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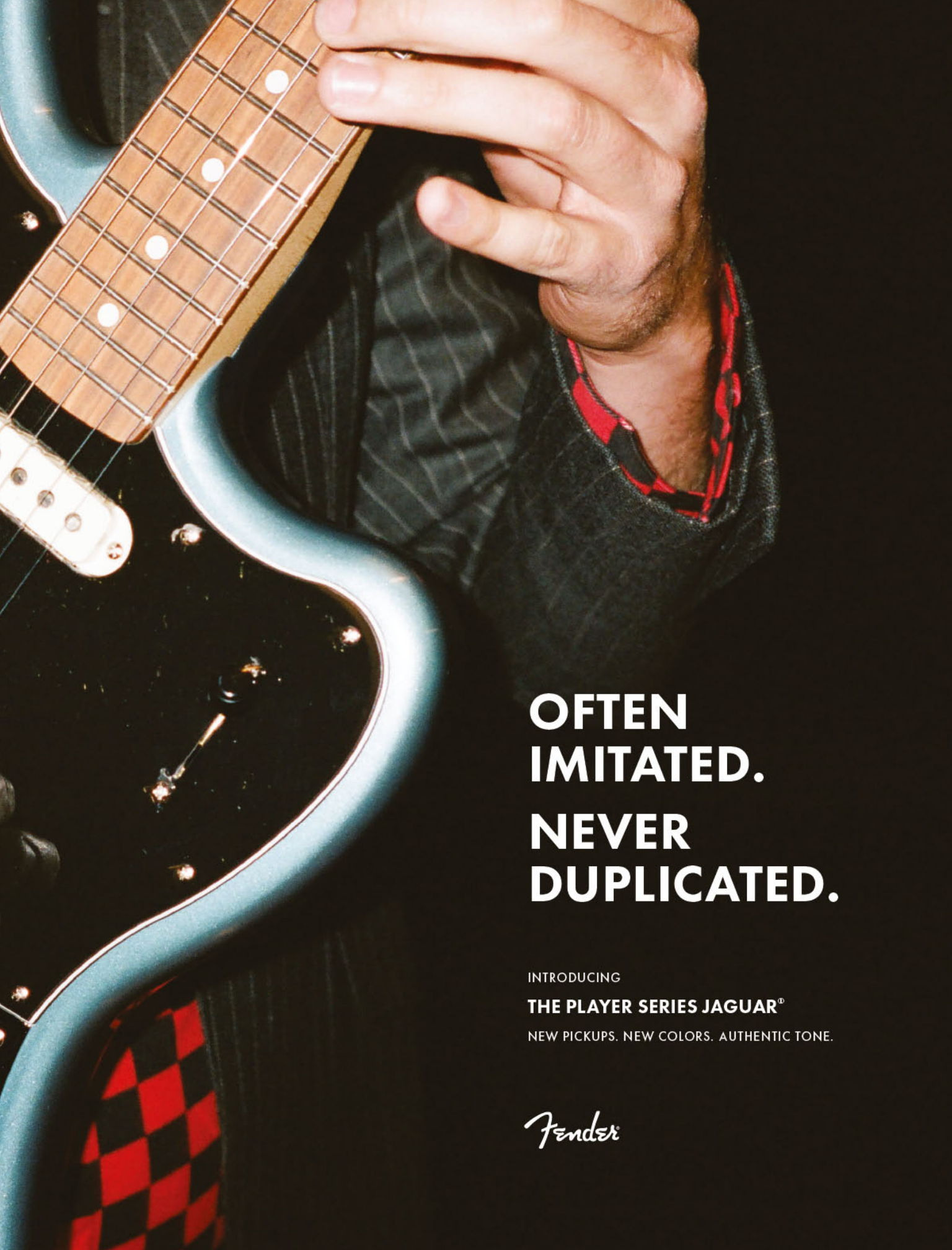


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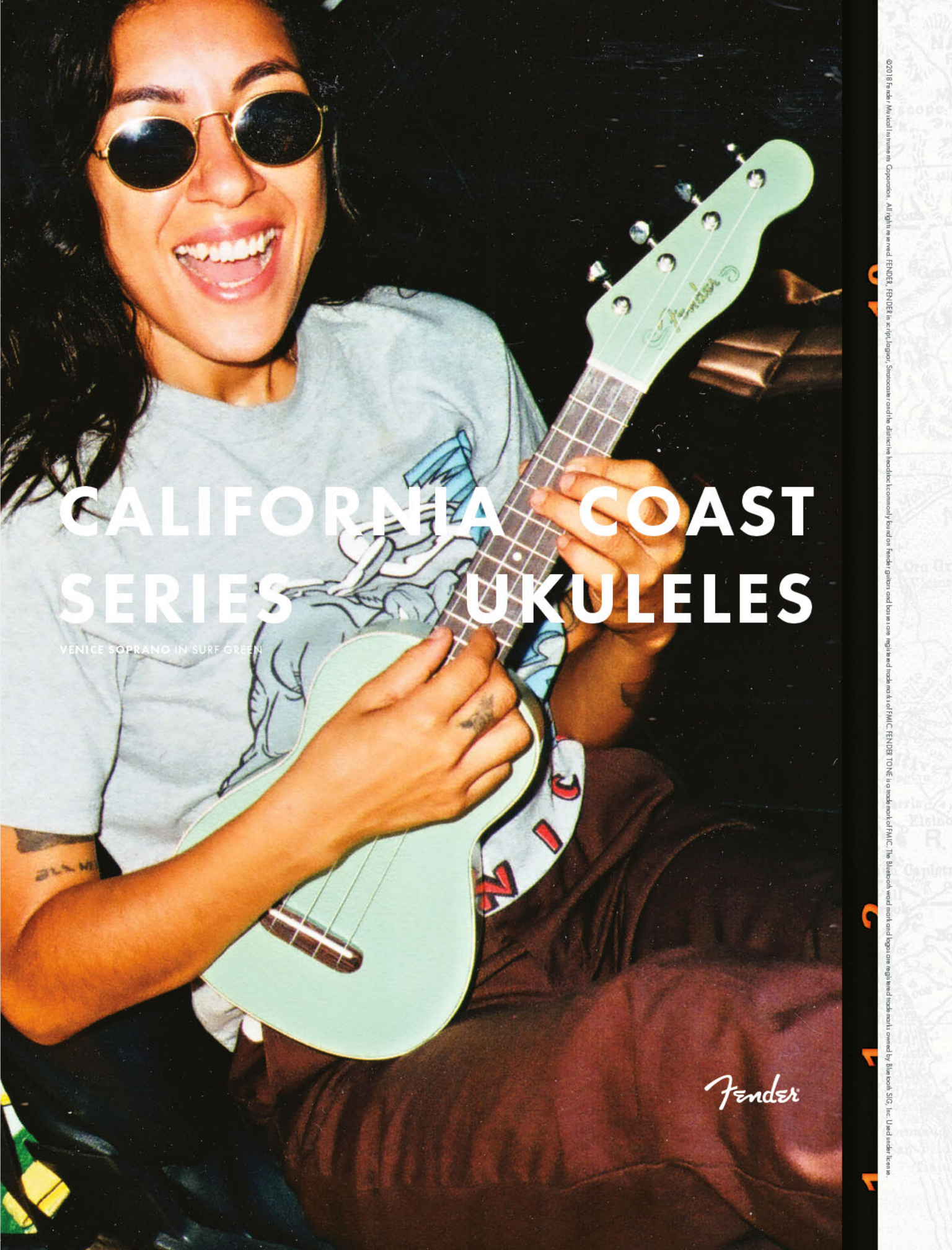
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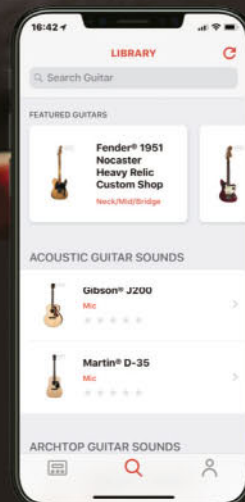
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{ From The Editor }

WE'VE PUBLISHED A steady run of themed issues over the past year. As this month's magazine was taking shape, we decided to break with that convention when a number of great, but seemingly dissimilar artists became available for interviews. We jumped at the opportunity to speak with each of them, and now that the issue is wrapping up, it's become obvious that one compelling reason was behind that decision: All of these guitarists are originals whose impact and influence transcend musical genre and, in nearly every instance, time itself. That, as much as anything, is what unifies this issue's artists.

Take the Smashing Pumpkins. When the group emerged at the rise of grunge, their music stood out not only for its mix of psychedelic rock and metal but also for Billy Corgan and James Iha's riff- and feedback-drenched guitar work. The Pumpkins went on to become perhaps the best representative of Nineties alt-rock before Corgan dramatically reshaped the band at the end of the decade. Since 2007, the group has consisted mainly of Corgan and guitarist Jeff Schroeder, but with Iha's return earlier this year, the Pumpkins are now a three-guitar band. They are also, reportedly, happier than ever. Richard Bienstock sat down with all three players for a revealing discussion about the group's new album, *Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1 / LP: No Past. No Future. No Sun.*

Surely, there has been no guitarist like Ace Frehley. As the lead axe man for Kiss, he embodied rock and roll's proclivity for absurd theatricality with his Spaceman costume and smoking humbuckers. But his gutsy riffing and wild lead guitar work also redefined rock for a new generation of players and inspired young guitarists as diverse as Marty Friedman and Dimebag Darrell. Ace's career has had its ups and downs, but he's been on a winning streak since 2009, when he returned with *Anomaly*, his first solo record in 20 years. Most recently, he reunited with his former Kiss bandmate Gene Simmons for a new album called *Spaceman*. While the title is an obvious nod to Ace's erstwhile persona, it's also an apt moniker for the record, on which he rocks out with all the power and fury of his heyday in Kiss.

Certainly, there's no denying the talents of Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen, Zakk Wylde, Nuno Bettencourt and Tosin Abasi. Each has followed his own path in a different genre of music, but when united as the guitarists of Generation Axe, they deliver an unadulterated celebration of the guitar unlike anything that's come before. The tour debuted in 2016 and returns this winter for a return engagement. It gives these five axe icons an opportunity to strut their stuff solo and with each other, and to demonstrate and celebrate the guitar's musical range and influence.

Finally, in this issue we've featured Kurt Vile, a guitarist who defies easy categorization. Vile has become one of the most exciting guitarists in the indie-rock universe, and while it's too early to say how his musical legacy will stack up, it's obvious that he's carved out an enviable place for himself. Blending acoustic and electric guitars with banjo (his first instrument) in a musical stew of ambient-infused folk and rock, he stands astride several musical genres, making him an icon for many of today's players who embrace stylistic ambivalence, or perhaps just eschew categorization. Like the other guitarists featured in this issue, he's an original, and a reassuring reminder that music's outliers can still find success and acclaim in an industry better known for rewarding commercial conformity.

Chris Scapelliti

GuitarPlayer

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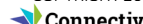
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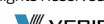


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The Fault in Our Stars

I realize this is the 21st century, and morality, good taste, and honor are somewhat challenged these days, and that peer pressures are mostly succumbed to by this current society's weaker constitutions. I suppose you are one of the good guys however and certainly deserve your newfound position at *GP* — but at least MM [former editor-in-chief Mike Molenda] had the decency to use ** between *F* and *K* and after *SH* ("decency" being a subjective point of view in this context), a point MM brought up in an issue not so long ago. I've been a reader since the early '70s and have been a subscriber at least a decade or two off and on over that period of time, so obviously you are hearing an old-school, outdated point of view to be sure. That said, I still believe that the content and approach

of *GP* in general is still the best compared to like publications, even though, after going through some of the old issues recently, I noticed that they are twice as thick as the ones I've been getting the last few years. But then the Snickers bar and Big Mac have shrunk as well, and they don't have as much online content. Anyway, I suppose it's time to ask myself if I should discontinue my long association with *GP* on the basis of the absence of a couple of stars (**). That decision is an easy one for someone like myself. Whether or not it actually matters was probably an easy one for you. Congratulations with your new position, and all the best with your endeavors. Thanks as always for the forum. — MIKE

What do you think, readers? Should we censor profanity in our pages, or are you fine with us keeping it real? Feel free to let me know at chris.scapelliti@futurenet.com. As always, we welcome your comments on this and other relevant subjects.

Coupl'a Joes

I love the Tone issue [November 2018], especially the interviews with the two Joes — Bonamassa and Satriani. Joe B. has shot his mouth off a couple times recently saying he knows where Clapton's stolen "Beano" Les Paul is and blowing up at people who use pedals. It was good seeing him drop all that nonsense and get back to talking about stuff we all really care about, namely great gear and tone. And kudos to both guys for talking about how to get great sounds from affordable gear. It can be done, and their advice makes it easier. Nice job, everyone! — GARY BAUM

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Percolating Guitars

Kevin Gordon and Joe V. McMahan discuss the art of instrumental interplay

BY MICHAEL ROSS

KEVIN GORDON'S LATEST release, *Tilt and Shine* (Crowville Media), is a college-level textbook of roots-guitar interaction. It's the kind of fluid, nonhierarchical, twin-guitar attack rarely heard outside of the Muddy Waters' band and the Rolling Stones. Though Gordon and Joe V. McMahan, his longtime partner in crime, both solo on the record, it's the way their instruments rhythmically interact that is so special.

"It's about having the accents bouncing off of each other," McMahan explains. "If Kevin's playing straight time, I have to find a way to syncopate. If he starts to syncopate, I tighten down and play simply. At this point we don't think about it much — it's just a playful conversation. Often, one guy is doing the Chuck Berry rhythm while the other does the upward accents."

The famous Berry rhythm-guitar style buttresses the groove of many Gordon songs. "I was writing songs during my early years in Nashville that were more obviously derivative of Chuck, like 'Deuce and a Quarter' [from 2000's *Down to the Well*]," he says. "There are specific measures of his recordings that I love, but I was not the kind of guy that would sit down and scientifically figure out what was happening. It would just be, What does that feel like, and how can I get it in my hands?"

The early rock and roll style that Gordon and company perform so expertly has been



Kevin Gordon

JACOB BLICKENSTAFF

described as a unique mixture of a straight-eighths groove combined with a triplet-based shuffle. For Gordon, though, it isn't about analysis. "I was never thinking, Who's playing straight and who's playing a shuffle? It's not that cut and dry," he explains. "I tend to think of it as this living, breathing thing — the fluid measure. I'm just doing whatever feels right at the time, and Joe's the counterfoil. You can really hear that percolating thing on 'Oil City Girl' [also on *Down to the Well*]."

According to McMahan, picking emphasis plays a role in defining the rhythm as well. He demonstrates by playing a straight-eighths

rhythm while accenting different notes. "The way those dynamics push and pull has its own dance rhythm," he says. "Kevin and I doing that off of each other is a big part of our thing. It's almost subconscious at this point, but back in the '90s we worked at it."

The dark mystery of Gordon's recorded and live sound derives in part from his and McMahan's liberal use of flatwound strings. McMahan's guitars include a 1970s Cortez Strat copy tuned to open D or G and strung with flatwound D'Addario .012–.052s. "It's Japanese," he says. "I bought it in a pawnshop outside of Eudora, Arkansas. It has a magical

thing about it. The pickups are underground and sound really good.” He also has an Airline guitar that’s set up similarly. “Even without an amp, it instantly sounds like the tone on ‘Fire at the End of the World,’ on *Tilt and Shine*,” McMahan says. Other Strats and Teles in his arsenal are strung with roundwound D’Addario .010–.052s.

Occasionally, Gordon wields a standard-tuned Tele strung with D’Addario .010–.052s, but more often you’ll see him strangling a flatwound-strung 1956 Gibson ES-125 tuned to open D. “I found that at a friend’s apartment,” he says. “I asked if I could borrow it for the weekend. He never saw it again.”

In the studio, both players achieved their classic American crunch through a ’60s-era Supro with an eight-inch speaker, a blackface Fender Princeton Reverb or a new tweed Deluxe-style amp—no pedals. “That’s the preferred way,” McMahan says.

Live performance requires a different approach. McMahan employs a post-CBS

Fender Deluxe, occasionally abetted by pedals. “For a few years now I’ve been into the Spaceman Aphelion pedal,” he says. “It’s an overdrive that makes any amp sound tweed-like. I recently got a ProAnalog Devices Manticore. It does a similar kind of thing with a different flavor.”

Gordon uses a blackface Deluxe without reverb, sometimes adding a late-’40s Gibson BR9 and pushing them with an old Fulltone Fat Boost pedal. He also uses a Strymon Flint pedal, occasionally for the reverb but mainly for the tremolo. “I’m a bit of a tremolo freak,” he admits.

Gordon and McMahan have a running joke between themselves that they are playing songs where “smart lyrics meet dumb music.” They are nevertheless well aware that the instrumental aspect of Gordon’s songs, though simple, is anything but easy. And as anyone whose band has tried to pull off this kind of two-guitar magic will attest, it most definitely is not dumb either. ■



Joe McMahan



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Electric Warrior

Former folkie KT Tunstall finds new inspiration on *WAX*, her amped-up sixth album

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

WHEN SINGER-SONGWRITER KT

Tunstall was busking on street corners in her early 20s with acoustic guitar in hand, she surely imagined life as a successful musician would bring her happiness and make her feel energized. But a few years ago, following the loss of her father and the collapse of her marriage, she began to add up the cost of success to her personal life. The Grammy-nominated artist, whose four acoustic guitar-driven pop records had made her a star around the world, was running on fumes and dangerously close to burning out.

"I felt like I had stepped into the wrong version of reality," Tunstall says. "I'd been the sole architect of my existence and somehow had still managed to end up in a place where I was miserable."

Just when she felt like it was all collapsing in on her, Tunstall sold everything, cut ties with her London home and found a new start in bohemian Venice Beach, California. She gave up her hard-earned music career and began studying composing for film. Tunstall relished the challenge. Then, one day while driving the Pacific Coast Highway, the wide-open Cali-rock hooks of Fleetwood Mac and Tom Petty reeled her back to her craft. Suddenly, it all made sense again. "I realized I was making very optimistic, positive music as the soundtrack to my own reinvention," she says. "In the end, I felt it would be a good thing to release those songs."

To mark her return to the music scene, Tunstall conceived a trilogy of albums

dealing with spirit, body and mind, starting with 2016's *KIN*. But writing her new album, *WAX* — the second in the set, which deals with themes of the body — drew her to the electric guitar in a bigger way than ever. Cuts like "Little Red Thread," "Human Being" and "The Healer" stutter and slash their way to expansive pop choruses, while offerings such as "Dark Side" and the leadoff single, "The River," unite her newfound love for gritty riffs with the classic California pop-rock that inspired her creative second act.

GP caught up with Tunstall as she prepared to release *WAX* and bring the songs to life on her current tour.

You're often associated with acoustic guitar. Is that where you usually begin

writing songs?

It's definitely where my roots lie — my beginnings playing open-mic nights and busking on the street, and also learning to use it as an all-in-one percussion instrument. Listening to where it sits with my favorite artists — Beck, Joni Mitchell, Fleetwood Mac, the Beatles, even Led Zeppelin and David Bowie — it all comes back to blues and folk music. The acoustic guitar is this incredible, self-sufficient tool that can be taken anywhere and used to create such a memorable experience. It feels like an extension of my body at this point. The vast majority of my songs begin with me alone with an acoustic guitar.

Why did you gravitate to the electric guitar on WAX?

There is something about the electric guitar that conjures a heavy, visceral energy that comes naturally with its sound. It's sexy and sensual and powerful. You can wield it like a weapon, or you can create beautiful ethereal landscapes. There's just the most massive spectrum. I feel a warrior energy that comes with electric guitar, which was required for this particular album.

You made a big move to L.A. a few years ago. What role did your life in Venice Beach play in making this record?

Venice Beach kind of saved my life. My deeper identity had become hijacked by being a successful musician. Without playing and making records, I didn't really know who I was anymore. I sold everything, packed up and moved to California. It was one of the best things I've ever done. I totally cut myself off from the idea of making any more records, promoting [or] touring. I trained at the Sundance Film Institute's Composers Lab in Northern California, which was the most extraordinary learning curve.

You took that inspiration back to London. When did the songs start to come together for WAX?

I knew I needed to make the "body" record in a place that had some grit. I could feel it was going to be a rock record, my first proper rock record. There had been a great letting go during the process of making *KIN*, and I'm so excited that, more than ever, I'm in a place where I disregard judgment and feel free to

make what I want to make. Nick McCarthy [formerly of Franz Ferdinand] and I met through a mutual friend, and I just woke up one morning and knew that I had to make the album with him at his supercool vintage dub garage studio in East London. We had a week of preproduction planned last July, and we ended up spending the whole week writing new songs together. It was pure magic.

Did that collaborative songwriting experience extend to the tracking?

We recorded live as a three-piece: myself on guitar and vocals, Nick on bass and Denny Weston Jr. on drums. I'd often not wear headphones at all and just hear the bleed of everything into the main room. I loved the performance of it. It really felt so close to playing a gig. [Tunstall's main studio rig was a Supro Belmont Vibrato, a Supro Statesman combo amp, a Taylor Grand Symphony and a Gibson Dove.]

WAX isn't all amped-up riffs, though. What inspired some of the quieter moments?

I feel like it wouldn't be a proper KT Tunstall record without some balladry. It's a core part of what I do. The ballads on this album are interesting to me because they are more challenging in content matter. "Poison" is about asshole politicians. When Nick and I wrote "The Night That Bowie Died" together, we had to take a minute to get our shit together. We really poured our hearts and experiences of loss into that one. "The Mountain" is one of the most exciting moments on the album for me. It's a whole new kind of ballad for me, which is away from guitar and more into atmospheric — a more meditative experience over the course of the song.

Looking at WAX as a whole, do you see a natural, thematic arc?

"Human Being" is the track that describes the album as a whole. "The River" is like the reminder to be completely present. It's a front-loaded track listing, with heavy punches opening the record, but it's the way I felt it should be: youth and vigor leading to wisdom and contemplation, punctuated with rockers to keep the momentum. Sounds like a life well lived! 🍷

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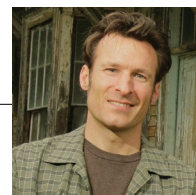


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{ CLASSIC GEAR }

BY DAVE HUNTER



The Mosrite Ventures Model Guitar

THE ENDORSEMENT GUITAR, or

"signature model," was nothing new when this stylish creation debuted in 1963. However, the Mosrite Ventures model took the concept several steps further, to the point where it was difficult to discern which came first: the endorsement or the guitar.

Mosrite founder Semi Moseley grew up in Bakersfield, California, after migrating there from Oklahoma (by way of Arizona) with the rest of his family while just a toddler in the late '30s to early '40s. Before setting out to build guitars, he played on the evangelical circuit in California. It was a far cry from the surf, rock and roll, and punk scenes that would passionately take to his guitars in years to come (although the Christian music world would remain a consistent, if less visible, market for his products too). Moseley honed a talent for home-crafted hardware through an apprenticeship with Paul Bigsby, and learned the German-carve body style by working with Roger Rossmeisl at Rickenbacker. He then set out to build guitars under his own Mosrite brand in the late '50s.

In 1963, Moseley's sleek and quirky guitars caught the attention of Nokie Edwards, guitarist with the Ventures. Edwards not only had the surf-rock band abandon its Fender Jazzmasters, he also crafted a deal that gave the group top billing on Mosrite's headstock. In the process, the company logo was demoted to model-name status between the tuner posts. The band funded production of the Ventures guitar at Mosrite's new factory in Bakersfield in exchange for exclusive rights to distribute the model. Due to the group's

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- > Reverse-style double-cutaway body
- > Slim neck with zero-fret and steel guide nut
- > Proprietary Mosrite vibrato and bridge
- > Proprietary fat single-coil pickups
- > "The Ventures" headstock



GUITAR COURTESY OF SOUTHSIDE GUITARS. PHOTO BY LUIGI CILENTO

popularity, the guitar was expected to be the company's new bestseller, but the Ventures model never came close to rivaling Fender's hot, custom-colored models, nor Gibson's popular guitars. It was, however, the most prominent Mosrite throughout the latter part of the decade.

Take a close look at this beautiful example from 1965, in original sunburst finish, and you'll see that, although the body is something of a reversed Stratocaster shape, nothing else looks like anything on another electric guitar. The neck has a slim, fast profile, with a precise zero-fret nut design and microdot inlays. The hardware and electronics were mostly made in-house by Mosrite. The pickups look somewhat like Gibson P-90s but are quite differently made, offering a beefy, bold tone that is simultaneously fat and clear. Notice how the neck pickup is mounted at an angle to help the bass strings retain more clarity and the treble strings more warmth — the reverse of the theory used on Fender's Telecaster and Stratocaster bridge pickups.

If your predilection leans more toward rock than surf, chances are you've had your Mosrite fix from Johnny Ramone, who powered the Ramones' punk-pop fury with a modified Ventures II model that had a slab body rather than the German carve seen on this example. Ricky Wilson of the B-52s, Kevin Shields of My Bloody Valentine and Jerry Cantrell of Alice in Chains have also rocked Mosrite guitars, although the flashiest example in popular use was probably that of country artist Joe Maphis, who wielded his iconic signature-model double-neck for much of the '60s and '70s. Funk fans will dig the arguably hipper adoption of the Maphis double-neck by Ohio Players frontman Leroy "Sugarfoot" Bonner, as heard on '70s hits like "Fire" and "Love Rollercoaster."

Despite the major endorsements of Maphis and the Ventures, Mosrite had a bumpy run through the mid-to-late '60s and folded in 1969. Various efforts to rebirth the company have occasionally resulted in worthwhile guitars, including — no surprise — Ventures and Ramones signature reissues. 🎸



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{ THE FOLEY FILES }

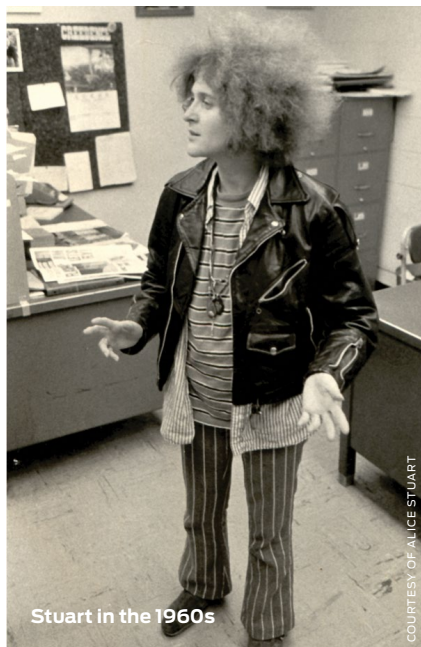
BY SUE FOLEY

Alice Stuart

ALICE STUART IS the only female guitarist to be a member of the Mothers of Invention. How cool is that? She was badass before *badass* was a word. Stuart met Frank Zappa in 1964 and played acoustic guitar with an early version of the Mothers. She left shortly after, before the group recorded its debut album, *Freak Out!*, to pursue her love of electric blues.

There were few female guitar role models in the mid-'60s, when Stuart's career took off, and like all the trailblazers I've interviewed, she is completely self-created. What's even cooler is she's still out there playing. Make sure to catch her when you can. You can find her schedule and learn more about her at alicestuart.com.

In an interview I read, you mentioned that Zappa taught you how to believe in yourself and your music. What was it



Stuart in the 1960s

COURTESY OF ALICE STUART

about playing with him that helped you gain confidence?

Well, I was really trying to go in a different direction at that point. He wanted me to continue playing acoustic guitar, and he wanted to play things around the Delta stuff that I was playing. The Mothers of Invention were a blues band then, and I wanted to start playing electric guitar, so we just basically had different ideas. But because I was working with him and he was obviously a go-getter, it just made me think maybe I could do whatever I wanted to do. And by then I had already made my first album, [1964's] *All The Good Times*.

Who were your electric guitar influences?

Probably my greatest influence on electric guitar is Roy Buchanan. I still listen to his first album and just marvel at his style.

Is that who inspired you to play Telecasters?

Yes, him and all the bare-bones kind of guitar players from the time, like Buddy Holly. I don't think of myself as just a blues player; instead, I see myself more like a roots or Americana guitar player, with a bit of country and rock.

Were you aware of Memphis Minnie back then?

When I started recording for Arhoolie Records, [label founder] Chris Strachwitz gave me a bunch of her stuff, and I just went crazy. I recorded her song "In My Girlish Days." When I heard her, I thought, She's been around for a while. She was really respected, won a bunch of guitar contests and stuff. I was really sad when I heard she'd passed away.

Do you think there's anything uniquely feminine that women bring to the guitar, or do you think music has nothing to do



LEE PHOTOGRAPHY

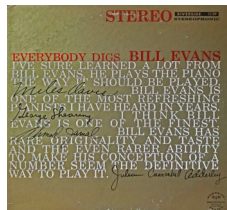
with gender at all?

I definitely love to rip it up, but I also tend to play guitar like it's an extension of my voice. I think of the melody, or, if I'm playing backup guitar, I think what's going to accent what the other players are doing. I played with Albert King, and he picked me up off the floor and said, "Honey, you play good guitar!" If Albert King says I can play, that's all right with me.

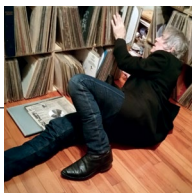
I have young women come up to me all the time and say things like, "Oh, my god, you're my role model! You've shown me that it can be done and that we don't have to go back." So that makes me feel good. I think a lot of it is belief in yourself. It's not like you need to think you're better than anyone else, but you do need to feel that you're playing on the level where you are, and not below it. You just have to know that you're really good. No one makes me feel like I am less than I am. 🎸



{ VINYL TREASURES }



BY JIM CAMPILONGO



Bill Evans, *Everybody Digs* *Bill Evans*

BACK IN THE pre-Internet Stone Age of the 1970s and '80s, my connection to new music was the Bay Area's own KSAN radio. KSAN was the FM birth child of freeform radio pioneer Tom Donahue, an underground station where relaxed, understated DJs spun extended jams and strung together a gamut of musical styles that could segue from Link Wray to Ravi Shankar to the Ramones.

I felt like I was inside the brain of those radio personalities, broadcasters who included Richard Gossett, Ben Fong-Torres, Dusty Street and Bonnie Simmons. Every day was a learning experience, and I always heard something new and exciting. KSAN radio introduced me to Muddy Waters, Lonnie Mack, Ravi Shankar, the Sex Pistols, the Police, the Pretenders, Devo and many other great artists that might have required an archeological dig if KSAN hadn't delivered their music to my home.

This is how I first heard Bill Evans' "Peace Piece," from his LP *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*. Released in 1959 on the Riverside label, the album was the jazz pianist's second record as a leader and featured Sam Jones on bass and the great "Philly Joe" Jones on drums. I was 13 years old at the time, and, admittedly, most high-calorie jazz playing might have been lost on me. But "Peace Piece" was a great jazz primer for the uninitiated, and I was instantly in awe of Evans' musical mastery. The track is a six-minute vamp over a repetitive bass line, where Evans patiently and brilliantly takes us through a journey of

melody and improvisation. He plays everything from nursery-rhyme melodies and flat Lydian scales to discordant whole-tone and diminished block chords, all the while being simultaneously extroverted and introspective. My young ears realized a solo can be a story with dramatic form, employing rising action, climax and resolution.

The great fringe benefit of *Everybody Digs Bill Evans* was being exposed to the album's other great, more traditional jazz performances, like "Tenderly," "Oleo" and, my favorite, "What Is There to Say?" Evans' phrasing on this track is absolutely sublime, and to this day, consciously or unconsciously, I try to employ it.

Any instrumentalist can benefit from hearing Evans play piano, and his influence was felt keenly by Lenny Breau. In trying to break through the guitar's limitations, Breau took picking-hand harmonics to a new level, escaping successfully into fully realized Bill Evans piano voicings. But that's another column.

I've always felt a sense of irony when seeing the cover of *Everybody Digs Bill Evans* and reading that line "I've sure learned a lot from Bill Evans..." Because, as I've gotten older, I've embraced the quirkiness and energy of Thelonious Monk, the playfulness of Erroll Garner and the craftsmanship of Duke Ellington. But I will always have a sense of "home" with the music of Bill Evans and a great feeling of gratitude to KSAN "Jive 95" for playing me a gateway to jazz. 🎸

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COLUMN

{ WHACK JOB }

BY TERRY CARLETON



PHOTOS BY MAY YAM

1966 Martin GT-75

THIS MAPLE HOLLOWBODY electric guitar has mesmerized me for years — not just this model but this very guitar. It's been hanging in the vintage vault at Guitar Showcase, one of my favorite haunts in San Jose, California. I was always curious why Martin, one of the oldest and most respected acoustic guitar builders in the world, could not successfully break into the market for electric guitars. I figured there must be something terribly wrong with the company's approach to designing and building them. So when I borrowed this GT-75 to write about it, I was expecting to give it a lackluster review and brusquely toss it into the proverbial pile of unsuccessful builds from the 1960s guitar boom. Boy howdy, was I wrong! This axe is just plain off-the-hook awesome. I'm gobsmacked!

WEIRDO FACTOR

The only unusual thing about this guitar is that it is a Martin electric from the 1960s and has stayed relatively unknown since its introduction in 1966, more than five decades ago. Its shape is rather elegant, with easy, understated flowing lines. The upper cutaways remind me of Lauren Bacall's shoulders, particularly if she were wearing a tuxedo. But except for the immortal Skip Spence from the amazing '60s San Francisco psychedelic band Moby Grape, no guitarist of any real note is known for playing one of these sweethearts, which is probably why the GT-75 was destined for obscurity. Martin stopped production of the guitar in October 1968, less than two years after it made its debut.

PLAYABILITY & SOUND

To start with, it plays wonderfully. The 22-fret



mahogany neck with Brazilian rosewood fingerboard is super friendly. The neck is slim, the action is low, and the feel is all quality. This is not a guitar you have to wrestle. The medium-jumbo frets are dressed smoothly, and there are no dead spots. The Bigsby-style tremolo, whose tailpiece is cleverly shaped like an *M*, is smooth and responsive, but the GT-75's real surprise is its sound. I've heard DeArmond pickups on a lot of guitars from the '60s, but there is something special going on with this pair. Called Dynasonic 2K, these particular pickups have a complex and chimy sound. The bridge setting is snarly

and biting and a bit microphonic, but in a good way. The neck pickup can easily sound jazzy if you roll back the tone knob, but with the control open, this pickup is also surprisingly bright. As for the middle position, it's money — loud, full and just a little bit phasey.

Even with a distortion pedal, notes played on the GT-75 are distinct, and wonderfully so, especially compared to my solidbody Gibsons and Fenders. The clarity is reminiscent of a stereo guitar whose signal gets split to two amps, one clean and

one overdriven. I just could not put this guitar down! I strung it with roundwound strings prior to testing, and although I suspect it was expected to be played with flatwounds, I also bet it would lose all of its snappy character if it were. The Klusons are tight and hold their pitch so well that this guitar, after hanging for years behind glass, was actually in tune when handed to me by Guitar Showcase assistant manager Jack Van Breen (a fine guitarist, by the way). What the...?!

VALUE

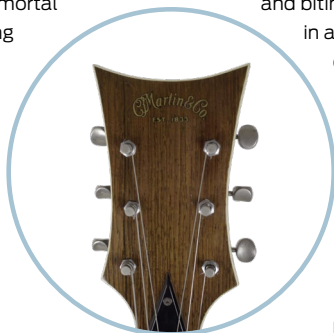
There are a few GT-75s online ranging in price from \$1,500 to \$3,000 — not bad considering it's an absolutely cool 50-something-year-old American-made electric guitar.

WHY IT RULES

I have to give the GT-75 two enthusiastic thumbs up! It sounds amazing, it plays super well, and the look is even groovy in a subtle art deco way. Besides, it's a dang Martin!

(Thanks to Gary Wineroth at Guitar Showcase, guitarshowcase.com, for the loan of this beautiful guitar.)

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com 🎸





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PEOPLE

REJUVENATED BY SMASHING PUMPKINS' NEW TRIPLE-GUITAR LINEUP, BILLY CORGAN PLUGS BACK IN AND CRANKS IT UP ON THEIR NEW ALBUM, ***SHINY AND OH SO BRIGHT, VOL. 1.***

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL HAGGARD



PLAYERS

{ SMASHING PUMPKINS }

IN FEBRUARY OF this year, Smashing Pumpkins announced a reunion of three-fourths of the original, founding lineup that had skyrocketed them to alt-rock glory in the 1990s.

Since then, that trio — singer, guitarist and primary songwriter Billy Corgan, drummer Jimmy Chamberlin and guitarist James Iha — has been doing exactly what fans expect reunited bandmates to do: embarking on a massive tour that celebrates their history by diving deep into the music they created several decades ago. They've been joined by guitarist Jeff Schroeder, who for the past dozen years has been a

Shiny and Oh So Bright tour, they've had something else up their sleeves — namely, an album of all-new material. Titled *Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1 / LP: No Past. No Future. No Sun.*, it's the first record to feature Corgan, Iha and Chamberlin since 2000's *Machina/The Machines of God* and *Machina II/The Friends & Enemies of Modern Music*. The new effort is only just being released, even though it was more or less completed back when the group officially announced its reunion.

From the beginning, Smashing Pumpkins had no intention of making a new album. When they first got together with producer Rick Rubin at his

“And that’s what we ended up recording.”

The result is an eight-song effort that harkens back to the classic Pumpkins sound but is also unlike anything they’ve done in the past. To the latter point, Corgan hesitates to call *Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1 / LP: No Past. No Future. No Sun.* an album. True to the effort’s title, he says, “I’m more comfortable with the term *LP*, in the tradition of what used to be called a *long player*. Because it’s not a conceptual album like, say, [1995’s] *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*. It’s more like a collection of eight tunes from a particular session.”

One of those eight tunes, the distortion-drenched space-rock workout “Solara,” was released earlier this year as the “Hey, we’re back together now” song. A prime slice of classic-sounding Pumpkins, it’s also the one new song in the *Shiny and Oh So Bright* live sets, and slots in nicely next to heavier tracks like 1995’s “Zero” and 2000’s “The Everlasting Gaze.” But elsewhere on *Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1*, the Pumpkins touch on various other aspects of their diverse sound, from the sleek and propulsive “1979”-like alt-rock of “Silvery Sometimes (Ghosts)” to the shimmering dream-pop of “With Sympathy,” the metallic snarl of “Marchin’ On” and the piano-and-strings pomp of “Knights of Malta.”

Whether or not *Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1* is an album in the traditional sense, it’s a welcome return to form for the Pumpkins and, in Corgan’s estimation, a necessary step in the reunion process. “That’s a big caveat for me for continuing the band past the 30-year mark at all,” he says. “As much as the world likes to focus on our catalog — and obviously the tour does, and I take responsibility for that — the primary focus still needs to be on creating new music.”

Corgan, Iha and Schroeder recently sat down with *Guitar Player* to discuss that new music, their respective roles in the recording process and the gear they used in the studio for *Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1*. Corgan also took time to reflect on the Pumpkins’ sometimes

“SIMPLY PUT, ME, JAMES AND JIMMY, AND NOW JEFF — WE’RE A DEADLY UNIT.”

— BILLY CORGAN

member of the band alongside Corgan, the Pumpkins’ only constant presence over their 30-year career. (Founding bassist D’arcy Wretzky was initially approached before talks devolved into a public he-said-she-said spat between her and Corgan.)

But while the Pumpkins have been trotting out classic fuzz-drenched ’90s anthems like “Cherub Rock,” “Today” and “Bullet with Butterfly Wings” to adoring arena audiences on their current

Shangri-La Studios in Malibu, it was with the goal of recording and releasing one song that, Corgan explains, “would sort of say to everyone, ‘Hey, we’re back together now. We’re going to go out and play some music and hopefully make some more good music.’ So what we did was put together 16 song demos, and then we whittled that down to eight, thinking Rick would pick one.”

Rubin’s choice? “Rick was like, ‘Let’s do all of ‘em!’” Iha says with a laugh.





(from left) Jimmy Chamberlin, Billy Corgan, James Iha and Jeff Schroeder. (opposite) Schroeder, bassist Jack Bates and Corgan

OLIVIA BEE

difficult dynamic, as well as his own complicated relationship with the guitar. Additionally, the frontman revealed that, until very recently, he was ready to put the band to bed for good. “I felt the well was dry,” he concedes.

But with Iha and Chamberlin back in the fold, and Schroeder still along for the ride, that feeling has changed. “I didn’t expect to be here,” Corgan says. “But now that I am it’s like, ‘All right, let’s go — I’m ready to plug back in and crank it up. Let’s do this!’”

It’s fair to say many longtime fans are going to hear that *Shiny and Oh So Bright* is a “reunion” record and expect it to sound something like *Smashing Pumpkins* circa the early-to-mid ’90s. When you listen to the album is that what you hear?

Billy Corgan: You know, I really don’t know how to answer that question. And I’m not trying to be cagey by

saying that. I just don’t agree with how most people characterize our music. I mean, most people that recognize me in airports, they say, “Hey, are you the guy that sang ‘rat in a cage?’” But most fans who’ve been along for the entire ride — including the different iterations of the band posthumous to the breakup in 2000, and then of course solo works and stuff like that — they realize that *Smashing Pumpkins* music is quite a vast and diverse set of influences and results.

James Iha: I think Billy just writes the way he writes. And it’s hard to write songs with your older records in mind, trying to recreate that magic. Because that was a different time, a different everything. At the same time, you’re creating new songs and you have the weight of the whole catalog behind that, because these are songs that people remember. So you can’t just, I don’t know, bring in a DJ and make a totally

new kind of thing. The only thing you can do is try to make good songs that have a good vibe and see what comes out. Otherwise you’re just chasing something, and that’s not a free and easy way to write.

Corgan: That said, does this material slot into the wide width of the actual reality of the band’s music? Yeah, it’s not too dissimilar. Or, what your question is really asking — and I’m not being pissy — “Does it seem familiar to the guy on the street?” Yeah, it would seem to. But do we care? No.

What was the dynamic like in the recording studio between you, James and Jimmy?

Corgan: I think what surprised me was how comfortable it was. Because we had so much recording experience together, we just kind of went back to the way we used to work. Everybody just fell into their lane.



PLAYERS

Jeff, how was it for you to be there with three-fourths of the original Smashing Pumpkins band?

Jeff Schroeder: It was great. Obviously I've worked with Jimmy before [Chamberlin has been recording and touring with Smashing Pumpkins solidly for the past decade] but never with James. And I did have one of those moments sitting there in the tracking room at the studio in Malibu, looking around and essentially seeing this version of the band, and then looking through the glass and seeing Rick Rubin, and that was a pretty surreal experience. It made me feel very thankful, and very happy to be there participating.

**"MY FEELING IS,
IF YOU TRY TO
MAKE THE GUITARS
EVEN HEAVIER,
IT JUST WINDS
UP SOUNDING
ONE-DIMENSIONAL"**

— JAMES IHA

Billy, in past interviews you've called Smashing Pumpkins an "open-source collective," meaning that musicians come in and out of the lineup, but still the band continues on with you at the helm. That being the case, what is special about having James and Jimmy together again with you?

Corgan: You know, I think it's taken me a long time to appreciate what it is about the combination of James, Jimmy and I — who were responsible for the majority of what people would recognize as the band's seminal work — that yields high results. And I say that with humility.

But here's one example: We were in the studio, and Rick pulled me aside and he said, "I get it." And I was like, "What do you get?" And he said, "James softens the metal." And what Rick meant by that is, James has a way of taking the blunt-force trauma of how

Jimmy and I approach rock music and creating a softer, more psychedelic kind of layering thing that somehow makes it feel cooler or sexier. And when you see it happen and you notice it, especially because it hasn't been around for a while, you're like, "Oh, that's that thing that people like!"

James, does that make sense to you?

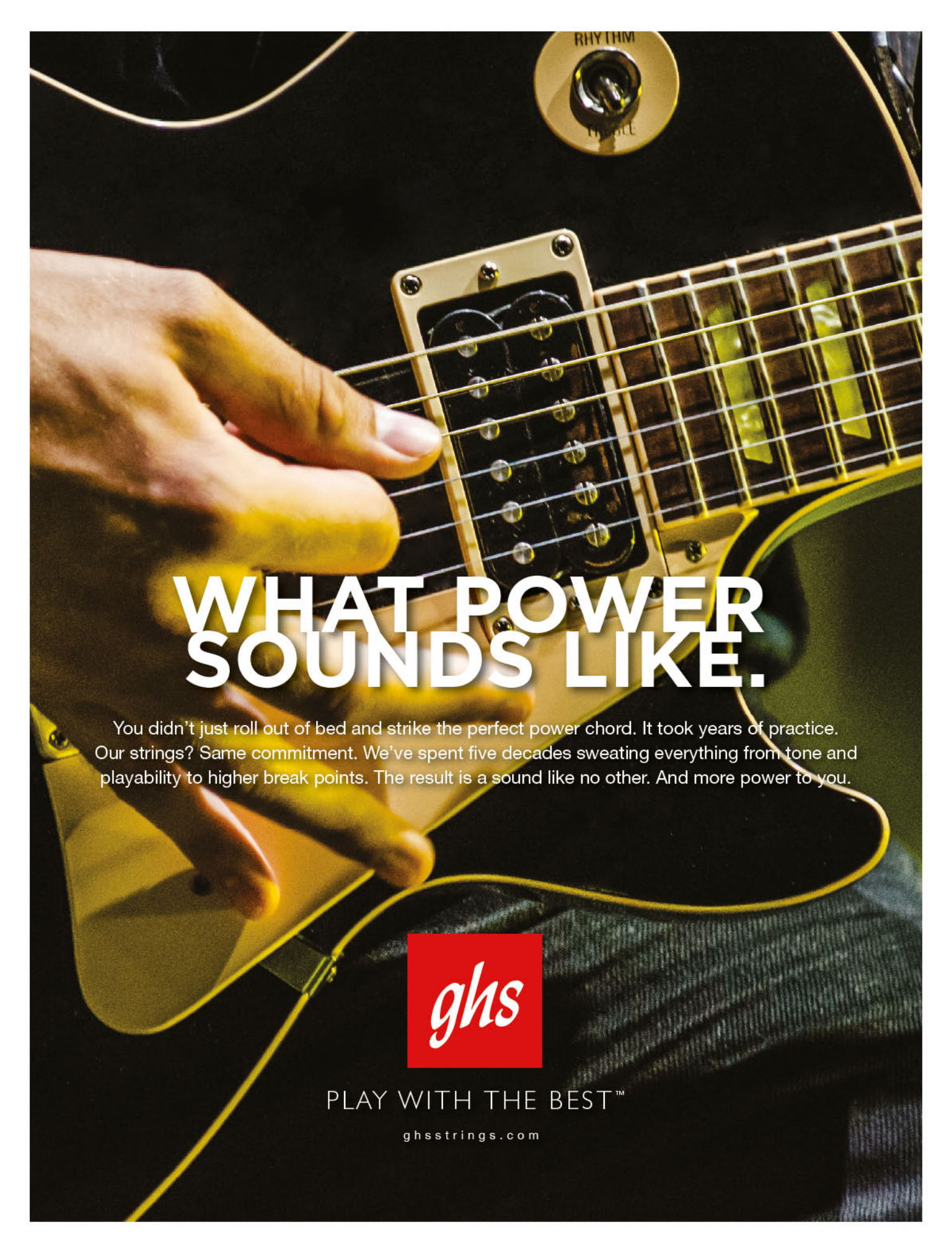
Iha: [laughs] Yeah. I mean, this time there were definitely a couple of heavy songs where I knew I wasn't going to be able to make the tracks any heavier. So I just looked for little melodic details or hooks that I could put in to bring out a different kind of sound here and there. My feeling is, if you try to make the guitars even heavier, it just winds up sounding one-dimensional. So I would look for something else to do.

If James "softens the metal," what does Jeff bring to the band?

Corgan: Jeff is a lot like Jimmy in that he's committed to his instrument at this other crazy level. Jeff practices six hours a day, no joke. I mean, Jeff had his guitar with him on the plane yesterday because he wants to practice on the off days! The last thing I want to do on off days is play guitar, you know what I mean? So Jeff brings a level of technical expertise that I don't have. Plus, he's been here now for 12 years, and he was a fan before he played in the band. So he has this really unique perspective on what he wants to hear from the band, and it's one that we don't have because, you know, we were the guys who rode around in the van. And as much as we like to think we understand other people's perspectives about our music because of the things



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PLAYERS

they say to us, it's not the same as actually having experienced what it's like to stand in a crowd in 1994 and see the band playing like our hair's on fire.

Schroeder: I've been in the band long enough that I've played so many of these songs. But I think when Billy and James play together, it just has that sound. I don't know how to put it into words other than it's that sound that they created together. It's become very identifiable as a Pumpkins-esque thing. When you hear it you just go, "Wow, there it is!" And I love that I can just add my thing over the top of that.

What was everybody's main guitar and amp setup on the record?

Corgan: I mostly played my Reverend signature model. It was really the first time I've had an opportunity to use it in this kind of situation, and I was quite happy and pleased with the sound.

Amp-wise, I used two vintage Laney amps — one is a classic Tony Iommi model from, like, 1970. And I mean it's a vintage one — it's not the reissue that they did. And it's just a beast. It's like the loudest amp you've ever heard in your life. And then the other one is the model that Tony used in the mid '70s that's basically the *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* sound. So I used a combination of those amps at different times to create the "big wall" guitar sound.

On *Shiny and Oh So Bright*, how many guitar tracks are in that "big wall"?

Corgan: If you just look at it from a rhythm perspective, generally it's two.

That's considerably less than it was back in the old days, when an average Pumpkins song could have any number of guitar tracks on it.

Corgan: Yeah. But I mean, probably my

most-listened-to band over the last couple of years is Judas Priest. I've really gone back to that classic cranked-amp approach. With all the Pro Tools and shit that people do these days, I just prefer a sound that's more in the hands than in the stacking.

James and Jeff, what were your setups?

Iha: I just kind of played whatever was around. There was a rack of guitars in the studio, and I'd try out a couple different ones really fast and see what worked. I also brought in a Les Paul Custom. It's a newer one, and it's chambered, which is great — because they're so heavy! Then for amps, I know there was some Friedman in there. But again, it was whatever was around in the studio.

Schroeder: The guitar I used the most was a '72 Les Paul Deluxe Gold Top with mini humbuckers. I also had a



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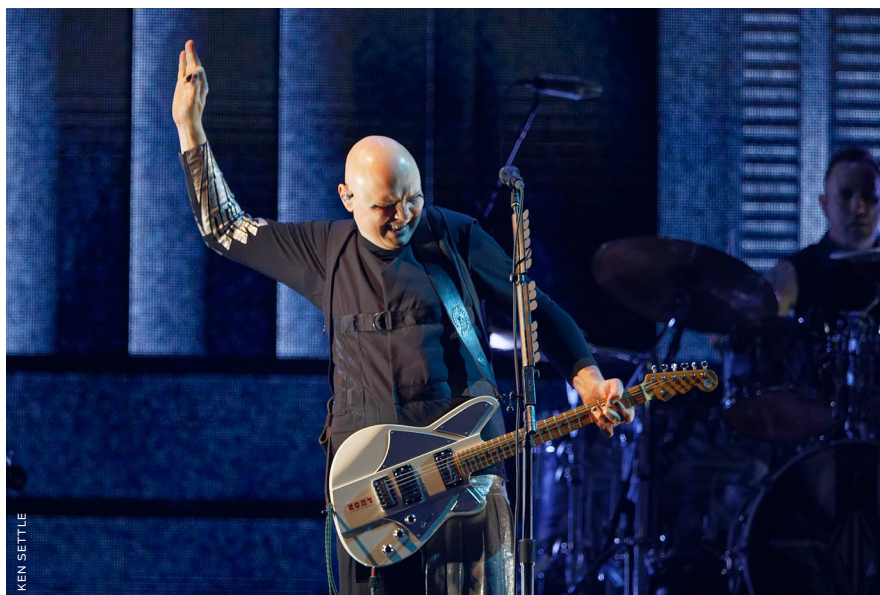


PLAYERS

Copeland, which is a guitar made by a guy out in Austin, and that one has mini humbuckers as well. And my main amp was a Carstens Warm Machine. It's a 50-watt British-style, single-channel, point-to-point boutique type of amp. When I tried it I was like, "Wow, this is one of the best amps I've ever heard in my life!" So I used that for most of the recording.

Billy, earlier this year while the band was in the studio recording the new album, you posted a note on Instagram that said, among other things, "the guitar feels once again like the preferred weapon of choice." Was there a point for you over the past years where it didn't feel that way?

Corgan: I think that feeling was a combination of things. One is that I've played guitar for 36, 37 years now. It's like a long relationship. You respect the relationship but you're not always in love. So there's that. And then secondarily, you know, I wasn't necessarily in a hurry to pick up a guitar when the majority of alternative stations in America wouldn't even play a song if it had a guitar on it. Why would you make new alternative-rock music if no



one's gonna hear it? And I don't buy the quasi-argument of, "Oh, just make your music and do what you believe." It's like, everybody is susceptible to the ways of the world. The Stones made a disco album, you know? Things happen, the world moves on and you find yourself kind of questioning whether the thing that brought you to the dance is

people identify as, you know, in quotations, the "classic Smashing Pumpkins guitar style," I developed that style when I was about 18 years old. So at some point I had to ask myself, Can I evolve on the instrument or am I just repeating myself? And I actually found a lot of inspiration recently by playing acoustic, which brought out a whole

"EVERYBODY IS VERY COGNIZANT OF THE SPECIAL MOMENT THAT'S BEEN CREATED"

— JEFF SCHROEDER

the thing that is also going to drive you out the door.

Another thing is that most of what

new vein of songs and kind of relaunched me as a songwriter into a different place than I'd been in a long time. But finding myself back in the band now, it's like, Okay, are we gonna do this again? And if the answer is yes, it has to come from a place of love or it's just going to sound weak.

All that said, had James and Jimmy not returned to the band, do you think *Shiny and Oh So Bright* would have come out sounding significantly different?

Corgan: Actually, I was done making Smashing Pumpkins albums. When I finished [2014's] *Monuments to an Elegy*, I was pretty sure that was it.

Really?

Corgan: Oh, yeah. I felt I had nothing else to say. I felt the well was dry and I was like, "I don't want to do this anymore in this way." I didn't expect a situation where we would be back together with three-fourths of the OG lineup, and with James back as a contributor. I didn't see that coming.





Clearly, you're now rejuvenated.

Corgan: Yeah. And again, I have this great perspective on what everybody brings to the table. And now that I understand it, I really cherish it and I promote it in a way that maybe I didn't before. Simply put, me, James and Jimmy, and now Jeff for 12 years, we're a deadly unit.

James, in your mind are you back in Smashing Pumpkins for good? Or are you taking a one-day-at-a-time approach?

Iha: I'm back in the band. But I think before all this started, I was thinking more, Let's just see how this goes and take it from there. But you know, it's been great. The shows have been great, and everyone's excited — tired, but excited. Because we're playing pretty long shows! [laughs] But I'm pretty happy with everything.

So what does the future hold for Smashing Pumpkins?

Corgan: I don't know that we're in a place in our lives where we can sit there and make plans for 10 years. I certainly have plans for 10 years, but it doesn't mean we're going to be able to do them, and I'm certainly not going to run my mouth about all of it, because at the end of the day it just comes down to whether all of us are in the same place emotionally.

Schroeder: Right now I think the vibe is the best it's ever been. And I think everybody is very cognizant of the special moment that's been created. So we want to continue down that road. At the same time, as far as what the future holds, I don't think we can give any definite type of answer. But I can say that we're definitely having a great time playing.

Corgan: The music's never been the problem. It's always been more about how we relate to one another. But now we have more perspective on our relationships, and that's the most important thing. So one thing I know is this: Nowadays, if you see us on a stage playing together, it's because we really, really want to be there. ■



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COLLECTION OF FAR-FLUNG
MUSICAL STYLES

BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARINA CHAVEZ

RECORDING ARTISTS tend to get locked in a cycle. An album is followed by a tour, which is succeeded by a break that leads to another stint in the studio. And on and on it goes.

Kurt Vile has found his own way out of that rut. The guitarist and songwriter cut his latest studio album, *Bottle It In* (Matador), at various studios in between road dates with his band, the Violators, and travels with his wife and daughters. During those more than two years on the road, the Philadelphia native also recorded an album of duets with Courtney Barnett (2017's *Lotta Sea Lice*), opened for Neil Young and saw his single "Pretty Pimpin'" (from 2015's *B'lieve I'm Goin Down...*) go to number one on *Billboard's* Adult Alternative chart.

If life has been busy for Vile, it hasn't hampered his productivity. Clocking in at nearly 80 minutes, *Bottle It In* features 13 songs from the road that become journeys unto themselves as he navigates the avenues, back roads and circuitous detours of his musical odyssey. "Touring is a big part of why you end up anywhere in the world," Vile explains. "So it's fun to utilize that moment. You play a gig in a random place where they booked you, and then you could start your adventure from there and travel a little bit."

The guitarist has become something of an indie-rock god in recent years. Following a brief stint in the War on Drugs, which he cofounded in 2005 with Adam Granduciel, Vile went solo in 2008, signed with Matador Records and began releasing a string of ever-better-selling albums. Through discs like 2011's *Smoke Ring for My Halo* and 2013's *Wakin on a Pretty Daze*, he became known for his droll vocal delivery, riff-oriented songwriting, and a musical range that stretches from lo-fi folk to sprawling electric guitar jams.

On *Bottle It In*, Vile's stylistic tour continues. "Loading Zones," the



leadoff single, is a taut rocker about using street smarts to skirt onerous parking laws. “One Trick Ponies” sways with a country rock groove, “Come Again” bounces along on Vile’s circular banjo picking, and “Hysteria” shimmers with a layered acoustic guitar riff that’s ultimately engulfed by acoustic guitar distortion, courtesy of former Sonic Youth member Kim Gordon. In addition, Vile and his band turn in lengthy jams on “Skinny Mini,” “Bassackwards” and the 10-minute, 40-second title cut, exploring the broad expanses of their epic grooves. “I didn’t know ‘Bottle It In’ was going to be that long,” he explains. “It’s sort of like living something rather than having it all planned out.”

Throughout the album, Vile combines acoustic-guitar rhythms and riffs with effects-drenched electric guitar filigree. The sonically rich and occasionally hazy soundscape is a warm, engulfing backdrop for emotionally weighted lyrics about love, paranoia and

his anxiety with the modern world. The guitarist took time out from a recent European excursion to talk with *Guitar Player* about the making of *Bottle It In*, his deep love of acoustic tones and his longing for simpler times

What’s the appeal of mixing studio dates in with your touring schedule?

You know, even if I play just one show and go into the studio, it feels more natural to me.

In what way?

When you play live, it’s the most in tune with the music you can be. When you record while you’re on the road, you can carry that energy into the studio.

Obviously, most artists cut records between tours.

There’s no way I could do that. I do everything all in together. I like to go into the studio even for a day or so, in between things. I think you can get just

as much done that way as you can if you stay in there for two weeks and work on the same song. The more time you have, the more you waste. I just figure if I go in and out of the studio while I’m touring, it makes it more natural.

I imagine that also gives you time to listen to what you’ve done and tweak things if you want.

We would definitely tweak the recordings later on and add some things. But ultimately what I wanted was for it to be as live in the studio as possible — get the basics down and then figure the rest out later, if I had to, if it wasn’t, indeed, already figured out.

Your way of touring and recording makes me think about Jackson Browne’s album *Running on Empty*, which he recorded live, at soundchecks, in hotel rooms and even on the bus while he was on tour.

Wow! I respect Jackson Browne, for



sure. That'd be cool to actually record on the stage at soundcheck. In some ways, when you're traveling, you're more relaxed. Somebody can just put a microphone on you at any point, and you're more comfortable with it. For me, it's a constant battle of trying to make things feel as laid-back as possible, even in the studio for this record. Things like, if you can get away with not wearing headphones, don't wear 'em — sing live while the band's playing. There are all kinds of ways to make it feel more natural.

Todd Rundgren has recorded his vocals from behind the mixing console for years. He's like, "I can do it right from here while listening off the monitors."

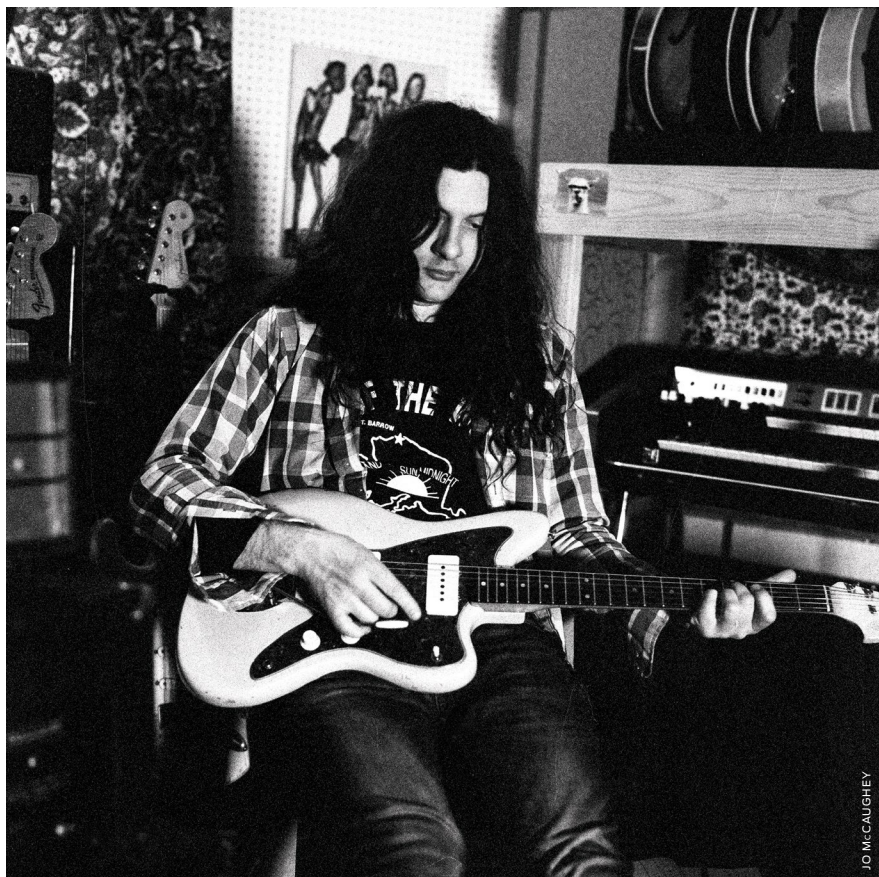
Yeah, I did that for "Bottle It In," while my buddy Stella [Mozgawa], the drummer from Warpaint, was playing drums in the next room. That's what this record's all about, just interacting when I'm with somebody or, when I'm by myself, just getting the part down, like an organic moment captured. That's what I shoot for.

You have your own way of doing things. The leadoff song, "Loading Zone," seems to be about that — about making the system work in your favor. What inspired that tune?

It's about knowing your town like the back of your hand. And I really do things like that in my hometown, where I can pull up to the record store and there's a loading zone across the street, one of many in the city where I know I can just run in, get what I'm looking for and get out before I get a ticket. [laughs] And that's a way of life, in general. It's like getting by on the backstreets. It's like you're just sticking it to the man a little bit — 'cause, obviously, the man's always sticking it to you anyway.

Why did you choose to name this album after "Bottle It In"?

"Bottle It In" is definitely the album's centerpiece. I'm definitely proud of it, and it's like some kind of new territory that I stumbled onto. When I name my albums — like *Smoke Ring for My Halo*



was named for my favorite song on that record. I had a feeling it needed to be highlighted, otherwise it would just be a song passing by. It's an important song.

And you know, if you get back to the heart of the matter with artists you respect, usually their classic albums are named for a song on the album. Like Neil Young: *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, *After the Gold Rush*, *On the Beach*. And those songs are such classics in themselves that you don't forget them, because they're each like a statement on their own. So "Bottle It In" — I just had to roll with it, and I just didn't want the song to go unnoticed.

Your songs are almost inevitably built on catchy riffs that could stand on their own, without vocals. Do you think in terms of riffs when you're writing?

Yeah, I like blues licks and melodic folk-tinged riffs. They've got to be melodic, a little bit pretty, but like with

the blues in there. I like to make them as hypnotic and as melodic as possible. I get lost in most of the riffs that I find myself coming back to.

On a lot of your songs, acoustic guitars provides the structure while heavily effected electric guitar adds sonic interest. Do you prefer one instrument over the other?

Well, if I had to pick a main tool, it would be the acoustic guitar. In fact, certain electric guitars that I fall in love with — and even new electric guitars that I buy — I won't even plug them in for days sometimes after I get them. I'll just sit on the couch and listen to how they sound acoustically and how they feel. I kind of like the idea of sitting on a couch and hearing all the nuances. Acoustically, you can't beat that. But then, in the studio, you can put it through an amp and all these effects — filters, phasers, delay or any kind of



{ KURT VILE }

weirdness. Or just a punchy amp sound. It's just an option to the guitar itself.

What are some of the effect pedals that you used on this album?

I'm not as particular with effects as I used to be, but I tend to just like to put some kind of filter or phaser on there if I can get away with it. One pedal I used was the Moog MIDI MuRF. It's kind of an envelope filter, but a little more than that. And the amps are really important too. These days I'm into these little brown '50s Fender Champs. Just crank those up.

What effect are you using to make that strange vocal-like guitar sound on "Loading Zones"?

It's a Ludwig [Phase II] guitar synth. It's the same one used on "The Diamond Sea," which is one of my favorite Sonic Youth songs.

Do you own that or did you borrow it from Kim Gordon?

No, I'm pretty sure their's got stolen back in the day. I bought one. It wasn't cheap.

What's your main acoustic guitar on this album?

I used these little custom-made 00 Martins that Vintage Instruments in Philadelphia had made. They're based on their favorite vintage guitars of the day, but they're made really well. The first one I had, I've been using since "Wakin on a Pretty Day" [from *Wakin on a Pretty Daze*]. I used it on that song, in fact. It's a Philadelphia Folk Festival 50th Anniversary guitar. And then I have another custom 00 from later.

You have some great electric tones on the record as well, like those solos on "Skinny Mini."

That was the last song I wrote for this album. I was on tour with Courtney Barnett for *Lotta Sea Lice* and I developed a real sound with my pedalboard. I was using the Moog Minifooger Chorus pedal, which I really love, and there's something about that with my most recent white 1966 Fender Jaguar. But I'm also getting some really good sounds out



**"I GET LOST IN
MOST OF THE RIFFS
THAT I FIND MYSELF
COMING BACK TO"**

of just an old green Big Muff and another crazy pedal called the [Wren and Cuff] Box of War. For "Skinny Mini," I played that setup through a 1950s Fender Bassman that we borrowed from a guy. He said it was an original speaker, so be really careful, and we just completely cranked it. So that's basically just a loud 1950s Fender Bassman with a Big Muff.

You seem to have a fondness for the past. The cover photo for *Bottle It In* looks vintage, and you even have ringwear on it. In "Mutinies" you sing, "I think things were way easier with a regular telephone." Other songs describe a fear of flying, and the video for "Loading Zones" is full of old cars. Do you have issues with the modern world?

Yeah, I yearn for simpler times. I'm a victim of my psyche being shocked by a million things at once. I definitely remember, in the old days, we could memorize things, like phone numbers and everything. Now my mind is much more scattered. I always like to be surrounded by vintage gear with multicolored buttons. And I like the way guitars look when they're old and used. When I get a new guitar it feels weird. I almost want to throw it against the wall, just to make it look normal. I like old amps, and I have a lot of old Korg synthesizers from the '70s. They all look so good, and they all sound good. "They don't make 'em like they used to" is certainly true in a lot of ways. I like things to be a little worn. ■

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AXE-MEN

“

I HAD THIS idea for many years, which was to create a show with five crazy guitar players and one backing band,” Steve Vai says. That show, which Vai dubbed Generation Axe, became a reality in 2016. And, true to his word, it features five of the most musically adventurous and technically accomplished players to emerge on the rock and metal landscape over the past 35 years. Rounding out the

lineup alongside Vai is neoclassical six-string legend Yngwie Malmsteen, Extreme guitarist Nuno Bettencourt, Ozzy Osbourne and Black Label Society axe master Zakk Wylde, and — the new kid on the shred block — Animals as Leaders eight-string wizard Tosin Abasi.

Generation Axe is back for 32 shows beginning November 7. For guitar heads, the chance to see not just one but five colossal heavyweights on one bill is

reason enough to nab a ticket to a show. But what makes the concept even more special is the fact that, true to Vai’s original vision, each player performs solo as well as in duos, trios and quartets with their contemporaries. Better still, all five players open and close the set with head-spinningly complex, heavily orchestrated guitar versions of classic rock songs, such as Boston’s “Foreplay” and Deep Purple’s “Highway Star.” Says



PLAYERS

THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES! SHRED SUPERHEROES STEVE VAI, ZAKK WYLDE, YNGWIE MALMSTEEN, NUNO BETTENCOURT AND TOSIN ABASI ARE BACK FOR ANOTHER SUPERCHARGED GENERATION AXE TOUR

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHEY PALMA



Malmsteen, “It’s really cool when we all come out onstage together. It’s like opening up a superhero comic book.”

In advance of the 2018 U.S. run of Generation Axe, Vai, Malmsteen, Wylde, Bettencourt and Abasi got together to discuss the upcoming shows, the best — and most difficult — parts of the set, and what happens when you put “five crazy guitar players” together on one tour bus.

Of course, they also talked about guitar playing — lots and lots of it.

“Nuno said to me one day, ‘If we were getting paid per note, we could all retire halfway through the first week,’” Wylde says a laugh. “‘And buy an island next to Johnny Depp!’”

Steve, this new run of Generation Axe shows follows a successful U.S. jaunt in 2016 and Asia in 2017. When you first

came up with the concept, how did you go about choosing the four other players that would join you onstage?

Steve Vai: I actually started with a list of maybe 40 people, and in all honesty, these four guys were the first four on the list. I was so lucky they all said yes. And I really was hoping they would, because they represent a very diverse group of players who are each completely at the top of his field. So I knew they had the

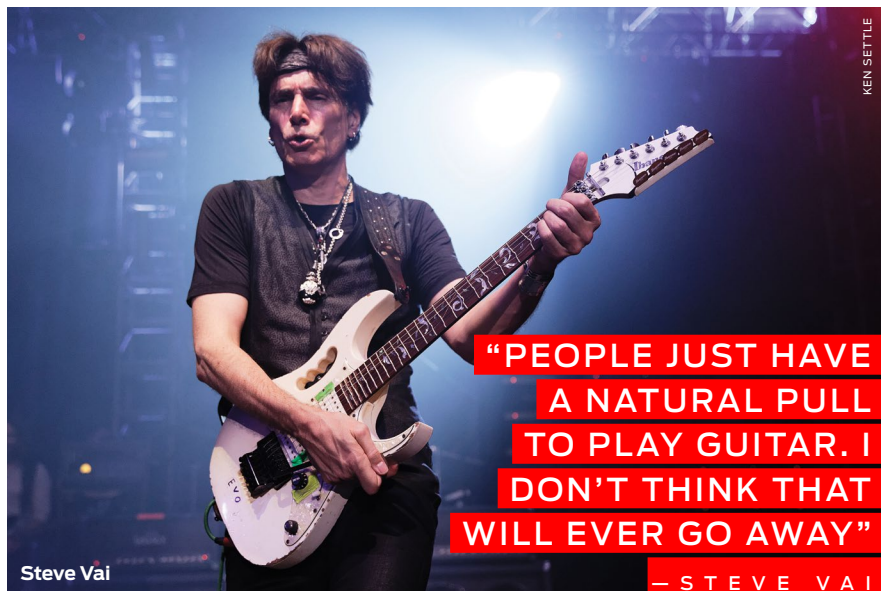


goods to do what was required, because the idea was to create some ensemble pieces of classic rock songs that were very well orchestrated for five guitars, four guitars, sometimes three, sometimes two. I also wanted to give everybody an opportunity to play a little set. So it's an organized kind of show: Tosin does his set, and then Nuno comes out and joins him for a song. Then Nuno does his thing, and Zakk comes out and joins him for a song. Then it's Zakk's turn. And it slowly builds until the end, where we all come out like gangbusters.

What did you guys think when Steve first approached you with his idea of a guitar shredding supergroup?

Nuno Bettencourt: Well I've been approached about these different guitar things in the past, and I think people stopped asking me because I always said no. I just never saw myself in that way. So when Steve reached out to me he said, "Look, I have this format that I think you'd be really interested in, where we do four or five pieces together, and then we each stretch out individually for about 20 minutes." And I thought, Wow, I would go see that. I'm in!

Zakk Wyld: It's a win-win. You get to jam all night and hang out with friends. The only difference between doing this at a keg party in our buddy's living room



Steve Vai

"PEOPLE JUST HAVE A NATURAL PULL TO PLAY GUITAR. I DON'T THINK THAT WILL EVER GO AWAY"

— STEVE VAI

when we were 16 and doing it now is that there's more people watching us... and I'm 51 years old! [laughs]

Yngwie, what do you like about each of the other players?

Yngwie Malmsteen: What I really dig is they're all very different — different sounds, different styles. Steve's Steve, and Zakk is much more bluesy. Nuno is almost funky sometimes. And Tosin is a real interesting guy because he's got a jazz thing going on like nobody's

business. Then I have the classical thing. So it's definitely a wide variety. You could take five other guitar players and it'd be not so big a difference, you know? Like when you see these blues jams and everybody just plays the blues. Whatever. This is a much different experience.

Tosin, as the new guy up there, it must be mind-blowing to share a stage with these four players.

Tosin Abasi: Absolutely. These guys are all immense musicians and guitarists, and they're decades into doing this stuff. And they're all as bold in personality as they are in their music. Having a conversation with Yngwie, Steve, Nuno and Zakk — the amount of musical history, the amount of influence they've had on music, the amount of influence they've had on gear, the stories about their touring experiences... I mean, someone should make a documentary just about the conversations on the bus. Because it's gold.

To that point, you all travel together on the same bus. What's that like?

Bettencourt: I have to admit, when Steve first told us we were all going to be on a bus together, I was like, "Are you sure about that? You really want the tour to last, like, a day or two?" I mean, you've got good people with good hearts but



Tosin Abasi



different politics, different religions. So at first it was kind of hairy. We'd get on the bus after the gig, somebody would say something about the election, and you'd see three guys go to bed. "G'night!" [laughs] But then we started realizing, You know what? This is an opportunity to get together and understand each other. And it became the greatest part of the tour, having the five of us talk before going to bed. It became a brotherhood.

Val: It's not uncommon to be up two, three, four hours at night with everybody on the tour bus, listening to music and hanging out. These guys have had extraordinary lives, and the stories are unbelievable. It's an incredible thing to be a part of.

Wylde: You're hearing everybody's Spinal Tap stories about the music business, everybody's war stories about being on the road, and it's like, "You're making this up, right?" "No, sadly it's all true!" It's just stories where everybody's crying laughing. Steve even said one night, "Man, if I didn't book this tour so

**"SOMEONE
SHOULD MAKE A
DOCUMENTARY
JUST ABOUT THE
CONVERSATIONS
ON THE BUS"**

— TOSIN ABASI

we could all jam together, this part of it alone would have been reason enough to do it."

When it comes to the show itself, is there a particular moment that tends to get the biggest response from the audience?

Bettencourt: I think the greatest response comes when people look up and see all five of us onstage. It's like, "What the fuck am I watching right now?" Because the fans that are coming, they already know us individually. But they haven't seen us together like this.

That's really where it's at.

Val: And then at the end, we've all been doing "Highway Star" together. By that point it's like everybody's gotten the shit kicked out of 'em, and you've thrown every punch you have. The response from the audience there is always nice.

Wylde: I think Steve and Yngwie coming

out and doing "Black Star," that's ridiculous. And Nuno coming out with Tosin and shredding, that's silly as well. The whole thing is amazing. It's like a three-hour show, and for me, when I'm not up there playing, I'm on the side of the stage watching the guys shred. It's just a blast.

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For the songs where the five of you are out there all at once, how do you keep the whole thing so well organized yet make it appear to be so effortless?

Malmsteen: We tend to keep it pretty disciplined... depending on the day! [laughs]

Vai: It's in the orchestration. Everybody's given a part, and they respect that part because they know it sounds great when we play together. So the dishing out of the parts is a relief. It gives space, it gives clarity, and it allows the beauty of these guitars in harmony to really sing. That's the unique thing about the show and the thing we enjoy so much.

**"NO MATTER
WHERE YOU GO
IN THE WORLD,
THE GUITAR IS
KING, MAN"**

— YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

Bettencourt: We have a rule when we're playing that Steve is basically the conductor. When he first put this together, he intricately and masterfully created separate parts for everyone and sent them to us to learn. "These are your parts," he said. "Do not stray from these parts." So when we get up there, we're all in our lanes and it's orchestral, and it sounds really cool.

You don't want it to just devolve into five guys shredding over each other...

Wylde: No, that's what it is! That's all it is. [laughs] You can't help it from turning into that. That's the show!

One of the great things about the Generation Axe setup is that, because you get paired up with one another, you're sometimes forced to play styles that are outside of your wheelhouse. To that end, is there anything you have to do onstage that is particularly challenging or difficult?

Abasi: For me, I think it's anything blues or classic-rock oriented. That's a



language that you need to speak authentically, and language is a hard thing to learn later in life. So when I'm trading blues licks with Nuno or Zack or Yngwie, it's intimidating, but it's a learning experience.

Bettencourt: The way the show is set up, after one guy plays, the next guy comes up and you have to play a song together before he leaves the stage.

And of course, the guy I have to follow is Tosin, so I have to play one of his songs. And I can't even find where the "one" is on his songs! I thought I was into progressive music — I grew up on Yes and Rush and Return to Forever — but man, his shit is, like, multiple time signatures and stuff at the same time. And then Steve has to jump up and do "Black Star" with Yngwie.

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Vai: Some of the lines Yngwie does on that are not really my style. That's okay, though, because I had the opportunity to work on them, and from that I developed some different chops in that area. But it's a challenge, for sure.

Every few years there seems to be chatter about the death of the electric guitar in popular music. But Generation Axe demonstrates not only that the audience for guitar music is big but also that it wants to hear playing that is complex and technically advanced.

Bettencourt: Look, guitar playing was really big for a long time, especially in the '80s. And then it got to a point where I think it became something like the Olympics — it was all about playing fast and outdoing everybody, and songs became less important. It became unattractive. But I think this tour shows that there's an art form there, and there's a way to find a balance where it doesn't have to be just shredding all night.

Vai: The guitar's just a cool instrument. People love the way it sounds when it hits their ears. They love the



Nuno Bettencourt (left), Wylde and Vai

WIN SETTI

vibrations of the strings clanging. And they like to see people who are completely accomplished on the instrument, who own the instrument, who are in touch with their inner creative instincts on the instrument and who are obviously passionate and dedicated to their instrument.

Malmsteen: No matter where you go in the world, the guitar is king, man. There is nothing that comes close.

Vai: People just have a natural pull to play guitar. And in some people, the pull is to play the living shit out of the thing, you know? I don't think that will ever go away. 🎸

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SPACE ODDITY

ACE FREHLEY GETS DOWN TO EARTH ABOUT RIFFS, RECORDING AND HIS IMPROBABLE REUNION WITH GENE SIMMONS ON HIS NEW SOLO ALBUM, *SPACEMAN*

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAY GILBERT



IT'S TAKEN THE better part of 40 years, but Ace Frehley has finally come to terms with his stature as a guitar hero. "People say to me all the time, 'You're the greatest guitar player ever,'" he says

matter of factly. "Or, 'I picked up the guitar because of you.' I get that one a lot. It's weird, because I always looked at guitar playing as my job. Even when Kiss was at its height of popularity, I couldn't take the



acclaim seriously. It made me feel guilty, like I was pulling the wool over people's eyes. I just did what I did, and things worked out." Notable guitarists who have dissected his licks over the years include Dimebag Darrell, Slash, Mike McCready and John 5, to mention a few. When reminded of this, Frehley lets out a laugh. "I guess they just liked good riffs, same as anybody else. You take something like 'Cold Gin,'" he says, referring to his classic Kiss-era tune. "It's a catchy riff in a catchy song. There wasn't a science behind it. I wish there was, then I'd write a lot more of them." Frehley applies his blissfully instinctive approach to riffology throughout his

**"THE PLACEMENT
OF A MIC MAKES
ALL THE
DIFFERENCE IN
HOW A GUITAR
SOUNDS"**

newly released eighth solo album, *Spaceman*, on which the 67-year-old Bronx-born guitarist blitzes his way through a robust collection of gutsy originals, such as "Rockin' with the Boys," "Mission to Mars" and "Pursuit of Rock and Roll." The album's other highlights include a ripping take on Eddie Money's soul-pop gem "I Wanna Go Back," and two stomping tunes Frehley penned with his old Kiss mate Gene Simmons: "Without You I'm Nothing" and "Your Wish Is My Command." Though there was bad blood between the two men for years, they've been on good terms as of late. In addition to making musical contributions, Simmons suggested Frehley name the new album for his former Kiss "Spaceman" persona.

"It was pretty easy working with Gene," Frehley notes. "I called him up and said, 'Do you want to write something for my new album?' And he said, 'Sure.' He came to my house, and we wrote two songs. Gene came up with the basic riffs, and then I wrote the

words and restructured the arrangements. After all these years, things are sort of the same between us."

You left Kiss when the band was still an enormously popular outfit. Any regrets?

No, not at all. Everything got to be too much. I felt like I lost my identity. I had some alcohol and substance abuse problems, and I wasn't playing the guitar anymore. I had to rediscover who I was, and I had to reacquaint myself with the guitar. Once I got my health back, my love affair with the guitar came back hotter than ever.

Is making records as exciting as it was back in the '70s? So much about the music business has changed.

We definitely had the best of it. We made records, and they sold like crazy. Since I started, we went from records to eight-tracks to cassettes to CDs and then DVDs. Now people hear music on the Internet. Yeah, we had it made back then. I just found out that Best Buy doesn't even carry CDs anymore. That surprised me a bit.

What's your process for recording an album? Do you simply collect a batch of songs, or is it a more formal undertaking?

I don't have a formal process for anything. [laughs] I can't force myself to write — I have to be inspired. Gene Simmons used to tell me that he wrote a song a day, but you know, he's a very disciplined guy. I can't do that. I'll play around and see if a riff hits me. If it does, I'll work on it. If it doesn't, I'll wait till the next one comes.

What did you learn about recording guitars from producers Eddie Kramer and Bob Ezrin? Anything you still apply to your own records?

I do everything now at home in my studio in San Diego. I've produced my last three albums in five years, and I couldn't have done it without those guys showing me the ropes. They showed me how to mic guitars and how to use preamps. I put two mics on a cabinet — usually an SM57 and a ribbon mic

— and I blend them. The placement of a mic near a cabinet makes all the difference in how a guitar sounds. A lot of people don't realize that.

In the studio, do you still stack a lot of guitar tracks for your rhythm sound? A lot of guitarists think that fewer guitars makes them stand out more.

Oh, yeah. I stack 'em high. I like layers and layers of Gibsons and Fenders. That's how I get my fat sound. I'll record one track with a Les Paul and then put a Tele on top. Usually I have six guitars on a rhythm track. I also put acoustics behind the electrics. I learned that from Pete Townshend.

He told you how to do that?

No, I can hear it! [laughs] I listened to the records.

Let's talk about some of the new tracks. "Bronx Boy" has a pretty crazy riff. Do you always write riffs first?

It varies. I just play what feels good.

Your solo on "I Wanna Go Back" sounds structured in parts and improvised in others. Do you have a bit of an idea of what you want to play in a solo?

All of my solos are improvised. There isn't one recent solo that I've planned out. I usually have my engineer record half a dozen solos, and then we piece them together. Sometimes I've made demos of solos, but I always wound up changing them to something different. I can't read music, so I just do things as I do them.

What were the main guitars for the album? I assume a generous amount of Les Pauls.

A lot of Les Pauls, a lot of Fenders and a lot of acoustics. Gibson did a '59 Les Paul reissue, and I've been playing that one a lot. Then I've got a bunch of Teles and Strats, and a lot of old Fender tweed amps. I use Marshalls — whatever I have sitting around. I just got a new Marshall at a pawnshop. It's a solid-state, but it sounds great. A lot of people don't like solid-state amps, but this one sounds good to me.



“THERE ISN’T
ONE RECENT
SOLO THAT I’VE
PLANNED OUT”



{ ACE FREHLEY }

Any new effect pedals?

I don't use pedals. I don't like them onstage because I trip over them. If I want some reverb or delay, I add that later. I play pretty much clean. I'll use plug-ins when I record, but that's after the fact.

I recently watched a clip on YouTube of Kiss on *The Tomorrow Show* with Tom Snyder from 1979. You were cracking Tom up, but it looked like Gene was kind of mad at you.

I was kind of loaded for that show. It was live television, so there wasn't much they could do. I felt a little bit of animosity from Gene and Paul [Stanley], but halfway through they realized that they couldn't win, so they joined in with me. That's when they started telling stories about me to Tom. [laughs]

Okay, the question everybody wants to

know is... Will there be another Kiss reunion with the original band?

I don't know. You'll have to ask Gene and Paul about that. I haven't been asked to do anything.

If you were asked, would you be up for reuniting the band?

Yeah, if the price was right. [laughs]

Last question! Is there anything on the guitar you want to do but still haven't?

In guitar design, yeah. I have a couple of new ideas for special-effects guitars. I invented the smoking guitar, the rocket guitar and the light guitar. I have a few other guitar ideas, but I can't disclose what they are.

Not even a little hint?

I can't say anything. I see them in my head, but I need to work on them and make 'em real. ■



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Faux Pedal Steel

How to emulate the sweetly weeping sounds of this signature country-music instrument

BY JESSE GRESS

IN *GUITAR PLAYER*'S July 2018 issue, I wrote a lesson on how to play faux bottleneck slide guitar using a technique highly reliant on controlled whammy-bar manipulation. I'd now like to demonstrate some ways in which you can emulate the sweet sounds of country-style pedal-steel note bends, which often occur with two- and three-note chords. This endeavor is another animal altogether, one that seems to demand a bare-fingers approach coupled with sheer strength.

I discovered this technique recently when I had to learn how to approximate the great Red Rhodes' pedal-steel licks from the Fraternity of Man's 1968 hippie anthem, "Don't Bogart Me," for this year's An Unpredictable Evening with Todd Rundgren tour (coming to a town near you). In this lesson, I'll present examples inspired by this song. A word of caution: Some of these bends may hurt a bit at first, so don't overdo it! Those who are weak of finger are advised to try using lighter gauge strings.

Patience and persistence will pay off and gradually yield surprisingly sweet and satisfying results.

WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN (OR NOT)

A major part of the pedal-steel sound entails precisely bending into (and out of) chord tones, so we'll begin by examining three different kinds of bends.

Ex. 1a features a double-stop bend in which the second and third strings are raised a half step and a whole step,

All examples performed with a swing-eighths feel. $\text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{ } ^{\text{r3}}$

Ex. 1a

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 84$

Esus4/2 E

Ex. 1b

E E
Esus4/2

Ex. 1c

E6 E

Ex. 1d

E E6 E

Ex. 2a

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 84$

E

Ex. 2b

Esus2 E

respectively. We're in the key of E, bending the root and 3rd (E and G#) up to the 2 and 4 (F# and A, respectively), and then releasing the two-string bend back to its point of origin. This creates a momentary Esus4/2 suspension that resolves back to E when the bends are released. **Ex. 1b** makes the same move even more steely by delaying the onset of the double bend by an eighth note, in this case the second note of an eighth-note triplet. This important double-stop bending technique — which we'll be seeing a lot more of — allows you to

briefly hear the E dyad (E and G#) before the bend up to Esus4/2, which may also be thought of as F#m over E. **Ex. 1c** illustrates an oblique bend (where two notes are played, but only one is bent) with a 5-to-6 bend (B-to-C#) played below a stationary E root — a move that could also be construed as an oblique bend into a partial A chord — before being released to B, creating the sound of an E6 chord moving to E. **Ex. 1d** applies the same rhythmic variant from **Ex. 1b** for extra steeliness.

In all four previous examples, we've

been bending away from the tonic E chord before releasing back to it. In **Examples 2a** and **2b**'s oblique bends, we're bending into the E chord, first using an F#-to-G# grace-note bend to form an E triad, and again with the delayed eighth-note triplet feel creating a momentary suspension. Both bends are played below a stationary root over 5 (E over B).

SET-UP AND APPLICATION

Before we get steely with a phrase inspired by the "Don't Bogart Me" intro,

Ex. 3a

E F#m G#m Asus4/2 Asus4/2 Bsus4/2 Bsus4/2 E A B E

♩ = ca. 84

Ex. 3b

E F#m G#m Asus4/2 A Asus4/2

♩ = ca. 84

fingerstyle

p m i 3 p m i 3 p m i

Bsus4/2 Bsus4/2 B B E A B Esus2

$\text{J} = \text{ca.}84$

T
A
B

♩ = ca.84

T
A
B

Ex. 6a

♩ = ca. 84

E E $\flat$ D A

T
A
B

Ex. 6b

♩ = ca. 84

E A B E

T
A
B

let's explore the lay of the land by mapping it out first, without bends. **Ex. 3a** shows the three-beat E-F $\sharp$ -m-G $\sharp$ m pickup, which utilizes a I-ii-iii diatonic-triads approach to the IV chord, A, in bar 2 (actually bar 1 of the four-bar intro). Here, a grace-note hammered double-stop and ensuing triplet eighths on the B and G strings form an Asus4/2-A suspension and resolution, which are subsequently transposed up a whole step to cover the similar Bsus4/2-B V-chord moves in bar 3. Bar 4 resolves to two beats of a 12th-position E triad, followed by the IV and V chords on beats three and four, before breaking on E on the downbeat of bar 4.

Ex. 3b transforms the same pickup and four-bar intro figure into a faux-pedal-steel fest. The E-F $\sharp$ -m-G $\sharp$ m pickup is played as three staccato accents, each preceded by its lowest note — the 5 of

each chord — on the first three shuffled eighth-note upbeats. This leads into a double-stop bend on the downbeat of bar 2 — the same one from Ex. 1a, albeit transposed up a fourth to cover A, the IV chord — followed by the same A-Asus4/2 bend played during the last two triplet eighths in beat two before releasing back to A on beat three. In bar 3, the same opening bend is shifted up a whole step and two frets and rephrased with a bend-release-bend move, generated from a single pick attack and played on the first two notes of a quarter-note triplet.

A two-note pickup leads into a position shift to E, using the oblique bend from Ex. 2a, which is held for the first triplet eighth of beat two and then released, via a picked grace note and subsequent pull-off to E during the remaining two triplet eighths. We'll be seeing more of

this move in later examples. A pair of parallel fourths outline A and B on beats three and four (note the grace-note finger slide on the latter) before we conclude with a cut-off version of the oblique-bend variant from Ex. 2b. Be sure to use the left- and right-hand fingerings indicated.

ALTERNATIVE FACTS

The pickup and four-bar figure shown in **Ex. 4** can serve as an alternative intro, or as the second half of an eight-bar chorus. The pickup bar commences on beat two with the obliquely bent E triad from Ex. 2b, followed by the same move played in descending half steps, from E $\flat$ to D, on the remaining two beats. (Tip: Use the same style of fingerpicking notated in Ex. 3b.) The bent D triad on beat four is reprised, held and released as Asus4-D-Asus4 when we cross into bar 2, until it



Ex. 7

♩ = ca. 84 (E) A

N.C. 8va-

Ex. 8

♩ = ca. 84 E A B7 E

Ex. 8b E A B7 E

resolves to A at the tail end of beat two and for most of the next two beats. The pickup into bar 3 features a fingerpicked banjo-style roll that arpeggiates a Bsus4 chord before we pull off the top note a half step, to imply a resolution to B on the downbeat, and add a quarter-note triplet of variously hammered single-note suspensions to complete the measure. Ex. 2a's bent E triad makes another appearance on the downbeat of

bar 4, followed by the oblique bend from Ex. 1c. This is sustained once again, until its picked grace-note release and subsequent pull-off in the middle of the quarter-note triplet that encompasses beats three and four. It then concludes with an oblique double-stop hammer-on that nails the I chord.

Ex. 5 recasts Ex. 4's chromatic intro pickup as a trio of descending oblique bends derived from Ex. 1d. The IV-,

V- and I-chord licks in bars 2, 3 and 4 use the same rhythmic phrasing as the first two beats in bar 1 of Ex. 4, applied to oblique bends derived from the bottom two notes of Ex. 2b, transferred to the top two strings. The second half of each bar features the obliquely bent E triad from Ex. 2b applied to the A, B and E chords. Examples 5 and 4 can be combined in succession (in that order) to craft an eight-bar solo.

For audio of this lesson, go to
guitarplayer.com/technique

BUILD A CHORUS

The pickup in bar 1 of **Ex. 6a** mimics the song's chorus vocal phrasing by converting the moves from Ex. 4's pickup to a quarter note on beat two, followed by a dragged quarter-note triplet, all performed using grace-note bends. The obliquely bent D triad repeats in the next measure (bar 1 of the eight-bar chorus) and is then lazily released to sound a brief Asus4 before resolving to a pair of A triads. You can construct an entire chorus using previous examples as follows: Play Ex. 6a; play bars 3 and 4 from Ex. 5; repeat Ex. 6a; and play bar 2 of Ex. 6a transposed up a whole step (two frets lower). Cap it off by dropping down to second position and playing the stretchy two-bar lick in **Ex. 6b**, which features yet another variation of the held oblique bend, picked grace-note release and single-note pull-off found in several previous examples.

BUILD A SOLO

Ex. 7 paraphrases the first half of Rhodes' solo. The pickup bar transposes the double-stopped bend from Ex. 1b up a fifth and seven frets, then drops it two consecutive half steps and frets. Bar 2 (actually bar 1 of the eight-bar solo) is identical to bar 2 of Ex. 3b. The chromatic double bends in bar 3 begin a whole step higher than the pickup and target another picked grace-note release on beat three, before anticipating the E chord in bar 4 with the same double bend (plus release) applied to a partial E chord on the top two strings (G# over E). Move the same shape down two frets, bend both notes up a whole step (ouch!) and partially release them by a half step before targeting the bend's point of origin on the downbeat of bar 5. Fill the rest of that measure and the remaining four bars of the form with any combination of Ex. 3b and Ex. 4, and you're good to go.

BRING IT ON HOME

The short ending lick shown in **Ex. 8a** requires some tricky sleight of hand that is well worth the effort. Slide into the opening G# note, let it ring beneath the

E added on beat two, bend the G# up a half step to A and hold it while adding the D# note on beat four. Then, simultaneously release the bent A back to G# while sliding D# up to E. Even more painful is the version that's shown in **Ex. 8b**, which starts the same as Ex. 8a, but ends with a simultaneous

bend from D# to E and release from A to G#. Yow! That's some contrary motion!

So there you have it. Apply these examples to your own cover version of "Don't Bogart Me" and you're sure to have a real crowd pleaser in your set! (Lyric suggestion: Try substituting *vape* for *joint*.) ■

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{ STYLE }



Great Gigs in the Sky

10 Tips to Help You Land — and Keep — More Gigs

BY VINNIE DEMASI

THIS SUMMER'S TOUR season is now in the rearview mirror, and it's been my busiest ever. Most of my shows have been with White Wedding, a costumed 1980s tribute band, of which I'm a regular member. But on numerous occasions, I've been fortunate enough to receive offers to fill in with other bands, allowing me to earn more while doing a job that I love.

To get and maintain gigs, you have to spend countless hours woodshedding and honing your chops in the practice room. But effective people skills and a

team-player attitude are equally as vital. Although there is no substitute for mastery of the material, being part of a successful working band — whether as a regular member or an occasional sub — requires more than just hitting the right notes. It takes a positive and caring attitude toward the venues, your performances and your bandmates. I've compiled this list of 10 often overlooked things you can do to make every show better, increase your value as a player and, hopefully, help you score more great gigs.

01. Dress to Impress

HAVING WORKED WITH various tribute bands, I can say from personal experience that dressing the part elicits a much more favorable crowd response. If you're not sure of the proper attire for a gig, don't guess and underdress. Instead, consult the bandleader. Also, don't outfit yourself half-heartedly. If the gig calls for a black tux, wear the nicest black tux you own. Black jeans, a black jacket and black sneakers don't cut it.

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02. Avoid the “Terrible Too”s

DON'T PLAY TOO fast, too loudly or too much. In a live performance, it's all too easy for our adrenaline to get the best of us and cause tempos to accelerate. Pay extra attention and follow the tempo that's given. If you're starting a song, give yourself a second to relax, take a deep breath and sing the chorus hook in your head. Then come in at the correct tempo.

When it comes to decibel-related matters, guitarists have a reputation for turning things up to 11. There's no denying that vintage and vintage-style Fender and Marshall amps sound sweet when they're cranked, but excessive stage volume makes things difficult for the sound technician and the other musicians around you. In an ensemble, what you're playing usually represents only 10 to 25 percent of what's going on musically at any time, so a small combo amp at medium volume is more than adequate if you're being miked through a P.A.

Also, don't overlay and step on the other instruments and performers, especially the singer. Like it or not, most people focus on the vocals. If you're playing a gratuitous fill while the vocalist is singing, you're essentially interrupting and speaking over him or her with your guitar.

03. Sweat the Small Stuff

DETAILS MATTER, AND taking care of little things before a performance helps avoid major train wrecks later on. Pack extra strings, picks, batteries and cables, as well as a working tuner. I always bring a spare axe and an Orange Micro Terror amp as backups, in case something on my rig goes catawampus. I also make sure my strap is secure, my instrument cable is locked through my strap, and my amp

and stomptbox settings are dialed in. In addition, I have a numbered and annotated set list, making it less likely I'll inadvertently skip a song, miss a patch change, or forget to capo or retune when it's needed.

If possible, pack some duct tape, power strips, adaptors, extra mics and their associated cables, and even ibuprofen! Someone else will invariably forget or need something, and not only will you be the hero but you'll be helping your band's cause.



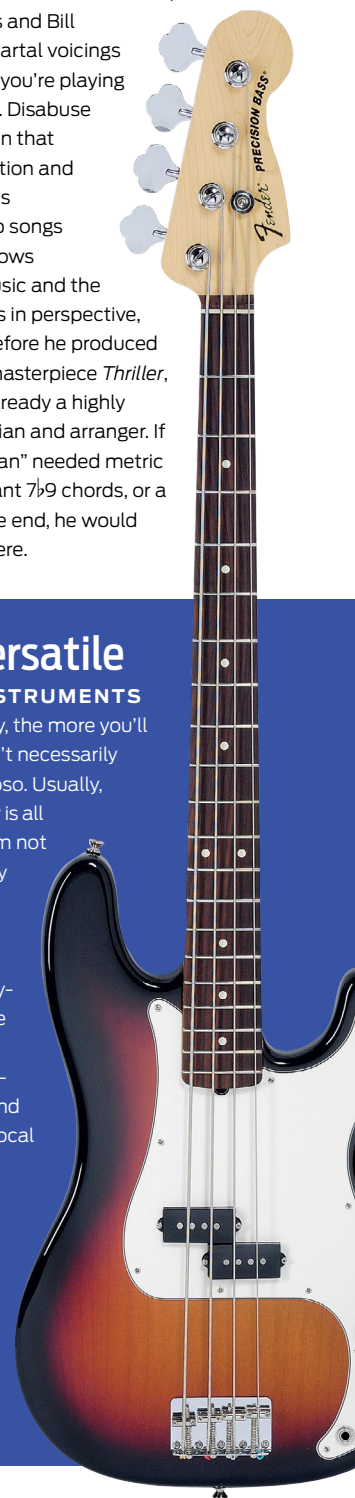
04. Don't Disrespect the Music

SURE, SUPER-LOCRIAN modes, tritone substitutions and Bill Evans—approved quartal voicings are hip — but only if you're playing improvisational jazz. Disabuse yourself of the notion that radical reharmonization and technical gymnastics somehow make pop songs better. It actually shows disregard for the music and the audience. To put this in perspective, keep in mind that before he produced Michael Jackson's masterpiece *Thriller*, Quincy Jones was already a highly regarded jazz musician and arranger. If he thought “Billie Jean” needed metric modulation, dominant 7♭9 chords, or a drum cadenza at the end, he would have put them in there.

05. Be Versatile

THE MORE INSTRUMENTS

and styles you play, the more you'll work. And you don't necessarily need to be a virtuoso. Usually, tasteful proficiency is all that's required. I am not Geddy Lee, Tommy Lee or Albert Lee, but I have gotten gigs playing bass, drums and country-flavored fingerstyle guitar by providing simple, solid, song-serving support. And despite having a vocal range somewhere between Kermit the Frog and the Violent Femmes' Gordon Gano, I can harmonize and have a repertoire of tunes to sing lead on, if need be.





06. See Things from the Venue's Perspective

EVEN THE MOST storied concert venues like the Whisky a Go Go, the Stone Pony and Madison Square Garden are businesses. Show respect to the venues in which you play by not littering, causing damage or rearranging the stage without asking. If someone associated with the establishment asks you to load in through a back door, move equipment out of a hall, refrain from drinking and smoking in the green room, or simply turn down, don't give them attitude. These requests are often driven by insurance liability concerns and/or the dozens of health department and city regulations that the venue must obey to avoid fines. It's also important to start and end your set on time. The venue's employees are at work and, like most folks, just want to go home when their shift is over.

07. Keep It in Line When You're Online

SOCIAL MEDIA SITES are great vehicles for promoting your music but should never be used for negative missives about other bands, clubs, gear manufacturers or musical styles. Online, it's easy to get lulled into the false sense that we're talking only to our friends, but even offhand comments made in jest exist in cyberspace indefinitely. You may find yourself in the awkward position of working with musicians, companies or club owners you once mindlessly dissed, or even without such an opportunity due to your unruly online behavior. So stay professional, and if you do have a bad experience with a person or club, try to work things out directly instead of firing off an angry electronic dispatch in the heat of the moment.

10. Be Agreeable

I WAS RECENTLY asked to help my friend Phil Smith, who had broken his finger and needed a guitarist to cover while he sang. I diligently learned all the licks from the songs on his set list. When I got to the gig, however,

he said he thought his hand had healed enough to play most of the leads and asked me if I could just hold down the rhythm instead. Rather than reacting with a bruised ego and taking it personally, I understood that he was simply trying to nurse himself back to

full strength while having a backup (me) in case he needed an assist. I was happy to oblige and help in any way he felt I was most needed. In the end, the audience had a blast, the venue was happy, and I still got paid to do what I love — play music.



08. Never Punish an Audience or Client

SOMETIMES THINGS GO wrong. Monitor mixes may be inadequate, house amps might be on their last legs, and the lighting may make the stage seem like the darkest depths of Mordor. Perhaps the promoter didn't do his or her job and the house is only a quarter full. Maybe a bandmate has been difficult and argumentative for seemingly no reason. While all these situations are frustrating, they aren't the fault of the people you're playing for. Don't punish those who hired you and/or came to see you by being surly, disrespectful, apathetic or otherwise affected onstage. The audience deserves your best effort, no matter what challenging circumstances you may be dealing with.

09. See Things from the Bandleader's Perspective

HEAVY IS THE head that wears the crown, and if you've never been in charge, you can't possibly imagine how much responsibility a bandleader carries, how much of their own money they expend and how many moving parts they MacGyver into making gigs happen. Before you've played a single note, they've likely spent countless hours booking, promoting, staffing, insuring and equipping a gig. As the person directly responsible for the success of a performance, they carry tremendous weight on their shoulders, especially for high-stakes events such as weddings. (Can you imagine how irate you'd be if the band tanked your first dance?) Make their life easier by offering to help set up, break down, print set lists, send out emails, find reliable subs or scout information about venue load-in and parking. Don't complain about insignificant matters like delayed start times, noncomplimentary food and beverage, or cramped dressing rooms. These are often beyond a bandleader's control.

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RUDY CAN'T FAIL

AS RUDY'S MUSIC CELEBRATES ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY,
OWNER RUDY PENSA REMAINS THE LAST MAN STANDING
FROM MANHATTAN'S LEGENDARY GUITAR ROW

BY CHRIS GILL

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF RUDY PENSA

THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY of Rudy's Music is a milestone in and of itself. But what truly makes this particular anniversary a cause for both celebration and contemplation is the store's survival in the increasingly difficult retail environment of New York City. Manhattan's illustrious guitar shops have quietly vanished in recent years. Manny's, on 48th Street, went out of business in 2009, a few years before all of the other stores vanished from the legendary Music Row that was once the heart of the city's musical community. When Matt Umanov Guitars in Greenwich Village closed its doors last December, Rudy's became the city's

sole remaining independent guitar store that can claim a connection to the instrument's late-'70s glory days.

"I really miss 48th Street," says Rudy Pensia, the owner of Rudy's Music. "I can't even go near that area anymore, because it makes me cry. I'm disappointed that the city of New York didn't protect that street. A big piece of history was lost. Everybody came to 48th Street during the '60s: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who, Jimi Hendrix — you name it. The street was famous for music stores since the '20s, but no one saw the potential of keeping the history alive."

Pensia closed his fabled 48th Street

store in 2015, a decision motivated by excessive rents as well as decreased foot traffic caused by the closures of music stores surrounding him. However, his store in Manhattan's SoHo district, which opened in December 2009, became a destination in its own right, thanks to its incredible selection of fine vintage, custom and rare instruments, which are displayed in a gorgeous, comfortable and welcoming environment. Like the Rudy's Music that once stood on 48th Street, the SoHo shop is a gathering place for all fans of the guitar, where famous rock stars seeking a rare vintage axe rub shoulders with young kids buying their first instruments.



Pensa (center) with Steve Miller (left) and Luke Janklow (right)



Pensa with customers Mark Knopfler (far left) and Dave Grohl (center right). The headstock of a Rudy's 40th anniversary model

Defying the grim nature of today's retail environment, Rudy's Music has been managed to grow and expand. Earlier this year, a new Rudy's location opened in Scarsdale, New York, a suburban town some 25 miles north of SoHo. In addition to offering a similar selection of instruments, the Scarsdale store will host special events, showcases and clinics.

"We're going to do things, like a flamenco guitar night where we serve Spanish wines from the wine store next to us," Pensa says. "When I moved to SoHo from midtown, a lot of my customers couldn't make it to the store anymore. People who used to drop into the midtown location at lunch could no longer take the subway or a cab to my SoHo shop because it took too long to get there. Now they all live in Greenwich, Armonk, Larchmont, and they all come to the Scarsdale store. My old customers really love the new location."

Another significant factor behind Pensa's success is that, in addition to selling fine guitars, he makes them. In 1982, he built several R Custom guitars that he sold at his 48th Street store,

and in 1985 he collaborated with his employee John Suhr on their own line of guitars. That same year, Dire Straits guitarist Mark Knopfler and Pensa worked out the details of a custom MK model that became Knopfler's main guitar for his group's massive 1985-'86 tour in support of their

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LOOKING TO SELL
CUSTOMERS JUST
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BUT RATHER
ONE THAT
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best-selling *Brothers in Arms* album.

"Mark thanked us in the credits on the album, which gave us a big boost in business," Pensa says. "We started making guitars for him around that time, and when he went to number one, he was playing my guitars. It was a big compliment, and it helped make

our guitars an instant success."

Dozens of notable guitarists have owned and played Pensa Custom Guitars over the years, including Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton, Lenny Kravitz, Lou Reed and Pat Thrall. Today, Pensa Custom offers a wide variety of models, including the Mark Knopfler MK-I, MK-II, MKD, MK Jazz, MK-80 and MK-90 models; T Thinline, 62 and RJR guitars; and the J-4 and J-5 basses. In celebration of the store's 40th anniversary, Pensa Custom is making a limited run of very special "Rudy's" models.

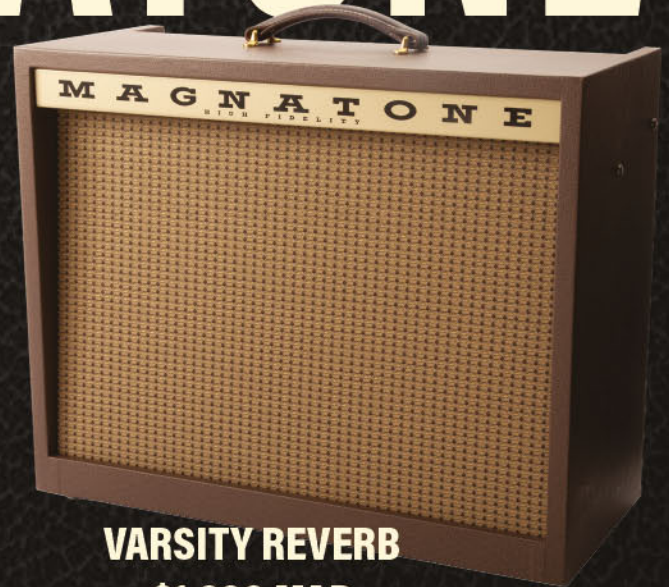
"This is the masterpiece," Pensa says. "I had an idea that we should change the Pensa name on the headstock to Rudy's, only for the 40th anniversary models. The guitars still have the Pensa name, but it's on the back of the headstock instead of the front. It's a one-time-only thing, as it's to celebrate the store's 40th anniversary going back to 1978 and not the anniversary of Pensa Custom Guitars, which started in 1985.

"I decided that we should find the most ridiculous, high-quality pieces of wood available," Pensa continues. "Initially, I wanted to make only

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20 guitars, but we sold 12 almost immediately, so I increased the total to 25. Makoto, the number-one guy at my wood supplier, asked me if I wanted mahogany. I told him that I wanted something really beautiful, with a lot of grain, at least for the top. The back could still be mahogany or korina. After a month, Makoto found 10 pieces of ziricote, which is a very rare rosewood that comes from southern Mexico. That was perfect. We also found some Macassar ebony and a few other woods. All of the wood that we got to build these guitars is ridiculous.”

The Rudy’s 40th Anniversary guitars are designed to make exquisite wood the focal point. The body and neck are fully bound, but the fingerboard is completely free of inlays to keep the design simple and elegant while highlighting the beautiful figuring and grain of the Macassar ebony. Features include a semihollow design with a single f-hole on the bass bout, a 25.5-inch scale length, 22 frets and gold-plated brass hardware, including the tremolo bridge. Three different pickup configurations are offered: three single-coils, two P-90s or two humbuckers.

Martin and Fender are also building special limited-edition models in celebration of the store’s 40th anniversary. Martin is creating a custom OM-style steel-string flattop acoustic in a limited run of only 15 guitars, featuring woods hand-selected by Pensa himself and interior labels signed by Pensa and Martin CEO Chris Martin. Fender is making four different Rudy’s Music 40th Anniversary guitars: a 1962 Telecaster, 1962 Stratocaster, 1962 Jazz Bass and 1958 Precision Bass.

“My all-time favorite Fenders are the models they made in 1962,” Pensa explains. “I think they’re really beautiful, and they have the right features that players really love. The reason why the Precision Bass is based on a 1958 model and not a 1962 is because I have always adored the P-Bass that Nokie Edwards played with the Ventures on the band’s first two albums. When I was growing up, I used to spend hours looking at that bass on their album covers, and dream.”

The fact that two of the biggest guitar companies in the world are paying tribute to the 40th anniversary of Rudy’s Music is a testament to just how important the store has been for the guitar industry over the years. Pensa plans on keeping his shop a vital part of the worldwide guitar community by



“IT WAS THE EPIPHONE CASINO JOHN PLAYED THE LAST TIME ALL THE BEATLES PLAYED TOGETHER”

providing visitors with an experience they can’t get anywhere else, one that will keep customers returning to Rudy’s.

“I’ve invited companies to send representatives to the SoHo store,” he explains. “I’m providing them with free space where they can show customers special guitars, allow them to select woods for custom guitars or just talk with someone from the company about how their guitars are made. If they want to order a custom guitar directly from the company, this will allow them to do just that. We’re bringing the guitar companies directly to the customers. Not everybody has the chance to go to the

Martin, Taylor or Fender factories, but more than 50 million people from all over the world visit New York every year. If they play guitar, I want them to come to Rudy’s Music and either find the guitar of their dreams or have it made. I already have five companies onboard, but I hope to have 15 to 17 by the beginning of 2019.”

As a collector who owns one of the world’s finest collections of D’Angelico, D’Aquisto and Monteleone archtop guitars, Pensa has seen many dream guitars pass through his shop. However, the most memorable guitar that truly blew him away was an instrument that was in the shop for only about a day.

“Sean Lennon brought his dad’s Epiphone Casino here in 1990,” Pensa fondly recalls. “I can remember the year very well, because Sean was only five when his father was killed on December 8, 1980 — which I’ll never forget, because December 8 is my mom’s birthday — and he was 15 when he came into the shop. Sean asked me if I could clean and restring a guitar, and when he opened the case, I almost died. It was the Casino that John played the last time all of the Beatles played together. I had to have a photo taken of me holding the guitar. It was by far the most significant guitar I’ve ever held in my hands. My only regret is that I forgot to keep the strings, as John was the last person to touch them.”

Pensa feels that his passion for the guitar has been key to the store’s 40 years of survival. “We’ve always tried to find the right guitar for the right person,” he says. “I’m not looking to sell customers any guitar but rather one that truly works for them. I always tell my salespeople to make sure that the customers have an experience. You have to be extremely nice, and you have to be extremely knowledgeable. But most importantly, you have to love what you do. If you don’t love guitars, I don’t want you to work here. I have a true passion for guitars, and people sense that. When you sense that, it makes the experience more special and meaningful, and that’s something you can’t get when you order a guitar online.” ■

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GEAR



Boss

GT-1000 GUITAR EFFECTS PROCESSOR

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

CALLING THE BOSS GT-1000 a guitar effects processor is like calling Amazon an online shopping site. While the description is technically accurate, it doesn't really tell the whole story. Sure, the new Boss unit contains a selection of overdrives, distortions, delays, modulators and reverbs, as well as specialty effects like Slicer, Slow Gear and others, but it does so much more. The GT-1000 aims to provide an all-in-one solution for getting great sound on the fly. To that end, it also offers an array of guitar amp models and configuration possibilities that take into account the diverse needs of modern guitarists.

There's much to love in the GT-1000. Its models sound and feel great, thanks to Boss's new AIRD (Augmented Impulse Response Dynamics) technology, which is supported by 32-bit AD/DA, 32-bit floating-point processing and a 96 kHz sampling rate. AIRD is much more than a marketing acronym, as I found the amps and effects responded to picking dynamics and guitar volume

adjustments as smoothly as their analog counterparts. I could dial in fully believable sounds to cover a wide range of needs, including country clean, blues breakup, rock raunch, fusion finesse and monstrous metal.

Boss has obviously put some thought into the GT-1000's potential applications. Its output section let me modify the patches for use through various amps, like a 1967 Fender Bandmaster with a 1x12 cabinet or a Supro Comet combo with one 10-inch speaker, or go directly into Ableton Live via USB. You can also adjust the GT-1000 to sound optimal through an amp's effect return, a power amp driving guitar speakers, a full-range monitoring system and other configurations.

The unit's routing system lets you arrange numerous rigs in various series and parallel options, with mono and stereo signal paths divided and mixed at multiple points. In addition, you can send different rigs to the main and sub outputs and optimize the sound for each destination. For example, you can send just the effects to a guitar amp input and give a direct feed with amp modeling to the house P.A. The outputs include independent ground-lift functions, making it easy to deal with hum issues introduced by differing destinations.

The GT-1000's hefty DSP makes patch switching ultra-fast and allows delay spillover. What's more, the two effects loops



let me switch a Fairfield Circuitry Unpleasant Surprise fuzz and an EarthQuaker Devices Spires Double Fuzz into the signal path at will. (Even though the GT-1000 offers Muff, Fuzz Face and Octave Fuzz pedals, you can't have too much fuzz!)

By default, the main footswitches are assigned to select patches, patch banks and three control assignments, but you can reassign them to control other functions, including tap tempo, parameter adjustment and more, in either latching or momentary modes. The GT-1000's Assign Matrix also makes it possible to allocate different colors to the status LEDs above the switches.

On the minus side, the GT-1000's panel interface is difficult to navigate. The company states, "In making sure that you never run out of DSP, Boss has opted to not allow you to add or delete effects blocks. All the available blocks are visible at all times." Unfortunately, the result is that the small size of the blocks makes them difficult to read, and much extra scrolling is required. And since you can't add, say, a third distortion block, you can't stack a treble booster and an overdrive while still having a fuzz. (Boss states, "Block categories are pre-defined so that the user never experiences an out of 'DSP/ Memory' message. The benefit of this approach is everything is visible, always available, and you

have instant switch time. The negative is some limitations. For example, you can't run four amp tones at the same time because it is predefined to having only two amp tones possible.")

Navigation gets easier when using the Boss Tone Studio app on a smartphone or tablet to edit the GT-1000 through Bluetooth. The app GUI is much easier to read and work with, and even makes it possible to record a loop in the GT's looper and adjust tones from the audience side while roaming the venue.

GT-1000 has too many features to cover here, and apparently too many to cover adequately in the manual, which is underwritten and hard to understand. Getting many of the features to work required repeated emails and calls to Boss, who were very helpful.

Once the GT-1000 was up and running, it became obvious that it could be the answer to many guitarists' prayers. In this era of fly dates and baggage charges, the fact that its low-profile footswitches reduce size and weight, while maintaining the bulletproof quality for which Boss is famous, is a major plus. And let's not forget that feel and sound. With AIRD, Boss brings a new level of realism and musical response to digital signal processing, one that promises authentic tonal dynamics and consistently great sound from one gig to the next. ■

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GT-1000

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PRICE \$999 street

TOTAL EFFECTS 110+

EFFECTS TYPES Distortion, dynamics, modulation, EQ, delay, reverb, filter, wah, volume/pan and pitch; also includes Boss MDP effects and algorithms ported from the DD-500, MDS-500 and RV-500 pedals

ONBOARD LOOPER Yes

ONBOARD TUNER Yes

INPUTS 1/4" mono, 1/4" effects return (x2), 3 x 1/4" (control/expression, amp control)

OUTPUTS 1/4" main outputs (L/R), XLR sub outputs (L/R) with independent AIRD output select settings, 1/4" headphones out, 1/4" effect send (x2) MIDI In, Out/Thru

USB Type B

WEIGHT 7.93 lbs

KUDOS Wonderful-sounding and great-feeling effects and amps, extensive configuration possibilities, compact size

CONCERNS Confusing and incomplete manual, crowded effects chain interface

The GT-1000's Assign Matrix lets you allocate different colors to the status LEDs





Vox

AC30S1

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

THE LEGENDARY VOX AC30 has evolved through several incarnations since its introduction in 1959. The new AC30S1 is the latest, an offshore rendition intended to deliver the essence of this timeless tone machine at a price that should be appealingly accessible to most working musicians and weekend warriors. It's more an homage to the image and sound of the early '60s AC30 than a period-correct re-creation. It features just one simple channel with gain, bass and treble controls in a portable 1x12 combo that includes reverb, an effect loop and a master volume control.

Vox bills the amp's single channel as being derived from the classic Top Boost preamp, considered the apex of AC30 tone for most guitarists. But it's worth noting that the traditional Top Boost circuit requires one and a half dual-triode 12AX7 tubes to do its thing, plus another full 12AX7 for the phase inverter. This amp carries only two 12AX7s in total, making it half a tube short. To that end, the designers tell us they have reconfigured the Top Boost sound into a more efficient circuit, which also has the bonus of being

more pedal friendly. The reverb is a digital emulation of a spring-type effect, and the effects loop is solid-state.

An AC30 just wouldn't be an AC30 without four EL84 output tubes (but, hey, fun fact: the very first AC30s of early 1959 used two larger EL34 output tubes). The AC30S1 follows suit with a quartet of these archetypally British bottles in its 30-watt output stage. Power is delivered to a single 12-inch Celestion VX12 speaker, a 16Ω driver that the maker tells us was specially voiced for this amp.

The plywood cab is mostly sealed at the back, except for a steel-mesh grille covering about 1/5th of the panel. The amp is dressed in the traditional black vinyl, with a copper diamond grille cloth and gold piping and logo. It weighs 54 pounds, which is less than the traditional AC30 2x12 combos of yore. A probe inside the U-shaped folded-steel chassis reveals standard

consumer-grade construction rendered across three printed circuit boards, with preamp and output tube sockets soldered directly to them. It's worth noting that you need to remove seven wood screws and four bolts to get at the tubes when it comes time to change them, plus a further 10 machine screws if the internal HT fuse needs to be replaced. But likely these are tasks for your authorized repairman.

Tested with a very Les Paul–like Collings City Limits with humbuckers and a Fender Telecaster, the AC30S1 displayed an admirable semblance of that sweetly chiming jangle that players love in an AC30 played clean, with the glassy ring and cutting power that are characteristic of this circuit rammed through EL84s. Pushing it into mild overdrive induced a textured crunch with some granular sizzle in the highs and upper mids. Cranked up for hairy all-out distortion (the master volume helps a lot here), the combo gushed gnarly, vintage-inflected lead tones that sat well across a wide range of classic-rock and garage-rock riffing. It wouldn't be reasonable to expect this amp to nail the 1960s JMI-built Vox Top Boost tone dead-on, nor that of a





SPECIFICATIONS

AC30S1

CONTACT voxamps.com

PRICE \$799 street

CHANNELS 1

CONTROLS Gain, bass, treble, reverb, volume

POWER 30 watts

TUBES Two 12AX7 preamp tubes, four EL84 output tubes

EXTRAS Digital reverb, FX loop

SPEAKER 12" Celestion VX12

DIMENSIONS 26"x 21.5" x10.5"

WEIGHT 54 lbs

BUILT China

KUDOS Appealingly traditional Vox looks and a clever repackaging of the AC30 tone at a reasonable price

CONCERNS Internal access for routine maintenance requires the removal of 21 fasteners

high-end boutique reproduction, and it doesn't. However, it delivers fun and playable tones that certainly get you into the same arena.

The master volume works well and really lets the preamp crunch up at low volumes for home and rehearsal playing. The overdrive pedals I tested it with — a JHS Angry Charlie and an Ibanez TS-9 Tube Screamer — did their thing beautifully in the front end. The

reverb sounded good and respectfully "springy," while the effects loop accommodated a variety of delay and modulation pedals without noise or fuss.

All in all, the AC30S1 looks the part and delivers an admirable portion of the essence of this British classic in a compact and moderately priced package that's much easier to schlep to gigs than a full-sized AC30. **A**

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Fender

PLAYER SERIES STRATOCASTER

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

INTRODUCED THIS PAST July at the Summer NAMM show, the new Player series guitars seek to lure younger guitarists to authentic Fender sound and vibe. To make the gateway as appealing as possible, they include some thoughtful updates, such as modern C-shape necks carrying 22 frets, Alnico 5-magnet pickups (some models have Alnico 2 or Alnico 3 magnets), and sleek bodies that are hand shaped as per “original specifications.”

The guitar line (basses are also available) centers on Fender’s enduring classics, namely the Jaguar, Jazzmaster, Telecaster and Stratocaster. The series offers three versions of the Telecaster and seven of the Stratocaster. The latter include the HSH (two humbuckers, one single-coil), the SSH (two single-coils, one humbucker), the Plus Top (with a figured maple top available in Aged Cherry Burst or Tobacco Burst), the HSS Plus Top, the Floyd Rose HSS, and the standard Stratocaster on deck here, which is available in right- and left-hand configurations.

Finished in an attractive blue color called Tidepool, the Player Stratocaster is both eye-catching and fun to play. (It’s also available in Sonic Red, Sage Green Metallic,

Polar White, Buttercream, Black, and Sunburst.) The neck shape, being neither overly thick nor thin, is probably ideal for the majority of players, and the slightly flatter radius of the maple fretboard (pau ferro also available) allows the action to be set a bit lower than would be possible with a standard 7.25-inch radius. Thumbs up to the carefully finished medium-jumbo frets as well as the silky satin finish on the back of the neck, which provides a supple surface for your hand to slide on.

Playability was excellent right out of the box (literally, as this guitar doesn’t come with a gig bag), and the intonation was solid and musical throughout the reaches of the neck. Once the strings were stretched out, the two-point vibrato bridge returned to pitch consistently under moderate bending. While not something that directly impacts playability, the hand-rounded contours of the alder body are a nice touch and give this guitar a pleasantly svelte, nimble feel.



SPECIFICATIONS

Player Series Stratocaster**CONTACT** fender.com**PRICE** \$649 street**NUT WIDTH** 1.650" synthetic bone**NECK** Maple, modern C shape**FRETBOARD** Maple, 25.5" scale 9.5" radius**FRETS** 22 medium jumbo**TUNERS** Die-cast**BODY** Alder**BRIDGE** Two-point vibrato bridge with individually adjustable saddles**PICKUPS** Three Player Series Alnico 5 single-coils**CONTROLS** Volume, tone (neck and middle pickups), tone (bridge pickup), 5-way switch**FACTORY STRINGS** Fender USA, NPS .009-.042**WEIGHT** 7.9 lbs**BUILT** Mexico**KUDOS** A nice-playing Strat that delivers a lot of bang for the buck**CONCERNS** Nut corners are a tad sharp, no gig bag

The electronics also received some updating, and here we find a trio of Player Series Alnico 5 single-coil pickups with staggered poles riding in a triple-layer pickguard. They were properly adjusted for height and tilt, with the bass sides lowered for a balanced response across the strings. The control scheme features a master volume along with two tone knobs — one for the neck and middle pickups and another for the bridge unit. A five-way switch provides all the usual pickup combinations: neck, neck-plus-middle, middle alone, middle-plus-bridge, and bridge.

Plugged into a Fender reissue Deluxe Reverb (with hand-wired circuitry by George Alessandro) and a new Mesa/Boogie Fillmore 50 combo, the Players Series Strat delivered all the sonic highlights you expect from this timeless classic. Whether digging in with a deep clanging tone on the neck pickup, getting funky on the chiming neck/middle and middle/bridge combos, or slamming down heavily on the bridge setting, these pickups

carried it all with their sweet balance of clarity, body and output.

I dug the bridge pickup's gutsiness and sustain though the Mesa Fillmore 50 on a gained-up setting, and often just left it in that mode when playing with an alt-country band, using the guitar's volume control to go from gritty clean to fat, twangy overdrive. No surprise that it also sounded great through a variety of distortion and fuzz pedals when fed into the Deluxe Reverb. Being able to tame the bridge pickup's brightness via the dedicated tone control is the bomb for buttery lead sounds. With the range of textures available from all the pickup combinations, this guitar and a high-gain amp is really all that's needed to cover a lot of gigs.

Fender knows the audience it's aiming for with the Player series, and based on the performance of our review Stratocaster, it's hit the bull's-eye. Sure, there will be those who'll knock some of the non-1950s aspects of this guitar, but I say try it before you deny it. ■



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Nutter

ASTRO CAPTAIN

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

AFTER 10 YEARS on the road with Keith Urban, Brian Nutter decided to relinquish the rockstar life to stay home in Nashville and build guitars. He started showing his creations at Summer NAMM 2017, where they stood out from a crowd of Tele, Strat and Les Paul clones like a unicorn at the Kentucky Derby.

The body shape of the Astro Captain model on review here bears a resemblance to a Gibson Explorer, but only vaguely. Combined with a three-on-a-side headstock and Red Sparkle finish (or Mint Green Sparkle, Ice Blue Sparkle, Silver Sparkle, Champagne Sparkle, Black Sparkle or custom finish of your choice), it creates a retro-modern vibe that should thrill any guitarist who wants to stand out from the crowd. The distinctive look is enhanced further by dots that are positioned on the bass side of the Bolivian rosewood fretboard up to the 12th fret, where they switch to the treble flank for the remainder of their journey up the 22-fret neck.

Despite its considerable size, three pickups and Duesenberg-style tailpiece, the Astro weighed in at just 8.5 pounds and was comfortable to play both sitting down and standing up. Some slight nut pinging aside, the fretwork, setup and finish were excellent. The action came in a little high for my taste, but two twists of a small screwdriver on the

Göldo Tune-o-matic style bridge dropped it to a comfortable zone, with no buzzing or fretting out.

The Nutter-wound humbuckers were warm and powerful, and the push-pull pots on the volume and tone controls switch each of the pickups into split-coil mode, where their extra oomph gave them a potent single-coil sound. The upper three-way toggle acts like a standard Gibson switch, selecting neck, bridge or both. The lower toggle offers middle pickup off, middle combined with whatever is selected above and middle-alone settings. The slider switch under each pickup reverses that pickup's phase, allowing you to throw any of the three pickups in or out of phase with the others. Those switches also choose which coil is operative in single-coil mode.

I'm not normally a fan of guitars with lots of switching options, but after an hour of delving into the Nutter's sonic possibilities, I found myself a convert. Each combination of switches offered usable sounds, and in addition to standard humbucker, single-coil and Strat-like positionally "out-of-phase" tones, I was able to nail classic hardwired out-of-phase blues tones à la early B.B. King and Peter Green. Running the Astro Captain through a Jetter overdrive pedal ahead of a

SPECIFICATIONS

Astro Captain

CONTACT nutterguitars.com

PRICE \$2,450 street

NUT WIDTH 1 11/16" bone

NECK Maple

FRETBOARD Bolivian rosewood, 25.5" scale

FRETS Dunlop 6100

TUNERS Sealed Kluson

BODY Alder

BRIDGE Roller TOM with Göldo vibrato

PICKUPS Three Nutter Rocket Booster 5 humbuckers

CONTROLS Two volume (push-pull), tone (push-pull), two 3-way toggles and three slide switches

FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario EXL110

WEIGHT 8.5lbs

BUILT USA

KUDOS A multitude of usable sounds, highly playable design, distinctive looks

CONCERNS None

Supro Comet, I could approximate some cool Brian May-style tones as well. All said, it was a lot of fun searching for unusual sounds to match the guitar's offbeat look, and with some experimentation I learned I could easily control the amount of phasiness by having all pickups on at different volumes.

If a trio of pickups and a cockpit of switches is not your style, Nutter will happily customize his guitars to suit your preference. I might be happier with just two pickups, as I found the middle one tended to get in the way of my picking style. But having experienced the Captain, I would definitely opt for the phase switches, as they help make this guitar as tonally adventurous as its eccentric styling suggests it is. ■

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Honeydripper

SUGAR BEE 1x12 COMBO



TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

TEXAS-BASED HONEYDRIPPER

Amps recently introduced the Sugar Bee, a 1x12 combo designed by a team consisting of Kendrick Amplifiers founder Gerald Weber, Dave McGrew, Rick Dielman and Dr. Ulrich Neumann, a scientist at the University of Southern California. This unique design is intended to meet the needs of players who want an amp that performs like a 1x12 combo with two 6L6 power tubes (or equivalent), but weighs about half as much.

The nut of the technology involved in the Sugar Bee is an exclusive, Patent Applied For “active output transformer” coupled to a single 12AX7 dual-triode running in class AB push-pull to produce 45 watts RMS. By eliminating the weight of a standard iron output transformer, and reducing the heft of the power transformer as well, the end result is a powerful 1x12 combo that weighs a scant 24 pounds — about the same as a solidbody guitar in a hard case.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sugar Bee

CONTACT honeydripperamps.com

PRICE \$2,495 street

CHANNELS 1

CONTROLS Drive, volume, Texas Tea, treble, bass, reverb, speed, intensity; Normal/Aggressive switch, 3-way Brite switch, Blues/Jazz/Lead switch

POWER 45 watts

TUBES Three 12AX7 preamp tube, one 12AX7 configured as a push-pull class AB output tube

EXTRAS Footswitch included for reverb and tremolo. Solid-pine cabinet. One speaker jack handles 4-, 8-, and 16Ω loads.

SPEAKER Kendrick Blackframe 12”

WEIGHT 24.2 lbs

BUILT USA

KUDOS Impressive tube sound and power yet weighs under 25 lbs

CONCERNS One speaker jack

The Sugar Bee’s preamp section uses three more 12AX7s, and the control set includes drive, volume, treble, bass, reverb, speed, intensity and Texas Tea, an exclusive Kendrick-designed control (also found on Kendrick’s So-Lo 7 recording/practice amp) that layers a tweed tone on top of the default blackface voicing. Turning the knob fully counter-clockwise is pure blackface; fully clockwise is pure tweed. The idea is that selecting somewhere in between these two settings will yield sounds reminiscent of both types of amps running together.

Other front-panel functions are a Normal/Aggressive switch, a three-way Brite switch and a Blues/Jazz/Lead switch that selects between a stock voicing, a more compressed voicing with less gain, and a more cutting, British-flavored lead sound. The aluminum chassis houses a large printed circuit board for most of the components — including ceramic sockets for the four 12AX7s and the speaker and footswitch jacks — with hand-soldered leads fanning out to the pots, switches and input jack. A smaller board holds the power supply. The interior workmanship is very clean, and it all fits snugly into a 1/2-inch-thick, mahogany-stained solid-pine cabinet, which also carries a Kendrick Blackframe 12-inch speaker and a full-size reverb pan.

The Sugar Bee’s compact size and light weight gives the impression of a low-wattage practice amp, but that all changes when you switch it on and turn up. The delivery is nothing short of amazing, and the output stage contributes to the harmonics-infused distortion and the tactile feel of real power tubes as you approach 10 on the volume knob. Fortunately, you can also rock fiercely at house levels thanks to the drive control’s abundant gain range.

The Normal/Aggressive switch is very

effective for setting up the voicing for the style of choice, as is the Blues/Jazz/Lead switch. Between these two functions, everything from clean and warm to gritty breakup (perfect for dirty rhythm playing) to full-tilt-boogie sustain is readily available. I had no trouble getting plenty of distortion on all three settings using a Tele or a Les Paul, although the Jazz setting is the mellowest of the three, and it feels a tad squishier when you drive it. I favored Normal because it sounded the fullest overall, and generally kept the Brite switch in the lower position for its lower-midrange emphasis. The Texas Tea control works as promised, producing a thicker, gnarlier overdrive sound when set fully clockwise (tweed) and a slimmer, cleaner tone when twisted in the blackface direction. Depending on the guitar, I dug leaving it at, or close to, the middle setting for a blend of both textures. Compared with several all-tube 1x12 combos in the 20- to 50-watt range, the Sugar Bee proved equally at home onstage alongside bashing bass and drums. In fact, like most tube amps, the harder you push it, the better it sounds.

For an amp that’s designed to function without a traditional output transformer, the Sugar Bee is surprisingly adept at maintaining its tube composure at all levels. Its multiple voicing functions wring way more tones from a single-channel platform than you might imagine, and when you add to it a nice-sounding analog reverb and a Patent Applied For “phase inverter modulation” vibrato (both footswitchable), the Sugar Bee is worthy of consideration for anyone looking for a super easy-to-carry combo that can cover pretty much any gig you throw at it. ■



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REVIEWED

WASHBURN
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STRINGS OF FORTUNE

Steve Dawson deals a richly rewarding experience on *Lucky Hand*, his new instrumental acoustic guitar album

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEIGH RIGHTON

STEVE DAWSON'S *LUCKY HAND* (Black Hen Music) is simply one of the most enjoyable instrumental acoustic releases to come across the *Frets* desk this year. He applies virtuosic Americana chops to imaginative instrumental narratives, and about half of the record features astonishingly unique and wonderfully complementary string quartet embellishments arranged by his former touring partner, violinist Jesse Zubot. Dawson is a thumbpick-wearing fingerstylist schooled in the Chet Atkins method and a master of advanced fingerstyle and slide techniques blueprinted by Leo Kottke. He also excels at resonator and Weissenborn approaches inspired by Skip James, Ben Harper and David Lindley.

Dawson tours extensively, performing with Americana/folk act Birds of Chicago, with a few solo dates thrown into the mix. But the multiple Juno Award winner — whose production credits include Birds of Chicago, Kelly Joe Phelps and John Hammond — is most at home in the studio. A Canadian expatriate, he relocated his Henhouse workstation to Nashville about five years ago but wound up returning to his Vancouver, British Columbia, stomping grounds to record *Lucky Hand* at the Warehouse Studio. The facility, which is owned by pop star Bryan Adams, boasts George Martin's former Neve board, and Dawson and Zubot's string quartet recorded live off the floor to tape. *Lucky Hand* is the guitarist's eighth solo release, and it's astounding that one player is responsible for such an array of acoustic guitar goodness. And then there are those incredible string arrangements!

How did you develop the vision for *Lucky Hand*?

I made a record about four years ago, *Rattlesnake Cage*, that was simply solo acoustic guitar, so I figured it'd be cool to do something else this time. Playing fingerstyle guitar with a band is difficult, because they tend to be redundant, so I thought about Van Dyke Parks' string arrangements. He produced Ry Cooder's first record, and Ry was a big influence on me. "One Meat Ball" [from Cooder's debut] is essentially a blues tune, but Parks' avant-garde string arrangement takes it out of context in a cool way. He did a similar thing with Phil Ochs at around the same time. Parks was busy, but my old friend Jessie Zubot had become very accomplished

at arranging strings, and he arranged a quartet based on my demos. Then the pressure was on me to relearn the songs exactly, in order to perform them along with the string players reading charts. It was important to me that we capture the spirit of the performances live in the studio.

How did you set up to record both the strings and guitar authentically?

We set up the string quartet traditionally, in a semicircle spread over about 20 feet. We miked them close, far away and also with the Decca Tree technique, which is a very specific way of spacing pairs of microphones around a symphony. I was about 15 feet away and facing them.

Do you have a primary miking strategy for acoustic guitar?

After years of experimentation, I've boiled it down to the simplest format. I rarely record with multiple mics, because I don't like the phase issues that arise, and in this case we had a lot of extra room mics around. I played into a single vintage Neumann U47 positioned a couple of feet away.

What's your main instrument?

My workhorse is a Larrivée that I bought new in 1993. It has a gigantic jumbo body with a sharp, difficult cutaway. John Larrivée was experimenting but decided it was too much hassle and gave up on the design. Anyway, I've always loved the deep sound of that





all-mahogany acoustic, and it's got a rather magic setup. You can still play it fretted, but it's set up fairly high for slide, with heavy strings. I use a D'Addario EJ17 medium set, but with a .015 on top. It's the best acoustic for playing slide that I've found on the planet, plus it's comfortable for gigging and travels well, so I always have it with me. I also have a 1952 Gibson J-50 that I love, but I don't like to travel with it. I was going to play my Larrivée on all the six-string stuff for *Lucky Hand*, but I changed my mind when I got to Vancouver.

What happened?

I decided I wanted another guitar with lower action for a few non-slide songs. I've never bonded with a Martin guitar before, but I

ended up doing so with a Jeff Tweedy model that jumped out at me for its great sound and feel. It's 00 size, so it's very different from the Larrivée, but it's also a very deep body. I was originally renting the Martin, but I ended up buying it. You can hear that Tweedy model on

**"IT WAS
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THAT WE CAPTURE
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PERFORMANCES
LIVE IN THE
STUDIO"**

the fingerpickers "Lonesome Ace" and "Lucky Hand," whereas the Larrivée is on tracks featuring slide, such as "Bone Cave," "Hale Road Revelation" and "Old Hickory Breakdown."

Can you address the art of getting a smooth slide tone on acoustic within the context of complex instrumentals?

I'm not stacking the slide up against all six strings as in a standard blues style; I'm isolating it on one or two strings. On a song such as "Bone Cave," a lot of the melody is played on the top string. I'm angling the slide away from the rest of the strings, so it's kind of easy to play the melody cleanly. Other songs require a lot of right-hand muting that

FRETS

{ STEVE DAWSON }

takes endless hours of practice to perfect. You figure out how to use one finger to play a note on a certain string while all the fingers are anchored, muting other strings. That's the key to a clean slide sound in a fingerpicking song.

What's your slide preference?

I prefer a large glass slide on my pinkie. I don't mind if it's a little loose, but the weight is very important. It needs to be thick enough to feel some gravity when I'm trying to get a good vibrato or simply changing positions. If the slide is too light, my hand goes flying all over the place. I prefer the smooth, clean sound of glass as opposed to a scraping metallic sound.

What do you look for in a 12-string?

Twelve-strings are tricky, because they're so finicky. It can be a bit of a nightmare to find one that works well for slide, and there simply aren't very many to choose from. I wound up with a Taylor Leo Kottke signature model. I like that it has a cutaway and that it is designed to be tuned a step and a half down from standard, to C $\sharp$.

"I GET A LOT OF MILEAGE OUT OF OPEN G"

Are there any tunings you tend to use more than others?

I never play the 12-string in standard, but I'll drop everything another half step and use a form of a double-drop D tuning, which is now a double-drop B tuning that goes, from low to high, B F $\sharp$ B E G $\sharp$ B. I tuned that way for the two 12-string tracks on *Lucky Hand*: "The Circuit Rider of Pigeon Forge" and "Hollow Tree Gap." When doing sideman work, I'll use actual double-drop D tuning — low to high, D A D G B D — because the middle four strings are the same as standard tuning, so I can look at my strings and know where to find a chord at any given moment. I can also relate to the lower three strings, as they form a thirdless D chord, and the top three strings are like an open G chord — G B D.

I get a lot of mileage out of open G. "Bone Cave" is tuned to that. I've got plenty of experience in open D, but I don't find it as interesting. I like to use a low open C tuning on acoustic guitar, especially the Larrivée, and on the Weissenborn lap steel. Low to high, it



goes C G C G C, and then I'll alternate the top string; I usually tune it to D, occasionally to E, and sometimes to C so it's in unison with the second string. Kelly Joe Phelps showed me another version of that same C tuning with an F on top, and I used that for "Hale Road Revelation." I might have capoed it up a step or two. I do that sometimes with the C tunings.

Talk us through how you got into playing Weissenborn-style lap steel.

I was blown away when I saw Ben Harper play a Weissenborn in Vancouver around 1991, just before his first record came out. I was drawn to the instrument, and in 1997 I met Neil Russell from Celtic Cross Instruments, whose specialty is making lap slides in true Weissenborn style. He made me one that's big and a bit unruly, and I love it. I eventually got into David Lindley's Weissenborn playing from his live records, and then I started getting into Hawaiian music, which sounds great on a Weissenborn. Most people use a thumbpick and two fingerpicks to play it, but I use three fingerpicks, as I do when I play

pedal steel or Dobro. I use ProPiks, which don't have any fingertips. It's like a metal ring around your fingertip, so you can still make contact with your flesh, but with the volume of a fingerpick.

Can you share some insights to the resonator tune from *Lucky Hand*, "Bentonia Blues"?

Bob Brozman turned me on to National resonators, and they eventually sent me a Tricone that's loud and projects well. I stopped playing it live because it's heavy, but I've always used it for writing and recording. It sounds really good in D tunings, and "Bentonia Blues" is D minor: low to high, D A D F A D. That's the same tuning Skip James used, and some of the chord voicings are right out of his book, even though the song itself has nothing to do with Skip James' music. Sonny Landreth's influence appears on that track as well, especially at the very end. I love the records he made with John Hiatt. He had stopped playing acoustic altogether for a while, so it's good to hear that he's back to playing some acoustic these days.

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You interview great musicians on your *Music Makers and Soul Shakers* podcast, available through your website [stevedawson.ca]. How did you get into podcasting, and what's coming up?

I love the format of the *WTF with Marc Maron* podcast, but he's a comic, so his musician interviews don't go as deep as I'd like. I adopted that format and started doing podcasts about two years ago. I've featured John Hammond, Van Dyke Parks, and I just talked to Chuck Leavell from the Rolling

**"I GAVE UP TRYING
TO MAKE AN
ACOUSTIC GUITAR
SOUND LIKE AN
ACOUSTIC GUITAR
ONSTAGE A LONG
TIME AGO"**

Stones. We discuss sessions and I fade in the music they talk about as it comes up in the interview. I was doing one every Wednesday, but I couldn't keep up on the production side, so now it's more like once a month. I always find it very interesting to do, and if other people like it as well, that's even better.

You've been touring considerably. What's your strategy for making the plethora of acoustic instruments you play all sound great onstage?

I gave up trying to make an acoustic guitar actually sound like an acoustic guitar onstage a long time ago. I put a Sunrise magnetic pickup in the soundhole of all my touring acoustics, including the lap steel. I love the tone and consistency of a Sunrise through a tube amp with a spring reverb. Whether I'm with a band or playing solo at a festival, I can walk onstage, plug into the amp, and I know it's going to sound good. Give me a reissue Fender Deluxe and I'm happy. 🎸



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WASHBURN REVIVAL SOLO D-135 ANNIVERSARY USA

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

WASHBURN IS CELEBRATING its 135th anniversary with a limited release of 135 Revival Solo Dreadnoughts inspired by the original 1937 Washburn #5244/#5246 Solo Dreadnoughts. To represent the company's history, the new guitars' serial numbers begin at 1883 and continue through to 2018. *GP*'s review unit was 1943, making it number 60 of 135. It arrived in a fancy hard-shell case, with a certificate of authenticity and a hardcover copy of John Teagle's book *Washburn: Over One Hundred Years of Fine Stringed Instruments*. The tome documents the company's legendary roots as Lyon & Healy and chronicles Washburn's development using oodles of catalog clips, photos of classic and modern guitars, and accounts from signature artists through the years. The aroma that wafts up when you open the case reeks of a hearty woodshop. You can smell that the guitar was crafted in Washburn's American custom shop.

The Revival Solo strikes the eyes with pure throwback loveliness. The D-135 is designed to be historically accurate to the size and shape of the original 1937 models, and it features broad, rounded shoulders and a full waist. Other classic Washburn inspirations from the original include a "smile" bridge, a Revival 30s-style headstock with open-back tuners and butter-bean knobs, and a uniquely shaped faux-tortoise pickguard. The solid Sitka spruce top is stained a light tan and complemented by bindings that flow naturally into the rich grains of solid mahogany neck, back and sides. A peep inside the body reveals cathedral-peaked scalloped X bracing made of high-alpine European spruce, and all the interior bracing appears neat and robust.

The D-135 strikes the ears with a true, time-honored dreadnought tone that's pleasantly balanced — not too boomy down below and not brittle up top. It doesn't come at you like the cannon fire of many modern dreads but with a more open, inviting sound. It's plenty loud, but not so much that it's difficult to sing over, making the guitar ideal for singer/songwriter-style accompaniment and perfect for the campfire. The Revival Solo practically calls out to be strummed with a plectrum, and it responds well dynamically to everything from a feather-like touch to a Pete Townshend hammer-fall attack.

The factory setup is player friendly, and barre chords are easily fretted on its C-shaped neck. Fingerstyle passages sound great as well. The relatively easy action comes at the expense of some fret buzz when digging into melodic runs with a pick, particularly on the fourth string with this instrument, and there was no truss rod to adjust, as far as I could see. However, this isn't a guitar designed for lighting-fast, linear flash licks; it's built to be like a Ford Model T, not a Ferrari. Heck, it doesn't even have electronics, although modern touches, such as the GraphTech Ratio machine heads, are a welcome addition.

Washburn's Revival Solo 135D is a great value, considering all the goodness you get for about two grand. Washburn fanatics will appreciate the historical authenticity, and traditionalists will dig its time-honored look and tone. But anyone in the market for a quality American-made dreadnought that won't break the bank better act quickly, because 135 guitars is an exceptionally limited release indeed! 🎸



SPECIFICATIONS

Revival Solo D-135 Anniversary

CONTACT washburn.com

PRICE \$1,999 street

NUT WIDTH 1.75", bone

NECK African mahogany

FRETBOARD Ebony, 25.5" scale

FRETS 20

TUNERS GraphTech Ratio, open back

BODY African mahogany back and sides, solid Sitka spruce top

BRIDGE Ebony

ELECTRONICS N/A

FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario EXP Phosphor Bronze Light .012–.053

WEIGHT 4.2 lbs

BUILT USA

KUDOS A natural chord strummer with strong value, time-honored design and pleasant tone

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Matt Blackett, Guitar Player Magazine

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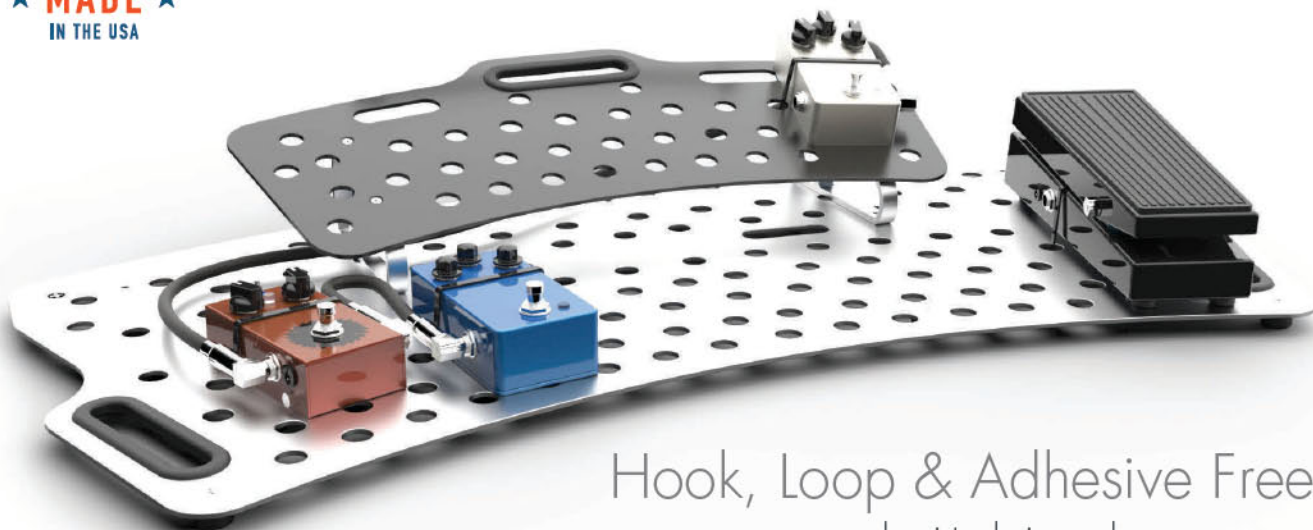


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- Michael Molenda Editor-in-Chief, GUITAR PLAYER



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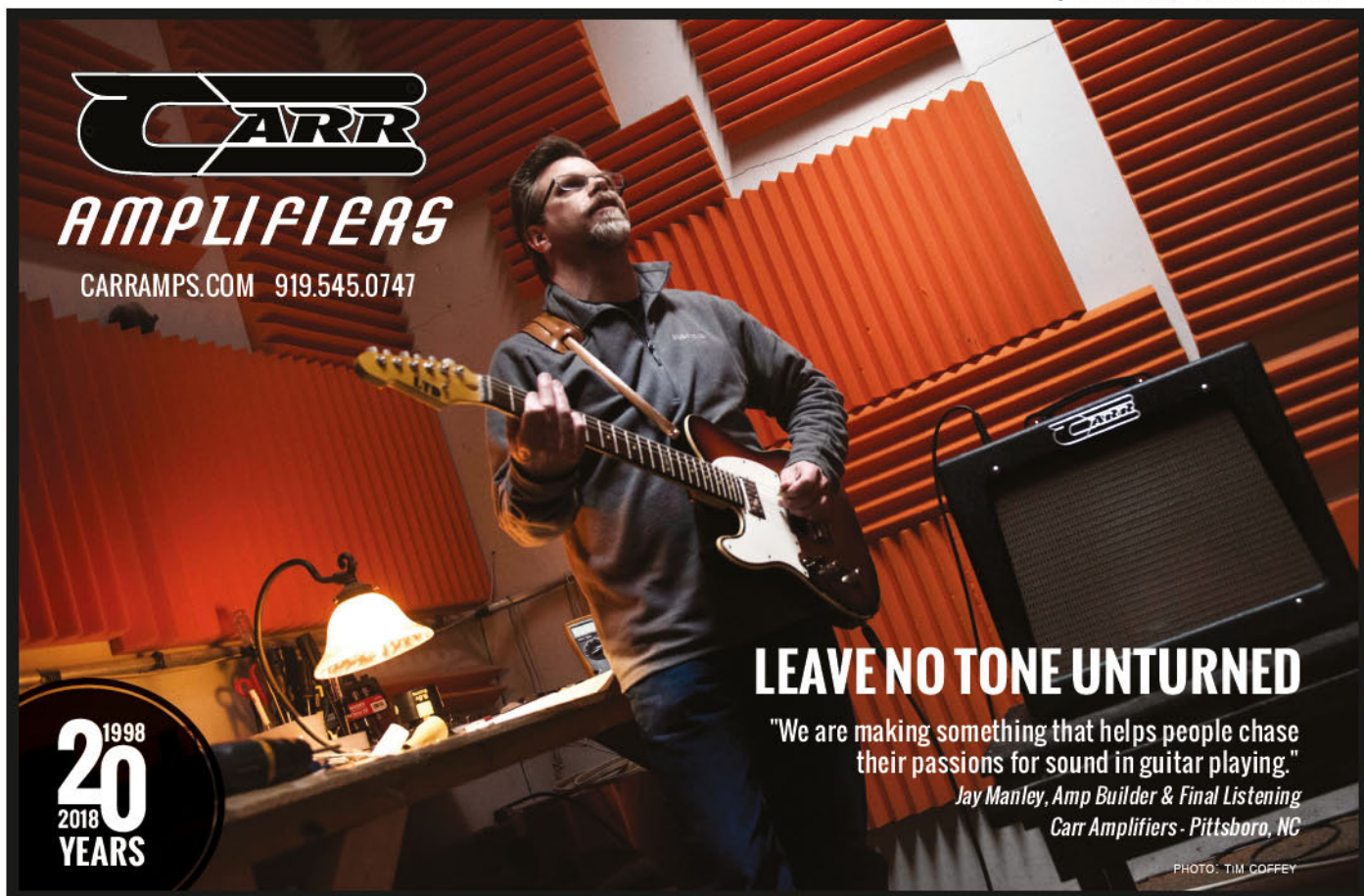
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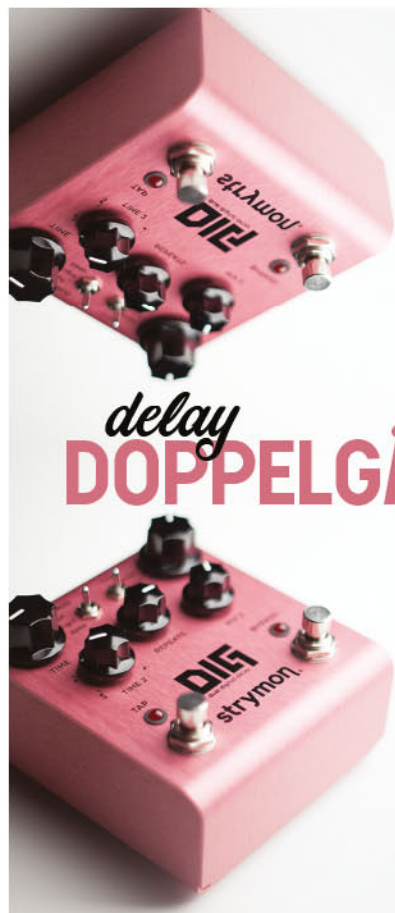


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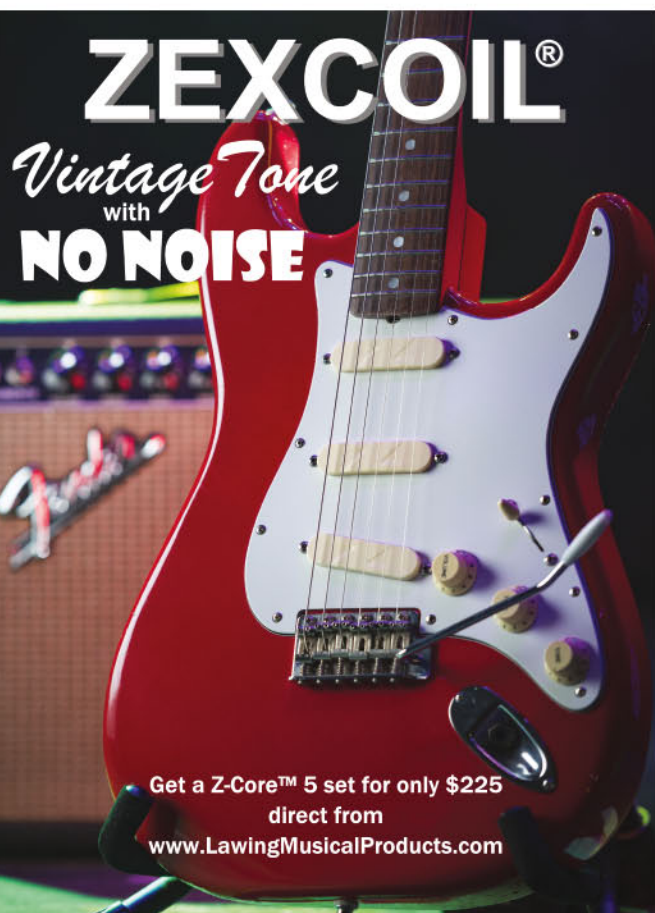
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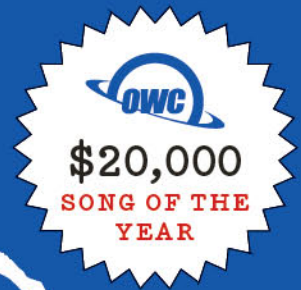
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> Drawn to the sound of John Coltrane's saxophone, Allan Holdsworth was compelled to create equally fluid legato lines on the guitar, which he adopted at age 17 after a sax proved too expensive. A self-taught guitarist, the English-born musician received his initial training from his grandfather, a jazz pianist, who, with his wife, raised the youngster.

> Holdsworth developed his signature "outside" sound by exploring a wealth of scale forms in his solos and building a vocabulary of unorthodox chord progressions. Lauded by

Frank Zappa as "one of the most interesting guys on the planet," Holdsworth influenced Eddie Van Halen, Alex Lifeson and Joe Satriani, among many other guitarists.

> After spending years supporting prog-rock and fusion acts like Soft Machine, the New Tony Williams Lifetime and the supergroup U.K., Holdsworth had a breakthrough in 1982 when Van Halen helped sign him to Warner Bros. The resulting *Road Games* EP from 1983 was nominated for Best Rock Instrumental Performance at the 1984 Grammy Awards.

> In 1986, Holdsworth became the most visible proponent of the SynthAxe, a guitarlike MIDI controller. He featured the instrument on that year's *Atavachron* album and continued to use it for the remainder of his long musical career.

> A guitarist's guitarist, Holdsworth followed his muse with a singularly pure vision up until his death from a heart attack in April 2017 at the age of 70. Said his longtime drummer Gary Husband, "He chased simply what he heard and what he loved." ■

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