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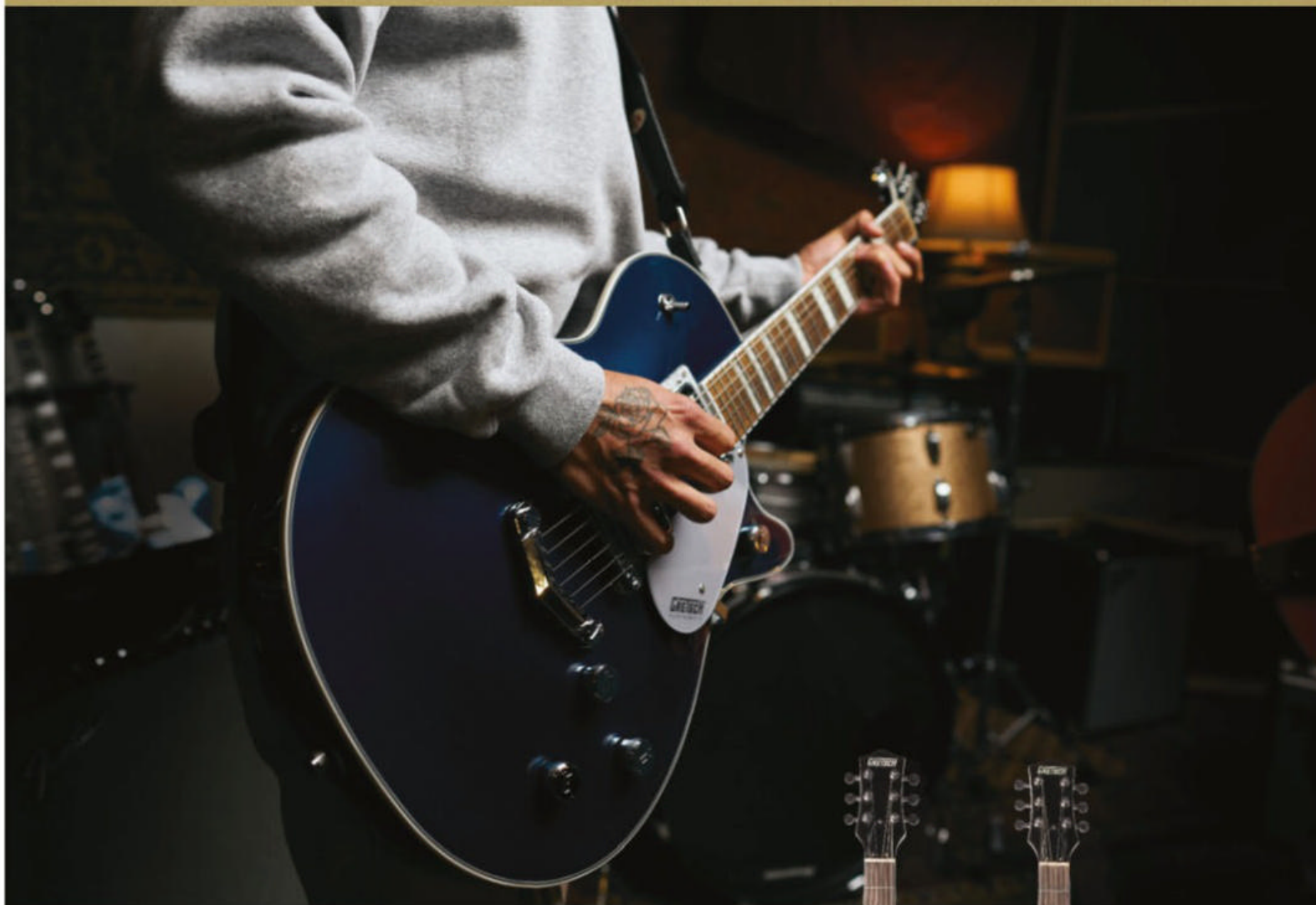
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THE GREAT WHITE WAY

WHEN WE CELEBRATED Jack White as one of our 25 guitar innovators in the April 2022 issue, we found ourselves in a dilemma. Should we acknowledge him for helping to popularize the use of cheap vintage axes from the 1960s, a nod to his early years of success with the White Stripes? Or should we honor him as one of modern rock guitar's leading gear customizers and the man behind an in-demand line of effects pedals built by his Third Man Hardware with companies like Gamechanger Audio and Union Tube & Transistor?

In the end we decided to celebrate the former achievement, and with good reason. We'd learned that Jack had granted *Guitar Player* exclusive access to his gear collection, a mouth-watering assemblage of custom guitars and pedals — not to mention, the celebrated 1964 “JB Hutto” Montgomery Ward Airline guitar from his White Stripes days. It was a trove worthy of its own cover story and gear spread, which is what we bring to you this month.

I've been working to have Jack in our pages for some time. He is a singularly unique guitarist whose style bridges garage rock, electric blues, art rock, country, folk and the same kind of proto-punk energy that fueled the MC5, the Stooges and other seminal rock groups from his native Detroit. His use of guitars and pedals to create a fireball of primal bent-string screaming is as refreshing as his desire for analog simplicity, whether recording to tape or plugging his guitar into a Whammy IV set for one octave down to mimic a bass guitar. And there's just something inspiring about an artist who makes do with whatever is in the room, even if that means — as the guitars and pedals in this issue demonstrate — sometimes modifying them to meet your latest sonic and visual objectives. In White's music, gear and career, punk unrest meets the classic American can-do spirit, the result of which is not only an impressive catalog but also his own Third Man record label and pedal company.

Credit for this issue's insightful cover story goes to James Volpe Rotondi, who has returned with a deep dive into the Jack's collection and the numerous modifications made to finishes, hardware, electronics and more. In addition, we're thrilled to welcome to these pages the work of esteemed photographer Eleanor Jane, who shot Jack's collection at Third Man Records in Nashville. You'll be seeing more of her photography in future issues as we continue to present artists and gear collections from around the world.

Christopher Scapelliti

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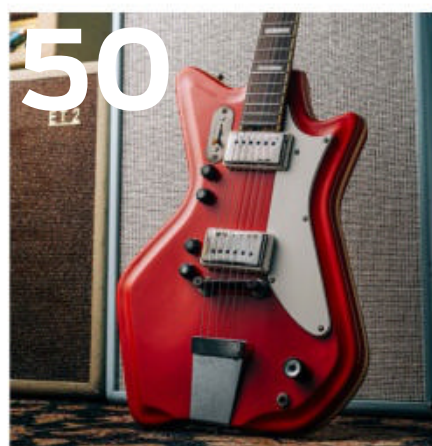
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Jack White, March 20, 2022, by Eleanor Jane



ISMAEL QUINTANILLA (BETO); ELEANOR JANE (WHITE & PEDALS); WILL IRELAND (DEF LEPPARD)

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DÉJÀ NEW

Bunting Guitar's Amarok looks, plays and sounds like an old familiar friend.

BY DAVE HUNTER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAI VILLEVAL

FOR YANIV LORIA of Bunting Guitars, it's all about creating vintage-familiar tones in guitars that boast 21st century usability, without ever copying the classics. Between that winning philosophy and the personal "tone quest" that starts every new client's journey, it appears that he's onto something. Loria founded Bunting Guitars in 2012 in Ein Shemer, Israel, with a love for classic electric guitars and an eye for original design. He built on his own for several years, and today the Bunting workshop includes fellow luthiers Tai Villeval and Stav Eskenazi, everyone working cooperatively in a "teal organization," a self-management system that, as Loria puts it, has "no boss, and no employees. We do everything together in terms of decisions. We all have the same voice in the brand, and we all do all the management together."

Labor philosophy aside, the key to Bunting's success so far is in the tricky merging of contemporary styles and classic tones, as seen throughout the lineup. "It started from there," Loria tells us. "I said to myself, 'I want to build guitars, so how can I bring this magic to new guitars without trying to mimic the old ones? Without building

replicas?' The biggest thing was to find out what happens to a player when he holds an old guitar. I wondered, How can I bring that feeling to it and achieve it with a new guitar?"

If our impressions are anything to go by, Loria, Villeval and Eskenazi have indeed achieved it, and then some, in the example of the new Amarok model we're checking out this issue. In the hands and on the lap, even

"IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS WE'LL PUT OUT AMAROKS THAT WILL BE MORE CLASSIC, WITH A FLAME TOP AND A BURST, PAFS AND TWO ELECTRONIC OPTIONS"

when played unplugged, it immediately feels like a well-gigged instrument that's been seasoned and smoothed through years of playing. A rendition of a guitar that Bunting admittedly intends to be "their Les Paul," this

particular Amarok is one of the first few off the workbench and was built specifically for Tom Shemer, the lead guitarist with Canadian glam-rockers the Damn Truth. Shemer has played a Bunting Melody Queen model for a time, while Damn Truth singer Lee-la Baum frequently plays the Alice EP model (a single-pickup LP Junior-meets-Tele design) and bassist PY uses a Lightning Dove bass made for him.

"We've been working with them for five years now," Loria says of the project, "and it was fun to do a pure rock and roll guitar, simple, made to cut through the mix. The black-with-leopard-skin look was fun to work with, and that's totally Tom's style. In a couple of months we'll put out Amaroks that are more classic, with a flame top and a burst, PAFs and two electronic options: stripped down, like you've got, and the classic four knobs and switch. This one is a bit wild because it was made for that specific artist."

Further evidence of the alternative approach is apparent in the tone woods and components used to concoct this variation on the single-cutaway, set-neck, dual-humbucker rocker. These include a body of

solid Spanish cedar and a flat top of Bosnian maple. Spanish cedar is not a type of cedar but a relative of mahogany, which some contemporary makers consider one of the better available substitutes for the high-quality Honduran mahogany that was more plentiful in the 1950s and early '60s, but which is relatively scarce and expensive today. We've seen it become more accepted in the boutique-guitar world of late, used by respected makers like Nik Huber and Doug Kauer, among others. In fact, the Amarok's overall vibe puts us in mind of those makers.

"The Spanish cedar body in the Amarok is traditionally a neck for flamenco guitars," Loria elucidates, "and the Bosnian maple neck is traditionally a violin neck and back, since Stradivarius. Because of these woods, it's very lightweight for a Les Paul. A lighter guitar means the wood is less dense, and that makes the guitar more resonant. You immediately lose the muddiness in the lows and the harsh high-mids, and that's basically, for me, what describes a good vintage guitar."

Not that the ingredients Loria discusses here are by any means set in stone. In fact, each guitar is tailored to the specific sonic and playability goals of its intended user.



The Amarok has a body of solid Spanish cedar and a top of Bosnian maple, woods commonly used in, respectively, flamenco guitars and violins.

“Every build starts with something we call the ‘tone quest,’” he tells us. “It’s usually an hour-long Zoom call with the client, and for at least the first half hour we don’t even talk specs; we just talk about the tone and feel they are trying to achieve, because sometimes the specs and parts they think they want don’t really add up to the guitar tone they envision for the build. Then once we have that concept, we can easily make it look and feel right for them.”

The glued-in Bosnian maple neck Loria mentions has a subtle but appealing flame to it, and the fingerboard is a sumptuously dark slice of rosewood, unbound, with 22 medium-high frets and tortoiseshell position markers. Another departure from the archetype is the 25-inch scale length used here, which should give the attack a little more snap and zing.

The tortoiseshell visuals are echoed in the top binding, pickguard, control-cavity cover and headstock facing, where the material is etched with the Bunting logo. It makes for a snarling, leather-clad contrast with the guitar’s black top, which is pre-aged with scuffs, scratches and dings, as are the guitar’s back and sides, while the neck is blended in with vintage-amber lacquer, but no physical antiquing. For Bunting, the wear is an important part of the formula: It means a guitarist doesn’t have to worry about handling something brand new and can play away with all the attitude and aggression necessary, without fearing that heart-breaking first scratch or ding. The bridge is a fully intonatable Pigtail wraparound, and tuners are Gotoh’s vintage Kluson-style with locking posts. For pickups, this Amarok sports a PAF-like Wolfetone Dr. Vintage in the neck position and, in the bridge, a hotter Wolfetone Marshallhead, which is suited to its new owner’s rock-intended tonal requirements.

Played unplugged, the Amarok exhibits excellent tonal balance and good articulation, which translates to a full-throated performance when amped up through a Fender Super Reverb and a Friedman Mini Dirty Shirley and 1x12 cab, with a selection of overdrive pedals. It has a thick, meaty voice overall but with good clarity and a degree of “bite” in each individual note that helps it cut through, even with judicious distortion applied. Unsurprisingly, it excels at anything you’d expect to tackle with a set-neck,



dual-humbucker solidbody. But it has its own voice, too, one that is mostly defined by a certain girthy warmth in both the neck and bridge positions, with a particularly aggressive mids-forward growl in the latter, clearly achieving that rockier voicing here that the client has requested.

The merging of the two in the middle position elicited a chimier, jangler sound that increased the guitar’s versatility in lieu of any single-coil or low-output bridge settings (although that pickup does clean up well by

winding down the guitar’s volume control). The overall balance between the two pickups works surprisingly well without dual volume controls. All in all, it’s a stripped-down rock and roll warrior that presents plenty of gritty attitude, with a surprising amount of sonic elegance beneath it all. And it’s just a lot of fun by any measure. 

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TEEM SPIRIT

With three solo albums in two years, Steve Dawson hasn't let a worldwide health disaster slow him down.

BY MICHAEL ROSS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA E. PARTAIN

CANADIAN-BORN STEVE DAWSON

was well into the second act of his music career when the pandemic hit. After a successful run as an artist, sideman and producer north of the border, the guitarist had relocated to Nashville. He set up a busy studio there while continuing to record and tour with, among others, future Americana superstar Allison Russell's band Birds of Chicago. Remarkably, Dawson has found the past two years to be some of his most productive.

For starters, he recorded three solo records, the first of which, *Gone, Long Gone* (Black Hen Records), offers a master class in all things slide, from the Cooder-tastic "Dimes," to the Weissenborn-style Hawaiian inflected "Kulaniapia Waltz." He also continued his terrific podcast, *Music Makers and Soul Shakers*, which features in-depth

player-to-player interviews with musicians, including guitarists Ariel Posen, Guthrie Trapp, Charlie Hunter, Jim Campilongo, et al. And he set up a remote recording crew capable of safely churning out records for musicians young and old. Yet somehow he still found time to get deep into the weeds with *GP* on the making of his record and the joys of multiple amps.

Did you develop your career in Canada as a solo artist, session player or both?

It was a bit of everything. I made solo records and had a duo with a violin player doing unusual acoustic instrumental music. Weirdly, the latter took off; we won awards and got booked at festivals. And then people started asking me to produce. That appealed to me because it allowed me to stay off the road.

How did you develop as a producer? Do you have engineering skills?

I'd been around studios and made records. I was not confident enough to engineer, but I could gather a group of people, put them in interesting scenarios, and make everyone comfortable. I knew how I wanted things to sound, so I hooked up with a couple of engineers and learned a ton from them. Now I engineer all the time. Also, 12 or 13 years ago I started mixing records for people.

With players not congregating in studios, how did you create tracks for the new record?

One thing I got out of Covid was making friends with a click track again. I hadn't used one for about 15 years and had hated them. I would do a rough outline of the song to a

“ONE THING I GOT OUT OF COVID WAS MAKING FRIENDS WITH A CLICK TRACK AGAIN. I HADN’T USED ONE FOR ABOUT 15 YEARS”

click, and send that to the drummer — either Gary Craig in Toronto or Jay Bellerose in L.A. I would get the song back and maybe arrange it slightly differently, or do a little drum editing, and then send it to the bass player, Jeremy Holmes in Vancouver.

At that point, I would record all my keeper tracks, do a rough mix of everything and send that to other musicians. Every day was like Christmas because I’d get these great files in return. Those might inspire me to change some of my parts or guitar sounds. It was time consuming, and not the way I would’ve usually made a record, but fun.

In the video for “Dimes,” it looks like you’re playing a Ry Cooder-type guitar.

It’s a Fender Strat I bought new in ’91. I was into Stevie Ray Vaughan then, but by ’94 I was sick of Strat sounds so I got rid of all the pickups. Over the years, I’ve probably had 30 different combinations in there. I have always used it for slide, but during Covid I said, “Screw it, I’m going full-on Coodercaster.”

I got a gold-foil pickup and lap-steel pickup from Mojo Pickups in England.

What strings are on it?

I mostly use D’Addario NYXLs: .015 on top to .062 on the bottom. I usually tune the two E strings to D [*low to high, D A D G B D*]. Coming from playing in open D and open G, I find it is the best of both worlds. I’ve got my slide on my fourth finger and the middle four strings are tuned standard, so I’m able to still play all kinds of chords.

Which slide are you using?

I picked it up in England. Some guy tagged me on Instagram

and said he made it. It looks like glass, but I don’t know what the hell it is. [*laughs*] It’s a little heavier than glass.

What about amps?

I had four amps set up the whole time. I had a Radial Shotgun box that splits the guitar signal four ways. It deals with any phase-inverting or ground issues. One amp was a Flot-a-tone accordion amp from the ’50s. It gets hot and smells funny [*laughs*], but it sounds great. There was a ’53 tweed 5E3 deluxe. It’s the super-primitive one that you can’t jump the inputs on. You can’t turn it up very loud either; it has to be close-miked. The third was a Premier 88, which is a crazy amp that comes attached to a separate cabinet that has one 15-inch and two three-inch speakers. It has five white tabs; when you flick them down, they cut certain frequencies. There’s a tremolo on it that’s somewhere between a brown Deluxe or Princeton and a choppy Twin. Finally, there was a Fender Princeton. I’d use a combination with no EQ. I’d just turn one or another of the amps up in the mix to create the tonal palette.

Did you ever use fuzz for the slide solos?

I used fuzz a lot. My Vancouver friend Chris Young’s company, Union Tube and Transistor, makes amazing pedals. His early prototype fuzz, the Buzz Bomb, gets a lot of play in the background. His other one, the Sone Bender, is a Tone Bender knock-off, but it’s more reliable than a vintage fuzz pedal. I used that on a lot of the solos. For more subtle overdrive I used a Greer Lightspeed. The tremolo comes from the amps, for the most part, although I did have a Strymon Flint. A Strymon Volante created some delays, and I used a Tel-Ray oil can delay for slapback.

Your Weissenborn-style lap guitar sounds different on different tunes.

The tunings are different, usually variations on C tuning. For bluesy or original stuff, like “Bad Omen,” it’s [*low to high*] C G C G C D. Sometimes I vary it, like tuning the high string to a C unison or E_b, or the 2nd string C



to a B_b for a dominant 9 chord. But when I play traditional ’20s and ’30s Hawaiian music, like “Kulaniapia Waltz,” I tune it to G [*low to high, D G D G B D*]. G tuning makes me play very differently. Also, on that tune, the mic would’ve been a lot farther away, whereas with “Bad Omen” it’s closer and more compressed, so it sounds more aggressive. On that tune you’re hearing a combination of the acoustic sound and an amp signal from the pickup adding some grit. There’s a bit of tremolo, but it’s subtle because it’s on the electric channel only.

You also play some smoking single-line solos.

When I play “normal” guitar stuff, I tune to standard and usually use a Nash T-style. That’s my main electric guitar, but I also have a Gibson ES-335 and an Epiphone Casino.

Tell me about the Henhouse Express Junior project.

It’s our name for an inexpensive way for people to record during Covid. We would Zoom with the artists to get their feedback on what the songs were about and what they wanted to hear. We did the same process for my record. After a year we realized everyone we were recording was over 40, so we started a contest to connect with younger people. It was free; there was no commitment and no strings attached. We just wanted to have fun and do something with kids. It does help promote our services to a new generation, though, which is great.

Gone, Long Gone is the first of three records you made for yourself during Covid. What are the others, and how do they differ?

The second is an all-instrumental pedal-steel psychedelic record called *Phantom Threshold* and will come out around July. It’s billed as Steve Dawson and the Telescope Three. The third is more like the first, except it has more traditional stuff. Half is brand-new songs, but it’s geared toward interpreting old stuff. 🎸



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Gone, Long Gone

“Dimes,” “Gone, Long Gone,” “Bad Omen,” “Kulaniapia Waltz,” “Time Has Made a Fool Out of Me”



MIAMI VICE

Nile Rodgers riffs on his famed Hitmaker Stratocaster as Fender releases a limited-edition replica.

BY ART THOMPSON

BESIDES BEING KNOWN for playing a white Strat for his entire career with Chic, Nile Rodgers has used the same 1960 Fender on nearly all the albums he's produced for artists such as David Bowie, INXS, Duran Duran, Diana Ross, Madonna, the Vaughan Brothers, B-52s, Mick Jagger, Steve Winwood and many others. Now Fender has announced a limited-edition replica of the iconic instrument — the Nile Rodgers Hitmaker Stratocaster — which will feature such NR touches as the mirror pickguard, Gibson “speed” knobs and, of course, the smaller-than-standard body that remains one of the guitar's mystifying elements.

“There are all these different stories I get from people at Fender, who are pretty knowledgeable, but you know, they weren't there when that happened,” Rodgers says.

“The person who put that guitar together may have had any number of reasons for making it like that, but my guitar is smaller than a regular Strat. A friend of mine, Richie Sambora, came up with a theory that it's actually a Mary Kaye Strat [*the first custom guitar that Fender produced, circa 1950*]. I was like, ‘Are you kidding me... Mary Kayes are like the most-prized Strats, and the guy screwed it up?’ If it is a Mary Kaye, it would be funny because I also bastardized it. But it could have been the body mold for a Mary Kaye. Who knows? I know the neck is from 1959 because a person at Fender told me that one of the guitar-assembly people back then had written profanity on some necks — like every Strat has a person's initials or some kind of identifier — and supposedly, as a disciplinary action, Leo Fender didn't let

them sign any '59 Strats. So for a whole year the necks had no signature or “1959” inside. That may be the reason why as soon as they took my guitar apart they went, ‘Oh, it's a '59!’ But I didn't know anything about that.”

You initially played an archtop, right?

Yes, I was initially playing a Gibson Barney Kessel. I had only played jazz guitars up until then. My mom bought me a Fender Mustang really early on, but a solidbody didn't feel right to me, so I switched to a hollowbody. I started out playing classical guitar almost exclusively, so I was accustomed to a big, fat body. When I started doing gigs playing electric, I just felt more comfortable with a big-box guitar.

What made you decide to switch to a Strat?

We were opening for the Jackson 5 on the American leg of their first world tour, and we were subbing for the O'Jays. The O'Jays and the Commodores were their legitimate openers, and I was in a group called New York City, and we would be a replacement for one of those groups whenever they got a gig paying more money or they were headlining. So we were down in Miami doing our own gig, and we had a group that was our opening act. They had a kid playing a Fender Strat, and they plugged into our equipment. I was playing my Barney Kessel though Acoustic amplifiers, like Sly and the Family Stone used. My partner, Bernard Edwards [*bassist, songwriter and co-founder of Chic*], would always say to me, "You should play a Strat."

Anyway, when this kid plugged into my amp and sounded, like, 10 times better than I did playing the same kind of songs, because we were basically a covers band, I was going, "Damn, that's how the song should sound!"

"BLENDING THE AMP WITH THE CLEANLINESS OF THE DIRECT HAS BECOME A THING. MY TECHNIQUE EXPLOITS THAT SOUND"

So I went to a pawnshop and I traded my Barney Kessel for the cheapest Strat in the store. I didn't know anything about them, but I just knew Bernard wanted me to play a Strat, and I loved Hendrix. So they gave me \$300 for my Barney Kessel, and I got the Strat. But I didn't like the color. I worked as a guitar repairman back then, so I put the finish on it and did this sort of yellowish antique white to make it look like Hendrix's guitar. Also, I needed Gibson-type knobs, because there were a lot of R&B songs at the time that used the volume-rising technique, like the beginning of "Let's Get it On." [*sings the part*] And the way to do that is with the pinkie — unless you had a volume pedal, which I couldn't afford.

Being a guitar repairman, you must have been good at refinishing instruments.



Yeah, and I only used one coat of lacquer. And then I put the reflective pickguard on it, just 'cause it was a cool little thing to be onstage and be able to shine it in people's faces in the audience. It was just some stupid idea I had, and it stuck. And then, of course, I changed the machine heads so that the guitar would pretty much stay in tune. If you've ever seen me play live, I only play one guitar. I'd rather stop the show if I break a string. [*laughs*] In all of these years of gigging, I've broken maybe six strings.

When performing, you always have the switch in the forward position.

Correct. I'm always on the front pickup, although for recording I will use other pickup positions. That's because, if you listen to my recordings, you'll hear that so much of my stuff is doubled. I'll have two or three guitar parts, because I come from the era of R&B or pop records or what have you, and you had two or three guitar players on the record. So I always have guitar arrangements, and I'll change pickup positions. But I almost exclusively play with the neck position. You'll rarely hear me go to the bridge pickup, 'cause my sound is already bright. I have very light strings, and I play with a very light pick, and that's because I want the sound to project, but I still want it to have body and roundness so the resonance will shine through on the lower notes. But with me it's all about the first three strings and the middle three.

Your tone is warm compared to the skinny sounds some funk players go for.

It's warm, but it still projects. That's something that developed from me recording with [*engineer/producer*] Bob Clearmountain



and always having a direct signal as part of my sound. Blending the amp with the cleanliness of the direct has become a thing, and I've gotten used to it, and my technique exploits that sound.

As a producer, you've always played guitar on the records you produce. Is it fair to say, whether it's Bowie, INXS, the Vaughan Brothers or Madonna, we're always hearing Nile Rodgers?

All of them. I would have to say as a producer, even when I'm producing a band, I play with the band. If you go way back to the beginning of my production career, when I produced INXS, I played in the band. When I produced Duran Duran, I played in the band. When I did the Vaughan Brothers, I played in the band. It's just part of my style of production, because I like guitar hooks. So I always try and have a guitar part that makes a person want to play it, or if you take that guitar part out of the song, you feel like something is missing. But I don't force myself on the band at all. That's not what happens.

Can you cite an example of how playing with the band helped turn a tune into a hit?

When we were doing "Original Sin" with INXS, for some reason they were having a difficult time playing the groove right in the pocket. I don't know why. I felt like they were nervous for some reason. So instead of just sitting in there at the desk, I decided to go out in the room and play with them. So that's what I did, and what happened was, believe it or not, the drummer's bass drum head broke after we did one take, and that take wound up being the record. 🎸



(from left) Universal Audio's Golden, Starlight and Astra pedals. Each features effects created from full-circuit models of carefully chosen vintage units.

DEEP DIVING

How Universal Audio crafted the ultimate vintage tones for its UAFX pedals

BY ART THOMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLLY CURTIS

UNIVERSAL AUDIO IS a dominant force in analog and digital recording tools, so the Northern California company was well equipped to create a trio of effect pedals that borrow from the best of both worlds. Introduced last year, UA's Astra Modulation Machine, Golden Reverberator and Starlight Echo Station were designed from the ground up to deliver the most authentic classic modulation, delay and reverb effects ever put into stomp boxes.

These pedals feature dual-processing engines, true-stereo operation, a knob-based interface, and foot-switchable Live and Preset modes that effectively give you two completely different sounds that you can recall in real time. Live reflects the current settings of the knobs and switches, and Present reflects the stored setting regardless of the knob/switch positions (that is until you move a knob or switch, and the unit automatically updates to those settings).

Other details include dual ¼-inch input and output jacks, and USB for downloading additional effects that are available free of charge upon registration via the UAFX app. Additional operating modes, including bypass routing (True or Buffered) and preamp coloration, are also available via the mobile app. Each pedal offers three effects (selected using the left-hand mini toggle switch), and you can switch between three variations of each with the right-hand switch. The center switch is used for saving custom sounds.

The included effects are as follows:

- **Astra Modulation Machine:** Chorus Brigade (1976 Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble), Flanger/DBLR (late-'70s rackmount MXR Flanger/Doubler) and Trem 65 (mid-'60s Fender amp tremolo)
- **Golden Reverberator:** Spring 65 (models of three different reverb tanks from three vintage Fender amps), Plate 140 (three late-'50s plate reverb units sourced from the

Plant Recording Studio in Sausalito, California) and Hall 224 (Lexicon 224)

- **Starlight Echo Station:** Tape EP-III (early '70s Echoplex tape delay), Analog DMM (late-'70s/early '80s Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man and Precision (hi-fi studio-grade delays, chorusing/flange and ping-ponging repeats)

UA's design team painstakingly modeled vintage effects for each pedal. For example, the Golden Reverberator's Spring 65 selections represent not only the three different reverb tanks from mid-'60s Fender amps but also the tube circuitry on the drive and recovery sides. UA's senior product developer James Santiago told *GP*, "Many pedals do just a preamp of an effect or a signal modeling of the sound, but we decided to do full circuit models of every effect, including all tubes, transistors and more inside each original unit. Our benchmarks are always tone and feel."

As a result, you get different timbres as you toggle the three settings with the left-hand switch. The “A” (up) position captures a tank that had a fairly sharp attack and a nice, smooth decay — a classic “blackface” reverb sound, if you will — while position “B” is smoother at the leading edge and more resonant overall, with a bit longer decay. The “C” tank is the oddity, because it emphasizes certain note resonances and has an absurdly long decay. You can further expand on these sounds by using the mod control to add chorusing color and widen the soundstage when running in stereo, and create dramatic effects using the decay, mix and pre-delay controls, sculpting the tones as needed with the bass and treble knobs.

“ALL THOSE OLD UNITS SOUND DIFFERENT. EVEN THOUGH I HAVE MULTIPLE VERSIONS, I SEARCHED FOR A FEW MORE TO FIND THE MAGIC PREAMP”

“The Spring 65 in Golden and Trem 65 in Astra are both based on those classic Fender AB763 amp circuits,” Santiago explains. “We found our favorite ‘A’ tank in a 1965 Deluxe Reverb I got at Norman’s Rare Guitars. It has the perfect classic bright, springy and drippy sound. That, plus a long time spent circuit modeling all the tube stages to and from the tank, gives it the harmonics, compression and air those tanks need to sound right with a guitar. Some of that mojo applies to the tube tremolo as well. Since you’re dealing with a lamp and photocell, the tremolo can sound different at slow and fast speeds. A similar setup is in all old Uni-Vibe phasers, and that’s why no two sound alike.”

The Starlight Echo Station’s Tape EP-III setting models three different solid-state Echoplexes: “A” is a pristine vintage unit with

a new tape and a compression circuit that was originally added to mitigate input-stage overload. Its sound is clear and well presented without noticeable dropouts or excessive hiss. The “B” setting reflects an earlier Echoplex with a used tape and no compressor circuit, while the “C” setting is a model of a heavily used Echoplex (also without compression) with worn tape that has dropouts and lots of hiss. One of the important features here is the color knob, which adjusts the input level to the preamp. On Echoplex units, this was a trim pot that you adjusted to accommodate hot pickups or line-level signals.

“One of the things that makes these old delays so great is that the preamp shapes lows and mids, and attenuates the trashy high frequencies,” Santiago says. “Now that’s a horrible audio spec, but it’s musical once you’re going into an overdriven amp. Every once in a while you find one that’s smooth and has a tiny bit of extra gain. That’s the one I went with. The tape cartridges are a whole other journey. We ended up using three different EP machines and tape formula versions in Starlight, so you can decide which one best suits your needs.”

The Astra Modulation Machine’s Analog DMM setting (left switch/middle position) offers a model of a vintage EHX Deluxe Memory Man, as used by The Edge, Eric Johnson and others back in the day. It had the ability to layer vibrato or chorus on the delay, and the Astra provides three choices via the right-hand switch: vibrato (up/A), modulation off (B) and chorus (C). You can create dramatic stereo modulated-echo effects in real time by manipulating the delay, feedback and mix knobs as well as the six-position rotary division control, which is normally

used for setting delay tempos with the tap switch. Being able to add distortion was another key part of the DMM, and the Astra’s color control lets you dial in the desired amount of distortion (or none) and

compensates for level changes with the mix knob.

“A really great analog delay can almost sound like reverb if done right,” Santiago says. “The repeats should degrade naturally, giving you a nice ambient trail. Another great thing is how the chorus/vibrato is done by modulating the clock speed. That gives you this really consistent vibrato on the delays that players like The Edge and Eric Johnson usually dial in. I did use one of my own Deluxe Memory Man pedals with the original Panasonic bucket-bridge chips, but I also went through a few more to look for any standouts in the bunch.”

There’s also much to like about the Astra Modulation Machine’s Chorus Brigade setting, a superb rendition of the vintage Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble, which has a single control for speed and depth. That function is on the Astra’s Intensity knob, and the “A” setting on the left-hand switch gives you classic chorusing, with dry on one side and chorusing on the other side, and the dual-processing allows for greater expansion of the effect because you’re running two chorus units if you’re going stereo. The vibrato section is on the “B” setting (this is

a two-position switch), and the Astra uses the speed and depth to control the effect. The Intensity knob does not affect the vibrato, only the chorusing, and you can add gain to the chorus and vibrato with the shape control.

In addition to modeling, the pedals feature dual-processing architecture that offers other sonic benefits. “It gave us the ability to add some cool sonic features,” Santiago says. “For example, the Live side runs separately on another processor from the Preset side, and each processor is discrete stereo. So let’s say you have an Analog DMM Live in stereo, so there are two fully running units going. And then maybe your Preset side is an EP-III, so you’ve got two discrete left and right EP-IIIs. And when you’re switching between them, they trail off, like having an A/B switch before each signal chain. In essence you’re really running four effects in total to pull that off.”

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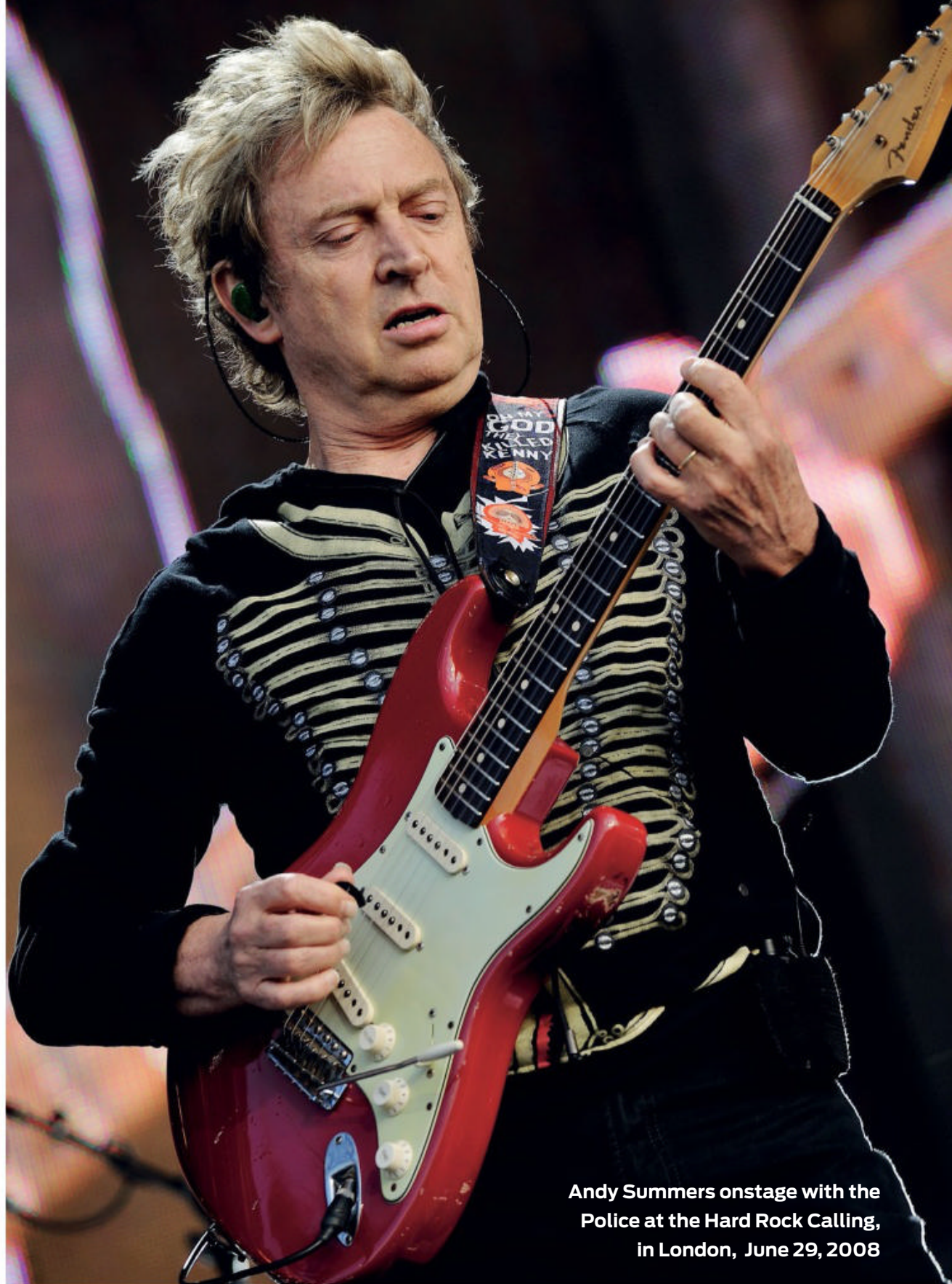
MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

As The Police — Greatest Hits returns in a deluxe edition, Andy Summers reflects on five classic tracks from the band's timeless catalog.

BY JOE BOSSO

WHEN IT WAS issued in 1992, *The Police — Greatest Hits* became a multimillion seller on CD, but its availability on vinyl was limited. To mark its 30-year anniversary, the 16-cut set (which, not surprisingly, packs in monsters like “Message in a Bottle,” “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic,” “Every Breath You Take” and loads more) is getting the deluxe vinyl makeover. Each track has been remastered at Abbey Road and cut at half-speed, and the package contains two heavyweight LPs and expanded artwork, along with other bells and whistles.

For guitarist Andy Summers, along with his former Police bandmates (bassist-singer Sting and drummer Stewart Copeland), approving remixes of tracks he recorded 40 years ago is all part of the job, but he's enthusiastic about the new vinyl edition. “It's superior audio, so why wouldn't we want it out?” he tells *Guitar Player*. He admits that listening to past work with the Police is the last thing he does on purpose, but on occasion he'll hear a track while out in public, and his ears will perk up. “It can happen at the weirdest times,” he reveals. “I'll be in a bar in



Andy Summers onstage with the Police at the Hard Rock Calling, in London, June 29, 2008

Mexico, and a Police song will come on, and I'll go, 'Wow, that's really good.' It's interesting. You get away from something you did, and suddenly you'll get a new take on it. It's happened to me all over the world.”

In a remarkable career that lasted just under a decade — the trio formed in London in 1977 and called it quits in 1986 — the Police grew from a gritty pub-rock act that fused aggressive punk with elements of reggae to become a stadium-filling rock group that performed highly ambitious and sophisticated smash hits. And unlike most bands that exist well past their shelf life, the trio didn't stick around and start sucking. They released five dynamite albums — *Outlandos d'Amour*, *Reggatta de Blanc*, *Zenyatta Mondatta*, *Ghost in the Machine* and *Synchronicity* — and left the building, their legacy complete and untarnished.

“There are so many reasons why we were a hit,” Summers tells us. “If I could narrow it down, I think the main thing about us was we didn't sound like anybody else. It was something we were very conscious of. We didn't want to sound like other bands. That was our natural instinct, but it could only have happened with the three of us. It's a miracle of chemistry. If we were one person different, it would have been very different.”

Summers' contribution to that chemistry cannot be overstated. By the time he joined the Police, he was already fully formed as a player, having studied jazz and classical guitar, and he boasted a performing resume on both sides of the Atlantic (for a brief time, he was a member of Eric Burdon and the Animals). With the Police, he dispensed with the blues-based licks and rote solos so prevalent in the '70s and pioneered a crafty

JOBV SESSIONS

blend of minimalism built around tight but memorable riffs (played mainly on a 1961 Telecaster), shimmering chord voicings and an individualistic use of pedal effects that magnified the band's sound in ways that were both thrilling and mysterious.

"I was a fairly trained guitarist, but I needed to open things up onstage," Summers says. "For me, the pedal thing started with the [MXR] Phase 90. We were playing for an hour, hour and a half, and there was just the three of us — we didn't have keyboards to fall back on. I had to make the guitar sound interesting, and then these pedals turned up. I added more pedals and worked out all sorts of combinations. Before long, I had a big Pete Cornish pedalboard with eight or nine boxes, but it basically started with the Phase 90."

By the time of the Police's second album, 1979's *Reggatta de Blanc*, his playing style and sound began to infiltrate the lexicon of other guitarists, a trend he became keenly aware of. "We were a hot item, and people saw how successful we were, and yes, I certainly noticed a lot of players aping — I'll say 'copying' — me," he says. "We were so popular and everybody thought, That's how to get a hot sound. But that's just where my ear went."

The Police's lean-and-mean ethos extended to their studio recordings, and even when they enjoyed lavish budgets and were able to work in the spiffiest facilities in the world (*Synchronicity* was cut at George Martin's AIR Studios in Montserrat), they resisted the temptation to overburden their songs with superfluous instrumentation. "That was a trap we were aware of," Summers says. "We started as a punk band, which lasted about five minutes because we weren't really punks, but I think part of the freshness of what we did was because the tracks were so stripped down. I never got into the army of guitars. The music was made out of the actual parts we were playing instead of multitracking. We tried to keep things as close as we could to the trio sound, and that made it easy for me to play the songs onstage, because I wasn't missing six parts."

He pauses, then adds with a laugh, "Of course, you have to be talented to do that. You have to be good."

"MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE" THE POLICE, *REGGATTA DE BLANC* (1979)



Summers at home with his Gibson ES-335 in 1982

"Sting showed me the riff he had, but I embellished it. I had the chops to make it swing and rock. I could tell right away it had something, and I was thrilled to play something that started to progress our style. Rather than just strumming chords — C# minor, A, B, F# minor — I was outlining the figures in a way that integrated very well with Stewart's hi-hat. I should say that the recorded version of this song is the best drum track Stewart ever did.

"PEOPLE WANT TO PLAY IT ALL THE TIME, BUT A LOT OF THEM CAN'T — THE STRETCHES ARE TOO BIG. YOU HAVE TO BE A REAL GUITARIST TO DO IT WELL"

"In the studio, we added a second guitar part, so there's a harmony going on there. Then it goes into a more of a rock chorus, but the verse is the classic Police sound, again outlining the chord, which is tonic, fifth and added ninth. I overdubbed some soloing. We were coming out of a sort of religious punk scene, and guitar solos at that time were supposed to be a mark of the old guard. Stewart was vehement about that, but I was a great soloist, so of course I was soloing my ass off. We were always in a weird position with that. As I started playing a solo over the end of the song, Sting went, 'Oh, actually, this is really good. Keep it in, keep it in.' It wasn't up

really loud, which I would've liked, but it was in there, with a lot of feeling.

"It's a famous riff, and I have to admit, it's hard to play. People want to play it, but a lot of them can't — the stretches are too big. You have to be a real guitarist to do it well. I've played it a lot of different ways, in a lot of different positions, over the years, just trying to do stuff with it, sometimes playing the second chord, the A with the open A string, rather than going to the obvious sort of shape of the added-ninth chord. It's pretty cool."

"BRING ON THE NIGHT" THE POLICE, *REGGATTA DE BLANC* (1979)

"It has that fingerpicked verse section. One thing that Sting and I shared was a love for classical guitar. As it turned out, I'd played classical guitar for years — I studied it for years at school in America. Once Sting and I got together, I discovered that he was a bit of a nut for classical guitar, as well. I would often play him classical guitar pieces — [Heitor] Villa-Lobos or some Bach — because I knew the stuff very well. He came up with this little pattern in A minor that was very easy for me to play — it was sort of in A minor and all over an A note. He had the part, but of course, I could play it. It wasn't standard rock at all.

"I liked the atmosphere of the song. I put in that muted opening part before the main verse section. We played it like that in concert like that a lot. The solo of the song is rather striking. None of it was worked out beforehand. It was all sort of spontaneous, really, just me in the moment. It seemed like the appropriate, anguished response to the

lyrics of the song. We kept all the noises in. I supposed that was our punk ethos coming in. You can't be all po-faced about all of this."

"REGGATTA DE BLANC" THE POLICE, *REGGATTA DE BLANC* (1979)

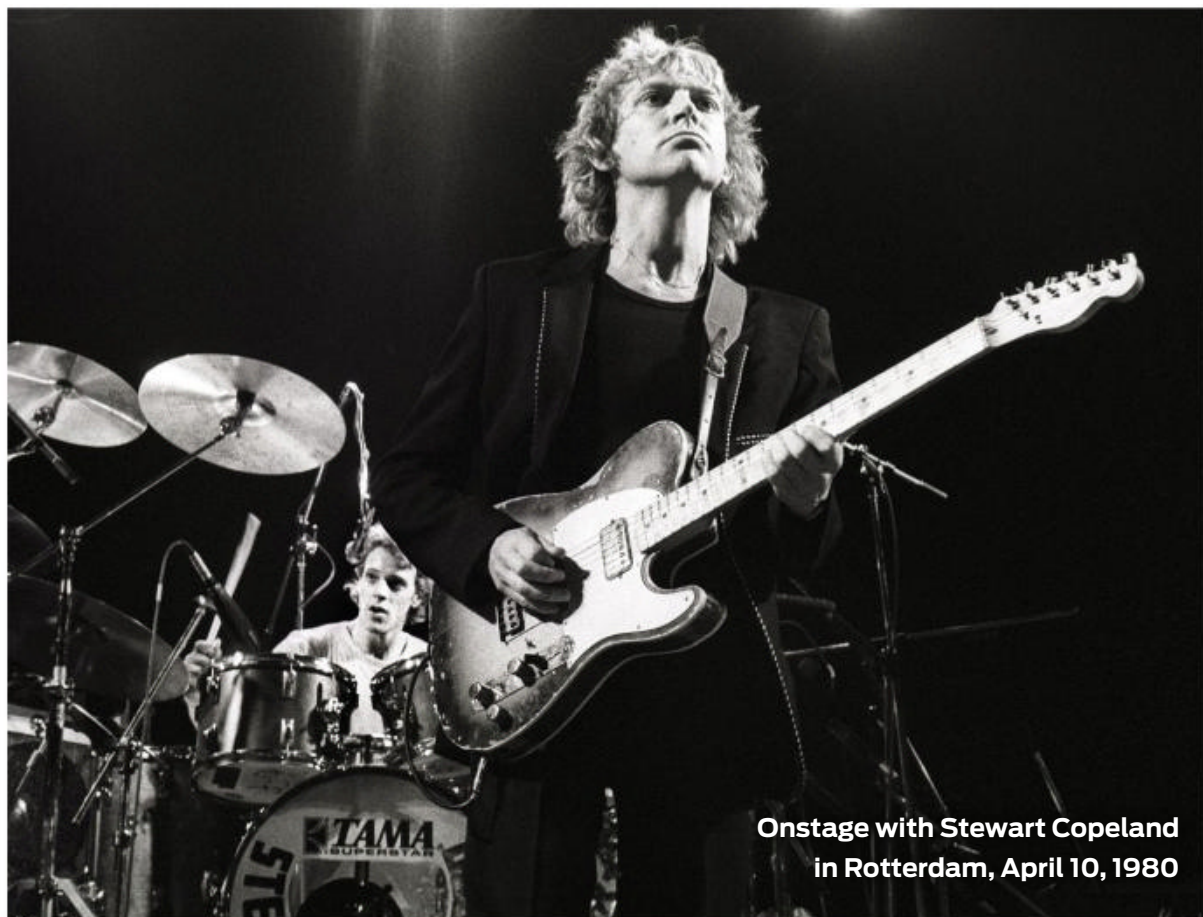
"It came about from jamming onstage. We didn't have a lot of material at the time, so we had to stretch things out. Toward the end of our show, we'd play 'Can't Stand Losing You,' and then we'd have this huge jam in the middle where I would play all sorts of stuff on the guitar. I used the Echoplex a lot. Sting and I would do this droning D pedal. It would go on for a while, and I'd do all these harmonics at the seventh fret and different whammy things. I learned the harmonics thing from Lenny Breau in Nashville. He was one of the greatest guitarists ever.

"Over time, this jam developed. Sting started doing some sort of incantatory thing to the audience, and we'd all be changing along together. Stewart was wailing on the hi-hat. We would build things up and get ready, and at the appropriate moment we would take off on that B to A movement. I would hit the fuzz and play this little riff, and we'd have thousands of people going nuts. You didn't need to do more than that if your feel was right. We were very locked in as a unit, so we could come up with this stuff. It was great fun.

"We won a Grammy for that song. I mean, it's true that we were very popular and could have just said 'hello' and gotten an award for it. But I was quite pleased about it, actually, because that piece of music was very typical of our trio. It was our thing, so to get a Grammy for something that had grown so organically out of our sweat onstage, it was very satisfying. And, of course, it didn't sound like anything else."



**In AIR Studios in 1981
with Sting (center)
and Copeland**



**Onstage with Stewart Copeland
in Rotterdam, April 10, 1980**

"DE DO DO DO, DE DA DA DA" THE POLICE, *ZENYATTA MONDATTA* (1980)

"By this point, we had the Police's stylistic approach pretty much nailed down. It didn't matter what the chord structure was or what kind of music we were playing; we could make it sound like the Police. On 'De Do Do Do,' I do a slightly rhythmic approach to playing the chords as opposed to just banging them out. I sort of fingerpicked the outlines of each chord, which made it sound different. I think this was a factor in making our songs endure. If you played them with big barre chords, they would sound old and ordinary.

"I HAD MY AMP ON 11 FOR THE SOLO — IT WAS REALLY LOUD"

"One thing in particular I would do is avoid a major or minor third in favor of a second. This song starts on an A chord, but I wouldn't play the C# of A major. Instead, I'd play B, which is the second of that scale. I'd pluck between the fifth string, third string or fourth string with a slightly damped upstroke picking pattern. This was typical of what I'd do. It made the parts more interesting and less corny.

"We were recording pretty quickly, but I didn't want to rush through my parts. I do this solo over kind of a weird section, and I knew I needed to work it out rather than just improvise it in one go. I said to Sting and Stewart, 'Give me half an hour to come up with something.' It worked out pretty well."

"DRIVEN TO TEARS" THE POLICE, *ZENYATTA MONDATTA* (1980)

"It's quite a complicated arrangement. We'd have these creative jams, and Sting would eventually start wailing on the top and I'd play all kinds of stuff. They weren't conventional guitar solos, but they were these big sounds and some passages, all kinds of stuff.

"With this song, I don't think we did played it onstage before we recorded it; I think we just did it on the spot. It's a classic situation where, six months after you record it, you go, 'Oh, shit. I wish we'd done that when we recorded it.' I know we played it a few different ways, moving it up and back in keys.

"I'm pretty sure I used my Telecaster. I had my amp on 11 for the solo — it was really loud, because it sounded appropriate for that sort of dissonant, chromatic solo. But I didn't play standard blues licks, which would've brought it down. It had to be something angry because of the lyrical content, which is basically about war and suffering. Feedback in the studio has always been an interesting technical thing. You don't want to stand in front of the amp; you have to sort of contrive a way to get the sound while standing away from the amp so you don't get your ears blasted. I think it was done in one take. We all heard it and went, 'That's it. It's got it.'

"I never played it onstage the same way twice. That's kind of a prog-rock thing, where all the solos are completely worked out and rehearsed note for note. We were very loose onstage. Songs got extended, not in a fussy way, but in a way that just kind of expanded their scope. I think that made things more exciting." 🎸



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Synthfully Good

For guitarists seeking sonic extremes, nothing hit the spot like Roland's GR guitar synthesizers.

IN THE LATE 1970s and early '80s, the synthesizer threatened to take over popular music, and legion were the pundits who lined up to ring the electric guitar's death knell. Then, just as guitarists were getting fit to burst with oscillator envy, Roland Corporation swooped in to save the day. Introducing what were arguably the most functional and genuinely usable guitar synths yet to hit the scene, the Japanese music-electronics company presented a series of impressive modules that culminated in the whopping GR-700 of 1984. While Roland's guitar synth didn't dominate popular music as a result, it wasn't for a lack of trying.

Guitarists have been trying to make their instrument of choice sound like something other than itself ever since a pickup was first introduced to an amplifier. Early players took aim at trumpets, saxophones and trombones. Loud, brash and packed with raspy character, they excelled as soloing instruments and let you be heard centerstage in a way that the early guitar rigs could not. The fuzz box and wah-wah pedal were among the first efforts to make six-string electrics mimic brass instruments, though they became so much more in creative hands. Soon after, more all-encompassing efforts hit the scene in the form of several iterations of "guitar organs" that were invariably packed with confusing controls and switches. The game was on.

Once the keyboard-based synthesizer started making inroads into popular music in the late '60s and early '70s, however, that was the sound to beat — and guitarists badly

wanted some of that otherworldly sonic goodness. Hit-and-miss efforts came from the likes of the Hammond-Innovex Condor Guitar Synth of 1970, and several others before and after. But it wasn't until Roland entered the game in 1977 with the GR-500 system that many guitarists sensed that a true guitar synthesizer had finally arrived.

The GR-500 system consisted of the synthesizer module of that name and the dedicated GS-500 guitar, connected to it by a 24-pin cable. The rig was functional but not particularly user-friendly. The GR-500 synth was a tabletop unit that required hands-on twiddling for patch changes, and the guitar was a somewhat cumbersome Les Paul-inspired affair, with a host of knobs and switches mounted to a big plastic plate on its lower bout, not radically different from the equally DIY-looking Gibson Les Paul Recording model, which was not a synth guitar. The GS-500 was made in the FujiGen Gakki factory in Japan, which also made guitars for Greco, Ibanez and other notable brands. In addition to the six-segment pickup (often called a hexaphonic, or divided, pickup) that sensed each individual string to trigger the synth unit, the GS-500 carried a single traditional electro-magnetic humbucking pickup in the bridge position, which was often considered a weakness of the design and didn't do much for it doubling as a traditional electric guitar.

The large GR-500 synth control unit allowed the creation of several synth-like sounds by applying filters and effects to all six strings in its Polyensemble and Bass sections, but true synthesis as we know it occurred only in the monophonic Solo Melody section, which had a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO), filter (VCF), amplifier (VCA) and low-frequency oscillator (LFO) for modulation, along with facilities to shape dynamics (i.e., an envelope) and the audio wave, much like a standard keyboard-based mono synthesizer. The whole rig sounded pretty good when used right, but it was overly cumbersome from a guitarist's perspective

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- > Dedicated guitar controllers
- > Six-segment hexaphonic (or divided) pickup
- > Cumbersome 24-pin connector and cable
- > Genuine synthesizer-based signal processing
- > Instant street cred circa 1984



Introduced in 1984, Roland's G-707 guitar controller and GR-700 synth unit (top, opposite) were the company's last attempt at a guitar synth in the classic era.



BY DAVE HUNTER



and didn't gain much traction in the market beyond the bold experimentalists who gave it a shot. It didn't help that the rig cost nearly \$1,000 in 1977, a sum that has the purchasing power of approximately \$4,700 in 2022.

In 1980, Roland released the simpler GR-100 floor unit, followed by the similarly styled but more feature-laden GR-300 Polyphonic Synthesizer. Both were far more intuitive for guitarists to use, and very relatable for players familiar with the larger effects pedals that were already proliferating under foot. As basic as the GR-300 might have appeared when compared to keyboard synths available at the time, it offered a surprising amount of sonic power. Each string signal from the hexaphonic pickup had its own genuine VCO, while LFO rate and Hexa-Fuzz could also be applied at will. There were also controls for VCF attack time and sensitivity, and decay was responsive to your playing technique, resulting in a feel far more guitar-like than the electronically controlled decay used in traditional synths. In addition, the GR-300 had foot switches for on-the-fly selection of Duet (which added the fundamental of the guitar string pitches to the VCO), Pitch A and B (two pitch presets), Env Mod (created a "wow" effect by sweeping the filter cutoff up, and then down) and Env Inv (inverted the "wow" effect to sweep the cutoff frequency down, and then up).

The GR-100 and GR-300 were partnered by three new FujiGen Gakki-made guitars: the Strat-like G-505, with three single-coil pickups; the set-neck, asymmetrical-double-cutaway G-303, with dual humbuckers; and the neck-through G-808, a seemingly Alembic-inspired creation based on the existing Greco GO1000 model, also with dual humbuckers. Two years later, the dual-humbucker, bolt-neck G-202 joined them. All had Roland's hexaphonic pickup mounted

just in front of the bridge, and carried a simpler and more intuitive control section. Each also had the ubiquitous 24-pin connector for the cable that sent voltage-control from the guitar to the synth unit.

For many players who noticed such things back in the day, the G-808 and GR-300 are probably most familiar due to their use by Pat Metheny. The jazz guitarist wholeheartedly embraced the technology (though it didn't entirely replace his beloved ES-175), and he even later modified the G-808 guitar controller for use with a far more complex Synclavier synthesizer.

In 1984, Roland shot its last major broadside at the concept of the guitar-control-plus-synth-module rig in the form of the GR-700 and G-707 pairing. The latter was an unashamedly modernist odd duck with a wedge-shaped body and a carbon-fiber stabilizer bar extending above the neck and connected at the headstock to improve rigidity (did we once think all guitars would soon look like this?). By all accounts it actually performed very well, but it was clearly an awkward beast to play as well as to look at, in the eyes of many observers. Plenty of synth-curious guitarists eschewed it in favor of the existing G-202, G-303, G-505 and G-808 guitar controllers, which partnered just fine with the GR-700.

But the synth unit itself represented a quantum leap in functionality and sound processing over its predecessors. Packing a true polyphonic synth engine derived from Roland's existing keyboard-controlled JX3P, the GR-700 offered two DCOs per voice for each of its six voices, plus independent envelopes for each voice, along with several other advanced functions, such as programmable memory and the first MIDI output on any Roland guitar synth. Eleven foot switches provided access to banks,

A GR-300 unit partnered with a G-303 controller



presets and editing functions, while the previous units' knobs had given way to a control screen with multi-function touch-buttons and an LCD readout. There was also an attachable PG-200 unit from Roland's JX3P synth to make programming easier in an age before computer-based gear editing programs were available. John Abercrombie, Robert Fripp, Al DiMeola and Jimmy Page all made use of the G-707/GR-700, and country-pop guitarist and comedian Jim Stafford played one on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*, partly for comic effect.

In due course, Roland figured out that a separate hex pickup and control bundle that could be attached to virtually any existing electric guitar was the way to go, and the company has rolled through an impressive range of synth units ever since. The quirkiness and bygone-cutting-edge charm of these early units still has a great appeal for many players today, though, and GR synths from Roland's first decade of the venture have attained a certain collectability on the 21st century market. That, and any and all of them can be surprisingly versatile creative tools. ■

BY JIM CAMPILONGO



If Hooks Could Kill

Roy Lanham slayed listeners the old-fashioned way: with his bare hands.

BACK IN THE early '90s when I'd frequent the Emeryville, California, Sunday morning Record Swap Meet, I discovered a copy of *The Fabulous Roy Lanham* in a seller's milk crate. Finding this type of rare-bird LP was the reason I set my alarm to wake up at the crack of dawn, but paying a whopping (then personal record) high of \$40 for an LP was a little unsettling. That was a ton of money to me back then, but, kind readers, I made the plunge and had no regrets whatsoever. This holy grail album showcased a tremendous guitarist, and its cover photo gives one the impression Roy Lanham could be a double for Robert Goulet. How could anyone regret this?

The Fabulous Roy Lanham was originally released on the Sims label in 1963 and reissued on CD by Bear Family in 1993. The reissue included some great tracks from Lanham's solo 1961 album, *The Most Exciting Guitar*, on the Dolton label. This Vinyl Treasures will focus on the original Sims 1963 vinyl release.

Roy Lanham was born in Corbin, Kentucky, in 1923, and went on to play guitar with the Delmore Brothers and the Sons of the Pioneers for almost three decades. Barney Kessel would tell Roy, "Take off your boots and hat and you can be a great jazz player," but I'm grateful that he kept wearing them. If my arm were twisted to describe Roy's style by genre, I would probably say he's a jazz guitarist, but he also had a big spoonful of something that, to my ears, is delightfully indescribable. Imagine Chet Atkins throwing away his thumb pick and becoming a flat-picking fiend, exhibiting steroidal chops and shredding to his heart's content. This might be my best shot at describing Mr. Lanham to the uninitiated.



**ROY LANHAM
MADE PEOPLE VERY
HAPPY BY GETTING
THE MOST OUT OF
HIS RIGHT AND
LEFT HANDS**

Roy came from an era of guitar that preceded folks obsessing on the "perfect killer tone." I might understand paying \$5,000 for a Klon Centaur, but one might ask themselves, "Can I play a nylon-string guitar to make folks happy?" Roy Lanham made people very happy by getting the most out of his right and left hands. He employed right-hand muting, sweep picking, raking toward destination notes, superb phrasing and Django-like trills, typically all packed into one performance. Sure, I might also suggest this record occasionally flirts with sounding corny, but that's no diss. It would be corny in

the Neil LeVang tradition, which is great corny. To me, this is high-level, strategized craftsmanship that perfectly complements his moments of jaw-dropping brilliance.

The first example of Roy's virtuosity is side one's "Holiday for Strings." He goes through rapid-fire

chord work and rips through key changes while sounding relaxed throughout. This is followed by one of my personal favorites, "Roy's Blues." Here he plays a style that brings to mind Johnny Smith trying to sound like a pedal-steel guitar. Another stand-out track is "Brazil," a tune that swings so smoothly it almost melts. Lanham's version of the song became my gold medal winner, unseating Les Paul's great version to a second-place tier silver medal.

"Under the Double Eagle" and "Brown's Ferry Blues" are absolute stunners, with the latter laying the way for Roy's opportunity to exhibit his Jimmy Bryant chops, while giving the sonic impression he's never close to breaking a sweat. "One Love" shows his ability to play a straighter, traditional jazz, yet

somehow Roy manages to sound totally original. We would be missing the point by attributing this to his Fender Jazzmaster sound; his virtuosity and choices are always distinctive, and his pyrotechnics always sound effortless. Side two ends with the show-stopper "Can't We Be Friends," where Roy and the group — Dusty Rhodes on rhythm guitar, Red Wooten on bass and Muddy Berry on drums — throw in the kitchen sink, beckoning the listener to turn the album over to side one and experience *The Fabulous Roy Lanham* one more time. Fabulous!

While writing this column, I did a quick Discogs search for *The Fabulous Roy Lanham*. Two copies were available, with each seller asking around \$200. Evidently, aside from being a timeless, bad-ass guitar player, Roy Lanham proved that wearing a tux and having a Robert Goulet mustache can be a very good thing. 🎸

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BY TERRY CARLETON

One-Night Standel

Despite a brief flirtation with some big names, Standel guitars, like this 1967 Custom, never got the love.

LIKE MANY LONG-FORGOTTEN

guitars of the 1960s, the Standel Custom had a stealth arrival and an even quieter departure. But don't let its obscurity fool you. As this 1967 model reveals, it's a nicely engineered guitar that sports some fine amenities and an interesting pedigree. Built in Southern California initially, and later in New Jersey, these guitars were manufactured for a few years at the end of the '60s before the line was retired. They were created by Standel amp builder Bob Crooks, who had collaborations with guitar makers Semie Moseley of Mosrite Guitars and Joe Hall of the fabled Hallmark guitar line. In '66 Standel joined up with Sam Koontz, who designed this model, and others, through the Harptone Company. Unfortunately, he was able to make guitars for just a few years, and by 1970 Standel had reverted back to making only guitar amps.

I often lament that if only someone famous had played one of the obscure guitars that I write about in this column, it might have caught on. But a number of amazing guitarists *did* play Standel axes, including Joe Maphis and Merle Travis. It's said that even Chet Atkins, who loved his Standel 25L15 amplifier, wanted to play a Standel guitar but could use only Gretsch guitars due to a contractual obligation.

WEIRDO FACTOR

The "weird" element becomes evident once you plug it in. The low-impedance, single-coil pickups were designed to be used with a compatible high-wattage Standel amp. Plugged into a Fender Twin, for instance, this guitar has a very low output compared to, say, a Telecaster. Visually, aside from the large pointy headstock, the most unusual element is the shape of the plastic and aluminum pickguard, which flows beautifully into the pointy cutaways. Notice that the bridge and trem system are attached to the aluminum section, which makes sense when you consider how many bridges and tailpieces buckle and pull up after years of use.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

Once you get around the low output by hooking up your favorite boost box, you'll discover that the single-coil pickups sound great and that the Standel Custom has tone unlike that of any other guitar. With both pickups on, its bright and present, and great for funk rhythm playing. The bridge pickup on its own is snarky and bitey and could be good for aggressive surf lines. The neck pickup is warmer, but I'd hardly use it for jazz. Standel offered larger semi-acoustic models that were better suited to that. This solid-body was aimed at the rock market, but due to the pickup design, it lacked the ability to overdrive an amp. And while you can compensate for that with modern processing, the Standel Custom would not be my, or probably anybody's, go-to guitar for distortion.

The hard maple neck has an adjustable truss rod and 22 frets on a thick rosewood slab. The open-back tuners are made by Grover, the bridge is fully intonatable, and the tremolo is reminiscent of the units found on Mosrites. In fact, the guitar's playability is quite like a Mosrite's, from its low action to its small-profile neck. In lieu of a selector switch, there are separate on/off sliders for each pickup, and the volume and tone knobs are global.

VALUE

As only about 300 of these guitars were reportedly made, expect to pay between \$1,200 and \$1,800 bucks, if and when you find one. But its rarity isn't the only thing that makes it collectable. It plays great, sounds great and has a very cool modern/retro look.

WHY IT RULES

This guitar has its own voice, and in the end, isn't that what we all want? Plus it weighs only a little more than seven pounds, making it a guitar you could play an entire gig with. 🎸

Thanks to Wayne Coy, Iron Arrow and Dinette (for making a new pickguard).



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAY YAM

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**“I RARELY DO FULL
SWEEPS WITH THE
WAH, OR PUMP IT IN
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IT’S MORE ABOUT
GIVING MY PLAYING
THAT ‘TALKING’
QUALITY”**



AUSTIN POWER

From chunk to *chicha*, Beto Martinez is the new king of Latin rock guitar.

BY JAMES VOLPE ROTONDI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISMAEL QUINTANILLA

“BLACK SABBATH MEETS Chicago!” Ozzy Osbourne exclaims, clapping his hands with great enthusiasm after Austin band Brown Sabbath slays the Sabbath chestnut “Fairies Wear Boots” for him in person — complete with conga drums and a wicked Latin brass section — at a small bar in East Austin. “There are a lot of [*Black Sabbath*] cover bands,” Ozzy notes a minute later, on an episode of A&E’s *Ozzy & Jack’s World Detour*, “but this, by far, is such a unique way of doing it. I’m really impressed. Your playing is fuckin’ great.”

Recalling the moment from his Lechehouse studio on the outskirts of Austin, the band’s guitarist Beto Martinez — he’s the one ripping the song’s massive main riffs and fiery triplet-driven outro solo on a red Gibson ES-333 — displays the same relaxed and humble bearing he brings to all his imaginative projects, and man, there are a lot of them. Brown Sabbath is itself an outgrowth of Beto’s big-band, Brownout, which he helped form with future Black Pumas guitarist Adrian Quesada.

But even Brownout was an outgrowth of Beto’s acclaimed nine-piece “Latin funk orchestra,” Grupo Fantasma, which took home a Grammy for Best Latin Rock/Alternative album on behalf of their acclaimed album *El Existential* in 2011, and were a favorite backing band for Prince for several years. Add to that Martinez’s other eclectic bands, including Money Chicha, Los Sundowns, Ocote Soul Sounds (with Quesada), his latest project, Caramelo Haze, and more, along with his production work at Lechehouse — for which he’s been recently nominated for an Austin Music Award — and you have the makings of a new kind of Texas guitar legend.

Unlike the vintage blues tradition that Stevie Ray Vaughan and Charlie Sexton drew on so expertly, Martinez’s mix springs from a bicultural grounding in classic and contemporary Latin sounds from Peru, Cuba, Colombia and his parents’ native Mexico, along with his teenage obsession with red-blooded American metal acts, from Metallica to Pantera. “When I first got into guitar,” the 44-year-old says, “it was all about hard rock and heavy metal. The first album I bought was Quiet Riot’s *Metal Health*, and then I discovered Metallica’s

...*And Justice for All*, followed by *Appetite for Destruction* by Guns N’ Roses.”

Martinez’s next phase of discovery included a “full force” induction into the music and techniques of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa, the two players from whom he began to model his own expressive work with the Dunlop Cry Baby wah-wah pedal, which you’ll find to some degree on nearly all of his recordings. “It’s pretty much an extension of my foot,” Martinez says with a laugh. “I suppose the easy reference point with me and the wah-wah, because I’m Latin, would be Carlos Santana, whose music I do love.

“But I more remember Zappa talking about how the wah-wah could be used for a speech-like sound,” he continues, “and that’s what I’ve always gone for. I very rarely do full sweeps with the wah, or pump it in regular rhythms. It’s more about giving my playing that ‘talking’ quality, keeping it positioned near the middle of the throw, and making more subtle moves on it as I play. I admit it’s become something of a stylistic signature for me. It’s so natural for me, in fact, that I don’t even think about using it anymore. I actually have to think about not using it!”



1. Martinez in his Lechehouse studio. The gear includes a vintage Tascam 388 eight-track reel-to-reel recorder with built-in mixer (at left), a Roland RE-101 Space Echo (right) and a Maestro PS-1A Phase Shifter (on the RE-101).



2. Beto's pedalboard includes a TC Electronic Hall of Fame 2, MXR Phase 95, Behringer UV-300 Ultra Vibrato (concealed under tape), Boss DD-7, Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi, EarthQuaker Devices Dunes, Dunlop Cry Baby wah and Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner.

SANDRA DAHDAH

Other key elements of Beto's sound include Fender amps, especially his trusty Fender Deluxe Reverb. His clutch of pedals includes an EarthQuaker Devices Dunes that he describes as his "essential overdrive/boost," and a Behringer UV-300 Ultra Vibrato. "The Behringer literally costs less than dinner," Martinez jokes, "and yet that's the one I get asked 'What's making that sound?' about the most. It's definitely my secret weapon." Martinez's not-so-secret weapon? His trusty red 2004 Gibson ES-333, on which he executes savvy double-stop R&B figures, funky slash chords, surf-approved bottom-string riffs, and, of course, those burning Dorian- and pentatonic-based solos.

But if you want to get to the core of what makes his style and sound so distinct, and what makes him an increasingly important player in the legacy of the electric guitar, you have to dig deeper. In particular, Martinez reflects and refracts the influence of many Latin electric guitar players (and Latin and Afro-Cuban musical genres) that you may have never heard of, and that's a big part of what makes exploring his work such a worthwhile pursuit.

In his combo Money Chicha, for example, you're hearing Martinez and his crack band — including the



remarkably gifted drummer John Speice IV, also of Grupo Fantasma and Brownout — casting their singular spell over the *chicha* style, a Peruvian form derived from Colombian *cumbia*. The hypnotic but danceable *cumbia*, evocative of traditional Andean *huayno* music, surf and psychedelic rock, is typically played with electric guitars and synthesizers, and leans heavily on the pentatonic scale. Martinez, though, is just as likely to inject harmonic minor or diminished melodies into it, as well.

"The pioneers of chicha guitar in the '60s and '70s were so expressive and so revolutionary with their tone and technique," Martinez says, name-checking bands like Los Destellos, Los Shapis and Los Hijos del Sol, "but their music barely made it out of regional South America until now." Among those chicha pioneers, he explains, are giants like Peruvian guitarist José Luis Carballo, of the Lima band La Nueva Crema, which translates as "The New Cream;" Enrique Delgado from Los Destellos; and

Bernardo Hernández, a.k.a. Manzanita, who fronted the band Manzanita y Su Conjunto with his explosive, wickedly rhythmically melodic guitar figures that almost suggest a Peruvian Dick Dale or Les Paul.

Another player Martinez readily recommends checking out is the late Cuban fusion guitarist Carlos Emilio Morales — he passed away in 2014 at the age of 75 — of the celebrated band Irakere. “If you listen to Morales’ playing and the whole band on the album *Irakere Live*, it’s absolutely insane what they’re pulling off live,” Martinez raves. He’s quite right; for polyrhythmic jazz fusion at its finest, even Weather Report would have been hard pressed to match the simply outrageous syncopated ensemble playing (and singing!) on display on this masterful set.



“IT’S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THERE ARE OTHER IMPORTANT PLAYERS AND SUBGENRES IN THE HISTORY OF LATIN ROCK AND PSYCHEDELIA”

“One other player I really want to mention is the great Colombian guitarist Abelardo Carbonó, who sadly passed away very recently,” Martinez adds. “Carbonó was sort of the godfather of Colombian cumbia and psychedelic guitar music, and he developed his own genre, called *champeta*, which is very West African in nature — almost like *soukous* — and very melodic.

“Y’know, whenever Latin psychedelic guitar is discussed,” Martinez adds, “it seems like Santana is the only person who’s mentioned. And I love Santana. But I think that it’s vital for people to recognize that there are many other important players and subgenres in the history of Latin rock and psychedelia.” 🎸

CINCO DE BETO

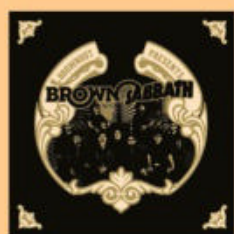
Check out these pivotal tracks from Martinez’s diverse catalog

“SE CAE EL SOL” THE LOS SUNDOWNS, THE LOS SUNDOWNS (2021)



Se cae el sol translates roughly as *the sun goes down*, so it’s clearly a kind of theme song for Beto’s cumbia-tinged psych-garage band of the same name. Blending a funky Latin beat with spaghetti-western-approved bell-like tones, the track is based on a I-IV-V progression in harmonic minor — Bm–Em7–F#dom7 — over which Martinez flows slinky blues-scale and harmonic-minor ideas with a classic spring reverb—soaked tone courtesy of a vintage Fender Super Reverb.

“INTO THE VOID” BROWN SABBATH, BROWNOUT PRESENT BROWN SABBATH (2014)



Even Ozzy was gob-smacked by the originality and sheer badassery of this horn-blasting take on the early Sabbath epic. Like the original, Martinez tunes his entire guitar down a minor third — that’s a hellspawn C# on the E string, yo — for the song’s sinister main theme, a chromatic-assisted blend of blues, tritones and Locrian mode that’s doubled by Brownout’s full horn section. And that blistering fuzz? That’s a Plum Crazy Fuzzy Lady pedal, a unique hybrid fuzz that uses both silicon and germanium transistors.

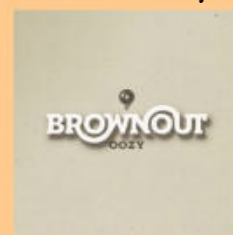
“CUMBIANCHERA” GRUPO FANTASMA, EL EXISTENTIAL (2010)



This infectious chunk of post-modern cumbia helped Martinez and Co. win a Grammy in 2010, and not just because of its chugging saxophones and soaring trumpet blasts — think Bond

composer John Barry married to Fela Kuti-inspired rhythm guitars. Based around a typically Latin Dm–A progression, it’s a natural vehicle for Beto’s rhythmic upstrokes on the offbeats, and his lovely solo starting at 2:02 mixes natural minor and blues-scale ideas with plenty of psychedelic garage dirt thrown over that vibey Fender clean.

“ANDO Y DANDO” BROWNOUT, OOOZY (2012)



If you dig serious conga grooves, you’ll love Brownout’s furious jazz-funk on “Ando y Dando,” with its cool I–bVI7–V7 progression (Fm–Db7–C7), that tips its hat to similarly smokin’ live bands of yesteryear like Irakere and Santana. Martinez’s solo, hitting at 2:20, kicks off with some wickedly fluid wah-wah licks that dance around both the flat-seventh and major-seventh in a pentatonic framework, launching into a flurry of dubby echoes that recall the fiery and fierce classic Carlos of live albums like *Moonflower*.

“ECHO EN MEXICO” MONEY CHICHA, ECHO EN MEXICO (2016)



A clever twist on the phrase *hecho en Mexico*, this swinging six-against-four feel features Martinez playing a slinky, lightly chorused pedal-tone hook in C harmonic minor over a Cmin–Fmin–G7 progression. His solo work here, though, leans more toward the kind of Zimbabwean pentatonic style that players like Jonah Sithole and Leonard Chiyangwa let fly in Thomas Mapfumo’s legendary bands. Throw in some classic garage-psych bends and high, piercing echo blasts (i.e., “echo” en Mexico) and you’ve got another eclectic and stylistically rich new hybrid from the Lord of Lechehouse.

SHRED WHITE & BLUE

JACK WHITE

HAS PUT HIS SIGNATURE STYLE ON GEAR — FROM ITS SOUND TO ITS LOOK. AS HE DROPS HIS LATEST ALBUM, *FEAR OF THE DAWN*, HE GIVES *GUITAR PLAYER* AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT THE GUITARS, PEDALS AND PASSION BEHIND HIS BLUE PERIOD.

BY JAMES VOLPE ROTONDI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELEANOR JANE





Jack White photographed
for *Guitar Player* at Third
Man Records in Nashville,
March 20, 2022

JUST FOUR DAYS after Eddie Van Halen passed away on October 6, 2020, Jack White performed the title track from his solo album *Lazaretto* on *Saturday Night Live*, brandishing his favorite blue customized EVH Wolfgang guitar as a gesture of tribute to the late master. “I won’t even insult the man’s talent by trying to play one of his songs tonight,” White said prior to the show. “[But] Eddie was very kind to me and saw to it that this guitar was made for me to my specs. Thanks again, Eddie, for this guitar, and rest in peace, sir.”

While some might be surprised to learn that indie-rock’s champion of primal blues lines and the late, lamented heavy rock virtuoso were so sympatico, it makes terrific sense on many levels. In addition to decades of knocking out album after album of wicked riffs and potent solos, both players have displayed throughout their careers an almost obsessive pursuit of individualism and specialized design in the instruments they’ve played, never content with stock

features and aesthetics, always pushing the envelope to make their own guitars more idiosyncratic, versatile and allied with their singular approaches to both technique and tone.

“Eddie was really gratified to learn that Jack was playing the Wolfgang guitars,” says Fender Master Builder Chip Ellis, who oversaw the design of the EVH Wolfgang line, as well as the customizations on White’s specific axes, and has been White’s

collaborator on custom designs ever since. White and Ellis’s latest co-creations, used liberally on White’s newest release — the wide-ranging and explosive guitar showcase *Fear of the Dawn* (Third Man) — are every bit as unique in form and function as you’d expect. And although they are unmistakably Fender guitars — including a customized Telecaster and Jazzmaster, and two Acoustasonics — they stray as far from the production models as one could possibly go.

Likewise, on *Fear of the Dawn*, White strays about as far from mainstream pop and indie rock as one could possibly go, turning in a blistering electric guitar statement that suggests timeless touchstones such as Frank Zappa, Prince, T. Rex, Thin Lizzy and Tom Morello as much as it does the kind of garage-psych nuggets on which White built his reputation.

The sounds are outrageous: White’s guitars practically peel the steel off your studio monitors with aggressive, even explosive tones that are anything but manicured, despite the album’s obvious top-tier engineering and mixing. As a sort of aesthetic palate

cleanser, White will also be releasing *Entering Heaven Alive*, a full-length album of predominately acoustic songs, something he’s more than proved his mettle at already, as evidenced by the lovely collection, *Acoustic Recordings, 1998–2016*.

As White and his band prepare for his first full tour in more than two years, he sat down with *Guitar Player* to discuss the methods to the madness behind his creative and fluid approach to recording, writing and modifying both guitars and pedals — including his own Third Man line of effects, which includes the cool Bumble Buzz, Triplegraph and Mantic Flex — and how his tone has evolved from his early days with the White Stripes through his Raconteurs years (with co-frontman Brendon Benson), the Dead Weather and his own unique and often challenging solo albums.

Let’s start with the very unique blue and white Telecaster you’re featured holding in our cover shot this month. It resembles the more copper/orange sparkle Tele you played with the Raconteurs, yeah?

This is sort of the next step on from that guitar, which Chip Ellis and I had started working on around the Raconteurs’ last album, before the pandemic. We called it the Three-Wheel Motion Low-Rider Telecaster. We started with a B-Bender-equipped Telecaster that I received as a Christmas present a few years back, and we just started adding cool elements and features that I’ve been wanting to have added based on my experience playing live over the past couple of solo tours I’ve been doing.

The B-Bender Tele was a great present to get. I’d always wanted one, and we changed the color of it to something more suitable for the color scheme of the Raconteurs, with that orange sparkle finish. Then the thought was, Okay, as long as we’re repainting it, let’s put some new pickups in it. At that moment in time, I was really into the Fender Lace Sensors for the bridge and then a P-90 in the middle position. And then we added a neck pickup that was on my brother’s 1972 Fender Telecaster Thinline when I was a kid. I always thought that the bassy-sounding neck pickup on that was really creamy, so I wanted to have that in there.

And then eventually the bridge pickup changed from the Lace Sensor, as well. My wife, [*Third Man* singer/songwriter/guitarist and session player] Olivia Jean, had gotten a custom guitar from Fender, and [*pickup guru*] Tim Shaw had made these outstanding Filter’Tron-style pickups for that. I love Filter’Trons, and I’ve played Gretsch guitars quite a bit, so I really wanted those same types of pickups in my Telecaster.

Sure, if you A/B most Filter’Trons against a lot of the higher-output pickups out there, they don’t compete for gain, but whatever Tim did to make these balance with the output of my other pickups, they’re

“I FEEL LIKE THE VIBRATO ARM AND THE WHAMMY PEDAL ARE MORE IN CONTROL OF WHAT HAPPENS THAN I AM”



just really furious Filter'Trons. Tons of bite. And we're even considering adding a coil-tap to it next. We did that with the humbucking Lace Sensors I used on the last tour, and that was really interesting at times for adding a bit of extra treble when you need it.

Tell me about this cool B-Bender.

Sure. So, this is not the factory Fender Bender that you'd typically see on a Fender guitar. It's called a Glaser Bender, and Chip Ellis partially recommended it to me because it's much lighter than a traditional all-steel B-Bender. I just wanted to be sure it was as good as the Fender Benders, because I really like those, and this one is great and, like I said, much lighter. My concern was that with three pickups, and

all these extra features, we were going to have to consider going semi-hollow with the Tele body to compensate, but so far so good.

The B-Bender works by pulling down on the guitar from the strap, and it allows you to adjust the bend as far as you want. There's a little cavity that goes under the neckplate so you can install the Bender

mechanism, and another one under

the bridgeplate, which is where the B/G Bender "finger" goes. It works great, really smooth, and can be used as either a B- or a G-Bender.

Now, in the past I always thought you couldn't have a B-Bender and a Bigsby on the same guitar — you have to pick one. But we figured out that we could have them both, except the Bigsby doesn't bend the B-string. On the Tele I used with the Raconteurs, I had a Hip Shot for dropped-D, as well as a B-Bender and a G-Bender, so I began to miss the ability to use the Bigsby on all, or at least most, of the strings.

"I LIKE TO USE SPEED IN SHORT BURSTS. I TRY TO CHOOSE MY MOMENTS"

White performs with his blue customized EVH Wolfgang guitar in tribute to Eddie Van Halen on *Saturday Night Live*, October 10, 2020



The armrest is a feature that's very unique to these guitars. What was the inspiration there? Also, what's the story behind that kind of robotic-looking segmented tremolo arm?

Well, I started putting armrests on that top back shoulder because many of the Gretsch models I was collecting had them, like the Duo-Jets, and the White Penguin had that sort of banjo armrest. At first I just thought they were really cool looking, but I began to realize that I do always wear the paint out in that area of the guitar. It's just a very beautiful and purposeful sort of "form meets function" design element, which also adds to a sense of symmetry with the pickguard.

The tremolo arm you're looking at was designed by a guy named TK Smith. His company, TK Smith Design & Fabrication, is based out in the Mojave Desert and makes amazing vintage-inspired guitars and electric mandolins, as well as cool vintage-style tone knobs and vibrato arms for Bigsby tailpieces. So me and Chip just attached it to the Bigsby. To be honest, I just loved the shape and design of it. It was different from the conventional Bigsby arm, but we'll have to see how it performs in practice. I haven't really had a chance to use it hard with the band yet.

You've always used some form of pitch modulation, including Whammy Pedals, octave fuzzes and Bigsbys. Do you feel like you're shooting for specific results with those tools, or is it largely a matter of improvising and seeing what comes out?

Definitely the latter. In fact, in a lot of cases, I feel like the vibrato arm and the Whammy Pedal are more in control of what happens than I am. In many ways, I feel like I'm following their lead, rather than the other way around. For example, the company that makes the Third Man Plasma Coil and Plasma Drive pedals with me — Gamechanger Audio — is also working on a Bigsby in a foot-pedal design. That could be really cool to hear what happens when you use the Bigsby arm and the Bigsby pedal at the same time. But yeah, to answer your question, I feel like some pedals are great for doing exactly what I want them to, and other pedals are kind of directing me, pointing me in a direction I wouldn't normally go.

WILL HEATH/NBC/NBCU PHOTO BANK VIA GETTY IMAGES



You've been exploiting interrupter, or kill, switches for a while now, and most of your guitars have them. What inspired that?

My interrupters do a complete cut of the signal, but I mean, Tom Morello was doing a similar thing back in the '90s by just turning on and off between two pickups. And of course, people would do similar things with Les Pauls back in the day, where they'd have one of the pickups' volumes down, so the pickup selector would act as a kind of kill switch. So it's nothing new. All my White Stripes guitars had those sorts of on/off switches on them back in the day, and I enjoyed playing with them, but eventually I thought it would be much easier if we installed them as buttons.

The inspiration for that way of doing it probably comes from when I was using the Fender EVH

Wolfgang USA Eddie Van Halen Signature guitars, which have these momentary push-button switches. I'm tempted to put them on all my guitars now. And it's not an issue for me with blending two pickups, because I've never blended pickups on any guitar I've used, not ever. Even my Tele is just three positions, not five.

I've also got a V-neck on this Tele, made from the whitest maple we could find, because I really don't like that sort of yellowy maple; I like it to be really white. I like the V-neck a lot. All the old Gibson acoustics I play, like my 1915 Gibson L-1 [*a.k.a. the Robert Johnson model*], are V-necks and I really like that. I understand why people wouldn't like it; it's hard to play. But I think I like making things a little bit harder on myself, too. So there's that.



But there's something appealing about putting a little extra leverage against my thumb off the back of the neck. I hadn't experienced that before, and I've grown to like it a lot. I'm not going to stand here and say, Yeah, that's the shape I love the most. But I will say that I do get some interesting results from it. I'll try it this year on tour and see if after 10 shows I'm still excited by it or if it's become a hindrance. But my sense now is that it's actually making me play a little differently. We're also experimenting with some scalloping, especially on the higher frets, and we'll see what that's like. I dunno. I just kept seeing it on all these Ritchie Blackmore clips I was watching, and I thought it was something I might enjoy.

Cool! had no idea you were a fellow Ritchie Blackmore fan. That may surprise some people.

Oh, yeah, Blackmore's great. I especially love mid-period Deep Purple albums like *In Rock*, *Fireball*, *Made in Japan* and *Who Do We Think We Are*. The second

and third Rainbow albums — *Rising* and *Long Live Rock 'n' Roll* — also have some pretty incredible playing on them. See, like Jimmy Page and Tony Iommi, Blackmore was still blues-based, y'know? A lot of the later players who were more heavy metal go over my head — or maybe I should say under it — because without the strong blues element in there, I begin to lose my connection to the music. But Page, Iommi and Blackmore are really just the heaviest blues that existed at the time, coming out of the English blues boom of the '60s and expanding it into this heavier sort of territory.

While I don't think the term *shredder* applies to you, you certainly have some speed in those hands, and you're not afraid to use it.

I like to use speed in short bursts. I try to choose my moments. Like anything, if you use too much of it, it can lose what makes it interesting in the first place. I also played all the instruments, including drums, on many of these songs, and that kind of led me to begin structuring the song in my head before I ever even picked up a guitar. Instead of the space for a solo either showing up naturally in a band arrangement or not, I could be very deliberate about it, because I was structuring the song from the drums up. Like, okay, I'm going to open up with something impressive on the guitar and sort of knock the listener on the head, and then I'll sing a bit, and then come back and do it again. That opened me up to try some things that maybe in a full-band tracking context I might not have gone after.

Talk about these customized Fender Tele- and Jazzmaster-style Acoustasonics you're playing. They look rad with those cool blue finishes. But there's more to your specs on these than just the finish, right?

Yeah, I made some recommendations regarding the range of sounds in them, as well. Y'know, I first started using an Acoustasonic for the last Raconteurs tour. Since we were going with an orange color scheme for that tour, we borrowed the design idea from one of my Gretsch Rancher Falcon acoustics, the one I named after the actress Claudette Colbert, which has her face engraved on the back by a great tattoo artist in Cincinnati named Kore Flatmo. Along with the tribute to Claudette, my thought was to try to mix some of the design vibe from those interesting old Fender Antigua finishes from the 1970s, but with the modern Acoustasonic guitars.

As for the sounds, I was lucky enough to be one of the first people to get an Acoustasonic when they first came out, and I brought it straight out on tour with the Raconteurs, so I got to road test it pretty heavily.

TRACKING JACK

HOW WHITE & CO. NAILED THE EXPLOSIVE SOUNDS ON *FEAR OF THE DAWN*.

STRAIGHT OUT OF the gate — and I do mean a noise gate — on the opening track “Taking it Back,” you are met with a small army of pitch-shifted guitar drones that sounds like someone placed an EBow on a Tomahawk missile. This is followed by a clutch of punchy, fuzz-bomb power chords that almost seem to claw their way through your speakers. (I actually checked mine to make sure they weren’t damaged. They were fine.)

In an age when guitar sounds on many high-profile rock records tend to be buried, overly burnished or just plain boring, Jack White has taken his enviably visceral, sometimes odd sounds to ever more aggressive and

idiosyncratic heights. And his playing is simply wicked, at times exploding out of the speakers like a mad cross between Frank Zappa, Tom Morello and Prince. His more lyrical blues playing, like on the closing track, “Shedding My Velvet,” has surely never been stronger. “I’d like to think that *Fear of the Dawn* is the best guitar playing that I’ve ever done,” White says, hanging out in the Blue Room performance space at Third Man Records in Nashville.

“While mixing it and listening to playback,” he continues, “I felt that I’d done more with guitar on this album than ever. I’ve taken my ideas further. I’ve experimented and taken a lot of risks with both my playing and my tone, and even with the dynamics, from very quiet to very, very loud. You’re also noticing the sort of ‘If we’re going to do it, let’s *do it*’ attitude me and the engineers had with the mixing process. Which is to say, if this new part comes in, I want it to come in heavy-duty. I don’t want the guitars off in the distance. I want each riff to be louder than the one before it, than the verse before it. So it’s great to hear you say that, because that was definitely something we went after on purpose.”

Tracking the album, on the other hand, meant being ready for happy accidents and sudden flashes of inspiration. “Jack works fast when he’s got creative ideas,” engineer Bill Skibbe reveals. “He’s very



immediate. You’re not premeditating a lot of it. There’s not a lot of upfront labor going into scrutinizing what kind of head you’re going to use. If Jack’s got an idea, we plug into this or that amp as quickly as possible, and find the tone that’s best suited to whatever he’s got in his head. From an engineering standpoint, that’s always been my favorite aspect of working with Jack: When it’s time to make it happen, you have to be able to get that sound and tone perfected as quickly as possible.”

In the studio, Skibbe helped set up a semi-circle of amps, including a ’60s-era blackface Fender Vibroverb, a customized vintage RCA tube head and

a rare German Echolette B40N head/cab combo. Skibbe, along with fellow engineer Joshua Smith, exploited a raft of vintage mics for the amps, including RCA BK-5B, 77D and 44BX ribbon mics, Coles ribbon mics and large-diaphragm condensers like the Neumann U67, which Skibbe praises for their “nice midrange bite, which is still a little mellower than a U87.”

The mics, generally set in a close-mic position, if slightly off-axis, typically hit either the vintage preamps in White’s 1920s-era RCA mixing desk, or simply passed through a vintage Neve 1073 EQ/preamp. To add “a little jump to the sound” during mixing, Skibbe and Smith often printed the guitars with a Universal Audio 1176 and/or Fairchild compressor, and stereo panning effects were used to “create movement if a part sounded a little static.”

“A lot of people think in terms of relative volumes when they’re mixing,” says Skibbe, who is also a mastering engineer, “but the idea here was to keep two simple ideas in mind: movement and depth of field. It sounds strange to say, with all the interesting pedals and cool sounds Jack was getting, but actually the overarching idea was really just to keep the sounds as simple as possible, and keep the creative energy in motion.” — James Volpe Rotondi

(from left)
White’s
custom Fender
Jazz Bass,
Acoustasonic
Telecaster,
blue Three-
Wheel-Motion
Low-Rider
Telecaster and
Acoustasonic
Jazzmaster,
with his
pedalboard
featuring
numerous
custom pedals

“I WANT EACH
RIFF TO BE
LOUDER THAN THE
ONE BEFORE IT”



ABOVE: With his 1950s Kay Hollowbody at a White Stripes show, with drummer Meg White, October 1, 2005

BELOW: Performing with the Fort Knox “Skunk Baxter” Firebird at the 2018 iHeartRadio Music Festival, Las Vegas, September 21, 2018

And the first thing I asked them was, is there any way we can have fewer choices for sounds? I felt I only needed three sounds: one great electric, one great acoustic and then a sound with both together, because that solved a basic issue with how to play songs of mine that had acoustics and electrics either in different sections of the same track, or sometimes doubling the same parts. That came in real handy with the Raconteurs. Before that, I’d have to write acoustic sections with a long enough space at the end so I could switch back to electric.

This custom Jazzmaster electric you’ve got in process here looks pretty cool. Any interesting mods happening on that one?

Oh, yeah. So, Dan Mancini, my brilliant guitar tech and mission man, has been working a lot on this one. A while back, I showed Dan a clip of a guy who had incorporated some sort of synth device into his guitar, and I thought, That’s what I’ve been trying to do for years that I wish we could figure out! I remember speaking to Matt Bellamy of Muse about how he incorporated a Korg Kaoss Pad into his guitar

[eventually leading to the Kort Manson MB-1 Matt Bellamy Signature guitar], and I always thought that was a great idea. So Dan and I began talking, and right now he’s in the process of installing the guts of an Electro-Harmonix Pitchfork pedal into the back of this Jazzmaster. The intermittent switch can turn on the harmonies, but I can also use one of the pots to bend the pitch as well, just like with a Whammy Pedal. I think Tom Morello may end up getting jealous of this and have to put it on his guitar, too. I’ll have to send him a clip of it and see what he thinks.



Will that have a similar mix of Filter’Trons and P-90s like the Telecaster?

It will have some of the same features as the Tele, but the pickups will be different. I own this incredible Gibson Fort Knox “Skunk Baxter” Firebird that I played with the Raconteurs, and the mini-humbucker pickups on that, which Jim DeCola designed, are just so impressive. Honestly, it’s almost a shock every time I play it. So Tim Shaw at Fender is working on his own version of that type of mini-humbucker to put into this Jazzmaster.

From your well-documented 1964 JB Hutto Montgomery Ward Airline to your gorgeous Gretsch “Triple Green Machine” to your 1950s Kay Hollowbody to your EVH Wolfgang guitars, you constantly seem to be exploring unusual choices in pursuit of both new sounds and new/old aesthetics. What do you think drives that for you?

I just think it’s cool that there are these moments in your life where you might play through a certain pickup or type of guitar, but maybe it’s at the wrong moment in your life, and somehow you decide, “Nah, that’s not for me.” And then you revisit it 10 years later, and you’re like, “Oh my God, actually this is great. It just has its own kind of appeal.” Now, obviously this kind of experience only happens when you’re really deep into the tone thing. Plenty of people wouldn’t know the difference if you played them five different pickups in a row. They’d probably sound exactly the same to them. But when you’re a guitar player, you can really hear how the differences matter and how they influence your playing and tone.

Still, it’s unusual to meet even experienced players or luthiers as ready to flip the script on conventional guitar design as you are. Or as curious about it as you always seem to be.

Well, I’m really curious right now about this Billy Gibbons Gyrock Signature guitar from Wild Customs that’s just come out. It has this crazy roller device that has three pickups loaded in it that you can rotate to choose which pickup you want. You just spin the drum in there, and you can also pop the pickups out, put different ones in, and it’s very easy to do from the backplate. There’ve been other companies that have tried to do removable pickups and removable pickguards, but it seems like they’ve really figured it out here. Pretty cool to have three choices of bridge pickup on a drum, so you can literally “roll” from lipstick tube to a humbucker. That would be so cool to have. I dunno. I might get jealous and have to try those out.

So, to answer your question, I guess I just always want to know what’s happenin’! [laughs] 🎸



TURNING JAPANESE

INSIDE JACK WHITE'S PENCHANT FOR USING — AND CREATING — PECULIAR PEDALS.

"THERE'S THIS ONE pedal on the album that I bought because it has a little decal of the Japanese anime figure and 'vocaloid' character Hatsune Miku on it, and my son is so into anime and all that stuff," Jack White says, laughing. "It's called the Miku Stomp, by Korg, and the idea is that you play through it and, using vocal synthesis, for each note you play, Hatsune Miku sings a different syllable in Japanese! On the song 'Into the Twilight,' I did an entire guitar solo with it. So I guess I can play in Japanese now."

Quirky and unique pedals are nothing new for White, whose penchant for peculiar pedals began with his iconic use of an original Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi — allied with a DigiTech Whammy Pedal — during his White Stripes years. Since then, he has designed and developed his own full line of pedals and other gadgets with small gear manufacturers, distributing them through his Third Man Records and Third Man Hardware companies, based in Detroit and Nashville, and via thirdmanstore.com. Notable among these are the Third Man Bumble Buzz Fuzz Pedal, produced in collaboration with Chris Young of Vancouver-based Union Tube & Transistor (uniontone.com); the Gamechanger Audio Plasma Coil distortion box (gamechangeraudio.com); the deliciously weird Third Man Hardware Mantic Flex Synth-Fuzz; and the Coppersound/Third Man Triplegraph Digital Octave Divider (coppersoundpedals.com), which features three proprietary, foot-sized telegraph keys, along with an integrated FX loop.

"The Triplegraph and the Bumble Buzz are definitely the heavy hitters on *Fear of the Dawn*," White says. "Everything on my current board got used at one time or another, but the Triplegraph, Bumble Buzz and Mantic Flex for sure. To be part of the design team for a pedal really changed

everything for me because I got to finally express exactly what I want in a pedal. To be honest, as unique as it is, I was kind of surprised at what a big hit the Triplegraph has become. We can't keep it in stock."

White points to a custom version of the pedal in blue, white and black. "On the album, this is what's making the bass guitar sound like a guitar, or making the guitar sound like a bass," he explains. "It was an interesting process, where I kept checking back to whatever I had written the original riffs on. I might write the song with a lower-octave bass sound and then switch the Triplegraph up — flip it to the other side to a higher octave or to a lower octave. This way, regardless of what sound I started off on, this would make me rethink how I wanted to do it."

White's touring board is always evolving, but the blue-tinged array for his tour in support of *Fear of the Dawn* is spectacular for its visual aesthetics as well as its raw power and idiosyncratic sonic colors. Co-designed by guitar tech Dan Mancini, it's backed by one of Third Man's two-level, aircraft-grade aluminum Holeyboard Pedal Boards. It includes traditional choices, like an MXR Micro Amp Boost, a DigiTech Whammy Pedal and a rehoused Russian Big Muff, alongside a gaggle of Third Man Hardware stomps, including the Bumble Buzz, Triplegraph, Mantic Flex and Plasma Coil. There are a few rare birds, too, like a Honda Sound Works Fab Delay from Japan and a rare '80s-era Russian-made Spektr-2 Fuzz Wah (since replaced by a Dunlop 535Q Wah), as well as a few smart utility choices, including an ISP Technologies Deci-Mate Micro Decimator Noise Gate Pedal. Probably not a bad idea to have it slotted in toward the end of your signal chain when you have at least four full-on fuzz destruction devices on your board. — *James Volpe Rotondi*

The Korg Miku Stomp (left) and Coppersound/Third Man Triplegraph Digital Octave Divider (right) are among the quirky pedals on White's board

1964 “JB Hutto” Montgomery Ward Airline

Made by the Valco company, and distributed via Montgomery Ward department stores from 1958 to 1968, the “JB Hutto” Airline, which originally retailed for only \$99, is perhaps White’s most iconic guitar, as it took the lion’s share of the heavy lifting in the band that would be his vehicle to stardom, the White Stripes. Nicknamed the JB Hutto after the great blues slide guitarist who was its best-known proponent in its day, the Airline’s distinctive fiberglass body and space-age design made it a natural fit for the iconoclastic White, who so elevated the guitar’s public profile that Eastwood began making a fine replica version in 2000, albeit with a chambered mahogany — rather than fiberglass — body.





Fender Three-Wheel-Motion Low-Rider Telecaster (Blue)

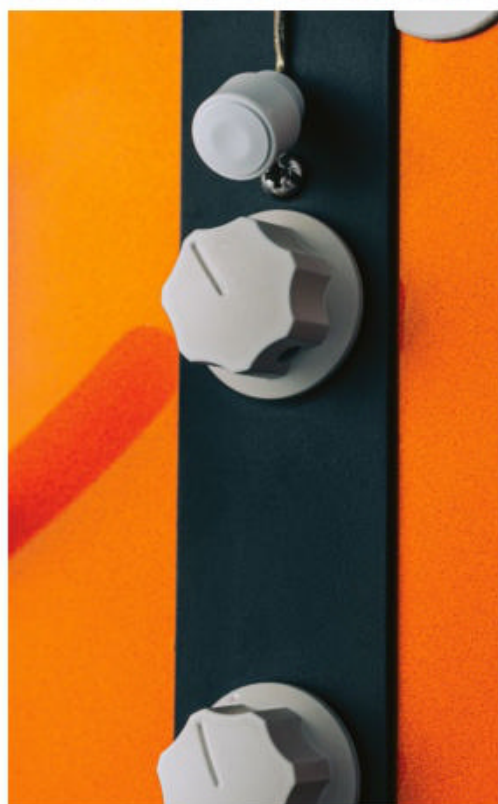
“The kill switch on the blue Telecaster is a simple momentary switch that we’d used on the EVH Wolfgang Signature Model,” says Fender/EVH Senior Master Builder and Project Engineer Chip Ellis. “That was one of Ed’s things. I don’t know if it was the first time that Jack had used an interrupter, or kill, switch, but when we sent Jack his first Wolfgang with the kill switch in it, he absolutely loved it. We built two custom Wolfgangs for Jack for that first solo tour, and since then, anything that we built for him after that got a kill switch. That’s just become part of Jack’s thing.” The Tele’s current Thinline Wide Range Humbucker once belonged to Jack’s brother Eddie, who had it on his Thinline. “I always loved that sound,” White says, “and I thought it would be cool to use my brother’s actual pickup on this guitar.”





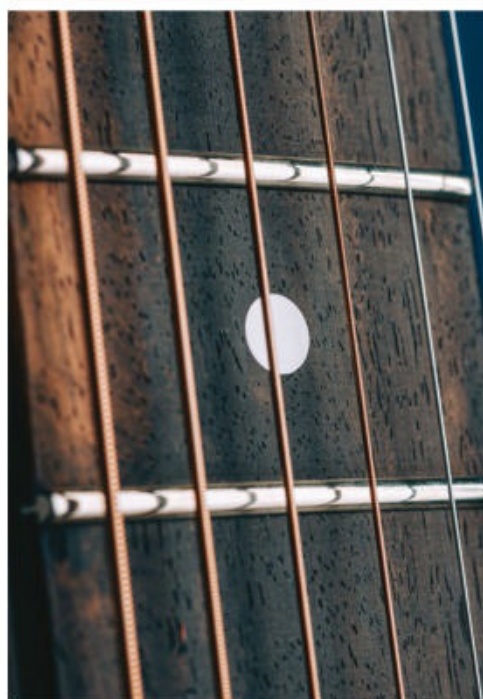
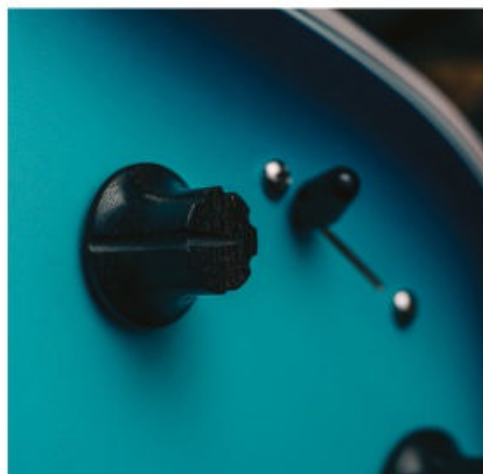
Fender Three-Wheel-Motion Low-Rider Telecaster (Copper)

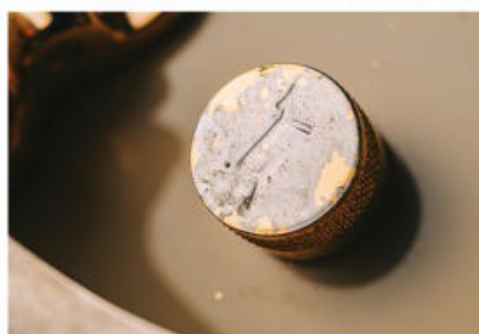
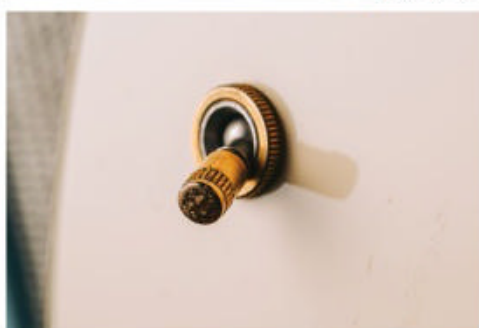
“The copper Telecaster was a gift that Jack received,” Ellis says. “It originally had the traditional B-Bender setup — the big one with the giant plate on the back and the huge mechanism, which he loved. It was clear that he wanted it to not be the typical Nashville Tele with the B-Bender. He wanted it to be very much his Tele. So there were lots of modifications. We basically hogged out a swimming pool rout in the body and glued in a fresh block of wood. We veneered the thing and turned it into something completely different with a Lace Sensor in the bridge position, something P-90-ish in the middle, and a Wide Range Humbucker in the neck. And then he wanted to add a G-Bender and the Hipshot bender for a dropped-D!”



Fender Acoustasonic Jazzmaster

"I'm the last guy you'd think would be interested in guitar modeling," White says, "and even when I first picked up the Fender Acoustasonic, I was still worried that it might sound a little fake. But that technology has come a long way from where it was 20 years ago." White's custom Acoustasonics have pared the available models down to just three, which keeps things simple for him during long shows with lots of moving parts. "There have been a lot of guitars over the years that have attempted to do both acoustic and electric sounds, but this is the first time I've heard a guitar that really does it well. And it's practical, especially for my solo catalog that has a lot of acoustic and electric in the same song. I used to have to actually write sections with pauses long enough so I could switch from acoustic to electric onstage."





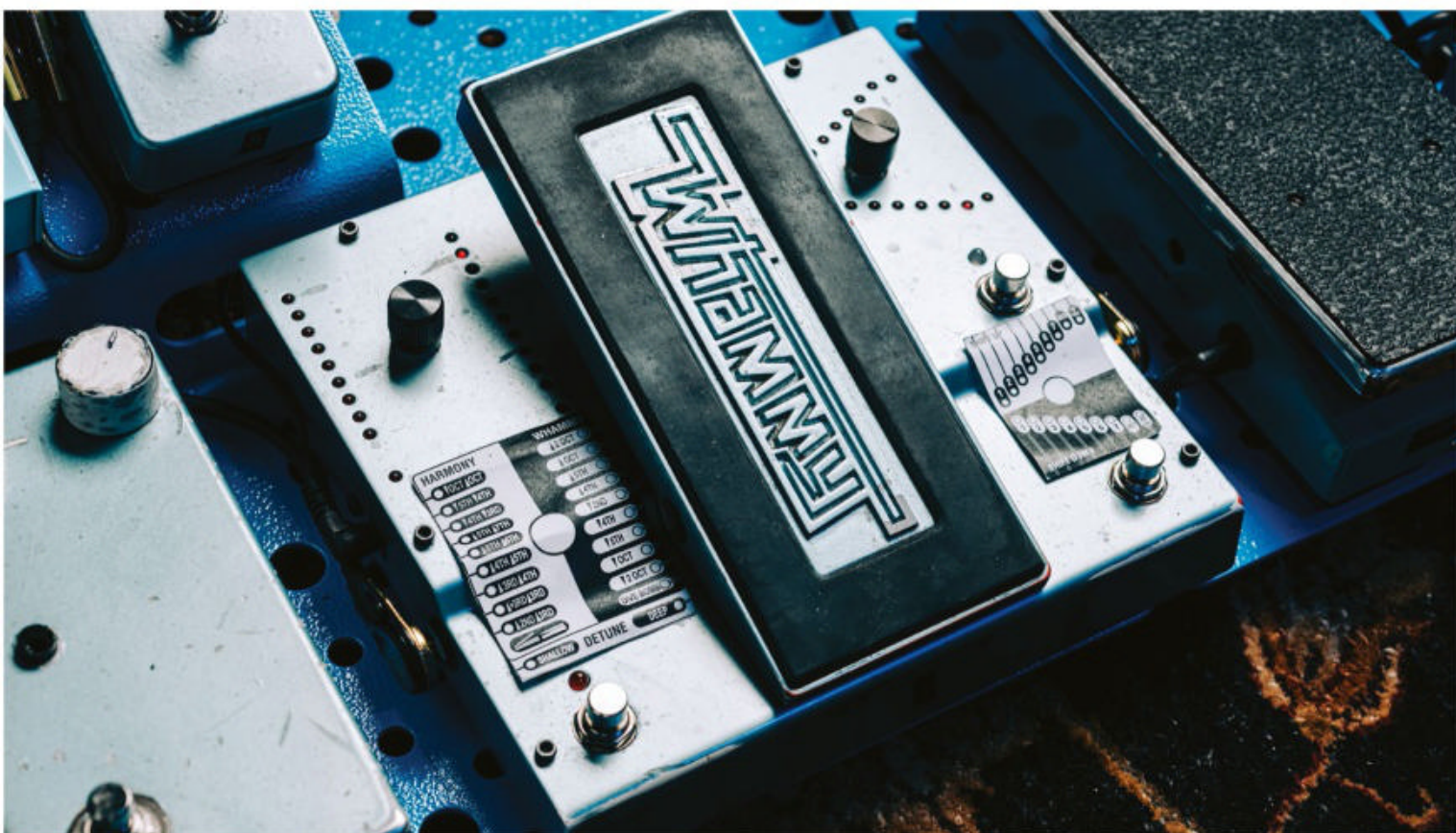
Gretsch G6199 Billy- Bo Jupiter Thunderbird

"This guitar was inspired by seeing Billy Gibbons play one of Bo Diddley's original Gretsch Jupiter Thunderbird guitars, which Bo had given to Billy," White explains. "When I was working on the theme song for the James Bond movie *Another Way to Die*, with Alicia Keys in 2003, my idea was that we'd play live at some point, and I'd outfit Alicia and myself and the entire band with these guitars, sort of like how Bo and his guitarist The Duchess did back in the day. While that never materialized, I ended up using the Billy-Bo for the 'Another Way to Die' video, and it then became the theme for my band the Dead Weather. You can even see that this particular Gretsch G6199 Billy-Bo Jupiter Thunderbird has the Bond/Third Man logo on it."



Third Man Holeyboard Custom Pedalboard

White's sweet sky-blue pedalboard is a two-level Third Man Holeyboard design, which can house up to 18 pedals at a time. The pedals shown here include a rehoused Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi, a.k.a. "Big Muff NYC" (middle left, opposite page) as well as a Demeter Tremulator TRM-1 and Electro-Harmonix Bassballs (left and right, respectively, at middle right, opposite). The Bassballs has since been replaced by an Electro-Harmonix Q-Tron+, while that groovy Russian Spektr-2 Fuzz Wah has been supplanted by a more reliable Dunlop 535Q Wah. Other pedals include the Third Man Bumble Buzz, Mantic Flex, Plasma Coil, Coppersound Triplegraph, Korg Miku Stomp, DigiTech Whammy, Honda Sound Works Fab Delay and more.







Leslie West photographed
in Chicago, March 26, 2009



TOP GUN

With fans that ranged from Pete Townshend to Eddie Van Halen and Yngwie Malmsteen, *Leslie West* inspired players across the genres with his singular playing style and a searing lead guitar tone that could belong to no other.

BY MARK MC STEA

WHEN LESLIE WEST passed away on December 23, 2020, at age 75, the list of guitar legends

queueing up to honor him told its own story. Many of them are among the players who appear on the new release *Legacy: A Tribute to Leslie West* (Mascot label Group), featuring contributions from such luminaries as Slash, Zakk Wylde, Yngwie Malmsteen, Steve Morse and Martin Barre, all of which highlights West's towering influence over rock and roll's many diverse strains. To the uninitiated, West is best remembered for "Mississippi Queen," an essential hard rocker from the classic rock canon.

Anyone with a deeper interest in the music West created, both as a member of Mountain and under various solo and band guises, would know his work is crammed with thundering riffs and exquisitely expressive soloing. It's a veritable treasure chest packed with memorable, moving songs.

In acknowledging the guitarist's monumental influence, nearly everyone sooner or later (and often immediately) seizes upon the same word: *tone*. The sound that West achieved with a P-90-loaded Gibson Les Paul Junior has been consistently cited as one of the most distinctive in rock music. His sonic signature is a thick, singing tone that has both weight and depth, and a vibrato that can sustain a note for days. His phrasing is all about economy. The man wasted not a single note to overplaying,



"I SAW ELVIS COME OUT AND GO, 'WELL IT'S ONE FOR THE MONEY,' AND THOUGHT, I GOTTA PLAY THIS THING"
LESLIE WEST

or tried to dazzle with bombastic flurries of speed. As he said many times, his aim was to create solos that could be sung, and music that moved the heart and soul, rather than impressed minds with its technical prowess.

He was born Leslie Weinstein, in New York City, 1945, but grew up in Hackensack, New Jersey, before returning to New York and living in several neighborhoods. After his parents divorced, he shortened his surname to West, gaining an air of showbiz cool as he cast off his Jewish ethnicity. He discovered the power of rock and roll as a child when he attended what he thought was a taping of *The Jackie Gleason Show*, the comedian's popular CBS television program. "My uncle used to write for Jackie Gleason, and my grandmother used to take me to all the tapings," West recalled. "One summer, she took me to see Jackie Gleason's *American Scene Magazine* [Gleason's show from 1962 to 1965], but there was a replacement. Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy

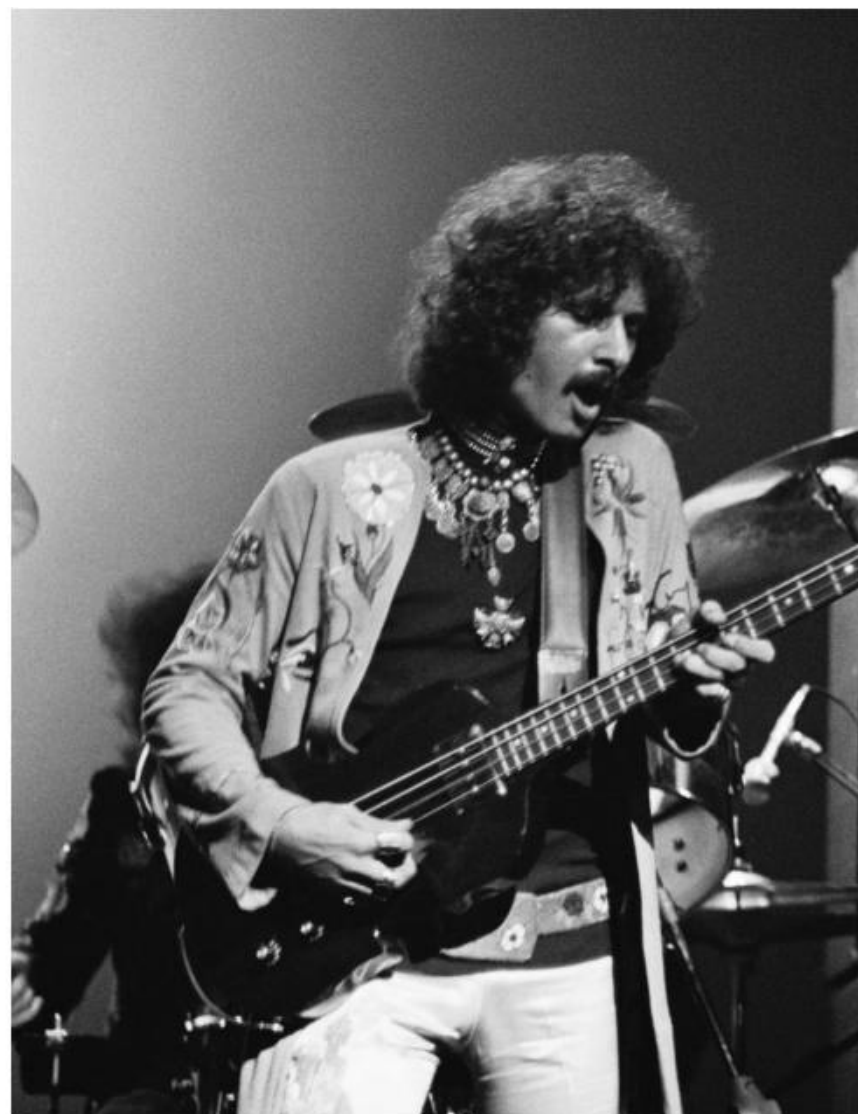
Dorsey had the stage show instead, and you know who was the guest on the show? Elvis Presley. That's when I started playing guitar — saw that son of a bitch come out and go, 'Well it's one for the money,' and thought, I gotta play this thing."

West's first taste of success came as a member of the Vagrants, a blue-eyed soul group from Long Island that scored a couple of minor regional hits with "I Can't Make a Friend," in 1966, and a burning cover of Otis Redding's "Respect," in 1967. A fascinating clip from this time, filmed in 1966 for the American-British teen movie, *Disk-O-Tek Holiday*, shows the Vagrants performing "Oh, Those Eyes," with West stepping forward for a great solo in an otherwise fairly unmemorable song. He mimes to the music with a 12-string Danelectro, but his main axe at that point was a 1958 sunburst Fender Strat that he bought with his bar mitzvah money. "When the Vagrants started, we all wanted new guitars, so I traded it in for — get this — a Kent," he once revealed. "A red Kent with three pickups! It was disgusting."

Although the Vagrants never achieved much success, playing in the band introduced him to multi-instrumentalist songwriter and producer Felix Pappalardi, who oversaw some of the group's work. When West parted ways with the Vagrants in 1969 to pursue a solo career, Pappalardi came along to produce and play on his solo album, *Mountain*. Although the record was named for the guitarist's larger-than-life physique, by the time it hit the stores West had proposed launching a power trio with that title and asked Pappalardi to come onboard, along with drummer N.D. Smart. West had good reasons to pick the talented producer, not the least being that he

West and Felix Pappalardi perform in Mountain on the Fillmore East's closing night, New York City, June 27, 1971

Performing with the Vagrants at the (pre-Fillmore East) Village Theatre, New York City, September 9, 1967



had worked with Cream, the ultimate supergroup, producing their 1967 psychedelic breakthrough, *Disraeli Gears*, as well as the two albums of theirs that followed: 1968's bluesy *Wheels of Fire* and 1969's swan song, *Goodbye*.

While it was obvious for *Rolling Stone* to describe Mountain as a louder version of Cream, given Pappalardi's background, it was also accurate. Mountain's music was packed with explosive, dynamic blues and rock masterpieces that could sit comfortably alongside the likes of Hendrix, the Who and Ten Years After, all of whom performed that year at Woodstock, where Mountain appeared on the second day of the festival. They scored the gig — only their third show as a band — due to the fact that they shared an agent with Hendrix. "We were getting five grand for it, which was incredible money for your third show in 1969," West revealed.

At the dawn of the age that brought forth a new breed of powerhouse guitar hero, his guitar playing immediately resonated with listeners hungry for unique voices. West always said he wasn't a fast player — all that mattered to him were tone and a desire to have a vibrato like a classical violinist. As he said in 1987, "I'm no great guitarist technically, but you wanna know why people remember me? If you take a hundred players and put them in a room, ninety-nine of 'em are gonna sound the same. The one who plays different...that's the one you're gonna remember. I learned that you should think about the song, think about the chords you're playing behind. Most of my solos come right out of those chords. You play the notes within the chords and try to pick a melody from there."

DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (VAGRANTS & MOUNTAIN)



His powerful guitar tone was matched by his equally imposing declamatory vocals. The contrast with Pappalardi's softer voice does much to belie the clichéd description of Mountain's music as the forerunner of heavy metal. That simplistic tag overlooks how broad the scope of their music was, with both light and shade in their sound and across their albums.

West's guitar tone was as immense as the man himself. His reputation was built on his use of the humble Les Paul Junior with a single P-90 pickup. West saw the advantage of having the extra space that a single-pickup guitar gave him when it came to generating his distinctive use of pinched harmonics. "You gotta have the Junior to do 'em right, because of the single pickup," he said once, when demonstrating his technique. "See the way the strings can bend down when you hit 'em? If there was a neck pickup, it'd be in the way. You bury the pick with your thumb and you have all the room you need." By the time the first Mountain album was recorded, West had a couple of Juniors from the 1950s, both a single and a double-cutaway. "The single-cutaway had a better sound than the other one," he said. "I used to string them with standard sets of La Bella strings, but I'd substitute a .010-gauge A banjo string for the high E string and move the other five strings down one slot, because you couldn't get extra-light sets at that time."

When it came to amplifying West's gutsy approach, a happy accident led him to finding the perfect fit. "It was just two Sunn stacks with the [Sunn] Coliseum PA heads," he explained. "They were Hendrix's old amps, re-Tolixed and reconed. See, the PA heads had those four inputs and a master volume,

which started the distortion thing for me. This was years before guitar amps had master-volume controls. The head had huge transformers and gigantic KT88 tubes, and the cabinets were loaded with Eminence speakers, which never hurt your ears even with the treble all the way up." It was that amp that appeared on 1970's *Climbing!*, Mountain's debut album, which included the song that would forever be linked with West: his raging hard rocker, "Mississippi Queen." "I'd turn the mic volume and the master all the way up, and overdrive the thing like crazy," he said.

Arriving on the heels of their Woodstock performance, *Climbing!* received strong reviews and reached number 17 on the *Billboard* chart, propelled by both "Mississippi Queen" and "Theme For an Imaginary Western," a song written by Cream bassist Jack Bruce for his first solo album. By this time, Smart had moved on to join Great Speckled Bird and Corky Laing had come onboard, solidifying Mountain's most celebrated lineup.

West's talents were widely lauded by the rock cognoscenti. When the Who arrived in New York City in 1971 to record what would become *Who's Next*, Pete Townshend asked him to perform in the studio with the group so that they could track the songs as a live act and eliminate guitar overdubs. Although West's recordings with the band were unused after

★★★
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 THING ABOUT
 LESLIE WAS THE WAY
 HE PLAYED BLUES.
 IT WAS JUST
 VERY NATURAL"**
 ROBBY KRIEGER

Onstage with
 Mountain in
 San Francisco,
 April 1970





Onstage with
Jack Bruce
in West, Bruce
& Laing,
in Copenhagen,
in 1973

the Who subsequently remade the album back in England, some of them, including an early version of “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” showed up as bonus cuts on reissues of *Who’s Next* and on an extended version of the leftovers compilation *Odds and Sods*.

Mountain’s second album was, in the minds of many, their best. *Nantucket Sleighride* came out in 1971, peaking at number 16, one spot higher than their debut. Among the highlights were West’s opening track, the hard-charging “Don’t Look Around,” his funk-boogie “You Can’t Get Away” (a

worthy successor to the similar “Mississippi Queen”) and Pappalardi’s haunting “Travellin’ in the Dark.” But it was the title track that showed Mountain at their best, a prog-like mini opera about whalers leaving for sea and the perils they faced. Key to the drama was an instrumental centerpiece that showed all four musicians — by now Mountain had been fortified with keyboardist Steve Knight — whipping up a formidable storm of hard rock, powered along by West’s gloriously overdriven

power chords. Oddly, this fragment served as the theme tune for Britain’s long-running political discussion show *Weekend World*, in the 1970s. Unaware of its use, West was apparently bemused by the enthusiastic response the song would get when Mountain performed it in the U.K.

The end of 1971 saw Mountain release *Flowers of Evil*, comprising a side of live tracks recorded at New York City’s Fillmore East that same year, and a side of new studio tracks. The fact that the band could deliver only one side of original material demonstrates how their relentless workload had drained their creative energies. Worse, relations between West and Pappalardi had begun to deteriorate. The guitarist explained in later interviews that the change came when the bassist claimed a quarter of writing royalties for “Mississippi Queen,” despite having written what West called “a handful of notes.” As the guitarist admitted, drug use exacerbated their problems, and after a 1972 U.K. tour, Mountain broke up.

It was here that the Cream connection reared its head again, when in 1972, West and Laing teamed up with Jack Bruce to form the supergroup West, Bruce and Laing. The lineup generated intense record industry interest, with Columbia signing the band to a lucrative contract deal. *Why Dontcha*, their 1972 debut album, was a worthy entry into West’s catalog, but is

★★★
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LESLIE WEST

inferior not only to the previous Mountain studio albums but also to Bruce's work with Cream. While it sold well, the band struggled with their follow-up, *Whatever Turns You On*, which just scraped into *Billboard's* top 100. By then, fighting had taken its toll. West, Bruce and Laing split up. Joined tenuously by their contractual obligations, they issued one last disc, the 1974 concert album *Live 'n' Kickin'*. For a band that had been together just 18 months, it was a fruitful union, albeit a short-lived one that produced little of consequence.

Apparently, the time apart had done West and Pappalardi some good. In an unlikely turn of events, Mountain reformed to tour Japan in 1973 and released the live album *Twin Peaks*. After extensive touring both overseas and in the States, they released a new studio album, *Avalanche*, in 1974. While not a bad disc, it again fell short of the first two Mountain records, and the group carried on touring until the end of the year, when they broke up once again.

West continued to play live and recorded a couple of solo albums, including 1975's *The Great Fatsby* and 1976's *The Leslie West Band*. He was rumored to have been in line for a shot at replacing Mick Taylor in the Stones, a match-up that seemed ideally suited on paper, given the way that guitar duties were divided between Taylor and Keith Richards during Taylor's tenure. Unfortunately for West, Ron Wood, who seemed born to be a Rolling Stone, snagged the spot, returning that group's sound to the organic interweaving of guitars that had been its modus operandum prior to Taylor's arrival.

West briefly lost his love for music in 1977, only to be reinvigorated by the emergence of Van Halen's self-titled 1978 debut album. While Eddie Van Halen's pyrotechnical guitar technique might seem a million miles away from West's deeply blues-rooted approach, he was a huge admirer of the elder man's playing. As the two formed a friendship, West's desire to play returned, even as the brand of music he was known for fell from favor. Perhaps the only concession he made to the emergence of the era of shred was in his change in equipment. In addition to abandoning his Les Paul Junior for a variety of pointy 1980s axes, he developed a particular fondness for headless guitars. West also began to introduce some subtle whammy-bar histrionics into his playing, perfectly exemplified in his 1992 appearance on *The Dennis Miller Show*, in which West was at his most commanding, plugging a Steinberger into a pair of Marshall stacks as he roared through "Mississippi Queen" before making a segue into "Nantucket Sleighride."

Mountain would continue to reform sporadically over the subsequent decades, although without

PEAK EXPERIENCE

BLACKBERRY SMOKE'S CHARLIE STARR RECALLS PERFORMING WITH HIS FRIEND LESLIE WEST.

THE RELEASE OF *Legacy*:

A Tribute to Leslie West demonstrates the respect felt by so many axe heroes for Leslie West's unique talents. The breadth of artists that contributed to it — from contemporaries like Robby Krieger and Martin Barre to shred legends such as Yngwie Malmsteen and Marty Friedman — highlights the fact that a truly great artist can transcend all genres. Blackberry Smoke's Charlie Starr formed a close friendship with West in his later years and was keen to be a part of the star-studded album project.

Why did you choose to cover "Silver Paper," from *Climbing!*?

I don't believe you could go wrong with any Mountain track, but this one has always hit home with me.

What is it about Leslie's playing that spoke to you?

His playing is like a soulful singing voice. He never overplayed. His guitar was just an extension of his own amazing singing. Plus he has the best tone ever.

Any favorite personal memories of time spent with Leslie?

I got to play "Mississippi Queen" with him at the Beacon Theater in New York City. We



jammed for something like 10 minutes before he even played the riff. It was mesmerizing.

What are the highlights of Leslie's back catalog for you?

When you make two records as strong as *Climbing!* and *Nantucket Sleighride*, it's hard to single out specific highlights, but for my money, not much is better than "Sittin' on a Rainbow" and "To My Friend" [both from *Climbing!*]. Those two pieces of music cover the spectrum.



With Joe Satriani at the Warfield, San Francisco, November 15, 2008

Pappalardi, who was shot dead by his wife in 1983 under suspicious circumstances. Released in 2007, their Bob Dylan covers album, *Masters of War*, was an unlikely entry in the group's catalog but was much better than might have been expected. West's heavyweight guitar-and-vocal combo powered many of the tracks to hard-rocking heights that allowed him to take ownership of the songs. Perfect examples of the Mountain blitzkrieg approach are "Everything Is

Broken," "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Highway 61 Revisited" and "Subterranean Homesick Blues." West's ability to shift from those powerhouse vocals to a softer, more reflective treatment was perfectly showcased on his acoustic reading of "Blowin' in the Wind," before it morphs into a dinosaur-sized stompathon.

West recorded a number of solo albums for various labels over the years and continued to tour extensively, even through the various health problems that dogged him throughout his life. He had managed to deal

with long-standing addiction problems only to be diagnosed with diabetes in the mid 1980s, and then had further problems when he developed bladder cancer around the turn of the millennium. West recovered but had new issues with his diabetes, which led to him having to have his right leg amputated at the knee in 2011. He continued to play live shows and record, even after so many setbacks. He lost a considerable amount of weight which undoubtedly improved his overall health, but sadly he died from a cardiac arrest in 2020.

West's legacy is clear in the number of artists who sought to work with him during his career and in the tributes that were reported at the time of his passing. Even if he were remembered only for "Mississippi Queen," that one song would be enough to cement him as one of the most strident axe-slingers in the history of a genre not short on killer guitarists. However, West had so much more to offer, and an exploration of his back catalog will reveal numerous riches, not only from his early period of success with Mountain but also right through to the later blues albums that he recorded as a solo artist. In truth, you can't go far wrong with any of his albums, as any Leslie West solo is a masterclass in tone, touch and taste from the ultimate "feel" player. 🎸

★★★
**"LESLIE COULD
 TAKE A SIMPLE
 TWO- AND THREE-
 NOTE PHRASE
 AND JUST SELL IT
 WITH THAT GRITTY
 DETERMINATION.
 HE KNEW
 EVERYTHING TO DO"**
 STEVE MORSE

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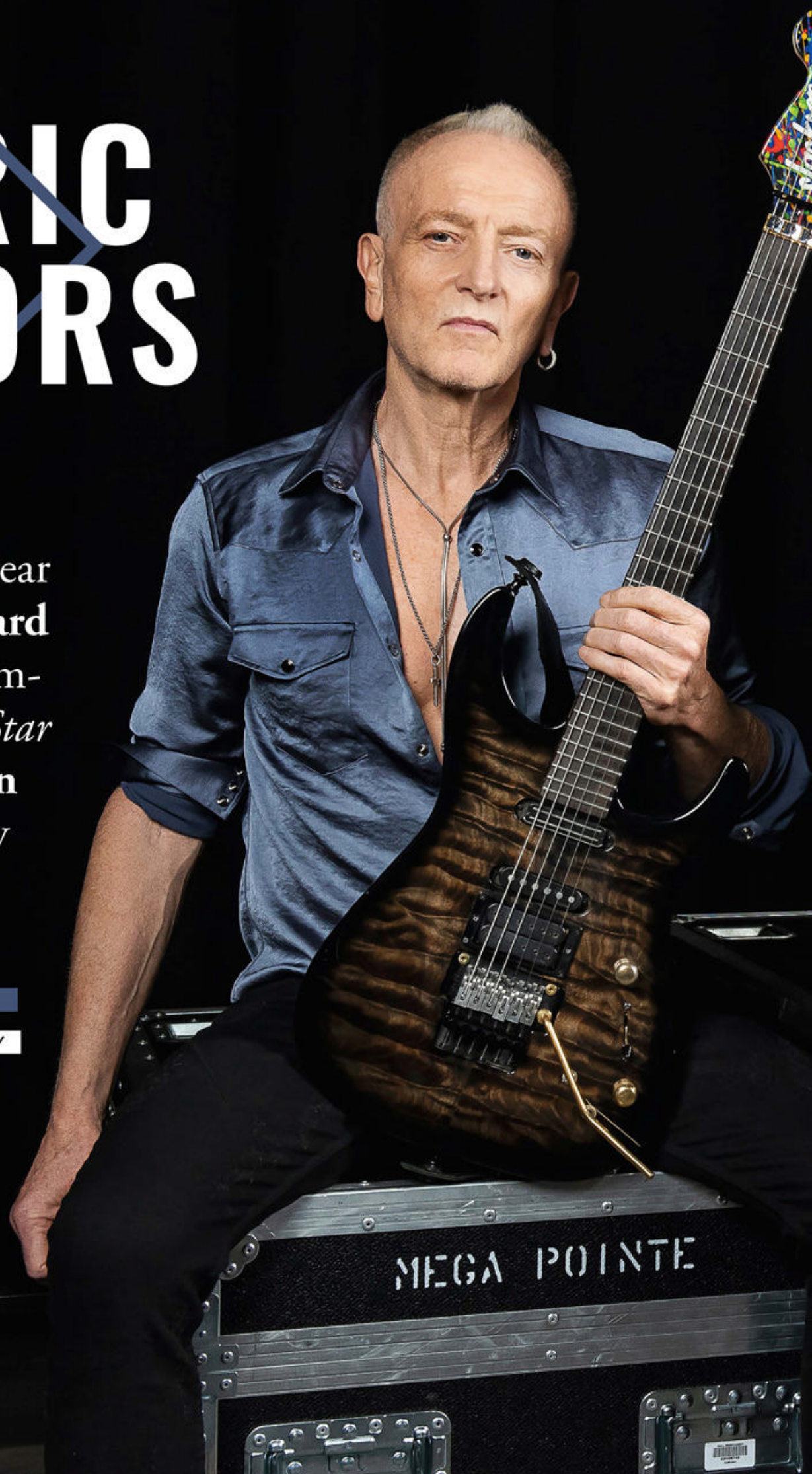
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ELECTRIC WARRIORS

Following a seven-year absence, **Def Leppard** return with the glam-inspired *Diamond Star Halos*. **Phil Collen** explains how they got it on like the old days.

BY MARK MC STEA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
WILL IRELAND





**“WE WERE ABLE TO KEEP
OUR DEMOS, WITH THE
SPIRIT INTACT, RATHER
THAN HAVING TO REDO
THEM TO ACHIEVE A BETTER
SOUND QUALITY AND LOSE
SOME OF THE SPARK”**

1. This model, named Red Sugah, is a hybrid of some of Collen's other guitars. It has a 1996 PC1 Trans Black Mocha body with a 2009 30th Anniversary PC1 splatter neck.

2. Note the reverse headstock here, unlike the production-model PC1 guitars.

3. Collen's custom model is loaded with a Floyd Rose vibrato with an FU-Tone titanium saddle and tungsten block.

4. The trio of pickups includes a DiMarzio Super 3 humbucker (bridge), a DiMarzio Custom Sugar Chakra (middle) and a Jackson Sustainer/pickup (neck).

DEF LEPPARD'S new album, *Diamond Star Halos* (Universal UMC), their first since *Def Leppard* in 2015, is swathed in 1970s influences, from its classic Marc Bolan-quoting title to stomping retro rockers like the lead track, "Kick." Leppard have never been afraid to proudly wear their influences on their sleeves, whether it be on *Yeah!*, their 2006 collection of '70s covers, or their 1994 hit remake of Sweet's "Action."

Recorded individually by band members in their own home studios, *Diamond Star Halos*' 15 tracks have all the power and glory of the multimillion-selling monsters *Hysteria* and *Adrenalize*. The group's extremely stable lineup still features guitarists Phil Collen and Vivian Campbell, singer Joe Elliott, bassist Rick Savage and drummer Rick Allen. Collen took time out to speak with *Guitar Player* about the making of *Diamond Star Halos* and reflect on his 40th year in the band. He is understandably excited at the prospect of taking the record out on the band's first tour since lockdown, headlining at stadiums across the States with Mötley Crüe, Poison and Joan Jett as support acts.

Where would you place *Diamond Star Halos* in your catalog?

I actually think it's our career-best album on a number of levels. Our last record, *Def Leppard*, almost felt like it was our first, in a way, as it was done without any kind of agenda. We weren't trying to get on the radio and have hits, et cetera, and this one felt like a real step up again from there.

The album's title references a line from the T. Rex hit "Bang a Gong (Get It On)." Fittingly, the album has numerous '70s references.

Without a doubt. For me and Joe, the era that we became baptized into music, so to speak, was really between 1971 to 1975. This is actually almost a concept album in a way, although we didn't realize that at first as we were recording it, but it is so '70s. We even have Mike Garson, who appeared on some of David Bowie's great glam-era albums, playing piano on a couple of tracks. My solo on "Goodbye for Good This Time" was a deliberate nod to Mick Ronson's influence and his playing on tracks like "Lady Grinning Soul." My end solo on "From Here to Eternity" was based on a Ritchie Blackmore feel. There are numerous '70s references that definitely come through all over the album.

I guess American audiences may not recognize how big an influence the glam-rock era was on so many bands. Aside from Bowie, it was more of an underground thing there and had more of an impact on New York City punk acts like the New York Dolls.

Yeah, exactly. You had to be in the U.K. to really understand the impact of that era. I remember how significant it was to see Bowie performing "Starman" on *Top of the Pops*, and how huge an effect that moment had. I'd already been into Deep Purple and bands like that, but when I was 14 and saw Bowie on the TV, it really spoke directly to me, and Joe was exactly the same. A lot of people don't realize how great someone like Marc Bolan was. That level of genius, you know?

I believe the new album was recorded individually by each band member in their own home studios.

Yes that's right. Although my home studio is actually my living room table. [laughs] I've been using Guitar Rig 5 for many years now. The *Man Raze* album that I did in 2011 [PunkFunkRootsRock] was recorded with the same presets as this record. I'd record ideas, pretty much as a demo usually, then send them to Joe and also to our producer, Ronan McHugh. We didn't ever get too glossy. On the song "Kick," for example, we just left my demo guitars on because they had such a great vibe. For the backing vocals on that,

I actually did them here in my living room on a hand-held Shure SM58. It just sounded great, so we kept it. Normally we'd have refined parts a little bit, but we didn't on this album; we kept it raw. Everyone did the same thing with their parts. Joe actually did the lead vocal for the song "This Guitar" on his laptop's microphone.

It is ironic, I guess, that this was recorded for a fraction of the budget of *Hysteria*, but sonically there isn't anything to choose between them, which says a lot about how technology has advanced.

It really does, and I'd really like to say to anyone: As long as you know what you're putting down, you have a good clean version and the performance is great — and you have someone who knows what they're doing in the mixing process — then you can achieve something that really satisfies your creative, artistic intent. With the way that we worked, we were able to keep our demos, with the spirit intact, rather than having to redo them to achieve a better sound quality and lose some of the spark in the process.

"WE REALLY SEEM TO HAVE FOUND A NEW LEASE ON LIFE AS A BAND. WE'VE STARTED WORKING ON THE NEXT ALBUM ALREADY"



In terms of recording gear, presumably you are still plugging straight into the computer.

Yeah, there isn't a single amp on there, or on the last album. The last few albums that I've recorded have all been with Guitar Rig 5. I only have a Focusrite Scarlett interface as well. Nothing fancy.

Were there any new guitars this time around?

I did use some different stuff this time. During lockdown I'd ordered a few different, cheaper guitars. Squier had done a reissue of the Starcaster, which I used for the intro to "This Guitar." For the solo, I used a Squier Telecaster, which I played on a bunch of albums in years gone by. It's a really cool guitar. It is just literally as I bought it. I didn't change anything, and it sounds great.

Other than that I used my newest signature Jackson PC1 in black walnut. I bought two basses over lockdown — a Squier Precision and an Epiphone EB-3. I was just really curious to see what they'd sound like for when I'm recording demos. They both sounded really good, particularly the Squier, which is particularly interesting when you think how cheap they are to buy, and they were great straight out of the box.

Campbell has been a Les Paul man since his Dio days. This 2018 model Vivian Campbell Les Paul Custom was from a limited run of several hundred guitars by Gibson, all finished in Antrim Basalt Burst. It features TonePros hardware, with all metal parts finished in satin nickel, and DiMarzio Super 3 and Super Distortion pickups.



What is interesting about this album, and indeed most of the previous Leppard albums, is that there are guitars everywhere, but nothing ever sounds cluttered. There is always a great sense of each part existing in its own space.

Well, with this album, most of the stuff was written by me and Joe, either separately or together, but from the get-go, you write with the vocal in mind. On that initial level, it becomes pretty obvious where a certain degree of space needs to exist anyway. But Viv and I know each other's playing pretty well, and we know what works for the song. The song is the reason for everything.

In terms of who takes a solo on a particular song, is that a fairly organic process, or do you debate who'd be best for it?

It just works itself out. We don't plan it, but if someone hasn't done a solo for a few songs, then we tend to think it's the other person's turn, but it's never really thrashed out as such.

"Kick" really makes a strong 1970s glam statement.

Yeah, I wrote it with Dave Bassett [*Shinedown, Halestorm, Daughtry*], and when we started I had a rough idea of the chorus and the bpm of the track. We're always trying to write a stadium-rock classic like "We Will Rock You" or "I Love Rock 'n' Roll," which is actually pretty hard to pull off. It's really easy to come up with something cheesy that just doesn't sound authentic. We went back to the feel of Slade, T. Rex, Gary Glitter and Mott the Hoople, and the track almost wrote itself.

"From Here to Eternity" almost sounds a little like a James Bond theme in parts.

Yeah, I know what you mean. Rick Savage wrote that one, and it felt like it already had its own identity from the start. We were discussing how it had a film noir vibe, and that developed as we recorded the song.

The country feel on "Lifeless" is an unusual direction for the band.

That has my favorite Vivian guitar solo. He played that on a Telecaster. When I started writing it. I definitely had a Stonesy vibe in my mind, maybe a little like if U2 were to play a country song perhaps. I recorded a lot of the parts on my PC1, and I was getting a Tele sound anyway, but Vivian's solo just really nailed it for this one.

There is a very trippy, Beatles vibe to "Liquid Dust."

Yes, it has a very Eastern/Indian feel to it, which I guess is what suggests the Beatles in the late '60s, when they were embracing psychedelia. That song is

actually about reincarnation, and I wanted the music to mirror that otherworldly idea.

What is the instrument that sounds like a mandolin at the start of “U Rok Mi”?

That’s actually a ukulele. I bought it for my daughter Samantha a few years ago. Then my other two daughters wanted one, so everybody got one, and then everyone in the band got one. [laughs] I just started playing around with the riff, and then it turned into this song.

It’s an interesting track, as it has a Led Zep “Going to California” feel at the start before morphing into almost a hip-hop bass-led stomp on the verses. It covers a lot of stylistic territory.

Yeah, it does. It has that almost-folk Zep thing going on, but then just as you’re getting comfortable, it wrong-foots you and changes gear and direction, which I love to do in a song.

I think this record has the best bass sound Rick [Savage] has had on a Leppard album, particularly on “Open Your Eyes” and “Gimme a Kiss.”

I absolutely agree. What is interesting is that I actually said that to Sav, that it was the best sound he’d ever had. The funny thing is that, because we were all recording at home, with whatever instruments we had to hand, we were often using things we wouldn’t normally take into the studio. Sav was just using his old Fender Precision, which had been sitting around the house for years. But again, thinking back to the ’70s, the Precision was all over most of those great records.

Will the upcoming tour be the first time you’ve played in a stadium since lockdown?

It will be the first time we’ve played live at all since then. It’s going to be a very strange feeling at first, I’m sure. Really weird.

It’s been seven years since the last album. Are you anticipating a similar interval until the next one.

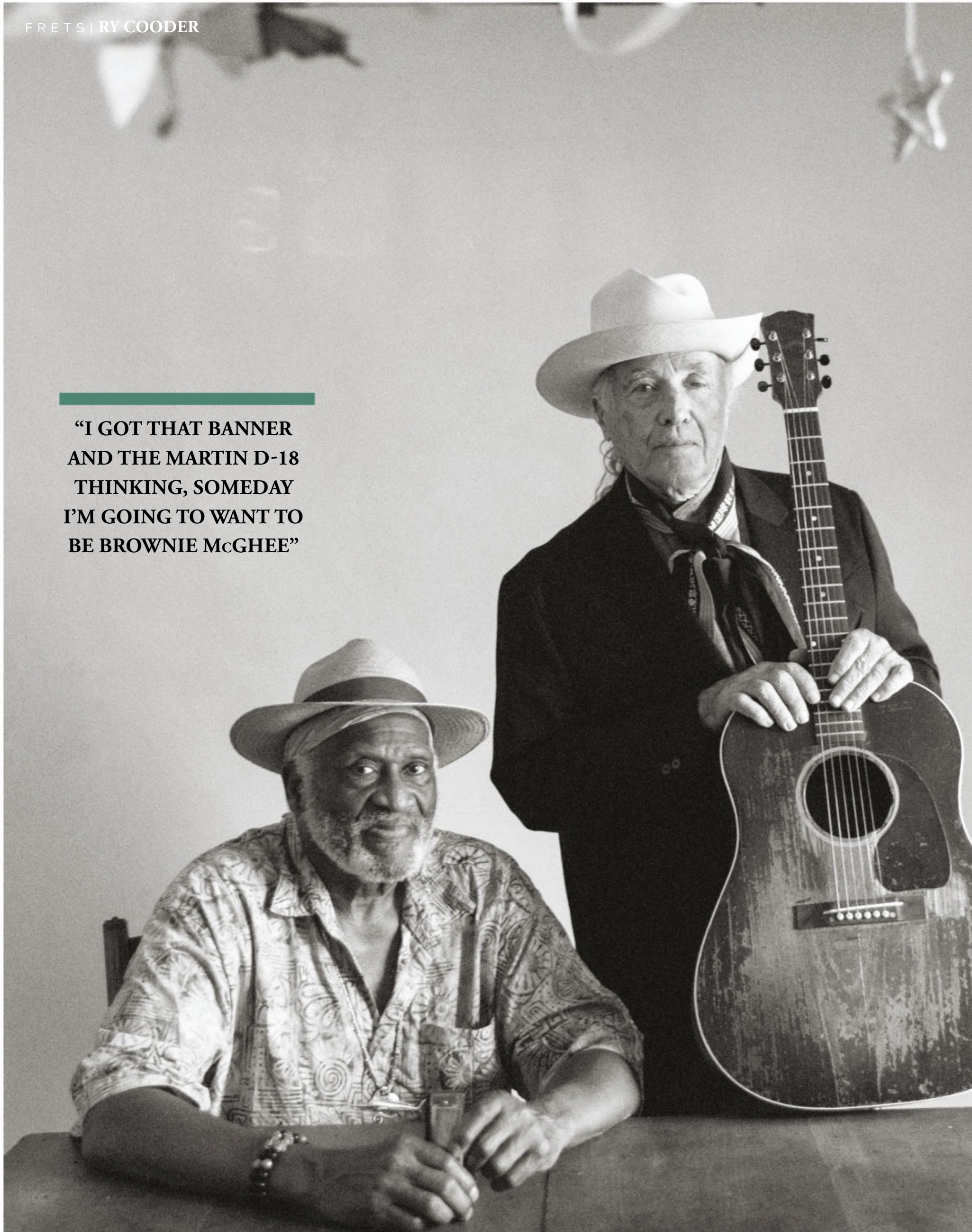
No. Me and Joe got on such a roll writing for this record — which is essentially a double album — that we still had a few more tracks on hand, one of which we completely finished. That never normally happens when we record an album. We usually use up everything we’ve got, and sometimes we’ll even be trying to come up with material at the last minute while we’re in the middle of recording. We could have actually kept going, recording more songs. We really seem to have found a new lease on life as a band. We’ve started working on the next album already.



This is your 40th year in the band. I guess it would have sounded pretty surreal if someone had suggested to you back in 1982 that you’d be discussing your music 40 years later.

It’s really weird and scary to contemplate the passing years. I would never have thought we’d still be playing to this level so far down the line, with stadium tours selling out. What is interesting is that it is more exciting now than at any other time in our career. Joe and I were doing an interview with a radio station last week, and we were both saying that the old cliché that youth is wasted on the young really is true. You appreciate everything so much more this far down the line, and that, combined with all the years of experience, makes everything so much more rewarding. We’re able to be this big rock band and get all the upside of that, and we’re so grateful for that and all the opportunities it brings. ■

**“I GOT THAT BANNER
AND THE MARTIN D-18
THINKING, SOMEDAY
I’M GOING TO WANT TO
BE BROWNIE MCGHEE”**





Ry Cooder and (left) Taj Mahal. Their new album reunites them as a latter-day Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.



AMERICANA REDUX

In our second installment,
Ry Cooder reveals the source
of his authentic guitar tones on
his new album with **Taj Mahal**,
*Get On Board: The Songs of
Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee*.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ABBY ROSS

LAST MONTH, RY COODER began to take us along on the journey of how he and Taj Mahal got back in the saddle together after decades apart and recast themselves in the roles of folk-blues duo Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. Vocalist/harmonica player Terry and acoustic guitarist McGhee maintained a prolific partnership from the early '40s to the mid '70s, and Cooder and Mahal's new album, *Get On Board: The Songs of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee* (Nonesuch), is a nod to the songsmiths, who inspired them to join forces as the Rising Sons in 1965.

Today, Cooder and Mahal are Americana icons in their own right, intent on keeping the flame and passing the torch to those who may find new inspiration in the time-honored tunes and perhaps offer new interpretations for future generations. Traditionals such as "Midnight Special" and "Pick a Bale of Cotton," as well as the stylist elements that inform originals such as "Pawn Shop," have been handed down through a century-long line of known and unknown troubadours using the six-string as a soapbox. McGhee was a Piedmont blues stylist, and for these sessions Cooder adopted everything from his technique using vintage metal finger picks to his choice of acoustics, including his primary guitar, a 1946 Martin D-18. As our conversation continues this month, the slide icon offers plenty of insights into both his acoustic and electric work and choice of amplification.

How did Brownie McGhee's backstory inform your arsenal of instruments?

The sweet sound on the album cut "Pawn Shop" is a Gibson "banner" guitar, a 1943 J-45 [featuring the slogan "Only a Gibson is Good Enough" in a golden banner on the headstock]. I got that and the Martin D-18 thinking, Someday I'm going to want to be Brownie McGhee.

So I had them ready to go. I knew Brownie had recorded with his banner J-45 because I'd seen pictures of him. He had tried to be an R&B guy for a while, you know. He had a pickup in an electric, and it sounded terrible, but he did try to do that juke thing. It didn't work out for him. He had to figure out that the audience had changed. Then he and Sonny Terry aimed the act at a White audience, and gave up on the Black audience. They weren't interested anyway, you see. Things had changed so radically at that point.

How did you cop the electric juke sound for the lead on the first track, "My Baby Done Changed the Lock on the Door"?

I had to put something in there. We basically cut the album live, including the vocals, but I overdubbed bits and pieces of other stuff, just to give it some juice, you know, fill it up a little bit. That's my much-modified Strat that I use for bottleneck most of the time. People know what that is.

The Coodercaster?

Sure, that's what people call it, and it's a nice instrument. It's always been useful, especially onstage, because you can really execute. It's got a great neck and you can really get around on that thing. It's no good in standard tuning — sounds terrible — but it really rings out in open tunings. Weird. Who knows why instruments sound good. Some do and some don't. They may look the same, but none of them are the same. That guitar just worked out. I've tried to do clones of it and never got there, but somehow that's a good one.

How did you get that gritty howling tone?

Sometimes you get lucky. That's a White

amplifier. [Forrest White] worked for Leo Fender, and for some reason he had his own subsidiary amp brand within the Fender family for a few years back in the '50s. This amp is a little bigger than a Champ and a little smaller than a Deluxe, with a little bitty eight-inch speaker. But it makes a big sound on a microphone. Terrific. When you crank it up, it'll howl, like you say, but at a low volume, which is really hard to get. Most amps don't sound good in a recording situation where you don't want to be so goddamn loud.

I used a couple of echo devices. I forget which ones. I'll use anything that meshes with the track. Your overdubs have to coincide. They have to be contoured to fit and make sense sonically. I was in a hurry. These days I don't want to spend too much time

messing around with sounds. I want to get it done before I get tired. I did all of the overdubs in a single day. Taj, Joachim [Cooder's son, who plays drums and bass on the album] and I recorded the whole record in three days. We did each song in one or two takes: "Map it out, but don't blow the groove. Don't get tired of it. Stop what you're doing, start up again, and record the goddamn thing." I'll bet that's how Brownie and Sonny did it. They wouldn't have needed a bunch of takes. And in those days you'd save tape. [Folkways Records founder] Moe [Moses] Asch would come in with a couple of reels and say, "Don't go beyond this, because we don't have any more tape."

"OH, GOOD LORD, NO, A LOAR? I'VE NEVER MADE THAT KIND OF MONEY. ARE YOU KIDDING?"

How about tunings?

It's mostly in standard, because Brownie was in standard. He played in [the key of] G sometimes, and in E most of the time. In our case, I would ask Taj if he had a key he that he liked for his voice or harmonica. "Beautiful City" is in G — well, it's on a big guitar so it's tuned lower than G, but it's in G position [standard tuning lowered down a step and a half yields the sound of an E chord when fingering an open G chord].

The guitar on "Beautiful City" is a weird, monstrous 1905 Adams Brothers acoustic that's as big as a guitarrón with a short little neck. So you can only play it

in the first position, but it has this huge, ridiculous sound that's like having its own echo chamber.

I've never seen another one or heard of the Adams

Brothers, so I assume

it was a special order. It's an amazing guitar but you have to tune it down like Lead Belly, so you can't play it in a lot of keys. It's only good in E and G, but it's fantastic in those two. It really rings like a 12-string.

It was fun to try something different to give variety to the album. "Pawn Shop" is played in standard tuning. I never play bottleneck in standard tuning because it's un-harmonic, but I broke my rule in this case because I didn't want to retune the guitar and lose some chord positions. I didn't want to overthink it. "Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee" is in open D and played on a Harmony Sovereign from the '30s.



Cooder and Mahal (at forefront) pose with the Rising Sons in 1966

There's some fine slide on "Wine." Do you use the same one on acoustic that you use on the Coodercaster?

Well, sure, I've only got one. It's the same bottleneck slide I've been using for over 40 years, since the '70s. You get to where you like something because it does what it does. Another slide with another surface like metal would be entirely different. Something about the weight is very important. If it's too light, it sounds terrible. If it's too heavy, you can't get around. Then you start banging into the guitar with the doggone thing. So the weight of mine is thick enough that you get a good drag on it, but not so much that it slows you down.

The mandolin in the "Hooray Hooray" studio video looks nice and old. Is that a Loar?

Oh, good lord, no, a Loar? I've never made that kind of money. Are you kidding, six figures? Mine is a 1919 [Gibson] F4. It's pre-Loar. It's not pricey; I think I paid \$600 for it in the '60s. You couldn't get near it for that today, it's a nice instrument, but it's not a Loar. That F4 is very loud, which makes it good for playing rhythm and blues. When Taj and I were sitting there, I said, "Hey, didn't I play mandolin on your first record?" He said, "Yeah," and I said, "Well, this is the same one."

In a recent Meet Your Maker feature, Lloyd Baggs [of L.R. Baggs] mentioned that he got his start in acoustic amplification working with you. He said that you had a rig the size of a refrigerator, and that the whole quest was to achieve a more realistic sound while reducing the rig to, say, at least the size of a microwave. Where are you at in that evolutionary process?

It's very simple: I gave up trying to do that. It's a losing battle. The problem has never been solved, as far as I know. Now, one thing I've got here [at home] in this '20s Stella is a little Seymour Duncan pickup. It's not so big as to cover up bass frequencies, and it's got two little controls: one for volume and one for EQ. That's good because you can roll off the low end.

That sounds like the Active Mag. Does that seem right?

I think so. It's great on this Stella 12-string, because it's got enough high end. But of course the real deal is to have a good microphone, like a Neumann. Then you can jack that up and just flavor the sound in the mix at the place you're playing with the pickup. The trick is to get enough midrange so that you don't play too hard, because that's the problem. If the pickup is magnetic like an electric guitar pickup, then you've got too much midrange and not enough top. It sounds tubby.

The exception was Paul Bigsby, who had secret shit. He built some magnetic guitar pickups that are completely unique. Paul was such an exceptional guy, and he had a good design. He had good wire that he made out of an aluminum alloy used on aircraft carriers that he got from Lockheed Martin, because he worked there during World War II. There's not as much top end as you might like in that 16k range, but they sound amazing whether they're on a solid-body electric or an acoustic. I've got a couple of those. They're nearly impossible to get now, unless you spend the Earth.

I gave up going onstage with acoustics. Now, when we were on tour with Ricky Skaggs and the Whites a few years ago, I wanted to play my D-18, but I had to have some amplification. So I put the Bigsby pickup on there and ran it through a Magnatone amp that didn't color the sound too much, like a Fender. That provided some size so that it sounded good onstage, and then the engineer could mic it up without having to do a lot of re-equalization, which is the death of the thing.

You don't use piezo pickups at all?

Oh, good Lord, no, I hate those things. That's awful. And I've tried everything, believe me. That refrigerator setup I had was no good. It was heavy and impossible to control. It was a bad idea, just the wrong road entirely. But now me and Taj are going to do some shows together, so I had to ask myself, What the hell am I going to play? You can't



Cooder performs with the Chieftains, Glasgow, Scotland, January 26, 2010

say, "I'm going to reproduce the living-room sound we got on the album on the stage," because it can't be done. What you need onstage is totally different. You have to reconfigure, so I started playing archtops with good old DeArmond microphonic pickups in them. That's a great sound if you have the right one and the right amps, which I think I do. I'm 75 today. You'd think I'd know something. You have to scale everything to the music, so figure out what makes the music sound right. It's okay to sound different from the record. This will be more of a juke joint effect, like at a barbecue, which is good because the audience needs to toe-tap and get happy. We need to make sure we put that out there.

Can you cite some specifics about the archtops you're planning to use when you take the stage with Taj?

One is an awesome 1940 Gretsch Synchronatic. It's one of those cat's-eye archtops, and it's a fantastically raw guitar, very bold. The other one is a 1949 [Gibson] Super 400, and it's a pure blues axe. You can do anything. It's huge, and so it sounds like a million bucks when it's amplified. I think we're ready, you know? We've got some gas in the tank this time. 🍺



Steve Vai performs at 2015 Rock in Rio, September 25, 2015

PEACE, LOVE AND GOOD HAPPINESS STUFF

*Inside Steve Vai's highly appealing and inventive rhythm playing approaches on his masterpiece, **Passion & Warfare**.*

BY CHRIS BUONO

STEVE VAI'S EPIC 1990 release, *Passion & Warfare*, left the guitar community and anyone else within earshot slack-jawed. From the first notes following the drum roll in "Liberty" to the final crescendo of "Love Secrets," *Passion* was a feat of artistic excellence. A collection of music of this magnitude has been tirelessly, yet deservedly analyzed from every angle. Nevertheless, there's an element that's not in the conversation enough — Steve's rhythm playing. Originally hailing from Carle Place, New York, less than an hour east of New York City, Stevie Vai had that groove that Ace

Frehley was singing about in '78 embedded in his musical DNA, and it's all over this record.

It's not out of the question to think a study in Steve Vai's rhythm playing would be ruled by outlandish syncopation and otherworldly chord voicings. While Mr. Vai is more than capable of such havoc, and this lesson will examine some choice examples, you'll find many of Steve's approaches to his rhythm playing are culled from staples and not alien love secrets. The gold to uncover in this lesson is how Vai peppers a well-documented ironclad

foundation in all things guitar with next-level rhythm techniques while never leaving the song nor the listener behind.

Perhaps Vai's greatest rhythmic attribute is his command of his rhythmic groove, or pocket, within his energetic and invigorating compositions. **Ex. 1** is a good illustration of this approach, with an odd-meter power-chord riff similar to one heard in "Greasy Kid's Stuff." Though in $\frac{5}{4}$ meter, this palm-muted groove in the key of E minor is inviting to play, with its inverted power chords voiced as perfect 4ths intervals.

RAPHAEL DIAS/GETTY IMAGES

Mixing three-note power chords with some slippery single-note riffing on the low E string, **Ex. 2** reveals a reworking of a riff from “Erotic Nightmares.” Parked in 1st, or “open,” position, this riff, which is based on the A Aeolian mode (A, B, C, D, E, F, G), slithers between commanding A5 and F5 chords and variations of palm-muted sequences made up of E, F, G on the 6th string before resolving the rhythmic tension with overdrive-friendly voicings of Csus4 and G5.

PERHAPS VAI'S GREATEST RHYTHMIC ATTRIBUTE IS HIS COMMAND OF HIS RHYTHMIC GROOVE, OR POCKET

Inspired by the verse riffs heard in “The Audience is Listening,” **Ex. 3** keeps you in the key of A minor and the open position with an uptempo sequence of A5, G5 and C5 chords along with palm-muted open low E notes before leaving you to shift up to the 12th fret to play the 4th-string-rooted, high-voiced D5 and C5 chords. Both examples are rock guitar 101 skeletons, but all Vai in heart and soul.

Moving a few steps past two- and three-note power chords and cleverly placed palm mutes, **Ex. 4** shifts a few gears, regarding tone and technique. Played with a clean sound, this four-bar arpeggiated idea in the key of E minor is patterned after the rhythm track Steve played at the top of “For the Love of God” and makes use of careful barring and arching while introducing the sound of major and minor 2nd intervals. To perform these voicings, your fretting fingers need to “stand tall” and cannot lean diagonally, in a way that unintentionally deadens adjacent strings. As for the makeup of these chords, bars 1 and 3 have minor add9 voicings that contain minor 2nd intervals, half steps, while the Fmaj7sus2 in bar 3 has a major 2nd, or whole step. This kind of usage of

Ex. 1

E5/B D5/A E5/B D5/A E5/B E5/B D5/A E5/B D5/A E5/B G5/D

Ex. 2

A5 F5 A5 Csus4 G5

Ex. 3

G5 C5 A5 G5 A5 D5 C5

Ex. 4

Em(add9) Am(add9) Fmaj7sus2 Cmaj7

2nd intervals within chord voicings injects a tightness to the sound of Steve’s voicings, helping to contribute to the uber-coolness of his music.

Ex. 5 takes the arpeggiation platform a step higher with a figure inspired by the rhythm part heard at the top of “Blue Powder.” Set in the key of A minor, the added movement horizontally up and down the neck will further challenge the notion of careful fretting. A useful trick

in this situation is to not hold yourself to fretting entire chords before playing the first note of an arpeggiation pattern. This approach is even more valuable when open strings are involved. Forming the chord as you play will afford you a little extra time, so that you can better focus on the accuracy of the fretting.

Circling back to “nested” 2nd intervals, **Ex. 6** is informed by a moment from Steve’s acoustic comping in “The

Riddle.” The opening Eadd9 is from Ex. 4’s playbook, regarding the voicing, and the next two chords combine open strings with notes fretted higher up the neck to generate clusters of 2nds. For instance, check out the minor 2nd between the 8th-fret A $\sharp$ and the open B string in the E6sus $\sharp$ 4/A $\sharp$ voicing at the beginning of bar 2. To double your pleasure, the following chord, on beat 3, includes what’s called a *cluster*, given its adjacent and compounding 2nd intervals: B - C $\sharp$, C $\sharp$ - D $\sharp$, D $\sharp$ - E.

If you find the sound of clusters alluring, jump over to **Ex. 7**, where you’ll find an ascending chord scale consisting of three-note diatonic clusters based on the F Lydian mode (F, G, A, B, C, D, E). As you play the seven chords up the neck, adjust the fingering of the middle note on the B string to be played either with your 2nd or 3rd finger. If the Bm(add $\flat$ 2) chord in bar 2 creates a feeling of déjà vu, it’s because it’s what Steve plays sparingly during the opening riff to “The Animal.”

And if our previous example wasn’t enough to convince you of a cluster’s value, **Ex. 8** takes its cue from the infectious breakdown in “I Would Love To.” To play this and Ex. 7, keep in line with the tactic of fretting the chord as you play it while holding down the notes as long as you can. The sonic charm of clusters is the result of the chord tones ringing together. When playing Ex. 8, keep your fret hand’s 4th and 3rd fingers planted on the B and G strings’ 22nd and 21st frets as you maneuver through bars 1 and 2. In bars 3 and 4, hold down the 15th-fret D with your 1st finger as you fret the following 17th-fret C with your 3rd finger.

Staying with “I Would Love To,” I’ll show you another great-sounding technique from Steve’s bag of rhythm guitar tricks. **Examples 9a** and **9b** illustrate chord work that moves quickly between two related voicings to create a sub-melody while alternately “chugging” on a palm-muted 5th-string root note. Ex. 9a demonstrates the concept with E- and D-rooted chords, ping-ponging between B/E and E then A/D and D. Ex. 9b does a similar alternation with

Ex. 5

Am Am(add9) Bm7add11 Csus2 Gadd2/B

Am7 Am(add2) Fmaj7sus2 Esus4 Gsus2

Ex. 6

Eadd9 E6sus $\sharp$ 4/A $\sharp$ Emaj7(6)/C $\sharp$

Ex. 7

Fadd2 Gadd2 Am(add2) Bm(add $\flat$ 2) Cadd2 Dm(add2) Em(add2)

Ex. 8

Esus4 G6sus2 Esus4 G6sus2 Am(add4) Cadd4 Am(add4) Cadd4

two-note voicings of A/B and Bm7. In this case, use an index-finger barre for the 2nd-fret notes, as this will set you up nicely for the descending slide of perfect 4ths at the end of bar 2.

Adding to the long list of disciples of Jimi Hendrix, Vai has recorded a handful of performances that make use of the time-honored bluesy and melodic clean-tone rhythm guitar approach pioneered by Curtis Mayfield that Jimi made standard fare. **Ex. 10** recalls a moment heard in “Sisters,” with a I - V progression in the key of G (G - C) that’s treated with must-know Hendrix-isms in bar 1. Still, in bar 2 you’re in Vai’s world, with fretted root notes held on the lower strings as you play natural harmonics (indicated by diamond-shaped noteheads) on the middle and higher strings (indicated by diamond-shaped noteheads) on the middle and higher strings. Once again, arching your fretting fingers is paramount here.

VAI HAS RECORDED A HANDFUL OF PERFORMANCES THAT MAKE USE OF THE CLEAN-TONE RHYTHM GUITAR APPROACH PIONEERED BY CURTIS MAYFIELD

Shifting gears to the idea of moving, or “walking,” bass lines, **Ex. 11** is reminiscent of the walking line Steve lays down after it got too loud in “The Audience is Listening.” You can either fingerpick this — with your thumb handling the bass notes on the 5th and 6th strings and your index and middle fingers plucking the adjacent-string dyads — or hybrid pick it — with the pick on the bass notes and your middle and ring fingers handling the rest.

Did you really think a lesson on anything to do with Steve Vai would be nary of at least one moment that stops you in your tracks to ponder if this guy is human or not? In the spirit of the clean-toned syncopated intro heard in “Answers,” **Ex. 12** goes for your strumming hand’s jugular. This uptempo

Ex. 9a

Ex. 9b

Ex. 10

Ex. 11

progression of “spread-voiced” sus2 chords sounds as if it’s in anything but the common time signature it is. What’s more, every chord played in these four bars is strummed with a downstroke while muting the 3rd and 4th strings. (Tip: Fret each note with a different finger, without barring.) This passage will create instant chaos if you don’t follow the prescribed fingering approach

and learn it at a slow tempo initially, before ramping it up.

If this inspires you to dive deeper into Steve’s rhythm playing, I suggest taking a good listen to some of the works that bookend *Passion & Warfare*, starting with his first solo album and the pair of David Lee Roth albums Vai appears on. Going back in time, you’ll find stealth chording in “Viv Woman” from Vai’s 1984 debut,

Flex-Able, deep-pocket riffing on tunes like “Bump ‘n Grind” and “Shy Boy” from Roth’s *Eat ‘Em and Smile* and gorgeous arpeggiated layering on “Damn Good,” featured on Roth’s follow-up, *Skyscraper*, to name a few. While you’re on the latter, don’t skip over the grooves Steve throws down throughout “Knucklebones” and “Stand Up.”

The instrumental successor to *Passion and Warfare*, 1995’s *Alien Love Secrets*, features its own gaggle of rhythm guitar excellence. From the expansive Hendrix-style comping in “The Boy From Seattle” to the overdriven chording in “Die to Live” and the Wes Montgomery nod through thumb-stroked octaves in “Tender Surrender,” all the way to the onslaught of syncopated downstroked chugs and off-kilter walking bass lines heard in “Kill the Guy with the Ball,” this seven-song EP is Steve Vai extending his best rhythm-guitar foot forward. 🎸

Ex. 12

Example 12 is a musical notation for a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, key of D major. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The exercise is divided into two systems, each with a treble staff and a tablature (TAB) staff. The chords and notes are as follows:

System 1:

- Chord: Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C)
- Chord: Dsus2 Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C, E, G)
- Chord: Dsus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C)
- Chord: Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C)
- Chord: F#sus2 Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C, E, G)

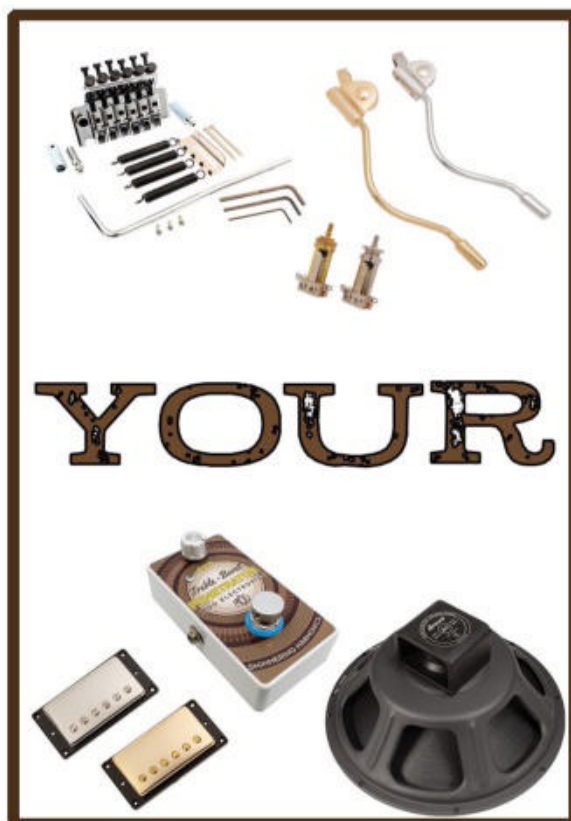
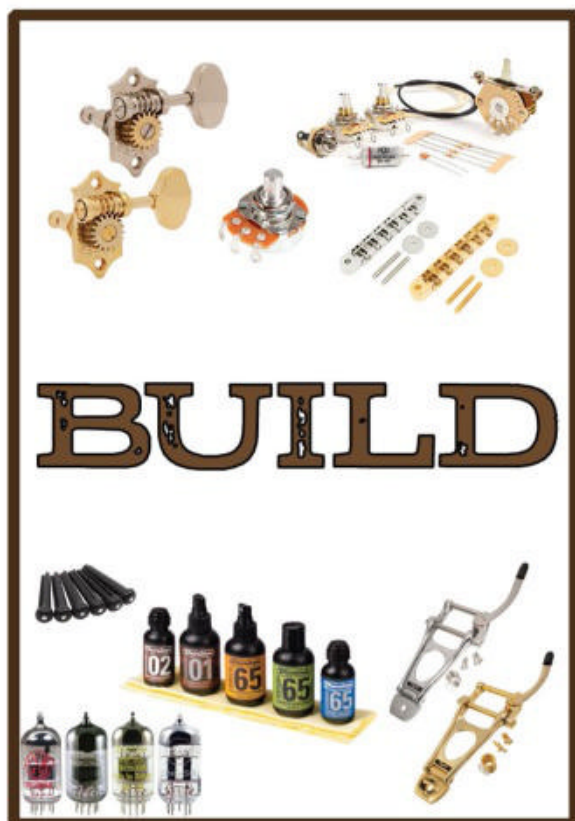
System 2:

- Chord: Dsus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C)
- Chord: Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C)
- Chord: F#sus2 Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C, E, G)
- Chord: Dsus2 Esus2 (Notes: D, F#, A, C, E, G)

The tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each note, with 'x' indicating a muted note. The exercise is played with a pick.

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Writing and Recording Acoustic Rock, Pt. 2

Spirit Hustler, “Circlin’ the Sun”

BY JIMMY LESLIE

A NEW TUNING can change the soundtrack of your life. So can a new guitar, and so can your buddies. Since becoming Frets editor in 2016, I’ve poured all the glorious gear goodness and artistic wisdom bestowed upon me into an epic recording project documenting my transition from Strat cat to percussive acoustic fingerstylist. Lucky Recording Company became the treehouse where musical friends could exchange ideas without limitations, and Spirit Hustler was born of an acoustic heart and layered with cosmic electricity. “Circlin’ the Sun,” the second single from our self-titled debut album features a skywalking slide solo by Jules Leyhe. The backstory to the tune is a stellar example of how being amenable to fresh ideas at all times can be transformative in the long run.

BE OPEN TO TUNINGS

Alternate tunings can be incredibly inspirational, but I wasn’t all in until Tronical sent an automatic tuning system that made switching a cinch. The device eventually broke, but I was hooked on going modal, meaning no 3rd. To get to E modal from standard, raise the fifth string up a step, to B, and the fourth up a step, to E. Drop the third string down a step and a half to match the E on the fourth string. E modal is similar to the open E favored by Duane Allman and Jules Leyhe but with the huge difference of no major 3rd on the third string. The whole tuning is one big power chord!

That sets the framework — or as it’s known in Indian classical music, the “raga.” You determine if you want a

major or minor tonality by what you play over the droning open strings. The wildest thing about having the same note on the middle two strings is that playing them simultaneously chimes like a 12-string. The intro to “Circlin’ the Sun” consists of a descending major scale played in double-stop unisons on the middle strings from the 12th fret down to open strings. The tricky part is that before each descent there’s a quick upward gliss (slide) that adds to the Eastern vibe.

USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM

Leyhe plays precisely the same lick in bottleneck style on a Gibson SG with laser-like focus on each tone. That adds a Derek Trucks or Ali Akbar Khan kind of spice to the mix. In the old days I would have simply grabbed my Strat and used a whammy bar to approximate the feel. Instead, I called Jules, who played the Duane role in our tribute, the Allmond Brothers Band, and he crushed it. He actually played lead three times on three sessions: once on the live track, again on an overdub session, and then again when I challenged him to take it to another level. When I asked him to hit the end lick an octave higher, he informed me that would put him past the top fret. I said, “You’re playing slide, so give it a try.” He nailed the sky-high coup de grâce and we both fell out laughing.



Spirit Hustler’s acoustic/electric duo is slide man Jules Leyhe and singer/songrocker Jimmy Leslie

FOR THE JOB

Another buddy system story: I had an acoustic that didn’t fit my style, and my friend Paul Hayward was in a similar situation, so we swapped instruments. Now he gigs with my former guitar, and my “new” guitar (dubbed “Paul”) was perfect for “Circlin’ the Sun” because it’s a Taylor 816ce Grand Symphony, which is a bit bigger and sounds grander than the company’s flagship Grand Auditorium.

The booming Grand Symphony shines with chime in the drone tuning, and can be heard clearly right off the bat in the introduction. FYI, Taylor updated the 816ce in 2020 with a Builder’s Edition that earned an Editors’ Pick in that year’s Holiday issue and is pictured here from a “Circlin’ the Sun” video shoot. 🎸

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets Editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player– and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn all about his psychedelic folk rock group at spirithustler.com.

LAVA

ME 3



TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

THE ERA OF the smart acoustic-electric guitar is upon us, and Lava Music is developing some brilliant ideas on its first models. They include the carbon fiber ME 3, on review, here as well as the Blue Lava Touch, made with high-pressure laminate, which is up for review next month. Both models feature the HiLava system (HI = Human Interface) with L3 smart preamp, and it's a game changer. The system is loaded with apps that offer everything from internally actuated effects (no amp required) to a practice program, onboard recording and looping, all of it accessed with a multitouch display that functions like a smart phone. Lava even created a social element to let users share original creations via the Lava+ app, which pairs the guitar with an actual smart phone and expands programmability. Traditionalists may sneer, but Lava is aiming squarely at progressive players, and it makes sense to merge their two primary obsessions: smart phones and guitars.

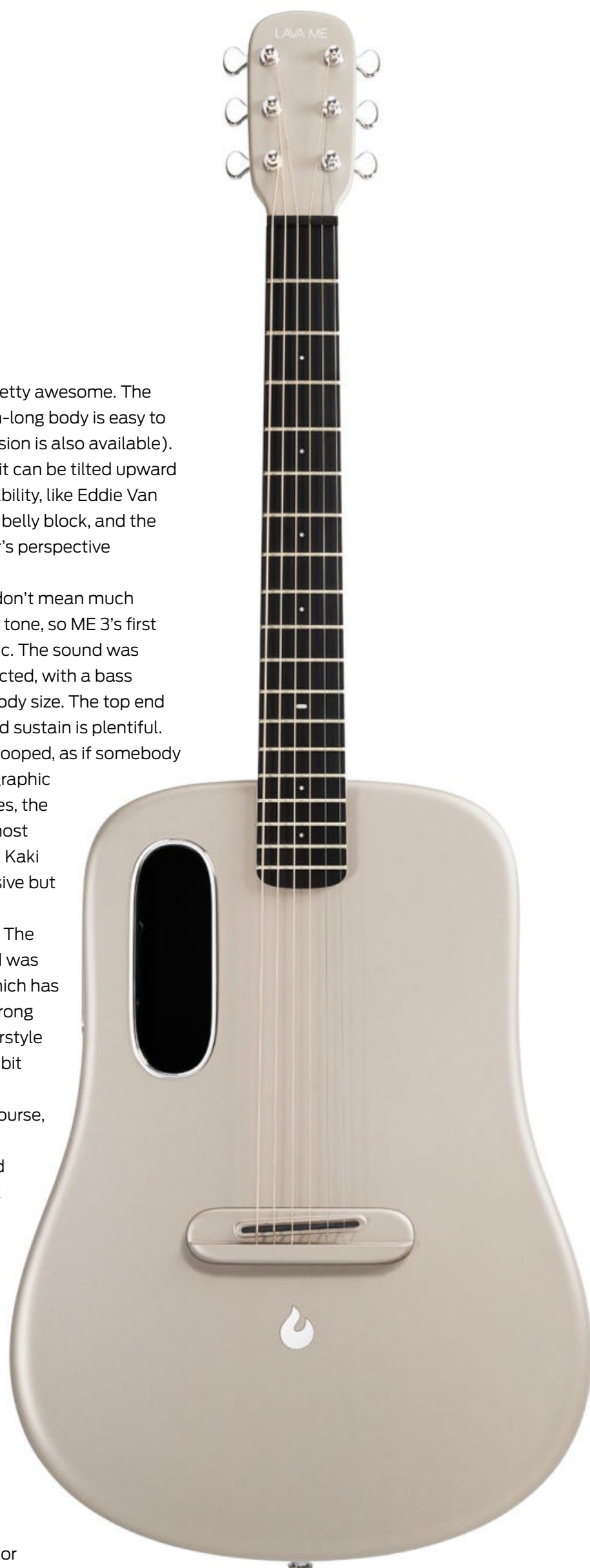
Lava Music was founded in 2013 and introduced its uni-body carbon fiber design on the first ME (pronounced "me") model in 2017, followed by the ME 2 and Pro. The ME 3 adds revolutionary smart technology with improved 4-Mass carbon fiber, designed for deeper bass and longer sustain.

Lava has created an extremely distinct body style, and their totally different take is good to see. I for one appreciate the *Futurama* factor. Although I ordered a blue-finished ME 3, I got gold and ended up loving the way the shiny finish added to the rectangular body's spacecraft aesthetic, with the oval sound port located in the upper bout. The one-piece body feels sturdy and smooth all the way down the finished neck, to the headstock loaded with supple silver tuners. The shape is a bit weird to handle at first, and it's likely to slide around on your lap unless secured with a Lava Ideal Strap 2 (sold separately for \$59). The design is ingenious and the strap is great. Once that's locked and loaded, the guitar's

ergonomics become pretty awesome. The relatively small 38-inch-long body is easy to manage (a 36-inch version is also available). When it's strapped on, it can be tilted upward for advantages in playability, like Eddie Van Halen did with his little belly block, and the volume from the player's perspective increases as well.

Bells and whistles don't mean much without a good organic tone, so ME 3's first test was totally acoustic. The sound was much bigger than expected, with a bass boom that belies the body size. The top end has a silky shimmer, and sustain is plentiful. The mids are heavily scooped, as if somebody set a smile curve on a graphic EQ. Among guitar heroes, the carbon fiber sound is most closely associated with Kaki King. It's plenty percussive but has a more rounded, deep-dish kind of tone. The sound when strummed was brushier than wood, which has a snappy attack and strong middle presence. Fingerstyle notes are precise but a bit mellowed.

Carbon fiber is, of course, extremely stable amid fluctuations in heat and humidity. Get that neck set right and it stays that way. But there was a downside here in terms of adjustability. I found the factory action to be tad high, and the remedy suggested in the manual requires shaving down the underside of the saddle with heavy sandpaper. It would be nice if a second saddle or



SPECIFICATIONS

LavaME3

CONTACT lavamusic.com

PRICE \$1,199 as tested for 38" with Space Charging Dock

NUT Fiber composite, 1.73" wide

NECK AirSonic 2 carbon fiber

FRETBOARD High pressure laminate, 23.94" scale

FRETS 18

TUNERS Lava-designed ultra light aluminum.18:1 ratio

BODY AirSonic 2 carbon fiber with Super AirSonic carbon fiber top

BRIDGE High performance fiber composite

ELECTRONICS HILava system with L3 smart preamp and FreeBoost 2.0 effects actuator, 4G memory, 32G storage

CONTROLS Volume wheel and on/off/sleep/wake button inside sound port. 3.5" multitouch screen on top side with status, menu and app icons

ONBOARD APPS Tuner, metronome, recorder, loops, practice, effects

EFFECTS 50+ presets consisting of: reverb, delay, reverse delay, chorus, tremolo, phaser, flanger, ring mod, octave, stutter, wah, slow gear, pitch shift, shaper filter, distortion and impulse response for line out

LAVA+ APP Syncs with HILava system via LavaCloud to keep track of effects templates, favorite grooves, practice summary, music, pictures, and devices plus top and trending recordings by other Lava players

CONNECTIVITY Wi-fi, Bluetooth, 1/4" output jack, USB-C jack for charging, contact charging available via Space Charging Dock (sold separately; \$149 for 38", \$129 for 36")

POWER 8,000 mAh/3.8V lithium-ion battery (up to nine hours of playing time), USB-C to USB-C and USB-C to USB-A cables provided, 15W USB-C charging adaptor not included

FACTORY STRINGS Elixir Nanoweb .012-.052

WEIGHT 4.96 lbs (as tested)

BUILT China

KUDOS Deep acoustic sound, exceptional craftsmanship, great neck. Ingenious locking strap system. Insane feature set

CONCERNS Long-term stability and durability of electronics. Action a tad high and no truss-rod. Amplified tone wetter than acoustic

The sound from the ME 3's soundport was bigger than expected, with bass that belies the body's size.



perhaps a shim were included to raise action to preference rather than the other way around. A short scale length combined with high action makes chords a bit difficult, but using a capo at the second fret helps a ton. The frets and fingerboard are nice and precise. The neck itself is a joy to hold, and the advanced profile with a fine finish makes sliding up and down feel super sleek.

As for the ME 3's electronics, all I can say is "Holy Toledo!" We've seen actuator-driven internal effects on acoustics for a while now, starting with the ToneWoodAmp, leading to Yamaha's TransAcoustic and on to the first smart guitars from Lâg. The HILava system ups the ante significantly, as it's essentially like having a rudimentary smartphone embedded in the instrument. Reach inside the sound port to find the on/off/sleep/wake button. The only other physical control is a master-volume flywheel. Everything else is indicated by graphics that appear on a 3.5-inch multitouch screen facing up at the player from the top side.

HILava delivers an immersive experience without a mobile connection, but for activation it immediately asks the user to

connect to the Internet via Wi-Fi. Download the Lava+ app to your phone, register a Lava ID with an email address, and then scan the QR code to activate. Now you're a member of Lava's online community, where players around the globe share trending grooves and original recordings created with the onboard Loop and Record apps. Record up to four tracks on Loops and adjust the sound level of each independently. Compared to the acoustic tone, the recordings are somewhat tinny and heavy on effects, but the app is great for capturing ideas, and it's convenient because the system auto-syncs your music into Lava+ via LavaCloud. It also keeps track of everything from total playing time to your favorite effects templates.

These effects sound amazing in this guitar, and they're outrageously fun, with great graphic depictions. I could get lost in the swirling reverbs, delays and reverse delays that populate Infinite Universe, Black Hole and Moonwalk all night long, and spend days digging into the tremolos, phasers and flangers that form the foundation for Lollipop, Shadow and Mushroom. Better still, you can edit them and put favorites into



templates for ready recall. While the Practice app isn't perfect, it's crazy cool. Choose from one of the five headings — Chord Transition, Strumming, Scale Training, Ear Training and Single Note — and then try to perform at a given tempo. Lava's "smart detection" indicates how well you did. It's a fun way to learn and improve.

Even at the highest level, onboard effects remain an enhancement behind the acoustic tone. But the script flips once the ME 3 is plugged into an amp. The effected sound becomes much more pronounced, and the booming bass of the acoustic box surrenders to the brighter, more midcentric piezo pickup tone. You can change the EQ curve, choose a line out-only effect like Slow Soul, or ditch the effects altogether and go with one of the impulse-response presets designed strictly to shape the line signal. But there is no global wet/dry control, and effects don't work once an IR patch is selected to make the guitar sound more like its acoustic self. That would be a welcome update for stage performers.

In the final analysis, there is much to love here, but also plenty of room for improvement. HiLava is the most advanced smart system we've seen to date, and it's easily the most fun to operate. The guitar itself is brilliantly designed in a travel-friendly size, with exceptional precision craftsmanship. Progressive players will flip for it the way so many car owners flip for the Tesla. On the other hand, so much of what's on offer here relies on that flexible HiLava system, with its amazing apps. What happens when that groovy electronic gadget



(clockwise from top) The ME 3's multitouch screen, the guitar in its charging dock, and the Ideal Strap 2

malfunctions or stops altogether beyond the warranty? For that matter, the ME3 is designed more for personal companionship than a grand stage presentation, which somewhat limits its usefulness, even while it opens a universe of opportunities for songwriting, recording and sharing.

For now, suffice it to say that Lava may be an outlier, but if the smart guitar takes off and the company plays its cards right, the sky is the limit. *GP* applauds Lava Music's innovative spirit and gives the ME 3 an Editors' Pick Award. Tune in again next month when we take a look at the Blue Lava Touch. 🎸



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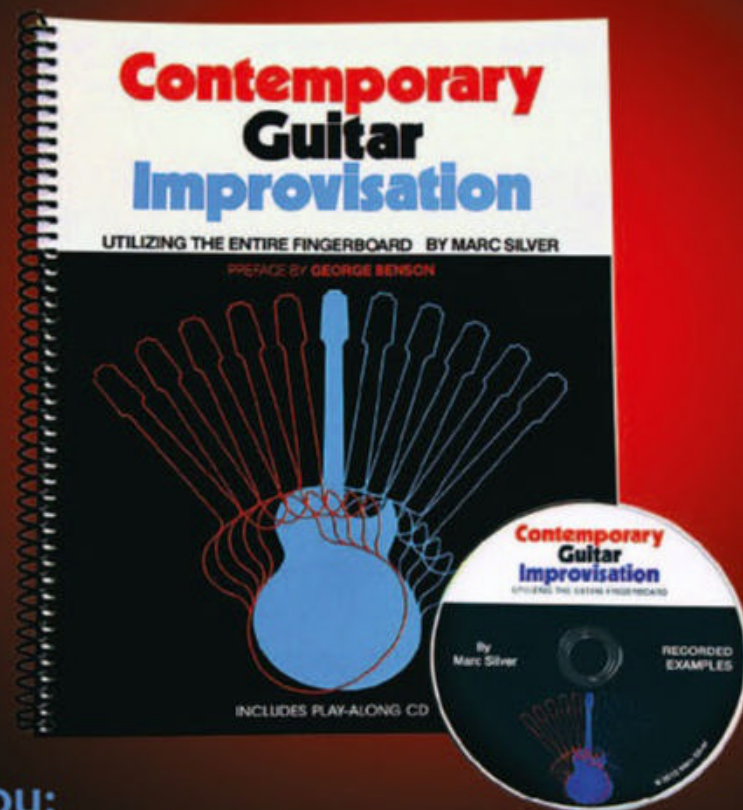
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SQUIER

40th Anniversary Telecaster, Gold Edition

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

FORTY YEARS AGO, Fender launched the Squier series of offshore-made versions of Strats, Teles and Jazz and Precision basses, which quickly became popular with players for their affordability, playability and tone. In celebration of this chapter in guitar-making history, the 40th Anniversary Gold Edition Telecaster, Stratocaster, Telecaster and Jazzmaster are offered as blinged-out versions of these classics that feature gold hardware, neck binding and a variety of available color finishes.

The Gold Edition Tele on review here looks sharp with its gloss-black finish (also available in Sherwood Green Metallic) and preponderance of gold-plated parts, including the bridge and its three saddles, tuners, front-pickup cover, knurled knobs and control plate, strap buttons and engraved neck plate.

SPECIFICATIONS

40th Anniversary Telecaster

CONTACT fender.com

PRICE \$599 street

NUT Bone, 1.650" wide

NECK Maple C shape, gloss finish

FRETBOARD Indian Laurel, 25.5" scale, 9.5" radius, pearloid block inlays

FRETS 21 narrow tall

TUNERS Vintage

BODY Nyatoh

BRIDGE 3-saddle strings-through-body Tele

PICKUPS Fender designed Alnico single-coils

CONTROLS Volume, tone 3-way selector

EXTRAS Gold anodized aluminum pickguard. Gold-plated hardware. Fingerboard binding

FACTORY STRINGS Fender Nickel Plated Steel .009–.042

WEIGHT 6.98 lbs (as tested)

BUILT Indonesia

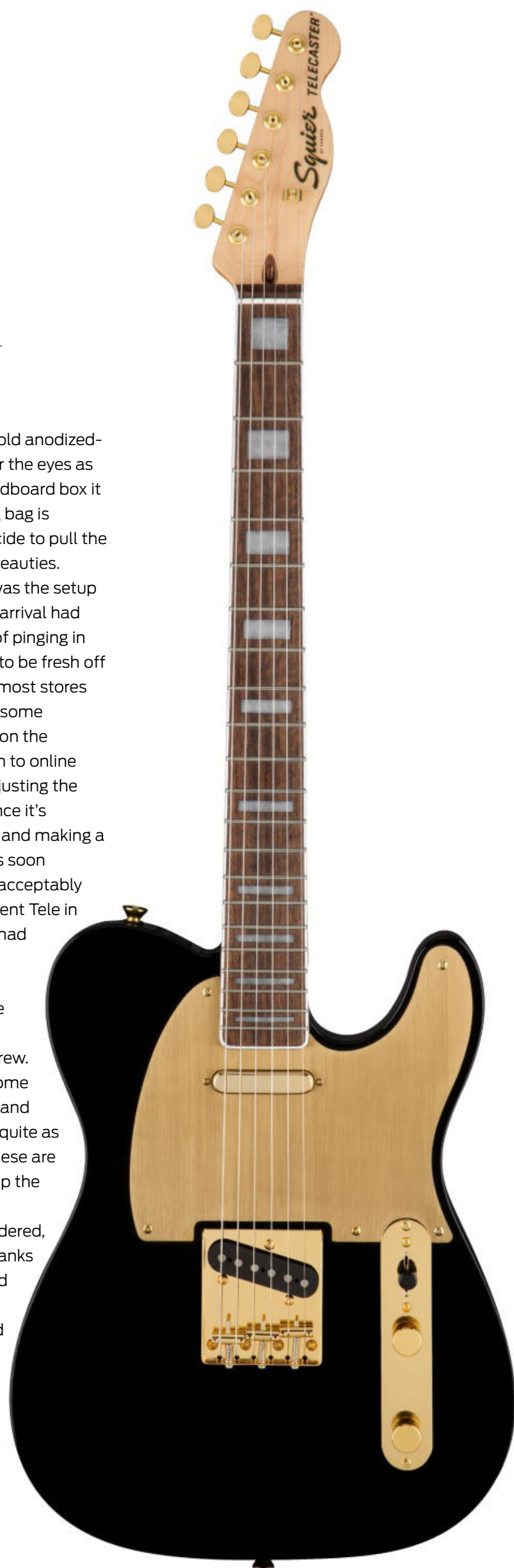
KUDOS Affordable, good sounding and sharp looking

CONCERNS No case or gig bag

Even the pickguard is brushed gold anodized-aluminum. It all made a feast for the eyes as we lifted this guitar from the cardboard box it shipped in. Unfortunately, no gig bag is provided, so order one if you decide to pull the trigger on one of these budget beauties.

A little more disappointing was the setup on our review sample, which on arrival had unplayably low action and lots of pinging in the nut slots. This guitar looked to be fresh off the boat, and I'm guessing that most stores would give their incoming stock some attention before putting guitars on the showroom floor or sending them to online purchasers. At any rate, after adjusting the truss-rod (easy enough to do since it's accessible from the headstock) and making a few other tweaks, the guitar was soon play-worthy and the intonation acceptably tuneful. Fender sent a replacement Tele in Sherwood Green Metallic) that had been properly set up, so I'm assuming this is how they are supposed to be sent out and the one we initially received had somehow gotten by the setup crew. The small bone nut could use some more smoothing on the corners and the pickup selector doesn't feel quite as solid as a standard Tele's, but these are acceptable compromises to keep the price down.

As such, and all things considered, the playing feel is quite good, thanks to the neck's comfy C-shape and the slender Narrow Tall frets, which are decently crowned and their tips smoothed where they meet the white binding — and no complaints there, as the binding is carefully done. The large pearloid inlays also stand out nicely on the dark Indian-laurel fretboard, and only a tiny amount of black filler is visible around them.





The 40th Anniversary Telecaster has a springy acoustic tone, with nice sustain, and it sounded cool played through a Fender Deluxe Reverb, a Victoria Double Deluxe 2x12 combo and a variety of overdrive pedals. The Alnico-magnet pickups are a wise choice because they're clear, balanced and have abundant output. The bridge unit has the fat, spanky bite you need from a Tele, but it's still sweet on top, and you can mellow things out for smooth distortion via the tone control, although the sound becomes muddy if you go too far. As usual for the breed, the neck pickup

is hardly the star of the show. It gets the job done when a rounder tone is needed, but it's best in combination with the bridge pickup, where you can appreciate the glassy rhythm textures and twangy lead tones that respond very nicely to volume changes. The volume pot also doesn't shave off treble when it's turned down.

All said, the Squier 40th Anniversary Telecaster, Gold Edition has a lot to offer in this price range. It looks sharp as hell, it plays well, and it sounds good for anything you'd want to aim a Tele at. At under six bills, it

delivers a lot of bang-for-the-buck, and it's a cool choice for those seeking a gigging guitar with a swanky, uptown look. This model and its Gold Edition siblings are fitting tributes to a line of guitars and basses that were well received back in 1982 for being able to go toe-to-toe with some of Fender's USA production models of the time. It's a different scene today, but with prices of just about everything going up, anyone looking to stretch their guitar-buying bucks will find these and other new Squier models worth checking out. **B**

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LINE 6

DL4 MkII Delay Modeler Pedal



TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

DUBBED THE BIG Green Monster for its imposing size and unmistakable color, the original Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler was released in 1999 to broad acclaim and popped up seemingly overnight on hundreds of touring pro rigs. Offering 14 types of delay plus a functional looper, it packed a lot into what is widely regarded as the most popular of the first successful line of modeling effects pedals (as opposed to merely “digital” effects pedals that use traditional DSP to create delays, reverb or modulation). It also did it using a big box that measured 10 inches wide, six inches deep and two and a half inches high) and required a dedicated 1,200mA nine-volt AC power supply if you didn’t want to burn through four D-cell batteries every 30 hours or so.

SPECIFICATIONS

DL4 MkII Delay Modeler Pedal**CONTACT** line6.com**PRICE** \$299 street

CONTROLS Delay selector, time/subdiv, repeats, tweak, tweeze, mix. Alt/Legacy pushbutton, four foot-switches; level control for XLR input on the back panel.

EXTRAS Stereo inputs and outputs, TRS expression-pedal/foot-switch connection jack, XLR mic input, DIN MIDI in and out/thru. USB C, microSD card slot, center-negative 9VDC adaptor input

SIZE 9.25" x 4.41" x 2"**BUILT** Assembled in China

KUDOS A bushel-basket full of great-sounding classic and modern delays, with several handy reverb selections and built-in looper with long times available

CONCERNS Some users might find the mix knob taper a little abrupt in places, but it closely mirrors that of the original

The stunning new DL4 MkII has just been released, and it packs more than three times the features of the original DL4 into a box about 20 percent smaller and some 30 percent lighter. By those criteria alone, it should quickly become a modern classic. Wisely, Line 6 has retained the familiar radioactive frog-green finish, an eye-catching color that will help identify the pedal on the boards of the pros.

As Line 6 likes to tell us up front, the DL4 MkII carries everything the original had (and I certainly haven’t yet found anything to disprove that), plus 15 new delays drawn from the company’s HX series of effects and amp processors, and a considerably expanded memory and function for the looper. The latter includes both four-button and single-button loop control with a whopping 240 seconds of onboard memory (operable in either stereo or mono, before or after other effects). This can be expanded to several hours with an optional microSD card.

Among the new bonus features are the so-called Secret Reverbs. Pushing and releasing the Alt/Legacy mode button toggles between the MkII Delays and the original DL4 Legacy Delays, accessed by the 16-position rotary selector. Pushing and holding that button while rotating the selector accesses 15 reverb types (named on the included cheat sheet, since there’s no room left on the face of the pedal), from room to plate to particle ‘verb to hot springs and more. The remaining adjustment knobs on the unit — time/subdiv, repeats, tweak and tweeze — likewise adjust

reverb parameters when the Alt/Legacy button is pushed and held, while mix, the last control, performs similarly across both. Foot switches A, B and C offer three saved presets and double for looping functions, as does the tap foot switch. Unlike the original, the MkII includes three selectable bypass modes: True Bypass, Buffered and DSP. The first two route the signal directly from input to output (engaging a buffering preamp in the second), while DSP keeps it all running through the A/D/A conversion.

Round back, connectivity has been majorly upgraded to keep up with today’s demands. The DL4 MkII retains the stereo ins and outs on quarter-inch jacks, while adding an XLR input with level control for directly connecting a dynamic microphone, plus a USB-C connection for firmware updates and computer-generated presets and MIDI selection. Two DIN connectors offer MIDI in and out/thru, and the TRS expression-pedal jack can be used to connect two more assignable foot switches. Power comes from a far more conventional nine-volt DC 500mA source (supplied). It’s all housed in a cast-aluminum box that, despite being streamlined, reflects the original’s style, with even better protection for the knobs in a recessed trough that puts them well below the sole of your descending Doc Marten.

I used an original DL4 off and on for many years from the time it first came out, and I still have that one in a drawer about an arm’s reach from my desk. Even my first few minutes with the MkII plugged in made me



want to get the green monster back on my board for good, but further explorations revealed the pedal in its MkII form to be one of the most comprehensively functional and sonically rewarding delay units on the market, by any measure.

I tested the DL4 MkII with several guitars in front of and in the loops of a selection of traditional amps, as well as in stereo into my Universal Audio Apollo Twin Duo interface to appreciate the effects in the headphones. The sounds are extremely good throughout and — as one would expect a quarter century on — realistic. For classic echoes, you'd be hard pressed to find anything amiss, and the range of tweakable creative alternatives doubles or triples those sonic opportunities. Most of the meat 'n' potatoes delays are still found on the Legacy side, with plenty of the MkII slots offering more unusual modes. Some of the new ones — the Elephant Man and Euclidean settings, for example — present juicy fresh takes on the archetypes.

Some old-school players who just need a delay or two and don't want the complication of the added features might still lean toward their genuine analog echo boxes (and to be fair, it behooves you to spend a little time with the manual and at least learn how to program three favorite presets), but I'd challenge you to find anyone in the audience who could hear the difference, or indeed, to really hear the difference yourself up onstage with a five-piece band raging alongside you. It's worth noting that the same goes for the quality of the Secret Reverbs, the usefulness and added-value-factor of which cannot be overstated.

Beyond the basics of "how does it sound?" the DL4 is just a massively handy echo box by any measure, and I haven't even discussed the looper yet (although it's tremendously functional, and I've enjoyed it enormously), another feature which is likely worth the price of admission on its own (although, sadly,

there isn't enough room here to attempt a full assessment of it).

All told, the brilliance of the Line 6 DL4 MkII re-think is pretty much off the charts, so let's leave it at that. Even if you just want to use it for three presets that cover your basic delay needs live, and maybe replace your reverb unit in the process, the MkII sounds great and is likely worth the outlay, even at its list price — and at the sub-\$300 street price... sheesh! What a bargain. Add in the versatility of some 30 delay types, Secret Reverbs, looping and more, and c'mon, need I say more? It's an Editors' Pick Award winner if ever there was one, and good luck getting this one back from me. 📺



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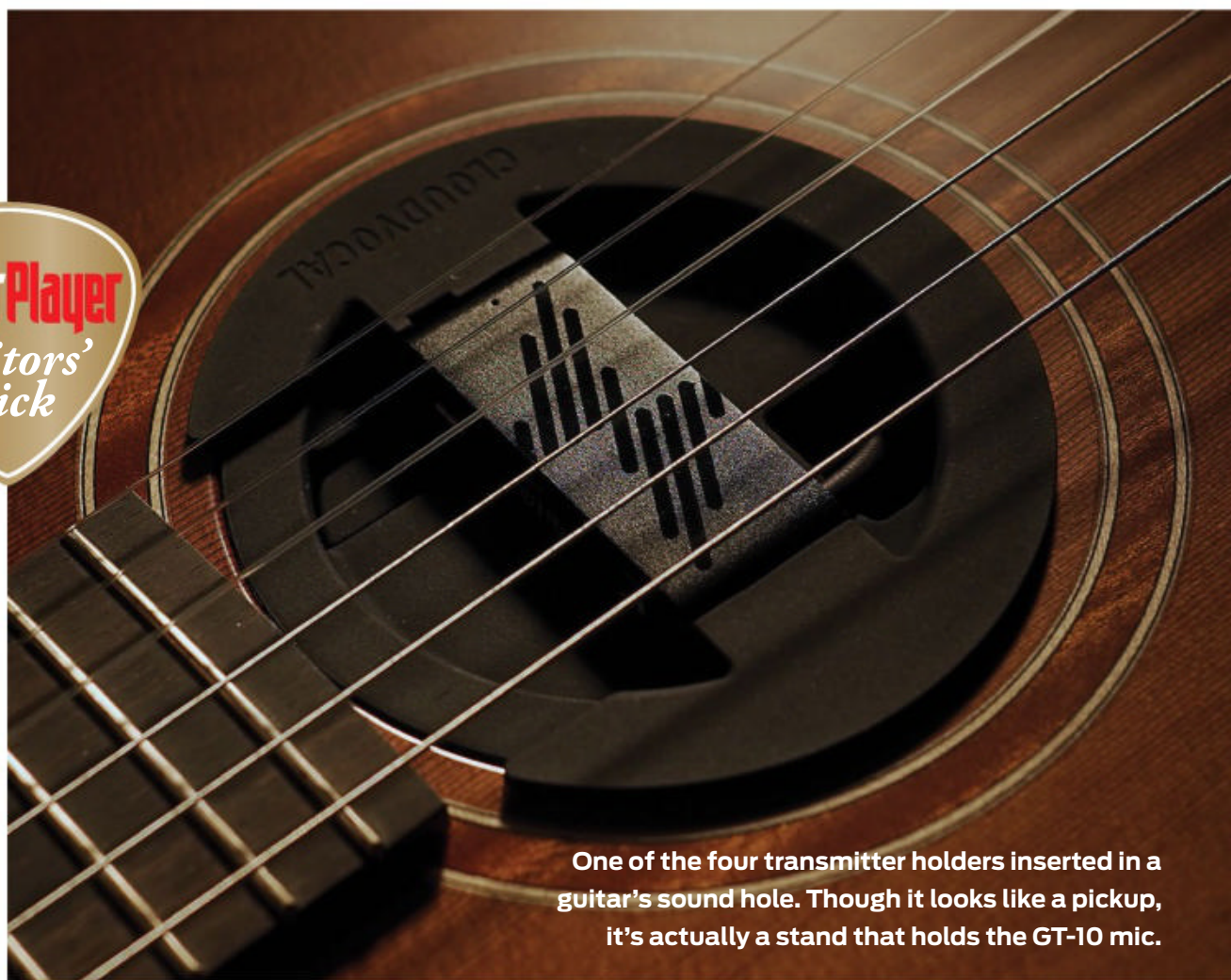
iSolo GT-10 Wireless Microphone Pickup

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

HOW TO POWERFULLY amplify an acoustic stringed instrument from within without breaking into its body is one of the great challenges of the musical instrument industry, and CloudVocal offers a progressive solution. CloudVocal makes an array of wireless instrument microphones, and the new for '22 iSolo GT-10 is an exciting prospect. It consists of a transmitter with a flexible mic that sits inside a silicon sound-hole saddle, and a receiver that integrates a preamp, EQ and extra inputs and effects. Any and all guitars from classical to vintage become unleashed and viable to venture beyond home and studio boundaries. As the owner of several such instruments, I was eager to test the new iSolo GT-10 system.

The mic sits at the end of a bendable stem attached to a metal transmitter that looks somewhat like a mini humbucker, and a second mic element is embedded at the base. To be clear, there's no pickup here, even though the full system can look like a magnetic sound-hole setup. The iSolo GT-10 comes with four silicon accessories that fit in the sound hole: Two are holders with rectangular stands that look like sound-hole pickups, while the other two are full sound-hole covers. All four devices have holes through which you feed the mic's flexible stem. I preferred the rectangular holders in low-volume situations, as they let me hear as much as of the acoustic sound resonating through the port as possible. For stage purposes, the sound-hole cover option would be ideal at reducing feedback. The concept is brilliant, but I was disappointed that none of the four fit well in any of my three Martins — an OO, 000 and OM — and only the larger cover was snug in my Gibson dreadnought.

To put the system in play, simply charge the transmitter, place it in the sound-hole and set up the receiver. Plug it in via the included power adaptor, or to a power bank for fully



One of the four transmitter holders inserted in a guitar's sound hole. Though it looks like a pickup, it's actually a stand that holds the GT-10 mic.

wireless setup (very cool), attach the antenna and pair it via Bluetooth to the transmitter.

Everybody knows there's nothing quite like a mic on acoustic instruments. Ideally it would be positioned outside the instrument, but that's not practical for this design and is limiting for a stage performer that doesn't want to be glued to the same spot. Pickups present their own challenges, and while most folks are fine with a piezo, a magnetic or both, many pros hate one or the other (Ry Cooder pisses on piezos in the Frets feature on page 72 and admits to making compromises.)

SPECIFICATIONS

CloudVocal iSolo GT-10

CONTACT us.cloudvocal.com

PRICE \$499 street

TRANSMITTER Dual capsule cardioid condenser mic, USB charging terminal, charging/power indicator, power/pairing button and indicator, preamp gain switch low/mid/high

WIRELESS 2.4 GHz ISM band w/smart auto frequency hopping, range 50 feet (normal) to 100 feet (boost on), latency 10ms (normal) to 20ms (boost), frequency response 10–20kHz (normal) 10–16kHz (boost) system THD+noise <.05% (1kHz@-10dB FS)

RECEIVER I/O line/mic input (TS or TRS), DI/line out, (unbalanced via TS or balanced via TRS to XLR cables included), antenna stem, 3.5mm TRS sync out and sync in for connecting up to three units, 3.5mm mute in

Indeed, the CloudVocal iSolo GT-10 transmits the kind of realistic acoustic tone — harmonically rich and vibrant, with plenty of percussives — that only a quality microphone can deliver. It was a revelation to hear my pure acoustic guitars amped up for the very first time through an L.R. Baggs Synapse Personal P.A. In his Meet Your Maker feature [GP, July 2021] Lloyd Baggs himself talked about the challenges a mic faces on the inside of a guitar, which he compared to a trash can. There are always feedback issues, and I encountered some here. That's why

for foot switch (not included), 3.5 mm TRS aux-in for backing tracks, DC input (7–9V USB, power adaptor included)

CONTROLS Bass +/-6dB @200Hz (shelf type), treble +/-6dB @2000Hz (shelf type), gain wireless mic +/-6dB, master volume, effect (room/hall/arena/delay/delay+verb/shimmer/chorus/flange), blend (dry to wet), EFX param adjust, range (normal/boost), line/mic gain (0–40dB), mic power indicator (blue/green/red)

BATTERY lithium, 5- to 7-hour life (range normal to boost)

BUILT Taiwan

KUDOS Innovative wireless design, authentic acoustic tone with effects, no holes drilled

CONCERNS Sound-hole cover/holder sizes limited, some feedback issues, effects blend leans on the wet side

there are many dual systems that utilize a pickup in conjunction with a mic. But if you don't want to drill holes in your instrument and prefer not to mess with cables, the CloudVocal system is pretty awesome. It takes a bit of finger wrangling to get that flexible stem positioned to where it sounds best and doesn't feed back much, but once you get there, it's a joy.

And then there are the effects. How very cool it is to be able to put some ambience on that true acoustic tone. But be careful, because the effects here are rather prominent, even with the blend knob set almost dry. I was absolutely tickled to hear my pristine acoustics resonating up close while the amp with its effects was on the other side of the room. In that setting, it was somewhat similar to the sound you get from the kind of actuator-induced, internally generated effects that are so hip on the Lava ME 3 [reviewed on page 82]. In this case, the pure acoustic sound is at the fore, bolstered by the amplified

The system includes (left) a mic on a flexible stem and a second mic attached to the holder (at top), plus a receiver (right) that integrates a preamp, EQ, effects and more.

ambience coming from the speaker at its preferred distance.

If you have acoustic guitars you want to hear amplified with effects, without compromising the instrument's integrity or sound quality, I highly recommend checking out the CloudVocal iSolo GT-10 Wireless System. This kind of electronic innovation in the acoustic realm is thrilling, and I can't wait

to see what the Taiwanese company comes up with in the future. An electronic anti-feedback option would be welcome, as would a transmitter that also acts as a magnetic pickup, creating a dual wireless system. In the meantime, it's a no-brainer to hand this modern invention so brilliantly designed to accommodate vintage instruments an Editors' Pick Award. 🎸



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CRAZY TUBE CIRCUITS

(Phi) Golden Ratio

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

COMPRESSION MAY BE the least understood of effects. The easiest way to comprehend it is to think about turning a simple tube amp up. As you increase the volume, the amp gets louder and the tubes begin to distort. Past a certain point, however, the distortion increases but the amp ceases to get any louder. That is compression at work. The tubes have placed a cap on how loud the signal can get. This effect can increase the apparent sustain of your guitar, and a compressor pedal performs a similar function, but without the distortion.

Cutting my teeth in the clubs of Manhattan, where any kind of volume is frowned upon by the people who live upstairs, I relied on an MXR Dynacomp, the only compressor pedal available at the time, to supply sustain at low volume. While the Dynacomp offered only two controls — volume and sensitivity — the Crazy Tube

SPECIFICATIONS

Golden Ratio

CONTACT crazytubecircuits.com

PRICE \$249

CONTROLS Volume, blend, ratio, threshold, attack and release. Three-way mode switch

EXTRAS Internal FET circuit ratio/distortion trimmer, 9V or 18V switch, high/low makeup gain switch

SIZE 5" x 3" x 2" (approximately)

BUILT Greece

KUDOS Extremely versatile, studio quality compressor in a pedalboard friendly housing

CONCERNS May be more control than you need



Circuits Golden Ratio compressor offers the tweakability of a studio rack compressor or a sophisticated plug-in simulation.

Threshold, which determines how much signal the pedal needs to see before the compression kicks in, helped me adjust the effect to best suit single-coils or humbuckers. Using the ratio control, I could determine how much the pedal squashed the sound once it kicked in. The attack knob let me choose settings that quickly damped down the attack for something like pedal-steel swells or snappy chicken picking, or slower ones that kept some of the transients for locking funk rhythm parts to a track. Release set the amount of time until the compressed sound returned to the original levels, and a long release kept the signal going.

The Golden Ratio includes three separate compressor circuits available through a toggle switch. The FET compressor adds its own color to the signal and can be set for super-fast response. OTA recalled the circuit type used in many pedal compressors, while in Opto mode, a photocell combined with a feedback detector circuit produced smoother

attack-and-release characteristics for a slightly subtler effect. The controls reacted differently depending on the mode.

There is no tone control, but the pedal is pretty transparent, and the blend control let me introduce as much uncompressed, original signal as I liked, which helped maintain tone and attack. Finally, the volume knob acted like the makeup gain feature on studio compressors, bringing back any level lost through compressing the signal. The volume control also worked when blend was set to no compression, so I could use the Golden Ratio as a pure boost pedal to drive my amp or an overdrive pedal. Even when using it as a booster, I preferred to add some compression, as it tightened up the grit, helping my lines cut through the band.

Although I've used compression for decades, I still have trouble getting my head around exactly how all those controls interact. Fortunately, neither I nor you have to fully understand the science — we can just turn the knobs until the sound is improved, and with the Golden Ratio, you'll find a plethora of settings that do exactly that. 🎸



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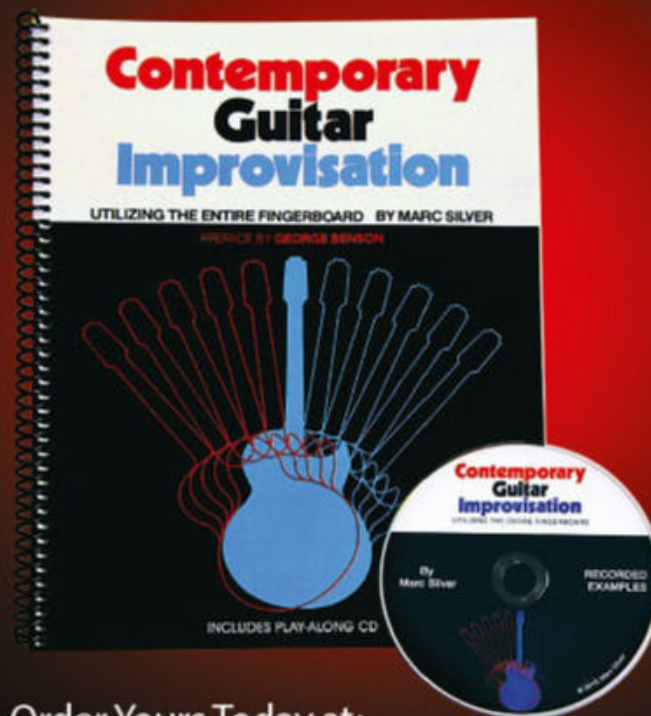
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How I Wrote... “Fantasy”

Aldo Nova reveals how some free studio time led to his breakthrough 1982 hit.

BY JOE BOSSO

“I’M OKAY WITH it now, but for the longest time I tried to play it down,” singer and guitarist Aldo Nova says about “Fantasy,” his soaring 1982 signature song. “Some people have said it started the pop-metal genre, and I guess that’s possible. Soon afterward, I saw a lot of bands come in with a similar sound, and that led to hair metal, which I didn’t want to be associated with.”

He laughs. “But after a while I came around,” he says with a shrug. “It’s a great song and a big hit. What’s not to be proud of?”

LED ZEP MEETS CHRISTOPHER CROSS

In the early 1980s, Aldo Caporusio was a budding young guitarist and performer in Montreal. By day he worked at a music store, and at night he played the city’s downtown clubs. “I did all the Top 40 hits and a lot of new wave covers,” Nova recalls. “More and more, though, people told me they wanted to hear rock, so that’s what I started writing.”

With Led Zeppelin as his North Star (“They had killer riffs, each one as good as a verse or chorus”), Nova came up with a turbo-charged power-chord pattern that felt like a good opener. From there he started building a song in layers.

“I definitely borrowed from a couple of places,” he admits. “The melody in the verses was kind of based around Christopher Cross’s ‘Ride Like the Wind.’ I even phrased my vocals like he did. And there’s a descending guitar line under the riff that’s very much like ‘Dazed and Confused.’ Once I had all those pieces together, I had ‘Fantasy’ ready to go.”



Aldo Nova performing at the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago, April 9, 1982

KEYS TO THE STUDIO

Nova’s opportunity to get into a proper studio came about by a most unusual circumstance. One night, after performing a club date, he ran into a local musician with a label deal who was recording at Montreal’s Bobinason Studios. “He was looking for a songwriter,” Nova says. “I told him I wrote, and we started working together.” When the guy skipped out of the sessions that had been booked, Nova got his big break. “The people at the studio said I could use his time and do whatever I wanted.”

Nova had never recorded a proper demo of “Fantasy,” but as the lucky recipient of a large chunk of free studio time, he operated as his own one-man band. “I played everything except the drums,” he says. “We tried a couple of drummers, but this guy Terry Martel nailed it.” For guitar tracks, Nova used his favorite wine-red Les Paul Custom. “I cut the solo on the fly, but I had a plan for it,” he says. “I wanted it to sound like dueling guitars, like those southern rock bands used to do, so I double-tracked the solo with one on the left and the other on the right.”

BANG FOR THE BUCK

Once Nova finished tracking “Fantasy,” American producer Tony Bongiovi came in to mix. “He made everything sound like cannons,” Nova says of Bongiovi, whose second cousin Jon Bon Jovi would work

with Nova in the 1990s. “He did a phenomenal job.” The recording led to a publishing deal and then a full label contract with Portrait Records, which gave the young rocker a chance to produce his self-titled debut album.

Thanks to its potent blend of sharp hooks, arena-quaking guitars and a tight sheen of surging synths, “Fantasy” vaulted its way onto AOR playlists in the early months of 1982, climbing to number 23 on *Billboard*’s Hot 100 and reaching number three on its Mainstream Rock chart, while the album *Aldo Nova* quickly went Platinum. All of which came as a surprise to the man suddenly living out the title of his debut single. “I never thought the song would be a hit,” he says.

Aiding its ascent was an elaborate video that was in regular rotation on MTV, in which the guitarist, clad in a leopard-print jumpsuit, emerges from a helicopter and is led to a warehouse by machine-gun wielding bodyguards. Reaching a locked door, Nova aims his Les Paul and shoots out a laser beam to get inside the building, after which he performs onstage for awaiting fans.

“Back then nobody had ever seen anything like that in a video before,” says

“SOME PEOPLE HAVE SAID IT STARTED THE POP-METAL GENRE, AND I GUESS THAT’S POSSIBLE”

Nova, whose new album, *The Life and Times of Eddie Gage*, is available now. “It looked like it cost a million bucks, but we did it for only \$15,000. It was definitely money well spent.” ■

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

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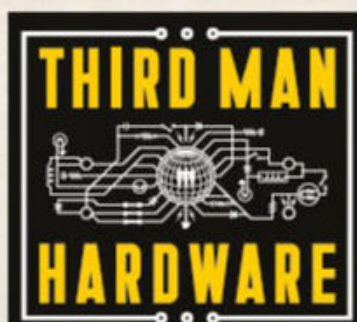
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