records, so I'm not against the whole concept of piecing records together," says Von Till. "But rock bands – rock bands that play together – I just like that idea of catching the performance. And, of course, yeah, if you flub a note, punch it, old-school style, play over the riff and fix your wrong note.

"But it's a performance, and it's a vibe, and it's a take. And sometimes the accidents, and the mistakes add to it. Sometimes the way that feedback accidentally came up between those two notes could never be replicated again."

That's part of the art of it all. Being alive and aware and open to these accidents is one of the essential skills of any musician or producer. We have to recognise when something great has happened even if it wasn't what were looking for at the start of the session.

And just hope someone has put the mics in the right place and the tape is rolling.

"For sure. I mean, we have these kind of epic grand soundscapes but we're still rock and roll," says Von Till. "We're rock and roll. It's a rock and roll band. We want that fucking dirty Motörhead/MC5/Stooges fucking shit in there! [laughs]"





01ST OCTOBER -
31ST DECEMBER
2026

KRK SYSTEMS®

BUY A PAIR, GET

CASH BACK.



KREATE SERIES



V Series Five
Powered Studio Monitor



ROKIT

SCAN ME

DISTRIBUTED BY JANDS



Electro-Voice Everse 8

A battery-powered, weatherized gigging speaker for everyone.

Review by **Steve Henderson**

Electro-Voice has a long history in audio technology – nearly a hundred years worth, in fact. From various landmark innovations, including their mid-century humbucking technology, to great microphones like the RE-20 and the PL-91, to simple and practical muso gear, like their fabulous TL15: a small, portable single 15 cab that every bass player needed to have in the 1980s. And their TL15 PA speaker, the same EVM-15L speaker as the bass cab but paired with a horn, offered a solution for the folks who needed a portable but big-sounding PA option.

In the 80s, EV's use of ABS plastic, rather than plywood, in their enclosures was a radical idea that changed the way people thought about cabinets. The EV Everse 8 is just such a box, but with an integrated mixer and D class power stage. Its polypropylene cabinet contains an 8" ferrite woofer and a 1" titanium dome high frequency neodymium speaker that delivers 400 real watts. The frequency response is about 50Hz to 20kHz and you can hear every bit of that upper-end range. The sound is crisp and smooth: the top end sparkles with harmonic detail. The bass frequencies are not boomy but defined and warm, as you'd expect from an 8" driver. If you want that crazy low-end thud, you'll have to add a sub. But the Everse 8 isn't really designed for that. Its focus is on vocals and acoustic guitar tones, and it's a perfect vehicle for the singer/songwriter-type performer. Also, at under 8 kilos and just 400mm tall, it's an easy lug and won't take up much space in the car.

The mixer section is simple: two XLR/TRS ports for the two main channels, a 3.5mm TRS jack for auxiliary devices, Bluetooth connectivity, and a DSP that offers contemporary effect choices, thanks to their sister brand, Dynacord. There's also on-board phantom power for those pesky condenser mics, a ducking mode, and feedback suppression if required. All the parameters can be controlled from your phone or pad via the app, so you don't even have to turn around and bend down to fine tune the mixer. This gadget is perfect for the solo gig.

Among all this, the Everse 8 has two very special features: it has a built-in battery that'll power the electronics for at least 12 hours (under normal usage), with the charge level monitored on the LCD screen. Secondly, it's "weatherised" such that, while you can't use it underwater, you can certainly get it to shelter, damp but unharmed, when the storm hits at the outdoor venue.

Variously plugging in a Maton MSH-210D dreadnought, a Maton MSH-212 12-sting, a Cort Gold-A10 grand auditorium (see pg 91), and a very old Washburn F-style mandolin with a Fishman bridge pickup, the Everse 8 produces a sound of such accuracy and clarity that we had to turn it up to make sure we weren't hearing too much of the acoustic sound.

The dreadnought six-string had that familiar low-end thump, surprisingly rich for such a small speaker cabinet, and the ever-present midrange push that we love so much. Meanwhile, the Cort A10 showed the more balanced tone you'd expect from a grand auditorium – great for fingerstyle, and enhanced by the Everse 8's articulate delivery. The 12-string, also a dreadnought, demonstrated how the Everse can reproduce those complex, chimey tones with plenty of separation and no muddiness, while the mandolin sounded appropriately honky without any squeal: just loads of spanky upper-mids. Dial in some medium plate reverb (number 11 on the effects screen), and we're ready to rock... acoustically.

Actually, there's a heap of on-board effects (some multi-effects, like chorus and reverb together) that are footswitchable if required, and it's fun scrolling through the options. I set up a loop station to play the same set of changes while dialling in various effects. The reverbs are particularly cool, and they have a three-dimensional character that makes them very useful. Too much fun.

There are outputs as well as inputs. You can connect two Everse 8s to create stereo separation or send your mix to an external mixer controlling a larger sound system. There's a 12vDC output to power up your radio mic system, or whatever else might be 12v compatible. There's even a USB-C charging port for your phone – although buying one just for that reason might be a bit extreme!

Verdict

The EV Everse 8 has a lot going for it. The sound is super-accurate, as we've come to expect from EV, the tonal range is surprising for its diminutive size, and the whole package is light weight, portable, and with all the knobs out of harm's way. The Everse 8 has an audio integrity that is both surprising and reassuring. For the acoustic performer, it's an absolute winner.

Pros Portable, powerful, great effects, super-accurate tone.

Cons None

RRP $1,825
Contact Jands
Web Jands.com.au









Jackson Pro Plus Signature Sleep Token IV Monarkh SC

A surprisingly versatile 30-inch extended-scale guitar built for crushing, low-tuned modern metal riffs

Review by **Matt McCracken**

Despite never showing his face or speaking publicly, Sleep Token's IV is among the most-searched-online metal guitarists of the past few years. The Roman numeral-ordered quartet is arguably the biggest band in metal right now, so it was only a matter of time before IV got a signature model.

There are likely some players who will be disappointed this isn't the same eight-string that IV has been wielding on tour for the past few years, but this guitar isn't as far away from that as it looks at first glance. Both carry a 30-inch scale length, featuring a girthy .084-gauge low E string. The Monarkh archtop single-cut body is the same, along with that distinctive "Pale Moon" ebony fretboard. Both models also feature Luminlay side dots and an EverTune bridge for stability on the low strings.

Dual Fishman Fluence Open Core Classic humbuckers are a less modern choice than you might expect, with Fluence being Fishman's more vintage-voiced tone. It's got a single push-pull volume knob that accesses the additional voices on the Fishman, plus a classic three-way toggle selector.

The fretboard has a compound radius, moving from 12 to 16 inches as you get closer to the body. It features 22 jumbo, stainless-steel frets with pearloid teardrop inlays, topped by a composite phenolic nut with a 42.86 mm nut width. Atop the neck is the 3x3 headstock with a set of Jackson locking tuners.

Eagerly opening the box, we expected the case for a signature model of such an image-focused band might contain some unique Easter eggs or details, but alas, it's just a standard Jackson gig bag. It doesn't fit the guitar very well, and considering the cost, we'd have expected at least one of those semi-hard foam cases — like the one the Christian Andreu Rhoads signature model came in.

The guitar looks phenomenal. It's a real stunner with the dark, quilted maple top, but that Pale Moon ebony fretboard is the star of the show. It's a unique color combination, looking like an almost-white maple with near-black ebony streaks across it. The look is natural, from the Diospyros malabarica species often called black and white ebony.

The sharp-eyed will note there's no Sleep Token logo at the 12th fret, as we see on IV's Custom Shop eight-string, which again is a little disappointing. Likely the cost of the fretboard outweighed that of adding in the additional work to spec a custom inlay of such complexity. For super fans, this might be a loss, but for those who just want a drop-tuned metal guitar, it could absolutely be a plus that there's no obvious ST branding on it apart from the "IV" on the headstock.

The build here was as we hoped, but one odd choice is that there's an unsightly block of black gloss that partially covers the neck from the heel.

LUCY ROBINSON

Perhaps done to cover up the neck joint, it's not on the Custom Shop model and feels a little odd terminating diagonally across the maple neck just shy of the 15th fret.

Sitting down to play, our first impression was that it's impressively playable considering the huge scale and behemoth string gauge. All the strings are wound, which tells you that the gauge is monstrous, yet we found the string tension to be relatively low. As a Bass VI with thicker strings rather than an eight-string guitar, this was not a shreddy experience, but we could fret barre chords on it, and bending the strings is absolutely achievable once you set the EverTune to the correct mode.

As IV is a Quad Cortex user, it made sense to test it with some of the Neural DSP plugin suites. While there's not much info on exactly what amp models IV is using, we opted to use Gojira X and Nolly X, both of which are designed for modern metal tones. But from our initial playing using one of our own presets, we found there was a lot of work needed to tame that low E string.



It's unruly out of the box, so we started with a high-pass filter on the way in to help tame the low end. Next, we needed to mess with the amp controls, particularly the resonance on the 5150-inspired amp sim. It was still a bit much, though, so our last adjustment was to lower the bass side of the humbucker a touch. It helped a lot, and we were able to get a much tighter, modern metal tone out of it.

If you like heavy music, this guitar can do it all, providing you make the right adjustments. Switching to the neck position was perfect for sludgy doom power chords, whereas the bridge position was ideal for djent tones or more prog metal-inspired stuff. Our final fix was to pinch a Gruv Gear Fretwrap from our own baritone and place it behind the nut to tame some of the extraneous noise.

It won't be as precise as some players might want, and that's because the pickups themselves are more vintage-voiced. Jackson has opted to fit the Fishman Fluence Open Core Classic pickups rather than the Modern ones, which makes it more versatile overall, but may not satisfy those looking for that super compressed, modern djent tone.

Due to this, the Monarkh sounded surprisingly good when played clean. We were impressed at how well-behaved it was through lower-gain presets and totally clean ones. It turned standard chord progressions into really ominous-sounding passages, and we wonder if part of the thinking here with the Classic Fluence was to prioritize flexibility over the often more sterile-sounding modern-voiced Fishmans. It can certainly handle those softer, cleaner Sleep Token moments.

Each pickup has two voices: a modern active and modern passive. Pulling the volume knob up activated the passive mode, which sounded a bit more open and had a more treble response versus the very midrangey active mode. There's not a huge difference between the two, and the single-coil voice isn't wired in on this guitar, which would've given it a more definitive secondary voice.

Nevertheless, this guitar surprised us with its versatility. It wasn't quite as good for low-tuned clean stuff as a baritone, but it was playable enough to do open and barre chords, and you can get some lovely sounds out of it with the clean channel of your amp alongside some reverb and delay.

Verdict

If you love drop-tuned metal and want to focus on riffs rather than shredding, the Jackson Signature Sleep Token IV Monarkh is a great alternative to a seven- or eight-string guitar. The pickup choice is flexible enough for djent riffs as it is cowboy chords, and the looks are distinctive enough to make it appealing to ST fans without putting off the wider metal community, who perhaps aren't so obsessive about the band. AD

Pros Great downtuned modern metal riffing; Pale moon ebony fretboard is absolutely stunning; Dual-voice Fishman humbuckers sound great for clean and dirty tones

Cons Half-painted neck joint is a weird choice; Gig bag is disappointing; Smaller players may find it awkward when playing sat down

RRP $4,499
Contact Jackson
Web au.jacksonguitars.com



LUCY ROBINSON

Gibson Victory Floyd Rose

An unlikely success story gets even bolder

Review by **Daryl Robertson**

Back in 2024, Gibson set out to give an obscure Eighties model a second chance at joining the ranks of the Les Paul, SG or ES-335, and, well, it was mission accomplished. This new version of the Victory was sleeker, meaner and, by all accounts, more modern, too. It went down well with Gibson fans as well as guitarists who often steered clear of the Nashville guitar giant's offerings.

But it seems fans of the updated model have been very vocal about a small missing detail — the lack of a locking tremolo system. According to Gibson, fans have been asking for the guitar to be equipped with a Floyd Rose, and the company listened.

Aside from the new whammy bar, this supercharged Victory sticks to the same specs as the previous version. Much like many Gibson options, it pairs a mahogany body with a striking figured maple top. The body is deeply beveled and contoured for maximum comfort.

Out of the case, this is a guitar that feels reassuringly solid, and there are certainly no finish issues or stray marks to distract from its handsome good looks. We'd say the construction is up to Gibson's current USA standards with a clean and tidy build. The fretwork is on point, being well polished and installed flawlessly. There are no fret nibs, those little extra pieces of binding that cover the ends of the frets you typically find on Gibson models. This means there's no fear of snagging your high-E on a wayward piece of plastic. No fret nibs can mean you feel sharp ends if the frets haven't been dressed perfectly, but thankfully that isn't the case with the Victory.

That said, we can't help wondering why Gibson hasn't gone with stainless steel frets for this model. We've seen them use this fretwire on the very modern Epiphone Futura, and it feels like a natural fit here, too.

The hardware is all solid and dialed in. The Floyd Rose is set up perfectly from the factory, and it feels rock solid. There's no weird creaks, no tuning instability, and crucially, no sense you'll need to reach for an Allen key every five minutes. The Grover Mini Rotomatics hold their own, even if they're mostly for show with the locking nut in play.

If we were to have one gripe with the build, it is the placement of the volume control. It sits directly under the Floyd arm, and we found ourselves accidentally rolling down the volume mid-dive bomb. It's a common complaint for Strat users, so it's not wholly unique to the Victory, but if the volume control was scootched back a touch, it would solve the issue.

We found the SlimTaper neck profile to be genuinely fast, but never felt too skinny or insubstantial. The compound radius, which morphs from 10" to a flatter 14" as you reach the higher frets, is pretty subtle but made a real difference for shred runs and wide fret-spanning legato licks.

This is a slick-feeling guitar, for sure. The set-up is low — at 1.25mm on the low-E and 1.00mm at the high-E — and buzz-free, and the trem stayed exactly where you'd want it, even after some aggressive use.

It's a guitar that made us want to keep playing, whether burning through scales or just messing around with some classic Floyd Rose flutter. The only adjustment was getting used to the volume knob placement, which is a small price to pay for everything else that works well.

The Victory is served by a pair of Gibson 80s Tribute pickups. These are higher-output passive humbuckers featuring Alnico 5 magnets and can be found in the Eighties reissue of the Explorer and Flying V.

For testing, we plugged into a Positive Grid Spark Live and its matching cab. We dialed up the gain and added a splash of delay. Now, while they aren't what we'd call super high-output by modern standards, these pups aren't shy either. We felt there was enough oomph for hard rock and metal, but enough note definition and clarity if you wanted to clean things up. The mids are smooth and up front, the lows are tight, and the high end has a pleasing bite and top-end. The result is a pickup set that perfectly fits the vibe this guitar is going for.

The push/pull volume for coil splits and the push/pull tone for inner/outer coil selection give you a lot of tonal options for a two-humbucker guitar.

Switching from the high-gain amp to that of a Roland JC model, we wanted to see how it handled the cleaner side of things. Popping up the volume coil activates the coil split. Okay, so single-coil sounds aren't going to fool anyone into thinking you're playing a Strat, but they're more than usable for a gig.

Experimenting with the inner and outer coils in the middle position, suddenly it has an almost out-of-phase character that's genuinely cool for funk, or anything where you want to step outside the standard Gibson box. A very useful tone indeed.

It rounds out an impressive package. We're seeing the Victory reach its most evolved and most powerful stage yet here.



PHIL BARKER

Verdict

This is the super-S-style alternative some Gibson fans have quietly wanted for decades, and it stands up to anything from the big names in the shredder world. Everything about the Victory Floyd Rose feels right, from the bold finishes to the rock-solid hardware and the great-sounding pickups.

Pros Looks incredible; Seriously playable; Rock-solid Floyd Rose; Pickups have plenty of bite without being too much

Cons Placement of the volume is awkward when using the trem; More modern features like stainless steel frets would be a great touch

RRP $5,499
Contact Gibson
Web gibson.com

Cort CM40B and CM150B MK2

Quality tone in a portable package? These are the real deal.

Review by **Steve Henderson**

The Cort company is famous for its extraordinary range of guitars and basses, as well as producing OEM products for other brands through their parent company the Cor-Tek Corporation, which is the world's largest guitar/bass builder. If you've played an instrument by Squier, Ibanez, PRS SE, Washburn, Epiphone, Schecter, G&L, and a bunch of other brands, you may well have played a Cort-built guitar or bass, manufactured to an individual brand's spec. However, the Cort-branded instruments have the freedom to create their own designs, without the narrow market expectations associated with those other logos. And they can do it with a much greater focus on budgetary value (no middle man!). A Cort instrument is almost always a lot of instrument for the buyer's dollar.

While all this has been happening, the clever folks at Cort have also turned their attention to amplification. Their philosophy seems to be practical, portable, and great value for money. (Full disclosure: I own a couple of 30w Cort guitar amps which are regularly used.) The two bass amps on review here fall squarely into that tenet.

The Cort CM40B ($399) is a top-loaded, 40 watt, 1 x 10 combo that weighs under 10kg. It is a very portable closed-back, cube-style amp that is simple to operate but still has a couple of interesting and unexpected features. The controls offer input gain and output volume with a 4-band tone stack in between. The tone stack is bass, low mid, high mid, and treble – and it's amazing how handy that dual midrange idea can be. Leaving the bass and treble at noon, there's an amazing array of flavours to be found by adjusting the two mid knobs. You can bump up the high mids for a little warm bite while still scooping the low mids for a woodier tone on the bottom E string. Adding a little more snap is the Bright switch, which gives a kick to the high treble frequencies, but without touching the actual treble knob.

If you want a bit of grind, there's a Mode switch (increasing the preamp gain) that adds some grit. The two volume knobs are now more important: set the Gain at 3 o'clock and the Volume at 10 o'clock (or whatever level suits your room) and you'll hear a soft, smooth overdrive. It's not a classic guitar overdrive but it adds a lot of harmonic content to the sound – much like an aural exciter will do. It's pretty cool.

The 10" speaker is surprisingly boomy and the cabinet has been tuned to optimise this. My PJ and Stingray both sounded very authentic, very focussed. The control plate also has headphone out and auxiliary in mini jacks and the rear panel has a preamp output to run into a DI, which will then "hear" the amp tones rather than just the bass pickup. The CM40B delivers a lot for sub-$400.

The CM150B MK2 ($699) is like the CM40B's big brother who can afford all the gadgets. It shares some of the 40's preamp details (the four knob tone stack, the pre and post volume knobs with the Mode switch, and the Bright switch) but adds some more-professional facilities for the more serious player. It produces 150 watts through a 200 watt 12" speaker and the cabinet is a little larger than the 40 watter to accommodate the extra grunt and larger driver. But it's still under 12kg, which is great news for bassists accustomed to the LUG...!!!

To that familiar preamp stage has been added Room and Scoop controls, offering an enormous variety of blends. The Room circuit adds a breadth or presence to the sound while the Scoop (you guessed it) lowers the mids for that woody, almost-hollowed out tone. If you love Jaco's Jazz Bass sound, you'll be all over this knob. The control plate also has a Speaker Mute switch, an Aux In, and a Headphone Out, which are all very handy for personal practice.

The rear panel offers an effects loop, a DI out (XLR), and a Ground Lift switch for killing the occasional hum (caused by the power in the venue). The effects loop is especially handy if you use chorus, phaser, delay, etc., because inserting them in the loop will cut out a heap of the effects' background noise. Basically, it gets amplified by the power amp and not the preamp as well.

The CM150B MK2 is a surprisingly powerful and toneful amp. Both my PJ and my StingRay sounded great through that 12" speaker – plenty of low end, loads of control over the sound, and enough grunt to play small to medium gigs. The Scoop dial was my favourite techy thing, with a heap of tonal variety in just this one circuit. It's like a medium wide Q function that straddles the two mid controls. Very clever.

Being a firm believer that good bass amps make good guitar amps (the Fender Bassman and the Marshall Super Bass are both great guitar amps), I couldn't help myself. I tried my favourite Strat and 335 into both of these amps and the tone was super-nice, with a broad clean tone and all that extra low end. I took them to a few rehearsals (where I was on guitar) and they delivered superbly.

Verdict

These two amps are well-designed platforms for the amateur or the pro, and each represent exceptional value for money. Small, light, and punchy, they deliver lovely tones and appropriate features. The CM40B and the CM150B MK2 are two of the best value amps we've ever seen.

Pros Great tone and projection, plenty of power, solid build quality, pro features, and very portable.

Cons None

RRP **Cort CM40B** $399.00
Cort CM150B $699.00
Contact Dynamic Music
Web dynamicmusic.com.au







Martin Shawn Mendes 000-10E

A big-voiced workhorse with vintage vibes and star appeal for a sensible price.

Review by **Jamie Dickson**

This tidy 000-size guitar, honouring the hit Canadian songsmith Shawn Mendes, is loosely based on a pre-war Martin that the artist himself owns – and blends vintage styling with modern functionality at a price everyday players won't instantly baulk at.

The 000 body shape is one of the best-loved platforms in the Martin canon, being favoured by everyone from Clapton to Mendes himself. While it resembles Martin's equally famous OM model, the 000's scale length is slightly shorter at 632mm as opposed to 645mm, giving a slightly looser, more relaxed playing feel than the OM (at a given tuning and with the same strings). That's made it a favourite with fingerstyle players and trad bluesers over the years, with bends and delicate fingerwork all falling easily to hand.

Like many mid-price acoustics, the Shawn Mendes 000-10E features a solid spruce top with solid sapele back and sides. Sapele is a commonly used, cheaper alternative to mahogany with broadly similar tonal qualities and appearance, hence it finds its way onto a lot of guitars in this price bracket and does them no disgrace.

Because this 000-10E is loosely based on a rare pre-war Martin, it's been given a bit of a vintage glow-up. For the first time on a Road Series guitar, for example, we get that lovely archaic-looking straightline bridge with crisply carved pyramids at either end. The faux tortoiseshell scratchplate, too, is patterned on that of Mendes' pre-war 000. So much for tradition, however, because there's also an eagle inlaid into the fretboard that's based on one of Mendes' tattoos.

As a modern electro, we also get the Martin E1 pickup system and a built-in tuner, too, which definitely aren't to be found on Mendes' pre-war 000. Martin doesn't specify if the FSC-certified spruce top is Sitka or some other type, but the amber toner used on it gives it a suitably vintage look, while scalloped spruce bracing does its usual job of balancing strength with ample resonance.

The neck, meanwhile, is made from what Martin calls 'Select Hardwood' – a catch-all term that typically means a tropical hardwood, such as sipo (sometimes called utile) or sapele, that performs a role similar to true mahogany at a lower cost. The vagueness of the term is intentional, allowing Martin to switch supplies sustainably and interchangeably without having to revise product descriptions.

The ebony 'board's 20 frets are tidy, though the fret slots are cut quite deep and filler is very faintly visible under some of the fret ends. The enclosed chrome tuners are perfectly effective, though we do wonder if an open-gear set would have looked the part better alongside that vintage bridge. The nut is made of white Corian, while the saddle is white Tusq, which is compensated for accurate intonation through clever shaping of its top edge.

Straight out of the box, this 000-10E has a fairly high action, measuring just under 3mm on the high E side at the 12th fret, so a little extra effort is required to get around the fingerboard, though a quick truss rod tweak would remedy that niggle and the 44mm nut width gives decent room for fingerstyle playing. The neck has what you might call a 'happy medium' feel. The Performing Artist profile is not skinny, not clubby, just familiar and comfortable, while the guitar voices and intonates single notes and chords clearly and holds its tuning well.

Strumming the 000-10E in standard tuning, we're surprised to find it has quite a bold voice, louder and more bassy than many guitars of its size, with a crisp midrange. In fact, it almost comes across like a mini dreadnought, though it lacks some of the breathy sweetness that really good Auditorium-size guitars often have. Overall, it's a guitar with a strong, appealing sonic personality – not the subtlest, but harmonious and clear with a good amount of power. It's a guitar we'd trust to get the point across on a live stage.

Lastly, we come to the amplified sounds. You plug into the guitar via a baseplate that also houses the battery compartment next to the guitar's endpin. This is a good system that obviates the need to fish around inside the guitar when it's time to replace the battery and also ensures the strap button doesn't need to be oversize to accommodate a jack input – we've found these a pain to push strap eyelets over and prefer the more standard button used here.

As tested through the acoustic preamp setting of a Blackstar Beam Mini, and also through a Roland Cube Street II, the amplified voice of the guitar is clear and reasonably natural-sounding for an under-saddle piezo pickup. Judicious EQ tweaking of the mids in particular allowed us to dial in a warm, balanced tone with little to no piezo 'quack'. The chromatic tuner, whose display sits just inside the lower rim of the soundhole, tracks well and gives a nice positive reading. It's activated using the control panel inside the upper edge of the soundhole, which also houses the tone control (which acts more like a bass/treble balance adjuster) and volume dial, plus a phase switch for suppressing problem feedback frequencies.

Verdict

Despite its hip vintage vibe, the Shawn Mendes 000-10E feels very much a modern performer's guitar and its clear, assertive voice is more 'festival' than 'folk club'. Some of the styling choices seem to be pulling in different directions, such as the modern tuners, eagle inlay and the vintage bridge, but it's a fairly priced guitar with custom-style touches and strong workhorse potential – and you won't have to be a fan of Mendes to appreciate its power and utility.

Pros It's a stage-ready Martin with a big voice and vintage details at a fair price

Cons Not the subtlest Auditorium-size acoustic we've played; minor setup niggles

RRP $2,199
Contact Martin
Web www.martinguitar.com

LUCY ROBINSON



PHIL BARKER

Orange OR60

The U.K. amp pros swap the grit for growl to make their purest-sounding premium all-tube head yet

Review by **Martin Smith**

Orange has long been known for its iconic brand of sonic savagery, and its punchy low-end served up with crispy treble has helped define the music of a great many artists. While the primary drive of the tube-amplifier industry leans toward refined vintage tone, Orange filled the niche for a more aggressive sound. Styles such as punk, doom-rock and indie-rock embrace the more cutting frequency range and punchy response these characterfully colored cabinets exude.

However, with this new amp, Orange offers its take on a more refined all-tube design, aiming to please a wider range of tastes while sticking with brand-building features such as pedal-friendliness and huge overdrive ability.

Those all-tube refinements carry through to the ECC82-buffered effects loop to provide enhanced clarity and coherence when using modulation-based effect processors, always best placed in the effects loop.

We have two wattage options incorporated into the standby switch, selecting between the full 60 watts or 30 watts to better match smaller environments. Improved top-end tailoring comes in the form of a redesigned presence circuit that works more effectively across the amp's entire volume range, and a three-position Bright switch allowing for neutral, narrow-band (think "sparkle") and wide-band (including some upper mids) options.

Orange has also included a bass Resonance control — a feature becoming de rigueur for modern high-gain amps. This, along with the Presence control, functions within the negative feedback circuit to tighten or extend the range at both ends of the frequency spectrum. And, yes, we're looking at you, detuned metal players!

A second footswitchable volume control (not master volume as, strictly speaking, this is not a master volume-equipped amp) allows solo boosting for stage use, an indication of the type of environment Orange foresees this amp being used in.

Built in England using the same familiar chunky cabinets that have become a trademark, the brand continues its reputation for hardy, giggable construction quality. An assembly inspection shows care was taken to withstand the rigors of the road. A heavy-duty PCB board lies at the heart of this cathode-following, self-biasing design using two 6L6 valves to produce 60 watts.

The OR60 can be biased to accept other common output valves such as the EL34, though the real-world wattage that will be achievable would be governed by the valves' output rating. Worthy of mention is that the smaller OR30 30-watt version turns into Class A operation with the wattage switch at half power, imparting a highly musical touch-sensitivity.

Plugging in our Les Paul, we spent a few bemused moments checking out the pictures that label the controls. We're undecided if the quirky fun is worth the brain resources needed to convert these cryptograms back to knob names, but it's something die-hard Orange aficionados might enjoy. First, we were astonished by the range of gain available from the first control as the second and third gain stages are being controlled by this one knob. From spanky cleans to all-out Armageddon, whatever your particular gain needs are, this amp has you covered.

If you are, however, the kind of player who simply has to put a boost before anything, the OR60 is more than ready to play ball. The Orange reputation for pedal-friendliness is fully in evidence. However, there isn't a great necessity to add extra gain for most sounds.

That solid, almost compressed sound for which Orange amps are famed is still very much in evidence and, as expected, our Stratocaster's single-coil pickups came punching through with impressive authority. A rich and full sustain renders lead licks with plenty of fluidity of the bravado-inspiring kind.

We found the Bright switch well tuned to best present a variety of guitars. The sparkle setting introduced the chimey top-end that flatters cleaner sounds wonderfully. The neutral position is recommended to get the most flexibility from tone-shaping pedals and the full-bright position introduces a wider band of top-boost starting lower down the frequency spectrum where upper-mids reside.

This setting brings back some of the traditional treble aggression that metal and punk players will expect from Orange but with a more refined air. The sandpapery grittiness, long described as an Orange hallmark, is less apparent and a smoother, more fluid voice takes its place.

As the gain level gets irresistibly nudged further clockwise, the Resonance and Presence controls help sculpt the response and we found it a doddle to dial up mosh-pit-approved tight low-end. With the Bright switch and the Presence control, it was possible to get an appropriate, aggressive top-end from any of our guitars.

We found the frequency response of the mid-control well tuned to either get that U.S. scoop or, at the other extreme, the U.K. mid-forward classic rock sound. The range of sounds achievable from the OR60 is huge, not due to channels and switches but simply from the power of the gain and EQ controls.

Verdict

If the abundant punch and gain of the Orange sound appeals but the trademark top-end sizzle doesn't, the OR60 could be the solution for you.

Pros Classier, less abrasive top-end will suit players of more classic styles; Resonance and Presence add modern control over power amp response; Excellent construction quality

Cons An included footswitch for the switchable volume control would be a worthwhile addition; Slight interference was occasionally detectable on the volume control

RRP $3,999
Contact Orange Amps
Web orangeamps.com

Fender '62 Deluxe Amp

For a brief period, Fender made amps that could roar with midrange-forward gain – and the brand's taking us back to that fabled brown-panel era once again

Review by **Martin Smith**

Nestled chronologically between the lo-fi tweed originals and the higher-headroom black-panel series was a short period of lesser-known brown-covered Fender amps, spanning the period from '59 to '63. By virtue of their upgraded components, circuit and speaker efficiency, these amps had unique sonic attributes distinct from any other period of the company's history. More bold headroom than the tweeds yet a less scooped midrange than the later black- and silver-panels, the brown amps had a mid character unique to themselves, along with the ability to achieve a thick overdrive.

Mr Fender was not entirely satisfied by this unholy saturation, however, and by the middle of '63 the company had moved forward with his quest for maximum clean headroom in the guise of the black-panel amps, and the brown range was quickly phased out to become a rarely seen historical quirk. Until the 90s, that is, when Fender reissued its super-rare and desirable brown-panel 2x10 Vibroverb. Although famously used by the late Jeff Buckley live and on record, the amp is not quite a faithful reproduction and didn't quite summon up the saturation potential of the originals.

Fender is now revisiting its brown-tinted past with this reproduction of the '62 Deluxe with its 6G3 circuit designation in which two 6V6 valves push out 20 watts through a single 12-inch custom-designed Celestion driver. The bias is fixed in this amp – in contrast to other brown-panel models – achieving a tighter and faster response. Those same 6V6 valves are utilised to produce the mesmeric valve-biased tremolo sound, which throbs with a depth all its own at the tap of the vintage brown footswitch.

The Deluxe, in its future black incarnation, has historically found favour among the US studio elite players of the golden era of record making, and as a result we've heard its sonic profile possibly on more records than any other. However, with this '62 brown-panel variation we have a more aggressive beast for our perusal, said to be favoured by both Billy Gibbons and Keith Richards.

Feel & Sounds

Pulling the combo from its packaging with its thankfully comfortable brown-leather handle, its period-correct Nubtex covering and wheat grille cloth cut a distinctive dash. Its traditional pine cabinet keeps the weight down for an easily manageable lift. Scrutinising the faceplate we find a minimal control set for this four-input, two-channel circuit. As per Fender protocol, input 1 (for either of its channels) is tuned for higher-gain sensitivity, in contrast to the slightly attenuated second input(s). The two channels aren't footswitchable within the amp's circuit, but they are in-phase, allowing for an ABY pedal to switch between the two or use both simultaneously.

We plugged our Strat into input 1 of the Normal channel and immediately rejoiced in the tight mids that rounded out the tone of our vintage-output single-coil pickups. In the neck position, the fabled woody depth was rendered wonderfully, without excessive power-sapping low-end. Its top-end, meanwhile, though unmistakably Fender, has none of the brash treble that can put a little too much sting in the tail of brighter-sounding guitars. As a result, the Deluxe achieves a distinctive condensed sound that brings to mind the classic US studio guitarist tone, exemplified on recordings from Steely Dan to The Jacksons, and much in between.

Engaging the vintage-looking conical-brown footswitch released the luscious throb of the valve-biased tremolo circuit. Out of the variety of tremolo circuits used in guitar amps, the valve-biased design has a very organic and pleasing ramp to its



Between 1959 and 1963, Fender revised its amp line-up: from the Tweed range with its rear-facing controls and saggy response, to the improved headroom, componentry and cabinet design of the brown-panel series. These models are generally regarded to have the most mid-focused gain-potential of any of the classic models

LUCY ROBINSON

modulations. It requires two well-matched power valves to get the strongest effect and is working very well with the Deluxe's 6v6s. The speed has the more usable part of its range between 5 and 10 but fulfilled all our speed requirements.

Lastly, it was time to push the gain on the Bright channel to find out how wild things can get. True to form, this amp has a hefty slab of mid-heavy gain to give fluidity to leads and lovely weight to riffs and chords. The particular frequency focus is perfectly chosen, neither sharp like a Marshall nor rotund like some Boogies. Stepping on the familiar green overdrive, used by legends such as Stevie Ray Vaughan to boost Fender amps, shaved off a little more low-end and gave more point to notes coming from our Les Paul. It was noticeable that, even at higher gain levels, there was still a clarity and coherence to notes.

Celestion has supplied a custom 12-inch speaker for this amp, which looks perhaps to be a ceramic design, known to subdue the brightest frequencies, accentuate the mids and perform well during break-up. We found this amp really shines with classic pickups and perhaps the addition of a reverb and boost-pedal complement.

Verdict

Price-wise, this amp resides at the lower end of the American Vintage range, likely due to minimal control set and lack of reverb. However, it is still an outlay worthy of some consideration as for that price you get a classic all-valve Fender that can be serviced and repaired (should that be necessary) to give many years of wonderful service. There's not much to learn or work out, just choose your guitar and amp channel and you're off! At 20 watts you should be able to get the valves cooking in rehearsals and small to moderate-sized gigs.





Over the decades of production, Fender has fitted a range of speakers inside its combos, ranging from early Altecs and Jensens to the bold-as-brass JBL D120 silver-capped drivers. In this instance we have a custom 12-inch Celestion designed specifically for Fender



The brown-panel sound offers a wonderful option for players looking to lose some highs and put the focus on the mids, for anything from rock to fusion, blues to country. Its wondrous valve-biased tremolo really shines here. Supplied with its tremolo footswitch and soft cover, it's a tidy little gig-and-studio combo with the tone of a rarified era. It will likely appeal just as much to players who have their technique and instruments dialled in as to less experienced students of the instrument. In either case, glorious sepia-coloured sound awaits. AG

Pros Wide gain range from clean-as-a-whistle to muscular-sounding overdrive; vintage-sounding valve-biased tremolo circuit with a subtle and organic throbbing modulation

Cons While the original didn't have reverb either, we were occasionally left yearning for that recognisable springy halo

RRP $2,899
Contact Fender Australia
Web au.fender.com



EarthQuaker Devices Sunn O))) HalfLife Octave Distortion + Booster

Delivering the droned, bottom-heavy fury inspired by Seattle drone metallers Sunn O))) with uncompromising force

Review by **Paul Riario**

It seems earthquaker devices is in a constant flux between light and dark duality — call it Yin and Yang, if you will — across most of its recognized pedals. On one side, it's known for beautifully ambient pedals that create luminous soundscapes, while the other side unleashes bellowing, sonic mayhem. Its latest stompbox, the Sunn O))) HalfLife Octave Distortion + Booster, falls under the latter description.

The HalfLife stompbox (as you probably guessed with its play on words) is a more compact, condensed and pedalboard-friendly version of the Sunn O))) Life pedal and lives on as a successful ongoing collaboration between Sunn O))) — the loudest of drone metal doomsayer bands — and EQD. Like the Life Pedal before it, HalfLife is designed to capture Sunn O)))'s core front-end signal chain driving multiple vintage Sunn Model T 100-watt tube stacks into glorious saturation.

Inspired by the vintage Shin-Ei FY2 Companion and FY6 Super Fuzz boxes and a vintage white-logo RAT distortion-style circuit, with a low-pass filter control, there isn't much to deal with in this triple-threat of a stompbox arriving in a more pedalboard-friendly size. Most of your guesswork will be made by using your ears and selecting which of the three clipping modes will provide the utmost in aural black magic.

The first OpAmp removes the clipping diodes entirely, unleashing its full output for an aggressively brighter, high-volume attack. Assym employs an asymmetrical clipping configuration using two silicon diodes and one LED, producing a slightly compressed, smoother amp-like crunch. Finally, Symm recreates the original double silicon diode configuration, delivering the classic, familiar rodent-like saturation that made the white-logo circuit a favorite.

Unlike the original Life Pedal, which features a dedicated Octave footswitch, HalfLife's upper octave is only controlled by dialing it in using the O knob or controlled dynamically with an expression pedal connected to the Octave EXP jack, allowing the octave to be blended in as needed.

The final Magnitude stage is designed to overload your preamp tubes with a clean, high-impedance boost while preserving your amp's natural character, driving it harder without adding coloration or introducing distortion of its own.

While it nods heavily to the classic ProCo Rat design, HalfLife departs from its saturation in a more symphonic fuzz-stortion that's tightly layered and articulate. What's interesting is you can hear the fuzzy textures become progressively darker in its clipping modes as you sweep from the brighter and grittier frequencies found on OpAmp, to the warmly compressed Big Muff-style saturation in Asymm, and finally plummeting down to the deep hirsute fuzziness in Symm mode.

We can only imagine that if we brooded in bands like Boris and Burning Witch, we'd dwell within the sludgy depths of Symm mode.

The highly responsive Filter knob swept from dense darkness to the cutting slice reminiscent of a cranked Sunn Model T's Brite channel. The upper octave tracked clearly on single notes above the ninth fret, provided you are flying high with your neck pickup. Here, the spiked upper octave tones added a clanging, metallic ring to the signal. It's an intensely fun pedal that can easily coax the bottom-heavy fuzz found on Gish-era Smashing Pumpkins as well as the shimmering, furry pulse of My Bloody Valentine's Loveless (yes we're dating ourselves here).

Finally, the highly transparent Magnitude clean boost was loud with a capital "L." Be mindful of your level setting, as its massive output — combined with the Amplitude stage — can quickly push an amplifier into explosive meltdown and endless sustain. Not that there's anything wrong with that!

Verdict

The Sunn O))) HalfLife unleashes a full-scale assault of saturated ecstasy, proving once again that this Machiavellian alliance with those shadowy Sunn O))) guitarists is a notorious victory for EQD.

Pros Sunn O)))'s Life Metal octave, distortion and boost tones in a compact pedal; Massive distortion/fuzz, powerful clean boost; Expression input for the Octave effect

Cons Pricey; Drone or doom metal tones are not for everyone

RRP $449
Contact EarthQuaker Devices
Web earthquakerdevices.com

PHIL BARKER



JBL Easysing Mics and Easysing Mic Mini

These AI mics promise to remove the vocalist and centre you – do they work?

Review by **Shaun Prescott**

AI has taken a lot from us: jobs, the ability to think independently, and now, the vocals from our favourite songs. Literally: the latest in JBL's growing range of AI-powered gear is a pair of wireless mics, and separately, a modular mini-mic, that can remove the vocal lines from basically any song, all the better for you to sing along.

JBL has implemented this technology to great effect in its Bandbox series of speakers, which are actual guitar amps that, among other things, can remove guitar parts from songs all the better for you to fill in yourself. We've reviewed them in the past and they definitely pass muster as brilliant practice amps for beginners and pros alike. But can JBL pull off the same trick for singers?

Let's get one important fact out of the way: these Easysing mics aren't going to reach their full potential with just any speaker. In fact, you're going to want one of JBL's Partybox speakers, which usually start at around $330 in Australian stores. I tested using the JBL Partybox Encore Essential 2, which has an RRP of $399, but you can really lash out and go for the JBL Partybox 720 which will set you back around $1,700.

Why? The included wireless dongle for both models is only compatible with JBL speakers. Lacking a JBL speaker you'll need to plug the dongle into your PC (or phone) and then run an AUX cable from your PC (or phone) to the non-JBL speaker. Meanwhile, the features in the JBL One app which are nice to have – EQ, microphone effects – won't be available if you're not connected to a JBL speaker.

Once you overcome this hurdle (or avoid it entirely by owning a compatible JBL speaker) set up is simple. Plug the included wireless dongle into the back of your JBL speaker and then, once you've powered on your mic, it'll automatically connect to the speaker. Pair your smartphone or PC with the speaker via Bluetooth, boot up your streaming service or music player of choice, hit play on any song with vocals, and then, using the orange button on the full-size Easysing mics, you can toggle those vocals on or off. Alternatively, using the JBL One app you can control the volume of those vocals: perhaps you want to harmonise, or perhaps you want a quiet guide to practice along with. You can control the volume of your own voice using buttons on the Easysing mics or, on the Mini, via a small dial.

I was surprised by how effective the vocal removal tech is: it often feels like magic. The vast majority of music I tested with the tech worked very well, though there were some pretty obvious exceptions: If a track is relatively lo-fi, with super echoey or reverberated vocals, the AI can get slightly confused: it's somewhat reassuring to learn, for example, that AI is just as flabbergasted by Victorialand-era Cocteau Twins as I am. Some styles of symphonic black metal will confuse it to the extent that it thinks the vocals are just guitar, or organ, or some other background noise (and fair enough too!). Elsewhere, the AI's efforts to paper over cracks in the absence of vocals can result in a very subtle softening of the volume which, mind you, is basically unnoticeable if you're belting out lines alongside.

Via the JBL Go app you can deploy a pitch shifter, all the better to accommodate different vocal styles in practice. The app also allows tweaking of bass, treble and echo settings, but it also has some presets ranging "pure" "rock on" and "pop star", to name a few, which have pretty self-explanatory use cases. I was surprised by the extremely negligent amount of latency here.

While the form factor of the regular sized Easysings is pretty straightforward, the Easysing Mic Mini comes in pieces. There's the microphone itself, which can slot into an included handle all the better to simulate – but not *quite* reach the size of – a regular-sized mic. Also included is the wireless dongle and a charging case which can charge both of the former at once. Crucially, there's a small magnetic panel included, which can be used to clip the microphone to your collar or anywhere else on your person, assuming you're wearing clothes.

These mics are marketed as karaoke mics predominantly, and frankly, at this price point the fact that they can turn mostly any song into a singalong contender is pretty impressive. But as a home practice solution for vocalists it comes especially alive. If you're in a band creating original songs, it's much easier to practice alongside your actual band, in their absence, with this piece of kit, assuming you've recorded something. AI doesn't have to be all about stealing stuff: this is one of the neatest use cases I've seen.

Verdict

Whether you're a vocalist in need of a simple but powerful at-home practice solution, or a music enthusiast who desires karaoke with an endless library, JBL's Easysing series of mics are bizarrely powerful things. They feel like magic in the hand.

Pros Works with the vast majority of songs ever recorded; Portable; Lots of cool options in the accompanying app

Cons Wider wireless compatibility would be nice; Vocal removal doesn't work seamlessly with some styles

RRP $279.95 / $249.95
Contact JBL
Web www.jbl.com.au

POWER TOOLS

VHT/Fryette Pittbull Ultra-Lead G-100-UL

1993-2017

CATEGORY AMPLIFIER HEAD
BY CHRIS GILL

In our HUMBLE opinion, the VHT Pittbull Ultra-Lead was the greatest amp to emerge during the high-gain amp "wars" of the early Nineties. Introduced in 1993 as a three-channel, ultra high-gain alternative to its predecessors, the Pittbull Classic and CL/X, which debuted the previous year, the Ultra-Lead offered singular tones, highly sensitive dynamic responsiveness and distinctive character unlike anything before (or since, for that matter). Its aggressive personality and beastly tones intimidated many players, which might explain why it was never quite as commercially successful as many of its competitors, although the model enjoyed a successful continuous 24-year run nonetheless. However, we're certain that quite a few guitarists and producers used an Ultra-Lead as a secret weapon in the studio but never divulged the details to maintain an advantage over imitators.



The VHT Pittbull Ultra-Lead's aggressive personality intimidated many players. [below] Static-X guitarist — and Ultra-Lead fan — Koichi Fukuda in 2022

VHT (or Fryette, as the company became known in 2009 when Steve Fryette sold the VHT name) made a few upgrades and modifications to the Ultra-Lead's features and specifications over the years, but at its core it always remained a 120-watt all-tube head powered by a quartet of robust KT88 tubes that could handle the circuit's extremely high voltages (more than 500 volts on the plates). The footswitchable Rhythm and Lead channels each are driven by four gain stages courtesy of 12AX7 tubes, while the Clean channel has two gain stages to provide textures from crystalline clean to thundering crunch. Although the gain sections for the Rhythm and Lead channels are individually voiced and feature separate volume and gain controls and an Edge switch (making the Ultra-Lead's three channels virtually independent), the Rhythm and Lead channels share the same bass/middle/treble EQ controls. However, Ultra-Lead heads with the switchable six-band graphic EQ can completely change either channel's tonal character with a stomp on the EQ footswitch. The effects loop can be set to series or parallel operation and includes a level/mix control, and it is also footswitchable to provide maximum flexibility for gigging.

The Pittbull Ultra-Lead's tonal personality is like a Hiwatt with 'roid rage. The Clean channel delivers super-punchy, immediate attack and shimmering, glass-like textures. The Rhythm channel's overdrive is like a hi-fi Marshall with gut-pummeling bass, screaming mids and sharp, cutting treble that explodes like a safety glass windshield in a high-speed collision. The Lead channel piles on generous heaps of gain, but the bass remains ultra-tight with percussive, pounding pick attack. Even at its most saturated levels of gain, the amp's note-to-note definition remains crisp and precise throughout the guitar's entire range. The amp pairs especially well with baritone and down-tuned guitars to deliver massive tones where the strings sound like heavy iron rods clanging in a steel mill.

> Even at its most saturated levels of gain, the amp's note-to-note definition remains crisp and precise



Because the Ultra-Lead delivers some of the most aggressive high-gain tones known to mankind, its list of users is predominantly players who specialize in extreme forms of metal. Page Hamilton of Helmet has used an Ultra-Lead as the core of his meltdown tones since the Nineties, and Slipknot's Mick Thomson plugged into an Ultra-Lead to record early albums like Iowa and Vol. 3: (The Subliminal Verses). Rob Caggiano used his Pittbull Ultra-Lead heads with Anthrax and Volbeat, and as a producer he's certainly convinced numerous guitarists he's worked to plug into one while recording. John Christ (Danzig), Koichi Fukuda (Static-X) and Aaron Turner (Neurosis) are also Ultra-Lead fans.

Fryette discontinued the Pittbull Ultra-Lead in 2017, but earlier this year the model was updated and resurrected as the Ultra-Lead II, which greatly expands the Pittbull's tonal palette for modern players. ag

BRIAN BAIRD (AMP), RICK KERN/GETTY IMAGES (FUKUDA)

EASYSING MICS

PORTABLE KARAOKE OR SINGING PRACTICE MADE BETTER WITH AI VOCAL REMOVAL



Fine tune your singing skills or just have some fun with friends with the JBL Easy Sing Mics. The new technology offers real-time vocal removal on any song. No special mixes, no setups needed. Just your favorite songs, minus the vocals. Adjust your vocal mix right from the mic or the JBL One App by lowering the original vocals by 25%, 50%, or 100%. Leave a little in for background support, or remove them completely when it's your moment to shine. Compatible with many of the JBL Partybox and Portables range.

Available at JB Hi Fi, Harvey Norman and JBL.com.au

*For non-commercial use only. It is your responsibility to know and abide by copyright laws in your country, and your use may require permission from the copyright holder(s). Review terms associated with use of prerecorded or licensed music, and streaming services, before using JBL EasySing Mics

Cort

Cort Earth GO

A SMARTER WAY TO PLAY EVERY DAY



A Smarter Way to Play Every Day

The Earth GO combines rich acoustic tone with built-in effects, looping, and Bluetooth audio — no amp or pedals required.

Real Tone, Anywhere

A solid spruce top and mahogany body deliver warm, natural sound — Whether you're a weekend camper, living room looper, or just looking to play more often, Earth GO is built to keep you inspired.

No set-up. Just play

No cables, no gear – just pick it up and start playing. That's the real joy of Earth GO

Compact & Travel-Ready

The Earth GO's mini dreadnought shape is easy to hold, easy to carry, and easy to enjoy anywhere.

Proudly distributed by Dynamic Music
www.dynamicmusic.com.au | +61 2 9939 1299

@cortaustralia Cort Australia*

LEARN MORE*