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A full-page photograph of the rock musician Slash. He is wearing a black top hat with silver studs, dark sunglasses, and a grey t-shirt. He has long, curly dark hair and a goatee. He is holding a red Epiphone Les Paul Standard electric guitar with a black pickguard and two humbucker pickups. The background is a dark stage with warm, out-of-focus lights in shades of orange and red.

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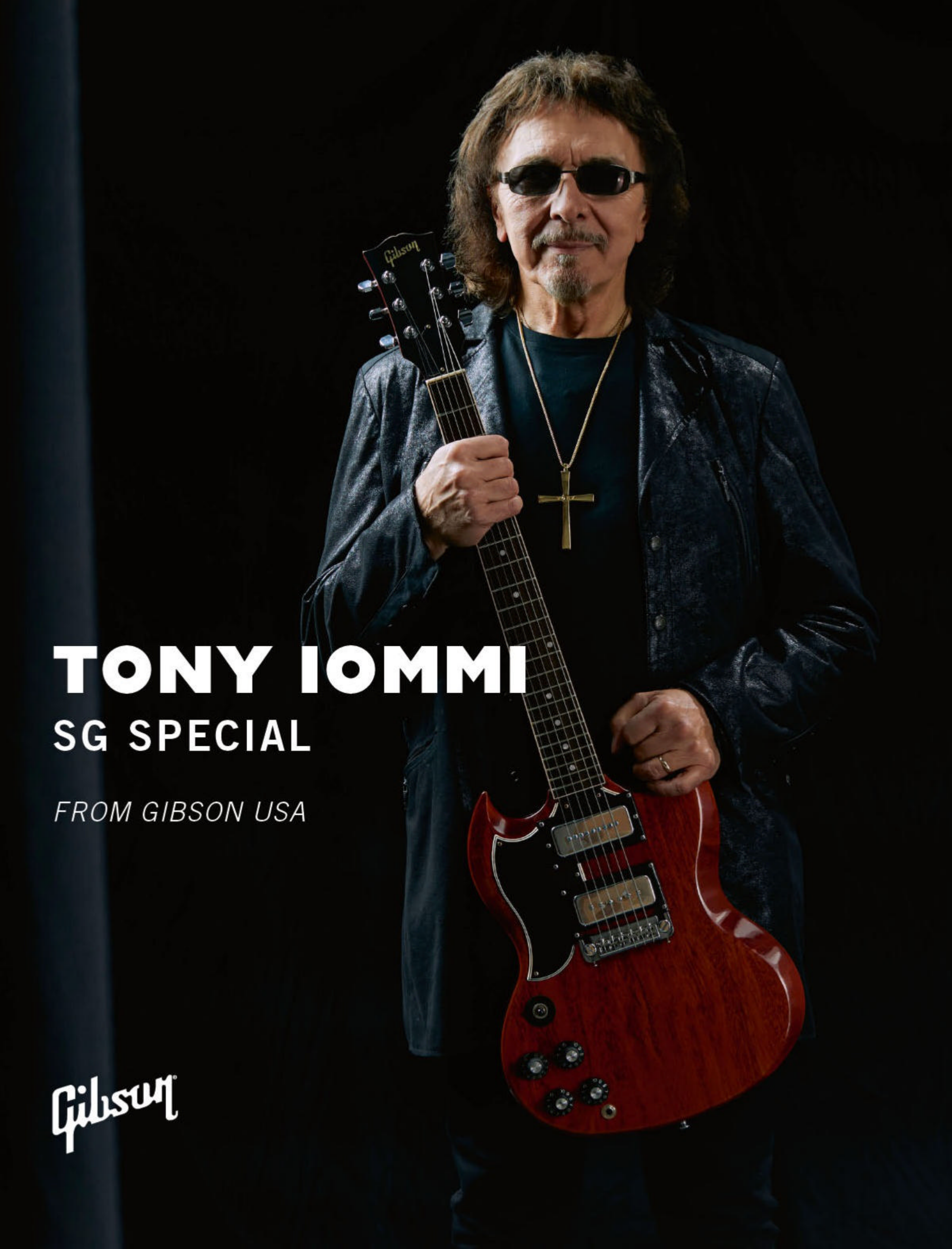


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NATHANIEL RATELIFF

LG-2 WESTERN | *VINTAGE SUNBURST*

A full-length portrait of Tony Iommi, the lead guitarist of Black Sabbath. He is standing against a dark, textured background. He has long, dark, wavy hair and is wearing dark sunglasses. He is dressed in a dark blue or black leather jacket over a dark t-shirt. A gold chain with a large cross pendant hangs around his neck. He is holding a Gibson SG Special electric guitar, which has a vibrant red finish and a black pickguard. The guitar's headstock, featuring the Gibson logo, is visible over his right shoulder. His left hand is positioned on the guitar's body near the bridge, and his right hand is on the neck. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of his clothing and the glossy finish of the guitar.

TONY IOMMI

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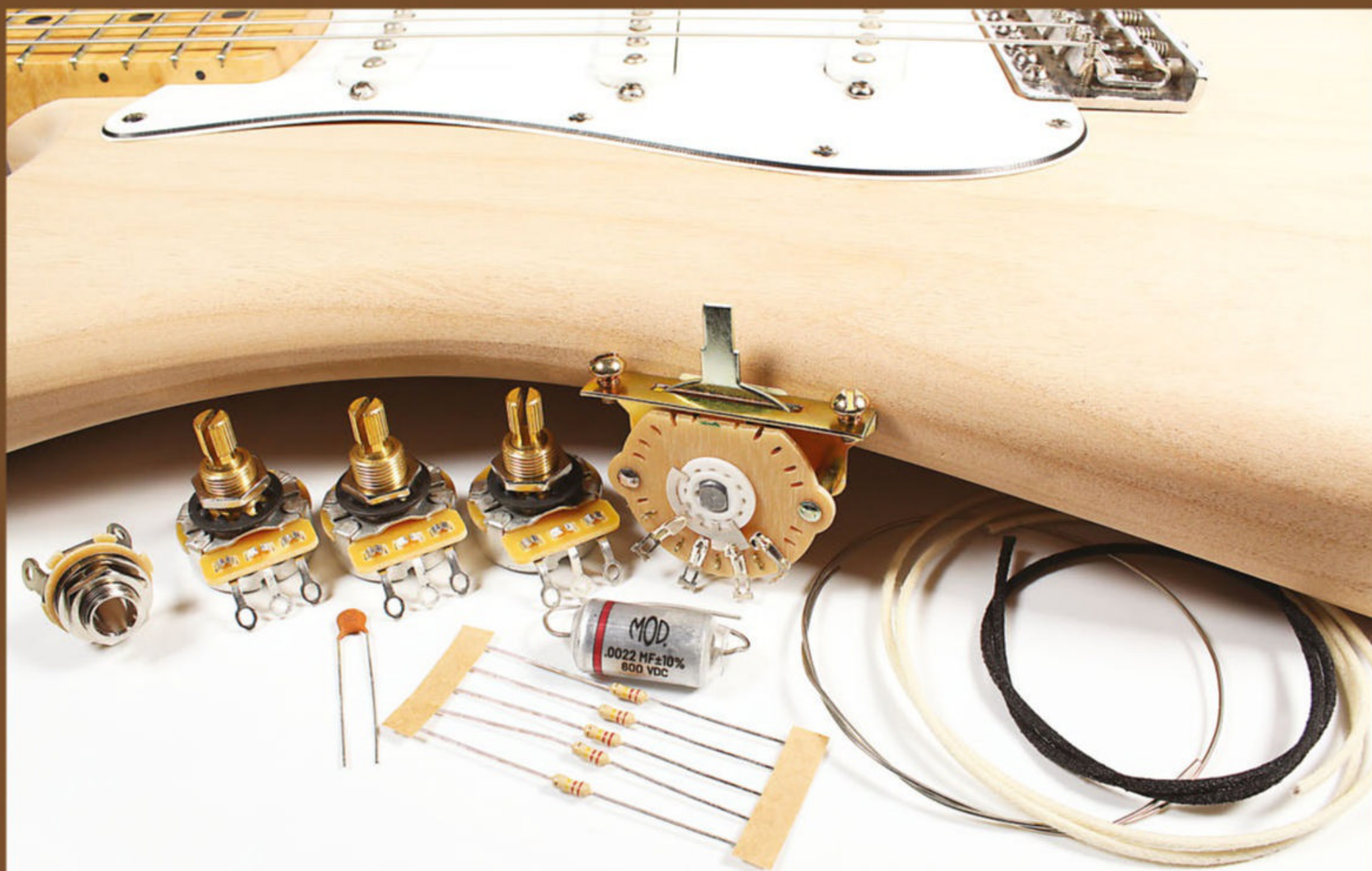
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TIME STAND STILL

IT HAD BEEN months since any of us had been able to speak with Alex Lifeson, and we all knew why. At a time when most musicians had been sidelined by the pandemic and were happily available to discuss their current endeavors and future plans, Lifeson spent much of the past year and a half privately mourning his longtime friend and bandmate Neil Peart. The former Rush drummer passed away on January 7, 2020, shortly before the global shutdown, having lost his long battle with brain cancer.

So it was a welcome relief when we were told Alex was back in action and eager to talk about his latest projects, including his group, Envy of None, and his new Epiphone Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axxess Standard, a beautifully crafted and budget-friendly take on his earlier Gibson custom model. As one of rock's most inventive, dynamic and emotionally melodic guitarists, Alex remains a compelling figure long after Rush have called it a day. In an engaging and wide-ranging interview with contributing writer Joe Bosso, Alex reveals that, after a year away from the guitar, he's back in full force and ready to drop some new tunes on the world as he pursues the next chapter of his life after Rush.

But our interview with Alex is just one of many great entries in this issue, which also includes an excerpt from *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen*, Brad Tolinski and Chris Gill's epic new EVH bio. Brad and Chris shed new light on every corner of Van Halen's life and prodigious artistry, delivering a long-awaited and vital read about the most important and influential guitarist of the modern age.

The bonanza continues as we sit down for new interviews with Robben Ford, Yngwie Malmsteen, Phil Collen and Earl Slick. There's no shortage of great reading in this issue. I hope you enjoy it.

Chris Scapelliti

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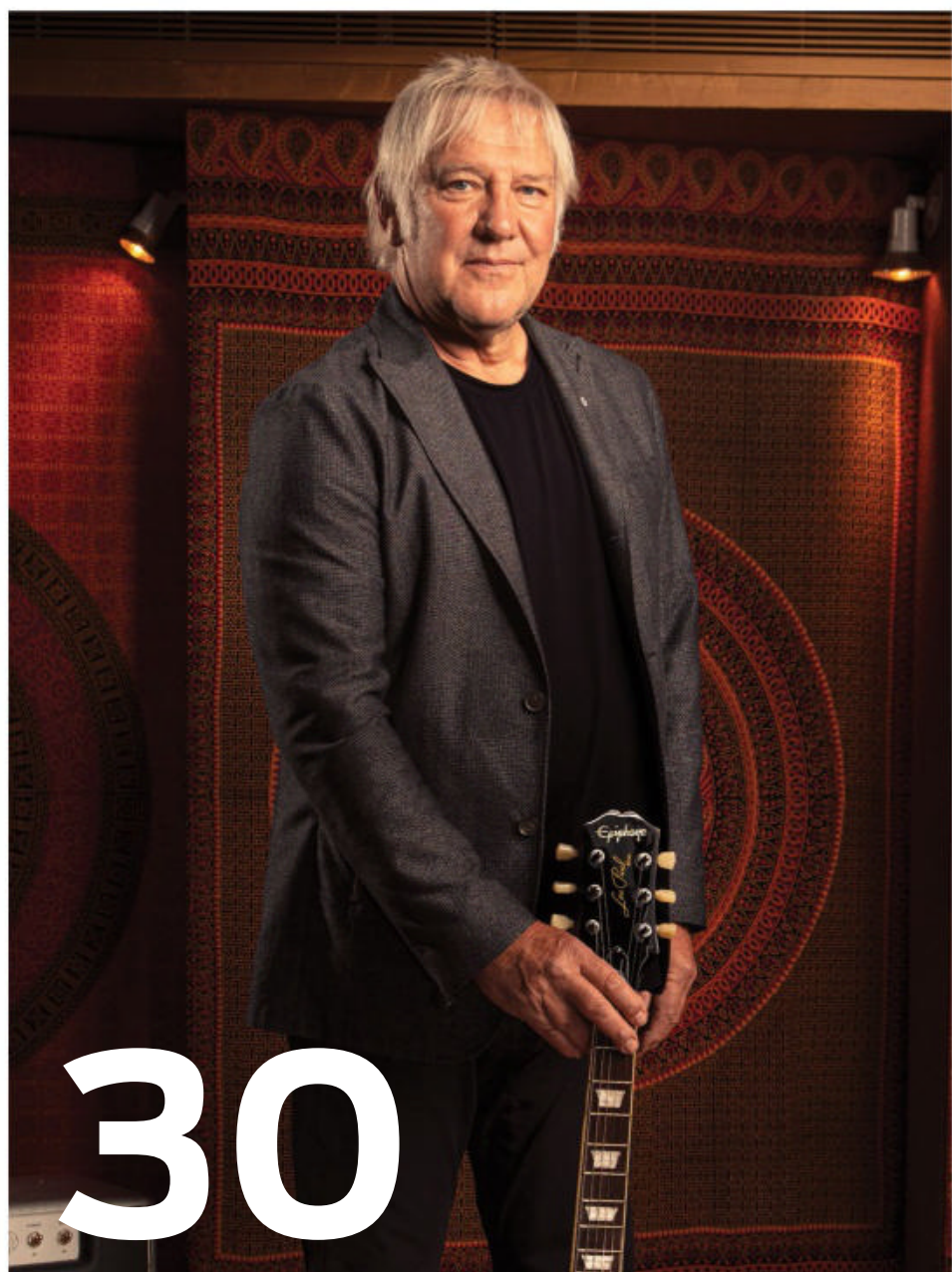
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Alex Lifeson with his new signature
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Photo by **Jaden D.**

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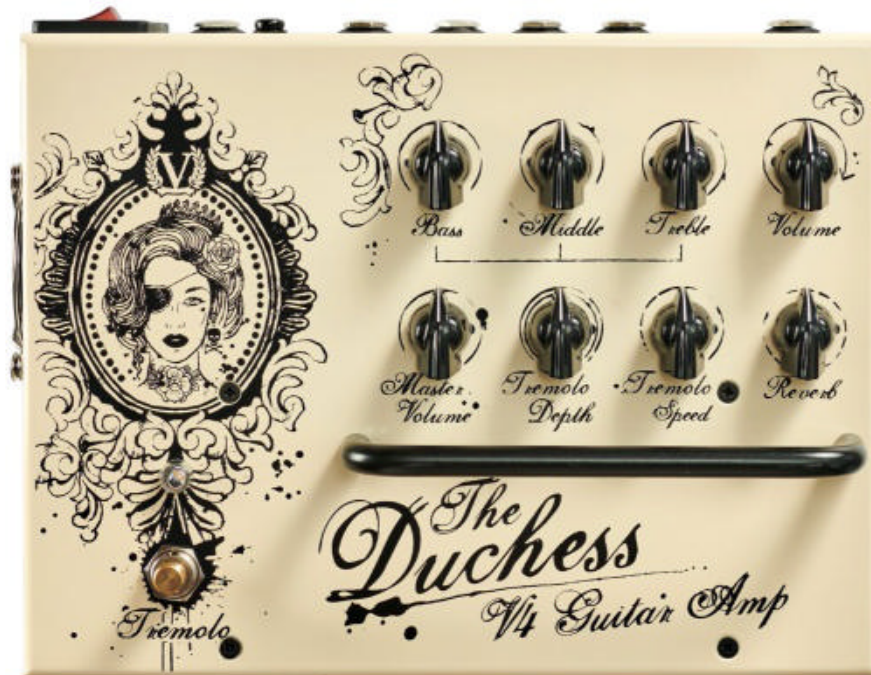
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BOULEVARD OF BROKEN-IN DREAMS

Billy Rowe's Rock N Roll Relics look, play and sound like much-loved and well-traveled treasures.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

ASK BILLY ROWE when his love for building guitars began and he'll take you all the way back to his San Francisco high school in 1980. "I was a big Van Halen fan," Rowe explains. "And Eddie was the guy of my generation who took guitars and reconfigured them to what he wanted or what he thought was cool. So I was always into tinkering with guitars, ever since I started playing."

"Then, in woodshop class, I decided to make one. I bought a block of wood at a hardwood shop in the East Bay, cut it, did the whole nine yards. I built a star guitar out of swamp ash. And that's where it started."

Still, it took many years before Rowe became a guitar builder. First he had to become a rock star. In the early '80s, he co-founded Jetboy, who relocated from the Bay Area to L.A. and quickly established themselves as one of the leading acts of the Sunset Strip's mid-decade glam-rock

explosion, alongside up-and-coming peers like Poison, Faster Pussycat and, most significantly, Guns N' Roses. Over-the-top looks and attitude were the calling cards of the day, and that extended to guitars as well. "I painted my Strat hot pink during the band's super-early glam era, put a mirrored pickguard on it and scratched it up," Rowe recalls. "It looked like Paul Stanley's cracked-glass Ibanez."

Jetboy eventually signed a major-label deal and released a well-received, if not exactly chart-conquering, 1988 debut, *Feel the Shake*. One more record, *Damned Nation*, followed in 1990 before the band called it quits. "After the second record, we toured for a little bit, got dropped by our label, and then we all ended up moving back home and kind of went our own ways," Rowe says. He worked a day job but ultimately found his way back to his first love. "I built a couple guitars for

myself, and then, you know, the internet started," he says. "I sold a guitar on eBay. I thought, Maybe I'll start a website. It just happened kind of organically."

Thus was born Rock N Roll Relics, which today is one of the more prominent boutique builders of high-end, stylish and, as the name obviously implies, age-finished electric guitars. And in keeping with the other part of the company's moniker, the guitars are undeniably rock and roll in sound, look and vibe. They include a Tele-like model named the Richards (as in Keith) and an LP Junior-style design christened the Thunders (that would be Johnny).

"I've always loved classic rock and roll and late '70s and early '80s punk," Rowe says. "The dirtiness of it. It's the same way that I've always liked beat-up Converse instead of squeaky-clean white ones. The aging just gives it more character."

Rowe began building guitars out of the garage of a family home in San Francisco that had once belonged to his great-grandmother. Initially, he was working entirely on his own. “I was doing bolt-on stuff, mainly Teles,” he says. “I was basically going after the Keith Richards/Joe Strummer type of thing, and then taking the classic Fender colors and just kind of aging them. There were tools on the wall, and it was something I was into. And there were only a handful of guys doing the relic thing then. Bill Nash was one. He was just selling stuff on eBay. It goes that far back.”

Rowe officially launched Rock N Roll Relics in 2005 and began to build a loyal and influential customer base through word of mouth as well as connections from his Jetboy days. Glen Campbell commissioned a

“I JUST WANT TO MAKE IT LOOK COOL AND ARTSY AND GIVE IT A VIBE”

blue-finished Strat-style model, while Cheap Trick’s Rick Nielsen picked out a double-cut, set-neck Thunders. Other customers have included former Kiss and current Grand Funk Railroad guitarist Bruce Kulick, Metallica producer Bob Rock and former Guns N’ Roses guitarist Gilby Clarke.

But the musician perhaps most responsible for helping to put Rock N Roll Relics on the map is Green Day’s Billie Joe



The Paisley finish extends to the headstock's back.



Rowe works on a Paisley-finished Starfighter.

Armstrong, who gave a Thunders model equipped with a single dog-eared P-90 pickup and a Black Flag finish pride of place on his band’s 2016–2017 *Revolution Radio* tour. “That’s where things really turned a corner for me, because Billie used that guitar for almost the whole set for those shows,” Rowe says. “And the Green Day fans are rabid and follow every crumb that they drop. So it definitely took the company to another level.”

As the company’s reputation has grown, so have its offerings. These days, Rowe is focusing on three newer shapes: the offset Revenge, the semi-hollow Lightning and the carved-top Starfighter. He’s been using all three, as well as a Rock N Roll Relics Blackheart model, onstage in his current gig

as the co-guitarist in Buckcherry. “I’m pimp daddying them all,” he says with a laugh.

Rowe has also added to his in-house staff at Rock N Roll Relics, though he still handles the majority of the aging work himself. As for his approach, “There are so many different processes when it comes to aging,” he says. “A lot of it is just little tricks of the trade that you learn through trial and error. And a lot of those mistakes become cool stuff.”

Over the years, he continues, “the aging thing has gone to such a different level. I tell people that I don’t even really try to make something look like it’s old. I just want to make it look cool and artsy and give it a vibe.”

To be sure, the Rock N Roll Relics model we spent some time with — a light-to-



medium-aged, Paisley-finished Starfighter — has vibe for days. The inspiration for the body shape, Rowe says, was the double-cut Gretsch Jet closely associated with one of his favorite players, AC/DC's Malcolm Young — “the god of rhythm guitar,” he says. But while Malcolm's no-nonsense axe and famed “clean-dirty sound,” as Rowe characterizes it, served as something of a template, the Starfighter is its own six-string beast. The African mahogany body boasts an elegant carve and is accented by single-ply binding, and the '60s-profile African mahogany set neck is topped with a fast-playing Macassar ebony fingerboard outfitted with Jescar medium-jumbo frets, pearl block inlays and cream binding. Pickups, meanwhile, are a pair of Mojo Tone Mojo'Tron Filter'Trons (Rowe says he became a fan of the original Filter'Tron sound back in the Jetboy days) controlled by two volume knobs, one tone knob and a three-way toggle. Appointments are rounded out by an Advanced Plating locking ABR bridge, Kluson tuners and a floating pickguard.

With its chambered body, the Starfighter was remarkably resonant, even when strummed unplugged. Hooked into a Fender Deluxe Reverb and cranked to barely acceptable residential-street volumes, it unleashed that classic Malcolm “clean-dirty” roar without sacrificing articulation, fullness or dynamics. If anything, the Starfighter took



**The double-cut
Gretsch Jet inspired
the Starfighter's body.**

things a step further tonally, evincing an open and airy midrange spread on chords and some pleasant warmth and softness around the edges of single-note lines.

That “clean-dirty” ideal could be extended to the Starfighter's impressive looks as well, with the grit of the lightly checked finish, back-of-the-body buckle wear and oxidized hardware pitted against the gentle swirl of the pink Paisley pattern and cloud-like Aged White colorway. The result is, true to Rowe's intentions, a guitar that is cool, artsy and vibey — and 100 percent rock and roll. 🎸

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CROWD SOURCING

In monetizing the art of making music, Greg Koch finds the freedom to make the music he wants.

BY ART THOMPSON

FOR A GUY who has become a household name on the guitar scene for his mind-boggling chops and zany humor, Greg Koch is also a badass in the guitar-video business, having made more than 4,000 online reviews for Wildwood Guitars alone. And that's just a part of it. Peruse his website and you'll find a merchandise line that includes instructional books and DVDs, Skype lessons, his Gristle King and Triple Gristle pedals and signature Fishman Fluence pickups, and, obviously, albums, the latest of his 15 releases being *From the Up'Nuh* (Koch Marshall Productions), which features Toby Marshall on Hammond B3 and Greg's son Dylan on drums. They comprise the Koch Marshall Trio, a scary-good group that forges rock, blues and funk into hybridized originals with titles like "Funky Klaus," "A Real Mother for Ya," "Daddy Long Legs" and "Nubby the Hoarder Man."



"My stuff is all over the map, which has probably hindered me from commercial accessibility, but I don't give a shit," Koch says. "I've been able to make a living with these other little spigots of things — clinics and videos and all the other stuff that allows me to pretty much do whatever I want on the musical frontier. I'm 54, and I remember, when I was in my 20s, I looked up to people that were older as role models of what to do and what not to do. But at the same time I'd be thinking, Man, they're in their 50s; why do they even get out of bed in the morning?"

He laughs. "But my dad lived to be 95, so I'm just getting started! We've got a lot of interesting music to play, and I certainly love playing it, and I'm very much enthused by the fact that there are all these ways now to reach a crowd of people that are interested in what we do in a very organic way. You don't need to have everybody into your stuff. You just need enough."

You're constantly coming up with new material for all the videos you make.

How did that overlap into the songwriting for the new record?

I'm basically fleshing out tunes the entire time I'm doing those videos for Wildwood. [laughs] So I've got these little scraps all over the place that either are congealed into a tune that's ready to go, or something that I might make a demo out of while sitting at my computer. It's in my iTunes library, so I'll be going for a little stroll, and in my morning perambulation one of those tunes might come out and I'll go, "Shit, I forgot about that one." So the next time I'm with Dylan and Toby, we'll try it out. And anytime we're at a

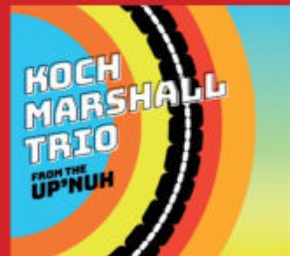
sound check, we're playing new stuff. New grooves are just coming in at will, and a lot of times stuff gels from that. "The Tussel" was a sound-check tune. "Funky Klaus" was something where Toby had this groove, and I kind of added a riff here and there and a little melody thing. A lot of times Toby will have grooves and chord progressions, and I'll go, "That's cool, what's that?" And then I'll add a melody to it and make an arrangement out of it. That was the case with "Funky Klaus," "Brushes" and "The Tussle."

I assume your new signature Reverend Gristle 90 saw action on the album, but what else did you play?

I didn't have the finished Fluence pickups for the duration of the recording, but I did use that guitar with the original Reverend P-90s on "Daddy Long Legs" "Nubby the Hoarder Man" and "A Real Mother for Ya." On "Luna Girl," the main guitar part is a '63 50th Anniversary Gibson Memphis ES-335. I have Fishman Fluence humbuckers in it, and it sounds like God. Then I used the Reverend

Gristlemaster to do the Tele parts on that call-and-response thing at the end. On "The Tussle," that's the 335 again, and there's Strat sprinkled in for some rhythm stuff and also a Fender Custom Shop Wildwood 10 '57 Strat, also with Fluence pickups.

What's great about these pickups is they sound like the epitome of what that guitar is supposed to sound like. The Strat was my main stage guitar for a good dozen years, but you've got to be MacGyver to keep them in tune, and there are always compromises, sonically. It's like the second position sounds good, but the bridge is a



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

From the Up'Nuh

"Luna Girl," "A Real Mother for Ya," "Nubby the Hoarder Man," "Daddy Long Legs," "Quarantonne"



little weak. But with the Fluence pickups, all five positions sound good.

“Funky Klaus” sounds like a composite of different guitars. What slide tunings did you use?

The main guitar part is the Gristlemaster, and I also used a Reverend Airwave 12-string. The baritone parts are a Reverend Pete Anderson Baritone, which sounds amazing. I’m in open E on the slide part. I used my 335 in standard tuning for the “Soul Stroll” slide part, and for “Nubby the Hoarder Man” it’s in open G. The 335 is also used for the slide stuff on “Succulent” and “Allore.”

It’s hilarious that you have a signature amplifier from Koch called Greg. What’s the story on that?

Yes it’s on the entire album, either the 2x10 combo or the head and a 1x12 bottom. As far as the name goes, there’s no relation, but it’s no coincidence. We were trying to figure out what to call it, and I said, “Why not just call it Greg, since we’ve got the same last name?”

So I was at Musikmesse doing stuff for Fishman some years ago, and right across from their booth were the Koch amplifier people. I ended up checking out this TwinTone III amp, and what I remember liking about it was that one of my favorite Fender amps was the Super-Sonic. I liked that the clean channel had two voices, and then there was the lead channel. But there was also an effects-loop button on the foot switch, and you could take an instrument cable and go from the send and return jacks on the back of the amp and goose it a little bit, so it became

like another boost level for both channels. The TwinTone III functioned kind of like the Super-Sonic. It didn’t have the same effects-loop scenario, but it had a rhythm master and a lead

master for the both channels, and a lead boost on top of that.

The Greg is so full featured that it has controls on the front and on top. Was that to accommodate your tone-control needs, and what specifically were they?

Besides a clean channel that would grind a little more, I wanted a more vivid reverb. Their reverb was good, but it wasn’t like a Fender reverb, where you could get lost in it if you wanted to. So they did a three-control reverb, like on a Vibro-King or an old Fender reverb tank. I also wanted a harmonic vibrato, which was kind of a hard one for them to do, but they figured out a way and also gave it a volume control. Basically, they took the TwinTone voicing and gave me a clean sound and a lead sound and a lead boost. So that’s on the front panel of the amp, and then on top there’s a volume and a gain for this OTS feature, which is output tube saturation — it’s a half of a power-amp tube that you can overdrive and add to either channel. I can be on the clean channel and hit that circuit, and it sounds like a dimed blackface amp. Then I go to the lead channel, and it sounds like the end of the world!

You know, you come up with an idea for an amp, and when you finally get it, you’re like, “I hope I wasn’t insane when I requested this thing.” [laughs] But never in the five years that I’ve been playing this amp has it made me think, Yeah, I’m going back to my Super Reverb. 🎸

**“YOU DON’T NEED TO
HAVE EVERYBODY
INTO YOUR STUFF. YOU
JUST NEED ENOUGH”**

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Phil Collen reveals the tales behind his greatest tracks, from the U.K. glam-metal scene to Def Leppard's blockbuster hits.

BY MARK McSTEAD

DEF LEPPARD DOMINATED the airwaves with "Photograph" in 1983, establishing the template for much of what was to follow in hair metal: catchy riffs, monumental choruses and short, to-the-point, shred-guitar solos. While many of the era's bands could be blamed for the genre's descent into mediocrity, Def Leppard were constantly finding ways to reinvigorate the limitations of the four-minute rock song. Phil Collen joined the group as it was recording *Pyromania*, the album from which "Photograph" was lifted. Consisting of singer Joe Elliott, guitarists Steve Clark and Pete Willis, bassist Rick Savage and drummer Rick Allen, Def Leppard had nearly finished the album when they let Willis go for excessive alcohol abuse. "I was initially brought in to play some solos Pete didn't finish," Collen tells *Guitar Player*. "I thought I was just helping out. I didn't realize that I was actually in the band until after I'd done some recording and they told me they'd booked a major tour."

A huge part of *Pyromania*'s success was Mutt Lange's production. "We were really blessed when we hooked up with Mutt," Collen says. But the album paled in comparison to *Hysteria*, which went 12 times Platinum, giving Def Leppard its first Diamond award, for record sales in excess of 10 million. The album took more than three years to record, due to the loss of Allen's left arm and delays with Lange's schedule, and it cost somewhere in the region of three million dollars. "But the results totally justified the time and money," Collen says. "The songs still resonate now."

A fantastically inventive and devastatingly effective guitarist, Collen has a few unique

wrinkles in his arsenal, including the string gauges on his signature Jackson PC1s (.013-.054) and Fender Telecasters (.014-.056). Even allowing for his habit of tuning down one half-step, that's some seriously heavy metal. Collen also uses brass picks, having abandoned steel picks due to their habit of breaking strings. "Now that I use brass picks, the string wins out and there is brass dust everywhere," he says. "I'm really lazy with strings, I don't really change them often because I don't ever break a string. Some of the guitars I have at home have had the same strings on for four years."

Like most acts, Leppard are waiting for the lifting of global restrictions so that they can get back on the road, "As soon as we get the word, we'll be back out," Collen says. In the meantime, he's been busy on several fronts. "We're always recording," he says of Def Leppard. "Me and Joe are writing a lot of songs together. I'm constantly busy. I have everything here at home to record onto my laptop. I've been pulling out guitars that I haven't played for a long time and enjoying them. It's like finding old clothes you haven't worn for a while."

At a time when many of us have been piling on the pounds in lockdown, the 63-year-old Collen has achieved one of his personal fitness goals. "I really worked on my physical training and diet and achieved my target of weighing the same as Bruce Lee at the same height — 140 pounds at five seven," he reveals. "I think you have to keep yourself moving and look after yourself, particularly as you get older. I can't wait to get back out on tour, and I want to be sure I'm totally ready for whatever life on the road might throw at me."



Collen (far right) onstage with Girl, January 1980

"HOLLYWOOD TEASE" GIRL, SHEER GREED (1979)

"I was in Girl prior to Def Leppard. We were a London-based post-punk, post-glam, hard-rock band. We were trying to merge everything together. We didn't have anyone to guide us, so we were kind of flying blind. The real tragedy for Girl is that we didn't meet someone like Mutt Lange, because he could have brought a lot to what we did. I really believe we could have been a lot bigger if that had happened. My solo in this was really the first recording I'd done that sounded like what I was trying to achieve. It combined all of my rock influences and made it work in my own context: a little bit of Blackmore, Schenker, Ronson and some Al Di Meola thrown in, right down to the Les Paul with DiMarzios and the shred/burn lick on the neck pickup. I also think I based the solo's format on a Mick Box [Uriah Heep] solo from '73. I used my Wine Red '76 Gibson Les Paul Custom with a DiMarzio Super Distortion bridge pickup into a Marshall 100-watt master-volume head through an angled 4x12 cab."

"PHOTOGRAPH" DEF LEPPARD, PYROMANIA (1983)

"*Pyromania* kick started the hair-metal thing with the big choruses and killer guitar solos. Ironically, I recorded this in the same room as I'd recorded 'Hollywood Tease' three years before. Def Leppard were actually very much a blend of the same influences as we had in Girl: some Bowie and T.Rex, some AC/DC and the Sex Pistols, glam and Led Zeppelin. 'Photograph' was the song that broke us into multi-Platinum status, with everything lining

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



**“YOU HAVE TO BE
ABLE TO HUM THE
SOLO. IF YOU HAVEN’T
GOT SOMETHING
MEMORABLE, YOU’RE
DOING THE SONG
A DISSERVICE”**

Phil Collen with his X-Stroyer,
strung with heavy-gauge
(.013–.054) strings

up perfectly: We had MTV, we were a top-20 band that could still be a hard-rock band, and we knew how to get an eight-bar solo in a song without alienating our listeners. That's why I usually work my solos out. Mutt always said you have to be able to hum the solo, because if you haven't got something memorable there, then you're just doing the song a disservice.

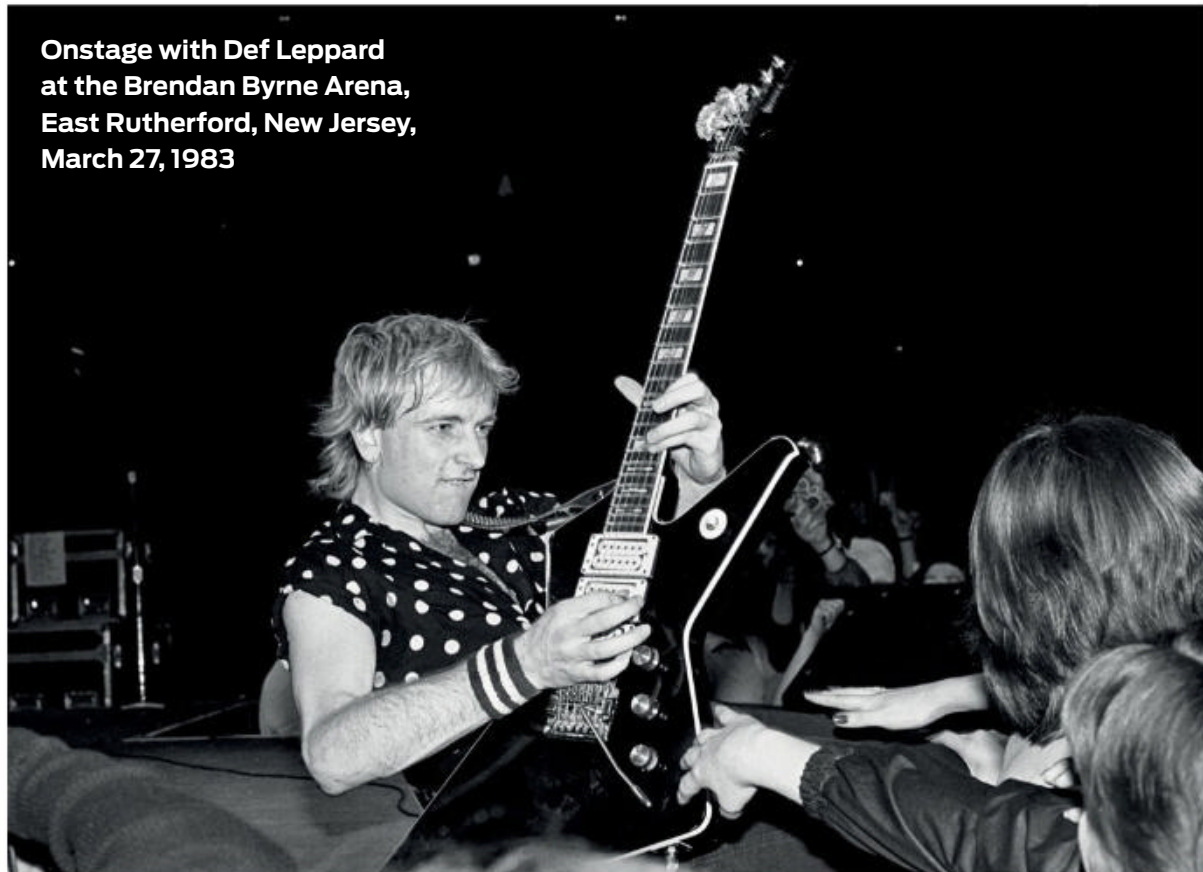
"Musicianship is finding what works and supports the song, creates some kind of emotion and takes it somewhere else from the vocal melody. If you can double-track your solo, it shows that you know what you just played. [laughs] Mutt had me double-track my solo to give it a creamier sound. I used my '80-'81 Ibanez Destroyer Custom with a DiMarzio Super Distortion in the bridge position and a Kahler trem system. This guitar is on display at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame museum in Cleveland. I used my amazing Marshall 50-watt head, that has since been stolen, into a Marshall 4x12."

"POUR SOME SUGAR ON ME" DEF LEPPARD, *HYSTERIA* (1987)

"This was from our biggest album. We had a completely different approach to the songs, songwriting and sounds. I used my '78 Fender Stratocaster, named Felix, with a cream DiMarzio Super Distortion colored black with a Sharpie in the bridge position and a Kahler trem, later changed to a Floyd Rose. On the intro I played my black crackle-finish Jackson Dinky, which is also on display at the Rock &



Onstage at the Birmingham LG Arena, December 6, 2011



Onstage with Def Leppard at the Brendan Byrne Arena, East Rutherford, New Jersey, March 27, 1983

Roll Hall of Fame museum. All of this song, and in fact the album, was played through a Tom Scholtz Rockman. Ironically, given how long we spent recording *Hysteria*, this song was cut in only 10 days, and it was the very last thing we recorded. It was actually a last-minute addition. Mutt heard Joe singing the chorus while playing an acoustic guitar and spotted the potential. It added something to the album that it really needed, with the power and the gaps between riffs to let the snare speak. Mutt was really instrumental in how we structured the arrangement for the dynamics — the light and shade. Part of the Mutt Lange magic is that there are so many parts on Leppard songs, but there is still a lot of space."

"PAPER SUN" DEF LEPPARD, *EUPHORIA* (1999)

"There is a different feel on this album, and this is one of my favorite solos from our catalog. It goes through a couple of key changes and is longer than the usual eight bars. My solo is the end solo on the song. Viv [Vivian Campbell, who replaced Steve Clark after his 1991 death] does the one in the middle. I used my Jackson PC1 [Kermit] with a DiMarzio Super 3 on the bridge position and a Floyd Rose trem. I played it through a Marshall JMP-1 rackmount [tube preamp] through a Palmer speaker simulator direct into the desk. I spent some time working on the solo, because of the key changes. I wanted to have a different theme for each part. There was a lot of scope on this one to

mix things up — the freedom to take the song somewhere else. I did spend some time thinking about how it should go, and I tried a few different approaches."

"MISTREATED" DELTA DEEP, *DELTA DEEP* (2015)

"The first concert I ever went to was Deep Purple at the Brixton Sundown, now the Brixton Academy, in 1972. It's the reason I started playing guitar and the reason I play on that side of the stage. And Blackmore is the reason I played a black Strat [Felix] with a maple neck, so it's kind of a full-circle appreciation thing. Delta Deep was a blues band that I put together. I played my red Jackson PC1

[Redrum] with a DiMarzio Super 3 in the bridge position and a Floyd Rose trem with FU-Tone titanium block and saddles. I recorded straight into my laptop via a Focusrite iTrack Solo and Native Instruments Guitar Rig 5, and, interestingly, I used a preset that was based on a Marshall head. I think part of what gives our version a heavier, denser sound is the heavy strings that I use, and the brass pick. They really let you dig in. A lot of players I love have a very light touch, but I have a really heavy approach, which can be tricky at times, but when you get it right, it really sings. There were so many great players that influenced me from the '60s and '70s. My all-time favorite is Hendrix, but there are so many — Ronson, Akkerman, Di Meola, Beck, Page — and they all gave me a lot."

"I DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS IN THE BAND UNTIL THEY'D BOOKED A MAJOR TOUR"

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by Matt Warnock



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STEP 1

Diagram showing the first step of the ii-V-I progression, focusing on root chords. The progression is Dm⁹, G¹³, Cmaj⁷, and A7(b⁹). The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature and a bass staff with fingerings (T, A, B) for each chord.

STEP 2

Diagram showing the second step of the ii-V-I progression, focusing on the Freddie Green rhythm. The progression is Dm⁹, G¹³, Cmaj⁷, and A7(b⁹). The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature and a bass staff with fingerings (T, A, B) for each chord, showing the rhythmic pattern of four chords per bar.

STEP 3

Diagram showing the third step of the ii-V-I progression, focusing on approach chords. The progression is Dm⁹, G¹³, Cmaj⁷, and A7(b⁹). The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature and a bass staff with fingerings (T, A, B) for each chord, showing approach chords (Ab13, Bmaj7, Bb7b13) on beat 4 of each bar.

STEP 4

Diagram showing the fourth step of the ii-V-I progression, focusing on rootless chords. The progression is Dm⁹, G¹³, Cmaj⁷, and A7(b⁹). The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature and a bass staff with fingerings (T, A, B) for each chord, showing rootless chords (Ab13, Bmaj7, Bb7b13) on beat 4 of each bar.



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This 1963 Reverberocket 2 features two 7591 output tubes for more power than its 6V6-based predecessor.

Rocket Science

With the 1963 Reverberocket 2, Ampeg launched a new weapon in the war between jazz and rock.

TOO EASILY FORGOTTEN amid the ranks of classic guitar amps, Ampeg has a long and storied history, as well as a reputation for original design and quality construction. While many players point to Fender's amps of the mid '60s as displaying the epitome of the tube-driven spring reverb sound, any discussion of that tone will inevitably encounter the dissenter who declares, "Well, have you played an Ampeg Reverberocket?" If the answer is "no," you've missed out on what many reverb-o-files consider the lushest, most elegant *sproing* of them all.

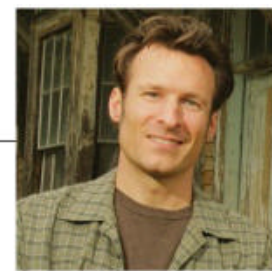
In addition to the overall veracity of Ampeg's onboard reverb, the Reverberocket is also widely acknowledged as the first production amplifier from a major company to feature the effect. Ampeg debuted the Reverberocket at the summer NAMM show in July 1961, but had prototyped the circuit as an add-on to the existing Jet model the previous April. The earliest schematics for the proper Reverberocket model date to May 1961, a full year and a half before Fender's first reverb-laden combo, the Vibroverb, hit the scene in early 1963. Fender quickly standardized both its reverb circuit and its core amp circuits

(despite the several changes from tweed to brown-panel to black-panel amps). Ampeg's designs, however, continued to evolve, sometimes dramatically, often resulting in amps that were radically different in sound and feel from their same-model predecessors of just a few months before.

To that point, consider the Reverberocket. The late-'61 and early '62 models featured an output stage common to most sub-20-watt amps of the era, generating around 15 watts from a pair of 6V6GTs with a 5Y3 rectifier, the same complement you'd see in the late-'50s tweed Fender Deluxe or early '60s Princeton.

IMAGED BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS, HA.COM

BY DAVE HUNTER



The front end used a set of octal-based tubes of the types seen in even earlier amp designs from other makers, including a pair each of 6SL7s and 6SN7s. In late '62 or early '63, however, Ampeg changed up the model entirely, issuing the Reverberocket 2 with 12AX7, 6U10 and 7199 preamp tubes, 7591 output tubes and solid-state rectification, along with a circuit that now included independent bass and treble controls, tremolo speed and intensity, and a single control for reverb depth, still labeled echo. Why the dramatic revamp, and why so soon? It all comes down to a battle between the archetypal tones of jazz and rock and roll.

“EVERETT HULL HATED ROCK AND ROLL. AMPS WERE NOT TO BE DISTORTED”

The Ampeg Bassamp Company was founded in 1949 by jazz pianist and bassist Everette Hull, largely on the back of an effort to amplify bass guitars. To that end, Hull's original design was a pickup fitted to the peg on which a double-bass stands, an invention dubbed the Amplified Peg, which was then shortened to Ampeg. As with any pickup, the Ampeg required an amplifier. As Hull's efforts proliferated among the jazz crowd through the '50s, his creations also caught the attention of many guitarists, and he hired engineer and designer Jess Oliver in 1956 to better fill growing demand.

Hull and Oliver released the early Reverberocket with the more common output stage, which allowed bitey, crunchy rock-and-roll breakup. As a result, the revolutionary reverb-equipped combo failed to fly with some jazz cats. The late Ken Fischer, builder

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- > 20 watts from two 7591 output tubes
- > 12AX7, 6U10 and 7199 preamp tubes
- > Controls for volume, bass, treble, speed, intensity, echo (reverb depth)
- > Navy check covering
- > Single 12-inch CTS speaker



of the famed and highly prized Trainwreck amps, was an engineer at Ampeg in the '60s, providing him with an informed perspective on the scene. “That R12-R Reverberocket that used 6V6 output tubes and all octals in the preamp, that was Everette Hull's one effort to make an amp that was a little more Fendery,” Fischer told me during our chats for my book *The Guitar Amp Handbook*. “You've got to keep in mind that Everett Hull hated rock and roll. He hated distortion, even when the blues guys would play with distortion. Amps were not to be distorted. So those R12-Rs had blue Jensens in them, 6SN7 and 6SL7 octals, which are always nice, fat-sounding tubes. That amp would be a great indie-rock machine.

“Ampeg made it for a short while, and all the jazz guys were complaining: ‘What's wrong with the new Reverberockets? They

break up too early.’ So Everette Hull converted them to 7591 [output tubes]. But if they had marketed them as a rock-and-roll amp, they probably would have been very successful.”

Fischer's take on the short-lived 6V6-based Reverberocket has made this relatively rare beast a favorite of rock and indie guitarists who seek an alternative flavor in the 15-watt, 1x12 combo arena. That said, the Reverberocket 2 that followed, as featured here, is also a great-sounding amp when kept in good condition. Its 7591s develop a little more power — likely something in the 20-watt range — and its diode rectification makes it slightly tighter and firmer, too, all of which helps to lend a slightly bolder, fuller voice to the famed Reverberocket. Either rendition is a classic in its own right, and your choice between the two really depends which flavor of Ampeg-driven goodness you're after. 🎸

BY JIM CAMPILONGO



Rule of Thumb

Thumbs Carllile showed his mastery of tone, touch and taste on 1973's *On His Own*.

KENNETH RAY CARLLILE was born in 1931 and grew up on a farm in Harrisburg, Illinois. At age eight he began playing his sister's resonator guitar, and when she hid the steel bar, young Kenneth used his thumb in its place, resulting in his nickname, Thumbs. This unorthodox technique spawned unusual chord voicings. Thumbs tuned his guitar down to E $\flat$ and would sometimes incorporate a capo à la Lonnie Mack, where open strings and guitaristic phrases could be available in F $\sharp$, A $\flat$ and so on. It was one of the many aspects of his musicality.

I have about five Thumbs Carllile records, and to be fair, some don't achieve the raw musicality seen in his live performances available on YouTube. Of the bunch, however, 1973's *On His Own*, on Gemini Records, is my favorite, as it showcases his versatility and distinctive style.

Thumbs played with dozens of great country stars, but his main gig for almost 10 years was with Roger Miller. Mundell Lowe, a great guitar player and friend of his, once proclaimed Thumbs "the most courageous guitar player for his unrehearsed swan dives into unfamiliar music." Once while at Scotty's Steel Guitar Convention in St. Louis, I met a musician who had played with Thumbs. While singing his praises, the man recalled a big industry showcase they were booked to play. Evidently there had been a long layover before the show, during which Thumbs relaxed, hung out by the pool and didn't practice a single lick. A week or more later, Thumbs showed up to the gig and played brilliantly, if not better than ever. Ah, to be a natural! Certainly, to play like Thumbs would involve thousands of hours of practice, but I loved that story.



On His Own opens with the Carllile original "Wounded Knee," a piece that juggles atmospheric blues lines that segue into huge rock chording reminiscent of Deep Purple organist Jon Lord (Thumbs had a cinematic compositional side). This is followed by "Son," another Thumbs original in a country-funk vein reminiscent of Jimmy Byrant and Speedy West's 1990 cut "Boogie Man." Thumbs' country-funk mastery is also displayed on "Mystery Train" and "Getting Your Ship Together." His guitar snaps, pops and grooves, while his double-stops and superimposed jazz lines speak out. I suspect this twangy

country-funk style is a lost art to another generation of guitarists, but maybe I don't get out enough.

The Hank Williams song "Lost Highway" is another personal favorite on which

Thumbs shows us how to play a melody. He also covers the Ventures' hit "Raunchy," itself a reworking of the classic by Bill Justis, who is *On His Own*'s credited arranger. Thumbs has a

refreshing take on the tune, making it bluesy, uptown and sometimes almost sneaky sounding.

Being a big Karen Carpenter fan, I was pleased by his take on the Carpenters' classic "Close to You," presented here as well. It's a real gem on which Thumbs displays a kind of Earl Klugh mastery, making a commercial sound perfectly palatable. On "Killing Me Softly," he plays the creamiest octaves I've ever heard. I didn't appreciate this Roberta Flack hit until I heard Thumbs unleash the beauty of its progression and melody. But to me, the standout track here is "Me & Memphis," a jazz blues in F on which Thumbs plays double-stops that are absolutely lovely and hot. I learned the top of this piece and was shocked to find how difficult it was, because Thumbs made it sound

so easy. I didn't try to touch his Gatton-like shredding that followed.

Players like Thumbs, Chet Atkins, Wes Montgomery, Phil Baugh, George Barnes and Howard Roberts, to name a few, come to mind as artists who can take any song and bring it to life instrumentally. From their example I've learned never to pre-judge a song as unworthy. If one can't find all the nooks and crannies a song is offering, it's not necessarily because of the song; more likely it's down to the shortcomings of one's imagination.

If I were to nitpick, I'd say some of *On His Own*'s songs are short and almost prematurely abbreviated. I suppose Thumbs left me wanting a little more. Likely he'll do the same for you. If you're unfamiliar with Thumbs Carllile, *On His Own* is a good place to start. It's an album where you can enjoy a masterful guitarist as he tutors us with his unique musicality. 🎸

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

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AND BRING IT TO LIFE
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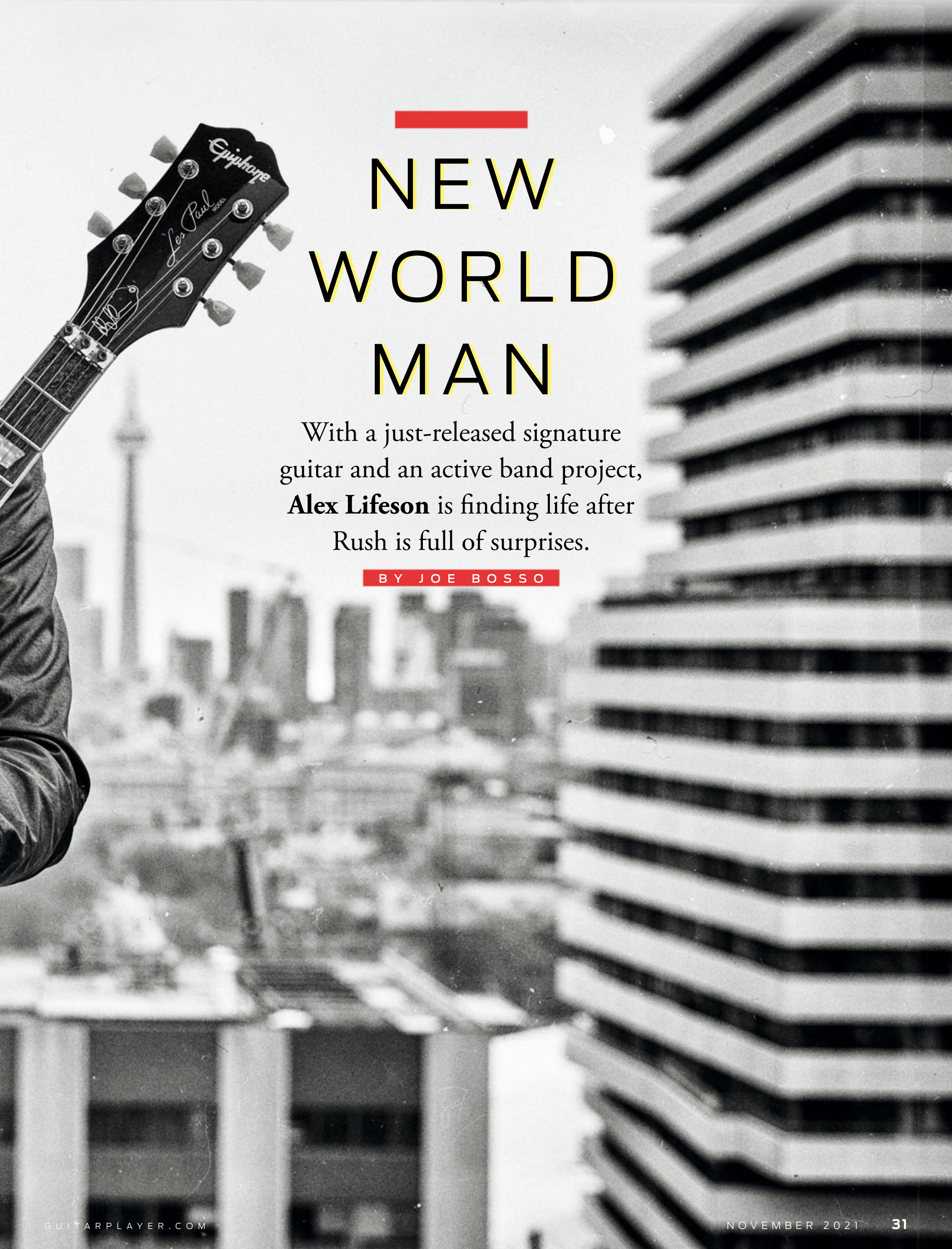


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NEW WORLD MAN

With a just-released signature guitar and an active band project, **Alex Lifeson** is finding life after Rush is full of surprises.

BY JOE BOSSO

“I FOUND THAT
INSPIRATION
AGAIN. SINCE
JANUARY, I
REALLY GOT
BACK INTO IT
IN A BIG WAY”

Rush perform
at Nashville's
Bridgestone
Arena,
May 1, 2013



A SIMPLE CONVERSATION STARTER like “How are you?” usually elicits a response along the lines of “I’m good.” So it’s comforting — and not a little surprising — when Alex Lifeson, sounding cheery and robust, and maybe a little bit relieved, says, “I’m excellent.”

Understandably, this isn’t the reaction one might expect to hear from the guitarist given the difficult circumstances of the past year and a half.

Compounding the Covid pandemic that has affected the world as a whole (forcing musicians, like everyone, to become virtual recluses), Lifeson was

dealt a much harsher and more devastatingly personal blow in January 2020, when his dear friend and Rush bandmate Neil Peart passed away from glioblastoma. Five years before, Rush had called it quits as a touring band after the drummer insisted he didn’t want to perform any longer if he couldn’t play at peak level. Peart’s tragic death brought with it a definitive end to the group’s 40-year career.

Since that time, Lifeson hasn’t talked to the press that much. “I feel like it’s been a while since I spoke to anybody,” he says, noting that he spent the majority of 2020 grieving Peart’s loss and processing his thoughts. Playing the guitar — always his salvation in good times and bad, and his fiercest pursuit since he took up the instrument at the age of 12 — held no interest for him. “I just didn’t feel inspired,” he says.

But shortly after the first anniversary of Peart’s death, he picked it up again. “And very quickly, it all came flooding back,” he says. “I found that inspiration

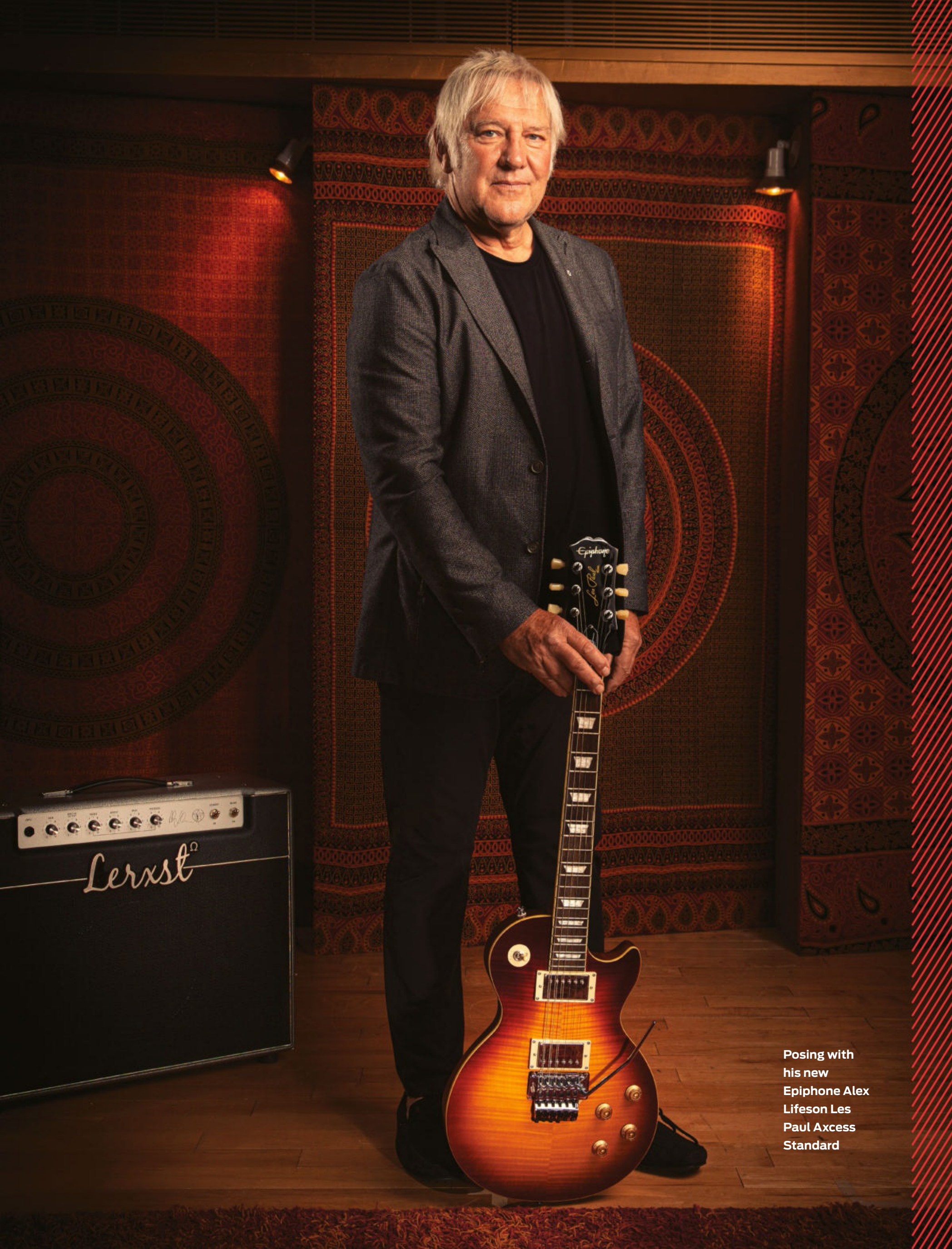
again. Since January, I really got back into it in a big way, which is great, because I love playing. It was difficult to just put it down and not be interested in playing, so it’s nice that it’s returned.”

He has other reasons to feel upbeat: There was the recent release of the Epiphone Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axxess Standard, a beautifully crafted (and moderately priced) remake of his earlier custom model for Gibson. And he even has a new band project, Envy of None, which also includes his longtime friend Andy Curran (former bassist for the Canadian band Coney Hatch) and a 24-year-old Portland, Oregon-based singer named Maiah Wynne. The group started out informally five years ago, not long after Rush quit touring. As Lifeson recalls, it wasn’t supposed to be a band at all. “Andy called me up and said he had a track, and he asked if I could add some guitar parts,” he says. “I said, ‘Sure. Send whatever you have over.’ This carried on for a while, and eventually Andy came across Maiah Wynne. The second I heard her voice on some of our material, it really opened my eyes. I thought, Wow, there is something really cool that we can do here.”

The guitarist recently posted two of their cuts on his website — “Kabul Blues,” a haunting, Eastern-sounding piece highlighted by Lifeson’s badass soloing, and “Spy House,” a tangy slice of atmospheric funk driven by a knockout cosmic riff — ahead of what he hopes will be an album release later this year. “Here we are, four or five years later, and we have 10 songs that are all sounding really good,” he says. “We’re looking to come up with a vehicle for a release, but you know, the industry is so different nowadays. You can’t just get a record deal like you used to. It’s much more difficult. And what does that even mean anymore? It’s been challenging, but we’re working hard on it.”

For years, Lifeson studiously avoided social media. “I was never interested in tweeting some comment I had in my mind or any of that stuff, and I liked the idea that I was protecting my private world,” he says. Recently, however, he finally broke down and launched an Instagram account, and the experience hasn’t been all that bad. “The response to my Instagram page — it’s kind of cuckoo, actually,” he laughs. “So I’m going to share music and material on the site — I’ve got tons of stuff recorded — and I can talk about where I was as a musician and on a personal level at different points. I’m looking forward to having that outlet now.”

How much personal detail he shares with his audience can sometimes be a tricky matter, and Lifeson recognizes that Rush fans are a particularly fervent lot. When asked if such intense interest, particularly in the wake of Peart’s passing, ever feels



Posing with
his new
Epiphone Alex
Lifeson Les
Paul Axxess
Standard

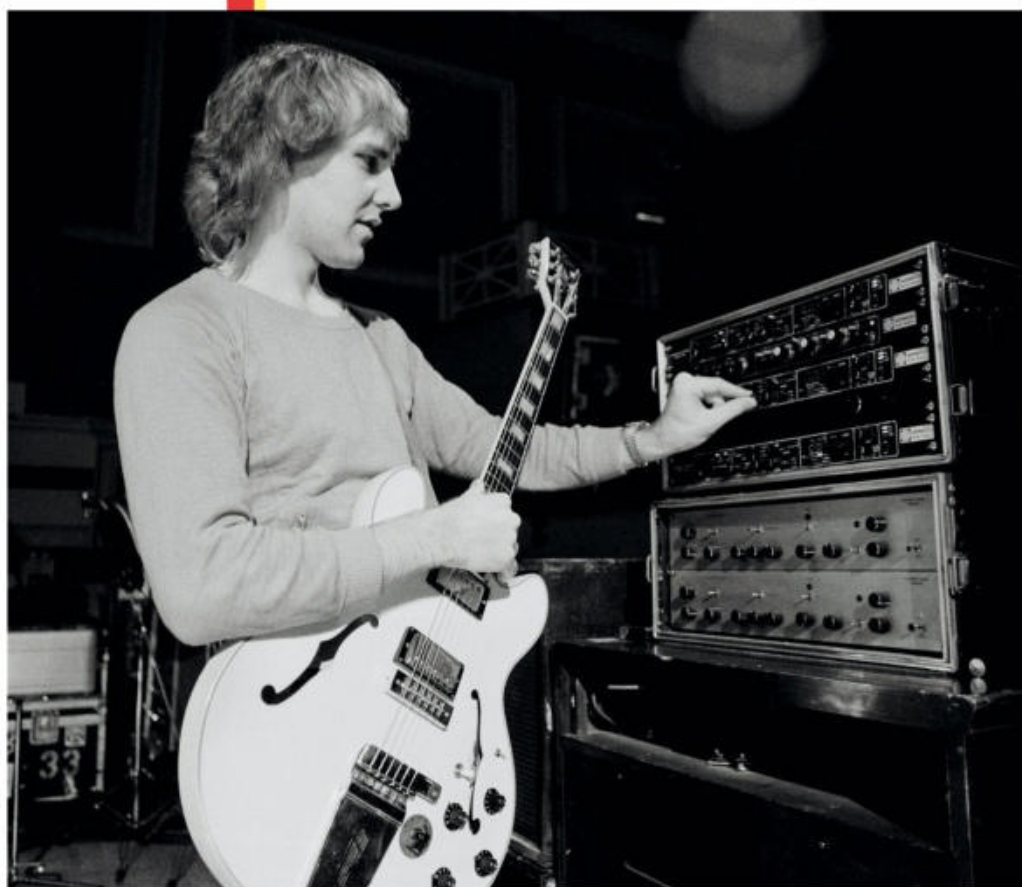
“WE HAVE 10 SONGS THAT ARE ALL SOUNDING REALLY GOOD. WE’RE LOOKING TO COME UP WITH A VEHICLE FOR A RELEASE”

Lifeson adjusts levels during a soundcheck at the De Montfort Hall, Leicester, June 21, 1980

like an intrusion, he answers, “I think it just comes with the territory. After 40 years of touring and being on that stage, people have their own preconceptions about who you are as a person. To me, I’m just Al, and I have my interests and my family and my life.

“But yes, with Rush fans, there was always quite an intense closeness between us, and it was a really important connection among the fans themselves. The activity level between Rush fans is still very strong, and the interest is certainly there, too.”

His relationship with childhood friend Geddy Lee remains as tight as ever. He and the Rush bassist-singer speak frequently, but Lifeson says there are no firm plans the two will work together any time soon. “Right now, I’m just happy to be playing guitar and making music again,” he says. “It’s sort of strange to be so busy after a very quiet period. It’s nice.” Grati­fied by the initial response to *Envy of None*’s first two offerings, he indicates that listeners might be in for some surprises. “The album will even include a country-and-western tune that I wrote,” he chuckles. “It’s pretty cool and different for me. I always find it fun to challenge myself, especially now. It’s different from the Rush experience of recording, but I love doing this kind of stuff. It’s interesting for me to do other things and just follow what my heart says. I love it.”



I’m curious about something. When you were a teenager, you had a certain relationship with the guitar — it was a tool with which you would achieve your rock dreams. Knowing that, how do you feel about the guitar now?

It’s interesting. I feel differently about it, and I feel the same. When I was young, I couldn’t stop playing guitar. I came home from school, and the first thing I did was go to my room and play till dinner. After dinner, I would play until I went to bed. I sat with records for hours and hours, lifting up the arm on my turntable and dropping the needle on a particular solo. I did this over and over and over.

Clapton’s solo on “Spoonful” — I spent hours trying to figure out how he played it. Finally, I played it on guitar for a friend of mine. We sat around my sister’s record player, and I played along to it. My friend was freaked out that I was actually able to learn it — maybe not as fluidly as Clapton could play, but it was all encompassing.

Nowadays, I think I have a much more mature relationship with the guitar, and I love playing. I have difficulty playing in standard tuning, so I’m just always finding some kind of alt tuning. It’s a little more challenging, but it’s immediately satisfying. All those harmonics and those beautiful tones, and the way your fingers go to new places. It’s a great challenge. Plus, I’m playing banjo and mandolin and mandola. I have a violin that I’m screwing around with. The guitars are coming off the walls constantly, and I’m really having kind of a renaissance with my playing after taking that year off to grieve Neil’s memory.

It’s no secret that you’ve suffered from arthritis. Has that affected your playing in a way that maybe you know but we might not?

I don’t think about it that much. It is what it is, and I play through it and it’s not so bad. I’m on really good medication, so I’ve kept it at bay. I used to require a lot of practice, but now I can just pick up and guitar and play without feeling rusty. Maybe that’s because of the 30,000 hours I’ve put into it. [laughs]

I always go to different areas and play different things, and so long as I can do that, I’ll be happy with it. Eventually, your physicality does preclude you from playing the way you used to, or playing at all, and I’m sure that day will come. But until then, I’m planning on playing as much as I can. And I do think that playing helps to keep my fingers limber and pretty pain free.

Rush never sounded overtly influenced by other bands — maybe Zeppelin a bit in the beginning. However, starting with *Permanent Waves*, there was



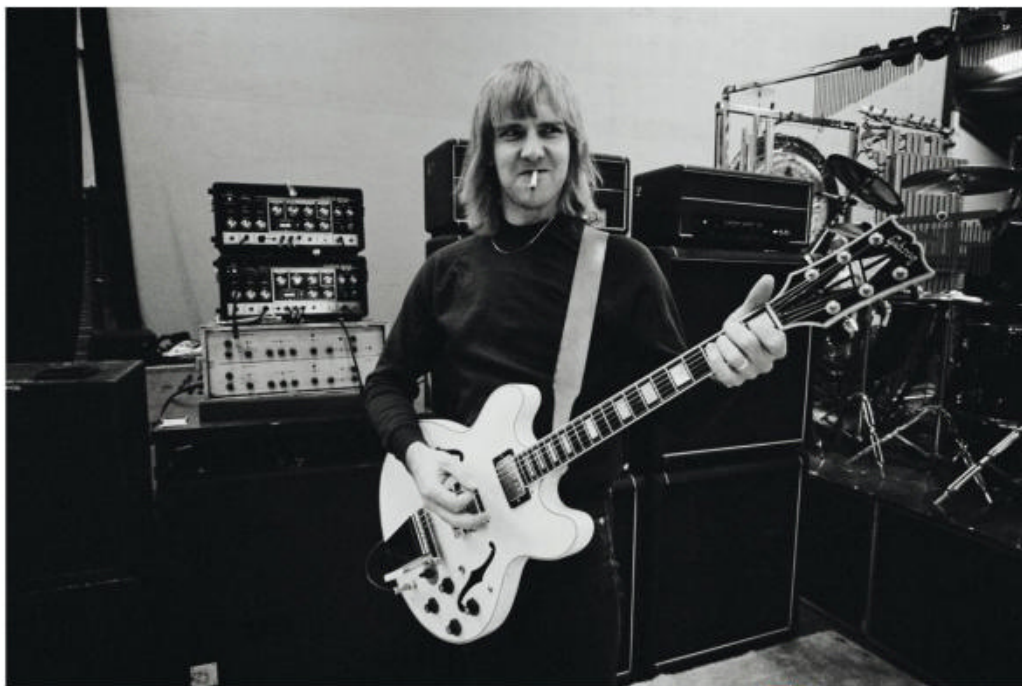
a noticeable Police vibe creeping in. Who in the band got turned on to the Police first?

I'm not sure. I think we all got into the Police around the same time in the late '70s. I always thought Andy Summers was a fabulous guitar player. I loved his discipline in the context of a three-piece band. I kind of fell in love with the chorus pedal at the same time as him, so I don't know if he was an influence in that way. We just both happened to come across this cool effect that influenced our playing. But I do think their approach to reggae — the way they Westernized it, I suppose — was really interesting to us. The Police took that music to a really cool place.

Did you and Andy ever get together? I know Neil became very good friends with Stewart Copeland.

No, I never did, unfortunately, but I have done stuff with Stewart at his place. We had one great session. We went out to dinner, the three of us — Neil, Stewart and me — and afterward we went to his place. He's got this really cool setup, just tons of instruments everywhere. I paraded through there and played everything I could. So we played and he recorded it. I remember Stewart telling me afterward, "What a night! I got great stuff and can't wait to put it all together." But something happened. His drive crashed and he lost the whole session. It was really heartbreaking.

It seems that most of your guitar influences were in trios — sometimes with a singer out in front — but



you never leaned toward two-guitar bands.

That's true. I don't know if that was just coincidence or why that is, but you're right. Cream, Hendrix, the Who — they were all essentially three-piece bands.

And, of course, the Police were a three-piece. What about U2 and The Edge? He had his own thing going on with effects. Did he get on your radar in a big way?

Yeah, I thought his style was so unique for the time. We did meet once. U2 were playing in Toronto and Primus was opening for them. I went to the show and sat down with Edge for a little bit after they'd played. It can always feel uncomfortable being in somebody

TOP: On the *All the World's a Stage* tour, May 1, 1977

ABOVE: At soundcheck, Bingley Hall, Staffordshire, England, September 21, 1979



ROLL THE TONES

Epiphone Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axxess Standard

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

THE INTRODUCTION OF the Epiphone Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axxess Standard is big news for Rush fans because it makes their hero's signature model much more accessible than its premium Gibson predecessor, introduced a decade ago. In the spirit of Epiphone and Gibson's modern hand-in-glove coordination and the mother company's longstanding relationship with one of rock's premier players, this Epiphone represents a

SPECIFICATIONS

Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axxess Standard

CONTACT epiphone.com

PRICE \$899 street

NUT Floyd Rose R4 locking nut, 1 11/16" wide

NECK Set mahogany, Axxess contour heel, 24.72" scale, Lifeson profile

FRETBOARD Bound Indian laurel, 12" radius, large dot inlays, trapezoid inlays

FRETS 22 medium-jumbo

TUNERS Epiphone Deluxe with keystone buttons

BODY Solid mahogany back with comfort-carve belly scarf plus carved maple top with AAA flame maple veneer

BRIDGE Graph Tech Ghost Tremolo

PICKUPS Epiphone Ceramic Pro (neck), Epiphone ProBucker 3 (bridge) Graph Tech Ghost Piezo (bridge saddles)

FACTORY STRINGS Epiphone .010–.046

CONTROLS Three-way switch, neck and bridge volume knobs each with push/pull coil split; piezo volume knob with push/pull on/off; master tone

WEIGHT 9 lbs

BUILT China

KUDOS Super tonal versatility. Wonderful playability. Exceptional value

CONCERNS Faulty pickup switch



career's worth of considerations and innovations. Primary among them is the instrument's tonal versatility. In addition to the coil-splitting capabilities of both magnetic pickups, it features a piezo bridge pickup that can either be accessed by means of a dedicated second output jack or summed with the magnetic pickups into the primary output.

As Lifeson explains to *Guitar Player*, this unique pickup configuration developed from his desire for an elegant solution to using an acoustic guitar onstage. "Switching from electric to acoustic was always cumbersome, and an acoustic on a stand became a beacon for uncontrollable feedback, particularly in acoustic parts repeated throughout the song," he says. "I really needed to have a more stable

platform. Incorporating the piezo pickup on an electric guitar did that, as well as allow me to blend in the piezo, adding another dimension to the live guitar character."

Visually, this guitar is a badass. The flame maple veneer on its carved Viceroy Brown-finished maple top conjures the vibe of a vintage Gibson Les Paul, albeit not quite as fancy. Appointments include four golden top-hat control knobs, trapezoid fretboard inlays, keystone tuners, cream binding all around, a set-neck glued into a solid mahogany body, and Lifeson's signature etched in the truss-rod cover. Beyond the pickup configuration, Lifeson-specific features include a Floyd Rose locking vibrato system and a neck profile built to his personal specs — "moderate, not too thick and not too thin."



Sling it over your shoulder and, yeah, it's heavy, but not particularly so for a Les Paul. A slight scarf cutaway on the top back makes it feel cozy against one's belly, while a sculpted cutaway at the base of the neck allows for more comfortable playing in the upper registers. The neck is full without being too plump, and the fretboard feels nice and smooth all the way up and down. The factory setup was spot-on as well, and while the action seemed almost too easy at first, there was no buzz or splat to be found. Shred away in the short rows and every note on each string is actually usable. Power chords and barre chords in the middle range come readily, and cowboy chords in open position have fantastic jangle. The Floyd Rose-style double-locking vibrato keeps everything in

tune while facilitating the deep dives and sky-high lifts of Lifeson's playing that can only be achieved with such a serious system. All that extra metal brings some brightness, sure, but that's part of the signature sound too.

Speaking of which, the tonal diversity on tap is astounding. The Axxess Standard has Epiphone's Ceramic Pro humbucker in the neck position and a ProBucker 3 near the bridge, and both can be split into single-coil mode with a lift of the corresponding push/pull volume knob. In humbucker mode, the neck pickup is girthy and the lead pickup is edgy. In combination, they complement each other to create a copacetic middle ground.

The coil splitting proved to be versatile. When playing in the lower register with the neck pickup, and using a bit of gain from a Blackstone Mosfet Overdrive into a 1966 Fender Super Pro, I found the sound a bit fizzy, but splitting the coil cleared it up. Doing the same with the lead pickup took the tone into funky treble territory. When combined, the two pickups coil-tapped all the way to slinky town. These units don't sound as crystal clear and powerful as the Gibson Burstbuckers included on Epiphone's Limited Edition 1959 Les Paul Standard, but they do deliver a fine PAF vibe and sound that's similar to the Burstbuckers with the volume knobs dialed back a bit.

The most unique feature is the piezo acoustic sound that comes courtesy of the Graph Tech Ghost Tremolo Bridge. Since this reviewer has an affinity for dual systems, I was all in on going down that rabbit hole. The Ghost is engaged or disengaged by pulling or pushing what would have been the second tone knob.

Here it acts as a blend control for bringing in or out the desired amount of acoustic sound. Isolating the signal via the second output jack and feeding it to an Orange Acoustic Pedal through an L.R.Baggs Synapse Personal P.A., I found it delivered a decent acoustic rock tone that sounded believable when I played the intro to "Closer to the Heart." It possesses the full low end and top articulation that piezos do best. Blend that with the magnetics' fantastic middle range, and it's the best of

both worlds. And the controls are easier to manage than one might suspect.

The trickiest aspect of mastering the Epiphone Alex Lifeson Axxess is working the vibrato bar while having the piezo pickup engaged. There's a reason these features aren't often offered together. Those piezos are located right in the individual bridge saddles, so they pick up every rattle of a shaking vibrato arm. On my Strat, I mitigate that by wrapping the arm threads in plumber's tape. That didn't work here because the threads aren't on the bar; they're outside, where the system is secured with a little threaded thimble-like apparatus. No matter how tight that is, there's still plenty of wiggle room. The bridge piezos convey the rattle much more than the magnetic pickups in the body do, so the workaround is to be judicious with the whammy when the acoustic sound is prominent, and then dial that back when you want to go wild.

The Epiphone Alex Lifeson Axxess delivers a whole lotta bang for the buck, with tons of features packed into the Les Paul platform. I can't think of another guitar that delivers such a diverse tonal range, easy playability, comfort, impressive looks and quality craftsmanship for under a grand. The main

"SWITCHING FROM ELECTRIC TO ACOUSTIC WAS ALWAYS CUMBERSOME. I REALLY NEEDED TO HAVE A MORE STABLE PLATFORM"

fault I have to report is that the pin securing the pickup selector switch broke during routine use, requiring replacement. It came loose shortly after arrival, so could have been the result of a rocky ride in the UPS truck.

As Frets Editor I've become more of an acoustic enthusiast than I ever imagined I'd be when I was growing up listening to hard-rock acts like Rush.

Lifeson clearly found himself so far down the acoustic trail that he was inspired to make his electric signature instruments in a hybrid style. For players like me who revel in the balance and want to make the most of both rigs onstage, this is a dream delivery. For the average player, it's a utilitarian Les Paul with some cool features and awesome options. For anyone, it's a steal of a deal on a modern marvel of an instrument that easily earns an Editors' Pick Award. 🎸

else's dressing room, especially after a show, so we never got a chance to talk a whole lot, which is unfortunate. I think we could have become pretty good friends, and I always wanted to play with him. I think that would be a really fun kind of evening.

Have any other guitarists from the past 30 or 40 years made a real impact on you? Maybe somebody we don't recognize, but you're sneaking in a bit of their style?

Oh, yeah. There's certainly Allan Holdsworth and David Gilmour. Actually, I just did a thing with Tom Morello and Kirk Hammett. Tom sent me a track that he'd written and demoed, and he said, "Just play everything you can on this. I'm going to send it to

Kirk, and he's going to do the same thing." I've always admired those guys, and especially Tom. The energy in his playing and his innovative style is really exciting to listen to. This track is typical Tom Morello. I got my mandola out and I started putting other kinds of things on it, and I think that really expanded what the song ultimately became. He's working on that project, and I'm excited to hear how it turns out.

"AS SOON AS YOU ADD SOME STRANGE TIME SIGNATURES, YOU'RE LABELED A PROGRESSIVE ROCK BAND"

The term *progressive rock* has been co-opted by bands that specialize in aerobic displays of musicianship and guitar-clinic solos. Did you ever mind being lumped in with that club?

Well, you know, we always kind of considered ourselves — and referred to ourselves — as just a hard-rock band. We weren't progressive rock in the way you described it. We were always progressive in that we were trying to evolve and move forward in

At a Gibson endorsement event, June 1980



how we approached music and how we applied our own ideas and inspiration. We weren't offended by the term, but I think it's a little inaccurate. As soon as you add some strange time signatures, you're labeled a progressive-rock band.

Some music trends kill bands, but Rush always seemed above the fray. Whether it was punk in the '70s or grunge in the '90s, you were never attacked by the new class coming in. It's as if Rush were untouchable.

I think that's just because we did what we did and what we wanted at all times. We were fortunate in that way. I remember before we did the album *2112*, there was a lot of pressure on us to kind of toe the line and be sort of — I don't know — that baby Led Zeppelin kind of band from the first couple of records. *2112* bought us our independence from any kind of record company or management interference. It allowed us to do the things we thought we should do. Sometimes it was successful, and sometimes it wasn't quite so successful, but they were our failures and we learned from them, and we always wanted to move forward. We never wanted to stay in the same place.

A lot of the music that was going on around us was great to listen to, and it was inspiring. Like anything, it influences you, even in subtle ways. I hear those influences in our music during those periods. What was great was that we took advantage of it and then moved on to the next thing, and we always maintained our own sort of flavor. I think our fans came to expect that from us. Rush fans are incredibly supportive, but they're also quite critical. We thrived on that criticism from them — not so much from music critics, but certainly from our fans. That was very important.

Let's talk about guitars, specifically Gibsons. Your history with Gibson goes back a ways: the ES-355, the EDS-1275 double-neck, the Dove acoustic. But the white 355 became kind of a constant for you. What was special about that one?

It started around 1976, when I did a tour of the Gibson factory in Kalamazoo. I was really excited about the tour but also the idea of ordering guitars at the factory. We were starting to make a little bit of money and getting some notoriety, so I could afford it. I've always been an ES guy and came up with the 335, but I quickly fell in love with the white 355, which sort of seemed like the ultimate guitar for me. I loved the weight of it, the feel, the look, the sound. I could just play it. It became part of me. Everything about it was right.

I loved the Dove, and the double-neck was a good utility guitar that we were planning on expanding. It

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



gave me another platform. But that 355, we've been through a lot together. It's been good to me.

A few years ago, you and Gibson came out with the Custom Alex Lifeson Les Paul Axxess. I can only imagine what a thrill it was to create a guitar to your own specifications.

It was. I didn't want to have a guitar just to see my name on it. That's easy, and a lot of people do that just to sell more guitars. I wanted a guitar that I would want to buy for what it was, for its features, so that's what we created. We spent a couple of years working on it, going back and forth on the pickups and the neck. I wanted the piezo pickup in it — to me, that was a given. I wanted it to become a great utility instrument.

One of the most satisfying things for me was hearing that a number of session musicians in Nashville bought the guitar because it gave them so much flexibility for their sessions. I thought, Yeah, perfect. That's exactly what it was meant to be — that kind of a guitar.

It wasn't just because they were Rush fans.

Right. The idea of "I can use this at work. This is a good tool for me." I mean, I love guitars. They're fabulous and gorgeous to look at, but at the end of the day, they have to serve a purpose. You need the right tool for the job.

What was the origin for the new version of the Axxess with Epiphone? What went into that?



It was a natural transition. Gibson owns Epiphone, and they wanted to re-release my signature Axxess in the Epiphone brand. I liked that idea, but one of my main concerns was about maintaining the quality at a much-reduced price from the Gibson. I talked to them, and they said, "Don't worry. Leave it to us. We're going to come up with something you're going to be happy with."

I think we went through two prototypes. There were headstock changes between the two, but essentially that was it. I remember getting one of them and spending a couple of weeks at home playing it, fiddling around with it, trying to wreck it. [laughs] It was sensational. I was really, really happy with the

TOP: With Neil Peart and Geddy Lee (top) making of *Permanent Waves*, October 1979

ABOVE: At Charter One Pavilion, Chicago, July 5, 2010

quality of the workmanship and all of the features. Everything about it was very satisfying to me.

We were going to release it a year ago, but things got weird with the pandemic. Guitar manufacturers were faced with no stock on anything because everybody was staying home learning how to play

guitar. It's been quite a tumultuous year and a half, but finally, a couple of weeks ago, we did get through the release, and my understanding is they sold out the first run. We're quite happy and excited about getting the next batch built.

“THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY WAS THE TURNING POINT FROM BEING SAD TO REMEMBERING ALL THE GOOD STUFF”

That's such a strange phenomenon. Live music stopped, but people bought more guitars than ever.

Yeah, I know! You would never have expected that. My perception was that music changed so much in the past few years — it's all poppy and

electronic. How many young kids were interested in learning how to play guitar? And apparently, a lot.

Speaking of live music, it has to be asked: Are you thinking of playing live again?

I'm not really thinking about that. It's challenging enough to try to get this album out first. To be honest with you, I don't think I have it in me to go on the road. I mean, if it was a handful of shows, that might be kind of fun, but anything beyond that... After 40 years of sitting in hotel rooms, I'm not interested. I've had quite enough of that. I do love my home life.

I thought I would miss being onstage a lot more, but I don't really. I've done a couple of things here and there. Small things — usually it's a charity event or something like that. It's kind of fun getting up and

Onstage at KeyArena, in Seattle, for the R40 LIVE tour, July 19, 2015



playing with other people, but the whole production — the big, giant machine — it doesn't really hold much appeal to me now.

How's your golf game?

It's a roller coaster. [laughs] It goes up and down, and it's terrifying most of the time. I think part of the problem is, because I'm a guitar player, I'm always trying to change something. I'm always trying to look at how I can make this little thing better, and I can't seem to settle into a groove, and my hands are too active in my swing. But I do love it. I keep dreaming about eventually getting better, but it's not in the cards for me, not at this age.

What's it like for you these days when you hear a Rush song on the radio? Given the fact that Neil has passed, I have to imagine that it's a different experience for you now.

I guess it is. I mean, there are lots of ways that I'm reminded of Neil. When a Rush song comes up and I listen to it, my first reaction is, “Oh, I remember how we did that. I really wanted to do that line over, but I didn't.” Those sorts of things run through my head. Or I say, “Yeah, this has held up after 30 years. It's not too bad. We did a good job on that one.” I seem to be more critical in that sense than nostalgic. I think I get more nostalgic when I see pictures of Neil and I'm reminded of that moment. There were so many. And I'm reminded of the rich relationship the three of us had and what a wonderful time we had together.

I think that's the thing with grieving — it takes time, obviously. It's trite to say that, but it takes time. I found that the first anniversary was the turning point from being sad about it to remembering all the good stuff. That was kind of the breakthrough I had after the first anniversary of his passing. I started to focus more on his laughing face. We did have a lot of laughs together. ■



GOOD VIBES

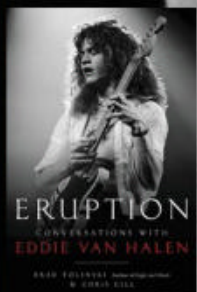
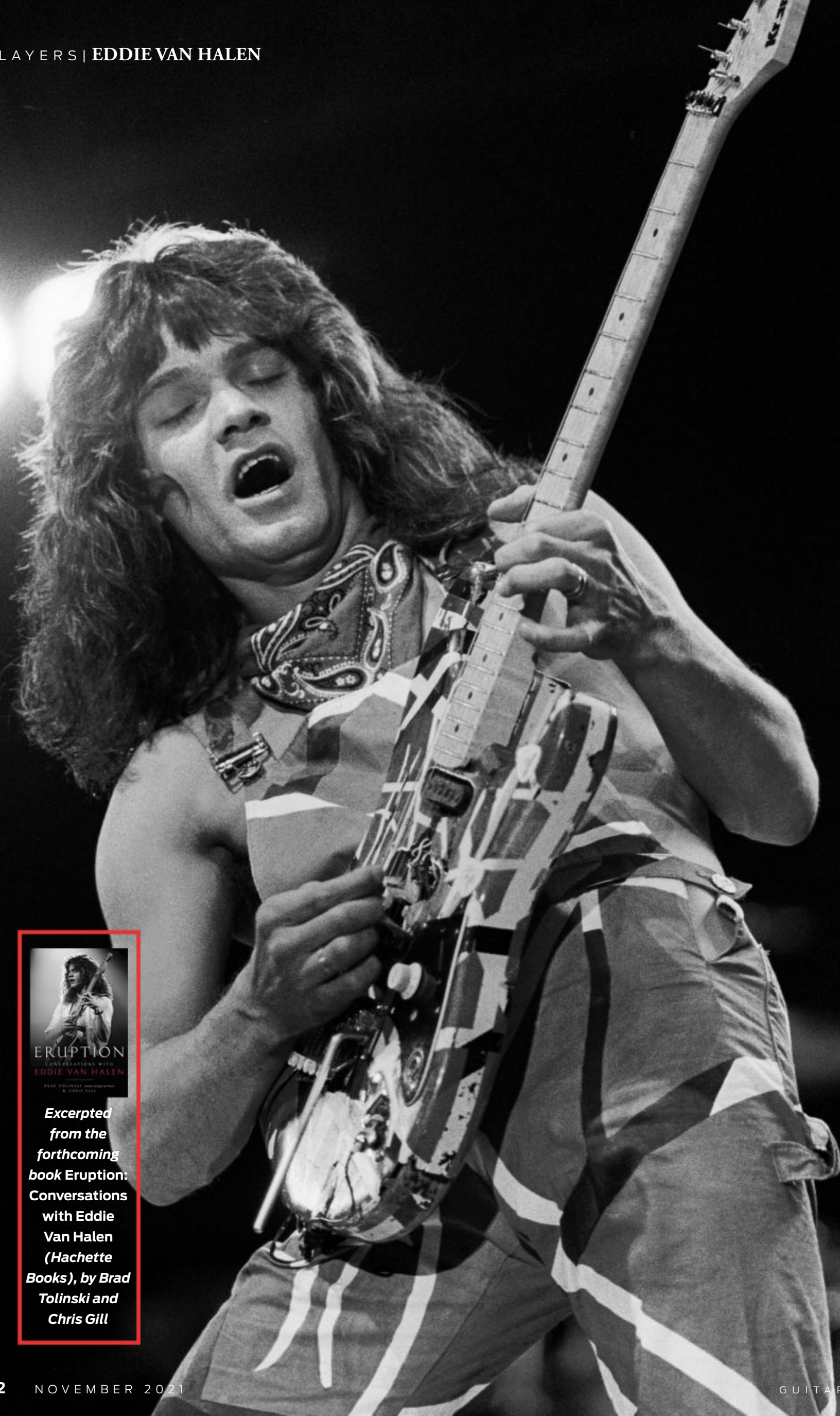
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*Excerpted
from the
forthcoming
book Eruption:
Conversations
with Eddie
Van Halen
(Hachette
Books), by Brad
Tolinski and
Chris Gill*

UNCHAINED

In this excerpt from *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen*, Brad Tolinski and Chris Gill reveal how Ed's recording studio and outside projects unleashed his creativity. The result was Van Halen's masterpiece, *1984*.

AFTER COMPLETING WORK on 1982's *Diver Down*, Ed Van Halen felt unusually restless. Although he and the band had worked almost nonstop for five years, the guitarist was in no mood for rest and relaxation. The album may have been an unexpected obligation forced upon Van Halen by Warner Bros., but instead of feeling relieved that he'd gotten it out of the way, Ed had the uneasy sensation that he could have done more.

Van Halen had more than four months of time off before their 1982 Hide Your Sheep tour was scheduled to begin in mid-July. With his bandmates away on vacation and his wife occupied with shooting *One Day at a Time* and made-for-television movies, Ed spent most of his time off alone, playing guitar or writing songs on his piano and synthesizers. The many accolades he'd received for his playing never went to his head, and in fact they made him more determined to grow as a musician instead of resting on his laurels.

Ed's impact on the guitar world had by this time become incalculable. Besides being arguably the most

innovative and most imitated guitarist on the planet, he'd also joined the ranks of the most influential guitar designers of his time. His DIY Frankenstein was hailed as a genuine breakthrough, even receiving a big thumbs-up from the genius of geniuses himself, Les Paul, a man notoriously difficult to impress.

A growing number of guitar manufacturers were shamelessly copying Ed's minimalist single humbucking pickup/volume control-only/vibrato bar "super Strat" design, with some even having the unmitigated gall to rip off his signature striped graphics. He was justifiably becoming angrier by the day as he watched others copy his ideas and rake in the dough. So when the founding partner of Kramer Guitars, Dennis Berardi, approached Ed in February 1982 with a generous endorsement deal, the guitarist was ready to sign on the dotted line.

Meanwhile, Edward's revolutionary two-handed tapping technique, squealing harmonics and deep whammy-bar dives were also being brazenly cannibalized by other players and seemingly overnight incorporated into the arsenal of heavy metal, new wave, pop and even jazz players. Ozzy

OPENING
PAGE: Eddie
Van Halen
onstage at the
US Festival,
Ontario,
California, May
29, 1983

BELOW:
Onstage at
Madison
Square Garden
for the 1984
tour. The
massive jaunt
sold out all 99
shows.

Osbourne's guitarist, Randy Rhoads — who rose to prominence with Quiet Riot on the Hollywood club scene along with Van Halen — was one of many who built upon Ed's foundation. The 25-year-old Rhoads' tragic death in a plane crash on March 19, 1982, temporarily led to his superseding Ed as rock's preeminent guitarist.

But if he felt threatened in any way by Rhoads — or any of the other up-and-coming guitar virtuosos — he didn't show it. In fact, Ed went out of his way to befriend a number of guitar-playing peers he respected.

During the spring of 1982, one in particular caught his attention: the British jazz-fusion/progressive-rock guitarist Allan Holdsworth, whom Ed had met on tour in 1978. Holdsworth's outlandish choice of notes and sophisticated left-handed legato work that produced horn-like tones and timbres captivated him like nothing since Eric Clapton's playing in his Cream years. He was thrilled when he discovered that Holdsworth was moving to Southern California, and

Ed was determined to jam with him — and perhaps produce a record for him on Warner Bros.

"I took [him] to some meetings and somehow he ended up spending the night at my house," Ed recalled. "When we woke up, Allan said, 'Shit, I have to be at GIT [*the Guitar Institute of Technology*] at noon to do a seminar.' I raced him down there just in time. Before I knew it, I was onstage with him and his band, and we were both answering questions and playing together. It was quite fun, actually, and very interesting, especially for the students. Because Allan and I play very different, we answered the same questions very differently."

This incident led to Ed contributing a chapter to the Musicians' Institute/GIT instruction book *Ten*, published later that year. The guitarist's involvement with the Hollywood music school resulted in a surge in enrollment of wannabe rock guitar heroes, who would later form bands that became part of the "hair metal" scene that dominated Los Angeles clubs for the rest of the '80s. The notable Van Halen-inspired players who studied at GIT included Paul Gilbert (Racer X, Mr. Big) and Dave Kushner (Wasted Youth, Velvet Revolver).

GIT graduates weren't the only musicians trying to follow in Van Halen's footsteps to stardom via the now-exploding Hollywood club scene. The band Steeler imported hyperkinetic Euro-shredder Yngwie Malmsteen from Stockholm, Sweden, and Ed's club days accomplice George Lynch finally found fame with the band Dokken. Ratt and Stryper both worked their way up the scene by starting as house bands at Gazzarri's, and although Mötley Crüe and Poison might not have had guitarists with Eddie's chops, they had a similar pop-metal sensibility that eventually made them household names.

A short while after the GIT seminar, Holdsworth invited Van Halen to join him onstage once again for a show at Hollywood's Roxy Theatre on April 29. Ed jammed with the band during their last song, and backstage after the show he met a young guitarist named Steve Vai, who was playing in Frank Zappa's band. Vai gave Van Halen his phone number and offered to introduce him to Zappa.

After a series of phone calls the following week, Van Halen, Vai and Zappa convened at Zappa's home studio. "Oddly enough, Edward lived, like, a mile away from Frank," Vai recalled. "While we were there, he ran home and came back with the new Van Halen record — I think it was *Diver Down* — and we listened to it. At Frank's studio there are just tons of instruments, so Edward started playing, and then Frank started playing, and then I started playing. It wasn't a song — it was just jamming. It was a lot of fun, and it went on for a while."





This encounter led to Zappa asking Ed if he would produce a single by his son, Dweezil, who was a huge Van Halen fan. Ed agreed, and a short while later he returned to Zappa's home studio with engineer Donn Landee. Both were impressed with the sound quality they were able to coax from Zappa's studio, and after the sessions were finished, the two talked about building a similar studio at Ed's house. Having such a facility literally in his backyard would provide Ed with an ideal place to capture and work on ideas, leading to his reestablishment as the driving force behind Van Halen's subsequent albums. Thus, the concept for 5150 was born.

Around this time, Van Halen also frequently hung out with studio guitarist and Toto member Steve Lukather, one of the handful of players Ed respected. In addition to his membership in a chart-topping band, Lukather had recorded hundreds of sessions with rock, pop, jazz and funk artists, including ripping solos on hits from Olivia Newton-John's "Physical" to "Talk to Ya Later" by the Tubes.

In 1982, Lukather was working in the studio with R&B giant Michael Jackson and legendary producer Quincy Jones on an album tentatively called *Thriller*. Jones suggested Jackson compose a rock song, in the hope that it would cross over to MTV and the white teenage market. Jackson wrote "Beat It" and came up with the idea of having Eddie Van Halen play a guitar solo on the song.

When Jones first called Edward to inform him of Jackson's request, the guitarist thought it was a prank

call and slammed down the receiver. This scenario repeated itself several times before Ed stayed on the line long enough to realize that it actually was the real Quincy Jones. Jackson and Jones dropped by the Coldwater Canyon house a few days later to play a rough version of "Beat It" for him, and, liking what he heard, Ed agreed to record a solo.

Since his bandmates were all away on vacation, Ed was unable to ask how they felt about his playing on the record. Truth be told, he didn't think too much about it. He was bored, had time on his hands, and it sounded like fun to work with Jones and Jackson. Besides, who'd ever notice his contribution to an R&B dance record?

The entire session took a mere two hours, and during that time Ed would write a new section for the song and record a 30-second solo [see sidebar, page 46]. The whole thing happened so quickly, Ed was too embarrassed to ask for compensation, but in an attempt to hide his infidelity from his bandmates, he did request that he not be credited on the album sleeve.

It didn't quite work out that way. "Beat It" went on to become a chart-topping, worldwide explosion of a song, winning Record of the Year at the 1984 Grammy Awards. Even though Ed's name was buried among the inner sleeve credits, the doorbell

Ed at the 1983 NAMM Show in Chicago with Kramer Guitars' Dennis Berardi, who sealed an endorsement deal with the guitarist.

"I WASN'T GOING TO ALLOW THEM TO CONTROL ME ANYMORE"
— EDDIE VAN HALEN

CUT TO THE CHASE

Steve Lukather reveals how Eddie hijacked “Beat It.”



EDWARD VAN HALEN rarely participated in musical projects outside of his namesake band, but when he did, it often involved his fellow guitarist and good friend Steve Lukather. The two both played on Michael Jackson’s mega-hit “Beat It” (although their parts were recorded separately); Ed appeared on two of Lukather’s solo albums; and he joined Lukather and George Harrison onstage on December 14, 1992, for the Jeff Pocaro tribute concert, which was broadcast on KLOS-FM and later released as a live album. “We were friends for 40-plus years,” Lukather says. “We went through life together — all the good times, bad times, ridiculous times, sad times, the whole shit. We were much more than just guitar pals. I adored the man as a human being.”

The first record that the two of you ever did together was Michael Jackson’s “Beat It.” Was it your idea to get Eddie to play the solo on that song?

No. That was entirely Michael’s idea. A lot of people don’t know that Michael was also a rocker. He loved Van Halen and he loved Toto.



“I NEVER KNEW ED TO LABOR OVER ANYTHING, SO I THINK HE WAS JUST GOOFING ON IT”

That’s why he hired us to work on several songs on his record. Michael had a very wide musical palette. I knew Eddie, but I wasn’t going to just give them his number. They had to go through the right channels. I wasn’t Ed’s agent or manager. Ed wasn’t all that up on Quincy Jones and what he did. He was asking me, “Who is this Quincy dude?” I told him that he was a really heavy cat and that he should do it.

It was ironic that we both ended up playing on the same record together. Ed later called me up and said, “I just played on your record, ‘Beat It.’” And I was going, “I know. We had to redo it because you cut up the tape!” He just started laughing.

What’s the story behind that?

We recorded a version of the song at Westlake Recording Studios, which is where Michael recorded the entire album, and Ed recorded his solo later at Sunset Sound. Michael had already recorded five separate vocal tracks. They spent a lot of time working on his vocals, because they wanted it to sound as good as possible. Those finished first-generation vocals were on a 24-track tape that we gave to Ed so he could record his solo. Either Ed or his engineer [Donn Landee] cut up that tape because Ed didn’t want to record his solo over the original backing part where Quincy and Michael wanted him to play. He just edited the tape to create an

ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (LUKE & ED)



Performing with the Jacksons on their Victory tour in Dallas, July 13, 1983. This was Ed's only appearance with the group.

entirely new section with chord changes that he liked better.

The problem is that back then we would record one track with SMPTE code [*Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers timecode*] for synchronizing one 24-track recorder with another 24-track recorder. That allowed us to record more than just 24 tracks. When you cut the tape, the SMPTE code doesn't lock up to the master tape any more. Quincy called me and [*drummer*] Jeff Pocaro and told us to go to Sunset Sound and record all of our parts all over again, because he didn't want to lose Ed's solo or Michael's first-generation lead vocals. Jeff had to make an entirely new click track with drum sticks so

he could play his drum part. He did that and nailed his drum track on the second take. Then I had to cram my guitar tracks onto it, and I also played bass.

We sent the tapes back to Quincy and he said, "It's too big sounding. It's too rock." I thought that since Eddie was on the track, I'd better crank up some Marshalls and record quadruple rhythm tracks. Quincy explained that he wanted the song to get airplay on R&B radio as well as rock radio, so he asked me to play through my small Fender amps. I did it again like that, and that's the version that's on the record. I'm honored to be playing guitar and bass on "Beat It." It's one of the biggest records of all time.

What did you think of Ed's solo?

That solo was like a collection of everything that Eddie ever did before, crammed into 20 seconds — harmonics, tapping, whammy-bar dives, superfast tremolo picking. I don't think that a whole lot of thought went into it. He just played and was probably thinking, I don't even know what I'm doing this for. I never knew Ed to labor over anything, so I think he was just goofing on it. But even when he was goofing, great things would come out of him.

Excerpted from Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen (Hachette Books), by Brad Tolinski and Chris Gill.

harmonics, distinctive vibrato-bar dips and frantic tapping could be the work of only one man.

David Lee Roth later was the first to take notice. “I was in a 7-Eleven parking lot,” he recalled. “There

were a couple of butch Mexican gals with the doors open of their pickup truck, and the new Michael Jackson song ‘Beat It’ came on. I heard the guitar solo and thought, Now that sounds familiar. Somebody’s ripping off Ed Van Halen’s licks. It was Ed, turns out, and he had gone and done the project without discussing it with anybody, feeling as though I would stand in the way. Actually, I wouldn’t

have at all. Quincy Jones is stellar company. If you’re going to do something, climb the big one.”

Ed’s brother Al and bassist Michael Anthony were equally forgiving — it was hard to criticize something that was exploding into a global phenomenon. And the crossover to the Black listening market was beneficial for the Van Halen brand.

**“SOMEBODY’S
RIPPING OFF ED VAN
HALEN’S LICKS. IT
WAS ED, TURNS OUT”
— DAVID LEE ROTH**

**Onstage
at Nassau
Coliseum,
Uniondale,
New York, 1984**

The band’s Hide Your Sheep tour commenced on July 14, 1982, in Augusta, Georgia, and they remained focused on performing through mid-February of 1983, as the dates extended into their first-ever concerts in South America. After the band wrapped up the tour in Buenos Aires, Roth remained behind to go on an adventure up the Amazon River, giving Ed a few weeks of freedom to make some finishing touches on his 5150 studio and get a head start on Van Halen’s next album.

Working mostly by himself, with Donn Landee behind the mixing board and Alex laying down drum tracks on a few occasions, Ed felt free to express himself as he never had before. The first tracks he recorded were synthesizer parts that became the genesis of “Jump.” Ed’s new fascination with keyboards would later become the source of much intraband tension during the album’s recording, but because Ed owned the studio, the naysayers couldn’t do much about it.

While Roth was still stranded up the Amazon, picking fire ants from his G-string (no wonder he selected Western Exterminator’s intimidating



hammer-toting “Mr. Little” character as the 1984 tour’s mascot), Ed made yet another extracurricular guest appearance. In April 1983, he joined Queen guitarist Brian May and an ersatz band of Hollywood session pros at L.A.’s Record Plant Studios to record three songs, including a 12-minute blues jam called “Blues Breaker,” a tribute to Eric Clapton, an early inspiration of both guitarists.

“After we played, [Brian May] called me up about four months later and asked what I thought about putting the stuff out,” Eddie recalled. “I said, ‘Send me a tape, let me hear it first,’ because I didn’t remember how it went. He did and I said, ‘Sure, what the hell? It reeks of fun.’”

Meanwhile, manager Noel Monk announced that Van Halen would be playing at the second US Festival, scheduled for Memorial Day weekend in nearby Devore, California. The band’s headlining set was billed as “The Musical Event of the ’80s” and netted them a record \$1.5 million. Playing for just two hours, Van Halen would gross more than they owed Warner Bros. in expenses from their first year with the label. Work on the album came to a halt as Van Halen shifted gears to put together its biggest stage production to date and rehearsed for the show.

On Sunday, May 29, Van Halen took the stage at Devore to close “Heavy Metal Day,” the middle slot of the festival, bookended by “New Wave Day,” headlined by the Clash, and “Rock Day,” headlined by David Bowie. The festival stage covered more square footage than the footprint of entire clubs the band had played only six years earlier, and their 500-plus backstage guest list was bigger than most of those clubs’ attendance capacities. The crowd that showed up, estimated at more than 300,000 people, was the largest the band had ever seen.

Unfortunately, most of the work that went into preparing for the show, including rehearsals, went down the tubes when the band members — particularly David Lee Roth — overindulged during the preconcert festivities. Roth performed like the second coming of Johnny Rotten, slurring his words when he remembered them, scating guttural noises when he didn’t, and berating hecklers by threatening to fuck their girlfriends. Even heavy postproduction editing couldn’t hide the ugliness captured by television cameras and later broadcast as select segments on Showtime.

Although Van Halen’s US Festival performance was far from their best, fans didn’t seem to care. The camera loved Roth even in his most inebriated state, and the exposure — particularly the overexposure of the singer’s bare ass cheeks in chaps — made Van Halen bigger stars than ever. MTV might have banned the “Pretty Woman” video, but they still loved Van



Halen. The music channel went on to play a critical role in the success of Van Halen’s next album.

As work on the album that was to become 1984 progressed, the band was splintering into separate factions. The partnership between Ed and Donn Landee had become particularly tight, with the two working together after hours almost every night. Alex was a part of this grouping almost by default — he was Ed’s brother. On the other side were Roth and producer Ted Templeman, who both found their input increasingly overruled by the guitarist. Roth, meanwhile, bonded with the band’s lighting and creative director, Pete Angelus — a pairing that blossomed later when the two became the producers of Van Halen’s music videos.

Amid all this creative tension, Van Halen somehow managed to deliver its masterpiece, 1984. The album missed its planned New Year’s Eve release date by a little more than a week, coming out on January 9, 1984, but by then the advance single “Jump” was working its way up the charts. By the end of February, it reached number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100, the only Van Halen song to do so. The album itself peaked at number two, with only Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* ahead of it. The irony that Ed’s contribution to “Beat It” probably kept their own album from reaching number one was not lost on the band. ■

**Performing
at the Forum
in Inglewood,
May 1984**



“MY CHOPS WERE
UP FOR THE
INSTRUMENTAL
THING, SO
I THOUGHT I
SHOULD GO WHERE
THE ENERGY WAS”



BROAD STROKES

Robben Ford goes bold with *Pure*,
the new instrumental outing he calls
“the most complete expression
of a musical life.”

BY MICHAEL ROSS

THOUGH HE'S A talented singer and songwriter, Robben Ford has nevertheless become a legend primarily for his prodigious guitar prowess. In addition to the fabulous fretwork on his own records, he is known for turning in stunning, lyrical solos on recordings featuring Jimmy Witherspoon, Michael McDonald, Miles Davis, the Yellowjackets, the L.A. Express, and even Bruce Willis and Kiss.

“From a very early age, I was drawn to beautiful melodies,” he says. “Eric Clapton is a melody player, as is Hendrix. They were not playing bebop. It was about feeling, sound and texture. Those were things I was attracted to: the sound of this note against that chord, as opposed to a lot of notes.”

Given the enthusiasm for Ford's guitar playing, it's remarkable that almost a quarter of a century has passed since he released an all-instrumental record under his own name. There have been vocal-less side projects with former Miles Davis group saxophonist Bill Evans, and a series of trio projects with drummer Vinnie Colaiuta and bassist Jimmy Haslip under the Jing Chi moniker, but Ford's last instrumental solo record was 1997's *Tiger Walk*.

In the interim, the guitarist, known as a master of tone, taste and time, has been honing his skills as a singer and songwriter on two decade's worth of releases. These have largely followed a tried-and-true process: Gather a fantastic rhythm section of bass, drums and keyboards, go into a world-class studio, and knock out the new



**“I’M DOING THE
 BROAD STROKES.
 IT’S MORE
 IMPORTANT TO ME
 TO COMMUNICATE AS
 A MUSICIAN THAT’S
 PRESENT AND ALIVE”**

**Ford
 performs with
 Supersonic
 Blues
 Machine at
 the Notodden
 Blues Festival
 in Norway,
 August 6, 2016.**

batch of tunes as live as possible. Occasional variations might include adding a trombonist (as on 2013’s *Bringing It Back Home*), bringing in former Black Crowe Audley Freed to play rhythm guitar so he could cut an entire record in 24 hours (2014’s *A Day in Nashville*) or even forsaking his sacred Dumble (2018’s *Purple House*). Still, fans could be pretty sure that, while each release might feature a new band

and maybe some new gear, it would essentially be a snapshot of the latest batch of songs.

But with his new album, *Pure* (Ear Music), Ford breaks from the recipe in a couple of ways. For starters, the return to his instrumental roots.

“Writing songs with lyrics is really hard,” he says. “My strongest voice is my guitar playing. In my early 20s, I had written a lot of instrumentals in a jazz vein for the Yellow Jackets, as well as for my first solo album. I had

also made two records recently with Bill Evans. My chops were up for the instrumental thing, and I was enjoying it, so I thought I should go where the energy was and let the music tell the story.”

Telling a story with his music is one of the things that separates Ford’s playing from other guitarists and many other instrumentalists as well. This is evident on *Pure* in the compositions as well as the solos. “I wanted to feel something,” he says, “to be moved by a voice, to be talked to.” To that end, he speaks to the listener in a number of tongues. Fans from his days with Jimmy Witherspoon, the Charles Ford Band and Charlie Musselwhite will be thrilled by the blues mastery of “White Rock Beer...8 Cents,” and “Blues for Lonnie Johnson.” The title track translates the soul of the blues into a Middle Eastern

dialect through the addition of exotic percussion and a virtuoso oud player. “Balafon” speaks in what today might be called a neo-soul vernacular, though Ford comes to the style more through O.G. practitioners like Curtis Mayfield, Cornell Dupree, et al.

In another departure from his usual *modus operandi*, the guitarist largely eschewed live recording for a more layered, painterly approach. Like *Purple House*, the new album was recorded by Ford and engineer/co-producer Casey Wasner at Wasner’s studio (also called Purple House) in Leiper’s Fork, Tennessee. They began rehearsals with a rhythm section, imagining they would record the record live, in typical Ford fashion. It soon became evident that the guitarist had a new vision, one that needed to be realized exactly as he imagined it. “When you bring guys into the studio, you have to let them sound the way they play, and it influences the music,” Ford says. “I felt that this time I wanted to have it my way.”

To that end, he and Wasner built the tracks from the ground up. “Other than bass and drums, it’s all Casey and me,” Ford explains. “I played all the guitars, keyboards and sometimes even synth bass. When I was orchestrating, I might want to hear something low. Normally, it would be the bass, but sometimes I didn’t want to hear bass guitar doing that low thing because it sounded too pedestrian, too predictable. I was able to make choices and go a different way. We’d get everything we liked using a click track, except for one song where Casey played drums. If we did use a bass player, we’d get it to where we could say, ‘Here’s what we’re looking for.’”

Once the rhythm ideas were set, Ford employed multiple drummers to realize them. “We sent tracks to Toss Panos in L.A. to play on one or two songs. I sent Keith Carlock one song, and Nate Smith is on the slow blues, along with Dave Rowe on bass. The shuffle has my brother Patrick Ford on drums.”

These days, it’s easy enough to layer parts in such a way as to give the illusion that the music was recorded in the same room by a group of musicians playing at the same time. This was not part of Ford’s plan, however. Instead, he and Wasner used the studio as a palette with which to mix in some sonic colors that might not normally be a part of a live performance documentation. The guitar sounds are often couched in their own ambience, either by applying a room sound different from the drum space, adding slap echo or reverb, or by incorporating of all the above. The tune “White Rock Beer...8 Cents” features climbing reverb tails that appear at the end of some of the phrases.

“On that tune, there are two bars open after the last phrase on the five chord,” Ford explains. “There’s a lot of space there, but I didn’t want to play any more



JOBY SESSIONS; WILL IRELAND (OPPOSITE)



melody, so we put a reverb tail on that last note and manipulated it, to make it go up. It cracks me up. I like humor in music. I felt it was in the tradition of Les Paul.”

Ford’s guitar playing remains *sui generis*. Many have tried to sound like him, but no one has succeeded. And while his sound might be inimitable, any professional artist ignores the current landscape at his



**“I FIND THAT
IF I DON’T TRY TO
COMPETE AND AM
JUST MY NATURAL
SELF, I HAVE NEW
THINGS TO SAY”**

or her peril. It is essential to consider where one’s offering sits in the pantheon of similar records being released, and Ford has his own way of approaching this. “Naturally, you think of all the people who’ve been making guitar instrumental records their whole lives,” he says. “I don’t listen to those guys, but I’m aware of them and how brilliantly they can play. There’s an element of having to compete. It’s just natural. But I come

back to who I am as a guitar player, what I have to offer, and go with that.”

One thing he has to offer is his unique approach to the blues. He demonstrated his mastery of this American art form through recording the solos for “White Rock Beer...8 Cents” and “Blues for Lonnie Johnson” in unedited live takes. These performances were originally streamed, in real time, through his Instagram account. Though relatively new to social media, Ford simultaneously managed to challenge himself and build anticipation for the record. “My girlfriend talked me into it,” he reveals. “She said, ‘You become a different guy in front of an audience.’ It was terrifying on some level, but it brings up this live performance energy.”

**Ostage
at Stupinigi
Sonic Park,
Turin, Italy,
July 14, 2021**



Ford has always had a special relationship with the saxophone. As proof, one need only listen to how his guitar tone melds with Bill Evans’ horn for some of the heads on *Pure*. “Bill and I have made two records now playing melodies together,” he says. “We have a very natural way of playing with each other, with a lot of listening. Saxophone has probably been the instrument I have listened to most in my life. I used to play it, so I know exactly how he’s fingering whatever I give him. I write with that awareness.” The guitarist likes saxophone so much that he uses two as the complete horn section on the record, with Jeff Coffin from the Dave Matthews Band joining Evans. This differs from more typical horn sections that might include a trumpet.

“Sax and trumpet speak of a certain time, more Stax or Muscle Shoals,” Ford says. “That’s one of the reasons why I don’t use the trumpet. It’s too dominant of a voice. Two saxophones create the texture I’m looking for, more like an organ.”

On many current blues records, the horns are added after the solos are recorded, and thus there is little to no interaction between the guitarist and the section. Ford has had his own issues playing with horn arrangements in some big-band situations. “I’m playing, and then suddenly there’s this horn riff,” he explains. “I’m a call-and-response kind of guy, but I don’t know when those riffs are coming, which makes it really hard.” On *Pure*, however, the guitarist wrote the arrangements, so he knew exactly what was coming, which allowed a delightful guitar/horn section conversation during his solo on “Blues for Lonnie Johnson.”

The last time *Guitar Player* spoke to Ford, for the release of *Purple House*, he was having an issue recording his famous *Dumble*, a problem he solved for *Pure*. “This time the live tracks were cut in bigger rooms,” he explains. “The *Dumble* needs to be cranked. We cut the blues songs at Sound Emporium, which has a large room. I used an overdrive pedal but no delays or reverbs. It’s just a guitar plugged into an amp. Everything else was put on in post-production.”

Having used non-*Dumble* amps on the last record, Ford continues to experiment with different choices, particularly Little Walter amps. “[*Little Walter* owner] Phil Bradbury made me a 15-watt amplifier called the King Arthur and a 50-watt called the 59,” he says. “He’s also made a hundred-watt head, but I just got that recently. For the melody on ‘Pure,’ I used the 15-watt with a single 12-inch speaker cranked all the way up. The solo for that song was cut at Casey’s using the 50-watt head and an overdrive pedal.”

While he has been known to record entire albums with one guitar, à la *Bringing It Back Home*’s 1966 Epiphone Riviera, for *Pure* he luxuriated in being able



to pick the perfect instrument for the part. The Riviera makes an appearance for the melody of “Go,” while his 1960 Telecaster handles the rhythm. For the “Milam Palmo” melody he used a 1964 Gibson ES-355. “And then, for the solo, I moved to a ’52 Tele where nothing is original except the body and neck,” he recalls “I don’t even know what the pickups are.”

Though you might think it is a Tele playing on “Blues for Lonnie Johnson,” it is, in fact, a custom-made, black Paul Reed Smith McCarty model with the pickups split and the amp cranked up. “Pure” divides the guitar duties between a red PRS for the solo and Ford’s ’64 SG for the melody. “For ‘White Rock Beer,’ I used a practically brand-new Les Paul with incredible sounding ’50s PAFs in it,” he says. “I wanted to play a Les Paul for the traditional Eric Clapton English thing.”

For another rocked-out solo, the guitarist again used the Epiphone. “I was sitting in a chair and used the Hermida Zendrive through the Dumble, once again cranked up loud in a big room,” he says. The occasional acoustic part is courtesy of Casey Wasner’s ’65 Gibson B-25. “He has one exactly like mine,” Ford reveals. “It was all about what texture we wanted”

In recent years, Ford has been using an Electro-Harmonix POG both live and on recordings. The POG is an octave-generating pedal, which the guitarist felt inspired him to play more jazz-inflected lines. But for *Pure* he has abandoned it. “It was just too POG,” he says with a laugh.

Asked whether he still practices, Ford offers an answer that may frustrate those who spend hours in their rooms attempting to achieve half his fluency and musicality. “I never practiced the guitar in a formal way, except for a brief period with the L.A. Express and Joni Mitchell,” he replies. “That’s when I got a book and started learning the fundamental scales: major, harmonic minor, melodic minor, et cetera. I started practicing them using back-and-forth picking technique for a period of about six months. That’s the only real practice I ever did. Otherwise, I have just played and listened. Everything I play is strictly by ear.”

As to where he feels his playing is headed, the artist known as Robben Ford references another great artist, the painter Henri Matisse. “At the end of his career, he started painting big things that were really simple, like the yellow man figure on a blue background with a red star, or a big green palm leaf on a blue background,” he says. “That’s where I’m at in my career as an artist. I’m doing the broad strokes. It’s more important to me to say something, to communicate as a musician that’s present and alive. There are so many guitarists who, as far as I am concerned, can play rings around me. I can’t compete



with that. My chop [*sic*] is different. I love colors, sounds and melodies. I’m still growing as a musician. I find that if I don’t try to compete and am just my natural self, I have new things to say. I’m older. I don’t play as fast or aggressively as I once did. That comes with time. It’s like another painter, Renoir, who said, ‘When you get older, you realize you can always take the next train.’ What’s your hurry?”

Pure seems more than just another record for Ford. It is a departure, but also a summing up. “More than anything I’ve ever done, this record is the most complete expression of a musical life,” he says. “Unlike most of my records, it’s not a simple recording of a place in time. This is the whole story in one album, with not a lyric on the whole thing. That works for me.” ■

MORE *is* MORE

Yngwie Malmsteen takes his neoclassical shred to new extremes on *Parabellum*.

BY MARK MC STEA

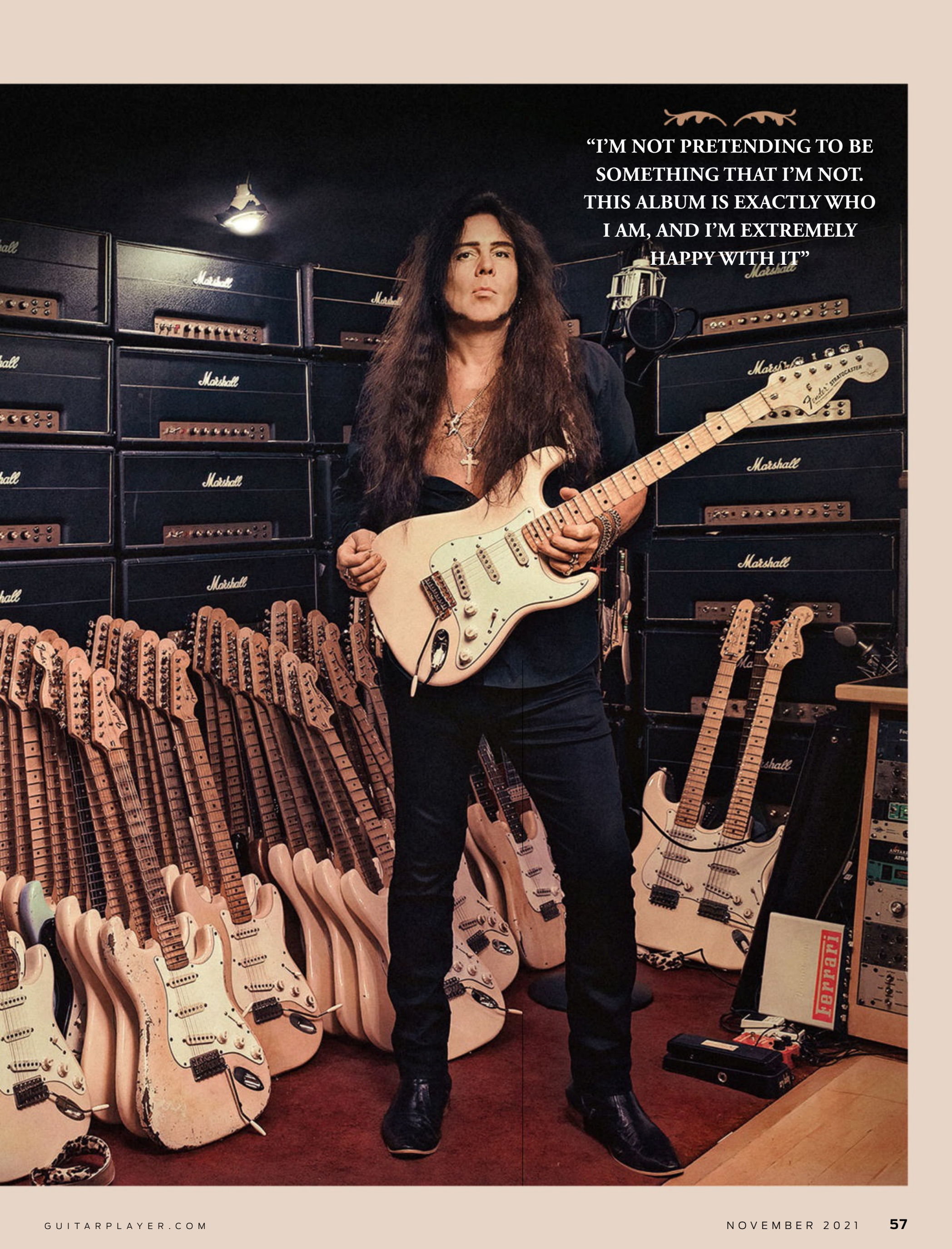
WHEN YNGWIE MALMSTEEN spoke with *Guitar Player* earlier this year to reveal how he composed “Far Beyond the Sun,” his signature song, it was clear that his love for the 1984 track was practically eclipsed by his enthusiasm for his latest creation, *Parabellum* (Music Theories Recordings). “It is extremely neoclassical,” he said of the new album. “People will think I’ve lost my mind. It is like my Concerto” — 1998’s Concerto Suite for Electric Guitar and Orchestra in E Flat Minor Op.1 — “but metal. I went totally over the top.”

Malmsteen has often liked to joke that as far as he is concerned, “more is more,” and the new album exemplifies that philosophy in spades. “What is exciting is when something comes to me, makes me think, Wow! and then I go straight to record it,” he says. “The new album is full of those moments.”

Now that *Parabellum* has been released, it’s clear that his enthusiasm was not misplaced. For fans of the neoclassical metal style Malmsteen pioneered, if not downright invented, *Parabellum* is the album of their dreams, packed with the Swede’s trademark arpeggios, pedal tones and insanely fast scale runs, but without ever letting technique take precedence over musical content. The album will not convert non-believers, but Malmsteen is only concerned with the integrity of his music. The global shutdown of live music in 2020 allowed him to bring an intense focus to the recording process, and that has resulted in him delivering one of the strongest releases in his catalog.



AUSTIN HARGRAVE



“I’M NOT PRETENDING TO BE
SOMETHING THAT I’M NOT.
THIS ALBUM IS EXACTLY WHO
I AM, AND I’M EXTREMELY
HAPPY WITH IT”

Interviewing Yngwie for the release of *Parabellum*, it was clear he was filled with excitement about the album and how his hardcore fan base will respond to it. Malmsteen takes nothing for granted, and as far as he's concerned, he's making some of the best music of his career.

***Parabellum* is possibly your most full-on neoclassical album. Was it a deliberate statement of intent, a way of embracing your style?**

“I WATCHED THIS JAPANESE GIRL PLAYING ‘FAR BEYOND THE SUN’ ON THE VIOLIN. IT SOUNDS EXACTLY LIKE IT WAS COMPOSED FOR THE VIOLIN”

Although that's what it turned out to be, I didn't plan it like that. It was just a very natural thing for me to do. For so many years when I was young, I worked on arpeggios and scales in much the same way that many guitarists work on blues scales or whatever. As a result, whenever I play something, it automatically sounds like me. With Covid and the cancellation of tours, I had a lot of free time, and that gave me the chance to bring a laser-like intensity to the recording process. My approach to the album became extremely

focused, which can be both good and bad. There is always a danger of being overanalytical, which is something I really strive to avoid. What you hear is what you get, ultimately. This album is exactly who I am, and I'm extremely happy with it. It's like I've gone full circle back to when I was 15 and had no distractions to interfere with my playing. That was what last year was like for me.

Given how well it turned out, would you intentionally use the same method again?

Yngwie recording in the studio in his home. Just don't call it a home studio.



I'm fully confident that I can work around touring commitments to deliver a great album in the future. *Trilogy* [from 1986] was the last time I recorded with so much time blocked out purely for the recording process, but I think the intervening albums have all been strong, even though I often had to record between tours or whatever. I think you just adapt to whatever circumstances you find yourself in. I'm pretty flexible. I don't have to lock myself into certain ways of doing things.

What were some of the advantages of working so intensely on *Parabellum*?

I could put the stuff on and listen to it in the car and get ideas for different tempos or approaches. I might have a track that I didn't think was working, but then I'd listen to it again a couple of days later while I was driving, and I'd hear something that I really liked and that maybe I could change. I had the time to review what I'd done and live with the tracks — the luxury of time to let the music evolve and develop.

Did you play everything on the album?

Everything except the drums. I played guitar, obviously, plus bass and keyboards, although a lot of parts that you might think are synthesizer were actually guitar parts. I did plan to have some guys come in to do backing vocals at the start, but I had such a great time recording the vocal lines that I didn't feel the need to do that.

Your vocals have gotten stronger from album to album. You must be very happy with the way that your voice has developed.

Thank you so much for saying that. I am very pleased. My mother sang jazz, and my family was full of great singers. I was always singing when I was younger, but not because I had to for my music. Over the past 10 years that I've been singing on my records, I've reached the point where I'm very happy with the vocals, and I don't plan to take a singer out for live shows anymore. This time I really made sure I was comfortable with everything vocally.

“Eternal Bliss” is the most radio-friendly song on the album. The harmonies are especially strong.

I had such great fun doing those. I kept trying to add extra layers and ended up with about 40 voices on it. The song went through a lot of changes in the arrangement. It originally started with an acoustic guitar, but then I thought of using the a capella voices on the chorus for the opening. That is a deep lyric on there, but I really mean what I say. I thank God every day. I must be the luckiest guy in the world. I'm such a grateful person. I just walk around smiling.



“Magic Bullet” has some blisteringly fast guitar harmonies. Did you hear the completed piece in your head, or was there a lot of experimentation with harmonizing lines and so on?

It’s funny how that one came about. I developed it on the road; I had it on an iPad with a number of tunes that I’d been working on, and I thought, I’m just going to mess around with this and see what comes out. So that came from just playing around with ideas. I came up with the cool bass line for it later on.

“Sea of Tranquility” has a very different feel from the other tracks, with its acoustic opening. There are so many layers of guitar parts that it takes repeated listening before everything is revealed.

I like to build texture with the guitar parts. Whenever I solo, I improvise. I always make solos up; I never work them out. If it feels good, I leave it, but if not I might do one more take. I don’t like to do things over and over; I like it to capture the feel on the spur of the moment. When I listened to it in the car though, I started to hear the different ways that it could have gone. A lot of times I hear something later that makes me think, Shit, that part is really good, I’ll put some harmonies on that line. That’s how some of the textures will evolve, after repeated listening and getting new inspiration.

So would you ever punch in a part on a solo?

I have done it sometimes, if the solo feels very inspiring. If there’s a very small part — maybe a couple of notes — that I’d like to change, I’ll punch it in, because I wouldn’t want to listen to that for the rest of my life. *[laughs]* Really though, I generally record the whole solo in one pass. I will usually like what I do, warts and all. *[laughs]*

You’ve previously said that if you slowed your solos down, they would still sound like music and not just a collection of licks. Presumably, musicality is always your primary consideration.

I think that is just the way that I approach the guitar. No matter how fast something is, I need it to be very musical. A lot of times I will play something really fast that is a fairly simple line if you slow it down, but it will be a strong melodic statement. I watched this young Japanese girl *[Unlucky Morpheus]* on YouTube recently playing “Far Beyond the Sun” on the violin, note for note, absolutely perfectly. It was really great, and what was so interesting is that it sounded like it was a piece of violin music, not just a string of guitar licks. It is so crazy that it sounds exactly like it was composed for the violin. I was amazed by that. It was like it had gone full circle from me being inspired by the violin to hearing it played by a great violinist.



The source of Yngwie's huge tone. (The Ferraris are full size.)

How much work does it take to maintain your level of ability?

I have a guitar in my hands whenever I'm watching TV or whatever. When I'm on tour, it's a lot of playing, and when I'm in the studio there's a lot of time spent playing. Everything I do is about improvisation though. I never play solos the same way, and I am always trying to capture a special moment. I don't think playing a lot is important; it's about playing the right thing.

Where does inspiration come from for you?

I don't really know. Any outside influence can have a good or bad influence. When I play, I'll find something that surprises me, and then I'll work with it. If you told me to write a country song, I could do that, but it wouldn't be something that excited and inspired me if I just did it to order. Now and then, something happens though, and a spark of an idea appears, and that is the moment that I try to capture and work to develop. I never play the songs the same way live. I often don't even follow the setlist. I'll just change the order or throw something new in.

Everything I do is spontaneous and improvised.

I saw you playing a vintage Les Paul on a YouTube clip recently. I don't think I've ever seen you play

anything other than a Strat. Do you feel out of your comfort zone on such a different instrument, and does it change the way that you play?

That was a clip that was filmed in a music store. It was a nice '59 model that they had. I do have a couple of Les Pauls, but I don't play them a lot. I can drive any car that I want, and I drive a Ferrari. In the same way, I can play any guitar that I want, and I choose to play a Strat. That's who I am. My Strat with the scalloped neck and the Seymour Duncans is like a finely tuned machine. I could play everything that I play on the Strat on a Les Paul, but that doesn't mean that I'd want to. I do like Gibsons though. I've always liked them.

What would take you outside your comfort zone in terms of equipment?

Well, music is stronger than the gear you use to make it, but having said that, the Les Paul isn't ideal, and of course if you were to play an electric guitar totally clean for example, that's a very different proposition. If I had to play something like a Tele through a Twin Reverb, I'd probably play in a more acoustic-like way. The sustain and the great sound of an overdriven guitar is something really special. I found what I like in terms of guitars and amps many years ago, and I don't like to experiment with that.

I guess for the new album, your gear choices were business as usual, with your signature Strat, Marshalls and overdrive pedals?

“ARPEGGIOS ALWAYS SOUND BETTER ON THE NECK PICKUP. THEY ARE MUCH SMOOTHER SOUNDING, MORE LIKE A VIOLIN TONE”

Yeah, that was exactly what I used. [laughs] And my signature Ovation and my signature picks.

When soloing, you often change rapidly from the front to back pickup as you move up the neck. Is that to maintain the consistency of your tone?

To a degree. I think arpeggios always sound better on the neck pickup. They are much smoother sounding, more like a violin tone. I do really like the neck pickup a lot, but I guess I mix and match.

You rarely use positions two and four on the five-way switch.

On my last blues album [2019's *Blue Lightning*], I did use those positions for the Hendrixy stuff, and I do think it is a really great, cool sound. I think I prefer the clarity and volume of the front and back positions, though. Those Hendrix tones are the very distinctive essence of the Strat sound.

Are there any styles of music that you'd like to explore that you haven't previously recorded in?

No, because I'm very pleased with the music that I make. I have a natural way of writing and playing; I don't pretend to do something that isn't who I am. Everything that I write and perform is exactly what I am intending it to be, and if I wanted to play in a different style or something, then I would. All the musical choices and decisions that I make are entirely mine, from the music that I make to who plays on my records.

What do you work on in your own playing?

There's always room for improvement and development in any musician. For so many years, particularly when I was a lot younger, I was such a fanatic about playing guitar. I wouldn't accept any limitations. I wouldn't stop playing or working on something until it was perfect. I've gotten to the point where I know that what really matters is the note choice, not the technique or the difficulty in what I am doing. You need to know a lot to be able to be free to express yourself. You need to understand what notes work with different keys, arpeggios and so on. Once you understand how everything works, you are free from thinking about the details and you can play with complete expression.

Have you seen any "reaction" videos on YouTube? There are a ton of them that feature people who presumably have no idea who you are, and they're blown away by your music.

MARK WEISS I have actually, and I find them pretty funny. The greatest thing it reveals is that music really is a universal language. The other thing is that if you are

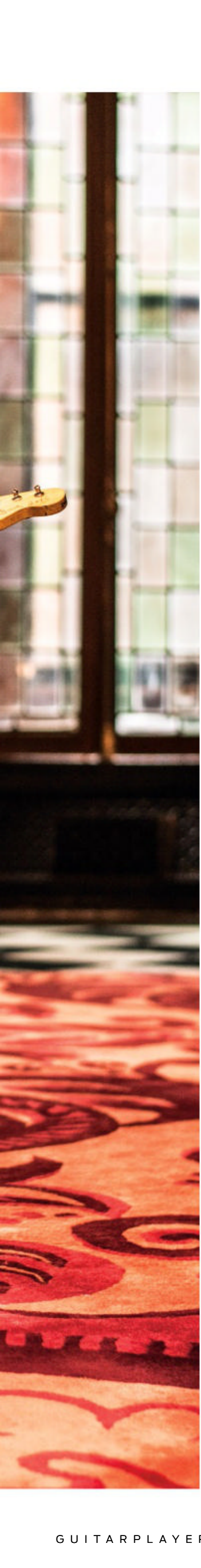


very passionate about your music, that is conveyed in what you do, and that passion is something that people will pick up on and respond to.

Do you still get the same buzz from music that you did 40 years ago, when you sent *Guitar Player* the tape that led to your breakthrough?

I think that has remained the same. I always challenge myself by improvising, and obviously that can go both ways; it can make you very frustrated sometimes. I can be very unforgiving with myself and I won't allow myself to fail. But as I said, I give thanks to God every day that I am so fortunate to be living this life. I don't take anything for granted, that's for sure. 🙏





DRIVE LIKE A **DEMON**

As he returns with *Fist Full of Devils*, his first solo album in 20 years, **Earl Slick** shares tales of his fast times with David Bowie and John Lennon.

BY JOE BOSSO

EARL SLICK CAN remember the last gig he played — right off the top of his head. “It was March 7th, 2020, with [former *Sex Pistols* bassist] Glen Matlock, in London,” he says. “Ever since then, I’ve been mostly on my own, like everybody. And let me tell you, you tend to go a little batty with so much free time on your hands.”

The veteran guitarist hasn’t exactly done nothing during the past year, and he says the period of relative isolation has been a blessing. It’s given him time to work on a memoir, which he says he’s close to finishing (“You keep thinking you’re close to being done, and then you go, Oh, wait, there’s that other thing!”), and it afforded him a clear chunk of time to record *Fist Full of Devils*, his first solo album in nearly 20 years.

Mostly, though, the extended lockdown has provided Slick with the opportunity to do something he rarely does. “I just sat around and thought a lot,” he says. “I’m always so busy doing this or that, and if I’m not doing something, my mind is on whatever I’ve got to do next. For the past year and a half, things kind of stopped, and I’ve had a lot of time to just think about who I am and what I’ve done.”

He pauses. “Funny things come into your head, like, ‘Did I just fake my way through it all?’” He laughs. “But then I go, ‘No, come on. That’s crazy.’ Some of the stuff I did, you just can’t fake it.”

Fakers don’t get to play with rock royalty like David Bowie and John Lennon, two of the more celebrated names on Slick’s star-studded resume. Slick was just 22 years old in 1974 when he began what would become a 30-year, on-and-off association

with Bowie. After hearing the “unschooled, street player” jam along to unmixed and unreleased recordings of songs such as “Rebel Rebel,” Bowie hired Slick to replace Mick Ronson in his band for the *Diamond Dogs* tour. “I don’t know how many people were up for the gig, but I got it,” Slick says. “After that, I was off and running.”

Years earlier, like millions of other teens, the guitarist sat mesmerized in front of his TV set as the Beatles were introduced to America on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The next day, he pestered his father to buy him a guitar — a \$30 secondhand Danelectro. “Did I ever think that one day I’d get good enough to play with John Lennon?” he asks rhetorically. “Of course not. The idea still blows my mind. Lennon was this huge guy; he was a hero. A little kid from Brooklyn doesn’t get to be in a room with him.”

**“I KNEW DAVID WAS
A MAJOR STAR, BUT
I ONLY OWNED ONE
BOWIE RECORD —
ALADDIN SANE”**

Slick took all of three guitar lessons before embarking on what he calls “a dedicated period of musical self-education.” Instead of playing rudimentary exercises, he hunkered down with the radio and records. At first, he picked along to the pop songs of the British Invasion bands, but soon he gravitated to the Rolling Stones and the Animals, and from them he learned about their roots — Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy and Chuck Berry. “I got really into the blues and became sort of the outlier at school,” he says. “My friends were still learning to play pop songs, and I’m playing the blues.”

Moving to New York City in the early 1970s, Slick tried to make a go of it in bands. There was an outfit called Mack Truck, and for a short time he played in a duo called Slick Diamond (with Scottish singer-songwriter Jim Diamond). Acing the Bowie audition changed everything for Slick, and together they changed music. Their daring experimentation on the title track to 1976’s *Station to Station*, fueled by Slick’s ragged, at times atonal leads, combined funk, soul and art rock for an overall effect that became revolutionary. Between tours and sessions with Bowie, Slick collaborated with artists such as Ian Hunter, John Waite, Tim Curry and David Coverdale, among others. After playing on John Lennon’s *Double Fantasy*

“PERSONALITY. IT’S WHAT’S CARRIED ME THIS FAR, SO I’M STICKING WITH IT”

(as well as tracks for a follow-up record, which was released in 1984 as *Milk and Honey*), he worked with Yoko Ono on her 1981 album, *Season of Glass*. Along the way, he formed the band Phantom, Rocker & Slick with the Stray Cats

rhythm section of Slim Jim Phantom and Lee Rocker, as well as the short-lived band Dirty White Boy.

“I did a lot,” he says with a laugh. “That’s one of those things that has run through my mind during this whole

pandemic. I don’t spend a lot of time on social media, but I recently hired a guy to work my web page and all that, and before I knew it, fans started popping up, and it reminds you of all the things you’ve done. It’s sort of mind boggling.”

Slick’s fans will find a lot to like about *Fist Full of Devils*, a diverse set of instrumentals that spans smart-alecky blues, poignant torch songs, white-knuckled rockers and a host of tracks

that toss genres into a blender. At age 68, the guitarist still has plenty of spunk in the trunk. He doesn’t so much strum an acoustic as dance with it, and his electric solos sing, swoon, sputter and roar. “The funny thing is, playing solos is my least favorite thing to do,” he says. “I could play rhythm all day and be perfectly happy. When

I was cutting these songs, I didn’t construct every note of the solos — I never do that. But I hear things in the chord changes and that guides me through a melody.”

He makes it clear that anybody expecting a record of guitar-clinic shred can look elsewhere. “The world doesn’t need another wanking guitar album,” he says. “Besides, I’m not proficient enough to pull that off. My whole thing is feel. Personality. It’s what’s carried me this far, so I’m sticking with it.”

What was it like in New York City for a young guitarist in the early '70s? Was it a hotbed of players all competing for the same gigs?

At the beginning it was competitive, but not between players — it was competitive in terms of bands. This went on for a while, and then things started to change. As we started to play out more, that’s when people were being offered gigs as guitarists. At that point, it started to become competitive.

Did you have the mind-set of, “Well, if my band doesn’t make it, I could be a session guy”?

No, not at all. The only thought I ever had about anything — other than having my own band — was that, if the Rolling Stones ever needed a guitar player, I was their guy. I don’t even think the word *sideman* was coined yet. My idea was to stick with my band, get a record contract and have a hit record. I didn’t consider any other kind of career.

Which guitars and amps were you using at the time?

I had one guitar and one amp: my ’65 SG



Earl Slick and David Bowie onstage in Poughkeepsie, New York, August 19, 2003



Slick (at right) in rehearsal for the *Diamond Dogs* tour, 1974



Playing a National resonator guitar

Junior and a 100-watt Marshall stack. And the cool thing was we had buddies who used to hang around, and the idea of being a roadie appealed to them. I was a smart little fucker, and I learned that I didn't have to haul my own stuff around when I could get other people to do it.

You were only 22 and hadn't been around much when you auditioned for Bowie. How did you not get rattled by his fame?

The funny thing was, I wasn't too nervous. I mean, I knew David was a major star, but I only owned one David Bowie record — *Aladdin Sane* — and the reason why I bought that was because of Mick Ronson. I mean, "Jean Genie" is "Mannish Boy." "Panic in Detroit" is Bo Diddley. Mick's guitar playing was a twist from the way it would normally be played, and I loved it. So I wasn't nervous about the audition, but I didn't tell anybody about it, in case I didn't get it.

When Bowie hired you, did he ever verbalize what he liked about your playing?

In his own roundabout "David" sort of way. Once I got the gig, I got a little rattled because I didn't know if I had to

play and sound like Mick Ronson. Did I have to play the stuff note for note from the records? Quite frankly, I was terrified, so I asked David if that's what he wanted. Thankfully, he said, "No. I hired you because I like the way you play. I want you to do what you do." That was a big relief.

How did your experience with Bowie expand your playing beyond the blues rock that you grew up on?

It opened me up, but not so much at the beginning. At the very start, I was just doing what I always did. You can hear that on *David Live*, from the Tower Theater. I was just playing how I played at the time. When we hit *Station to Station*, that's when things changed.

You're dovetailing into my next question.

Yeah, *Station to Station* — everything changed because he changed. In his own way, he would push me into new areas to get me uncomfortable. Even though he still wanted me to do what I did, there were certain things he wanted me to rethink. It opened me up, for sure. What was nice was that these ideas he had felt very natural to me.

So even the title track to *Station to Station* — which now sounds so trendsetting and prescient — it didn't seem avant-garde to you?

I don't think you can tell what's trendsetting at the time you're making something. Whatever we recorded, my attitude was, This is what we're doing. I didn't really think about the impact it would have. The thing about that song — and the whole record, really — was that David didn't bring in finished pieces. Take the title track: That was three pieces of music that he brought in. I thought they were going to be three separate songs. Somehow it glued itself together to become the epic that it is.

And that felt natural to you?

It just was what it was. The way we communicated was, "Here's what we're doing." It didn't seem weird. When you were around David, the process of recording wasn't weird compared to the rest of the stuff going on.

Did he play you music he was listening to, bands like Kraftwerk, just so you could get an idea of where he was at?

No. No, he didn't play me that stuff. He would try to feel me out in certain ways,

though. Before *Station to Station*, he took me out to see Lou Reed and Roxy Music. He really liked what they were doing, and I think he was trying to feel me out and get my reactions.

What kinds of guitars were you playing on *Station to Station*?

I had an early '70s Les Paul, a Strat from '64 or '65, and my SG. Oh, and my Gibson J-45.

John Lennon tapped you to play on *Double Fantasy*. The two of you had already worked together on David's *Young Americans* album.

Yeah, it was at John's request that I was on *Double Fantasy*, and it was based on us both doing "Fame" together. The funny thing is that I had no recollection of it — none — which was a running joke the whole time. During our conversations, John would tell me the story of recording the track, and he knew that I was involved, but I couldn't remember it at all. I was a little high back then, as we all were. But John remembered. I didn't.

That's so funny. Most guitarists would remember recording with John Lennon.

Yeah, well, they were strange times.

So you get a call to play on Lennon's record, his return from retirement. That must have been pretty head-spinning.

It was way more head-spinning than Bowie because I was a real John Lennon fan. It was because of the Beatles that I was exposed to rock and roll and decided I wanted to get involved with it. And John was the guy that I gravitated toward. So yeah, it was a trip.

When John was in the studio with you, did he have firm ideas of what he wanted from you guitar-wise? Or did he just let you play to see where you were going?

He pretty much did the latter. What he would do with all of us as a group, he would go, "I want this kind of a feel." He would guide you, but he didn't dictate parts. I was the only one on the sessions that didn't read charts, and apparently John remembered that from *Young*



Americans. He wanted one guy in the room who was more of a street player. The other people were the best session guys on the planet.

Did you ever play that crazy Sardonyx guitar that Lennon was using during those sessions?

Yeah. I even bought one. I wish I still had the freaking thing. I sold it to somebody, and I know who he is. Because it's very important to the guy, I never offered to buy it back from him.

What did it sound like? Is there a track on *Double Fantasy* you can point to as an example?

I can't mention a particular track. John used it a lot. It was a stick body with two wings on it, and it had a pair of humbuckers. I don't really remember what it sounded like. I don't even know

why he bought it, because he still liked to play his Casinos.

A few years later, you stepped back into Bowie world after Stevie Ray Vaughan pulled out of David's *Serious Moonlight* tour. How much time did you have to prepare before you hit the road?

I didn't have any time at all. I mean, from the time they called me, I think I had maybe three or four rehearsals with the band. I had to learn the whole show. Now granted, I'd either played or recorded half the show anyway, but there was new stuff I wasn't familiar with, and I had to learn it. I sat with a cassette deck in my hotel room in Brussels and did the best I could to digest all the stuff.

Regarding the tunes he had recorded with Stevie, did David give you the same direction as he had when you first

ROB MONK

started working together — to just be yourself?

All he told me was, “We’ve got a big festival coming up really soon. Do you think you’ll be ready?” And little arrogant me said, “What, are you kidding me? I’ll be ready from the first gig.”

What was your relationship like with Carlos Alomar? You guys ended up as bandmates on that tour.

It was good. We had a good working relationship because our roles as guitar players were very defined. We didn’t play alike at all. He covered his bases, and I covered mine. There was no competition. Maybe if we played the same way it could have gotten strange, but that was never the case.

What’s the story with Mick Ronson showing up at a gig and trashing one of your guitars?

Oh, that’s a funny one. He sat in with us at an outdoor gig in Canada. I don’t know what song we were playing, but he borrowed one of my guitars — it was a custom-made DiMarzio — and he started swinging the thing around over his head and put some dents in it. I wasn’t even pissed off or anything, but I was a little terrified. [laughs] Now people pay a lot of money to get beat-up guitars.

You worked with Bowie on a series of his latter-day albums. Would you speak during those long times apart? Did you have to renew your relationship?

Funny thing about that was, it was seamless. When we started working together again back in the late ’90s or early 2000s, we hadn’t seen each other or had any contact in a long time. I was on the West Coast at the time, so I flew to New York to play with the band he had, and the first thing David had me play was “Stay.” David wasn’t even onstage with us — he was sitting on a lounge chair or something — but the second he heard me playing, this big-ass smile came across his face. It was like a minute hadn’t even gone by between us.

Now, what’s interesting is, it became more of an open relationship. We really became friends. Back in the day, we

weren’t really friends, maybe because we were both so out of it. We weren’t enemies; we just weren’t buddies. But during the time we were apart, we both changed a lot, and our relationship grew tighter once we took up again. We talked a lot more about personal things, which we never did before. So that was nice.

Your new album is notable among guitar instrumental records in that there’s a distinct lack of noodling. It’s virtuosity without showboating.

Yeah, well, I don’t do the noodle thing — that was never my thing. Some of the songs are really based in the piano as far as the writing. Al Morris, who played piano on the record, he would come up with really cool, unusual stuff, and that pushed me into all sorts of atmospheres — not so much melodies.

Some of the tracks, like “Vanishing Point” and “Black,” sound like they could be film scores.

Yeah, yeah. “Vanishing Point” is something I started writing in the ’90s. Al helped me get it in shape. “Black” is pretty cool. It sort of came from the frame of mind I was in at the time — a little tortured — but the inspiration for the overall sound comes from Angelo Badalamenti, David Lynch’s guy. I’m a major David Lynch fan, and I love what Angelo does with him. In the movie *Fire Walk With Me*, there’s this really ominous bar scene. It’s shot with red backgrounds, and there’s all kinds of weird shit going on. I purposely tried to write something with that same feel.

What’s cool is, although it sounds like a score, parts of it also feel like a jam.

That was the idea. There was just enough structure in it, and then out of the blue, Al started to play this sort of ’50s piano thing, in a happy, major key. We jumped on that. It goes from this



dreary, dark, echo-y thing into this really happy bridge. It was a great trick.

What are your main guitars these days?

I’ve gravitated right back to where I started — to the Teles. There’s a lot of Telecaster on the record. I used my famous signature model on it. Some of the little Hendrix-y rhythm things that you hear, these little double-stops that remind me of “Little Wing” — that’s not a Strat, although it sounds like one. That’s my signature model, with P-90s in it. I also used my SG and an Eastwood Airline Tuxedo. The acoustics were mainly the two Gibsons and a

Tacoma 12-string. That’s one of the best 12-strings I own.

**“I COULD
PLAY RHYTHM
ALL DAY AND BE
PERFECTLY HAPPY”**

Last question, and it sort of goes back to what we started talking about. Do you ever stop

and ask yourself, “Why me? Of all the guitar players in the world, how did I manage to play with all these people?”

Oh, God, all the time. I mean, I look at a guy like Steve Lukather, who is just amazing. In my mind, he’s like a modern-day Tommy Tedesco or Steve Cropper. Steve Lukather is the only session guitar player I’ve ever heard who can convincingly play any style. If he’s doing a blues thing, he sounds like a blues player. If he’s doing jazz, he sounds like a jazz player. He doesn’t sound like a session guy faking it.

So this goes back to “Why me?” I mean, I’ve sat in with Steve, and I’m afraid to play around him. It’s like, Holy shit. He’s embarrassing me. I can’t do what he does. Nobody can. I just do what I do, and people seem to like it. It’s always worked for me, so I can’t complain. ■

HONOR ROLE

Fingerstyle guru **Andy McKee**'s first new studio effort in nearly a decade pays homage to Prince and Michael Hedges.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

ANDY McKEE IS the epitome of solo acoustic excellence, and on his new album, *Symbol* (Mythmaker/Cruzen Street), the guitarist embraces his role as one of the planet's premiere percussive fingerstyle ambassadors. Three of *Symbol*'s six songs are covers honoring his most influential heroes, Preston Reed, Billy McLaughlin and Michael Hedges. McKee also conveys reverence for Prince, with whom he toured Australia in 2012, by milking every drop of meaning from "Purple Rain" without uttering a syllable. McKee's rendition is actually quite straightforward considering the advanced techniques at his command, and it is majestic in its modesty. He allows the starkly exposed melody to speak for itself, and this version will surely spur other players to give it a shot.

The penultimate track pays homage to McKee's other obsession, video game music, and he renders the symphonic "Streets of Whiterun" with expansive beauty on harp

guitar. The acoustics on *Symbol* sound deep and lush, which is particularly impressive, considering McKee recorded at home using a single Mojave Audio

MA-200 microphone to capture his Greenfield guitars. The album was mixed by solo fingerstylist and former Guitar Masters tour mate Antoine Dufour.

The finale commemorates some of McKee's favorite movie soundtrack music with a medley of training scene tunes from *Rocky IV*, which was a formative factor in his lifelong instrumental appreciation. With original composer Vince DiCola playing everything except guitar, it's a wild sonic sea change, the dramatic nature of which is furthered by McKee's diametrically different electric guitar style. It bears no resemblance to his percussive acoustic approach and is instead inspired by shredders such as Joe Satriani and John Petrucci. He even used an Ernie Ball Music Man John Petrucci signature model on "Rocky IV Medley."

McKee wears his modern acoustic Eagle Scout badge with honor, and he gets truly geeked up talking about instrumental virtuosity of all stripes. But what sets him apart is his pure passion for honest musical expression. McKee relishes opportunities to preach what he practices. He recently completed his annual Musicarium guitar camp, and is touring with fellow solo acoustic icon

and educator Tommy Emmanuel. McKee's videos are infinitely popular on YouTube, and he has a relatively new TrueFire channel called "The Joy of Playing," where eager legions of

dedicated disciples can browse a broad selection of video tutorials in which their guru pontificates on everything from gear to technique and influences.

"I SOMETIMES STUMBLE OVER WORDS, SO MUSIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DIRECT WAY FOR ME TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE"

What's at the heart of your deep appreciation for instrumental music, and why haven't you cut more fresh studio takes recently?

I sometimes stumble over words, so music has always been a direct way for me to connect with people. But considering all of the insanity that's been going on in the country over the past four years, what kind of music could I write that would connect? I felt like I didn't understand people the way I thought I did. That really shook me and threw me into a tailspin. My whole desire to even try writing music anymore seemed futile.

SIMONE CECCHETTI



Was interpreting a few tunes by your heroes essentially a creative way to get your mojo working again?

Yeah, it honestly was a bit. I do have original tunes written, but some of them are just so different, ranging from retro '80s-inspired electric to very meditative, relaxed music. My manager and I were talking about doing a series of EPs focused on different styles, and then I had the idea to do this covers thing, because I always like to shine a light on the people that inspired me. Fingerstyle instrumental is such a niche style. Some see it on YouTube or Instagram for the first time and are unaware of the history.

I figured that I should do a few of their tunes as well as some others that I'd done live or online but hadn't recorded and released.

The Prince cover is not a huge surprise, because you toured with him, but it is crazy to find out that you played "Purple Rain" on that tour as a solo opener and he would work you into his band later in his set. How did that happen?

Prince wanted me to do something special to open the show. I found that "Purple Rain" worked well on baritone, so I found the key and lowered it [*from B, on the original, to A*], as my Greenfield is a

baritone lowered a step from normal baritone pitch. The lowest note is A, instead of B, and the tuning is like DADGAD with a suspended fourth, but dropped down so that from low to high the strings are A E A D E A. I tried to keep it simple, mostly just the melody with a bit of harmonic accompaniment. With that stripped-down presentation, you can hear the melody very directly. I sent Prince my version of "Purple Rain," and he loved it. To start the show, he had an elevator lift me up through the stage; I'd play "Purple Rain," and then it would go back down until later. I'd come back up and do a medley with the band.

It ended with us doing “Purple Rain” together, and by that point I’d have an electric guitar. He played the solo. [laughs] His original idea for the stage presentation had me wearing a wild 50-foot cape. But I wasn’t too into that.

How does a guy like you relate to a guy like Prince?

He brought up Joni Mitchell on more than one occasion, and I’m a huge fan as well. There was one point where I tried to relate what I do instrumentally. I do some fancy technical stuff, but I don’t ever want that to be the show — you know, “Hey, look at how badass I am on the guitar!” I try to use that stuff to write something interesting or beautiful. Like Joni Mitchell, I’m trying to paint a picture or tell you a story, just with the guitar. It’s not necessarily about the theatrics, although sometimes that’s fun.

Did you hear Joni Mitchell just announced the release of a long-lost performance from 1968 recorded by Jimi Hendrix, who brought his reel-to-reel machine to the club?

I did. That’s crazy unbelievably wild!

Michael Hedges is a Hendrix-like icon to modern acoustic enthusiasts. What’s the story behind your version of “Ragamuffin”?

I tuned my signature Greenfield to DADGAD, like it is on his original recording. I’d worked on learning that tune by ear several times over the years. When it came time to do this, I thought about getting into the transcription and doing it perfectly correct, but I ultimately decided to go with my own take and play



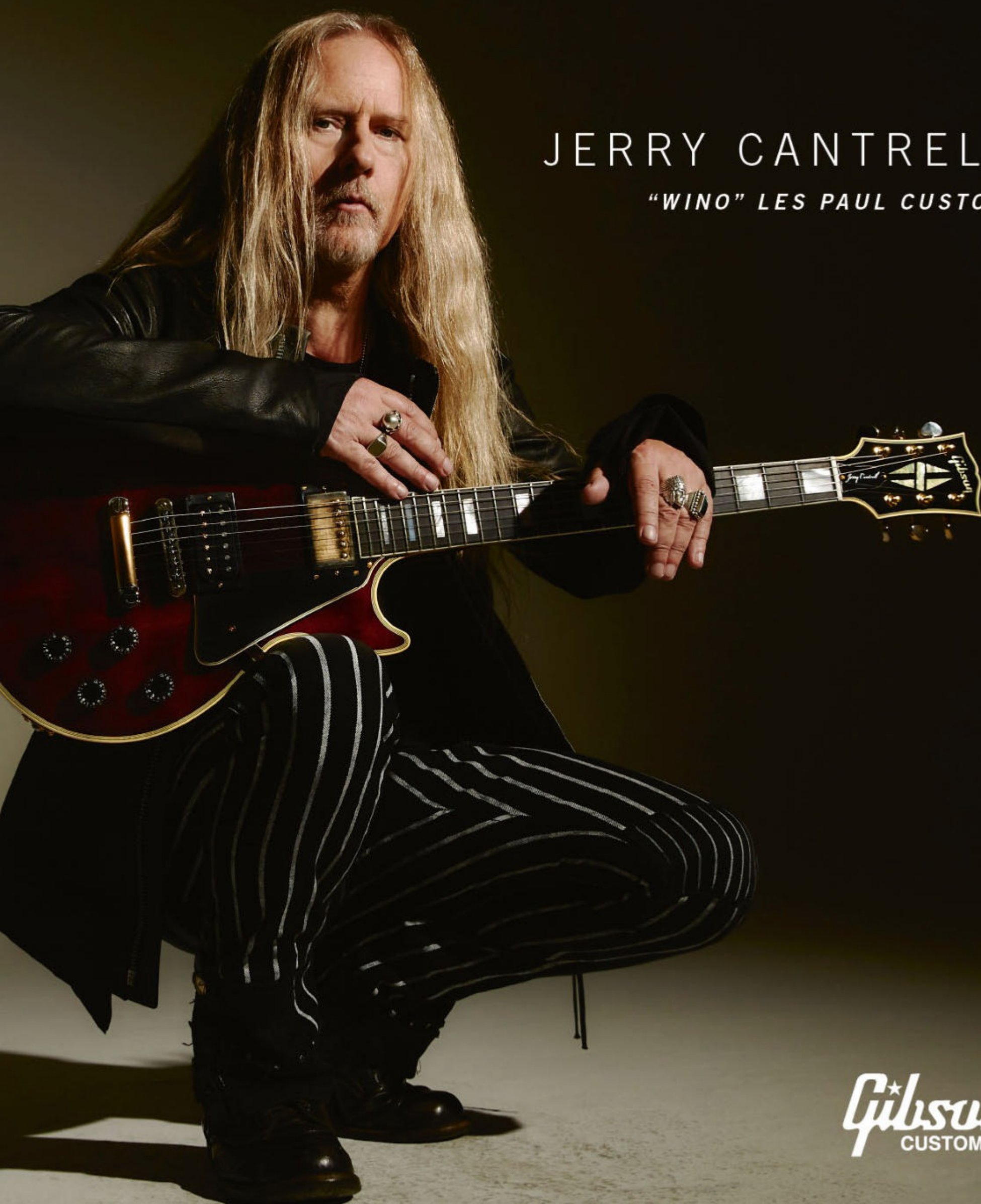
Onstage at Columbia Theater Berlin, Germany, May 21, 2018

some things slightly more aggressively. When I discovered Hedges, I was intrigued by his ability on the guitar, but his music seemed like it was from another dimension. It was so powerful. Everything he was saying with the guitar resonated with me 100 percent. Sadly, he passed away in the car accident [on December 2, 1997] just a few months after I discovered his music, so I never got to see him play live or meet him. But he was transformational in my life, how I approach music, and what you can do with the guitar. He’s a profound influence to this day and I still listen to his albums all the time.

How does Preston Reed figure into your equation of acoustic inspirations?

I originally got into fingerstyle guitar through Preston. I was 16 and playing with high-school friends, doing stuff like Metallica, Iron Maiden and Pantera. My cousin invited me to check out a Washburn clinic with Preston Reed, and I was blown away to see one guy doing so much by playing percussively on a steel-string acoustic. I was into tapping, because I was trying to learn Eddie Van Halen and Joe Satriani solos, but Preston was using it to help cover all the bases throughout an entire piece of music. I’d never seen anything like it. His

ANDREA FRIEDRICH/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (LIVE) SIMONE CECCHETTI (INSET)



JERRY CANTRELL

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instructional video got me going on modern acoustic guitar. I chose “Chattanooga” because it’s quite sophisticated for that style. There are so many interesting things: a beautiful melody, cool key changes and a sense of forward movement. I played it on my signature Greenfield, and the tuning, from low to high, is B G D G A D.

How about the Billy McLaughlin cover, “Clockshop”?

That’s a quintessential Billy McLaughlin kind of tune. He has an approach to tapping on steel string in altered tunings, using legato pull-offs with the fretting hand to create a flowing sound that’s unmistakably his. Playing that way doesn’t leave a lot of room for chordal work, so you’ve got to have a strong melody and support it with the bass line. I’ve incorporated that approach to solo guitar composition into my own songs, and my version of “Clockshop” is pretty directly comparable to his with a few little differences. I learned “Clockshop” by ear, listening for open strings, and my version is in the same tuning as his: C G D G A C. I recorded it with my signature Greenfield.

Can you share some insights on how you adapted the video game tune “Streets of Whiterun”?

I’m a big video game dork. That’s my main hobby and entertainment medium. I’ve been a big fan of *The Elder Scrolls* for many years. *Skyrim* [the game’s fifth installment] came out about a decade ago. It’s a big, open-world fantasy, with beautiful music that plays throughout as you visit different places. “Streets of Whiterun” is unbelievably gorgeous. It’s orchestral, so I figured the harp guitar would be my best arrangement tool, because it’s the best route for me to cover really low stuff. The tuning for the guitar is an open E major: E B E G# B E, and the harp is tuned C# F# G# A B G#. I shot a video of myself playing that tune several years ago, and people loved it on

YouTube. I decided to record it as a sort of homage to video game music.

Greenfield Guitars introduced two versions of your signature model in 2020, with the Rylynn being somewhat

less expensive, but they’re both major investments. What is the most important aspect for those seeking the Andy McKee sound on a budget?

I can pick up any

guitar and play away, as I’m not too particular about things, but I prefer the huge sound of a jumbo body. It’s great for fingerstyle playing because there’s a lot of low end and volume. Of the three main Greenfields I use live and in the studio, two of them are jumbos. The harp guitar has a unique body shape, but my signature G4.2 and the baritone with the color-shifting paint are both jumbos that can fit in the exact same case. The baritone simply has a longer scale length.

Have you had any pandemic-era epiphanies about being a guitar player right now?

As I grow older, what I look for in music and guitar playing is something that comes across as genuine. It doesn’t have to be flashy or have anything to do with that. There are so many guitar players out there. When you find someone that you can tell is being honest, has dove deep to discover who they really are and expresses it through the guitar, that’s the good stuff. I get a kick out of hearing that these days. 🎸

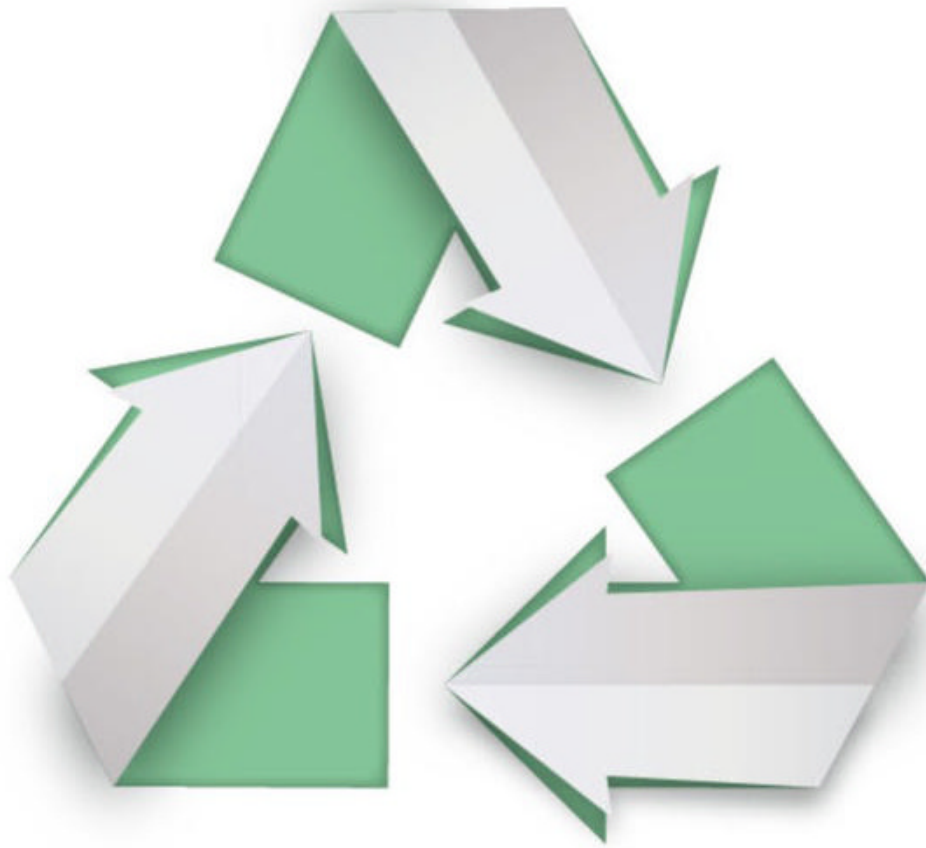


At Teatro Colosseo, Torino, Italy, opening for Tommy Emmanuel’s first Italian tour date, October 2, 2016

“PRINCE’S IDEA HAD ME WEARING A WILD 50-FOOT CAPE. BUT I WASN’T TOO INTO THAT”



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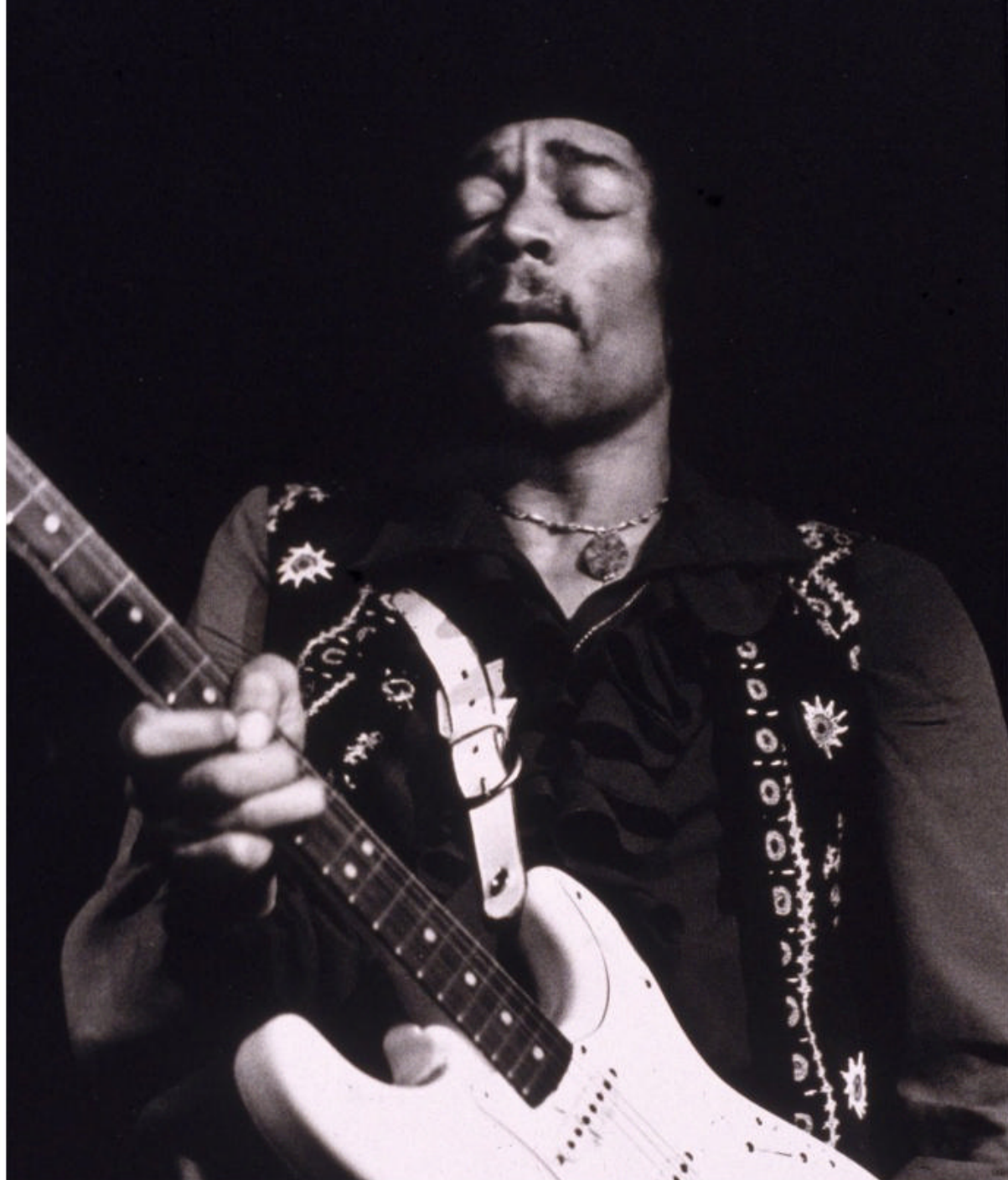
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HENDRIX CHORDS

Put Jimi Hendrix's chord inversions, melodic scale-tone embellishments and jazz voicings to work in your own rhythm-guitar playing.

BY PATRICK BRENNAN



NO GUITARIST HAS influenced music and culture as profoundly as Jimi Hendrix did. Even before burning and smashing his Fender Stratocaster during the bombastic finale of his 1967 Monterey Pop Festival performance, the visionary musician had revolutionized the world of electric guitar with his unique approaches to playing the instrument and using it with his amplifier and effects to create new, otherworldly sounds.

While Jimi's innovative lead guitar style has been widely analyzed and imitated by countless players in the decades since his passing in 1970, one aspect of his six-string artistry that is equally groundbreaking and often overlooked is his approach to playing chords and rhythm guitar. This is where he stands far above his many imitators. As Hendrix famously demonstrated in his ballads, he would often ditch standard barre chords in favor of melodic phrasing built around and woven into *chord inversions*. In this lesson, we'll explore this and other aspects of Jimi's rhythm guitar style and technique with original examples inspired by such

signature songs as "The Wind Cries Mary," "Castles Made of Sand" and "Little Wing."

INVERSIONS

In music theory, a *voicing* refers to the vertical arrangement, or "stacking," of notes in a chord. For example, an A major chord is made up of three notes, A, C# and E, which are the root (1), major 3rd and 5th, respectively. If you play these three notes together in ascending order, from low to high, the chord is said to be in *root position*, for which the root is the lowest note, being on the bottom of the voicing, or "in the bass," as they say. If you take the A note and move it up an octave, it then becomes the top note of the voicing, rendering the ascending order of notes C#, E, A. The chord is now in what's called *1st inversion*, for which the 3rd, C#, is in the bass. Likewise, flipping the C# note up an octave leaves the 5th, E, on the bottom of the note stack, giving us what's called a *2nd-inversion* voicing, for which the 5th is in the bass.

Ex. 1 has you playing these A major chord voicings in ascending order

through two octaves, running up the neck in the first two bars. Then, in bars 3 and 4, you will descend a series of D major (D, F#, A) inversions before finally ending back on A. The shapes used here are all common major chord inversions and close-position "grips," and they're all essential building blocks for understanding Hendrix's approach to rhythm guitar playing that should be learned well in a variety of keys. Now let's look at how Jimi would creatively make use of these kinds of shapes.

BREAKING THE BARRE

One of Hendrix's greatest contributions to the rock guitar vocabulary stemmed from his eschewal of standard six-string barre chord shapes, for which the index finger (1) serves as a movable capo clamped across the strings. Instead of using these stock chord forms, which are technically restrictive, as they use up all four fingers, the guitarist opted to instead hook his thumb around the top side of the fretboard and use it to fret the root of the chord on the low E string while fingering a root-position triad on the D, G and B strings with his 3rd, 2nd

and 1st fingers, with the 1st finger sometimes forming a mini barre across the top two strings, to double the root note an octave higher. This unorthodox fretting approach gave the guitarist the option to utilize his now-freed-up 4th finger (the pinkie) to add decorative melodic embellishments and momentary “extensions” to the chord. This technique is showcased most famously in early hits like “Purple Haze” and “The Wind Cries Mary” (both from *Are You Experienced*).

When utilizing thumb fretting this way, it’s very important that the tip of the thumb extends beyond the low E string to lightly touch and mute the unused A string, so that it does not ring open when you strum across the strings, just like when you play a strummed octave on non-adjacent strings, which is what happens here within the chord voicing. Jimi had large hands, which made this technique seemingly effortless for him to employ. Having a fairly thin neck profile on your guitar makes the technique easier to perform than on one with a chunky “baseball bat”-like neck. If you’re having difficulty with the technique, try performing it on a guitar with a thinner neck. Another helpful option is to additionally mute the unused A string with the tip of your 3rd finger as you fret the D string.

Ex. 2 revolves around a two chord progression (G to F) and demonstrates how you can use the available surrounding major-scale tones related to each chord to achieve the kind of “chord-melody” activity that’s a hallmark of Hendrix’s distinctive rhythm guitar style. Start by fretting a root-position G major triad (G, B, D) with the root note doubled an octave higher on the high E string (via a 1st-finger mini-barre), then add your thumb on the low E string to thicken and bolster the voicing, by doubling the root note an octave lower. With this G chord as your base, you will in turn add the “extensions” A, E and C — all of which are conveniently located at the 5th fret on the top three strings — to the chord, fretting each of them with your 4th finger. In bar 2, you will shift down two

Ex. 1

Diagram for Example 1, showing a sequence of chords: A (root pos., 1st inv., 2nd inv.), D (root pos., 1st inv., 2nd inv.), and A (root pos., 1st inv.). The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff are three staves labeled T (Treble), A (Alto), and B (Bass). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. A final measure shows a whole note chord with a 3rd finger extension on the A string.

Ex. 2

Diagram for Example 2, showing a sequence of chords: G, F, F#, and G. The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff are three staves labeled T (Treble), A (Alto), and B (Bass). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. The G chord is shown in root position and 1st inversion. The F chord is shown in root position. The F# chord is shown in root position. The final G chord is shown in root position.

Ex. 3

Diagram for Example 3, showing a sequence of chords: C and Bb. The diagram includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff are three staves labeled T (Treble), A (Alto), and B (Bass). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. The C chord is shown in root position. The Bb chord is shown in root position.

frets and one whole step to an F chord (F, A, C) and utilize the open G string in addition to fretted scale tones similarly patterned after those in the previous bar. Since we’re not utilizing the high E string here, you needn’t form a mini barre across the top two strings and can fret the B string with the tip of the 1st finger.

Ex. 3 is inspired by the opening riff to “Wait Until Tomorrow” (Axis: Bold As Love). Begin in 5th position, playing a C major triad in 2nd inversion (voiced G, C, E, low to high) with your 1st finger barring the D, G and B strings. Then hammer-on to an F major triad (F, A, C) in 1st inversion with your 2nd and 3rd fingers before resolving back to C. As the

overall harmony doesn't change when you hammer-on to the F triad, this produces the effect of suspension and resolution. Suspension is the musical tension created by replacing a chord tone, such as a major or minor 3rd, with a non-chord tone — most commonly substituting the 4th or 2nd (sus4 or sus2) for the 3rd — followed by the return and resolution to the chord tone.

From there, use your thumb to fret the sliding root note on the low E string, ultimately landing at the 8th fret, where you will fret a root-position C major triad, with an added 4th-finger B-string hammer-on for melodic interest, moving from the 5th of the chord, G, to the major 6th, A, and back. In bar 2 you shift down to 3rd position and mimic the previous sequence from bar 1 a whole step lower, centering everything around an embellished B $\flat$ major chord (B $\flat$, D, F).

PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS

Just as often as he would play inversions in the straightforward manner detailed earlier, Hendrix would break apart inversions by playing double-stops and single-note melodies around them. **Ex. 4** demonstrates this approach applied to a simple four-chord progression: A - D - C - G. You begin by framing an A major chord, sliding into a 1st inversion voicing, only here instead of playing the full three-note triad, you will play the bottom note C $\sharp$, then subsequently perform a double-stop with the remaining tones (E and A) above, hammering-on to the 9th fret on the A string for added melodic tension before resolving to the original chord. You'll continue playing the progression in this manner, with legato finger slides and double-stop hammer-ons and pull-offs liberally employed throughout, Hendrix style. Note the use of triple-stops in bar 2, which incorporate suspensions — sus4 and sus2 — based around the 1st-inversion D major chord, which is a move Hendrix often used to brilliant effect. The common thread throughout this example is the way each chord, rather than adhering to one single overall scale, is “borrowing” neighboring tones from its own related major

Ex. 4

A D

Ex. 5

Em7 Am Bm

pentatonic scale. This concept is a hallmark of Hendrix's singular approach to key and tonality. More on that later.

Thus far in this lesson, we've only dealt with major chords, but Hendrix was equally expressive with minor chords. His approach here often came down to availing himself to the tones of the minor and minor pentatonic scales.

Ex. 5 is inspired by a portion of his stellar intro to "Little Wing" (*Axis: Bold As Love*), using three minor chords: Em7, Am and Bm. Here you will use tones derived from the E natural minor scale (E, F $\sharp$, G, A, B, C, D) when melodically contouring our chord progression. Bar 1 is based around the Em7 chord (E, G, B, D). The key to this passage, in terms of technique, is maintaining the 1st-finger barre across the A, D and G strings at the 7th fret, which both provides the chord tones E and D and an added scale tone, A, played here on the D string, which comes in handy as both a melodic tone and as a tension against other melodic tones, as seen in beat 2. In bar 2 you will move on to an Am chord (A, C, E), voiced with an open A root and your 1st finger barred across the top three strings at the 5th fret, forming a 1st-inversion voicing. From there, perform a pull-off from the high E string's 7th fret with your 3rd finger and proceed to walk down the B string, from the 8th to the 7th and 5th frets, all while playing the 3rd chord tone, C, underneath, fretted with the barre. Following this, you will slide up to 7th position, via the 3rd finger on the A string, straight into a Bm chord (B, D, F $\sharp$), playing a double-stop hammer/pull before landing on the root of the chord.

JAZZING IT UP

Despite having no formal education in music theory, Jimi demonstrated harmonic sophistication and paved the way for contemporaries like Frank Zappa to further incorporate jazz harmony into the rock lexicon. As a case in point, consider Jimi's use of the E7 $\sharp$ 9 chord (voiced, low to high, E, G $\sharp$, D, G natural), often called "the Hendrix chord" because of how frequently and prominently the guitarist used it in his

Ex. 6

E7 $\sharp$ 9 N.C. G13 C7 $\sharp$ 9

Ex. 7

E6 C9

E6 A6 G9 E6

music. Jimi favored this chord because of its "split nature," containing both a major and minor 3rds, or, as the chord symbol dictates: the major 3rd and the tension $\sharp$ 9 above it. This major/minor duality perfectly encapsulates the spirit of Hendrix's musicality; pushing boundaries and refusing to be defined by any rules of music.

Ex. 6 begins with an E7 $\sharp$ 9 voicing played on the middle four strings after an open low E root. Subsequently, you will play a single-note E minor pentatonic lick before plunging down towards a G13 chord (voiced, low to high, G, F, B, E) — the 13 chord being a common substitution for the 7 $\sharp$ 9 chord — followed by C7 $\sharp$ 9 (voiced C, E, B $\flat$, E $\flat$).

In addition to demonstrating the E7#9 in all its glory, this chord progression is indicative of Hendrix's penchant for playing around with key and tonality. While the key center E holds steady throughout, there is no firm distinction as to whether you are in a major key or a minor key. And while the root motion of the progression clearly outlines an E minor scale, the chords themselves are all variations on dominant 7th chords — each containing the major 3rd and minor, or “flatted,” 7th chord tones — taking the typical 12-bar-blues approach of shifting I, IV and V dominant 7th chords to its harmonic extreme. This chord methodology made for iconic riffs and a uniquely colorful sound, and laid the harmonic foundation for some of Hendrix's greatest leads.

Hendrix was equally fond of using major 6th and dominant 9th chords, as

evidenced in such masterpieces as “Third Stone From the Sun” (*Are You Experienced*) and “If 6 Was 9” (*Axis: Bold As Love*). The major 6th chord is built using the major triad (root, 3rd and 5th) with an added 6th degree, which can take the place of the 5th. The dominant 9th chord places the major 9th scale tone (located an octave above the 2nd) atop a dominant 7th chord — 1, 3, 5, b7, 9, although the 5th is typically omitted.

Ex. 7 alternates between these two chord forms in a soulful descending progression connected by melodic fills. You'll start with an E6 chord, voiced E, G#, C#, E, B in 9th position, with an E major pentatonic lick leading you into C9 (voiced C, Bb, D, G), with your thumb fretting the 6th-string root. Note that this voicing lacks the major 3rd, E, which is not uncommon. From here, you'll work back to E6 in a slightly

different voicing, played in 5th position (voiced E, E, G#, C#, E). A sliding double-stop based on the E major pentatonic scale (E, F#, G#, B, C#) guides you into the final stretch of chords: A6 (voiced A, F#, C#, E), G9 (voiced G, F, A, D, again without the 3rd), and one last E6 chord voiced E, B, E, G#, C#), played down in 1st position. This example, in addition to being a particularly jazzy sample of Hendrix's chordal prowess, also hints at the chord-melody playing style of Stevie Ray Vaughan, a Hendrix obsessive who would go on to become one of the all-time greatest guitarists himself!

Now that you can play chords with the same nuance and creativity as Hendrix, grab your Strat, dial in a warm but punchy clean tone and see what kinds of soulful, melodic chord-based riffs you can come up with. ■



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ALTERED REALITY

A fresh approach for mastering the altered scale, the elusive 7th mode of melodic minor.

BY CHRIS BUONO

I'VE BEEN PLAYING the guitar and studying music for over three decades. Throughout my time spent woodshedding in the name of mastering various scales and all their various modes, one scale in particular traditionally vexed me. After years of trying to harness the potential of this Voldemort-like “scale that must not be named” (not yet) with otherwise successful methods, I realized I had to change my approach. I needed a new reality, one that entailed re-examining the importance of naming conventions, embracing enharmonic equivalents (different names for the same pitch) and, perhaps the most jarring, using chords to inform my learning of a scale.

I speak of *the altered scale*, which is the seventh mode of the melodic minor scale. Now, it's our standard practice to spell out a scale's intervallic formula in parentheses when it's first mentioned. This temporary omission is fallout from the theoretical rebellion the altered scale wages, which I will attempt to quell in this lesson. To the uninitiated, the altered scale presents itself as a formidable foe, with its enharmonic tendencies and formulaic duality, as well as its multiple names. Regarding the latter, in your own quest to learn about the altered scale you may have already discovered the relatable names *super-Locrian* or *Locrian ♭4*, or maybe more descriptive names like *altered-dominant* (my favorite) or *diminished whole-tone* (my second favorite). If you're looking for more commemorative or exotic names, then consider dubbing this organized order of elements the “Pomeroy,” “Ravel” or “Palamidian” scale. Whatever



name suits your fancy, the fact remains the altered scale is a challenging proposition to wrap your head around. All that said, to get the most from this campaign, prepare to have your own scale learning reality, well, altered.

As I mentioned, the altered scale is the seventh mode of melodic minor (1, 2, ♭3, 4, 5, 6, 7), which ironically has its own naming saga. The historical use of melodic minor, in classical music, calls for the scale to follow the formula you see here as it ascends; when it descends, however, it shifts to the parallel natural minor scale, or Aeolian mode, formula (1, 2, ♭3, 4, 5, ♭6, ♭7), where the 6th and 7th degrees are lowered a half step. “Jazz minor” is an alternative name that helps

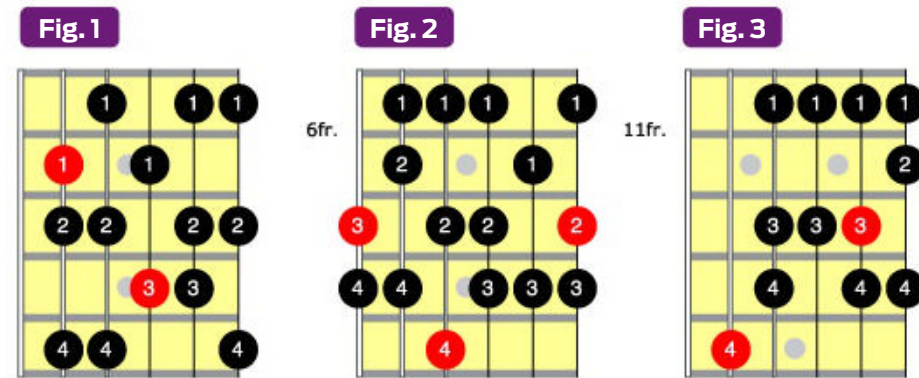
differentiate the manner in which melodic minor is played by modern improvisers, where the scale retains its makeup regardless of the direction it's played.

At face value, the altered scale is intervallically spelled 1, ♭2, ♭3, ♭4, ♭5, ♭6, ♭7. From a C root, the notes are C, D♭, E♭, F♭, G♭, A♭, B♭. As you ponder the who, what and why of that diminished 4th (F♭), play through the patterns illustrated in **Figures 1–3**, ascending and descending, to get a feel for the sound as well as the somewhat archaic fingering possibilities of this enigmatic device. About that ♭4th degree: this is where names like super-Locrian and Locrian-♭4 originate, since the rest of the scale

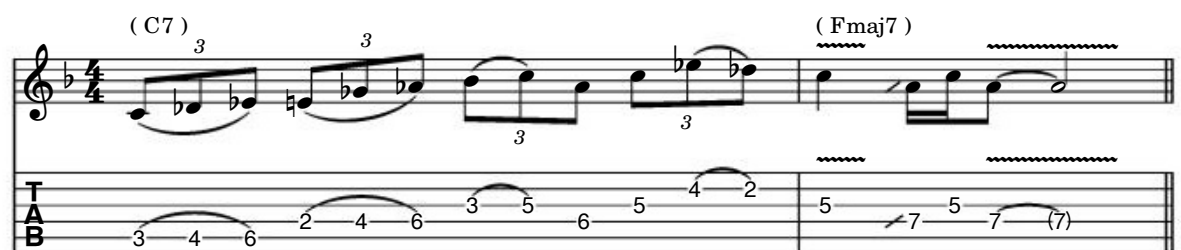
spells out a Locrian formula (1, $\flat 2$, $\flat 3$, 4, $\flat 5$, $\flat 6$, $\flat 7$). However, looking at the scale from this perspective robs you of the treasure that awaits.

Setting aside the honorary naming conventions, the gold within the altered scale is revealed when you consider the more descriptive names such as altered-dominant and diminished whole-tone. The former hints towards the scale's flavor and function while the latter spells about valuable insight into the idea of formulaic duality. With a shift in perception, let's spell the altered scale as C, $\flat D$, $\flat E$, E, $\flat G$, $\flat A$, $\flat B$. Notice the enharmonic shift from $\flat F$ to E. Although they are indeed the same pitch, reckoning the 4th degree of the scale as E reveals its true value as a major 3rd of C. In conjunction with the $\flat 7$ th degree ($\flat B$) you can fully appreciate the nod to a dominant 7 chord (1, 3, 5, $\flat 7$) that the altered scale offers and thus the notion of perhaps calling this scale altered-dominant. Regarding the "altered" nomenclature, this describes the function of the remaining scale tones - $\flat D$ ($\flat 2$), $\flat E$ ($\flat 3$), $\flat G$ ($\flat 5$), $\flat A$ ($\flat 6$). These "outside"-sounding notes provide tension over the first half of a V7 - Imaj7 cadence, for example, thus creating a more intense sounding resolution that's attractive to jazz, fusion and modern blues players. **Examples 1–3** show a trio of V - I lines in the key of F — C7 to Fmaj7 — where the C altered scale could apply. The licks will feature each of the three scale fingerings in Figures 1-3, respectively, to begin to give you a taste of what this approach has to offer.

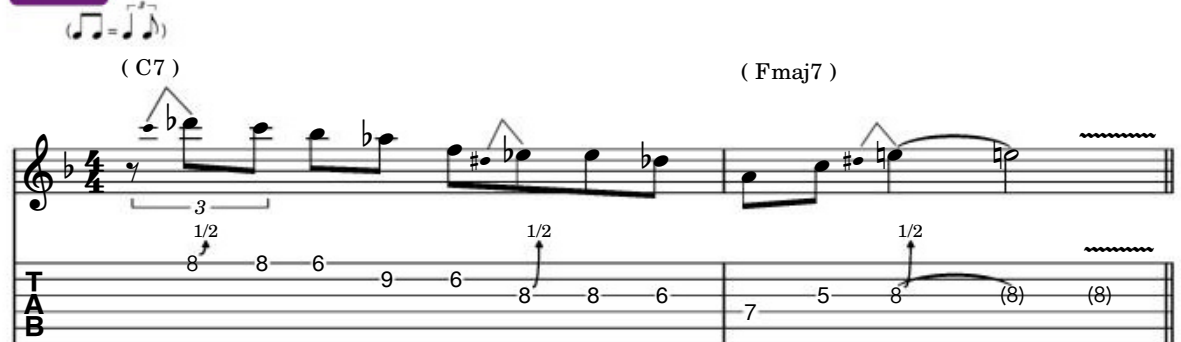
Respelling the scale one more time, as well as shifting a few choice scale degree assignments, chew on this iteration: C (1), $\flat D$ ($\flat 2$), $\flat E$ ($\flat 3$), E (3), $\flat F$ ($\sharp 4$), $\flat G$ ($\sharp 5$), $\flat B$ ($\flat 7$). From this perspective, you can start to wrap your head around the idea of calling the altered scale the diminished whole-tone scale (1, $\flat 2$, $\flat 3$, 3, $\sharp 4$, $\sharp 5$, $\flat 7$). With the major 3rd (E) serving as a shared axis point, we can split this scale down the middle, with the initial four notes resembling the first half of a *symmetrical diminished* scale formula (1, $\flat 2$, $\flat 3$, 3, $\sharp 4$, 5, 6, $\flat 7$) — also known as the *half-whole*



Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



scale, due to the repeating step pattern — and everything north of the major 3rd mirroring the last four notes of a *whole-tone scale* formula (1, 2, 3, $\sharp 4$, $\sharp 5$, $\flat 7$), which, as its name implies, is made up of successive whole tones, or steps. Both the symmetrical diminished and whole-tone scales in their totality are viable options for supplying lines with tension over dominant 7 chords, as well.

With the altered scale name game addressed and some, albeit not all, of the talk about enharmonics fleshed out, the

attention shifts to establishing a neck vision through chords. You might still be thinking, "Chords? I thought this was a lesson about getting better control over a scale." The approach centers on this thought: Scales are melodic devices meant to be in constant motion while chords are fixed, stationary harmonic devices. With regards to the latter, chords are easier to picture and thus visualize on the neck. In conjunction with that notion, think of chord tones as markers on a trail with myriad pathways.

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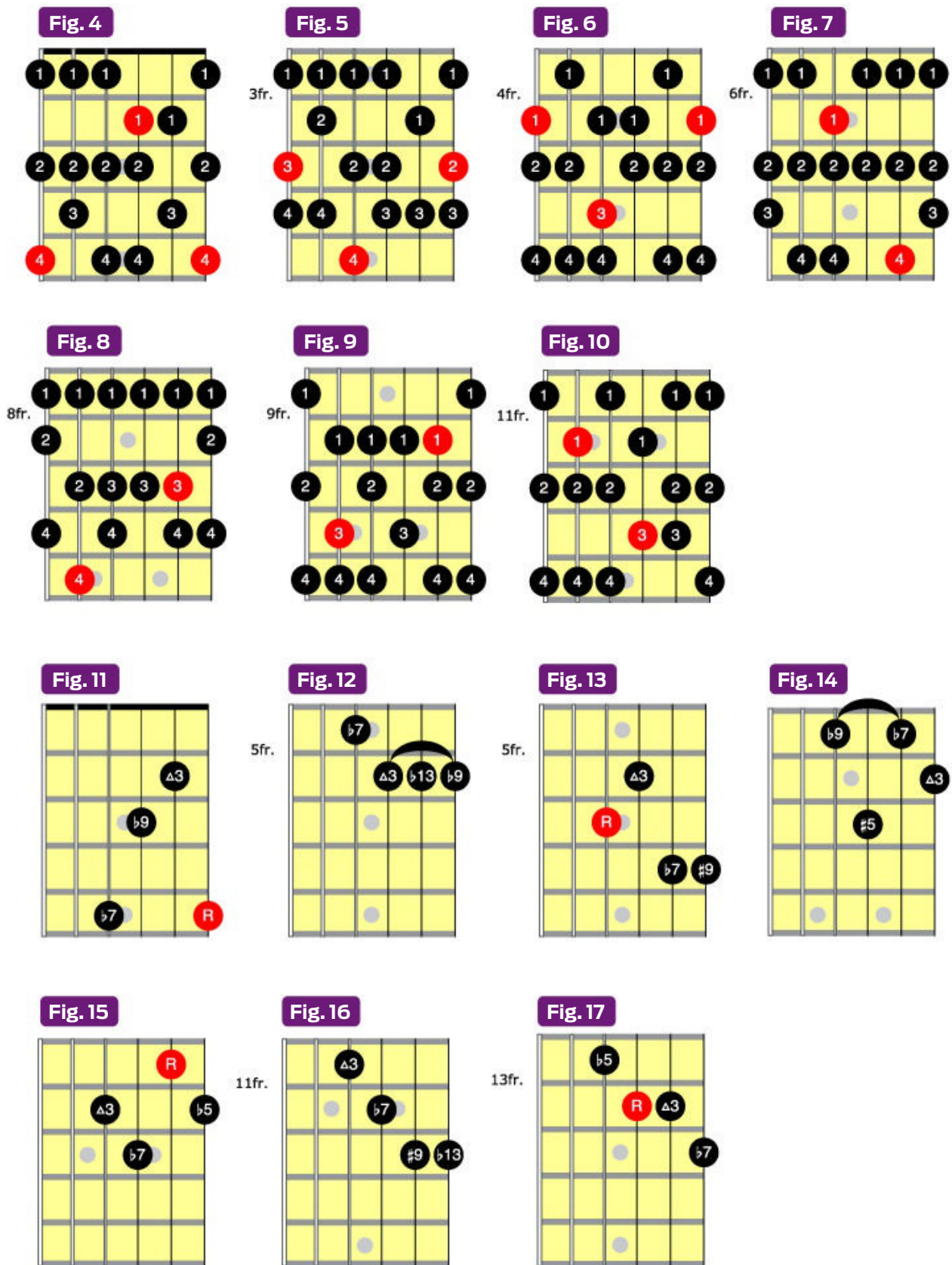
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To get started, you need a complete series of altered scale fingerings that end on successive scale tones. These will serve as your pathway. **Figures 4–10** provide just that, with a collection of fingering patterns for the A altered scale (A, B $\flat$, C, C $\sharp$, E $\flat$, F, G) that make their way up the neck, starting with a pattern that climbs up to a 5th-fret A root on the high E string. (The A root notes are circled in red in all of these diagrams, in every octave where they occur.) It should be noted that the lowest note in each of these seven patterns (i.e., the note you start on, on the low E string, fretted with the 1st finger, is a successive scale degree, with the first and lowest pattern beginning on the $\sharp 5$ (F).

For each of these patterns, I assign a corresponding altered-dominant-7 chord shape, illustrated in **Figures 11–17**, respectively, which similarly contain root-note markers, highlighted in red circles. The connection between the scales and chords rests on the highest note of each chord purposefully matching the highest note of the scale pattern it's mated with.

To begin to illustrate and cultivate this system, the phrases in **Examples 4–10** have you playing the associated chord that goes with each scale pattern before playing a descending line on the top three strings. With the exception of Ex. 5, each chord's highest note fingering is common with the scale it's connected to. This makes for a smooth legato-like transition from the fixed harmonic altered entity to its ever-flowing melodic counterpart. Even better, within those short descending bursts you'll pass by more markers in the forms of chord tones, as you walk your fingers down that particular pathway.

As you review Examples 3–9, you may notice altered extensions, such as $\flat 9$, $\sharp 9$, $\sharp 11$ and $\flat 13$ in the chord names. Another challenging facet of the altered scale and the harmony it breeds is the liberal use of what are called *upper extensions* when naming scale and chord tones. More often than not, players experienced in extended harmony of all types will freely label scale degrees



Ex. 4

A7 $\flat 9$

Ex. 5

A7 $\flat 9 \flat 13$

within the simple range (first octave) as extensions found in the compound range (second octave). Below is a table that addresses all of the possibilities:

Scale Tone	Equivalent Upper Extension
$\flat 2$	$\flat 9$
$\flat 3$	$\sharp 9$
$\sharp 4$ or $\flat 5$	$\sharp 11$
$\flat 6$	$\flat 13$

You may also have picked up on the use of $\sharp 5$, despite not having an $E\sharp$ in the spelling provided for the A altered scale. The liberal approach to designations also includes enharmonics — one player's $\sharp 4$ is another player's $\flat 5$. Be patient with this; it will come. In the end, with time, you will not only start to be versed in the possibilities, but you'll also develop your own naming conventions.

Let's have another go at aligning those same A altered-scale patterns in Figures 4–10 with same altered-dominant chords, this time with grips on the middle four strings, as illustrated in **Figures 18–24**. This time, the match is on the B string, where both the highest note of each chord voicing is common with the highest note of the associated scale pattern. You'll find another approach to the idea of pathways in **Examples 11–17**. The fingerings for the chords are slightly different, despite the voicings remaining the same, due to the major-3rd tuning relationship between the G and B strings. Embrace this concept and invest time into transferring your entire chord vocabulary to neighboring string sets. It's a powerful skill to have and will bolster your neck vision tenfold!

I hope this method helps you develop your own reality with the altered scale, one where you harness its full potential and take it even further. I encourage you to compose your own pathways and systems of markers to help drive home this concept. As you woodshed these examples, along with your own ideas, be sure to regularly apply slight changes along with modulating through all 12 keys. These practices will not only solidify this new reality, but all the ones to follow. 🎸

Ex. 6

A7 $\sharp 9$

Ex. 7

A7 $\flat 9\flat 13$

Ex. 8

A7 $\sharp 11$

Ex. 9

A7 $\sharp 9\sharp 5$

Ex. 10

A7 $\flat 5$

Ex. 11

A7 $\flat 5$

Ex. 12

A7 $\sharp 9\sharp 5$

Ex. 13

A7 $\flat 5$

Ex. 14

A7 $\flat 9$

Ex. 15

A7 $\flat 9\flat 13$

Ex. 16

A7 $\sharp 9$

Ex. 17

A7 $\flat 9\flat 13$

Acoustic Blues Musings, Pt. 1

How to choose a blues box and strings.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PLAYING BLUES ON an acoustic guitar is as natural as the sun in the sky. After all, that's how the thing got started. In the modern era, some acoustics are built for blues and some aren't. An instrument that requires a little elbow grease is generally a good thing, and unless one seeks a contemporary sound, a vintage instrument or one designed along traditional lines adds an air of authenticity. The choice of strings can make a significant difference in tone and playability. Here are some historical insights and musings on how to choose a blues box and the strings to make it sing.

ORIGINS AND CONSIDERATIONS

A blues acoustic doesn't have to be fancy unless you need a snappy guitar to play sophisticated licks. Consider "Catfish" Keith. He plays a dazzling signature Santa Cruz that helps him conjure tricky harmonics, and his Catfish Special is an upscale representation of guitars from the formative Great Depression era, when many cats played parlor guitars. Martin 0 and Gibson L series models epitomize the style, the latter being favored by Keb' Mo'. With only 12-frets to the body, these guitars have their bridge further from the sound hole and closer to the center of the lower bout, giving the instrument a warm and powerful tone. Having a shorter scale length and fewer frets also brings the frets closer together and results in less

string tension. That means less distance for fingers to stretch, easier string bending and an overall slinkier feel. These designs are still widely available, with Taylor a notable example of a manufacturer that embraces the 12-fret concept while adding modern touches, such as a cutaway.

Another school of bluesers prefers big 12-strings, often in lowered tunings. They include old-time players like Leadbelly, with his iconic Stella, and contemporary guitarists such as Leo Kottke, who recently reported that he had the chance to buy one of Leadbelly's Stellas but didn't because "it scared me." Electric icon Jimi Hendrix hardly played acoustic in public, but in the most famous footage of him doing so he's playing a Zemaitis 12-string.

And of course, a resonator adds an air of legitimacy. Think of Taj Mahal playing a National Duolian on his classic albums such as *The Natch'l Blues*. These days he plays a Regal RC-56 Tricone Resophonic with a copper-plated brass body.

STRING THEORIES

Strings matter. Heavier gauges generally deliver more robust tones, but lighter strings are better suited to the treble-forward nature of the smaller guitars. Some players leave old strings on as long as possible for the most authentic worn-in tone. As Luther Dickinson once noted in these pages, "Think about the

situation of the old-time blues players. Those guys couldn't afford new strings."

According to Ben Harper, "The rumor and myth of the Leadbelly 12-string is that he used to get free piano strings from a piano refurbishing company. After they put on new ones, they'd give him the old ones. Those thick strings would bend the neck of his guitar if he didn't lower the tuning way down. That became the Leadbelly 12-string sound."

Nylon and gut strings have become the exception for American blues since steel strings became widely available in the 1920s. The 80/20 bronze alloy introduced by D'Addario in the 1930s delivered strong highs and lows with reduced mids. It was succeeded by less corrosive phosphor-bronze strings, which D'Addario introduced in the 1970s. They remain ubiquitous for players of all styles, and are available standard or coated. More recently, manufacturers have produced strings with alloys designed to let the sound of the wood speak. They include D'Addario's Nickel Bronze and Martin's Retro strings, made of nickel and copper. It's worth auditioning a few string types to find the best sound and feel on a given acoustic.

Once the wood and wires are happening, there are some time-honored tricks that can help make playing acoustic blues easier. We'll address a few in next month's Frets Learn column. ■





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ESP

LTD MH-1000 Deluxe EverTune

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

ALWAYS SEEKING TO improve its guitars, ESP recently announced it was adding stainless-steel frets to all of its LTD 1000 Series guitar and basses. It's a notable update since stainless-steel can provide a smoother playing feel as well as better resistance to wear and corrosion than alloy-based fret wire. The LTD MH-1000 Deluxe EverTune on review here is a beautifully made guitar that has a mahogany body with a flame-maple top finished in Dark Brown Sunburst, and a three-piece maple set thru-neck. The ebony fingerboard has

SPECIFICATIONS

LTD MH-1000 Deluxe EverTune**CONTACT** espguitars.com**PRICE** \$1,299 street**NUT WIDTH** 42mm, molded**NECK** Maple three-piece set neck-thru, Thin U shape**FRETBOARD** Macassar ebony, 25.5" scale, 14" radius**FRETS** 24 stainless-steel extra jumbo .**TUNERS** Grover**BODY** Mahogany with flame-maple top**BRIDGE** EverTune F model**PICKUPS** EMG 60TW-R (neck) EMG 81 (bridge)**CONTROLS** Volume, tone (pulls for coil split), three-way selector**EXTRAS** Dark Brown Sunburst, Snow White, See Thru Black**FACTORY STRINGS** D'Addario XL-120 .009-.042**WEIGHT** 8.3 lbs (as tested)**BUILT** Indonesia or Korea**KUDOS** Plays very well and stays solidly in tune. Excellent construction and finish**CONCERNS** Gig bag has to be purchased separately. Some will miss the trem, despite the advantages that EverTune provides

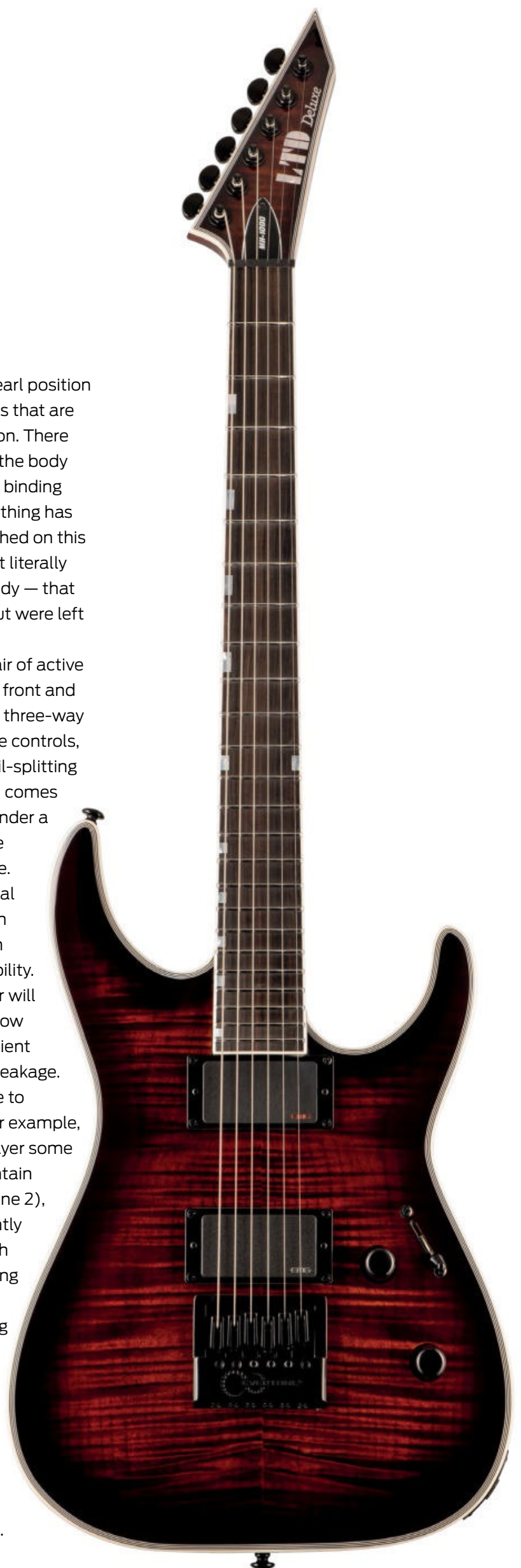
hip-looking square/rectangular pearl position markers and carries 24 jumbo frets that are crowned and polished to perfection. There are elegant multi-ply bindings on the body and headstock, while single white binding adorns the fretboard edges. Everything has been so well rendered and smoothed on this guitar — including a neck joint that literally flows into the double-cutaway body — that it's surprising the corners of the nut were left fairly sharp.

The electronics consist of a pair of active EMG humbuckers — a 60TW-R in front and an 81 at the bridge — along with a three-way blade switch and volume and tone controls, the latter being a push-pull for coil-splitting the pickups. Power for the system comes from a nine-volt battery housed under a cover that's secured with machine screws to make it easier to remove.

Our review instrument is special because it's also equipped with an EverTune bridge, a passive system that provides uncanny tuning stability. Once it's set by the user, the guitar will not go out of tune, regardless of how hard you play, fluctuations in ambient temperature/humidity or string breakage.

You can easily adjust EverTune to respond to your playing needs. For example, I used the guitar in the studio to layer some rhythm parts. By setting it to maintain constant pitch (which is called Zone 2), I found it impossible to inadvertently bend the strings out of tune, which made for more consistent-sounding tracks. Conversely, for performing, I set it to respond to string bending and didn't have to touch the tuners for the duration of the gig.

Setting the EverTune's bending sensitivity is easily done via the tuning machines. The MH-1000 arrived set to Zone 2, which might confuse someone who isn't familiar with the system.





To change it, simply tighten each string until the note goes sharp, then back it off until it's in tune again (referred to as the Bend Stop or transition point between Zone 2 and Zone 3). Now you can bend strings and apply vibrato as much as you like, and EverTune will keep the tuning and intonation absolutely solid.

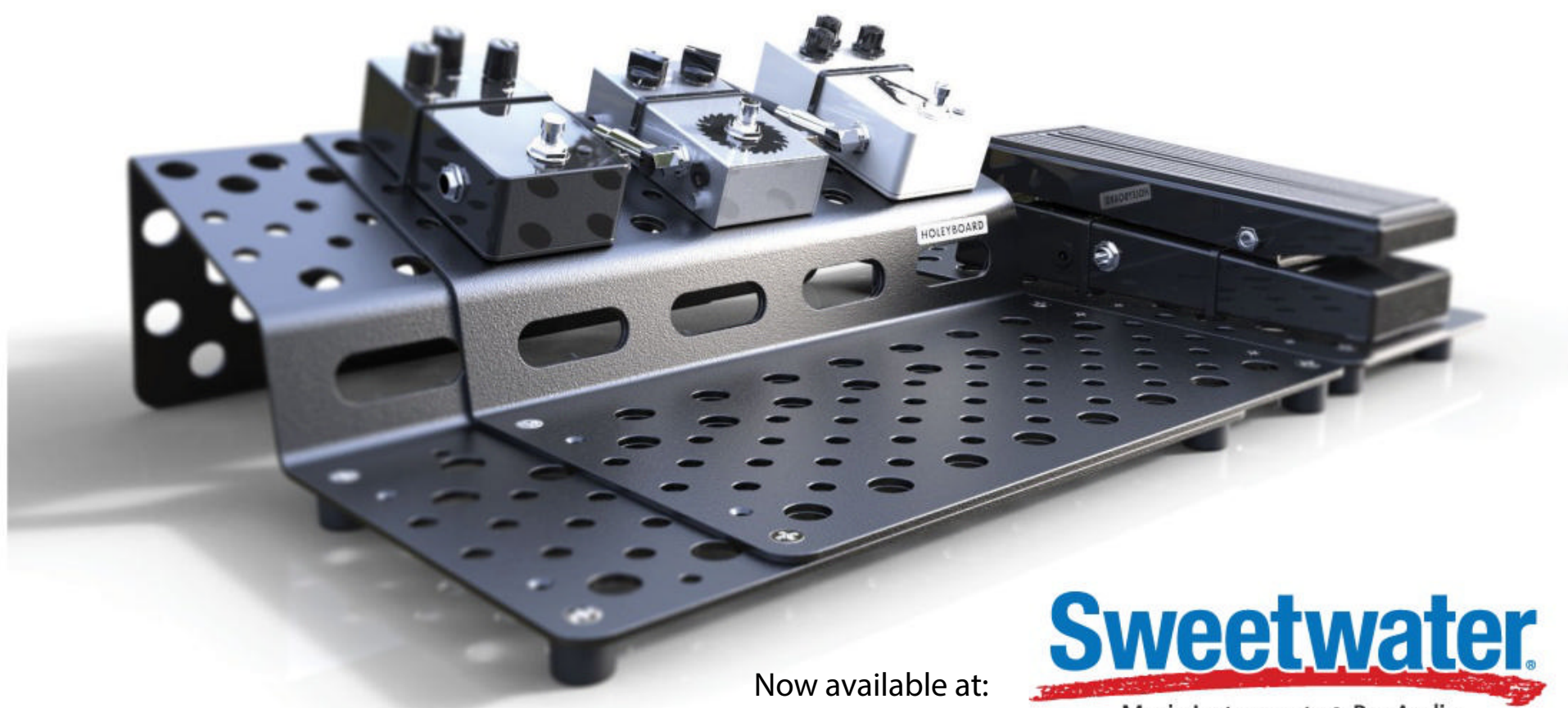
EverTune certainly enhances the MH-1000's overall performance, and, coupled with an excellent factory setup, this guitar plays beautifully and has a lively and sustaining acoustic sound. Played through a Victoria Double Deluxe 2x12 combo with a

Fulltone OCD for distortion and three UAFX pedals (Astra Modulation Machine, Golden Reverberator and Starlight Echo Station), the MH-1000 sounded very even and balanced, and delivered a wide range of sounds. It was also dead quiet. The EMG 81 at the bridge is great for everything from spanky cleans to heavily distorted tones, while the 60TW-R in the neck position delivers a full, round tone that stays firm and clear at all volume settings. Both pickups kept their detailed composure when rolling down the tone control, and the push-pull switch provides

crisp, single-coil tones that sound very cool for rhythm playing with both pickups on. I mainly used the MH-1000 in the studio in this mode, and I dug how it sounded with guitars that were pushing various amounts of overdrive.

The LTD MH-1000 Deluxe EverTune is a lot of guitar for the money, and it should appeal to those looking for a superb-playing rock machine that delivers great sound and won't leave you fighting with tuning issues, no matter how aggressively you play or what mother nature throws down. 🎸

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VICTORY

The Duchess V4 Guitar Amp

TESTED BY JAMES ROTONDI

VICTORY AMPS AND their chief designer, Martin Kidd, have enjoyed a sterling reputation for high-quality British-made boutique amplifiers for nearly a decade. From their stunning aesthetics to the careful selection of tubes, transformers, speakers and voicings, there are reasons Victory amplifiers like The Duchess V40, The Sheriff 22 and the VC35 The Copper Deluxe have won over players like Guthrie Govan, Richie Kotzen, Joe Gore and Chris Buck. Built (and generally priced) for pros, Victory's goods surely belong in the top echelon of modern-day amp makers.

That said, being a notable maker of Class A tube amplifiers in the age of modelers and profilers may not be the most mixed portfolio

SPECIFICATIONS

The Duchess V4 Guitar Amp

CONTACT victoryamps.com

PRICE \$699 street

CONTROLS Bass, middle, treble, volume, master volume, tremolo depth/speed, reverb

POWER 180 watts, ICEpower solid-state

TUBES Preamp tubes only: 1 x Mullard EC900, 3 x CV4014

EFFECTS LOOP low-impedance series loop

EXTRAS Tremolo and Reverb foot switch (optional)

CABINET Victory V112 Neo Cabinet with Neo 250 Copperback speaker, \$719 street

WEIGHT 3.75 lbs

BUILT U.K.

KUDOS An elegant and smartly designed portable pedal amp with a superb preamp section. Great for ultra-clean tones or direct-recording applications

CONCERNS A brassy-sounding high-tech solid-state power section that rattles the ears



an amp company could have. It's perhaps to address this new market that Victory last year added The Duchess V4 Guitar Amplifier to its Duchess line, the company's ode to the dreamy cleans and light overdrives of classic Fender amps. With essentially the same preamp section you'll find in the widely admired The Duchess V40 Deluxe full head and the V40H lunchbox head, the V4 follows the same basic design map of Victory's widely admired unpowered V4 preamp pedals — including the Sheriff, Kraken, Jack and Copper models — if with a slightly bigger form factor, and with its own internal power.

Atop the V4's powder-coated aluminum chassis, the Duchess script graphics surround a clutch of mini chicken-head knobs that control a tone stack of bass, middle, treble and (preamp) volume. There are also controls for master volume, tremolo depth and speed, and digital reverb. The back panel sports a speaker out, a line out (bypassing the power section and ideal for direct recording), a low-impedance series effects send and return, a foot-switch output and a guitar

input. There's even a nine-volt DC jack, which can power up to 500mA. (Note that many single pedals are rated for nine-volt 300mA, so be sure not to exceed this limit.) The industrial design is super cool, and the pedal is light and portable. The digital reverb and tremolo are top-notch, and the preamp has sensational tonal colors.

So what's not to like? Well, the solid-state power section, specifically, the V4's 180-watt German-built ICEpower ASW200AS1, the same Class D compact amp design found in powered Kemper modelers, among others. As with the Kemper PowerHead, the early consensus among many users — and not just old cork-sniffing tube guys — is that something is not quite right with the way ICEpower drives a speaker cabinet. Scan the comments sections of many a thread on how to power your Profiler, or the many U.K. reviews of the The Duchess V4 itself, and you'll find the jury is still out.

Describing the somewhat brassy, unnatural and hard attack of these ICE amps, some players use the terms *pokey*, *bright* and



brash, or simply remark, “something seems off.” As much as I respect Martin Kidd and Victory, I have to agree, and it points to a troubling marketing trend in the industry. Manufacturers love to tout their partly (or completely) solid-state designs, and even their 100-percent digital modelers, as possessing “real tube warmth” or “fat tube saturation.” But as useful as the benefits of these tools may be, only tubes have tube warmth. Anything else is a simulation.

Some modelers and preamp pedals accomplish this extremely well in a direct recording environment, but it’s still a simulation. You may have great preamp tubes at play, but without a tube power-amp delivering those modeler/preamp sounds to a cabinet, it’s not going to be real tube warmth. The difference isn’t subtle, either, at least not for someone who’s spent a lifetime playing tube amps. If you’ve been playing solid-state gear for years, perhaps you won’t notice the difference at all.

Still, let’s talk about what this amp does well. Because of its massive clean power, this



is a terrific amp for ultra-clean tones. I played my Fender American Professional II Jazzmaster through the V4 on a recent jazz-blues gig, setting a subtle tremolo and reverb sound, and that big headroom really delivered some nice Grant Green tones and even echoes of Jimmy Wilsey—style lounge twang. A Jazzmaster, Gretsch or more atypical choice are good with the V4, as your Strat, Tele and Les Paul tones are not likely to sound quite the way you’re used to. I suspect the V4 would make a brilliant keyboard amp, too, and running my acoustic-electric guitars through it was not unlike plugging into a solid-state acoustic amp like a Henricksen or an AER. Though some have called The Duchess V4 a “great pedal platform,” I don’t think any of my gain pedals offset that sonic hardness.

Our V4 was paired with a Victory V112 Neo (neodymium) 1x12 cabinet, and Victory was kind enough to send us a more conventional 2x12 V12 VCD cab with Celestion G12M-65 Creambacks, as well, for comparison. There’s no question the Neo cab, with its Celestion Neo 250 Cooperback speaker rated for up to 250 watts, exaggerated that brassy solid-state quality, but it was still evident through the 2x12 as well, though certainly boasting a more natural breakup. Interestingly, I found the V4 made an excellent direct-recording device. Although it has no built-in cabinet emulation of its own, it sounded great with my own IRs going straight into a Universal Audio Apollo Twin and into Apple Logic Pro.

Again, this Duchess preamp circuit, with its one Mullard EC900 triode and three Mullard CV4014s, is really stunning.

Though the solid-state V4 has no need to match the impedance of your speaker cab, the wattage is reduced significantly as you increase the speaker load. That is, it takes advantage of its full 180 watts through a four-ohm load like the Neo 1x12, but that is reduced to an effective 100 watts into eight ohms and 50 watts into 16 ohms. Still, these are solid-state watts, not tube watts. It’s just not the same. Plugging the V4 into eight-ohm and 16-ohm cabinets yielded mixed results: The amp sounded diminished to my ears — less power, but less fullness and projection as well — and still had that nagging hard and brassy sound. Even with the preamp volume all the way up to dial in some breakup, it didn’t deliver what I would ever call real tube warmth.

The debate over tube versus solid-state power is not going to end with this review. There are those who will find the portability and versatility of The Duchess V4 worth any sonic trade-offs, and there will be younger players raised on virtual amps who may not hear it as a trade-off at all. Tone is surely a subjective experience, though with Victory’s well-earned reputation in the world of boutique all-tube amps, I’m not sure gambling with this type of solid-state power is the best objective approach to designing a smaller footprint amplifier for the faithful. ■

D. KOWALSKI

Dark Gene Micro Amplifier

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

FOR MORE THAN 10 years, David Kowalski has been building and repairing tube amps in McAllen, Texas, just across the Rio Grande — and the U.S. border — from Reynosa, Mexico. Fairly recently, he came up with his own big idea in the form of the tiny Dark Gene micro amplifier. Available in Red and Green models, the Dark Gene puts out a diminutive 0.5 watt into your choice of four- to 16-ohm cabinet, and is voiced and gained-up to sound huge in spirit, if not in decibels.

Mini and micro amps have become a popular way to achieve cranked-up tube amp fury without overwhelming volume. Unlike some of the mass-manufactured mini amps that have hit the market in recent years, the Dark Genes are hand-wired in genuine point-to-point style. A pair of 12AX7 tubes take preamp duties, and a 12AU7 — also

SPECIFICATIONS

Dark Gene Micro Amplifier

CONTACT dkowalskiampifiers.com

PRICE \$349 direct, each

CHANNELS Red model, 2; Green, 1

CONTROLS Sensitivity, gain 1, treble, bass, gain 2 (with clean/lead push-pull on Red Model), switch for Top/Mid voicing

POWER 0.5 watts

TUBES Two 12AX7 preamp tubes, one 12AU7 as output tube

EXTRAS Low output for use as preamp. Uses a standard IEC power cord

WEIGHT 2 lbs

BUILT Assembled in USA

KUDOS Cleverly designed and well-constructed, they tonefully fulfill the need for low-volume playing

CONCERNS Red overdrive can sound a little fizzy when pushed hard

traditionally a preamp tube — is conscripted as an output tube, wired in parallel for a dual-single-ended Class-A output stage.

The circuit is cleverly put together using quality components, and both the power and output transformers are also located inside a metal box that's just seven by five by two inches (though the height measurement excludes the tubes mounted atop the case). The entire thing looks more like a boutique pedal than an amp, and indeed it can be used as such. In addition to an output jack (labeled "full") that feeds a speaker cab, the Dark Gene has a line out (labeled "low") that lets it function as a preamp pedal for driving cab sims into power amps and other live or studio solutions. No speaker cab needs to be connected during such use.

Looking virtually identical, the Red and Green Dark Gene models are distinguished by the color of their pilot lights and the sound of their respective circuits. The Red model came first and is described by its maker as a "blackface-style preamp with a completely original overdrive section." It carries a single input, controls for sensitivity (EQ ratio), gain 1, treble, bass and gain 2. There's also a three-way voicing switch that accentuates the mid or top. Gain 2 is a push-pull control. When pushed in, the amp is in High-Gain mode, and gain 2 acts as a master volume. Pulling it out removes gain 2 from the circuit and engages the Rhythm mode, in which gain 1 become the only volume.

The Green model resulted from requests for a more Marshall-esque Plexi-meets-JCM800 circuit, which is voiced more toward midrange grind and high-end sizzle. Unlike the Red model, it lacks the push-pull switch on its gain 2 control and has only the High-Gain/Overdrive mode.

I tested both amps using a Gibson Les Paul 1959 Reissue with humbuckers, and a K-Line Springfield with Strat-style

single-coils, into a Germino 2x12 cab with Greenbacks and a custom 1x12 with a Scumback J75. The Dark Gene Red got the first spin and quickly proved to be a fun and compelling little beast. With gain 1 set below noon, the clean channel generally copped a mid-'60s American tone, with surprising body and reasonably full lows. It's not one to rattle the foundations, but it provides plenty of tubey playability without disturbing the TV watchers in the next room, while delivering a crisp, detailed voice with easy bloom and bite from the S-style guitar and a little more sting and grit from the Les Paul. It's a likable and usable clean tone for a broad range of playing styles, and I could see it getting a lot of use in the studio, too. Cranking gain 1 beyond halfway induces some old-school, non-master-volume grind for enjoyable garage-rock or gnarly blues hijinks. At the same time, a lot more sag seeps into the touch response, yielding an interestingly low-voltage fuzz-like playing feel that can be fun.

In Overdrive mode, the Red sounded more hot-rodded '60s West Coast than modern high-gain, with loads of sizzle and sustain, plus a little preamp fizz on top. It's an enjoyable lead voice, for sure, but it also benefits from some careful balancing of the sensitivity, gain and EQ knobs to keep it from getting too buzzy. The hot preamp and the Class A output stage combine for more compression and bloom here, and ultimately it's a very touchy-feely little amp that begs you to spend some time playing and exploring its possibilities.

The Green model goes straight to thick Brit-mini-stack grind and burn, and while I thought that might be kind of redundant in the wake of the dual-mode Red amp, I found this one a likely go-to for rock duties in general. The cranked-Plexi voicing has become a classic lead tone for good reason, and this little box again proves why: There's





something instantly right about this sound in the classic-rock mold. Given the range of the two gain controls plus tone switch, it's not the one-trick pony you might expect, rolling confidently from thick Kossoff-like blues-rock to crispier, higher-gain early '80s hair-rock with ease.

It's worth noting that both models took to drive pedals and functioned well in preamp mode, though the functionality of the latter depends as much on your pedal setup and final cab-sim/IR and/or power-amp configuration.

All in all, both Dark Gene amps are a blast and serve as an easy reminder of why the mini- and micro-amp craze is still roaring. The Red model does what it does very well, and proved more versatile overall. But for whatever reason, I unexpectedly found myself spending more time playing the Brit-toned Green. And that's what it's all about. 🐼



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EMINENCE

DV-77 Mick Thomson signature speaker and Kristian Kohle Metal IR Pack

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

WITH THE QUEST for modern metal tones becoming an ever-more-refined adventure, Eminence has thrown down the gauntlet with the new DV-77 Mick Thomson Signature model. Designed in collaboration with the Slipknot guitarist and Mike Smith of Omega Ampworks, the DV-77 uses Eminence's popular CV-75 (think of the earlier English Vintage 30 platform) as a springboard to recalibrate the formula for an ideal

SPECIFICATIONS

DV-77 Mick Thomson Signature Speaker

CONTACT eminence.com

PRICE \$149 street

POWER HANDLING 70 watts

EFFICIENCY 100.6db (1W/1M)

NOMINAL IMPEDANCE 8 Ω

MAGNET 50 oz. ceramic

TOTAL WEIGHT 10.4 lbs

BUILT USA

KUDOS A punchy, well-balanced speaker that takes a lot of punishment. Sounds great with high gain and surprisingly good with cleans

CONCERNS None, as long as you heed its rock-inspired intentions

Eminence Kristian Kohle METAL IR Pack

CONTACT eminence-digital.com

PRICE \$49 street

FEATURES 18 individual and blended impulse responses in total, each at 44.1 kHz, 48 kHz, and 96 kHz (54 WAV files in all)

SETUP Captures made using a Mesa 4x12 cabinet variously miked with Shure SM57, Rode NTR, Heil PR-20 and sE V7x

KUDOS Great-sounding speaker-and-cab emulations. Useful for rock applications

CONCERNS None

aggressive, yet balanced heavy rock performance.

While accepting that plenty of guitarists achieve their speaker sounds in the virtual realm these days, Eminence-Digital has almost simultaneously released the DV-7-laden Metal IR Pack, a selection of metal-minded impulse responses created by Kristian Kohle of Kohlekeller Studio in Germany. We tested the actual and virtual to see how they performed.

Though its foundation lies in existing technology, Eminence tells us they designed the DV-77 from the ground up, using new voice coil and spider designs, a carefully selected U.K.-made Kurt Mueller cone and a hefty 50-ounce ceramic magnet. A high-efficiency of 100.6 db (1W/1M) and 70-watt power handling round out the specs list.

Tested in both closed- and open-back cabs with a Les Paul into a Friedman Small Box and Boogie Mark III, the DV-77 took high gain extremely well, punching out a voice that's lush, meaty and extremely well balanced, with no mush at the low end or stridency at the top. Where some players find a certain spiky upper-mid harshness in the Vintage 30, for example — justifiable classic though it is — the DV-77's midrange is thick and full, just a little bit creamy when overdriven, and not the least bit fatiguing. More to the point, it chugs and sings with equal aplomb while feeling dynamic and playable through all settings.

Used with either amp set clean, the DV-77 was impressive, and even at lower volumes it exhibited a linearity that beautifully threw back whatever you put into it. There's a little bark from the open G and D strings that might be just a bit obtrusive for some styles, but it isn't intended for country twanging. All in all, the Eminence DV-77 is simply a very likable and versatile performer, and a real winner for rock in particular.



KRISTIAN KOHLE METAL IR PACK

In addition to several great DV-77 IRs, this pack includes files generated using Eminence's Swamp Thang and CV-75, plus blends, and the selection proves a real boon to any rockers going the digital route. Flipping between speaker IRs always requires an aural



readjustment to the surprisingly dramatic EQ shifts, but once I'd played with them a bit via a Mesa CabClone IR+ and the Neural DSP Quad Cortex

I found most options both extremely useful, and they were great-sounding captures by any measure.

I liked the various DV-77 IRs in particular, and the DV-77 Fat WAV became one of my new all-round favorites. Like the physical speaker, it's big, full, aggressive and muscular, yet well balanced and impressively musical all at the same time. All in all, this is a great selection of well-judged emulations, and worth grabbing for heavy and moderate IR needs. 🎸



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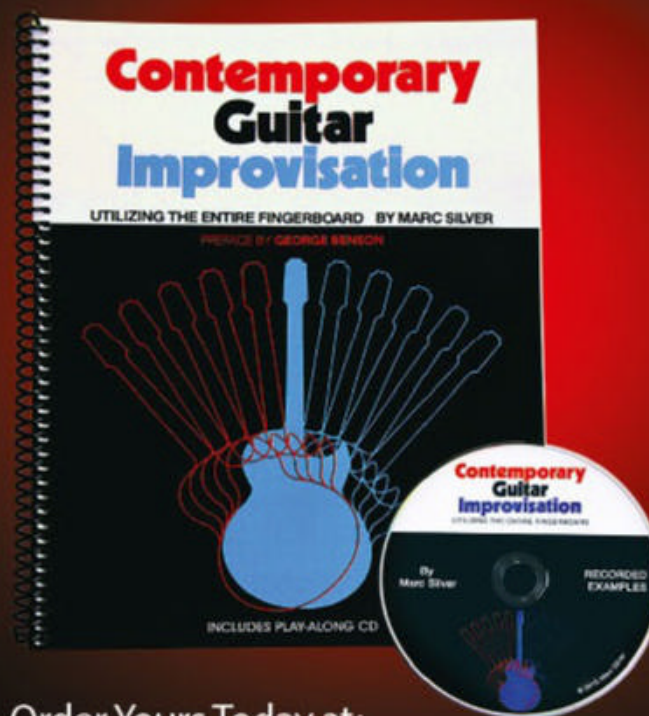
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How I Wrote...

“Do You Feel Like We Do”

Peter Frampton explains how his 1973 sleeper became the monster hit of 1976.

BY JOE BOSSO

“OUT OF THE hits that I’ve had, I can’t underestimate its importance,” Peter Frampton says of “Do You Feel Like We Do.” Originally released as a six-minute studio cut on the guitarist’s second solo album, 1973’s *Frampton’s Camel*, the song became an instant classic thanks to the epic 14-minute version on his epochal 1976 live album, *Frampton Comes Alive!*

“That’s the version that helped break things wide open,” he says. “It sort of worked as the trailer for both the album and my concerts. ‘You want to know what Peter Frampton sounds like live? Listen to this!’”

“WOKE UP THIS MORNING...”

In preparation for *Frampton’s Camel*, Frampton assembled a band consisting of keyboardist Mick Gallagher, bassist Rick Wills and drummer John Siomos. “We did a lot of jamming back then,” he recalls. “We were a new band, and jamming was our way of figuring out our sound.” One day, the guitarist came to rehearsal with his reel-to-reel tape machine, on which he’d recorded chord ideas and a melody for a new song.

“I didn’t have much else to it,” he says. “We jammed a bit, and at one point somebody said, ‘Wind the tape back to three or four minutes in. You played a line that’s really cool.’ That line turned out to be what I then used for the main hook riff. Then Mick started to play harmonies of the line on the keyboard.”

Stuck for a chorus, Frampton improvised what he considered to be a dummy lyric: “Do you feel like I do?” “It didn’t sound right, so I told the guys, ‘Don’t worry. I’ll come up with

something better,’” he says. “Of course, I never did.” After coming up with an A-to-E chord pattern for the verse, he wrote lyrics that summed up how he felt after a night of overindulgence: “Woke up this morning with a wine glass in my hand.” “They came right out,” he explains, “and they’re probably the most iconic lyrics I’ve ever written.”

SOMETHING’S HAPPENING

The band previewed the song at a few shows before recording it at New York City’s Electric Lady Studios. Frampton used his now-famous 1954 Les Paul Custom that he paired with a late-’50s Ampeg Echo Twin. “That amp wasn’t designed for distortion, but it broke up beautifully and gave me a great sound,” he says. Getting the song on tape was relatively straightforward, but the band recorded two versions: one slower, one faster. “We thought the slower one was best, so that wound up on the album.”

Nobody in the guitarist’s camp or at his label thought the song was a hit. “It was a good FM deep track, and it got some play in various spots of the U.S.,” Frampton remembers. But over the next two years, during which time he released two more studio albums — 1974’s *Somethin’s Happening* and 1975’s *Frampton* — “Do You Feel Like We Do” began to stand out as an audience favorite. “We closed the show with it, and we really started to draw it

out and play with its dynamics,” he says. “The crowds seemed to love it more and more.”

Adding to the excitement was his introduction of a talk box during one of the extended solo sections. He first used the effects unit for the studio recording of “Show Me the Way,” but during his 1975 concerts he fully embraced the device. “People went nuts when I went to use the talk box,” Frampton says. “Hey, everybody needs a gimmick, and this was mine.”

FRAMPTON IS EVERYWHERE

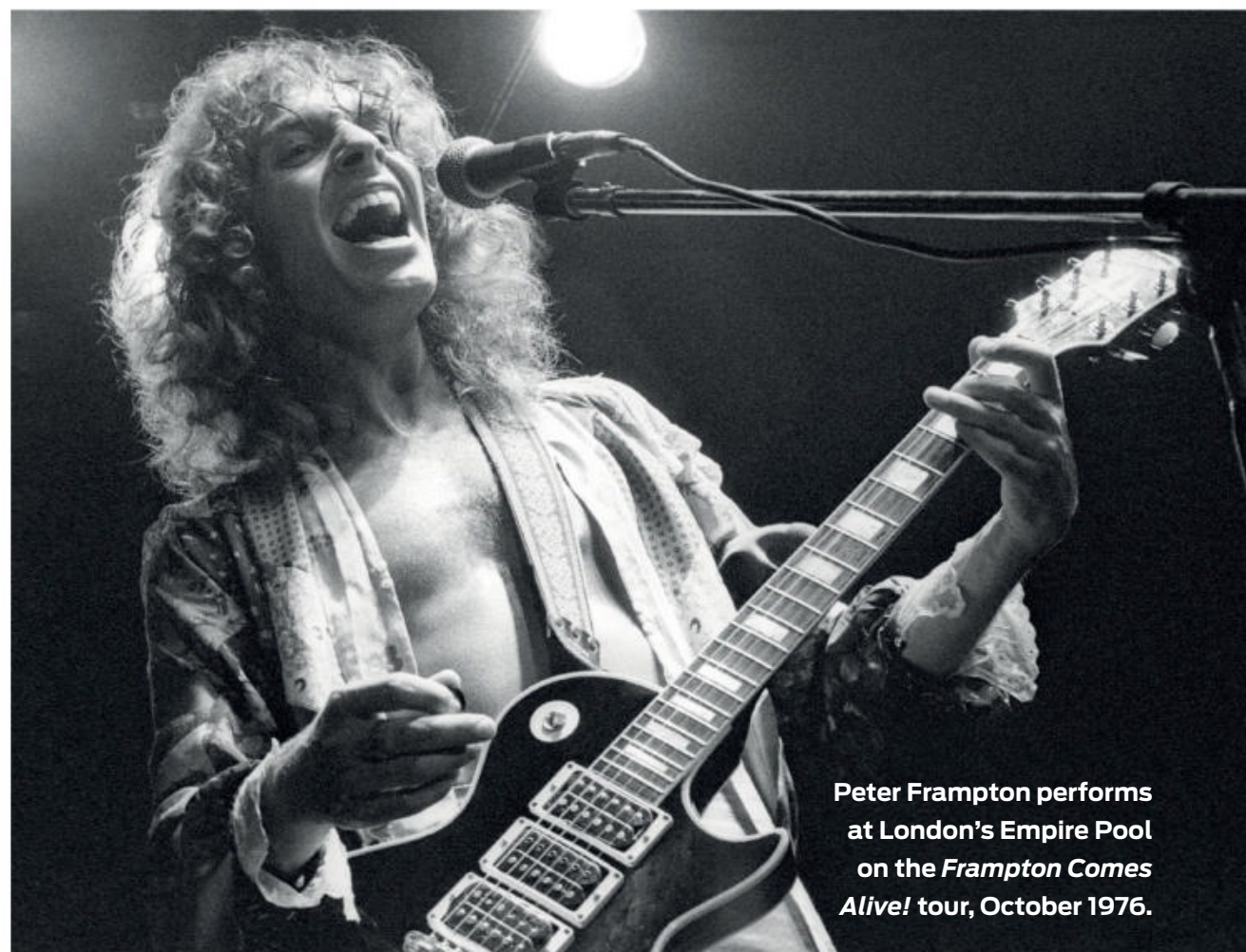
The release of *Frampton Comes Alive!* was a seismic cultural moment, and within months of the record’s appearance, Frampton went from playing theaters to selling out arenas. The double album sold in the millions, his posters adorned millions of teenagers’ bedrooms, and his presence on both AM and FM stations was a lock. “I was everywhere,” he recalls. “It got to the point where I was sick of

myself. I’d turn on the radio and hear myself. I’d change the station and land on myself again.”

Over the course of his career, Frampton never played a gig that didn’t include “Do You

Feel Like We Do.” “It’s my show closer, the ultimate capper to a concert,” he says. “What was really remarkable was when I would play with Lynyrd Skynyrd, I’d play ‘Do You Feel’ and they’d play ‘Free Bird,’ so you’d get the two longest FM songs in one night.”

“WE STARTED TO DRAW IT OUT, AND THEY SEEMED TO LOVE IT MORE AND MORE”



Peter Frampton performs at London’s Empire Pool on the *Frampton Comes Alive!* tour, October 1976.



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