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# THE OUTLIERS ISSUE

# 12 GUITARISTS BEYOND THE NORM

# GuitarPlayer

How to be  
Bill  
Frise

PLUS  
**SKUNK  
BAXTER**  
10 TIPS FROM  
THE MASTER

**NILS  
LOFGREN**

INSIDE HIS  
REUNION WITH  
NEIL YOUNG AND  
CRAZY HORSE

**LES PAUL**

BEHIND THE  
RECORDING THAT  
RESHAPED  
GUITAR

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THAT MADE HIM  
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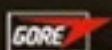


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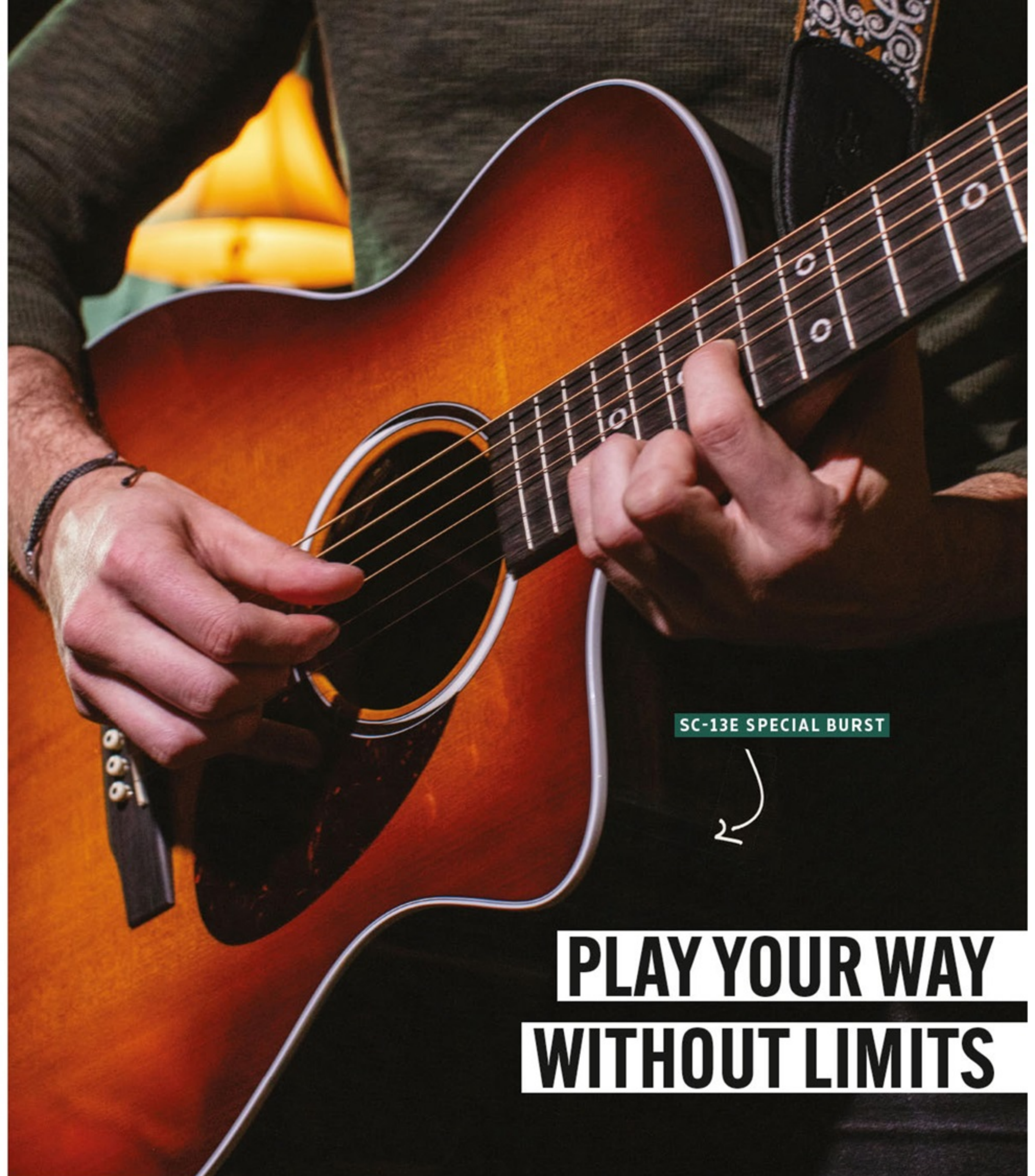


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## ARTIST WITHOUT BORDERS

**JAZZ HAS ADMITTEDLY** been a tangential interest in my life. My mother passed her love of Dixieland and big band to me, providing me with a decent foundation on which to build my modest knowledge of ensemble jazz. Later in life I cultivated an affection for be-bop, building a library of albums by Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. I dug fusion, but nothing modern clicked with me until I discovered ECM Records in the mid 1970s, several years after its inception. The label's artists and aesthetic meshed well with my interest in meditative and ambient music, and many of the musicians — like Gary Burton and Ralph Towner — crossed over to other artists I had a liking for.

It was in this way I first came to hear Bill Frisell. I'd find a cut of his here or explore an album of his there, and be blown away by the beauty of it, the consummate virtuosity of his playing and his engrossing use of looping to create constellations of sound that orbit some ethereal atmosphere of his own making.

But if I'm honest, I'll tell you that it took Elvis Costello for me to appreciate Bill as a musician without borders. I am a huge Costello fan, and when I stumbled upon his and Bill's live 1995 collaboration, *Deep Dead Blue*, it made me take notice in a way I hadn't before. I was impressed that a musician I so identified with the world of jazz was working with an artist who, as of 1995, was still seen as something of a musical magpie, whose short-lived flirtations included country, Americana and classical string quartet. Bill's work with Elvis represented something new. Unlike those other records, *Deep Dead Blue* featured just two instruments: Elvis's voice and Bill's guitar. Hearing Bill's supportive guitar work — his dynamic combination of restrained phrasing and full chording — and novel voicings gave new life to familiar songs. It also gave gravitas to Costello, but it blew the doors off my own perceptions of Bill as an artist within the confines of jazz. He's an artist who knows no boundaries.

I don't think it's making too much of it to say Bill Frisell has no peer when it comes to his stylistic fluidity, something that has attracted artists from across genres to him. When I spoke with writer Bill Milkowski about our plans to feature Bill in this issue, I gave him one assignment: Find out how Bill thinks about and approaches music. As the guitarist reveals, it begins with an open mind and a sense that every note is a question in an ongoing conversation with his fellow musicians. Our interview with him is a deep and insightful read that will reshape your own approach to playing with others.

This is the last issue we're shipping this year. I wish you a happy start to 2023. I hope it's a good year for you and for all of us, and I wish you and your loved ones all the best. Thanks for being here with us.

*Chris Scapelliti*

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# SHORE THING

Well known for his hugely detailed and exquisite custom builds, Seth Baccus is expanding his output starting with this bolt-on Shoreline.

TESTED BY DAVE BURRLUCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL BARKER

## WITH CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE

in both retail and guitar craft, not to mention teching for numerous touring pro musicians, Seth Baccus (the stepson of guitar-making legend Andy Manson) has built himself a considerable reputation for his Nautilus set-neck and Shoreline bolt-on custom builds. But as his reputation escalated, so did the demand, and before long he was turning down orders. Salvation came from the newly formed U.K. Guitar Builders (UKGB), based in York, England, and the guitar we have here is one of the first off the small production line. To be honest, when we first heard about this collaboration, we expected to see a more

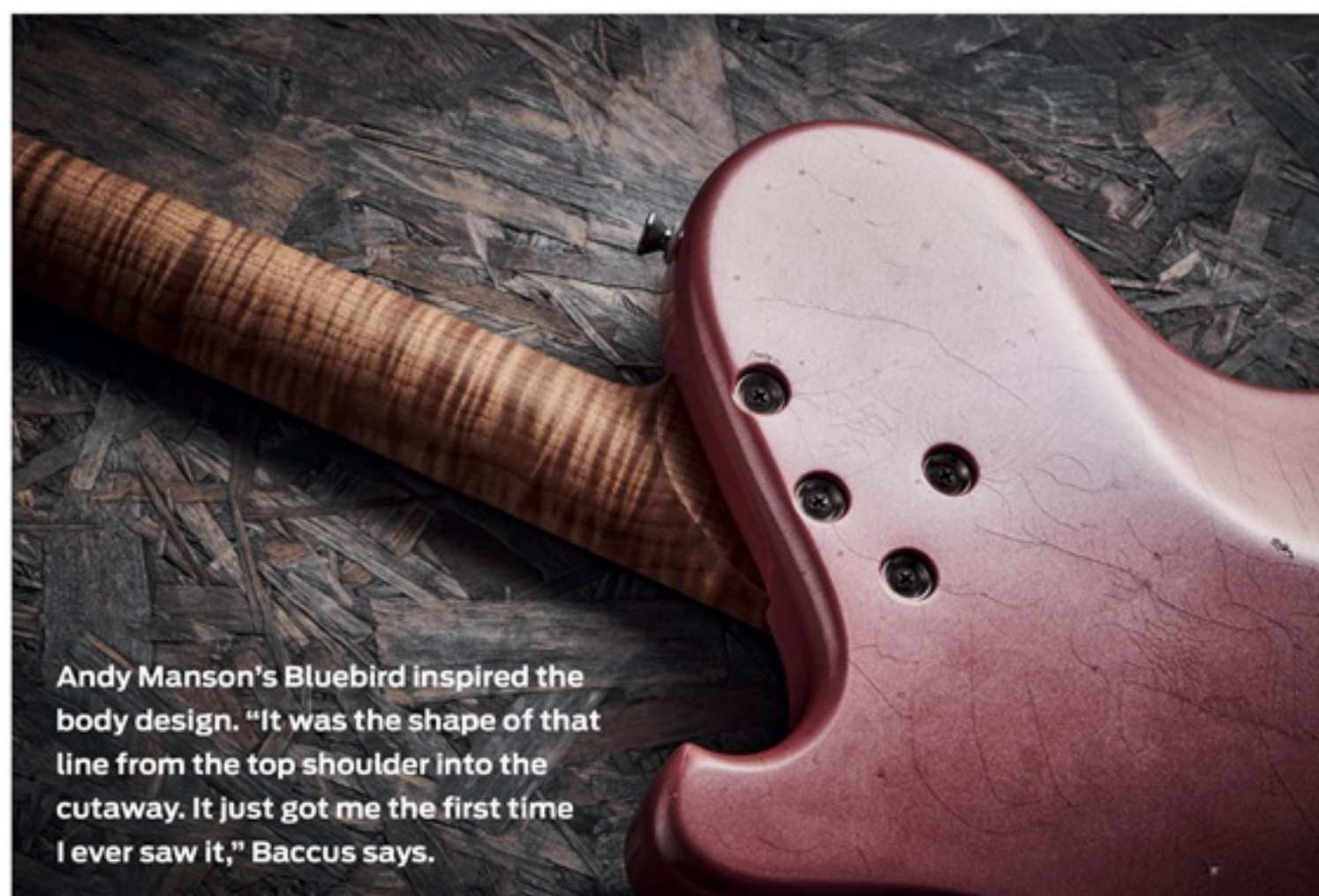
cost-effective version of the \$3,000-plus bespoke Shoreline (there are no plans at the moment to produce the Nautilus). This guitar is anything but.

Like the Nautilus, the Shoreline uses the same original outline inspired by an acoustic guitar Andy Manson had made. Both guitars also use a Fender-like 25 1/2-inch scale length (although Seth does offer a shorter scale on the Nautilus Junior in his bespoke range). In the new range, the Shoreline comes in two styles: the original T, and the JM we have here, plus an S model that's planned for production later in the year. Despite the JM designation, there is very little Jazzmaster about it.

"The JM did in fact come from the first one I built," Baccus explains, "and that had full-size Jazzmaster-style pickups and a Mastery vibrato. But it then evolved into various pickup configurations and bridge options. So now the JM moniker signifies the styling and pickguard shape more than actually relating to a Jazzmaster in any specific way. Model names get more complicated over the years as things evolve and shift and change."

The JM is available, for example, with twin humbuckers, or, like our review model, with a bridge humbucker and a P-90 at the neck. While the Shoreline's style obviously





Andy Manson's Bluebird inspired the body design. "It was the shape of that line from the top shoulder into the cutaway. It just got me the first time I ever saw it," Baccus says.

references the classics, it's not just the original outline shape that's different. Instead of alder or lightweight ash, the body here is obeche (FSC certified), which is completely hidden by the delicious aged and lightly relic-ed vintage nitro finish. It's beautifully shaped, with a large edge radius and Fender-like comfort contours on the face and back, and a pretty regular bolt-on depth of 1 3/4 inches. The Fender-like squared heel is replaced here with the sloping line from that rounded bass shoulder to the small horn, and we have four regular machine screws that sit in steel ferrules to hold the neck to the body.

## "THE JM MONIKER SIGNIFIES THE STYLING AND PICKGUARD SHAPE MORE THAN ACTUALLY RELATING TO A JAZZMASTER"

The aging goes beyond the body and headstock face to include the hardware, which looks like it's been in place for decades. The short Tele-bridge plate holds three intonated Gotoh In-Tune brass saddles, and although it's through-strung, you can top-load it as well. Tuners are standard Gotoh vintage style. The beautifully shaped and cut nut appears to be unbleached bone.

Moving from open-ended custom to small production invariably limits the options, but we were surprised at what's on offer here. For various upcharges, you can have a master-grade flame neck, a semi-hollow

body with f-hole, a double-bound body, a Mastery vibrato, plus a variety of custom finishes and pickguards as well as alternative brands of pickups upon request. The range of finishes is generous as well, comprising 12 solid colors (including Burgundy Mist, as reviewed) plus two translucent colors. And while you can spec your favorite brand pickups, Baccus has selected a pair from his local winder, Bare Knuckle, as standard: a classic Mule at the bridge mounted in an Anomaly pickup ring (developed by Seth and designer Luke White), and a Blue Note 90 at the neck that mounts directly to the body. The drive is simple, too, with a shoulder-placed toggle pickup selector, a master volume and a tone control with a pull-switch to split the humbucker.

If the vintage-informed craft is beautiful, the neck is off-the-scale good. The wood choice here is exceptional, with a deep dark golden hue and broad striping. This super-smooth oil-and-wax finish is rather like the guitar's appearance, and it feels old and worn in, adding to the vivid illusion that this isn't a new guitar. There's plenty of meat, too. It feels very robust, with a deep rounded C profile that feels deeper than the dimensions suggest: 21.7mm at the 1st fret, 23.8mm by the 12th. There's an old Fender feel at play, for sure, but the 12-inch fingerboard radius is more Gibson-like. The medium-jumbo frets are beautifully installed, with smooth domed ends, and they aren't overly high, either. It all feels superb, and the detail is everywhere, not least in the lightly rolled fingerboard edges.







The Shoreline's various flavors come with different pickguard designs.



Thanks to the obeche body, the JM weighs in at 6.84 pounds, and strapped on it just feels like a part of you. But light in weight doesn't mean light in sound. Even unplugged, it has quite a strong, full response, and as we turn up the volume we hear a really quite muscular tone emerging.

The Bare Knuckle P-90 isn't one I can remember hearing before, but it's certainly on my radar now. On this platform, it's smooth, but with a grainy texture, and cleans up nicely with volume reduction, adding a very Gibson-like voice for jazzier lines and wailing beautifully and smoothly with some classic-rock crunch. Hit the toggle to bridge and the voice is big and beefy — that muscular tone we referred to earlier. Here, the Mule sounds a little darker, with quite a kick in the snarly midrange. It's great for grungier, rockier sounds, but backing off the volume rounds it a little more, and you can't help thinking that a sympathetic treble bleed on the volume pot would just clean things up a little more. The split voice might be a bit too much of a contrast on its own, but in the pickup mix it certainly works to add more Fender-y character to the tone.

Baccus's clever amalgamation of classic construction and pickup styles blurs the lines



between Fender and Gibson, and it's not just the lightly relic-ed finish and aged hardware that make you think this is a pre-owned piece. It really feels like one, too, not least the neck. Yet, from the moment I opened the Hiscox case, there was nothing precious about the JM. It's made to be played.

Yes, at roughly \$4,000, it is getting on for Fender Custom Shop money, particularly if you were to indulge in some of the available options, but it holds its own in that company or with pretty much any top-level instrument out there. We can only imagine what the future will bring. 🎸

**CONTACT** [sethbaccus.com](http://sethbaccus.com)

**PRICE** £3,399 (approx. \$4,000) with case, as tested



## UNDER THE HOOD

A closer look into the JM's minimal, unshielded rear cavity.

**REFLECTING THE STRAIGHTFORWARD** style of the instrument, the circuit here is simple. It includes a standard CTS volume pot and a modern-style CTS tone pot (both with a nominal value of 500k ohms), with PCB connections for the pull switch that splits the bridge humbucker. The wiring is modern in style, with a .022 mF Orange Drop tone capacitor. There's no treble-bleed circuit on the volume, and no tricks or tuning with that coil-split.

What can we say about the ever-popular and best-selling Bare Knuckle Mule? It uses a different number of turns on each bobbin, a sand-cast Alnico IV magnet, solid nickel silver baseplate and cover, butyrate bobbins, maple spacers, nickel-plated slugs and Fillister No.5 pole screws. BK states its DCR at 8.4k; ours measured 8.3k, and 4.04k when split to the slug coil. Of the Blue Note 90, Bare Knuckle says it is "a smooth, warm P-90 with a very open voice and touch sensitive dynamics, producing a fat but really articulate vintage soapbar tone". We couldn't agree more. It uses two sand-cast Alnico II magnets with a quoted DCR of 6.8k ohms; ours measured slightly lower, at 6.52k.





# FULLY CHARGED

Blues-soul firebrand Eddie 9V conjures up the ghosts of Macon's fabled Capricorn Studios on his electrifying new release.

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPH BY EM PEARSON

**EVER SINCE HE** can remember, Brooks Mason has felt like an old soul in a young body. When he was six, his parents put him in therapy after he insisted that he'd been reincarnated. He showed up at high school parties with a copy of *The London Howlin' Wolf Sessions* under his arm. "My friends would be playing Lil Wayne and metal and stuff, and I'd put on Howlin' Wolf," he says. "At first, they were like, 'What the hell are you doing?' Then they'd listen and they dug it. I told them, 'You're listening to the new rap, but Howlin' Wolf was doing his own kind of rap back in the day. It blew their minds.'"

Mason didn't last long in high school. At 15, he took a decade of guitar playing and

studying records by the likes of Freddie King, Albert Collins and Michael Bloomfield, and he set off for the blues clubs of his native Georgia. Leading a six-piece band that included his bassist brother, Lane Kelly, he rechristened himself Eddie 9V — as in the variety of battery — and took his act to every joint that would have him.

He went down a smash. *Left My Soul in Memphis*, Mason's 2019 debut album, recorded in a double-wide trailer, signaled the emergence of a vital new blues star. Two years later came *Little Black Flies*, a veritable blues party that showcased Mason's skills as an exuberant singer and guitarist, as well as his songwriting partnership with Kelly.

The guitarist's new album, *Capricorn* (Ruf Records), recorded at the fabled Capricorn Studios in Macon, Georgia, is something of a breakthrough. It brims with buoyant Mason/Kelly originals, like the swampy, psychedelic "Yella Alligator," the gospel-tinged "Are We Through?" and the deep-grooving strutter "Tryin' to Get By," as well as a bruising cover of Bob Dylan's "Down Along the Cove." The album is a thrilling evocation of blues and Memphis soul that manages to sound both lovingly vintage and positively modern. Throughout the good-time set, Mason layers the selections with a guitar approach that balances impulsive, powder-keg power with artful, carefully crafted phrases (he's joined



on a couple of cuts by Macon slide ace Dustin McCook). He's also a doozy of a vocalist — grand and charismatic, a real peacock. Give this guy a song, and he'll put on a show.

"I had a real blast making this album, and I think that comes through," Mason says. "Of course, recording it at Capricorn Studios was so special to me. The vibes and the history of that place. Walking in, I knew I felt some ghosts." He laughs, then adds, "But I'm not afraid of ghosts."

**You left school to play the clubs when you were just 15. So... no plan B?**

[laughs] No plan B, man. There's that classic line: "If you have a plan B, you plan to fail." I always gave 100 percent to the music I play. My mother didn't always approve, but now she's okay with the music thing. My dad

## "NOTHING GETS YOU SHARP LIKE PLAYING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE. YOU JUST HAVE TO BE IN THE MOMENT AND PERFORM"

always pushed me and my brother. Anytime we felt like giving up, he'd give us a pep talk.

**I imagine that playing the clubs had a dramatic impact on your playing ability. You had to get good fast.**

Definitely. Nothing gets you sharp like playing in front of people. You have no time to think; you just have to be in the moment and perform. Playing shows in clubs was practice for me. When I'd come home, I wouldn't even pick up the guitar 'cause I already did my practicing. [laughs] I did my 10,000 hours of guitar practice by the time I was 15.

**Beyond guitar playing, you're a natural frontman and performer. You really know how to engage listeners.**

That came along with my guitar playing. See, for the longest time we made money from passing around the tip jar. We'd play this joint in Atlanta, Fat Matt's Rib Shack — great place, but they'd only pay the band 100 bucks. If you wanted to come out of there with real money, you'd work for tips. I felt bad asking for money, so I worked on my stage banter. I entertained



Eddie 9V performs at the Brooklyn Bowl, in Nashville, June 27, 2021.

people. They dug what I did, so they didn't feel bad about putting money in the jar.

**I can hear bits of influences in your guitar solos — Freddie King, Michael Bloomfield...**

Oh, Bloomfield's my biggie. Everything I learned about building a solo, I got from him. He didn't just work around the neck; he told you stories. It's like he started at chapter one and took you till the end. There's so many people who influenced me. Derek Trucks, Elmore James.... I mean, we could go on.

**From a songwriting standpoint, though, you seem to draw a lot of inspiration from '60s and '70s soul.**

That's kind of the transition I'm making. I love the blues, but I don't want to be just a blues cat. What we're doing is "Al Green with blues solos." I've played redneck honky-tonks and Manhattan hipster bars, and everywhere I go, they really respond to that kind of music. Soul goes with the blues, and vice versa.

**The song "Yella Alligator" has a swampy blues and soul sound reminiscent of Little Feat. Great slide tone in that song. It's both caustic and sweet.**

You play a Les Paul into a Vibrolux at Capricorn and you're going to sound good. The slide in the choruses is me, but the slide at the end is played by Dustin McCook. He was like my Duane Allman plug-in. He played on "Down Along the

Cove," the Dylan cover we did.

**That's an interesting song choice, with a Capricorn connection, of course.**

There is. Johnny Jenkins covered it at Capricorn. It was 1970, and he had Duane and the Allman Brothers on it. We tried to play ours as close to what they did as possible.

**Your soloing and filigrees in "Are We Through?" remind me of Pop Staples.**

That's a huge compliment. The Staples Singers and Pop Staples — big influences, for sure. Pops really knew how to weave his parts around vocals. Man, that song really came together pretty quick. That's all me on the guitar, and I think I'm on the drums and bass on that one, too. There are some songs that I recorded most of, if not all the instrumentation. But I'd say a good 80 percent of these songs were all done with the band.

**What were your main guitars on the record?**

Mostly I used a Fender Esquire. It's a pretty recent Custom Shop model, but they did a hell of a job on it to make it look settled. I also used a Les Paul goldtop that I've had for a while. I got it in 2011, I believe, but the thing looks like it's from 1952 from all the abuse I put it through. I admit that I beat my guitars up pretty bad. Everybody's always asking me, "Where are your guitar stands?" I just forget to bring them, so they get knocked around. As long as they keep making music, you know? ■



### RECOMMENDED LISTENING

**Capricorn**

"Beg, Borrow and Steal,"  
"Down Along the Cove,"  
"Tryin' to Get By,"  
"Yella Alligator,"  
"Are We Through?"



# TIP SHEET

From fingerboards to guitar etiquette — Jeff “Skunk” Baxter offers advice to make you a better (and more chill) guitarist.

BY JOE BOSSO

**HE'S BEEN A** member of not one but two iconic bands: Steely Dan and the Doobie Brothers. And if that weren't enough, he's one of the most recorded session guitarists in history. But despite the thousands of hours that Jeff “Skunk” Baxter has held a guitar in his hands, he claims that he's never once gotten tired of the instrument.

“Far from it. I feel like a child every time I pick up the guitar,” he says. “I’m just so fascinated by this magical invention and the sounds it can make. I think that’s why I’ve never gotten into a rut. Somehow, I’ve always held onto the excitement of playing the guitar. It’s always fun, and whether I’m in the studio or onstage, my brain is immediately attuned to learning what new thing I can do with it.”

That extends to playing at home, as well. For Baxter, random noodling, that athletic pastime of every guitar player on the planet, is out. “I never sit around and just play mindless stuff,” he says. “When I watch TV, I try to play the melodies I hear, whether it’s a jingle or the theme to a TV show or movie. That way, I’m always playing something with a construction to it, and ideas come from it.”

Here, Skunk runs down a half-dozen pieces of solid advice for his fellow players.

## 1. MAKE A METRONOME OR CLICK TRACK YOUR FRIEND

“I started with a metronome when I took classical piano lessons as a kid. By the time I got into the studio scene, that slid right into using a click track. I never fought a metronome or click track — they were

my friends. Plus, I was fortunate to have played with many great drummers who had excellent time. Working with an excellent timekeeper takes the burden off you, because you don’t have to worry about staying in time. Somebody else — or something else — is doing it for you. This is important in all music, but especially if you’re playing R&B. Groove and time are everything.

“You can buy an inexpensive metronome or click. I do recommend the Roland eBand JS-10. It has eight- and 16-bar grooves that are perfect for playing along to.”

## 2. DON'T BE THE FIRST TO SOLO

“We had this running gag whenever a new guy came into the studio. Invariably, he’d just play all over everything, so we’d say, ‘Hey, man,

I really dig what you’re trying to do.’ It was a backhanded way of saying, ‘Okay, chill.’

“There is something called ‘guitar etiquette,’ and the idea is to be aware of what’s around you. Listen to the other players — it’s not just about you. If the idea is to serve the music, then you need to fit inside of it — and with the other players.

“So just listen. It may be the case that somebody else will have a really great idea. Just chill. If you’ve made it in the room, we know you’re good. You’ll get to play your great solos, trust me. But wait till it’s time.”

## 3. USE YOUR “BUILT-IN” GUITAR TEACHER

“Most people can sing; in fact, everybody can sing. Even if you don’t have a great voice, you can sing a melody, and that’s a beautiful and



JIMMY STEINFELDT





**“TRY TO PLAY THE  
RHYTHM GUITAR  
PART TO ‘CLEAN UP  
WOMAN’ BY  
BETTY WRIGHT.  
I GUARANTEE, IT’LL  
CHALLENGE YOU”**

useful tool that you have available to you at all times. Think about it: If your brain can feed information to your vocal cords, why can't it do the same for your fingers?

“I used to love listening to the recordings by [jazz pianist] Oscar Peterson. I would hear this grunting and mumbling in the background, and I realized that Peterson was singing along with what he was playing. It wasn't what you'd call singing in the traditional sense, but in his mind he was vocalizing the music. He was connecting his voice to his fingers.

“Try it yourself. Come up with a simple melody in your head and try to sing it. Then play it on the guitar. After a few tries, you'll be able to do it, and it'll be different than what you might do if you were just playing. It's a really great technique.”



#### **4. TREAT YOUR FINGERBOARD PROPERLY**

“I've always been a guitar-fixer guy. People still ask me to work on their instruments. They'll say, 'Hey, Skunk, I've got a problem with one of my guitars.' And I tell them, 'No problem. Bring it around the house and let me see what I can do.' One secret I have, whenever I refret a fingerboard, is that I use steel wool and wood oil on it. Then I let it dry, and I finish it by rubbing it hard with a piece of tanned leather. It shines everything up, and the frets love it.

“You don't have to refret your guitar to do this; you can simply remove your strings. The steel wool removes 99 percent of the surface imperfections, but for some reason the leather takes care of that last one percent. Your fingerboard will feel so smooth, you won't believe it. And don't be afraid to apply a lot of pressure. Your guitar can take it.”

#### **5. SPEND SOME TIME PLAYING AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR**

“I've always found it strange when people would come to a gig with all this gear, and they'd say, 'I just can't get my sound.' I'd think, Really? Why is that exactly? How about you just play the guitar? Maybe what you think is your sound isn't your sound after all. Just play the guitar and worry about all that other stuff later.

“If you're an electric guitar player, try to spend time playing acoustic guitar. An acoustic guitar makes you work a little harder. It makes you honest and keeps you honest. It's good for your hands and fingers, and it brings you back to the soul of the guitar. It's so personal — it's right up against

your body, and you feel its sound. There's nothing like it. It shows you what you've got because it's an undistorted, unprocessed and unbiased mirror of your playing. If you can sound good on an acoustic, you'll sound good with anything. In fact, lately I've put heavier gauge strings on my electrics. I like that little bit of fight I get. It's almost like playing an acoustic.”

#### **6. GET INTO RHYTHM PLAYING**

“B.B. King once told me that I was the greatest rhythm guitar player he'd ever heard. Talk about a high honor. It doesn't get any better than that. To me, him saying that was especially important, as I consider the art of rhythm guitar one that is highly underappreciated.

“Everybody wants to play lead guitar, but it's no big deal. In fact, I'd say that anybody can play lead. It's true — you spend enough time going through solos in your room, and before long you'll be a decent lead guitarist.

“But rhythm guitar is an art form and a skill unto itself. It inhabits an interesting and special place between the drummer and bass player. To anybody who thinks rhythm guitar is easy, here's a test: Try to play the rhythm guitar part to 'Clean Up Woman' by Betty Wright. Let's see how well you do. I guarantee, it'll challenge you.

“Here's another idea: Maybe take a few drum lessons. It will help give you an understanding of how a drummer plays a groove. Or pick up a bass every once in a while and explore the world of playing the fundamental notes of different chords. It will help your rhythm guitar playing and give you a good basis for building chord intervals.” ■





Keith Scott (right) performs with Bryan Adams at Olympiahalle, Munich, Germany, September 24, 2008.

## MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

With over 40 years as Bryan Adams' guitarist, Keith Scott knows the tales behind the Songwriters Hall of Fame nominee's best tracks.

BY JOE MATERA

**AS BRYAN ADAMS'** right-hand man, guitarist Keith Scott has clocked up more than 40 years of service for the superstar Canadian rocker. His six-string skills and stylings have been an integral factor in Adams' illustrious music catalog and career. One listen to his emotionally charged guitar solo on Adams' "Native Son" perfectly encapsulates everything you need to know about Scott's guitar mastery.

Now 68, Scott first picked up the guitar at age 14 and learned to play by ear. It wasn't long before he was paying his dues playing in bands and performing on the club circuit in his native Vancouver. Scott met Adams by chance in 1976, but it wasn't until five years later that the singer-songwriter came calling and offered him a position in his band.

"I didn't start working with Bryan until the fall of 1981," recalls the quietly spoken guitarist. "He had recorded the *You Want It, You Got It* album in early 1981 and soon after came to see me. I was playing with a club band at the time, and Bryan told me he had made this record in New York using these guys named Mickey Curry [*drums*], Tommy Mandel [*keys*] and Bob Clearmountain [*producer/engineer*]. He said he didn't have a budget, otherwise he'd have phoned me and got me in earlier. But Bryan was kind of selling me on what he was planning to do."

In late 1982, soon after Scott was ensconced within Adams' ranks, they began to work on *Cuts Like a Knife*, Adams' third album. Released in the early part of the following year, it served as Adams'

commercial breakthrough before its 1984 follow-up, *Reckless*, shot him to worldwide fame and fortune.

"In my case, being offered the position to join Bryan came at the right time and under the right circumstances," Scott says. "I have enjoyed that experience for the most part and for a relatively considerable amount of time."

His long musical relationship with Adams has seen Scott's role segue from hired gun to brother in arms. "There is a certain family type aspect to it that still resonates or permeates," Scott says. "That is what is most apparent after 41 years. Not much goes unnoticed after so much time spent together, either on a professional or personal level. And I am grateful for the abundant quality time and opportunities."

STEFAN M. PRAGER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



## **“CUTS LIKE A KNIFE” CUTS LIKE A KNIFE (1983)**

“Bryan played the main opening riff to the song. At the time we recorded the demo for the song in 1982, we hadn’t toured a lot, but we had made some headway in the United States. When we went in to do the solo at the Power Station in New York, I made about 10 attempts before Bob [Clearmountain] had to go and take a phone call. Bryan told me, ‘Forget about everything we just said and go for it,’ and he pressed the record button.

“At that point I started the solo with that trill, and we got most of it in one take because I wasn’t thinking about it. Sometimes that happens and you luck out. I always thought that if you manage to get a bit of the solo off the floor on the basic recording, it was such an amazing accomplishment, because you weren’t thinking about the solo — you were thinking about getting the arrangement right so that you had the basic track covered. Every record that I did, if I managed to get a solo off the floor, I would consider it a major victory.

“I used my ‘Beast’ Strat through a rented Marshall, with a DOD Overdrive pedal. I picked the Beast up during my club days in the 1970s. I had gone into a music store and just picked a brand-new 1976 white Fender Strat with a maple neck off the wall. I rented it for a few months first before I finally bought it, as I had been playing a Les Paul Custom at that point and wanted to try something different. I was covering things like Jeff Beck’s *Blow by Blow* in the clubs, which made me

want to get a Strat again. For that matter, I had started out playing on a Strat. When Van Halen brought out their first record, the thing to do was take out the three-pickup arrangement and stick a single humbucker in the back, which is what I did too. I had that guitar until about the late ‘80s, and it was my main guitar on the road up to a point.”

## **“NATIVE SON” INTO THE FIRE (1987)**

“I have indigenous background in my family on my father’s side, so there was a connection with this song, specifically in that regard. I came in when it was at the demo stage and did some of it as an outline, so I had a rough idea of where I was going when it came to recording the solo. Once Bob Clearmountain in his superb way dialed up a sound that was appropriate for the track, we went for it and got a couple of really great takes. And we did one other take where we added maybe one or two things, and that was it. I was really happy to be part of that. I had a lot to express from an emotional side because I loved the sentiment of what Bryan was saying in the song, and hopefully we did accomplish that.

“For this recording, I played Bryan’s 1962 Strat through a 1960s Vox AC30. It was mainly clean, though I did use an Ibanez Tube Screamer to give it a bit of a kick on the front end. At that time, from the mid ‘80s through to the 1990s, we used that guitar a lot on our records, especially on *Waking Up the Neighbours*.

“When I performed ‘Native Son’ live during the tour for the *Into the Fire* record, I used a custom Fender Tele. It’s a bit of a player’s guitar, and it changed my playing a little to where I had to be a little bit more on top of it.

“The song is in A and the solo is in its relative minor key, F#. If I have to admit to an influence, I have to say it was Mark Knopfler. I had this similar hybrid picking thing going with the plectrum and fingers, where I would pick a note and the little finger would catch this grace note giving it this muted feel sound, due to the way I attacked the note. It’s very simple playing but hopefully emotional in the way I used the vibrato and the sliding between the notes.”

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## **“BRYAN TOLD ME, ‘FORGET ABOUT EVERYTHING WE JUST SAID, AND GO FOR IT,’ AND HE PRESSED THE RECORD BUTTON”**

## **“INTO THE FIRE” INTO THE FIRE (1987)**

“At the time that we made *Into the Fire*, Bryan and Jim Vallance, his longtime collaborator, were at their height, and Jim had also just got a new [E-mu] Emulator sampling keyboard. It was quite high-tech and had some interesting sounds and loops on it. When we recorded that song in 1986, U2 were really starting to make waves in the United States, and that whole Peter Gabriel/Sting type of emotional music was hitting the airwaves. They were also topical — they weren’t singing about boy-and-girl things, like we were; they were singing about human rights and saving the world. The sentiment was quite serious, and Bryan and Jim caught that wave a little bit. The chord shapes of that song, with the open ringing strings and everything, kind of backed that up too, as it was a moody sound. The whole record was moody, from the music to the album sleeve.

“Lyrically and musically, this song is associated with a lot of great memories from that time, and it still holds weight for me. It still rings true. I really came to grips with it when we performed it at the Royal Albert Hall earlier this year [2022]. It was wonderful to be

Adams and Scott  
perform in 1985.



FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



able to go back and play something from deep in the catalog, as it's really rare for us to go that far into those obscure tracks. It was a real treat, as you never know whether you'll ever get that opportunity to do that again.

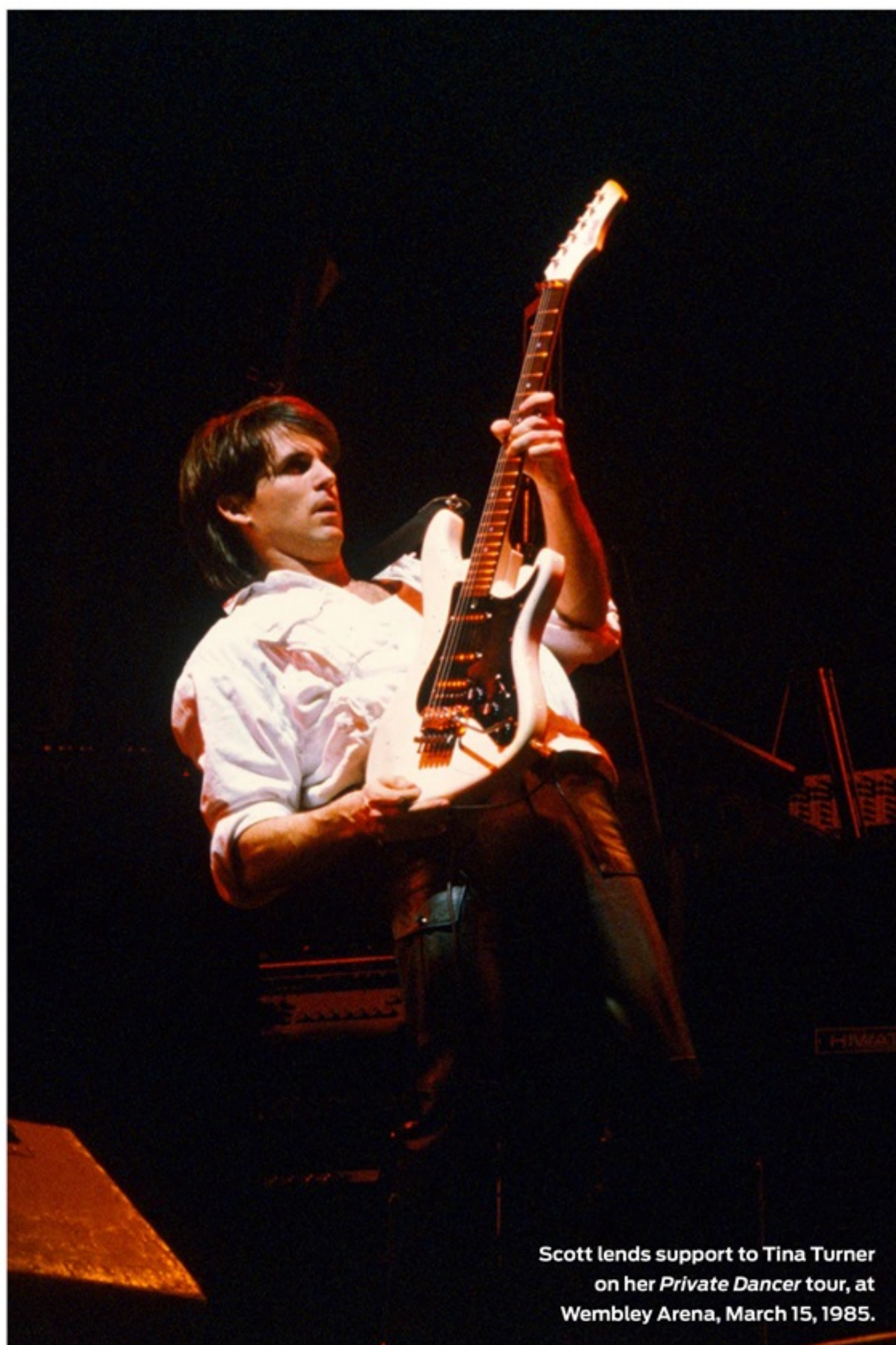
"In terms of the guitar, we were definitely going for that single-coil, shimmering kind of Vox AC30 sound, with that beautiful midrange that they have. It was the right combination to use at that point. 'Into the Fire' is probably my best track we ever did as a band."

**"IF I HAVE TO ADMIT  
TO AN INFLUENCE, ITS  
MARK KNOPFLER. I HAD  
THIS SIMILAR HYBRID  
PICKING THING GOING"**

**"DON'T DROP THAT  
BOMB ON ME"  
WAKING UP THE  
NEIGHBOURS (1991)**

"We'd gone through that 'emotional record' period with *Into the Fire*. On *Waking Up the Neighbours*, we went back to nitty-gritty overdriven electric guitar blues again, which was a lot of fun. This song has some interesting chord patterns to it. [Producer] Mutt Lange played a big role in it. He had us walk through the song step by step, and he made suggestions right up until the tag at the end of the song, where Bryan interjected and said, 'Just let Keith go.' And that's what I did. I just played the tag, and we got some fun things out of it."

At that point in our career, we had substantially more guitars to choose from, as we had been collecting a little bit along the way. There was an SG Junior that had a single Seymour Duncan in it instead of a P-90. It was okay, but it had a really thick neck and due to the setup, it was a nightmare to play. My fingers would bleed. But they said, 'Let Keith use that one!' After a couple days of us messing around, my fingers kind of hardened up and I got used to it, and that was the guitar I used on that solo. When I hear it now, I hear the amount of energy that went into that song, especially on the solo on the way out of the song."



Scott lends support to Tina Turner on her *Private Dancer* tour, at Wembley Arena, March 15, 1985.

**"FITS YA GOOD"  
UNPLUGGED (1997)**

"[Guitarist] Jamie Glaser played on the original recording [on *You Want It, You Got It*], but I played on the unplugged version and took a different approach from what I had been asked to give at that point. The whole idea of us going into an acoustic environment had its own challenges and I was looking forward to trying it. I thought playing instruments such as a nylon-string and a mandolin on a recording, was a good wakeup call for me to try things.

"Prior to the recording, we had a guy named Pat Leonard who was producing and arranging the material with us. The three of us were in Bryan's studio mapping out what

we were going to do. This being a rock song, we had to completely rethink it, keeping in mind that we had the Juilliard string ensemble that Michael Kamen had arranged and conducted too. I chose that particular solo just because it demonstrates how to leave space. I open the solo with just a few notes, as minimal as possible, then let it develop, and by the end, I am doing this kind of arpeggiated run down on the guitar, which was played on a Martin acoustic flattop.

"That song and solo are an example of where I had to really rethink how I normally play with Bryan. I'm really proud of it, as it really helped me change the direction of what I was usually used to. I just love that moment." ■

SOLOMON N'JIE/GETTY IMAGES



# Tone Within Reach

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Pickups



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## B-List Beauty

This 1964 Gretsch Corvette Model 6135 brings vintage bling to those on a budget.

**INTRODUCED IN 1961** as what would appear to be a rather obvious rival to Gibson's Les Paul/SG Junior, the Gretsch Corvette never really graduated to pro-player status like the guitar maker's Duo Jet or 6120 models, but it makes a particularly interesting "B-list vintage" guitar. Gretsch first used the Corvette name on a guitar in its lower-priced hollowbody Electromatic series of 1954-'59. This was a non-cutaway archtop with a single DeArmond Model 200 (a.k.a. Dynasonic) pickup in the neck position and relatively modest cosmetics beyond the block fingerboard inlays. Shortly after, Gretsch headed back to the drawing board to concoct a student model that would be more appropriate for the times, and the new and entirely revamped Corvette fit the bill.

Although Gretsch had unveiled the Duo Jet ostensibly as its first solidbody guitar in 1953, it had a lot of chambering within the body and was semi-solid at best. As such, the Corvette of the '60s was the company's first solidbody electric guitar, and it embodied a mash-up that was pretty hip to the times, too.

The short-lived first version of 1961 had a more rounded slab body that somewhat echoed a double-cutaway Les Paul Junior of 1958-'61, with more asymmetrical horns. But toward the end of its debut year, the Corvette appeared to represent some blatant effort on Gretsch's part to play catch-up on Gibson's own design evolution. In came beveled body edges, pointier horns and an overall look that was unapologetically SG-like. For 1961-'63, Gretsch stuck with its (also rather

### ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- > Asymmetrical double-cutaway design
- > Solidbody made from mahogany
- > Glued-in mahogany neck, 24.6" scale length
- > Brazilian rosewood fingerboard with dot inlays
- > Two single-coil Gretsch HiLo'Tron pickups
- > Burns vibrato



GUITAR COURTESY OF SHOALS GUITAR BOUTIQUE. PHOTOS BY GOLD STRIKE PRODUCTIONS.



BY DAVE HUNTER



Gibson-like) three-a-side headstock and retained the odd little trapeze tailpiece for the hardtail models, although the floating rosewood bridge saddle — seemingly a pointless compromise on a solidbody guitar — disappeared after '61. Even so, Gretsch continued with what was essentially a floating rosewood bridge base with a simple steel bar saddle atop it, which at least gave a little more clarity, bite and sustain to the tone.

By the arrival of our featured example, in 1964, however, the Corvette came more into its own skin, chiefly in the form of the distinctive two-plus-four headstock that was like nothing else on the market. Whether a semi-nod to Fender, to Gibson's Firebird or simply an entirely original Gretsch concoction, the headstock design really helps these mid- to late-'60s Corvettes stand out and presents an interesting point of design in and of itself. Around the same time, Gretsch also added a notch at the tail end of the body into which the strap button is set.

Among the other nifty features of the 6135 are the rather unusual vibrato tailpiece, partnered with the rudimentary tension bar and the basic bar bridge. The former is actually a rather clever design manufactured by Burns London, the maker that famously put guitars in the hands of Hank Marvin and the Shadows in the mid '60s. It would seem a convoluted trade route, but we can only imagine the Burns was more affordable than



The tailpiece was made by Burns London.

a U.S.-made Bigsby. Its use is also something of a coincidence, since Burns would be purchased by the Baldwin Piano company in 1965, which would then purchase Gretsch in 1967. Although it is designed somewhat differently, with a single sturdy spring placed behind the center of the roller bar and secured within that pyramid-like structure behind it, the Burns vibrato also functions quite like a Bigsby, with a similar easy action and rather limited travel.

The real centerpiece of the Corvette's tone, of course, is in its HiLo'Tron pickups. Although the single-pickup 6132, 6133 and 6134 models are usually more plentiful, the 6135 carries two of these Gretsch-made single-coils, and offers a lot of sonic flexibility as a result. Gretsch introduced the HiLo'Tron in late 1959 to replace the DeArmond Model 200 single-coil it had previously been using, and it became standard-issue on several lower- and mid-priced models for several years after. Although it is often mistaken for a mini-humbucker with one row of adjustable polepieces and is indeed housed in a cover the same size as that of Gretsch's famed Filter'Tron humbucker, the HiLo'Tron employs



The two-plus-four headstock was distinctive.

just one coil positioned to the pole-side of the housing, with a bar magnet on the other side and a steel charge plate linking the two.

Like vintage Filter'Trons, these old HiLo'Trons don't pack a lot of punch, but their meager resistance readings (generally in the 3.5k to 4k ohms range) don't tell the full story. While they don't have a lot of output

compared to many other pickups, they do have a rich, dynamic, chiming tone that can really bite when you apply some overdrive or crank up an old tube amp, and they are definitely another component

capable of delivering "that great Gretsch sound." Sadly, countless original Corvettes have been hacked over the years by owners who have pulled and tossed their HiLo'Trons in search of more output, almost invariably securing inferior tone in the process.

All in all, a Corvette in good and at least somewhat original condition can be a surprisingly solid player and a great-sounding guitar by any measure. They are also arguably a more viable proposition for contemporary indie and alt guitar styles, and certainly can be had for a lot less cash than many of the more famous vintage hollow and semi-hollow models up for offer. ■

## THE CORVETTE OF THE '60S EMBODIED A MASH-UP THAT WAS HIP TO THE TIMES



The pickup covers bear the distinctive Gretsch logo.



BY JIM CAMPILONGO



## Dress-Down Culture

The Lima brothers put their personal style on a selection of classical standards.

**CLASSICAL GUITAR ALBUMS** can be staid affairs. *Casually Classic* is an exception. It's a record that breaks through to feel free, loose and in-flight. It's a first-class journey, courtesy of Los Indios Tabajaras, a guitar duo that consisted of brothers Antenor and Natalicio (Nato) Lima.

Los Indios Tabajaras translates to "people who live in the north-east of Brazil," which is literal, to say the least. The brothers were indigenous Brazilians from the Tabajara tribe. They spent three years traveling on foot 1,200 miles to Rio de Janeiro, where their musicality was forged. Most of their musical background is vague, but I did find they were self-taught, recorded for RCA Latin America, and took a break to study music before resuming their career as Los Indios Tabajaras. The brothers were then heard by Chet Atkins, who at the time was producing artists for RCA America. They went on to record their own instrumental record on RCA and proceeded to have a discography so vast, it reads longer than a Staples receipt.

Los Indios Tabajaras also enjoyed commercial success with "Maria Elena," a song that has been covered by the always discriminating Ry Cooder as well as by Marty Robbins, Nat King Cole and Jimmy Dorsey. The brothers made the tune their own, and their recording of it spent 14 weeks in the



top 100 in 1963. It's a must-hear, it's plodding monolithic rhythm supporting beautiful Django-esque lead lines that create an expressive world of their own.

While "Maria Elena" and most Los Indios Tabajaras' albums offer many wonderful moments, my personal favorite is *Casually Classic*. Released by RCA Victor in 1966, this great LP includes selections from Chopin, Tchaikovsky and Bach and an assortment of lovely and stunning renditions of classical standards. It's a delightful listening experience and a great way to meet the unforgettable artistry of Los Indios Tabajaras, who really let their hair down and shred.

### LOS INDIOS TABAJARAS BREATHE FIRE AND SOUL INTO THESE CLASSICAL STANDARDS

The album opens with Chopin's "Valse in C-Sharp," giving the listener a taste of what will follow stylistically: tempo changes so locked in that only brothers could pull them off, as well as jaw-dropping technique, sprinkled with romanticism and played from the heart. "Flight of the Bumble Bee" is just crazy good. It might be the fastest guitar playing I've ever heard in my life, and it's a showstopper. As far as I'm concerned, the two brothers could show up to a gig and play this one tune and I'd leave a satisfied concert goer. Vivo Nato!

Aside from being a great hang, *Casually Classic* has given me a lot. When Luca Benedetti and I recorded "Minute Waltz" on our

album, *Two Guitars*, I referenced the Los Indios Tabajaras' version as a successful template. The brothers' playful tempo changes made it okay for us to humanize the piece and emphasize the beauty of the song — to brush off the dust of historical precedent and make "Minute Waltz" ours too.

You might think you're not a classical guitar person, but I urge you to check this record out, no matter what preconceived leanings you may have. *Casually Classic* is a great way to enter the pristine house of classical guitar and hear the explosiveness of Los Indios Tabajaras, who breathe fire and soul into these classical standards. 🎸

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at [jimcampilongo.com](http://jimcampilongo.com).





BY TERRY CARLETON



## Mutt Clang

It has a baseball bat neck and a virtually flat fretboard, but this 1964 Greenburst “Jetstar” M.I.J. mongrel mash-up is loud and ready to rock.

**OVER THE YEARS**, the Jetstar name has appeared on guitars branded by Guild, Galanti and DeArmond. This guitar’s nameplate came from a piece of vintage luggage. I just can’t get behind a guitar that doesn’t have a headstock logo, and neither can my buddy Ardy, who built this cool green mash-up.

The guitar pictured here was most definitely made in Japan, but just where and by whom is hard to say. Using Frank Meyers’ wonderfully comprehensive *History of Japanese Electric Guitars* (Centerstream), I determined that the body, neck and bridge could be from FujiGen Gakki, while the gold-foil pickup looks to be made by Teisco and the pickguard could be by Sakai. The Kluson-style tuners are mint-green aftermarkets, and the green knobs are from a discarded ’60s Airline record player.

But determining the branding is tricky. In the mid ’60s, Japan’s 50 or so independent guitar plants combined to churn out some 20,000 guitars a month. Understandably, there was a lot of component cross-pollination and a couple dozen different brand names, depending on who was importing what and to where. Of course, we all know of Teisco, but there are many guitars that look vaguely like this one with nameplates by Decca, Kent, Demian, Zenon, Knox and Sakai, to name a few.

### WEIRDO FACTOR

What’s weird is that I’m writing about a guitar that looks to be a plain, stripped-down starter

model with just enough electronics on it to qualify as electric. But what’s weird about the guitar, or at least anomalous, is the headstock. None of the aforementioned guitars had the three-plus-three design shown here, but rather the six-on-a-side format. Incidentally, the original headstock made the guitar look top heavy, so Ardy reshaped it to the more aesthetically pleasing Epiphone Wilshire-esque shape it has today.

### PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

The C-shaped maple neck is wide and chunky and fills my entire palm. Perhaps it’s so substantial because it has no truss rod, but the feel is more like a classical guitar in width and a Guild 12-string acoustic in depth. To make matters more challenging, the rosewood fingerboard is flat from the nut to the 21st fret. However, something almost visceral takes place when you pick up this rather heavy, eight-pound guitar. The weight, the fat neck and the pitbull nature of its look makes you want to smack it around like Jack White or Dan Auerbach might.

And to its credit, this guitar just takes it. The Teisco pickup has an unbelievably high output. I compared it to my favorite Strat using the same amp settings, and the Fender sounded like a banjo. Ardy shimmed the neck for more pull on the strings, reshaped and/or reglued many of the frets, and proceeded to set it up beautifully. They also changed out the tone cap

to a .01uf (versus the more common .022uf). While it won’t go full bass, it does produce at least three distinct and usable rhythm sounds. Just something to consider if you’re facing a similar restoration mod.

### VALUE

This guitar retailed for about 35 bucks in 1964. You can find it today for \$150 to \$350, but you may spend just as much getting one into good playing condition.

### WHY IT RULES

It looks unassuming, but it wants to rock. It’s been set up to play well and to be played aggressively. 🎸

*Thanks to Ardy for another cool build, Frank Meyers for the tech info, and omnipresent YouTuber Mike Dugan for proving that these castaways have musical merit.*

*Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at [rtcarleton@gmail.com](mailto:rtcarleton@gmail.com). Who knows? Maybe I’ll write about it.*









# STEEL-DRIVING MAN

BY GARY GRAFF

As Crazy Horse drop their latest, *World Record*, **Nils Lofgren** reflects on his tenure with Neil Young, his new tour with Bruce, and his latest obsession: the pedal steel.

**I**T'S EARLY — barely past sunrise — in Nils Lofgren's area of Arizona, not far from Scottsdale. But the veteran multi-instrumentalist is awake and into his day, accompanied by Rose, the 95-pound mixed-breed Lofgren and his wife, Amy, rescued last year.

She and the couple's 14-year-old Chihuahua, Outlaw Pete, meanwhile, are still asleep.

"I like getting up super early, sometimes in the dark," Lofgren, 72, says. "When I'm on the road it's different; I can't sleep because of the performance adrenalin. But at home, when I'm able to get a little sleep, I'm an early riser."

Lofgren isn't one to waste any of that time, either. He's been a recording artist since he was a teenager in the band Grin — which got its break thanks to the patronage of Neil Young and his co-producer, the late David Briggs, who made Lofgren part of Crazy Horse for 1970's *After the Gold Rush*. Lofgren is now in the midst of his third

tour of duty with Crazy Horse, back in the saddle since 2018 and Frank "Poncho" Sampedro's retirement from the group. He's made two pandemic projects with the band: *Barn*, recorded June 2020 in, as the title indicates, a converted barn, dubbed Studio in the Clubs, in Colorado's Rocky Mountains; and *World Record*, released this past November, made with Rick Rubin at his Shangri-La studio in Malibu.

Lofgren has also logged a solo career that he began with a self-titled effort in 1975 and has been part of the E Street Band since replacing Little Steven Van Zandt in 1984, playing on eight of Springsteen's studio albums. He served tours of duty with Ringo Starr's first two All-Starr Bands, co-wrote with the late Lou Reed on 1979's *The Bells* (along with songs that became part of Lofgren's 2019 album, *Blue With Lou*), and he was the lead guitarist on onetime Foreigner frontman Lou Gramm's first solo album, *Ready or Not*, in 1987.

*Stalwart* is a more fitting term for Lofgren than *journeyman*, and given his



multi-instrumental skills — guitar, keyboards, accordion, banjo, pedal and lap steel, mandolin — *virtuoso* is not out of the question. He spoke with *Guitar Player* just as *World Record* was rolling out and Springsteen began tuning up to hit the road.

**It's been a long time since you've done any touring. What are your expectations for this year?**

We've got a great body of work, so you brush up on it. Bruce has a new album of his favorite soul and R&B songs [2022's *Only the Strong Survive*], and it's obvious that'll be in there. But, y'know, we're used to improvising, never following a set list, which is

something Neil doesn't follow either. I think the last show we played with Neil, up in Canada, it was 20 minutes before the show and we were waiting for a set list we know we will not follow, and Neil just said, "Guys, I don't want to write a set list. Let's just walk out and do whatever comes." That's extraordinary, to be able to walk out with no set list and

**"Neil just said, 'Guys, I don't want to write a set list. Let's just walk out and do whatever comes'"**

just win it. And it worked out great 'cause it's Neil and Crazy Horse. Same thing with Bruce — there's a lot of improvisation. So I just get ready like I always have and hope for the best that it works out.

**You like it unpredictable, don't you?**

It's not for everybody. It's like the difference between a classical musician, who can sightread the most complicated thing you put in front of them and play

it, but if you asked them to improvise the blues they say, "No, I don't do that." I studied classical accordion for 10 years, from five to 15, then picked up the blues guitar as a hobby, just 'cause all my heroes were, like, B.B. King, Albert King, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, Clapton...all of 'em. And I was just playing it for fun, never thinking I could be a professional musician.

**You have your solo career, of course, but you're such a band guy, too. Do you have a preference?**

I'm lucky to have both, and I'm blessed to be part of two really great bands. And occasionally I've been lucky through the years to moonlight with Willie Nelson and Branford Marsalis and other great people. And it was probably a blessing I didn't have a hit record when I was 18. It might have killed me and would certainly have precluded going out with other great bands. But I still remember when I was 18, walking into David Briggs' home in Topanga and driving his little VW to Neil's home to record *After the Gold Rush*. I still remember saying, "Wow, it's nice not to be the bandleader." All these nonmusical responsibilities disappear and everything is just musical. I just embraced that, and I still do.

**You made an album with Springsteen that came out during the pandemic [2020's *Letter To You*], but it's Crazy Horse that kept you busiest, between *Barn* and *World Record*, which were two very different recording experiences.**

For sure. We had a ball making *Barn*, and there was a great, very earthy, realistic documentary [*Barn*, directed by Young's wife, Daryl Hannah] of friends for 50-some years. And as we kept going through *Barn*, of course, we talked about touring, and we wanted to play, but COVID kept that from happening. But Neil talked about writing again, and he would keep in touch with us. And at one point he said, "Hey, it might be summer, maybe a little earlier." Then out of the blue he said, "Look, I have the songs, can you make May 1st work?"

**He didn't exactly have the songs like he used to, though, did he?**

I was surprised. I'm used to working pretty quickly with Neil, especially when it's Crazy Horse. Usually it's 11, 12 days — a kind of a whirlwind, catch-it-as-you're-learning, super-live, no-headphones approach, which is really cool. And all of a sudden he said, "We're gonna probably be 21 days, because I need some time to figure out what I'm gonna play. I wrote these songs walking and kind of singing, chugging, rapping, whatever into a Dictaphone. So I need some extra time."



JOEY MARTINEZ





#### What was that figuring-out process like?

It was this organic, beautiful thing that we did. It was an exploratory thing. The songs weren't full arrangements that were mapped out. Billy [Talbot, bassist] and I were at least on top of some chord progressions, but Neil didn't know what he was going to play from song to song. He kept jumping from instrument to instrument, and so did I. I'd go to the pump organ or the accordion; he'd pick up a guitar or go to the piano. It was kind of musical chairs sometime, and days sometimes before we figured out what he and I should play for each song. 'Cause he said, "I've never written an album without an instrument." It was a very fresh, very new kind of thing for us.

**When most people think of Crazy Horse, they think of *Tonight's the Night* or *Rust Never Sleeps* or *Ragged Glory* — the grungey, distorted guitar stuff. But when you're involved, it tends to be gentler and more subtle. Are you the guy that tames the beast?**

[laughs] I don't know. Certainly, the obvious nuances, the different instruments and the accordion and any keyboard are what I add to it. Also, just the tonality of my singing. Y'know, the band's got an enormous history of great stuff and what Danny [Whitten] and Frank did. Poncho did an amazing job for 37 years, especially the heavy rock and grunge sound. But it's

obvious that when I'm in the band we're able to jump around and have more sounds and be more nuanced. But the heavy thing — that sneaks in here and there with me too.

#### The heaviest moment on *World Record* is "Chevrolet," another long, 13-and-a-half-minute guitar epic. How did that come about?

When I heard it I thought, Yeah, this'll be a great two-guitar track. I got out the black [Gretsch] Falcon and cranked it way up to where it was starting to take off in my hands a little bit, not unlike Neil and Old Black [Young's customized 1953 Les Paul]. I'd overdriven the sound and turned it way up, and it really had a great sound with Old Black. And all of a sudden we were playing it, and we got into this hellacious, long jam. I think it was like 14, 15 minutes. Neil called me about it later and he said, "Y'know what? We got the single edit, which is only 11 minutes, but we put three minutes back in 'Chevrolet.'" I said, "Great!"

#### It definitely has the live, off-the-floor feel we associate with Crazy Horse. Was that the case?

We kept trying it. We'd just come in every couple days and play the song again, just two or three times, and move on, and I think they used one of the earlier ones for the album. There was one time where it got really crazy. Neil was playing lead and I started doing some

**ABOVE:** Crazy Horse regrouped for *World Record*. (from left) Nils Lofgren, Ralph Molina, Billy Talbot and Neil Young.

**OPENING PAGE:** Lofgren performs at the 30th Annual Bridge School Benefit concert, Mountain View, California, October 22, 2016.



counterpoint, and then it just smoothed out into the groove. I said, "Well, that sounds like you went into a rough town and had a lot of misadventures, and now you're back on the highway, just cruising at 45, taking it easy." I like that. I thought it was a great thing and a bit of self-discovery as a band.

**You're playing pedal-steel now, I see.**

**"I'd love it if Neil and Bruce let me make their touring schedules so I could weave back and forth in both bands"**

Lofgren performs with Bruce Springsteen at London's Wembley Stadium, June 4, 2016.

For the first time, yeah. I'm kind of a beginner pedal-steel player. I got to spend so much time with the great Ben Keith on the road and in studios, way back to *Tonight's the Night*. He was such a great inspiration to me. I'm still kind of a decent beginner on it, but when we were gonna do "I Walk With You" I had it in my room and ran it through this little [Electro-Harmonix] POG that makes it sound like a pipe organ that's being

distorted, 'cause I didn't know what to play on that song and I didn't want to just crank up the black Falcon and have it be a rough guitar. I thought, Man, the pedal steel, if I overdrive it through this little POG.... And I said, "Neil, can you come in my room?" I played the sound for him and he said, "Man, you got to get this instrument over in the main room," which I did. So there's a couple songs I played pedal steel on for the first time forever, which for me was a kick, because as a beginner you're a little cautious. It's not like improvising the blues on a Strat, but it worked.

**Sometimes knowing a little less turns into more, because you have to compensate for what you don't know.**

I remember on *After the Gold Rush*, when they asked me to do it, I was 18. They said, "We're gonna put you on piano, too, as well as guitar and singing." I said, "Well, I'm not a professional piano player," but they were like, "Yeah, but you played accordion your whole life. You'll come up with something good." And I just did these simple parts and they worked. At my most creative, I was very deliberate and simple, and that left a lot of space that was appealing to David Briggs and Neil. That's something I've never forgotten.

**What was working with Rick Rubin like for Crazy Horse? It seems like it could have been a Godzilla versus Mothra situation, since Neil tends to like to keep hold of the reins on his albums.**

I think Neil in general is reticent to turn over that type of control, but I think this time he just wanted to show up and just be the guitar player and the singer and not always have that producer's hat on. Rick allowed that for him, and it worked really well. I got there early, so I saw Rick one afternoon, sitting in the sun on the porch. I went up and we had a nice chat about music and history. He learned a lot about me, I learned about him. And Rick was helpful in kind of giving me some tips, or old records to check out, just for a general place to aim at, 'cause we had a million instruments. We had so many options it was unreal. Everyone was wide open to anything and everything. Obviously, the main goal was to come up with something that they both felt good about.

**You've got a full schedule with Springsteen this year. What happens if Neil decides to take Crazy Horse out, too?**

[sighs] I'm in two great bands, so it's complicated. I'd love it if Neil and Bruce let me make their touring schedules so I could weave back and forth in both bands, but of course no one's gonna let me do that, so I just do the work that's in front of me. And if Neil goes out and has to get somebody else, that's how it'll have to be, y'know?

**Are you working on another album of your own?**

I am, and you know what? I'm pretty far along. I'm feeling really good about it. It's got rough stuff, gentle stuff. I'm not in a rush. I've been chipping away at it all year. I'm hoping to be done by the end of the year and maybe get it out in the spring. It's just this little mom-and-pop operation my wife, Amy, and I have [Cattle Track Road Records]. We've been doing that since the early '90s, when I parted ways with the music industry. And it's very healthy for me to do my own music. It doesn't replace performing, but it gives me a creative outlet, and I'm excited about the record. ■



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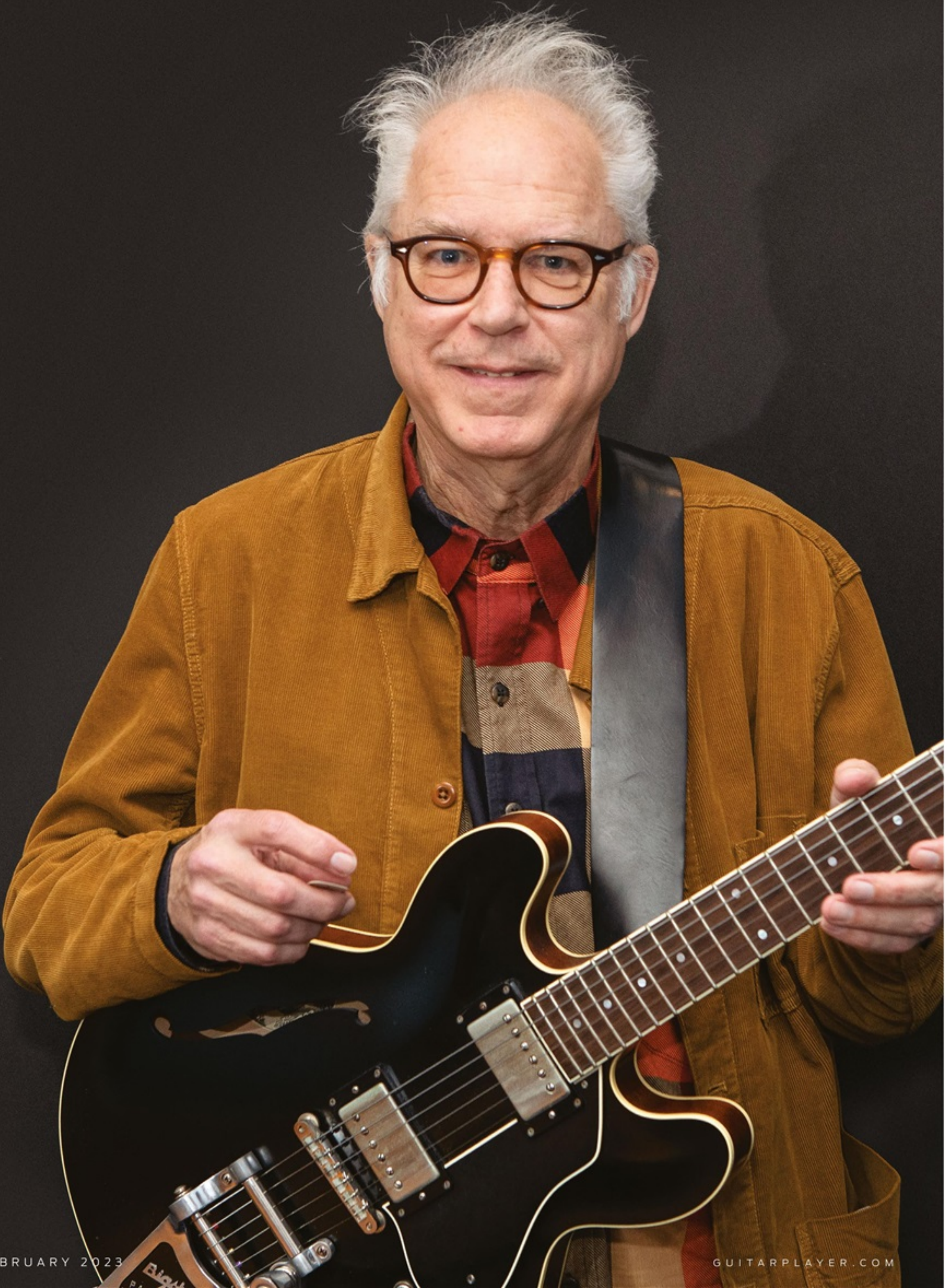
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# *THE* CURIOUS GUITAR *OF*

# Bill Frisell

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

He treats every note as a question. It's an approach that's made him a favorite of artists across the spectrum.

*GP* asks the guitar legend a few questions of our own.

Bill Frisell  
photographed  
with his  
Collings I-30  
LC with a  
Bigsby, at the  
Blue Note,  
New York City,  
November 30,  
2022

KYRA KVERNO



## When the Beatles made their American debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9, 1964, it inspired a generation of Boomers to pick up the guitar.

But it was a much earlier TV broadcast that helped turn Bill Frisell on to the instrument, when he was a boy growing up in Denver. Credit Jimmie Dodd, host of *The Mickey Mouse Club*, with planting the six-string seed in Frisell's young brain. Dodd was Head Mousketeer during the televised show's initial 1955 to 1959 run, when it was shown five days a week on ABC stations across the country. He wasn't just an actor; Dodd also wrote the program's theme

song and premiered his Mousegetar on the November 11, 1955 show, which aired just a few months before Frisell's fifth birthday [see [youtube.com/watch?v=XWLrPg\\_altI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWLrPg_altI)]. Dodds' adeptness on the instrument was immediately evident in the crisp, Django-esque filigrees he played between strummed chords on the tune "I'm a Guitar." It may have been that very song that first captured the imagination of young Billy Frisell.

"Right there is what got me wanting to play the guitar," Frisell

tells *Guitar Player*. "I think I was about four. Wow!"

Frisell's guitar journey followed a path that began in earnest at age 13, when he took lessons with Bob Marcus at the Denver Folklore Center. In high school, he got hooked on Wes Montgomery and as a senior began studying guitar with Dale Bruning, who recorded a series of jazz standards with Frisell

decades later on their 2000 duo album, *Reunion*.

At Colorado State, now the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley, Frisell studied for one semester with jazz guitar great Johnny Smith, whose clean articulation and impeccable picking technique on 1956's *Moonlight in Vermont*, with sax great Stan Getz, had also influenced young Pat Martino. Smith's 1962 solo guitar album, *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, recorded at his Johnny Smith Guitar Center in Colorado Springs, may have served as a template for Frisell's own 2018 solo guitar debut, *Music IS*.

To date, Frisell has made more than 40 albums as a leader, starting with 1982's *In Line* for Manfred Eicher's ECM label. Prior to that, he had served as a kind of house guitarist for the imprint, appearing on albums by German bassist Eberhard Weber (1979's *Fluid Rustle*), American drummer Paul Motian (1981's *Psalm*), Norwegian bassist Arild Anderson (1982's *A Molde Concert*) and Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek (1982's *Paths, Prints*). He has since racked up appearances as a sideman on more than 300 recordings that cover a remarkable range of artists and styles. He's cut pop and rock sessions for the likes of Elvis Costello, Paul Simon, James Taylor, Marianne Faithfull, Rickie Lee Jones, Bonnie Raitt, Joe Jackson, Loudon Wainwright III, and Robert Plant and Alison Krauss. He's accompanied jazz legends like pianists McCoy Tyner and Paul Bley; bassists Ron Carter and Gary Peacock; trumpeter Chet Baker; drummers Jack DeJohnette, Billy Hart, Ronald Shannon Jackson and Andrew Cyrille; and saxophonists Charles Lloyd and Lee Konitz. Some of Frisell's most potent and revered recordings came as a member of the bass-less trio featuring saxophonist Joe Lovano and led by the late jazz drummer-composer Paul Motian, with whom he made 20 albums during their more than 30 years performing together.

Frisell was also a pioneer of the current craze for looping. He pioneered looping-delay-backward effects in the '80s, then in the '90s had some edgy encounters with distortion pedals during his time in the services of John Zorn's cacophonous avant-noisecore improv band, Naked City. He's famously known for using the Electro-Harmonix 16 Second Digital Delay early in his career before switching in 1999 to the Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler, the looping pedal that has remained in his arsenal ever since. Frisell has cut back on effects considerably in recent

**"What's kind of cool is the way that those digital delay devices kind of rewire your brain. It affected the way I hear structures in the music"**

Frisell at home  
in New York  
City, December  
3, 2022







MONICA JANE FRISSELL



years, allowing his innate musicianship and melodic gifts to shine through with stunning clarity and intention. As ever, what he plays is surprising, rendered with a tasteful, painterly approach.

GP talked to Frisell about his latest Blue Note release, 2022's *Four*, with pianist Gerald Clayton, saxophonist-clarinetist Greg Tardy and drummer Johnathan Blake. He also shed light on his philosophy of the instrument, his approach in a band setting and his current arsenal of guitars, which includes a blue Telecaster that belonged to his late friend and colleague Robert Quine, who made his mark with proto-punkers Richard Hell & the Voidoids (their 1977 album, *Blank Generation*, is a definitive anthem for that era) and during the early '80s with Lou Reed (circa *Blue Mask*, *Legendary Hearts* and *Live in Italy*).

**I**n Philip Watson's recent biography on you, *Beautiful Dreamer*, he brings up your meeting with Robert Quine in the early '80s at music journalist Chip Stern's apartment on the Upper West Side. So essentially, we have Chip to thank for bringing you and Quine together, which led to your early experiments with the Electro-Harmonix 16 Second Digital Delay pedal. And the rest is history. Yeah, Chip was right there when Quine brought it to a jam we had. And as soon as I saw it working, it was sort of this instantaneous thing. I just knew what to do with it. It was like it was made for me or something. And Quine was sort of amazed when I started playing it. His mouth was hanging open just watching me play. I swear, it was like... Somehow it was just all laid out. It just fit with the way my brain was working.

**Frisell performs a soundcheck with the Bill Frisell Trio in Rome, Italy, July 10, 2019.**



**You've done so much over time with looping and backward guitar. But on the new album, *Four*, you only dial up looping on one tune, "Dog on a Roof."**

Well, I thought I was going to make it through the whole record without using that thing. I've been using it less and less lately.

**Your 2019 album *Valentine* had some backward effects on it.**

Yeah, a little bit. But the last few months of being out there playing, I haven't used any effects at all. Reverb is about the only effect that I'm using these days.

**What pedal do you currently use for looping?**

It's a Line 6 DL4 pedal. I had the Electro-Harmonix 16 Second Digital Delay for quite a while before that bit the dust. Then I had a DigiTech 8 Second Delay, which was also another thing that Quine introduced me to. He always was the first guy to get that new stuff. Then I got the Line 6, and that's pretty much been it for me for 20 or more years.

But really, I'm sort of getting pretty burned out on effects. The last few months I haven't been using anything at all. I did a solo gig a couple of months ago, and that's the kind of situation where I always would rely on it so much. But I was proud of myself: I did the whole gig without using any pedals or anything, just playing by myself. That was sort of the true test, I guess. What's cool is the way that those digital-delay devices kind of rewire your brain. It affected the way I hear structures in the music, so you carry that over into how you play without them. So if you take the box away, the effect is still in your imagination. Now it's almost like I'm trying to get at some of that stuff that I would have done with the delay, but I'm just doing it with my hands.

**You're emulating the effect to the point where it becomes part of your vocabulary.**

Yeah, which is kind of great. It's like you learn something from the machine. It will teach you something that you figure out how to do yourself.

**I went back and listened to your first album from 1982, *In Line*, and that is a startlingly singular statement at that moment. On the title track, for instance, there's layers of guitars, lots of loops, no discernible time. It's like a different language for the instrument back then, and it sounds as amazing and refreshing today as it did 40 years ago.**

Wow. I haven't listened to that in so long.

**And that debut album introduced a tune that you would continue to play over your career, "Throughout."**



Oh, yeah. I feel like that was sort of the first song that I ever wrote that was like an actual bit of inspiration. It just came out in a couple seconds. I don't know how that happened and I keep trying to get back to that. Something like that happens and you think, Man, it's so easy to write a song. But then it's like, Okay, try to write another one.

**On the new album, you reprise your compositions "Good Dog, Happy Man," "Monroe" and "Lookout for Hope." What is your attitude about approaching your own tunes that you had previously recorded before?**

As I get older, I notice that happening more. For example, I first tried to play "The Days of Wine and Roses" maybe 50 years ago, and as the years go by you keep discovering more and more about the tune. It keeps revealing more and more stuff. So I was aware of that happening with standard tunes. But what's weird about getting older, it starts happening with my own tunes. So if I come back to one of my own tunes that I haven't played in a while, I'll see it in a completely different way or I'll notice things that are in it that I didn't even know were there before.

In this case of playing some of my old tunes on *Four*, it's really thrilling for me to hear someone else interpret them. I don't know if these guys ever even heard those tunes before. I know Greg Tardy played "Monroe" before, but to hear what the other guys' take on it would be hearing it for the first time, it just brings a whole new life to the song. With anything I write, I don't have any hard and fast idea of what it's supposed to be. I just want it to be a way to get us into playing some music together, and I want to be surprised, and even startled sometimes. So it's just nice to see what these guys have to say about it.

**I've noticed that whether it's you playing a standard or reinterpreting a tune of your own, you do this thing where you'll leave out fragments of the melody or parts of a chord. Rather than a Joe Pass approach, where you're putting all of the information in the tune — the basslines, the full chords, the melody — you're picking and choosing a triad to suggest a chord or part of a line to imply a harmonic shape. It's kind of a Monkian approach. Jim Hall did that too. Where does that come from for you?**

Probably in everything I do there's going to be some sort of Jim Hall influence in there. But also Monk. I think about Monk every day. He's like the master of how you can stick with a melody and find infinite variety in that without leaving it, really.

And that idea of leaving space: You don't have to say everything. If the melody is really internalized in you, you begin to hear it the way Monk plays it, where you might just play a piece of the melody and



internalize the rest. And it never goes away, but it becomes this springboard for all this other stuff to happen. The other thing about leaving space in a song is that you want to hear what someone else has to say about it. You know, you can't just keep pumping it out yourself. You have to leave room for other people to get a word in too. Like with this new album, it's really more about four people just having a conversation. It's not like there's a real soloist anywhere. It's more about just four people talking.

**With one of his Steve Klein guitars in 1996**

***Four* may be one of your least guitaristic albums, in a sense. You don't even play on "Always," which is a solo piano piece. And the tune "Claude Uteley" is almost a drum showcase for Johnathan Blake. So the album is very conversational, and in some cases you leave the conversation entirely.**

Yeah, and that's the way it would be if you're sitting around with some people and having a conversation. You know, you're not talking all the time. You sit there and you check out what somebody else has to say. And then maybe you get your own thing in there at some point.

**"It's like you learn something from the machine. It will teach you something that you figure out how to do yourself"**





Frisell with  
a Fender  
Telecaster  
in Villa  
Celimontana,  
Rome, Italy,  
2006

The dialoguing that you do with Greg Tardy on the Americana piece, “The Pioneers,” reminds me of the intimate duo album you did with him, *More Than Enough*. Maybe that one got overlooked when it came out in 2019 on the vinyl-only label, Newvelle Records, but it was a fantastic album.

Yeah, that was so great. And it is a little hard to find. Actually, the deal with Newvelle is, the masters revert back to the artist after a few years, so Greg was talking about putting it out as a CD in the near future. So probably more people might get to hear it, eventually.

**“I think about  
Monk every day.  
He’s like the master  
of how you can stick  
with a melody and  
find infinite variety  
in that without  
leaving it, really”**

back [2008]. And we’ve done a lot of gigging together over the years. He’s amazing.

It has some beautiful examples of you two playing on jazz standards, like Duke Ellington’s “Single Petal of a Rose,” Billy Strayhorn’s “Blood Count” and Thelonious Monk’s “Ask Me Now,” as well as two of your own tunes, “Monica Jane” and “Worried Woman,” the latter which you also recorded on *Four*.

Yeah, Greg’s been such a great musical partner. I love playing with him. He played on that *History, Mystery* album that I made a while

Your very tender “Waltz for Hal Willner” on *Four* is for the late producer, who you first worked with in 1981 on his Nino Rota tribute record, *Amarcord Nino Rota*. He subsequently produced several albums that you played on, including Marianne Faithfull’s *Strange Weather*, the Disney tribute album *Stay Awake*, Allen Ginsberg’s *The Lion for Real*, David Sanborn’s *Another Hand*, the Charles Mingus tribute album *Weird Nightmare*, Laurie Anderson’s *Life on a String* and Lucinda Williams’ *West*, not to mention your own albums that he produced, *Unspeakable* and *The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved*.

Yeah, Hal passed so quickly from COVID during the pandemic, within the first month or so. Such a shock there. This piece “Waltz for Hal Willner” is actually an older thing that was part of this Allen Ginsberg tribute project that I did with Hal called *Kaddish* [which had its world premiere in 2012 at New York City’s Park Avenue Armory and was later performed at UCLA in 2013]. It was an almost nursery rhyme kind of song that appeared in this piece we had done for Ginsberg, and somehow that melody kept coming back to me.

And I kept thinking about Hal with that one. *Kaddish* was the first time where he specifically said, “I don’t want you to play guitar on it, I just want you to just write the music.” And that was Hal’s way of acknowledging that I could write music. It seemed like everything I did with him would present me with



some opportunity, and it was like something that I didn't even realize that I could do myself. But Hal would just push me through the door, and I'd have to deal with it.

It was always like that with Hal. He knew more of what I was capable of than I did. You know, he trusted me like crazy, from the very first meeting with him in 1980, when no one knew who I was and he asked me to play on that Nino Rota record he produced. He didn't know me; he just had a feeling about me.

**Another song on your new album, "Lookout for Hope," was the title of your 1987 album. You also recorded it with bassist Kermit Driscoll and drummer Joey Baron on 1991's *LIVE*. Then you did it again with Victor Krauss and Jim Keltner on 1998's *Gone, Just Like a Train*. It seems like a work in progress.**

Yeah, originally the actual form of it was kind of complex. There was something in the form that was kind of odd and sort of awkward, so we didn't really play it live very much back then. When I did that album with Victor Krauss and Jim Keltner, I completely dispensed with the whole counter line that was going underneath it. So I super simplified it and just opened it wide open, and that just made it easier to just play. But then later on, I felt like I missed some of what I had originally written. So finally now, 35 years since I wrote that tune, I feel like I finally got it straight the way I wanted. It sort of solidified into this form that we're playing on this new record. So "Lookout for Hope" was more of this struggle over all this time before I finally felt like I got it right.

**It's like "The Days of Wine and Roses." You've probably played that a hundred different ways on gigs over time.**

I hope so. That's what I've tried to do.

**You said in an interview with John Schaefer from the 2022 New York Guitar Festival, "Every note I play is like a question." That's a really interesting way to think about it. So in essence, you're doing call-and-response with yourself.**

Yeah, I really believe that: Every note is a question. It's like on a micro scale and on a macro scale. If you take your instrument and just hit one note on one string, it's like, "Okay, what are you going to do next?" But it will lead you to something else somehow. And it's the same thing even with a song: You learn one song and it'll lead to something else. Like when we were just talking about "The Days of Wine and Roses," I immediately started thinking about Henry Mancini's other great tune, "Moon River." It's like they keep talking to each other



## Style Maven

Want to be as stylistically fluid as Bill Frisell? Forget about labels. Drop the attitude. Be humble.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

**BILL FRISELL HAS** played with musical artists across the gamut of styles. But whether he's jamming with John Zorn, recording with drummer Matt Chamberlain in the group Floratone, or performing with Elvis Costello (as he did for 1995's *Deep Dead Blue*), he approaches the music with the idea of listening and understanding.

**How do you get the dexterity to jump from one style to the next?**

You know, this whole thing with styles and genres and all the labels we put on all these things... We need to talk about it, so we have to have words for it. But when I'm playing or listening or whatever, I'm not thinking, This is jazz, or This is rock, or This is Americana... I don't really change what I do from situation to situation. Just listening is the main thing. And then just trying to understand as deeply as I can what's going on around me and reacting to it. The context may change, but my process is the same. It's just about being open to certain things.

**And what do you think attracts so many different artists in different genres to you?**

I think it's the same thing: I appreciate and listen to what they're doing. All you have to do, if you like something, is be open to it. I've been lucky to be able to tell people I like their music, and then they'll usually welcome me into their world.

**What can others do to develop that fluidity?**

It's about being straightforward about what you like, and being humble about it too. If there's someone you want to play with, go to them and try to learn from them. That's how my own bands work. It's like, the guys in my band are blowing my mind so much that I'm really not the leader of the band. I have them in my band because I want to figure out what they're doing. I heard Ry Cooder say that a long time ago: that you learn from your band.

If you go in there with that attitude, then you'll be welcomed. Most people are generous and want to share what they know. But if you go in there saying, "Oh, I'm going to be a super bad ass, I'm gonna show this guy," that puts someone off.

So, humility is the key. And if I do a workshop with younger players, I always tell them to not be afraid to show what it is that you actually like. The worst thing is to try to be cool, or to try to do what you think somebody else thinks is cool. So you've got to be strong. And if you happen to like a Burt Bacharach song or whatever, then just play it. That's what gives each person their own individual voice. Again, it's just that openness to all music. There's so much amazing music and I keep trying to figure out what's going on with it.

**"There's so much amazing music and I keep trying to figure out what's going on with it"**



somehow. You play a phrase or play a little bit of a melody, and it's like a conversation. Even with yourself, it's a conversation. You play those first couple of notes on "The Days of Wine and Roses"... that's a question. And then you answer that question, and it starts snowballing from there.

**So the question could be, "The days?" And the answer could either be, "Of wine and roses," or just, "roses."**

Yeah! Or just a blank response, like, "I don't know." Or think of some other completely unrelated response.

**That's what Monk did. He left out a lot of notes playing "Sweet Lorraine" or "Sweet and Lovely" or "Dinah." When he was playing any standard, especially solo, he really was having a call-and-response with himself.**

Definitely. With him, I started noticing how leaving out notes of a chord also is like a huge thing. That happened with Monk. I'm always learning from him. It's like he's constantly giving you a lesson or something. A few years ago, I was playing his tune "Well You Needn't" and I kept finding all these little details in it that I hadn't noticed before. I'd find new things. Like I discovered that I was messing up one chord on the bridge. I was playing a D $\flat$ 7th chord, because that's what everybody plays and all my schooling tells me that. And I thought, Okay, I think I'm finished now; I got everything totally together. I finally learned this song. But then I found this Blindfold Test with Monk from *Downbeat* where they played him other people playing his songs. And so that chord in question — I think it was Phineas Newborn playing the song, and Monk goes, "No, no, you can't play it that way. That chord shouldn't have

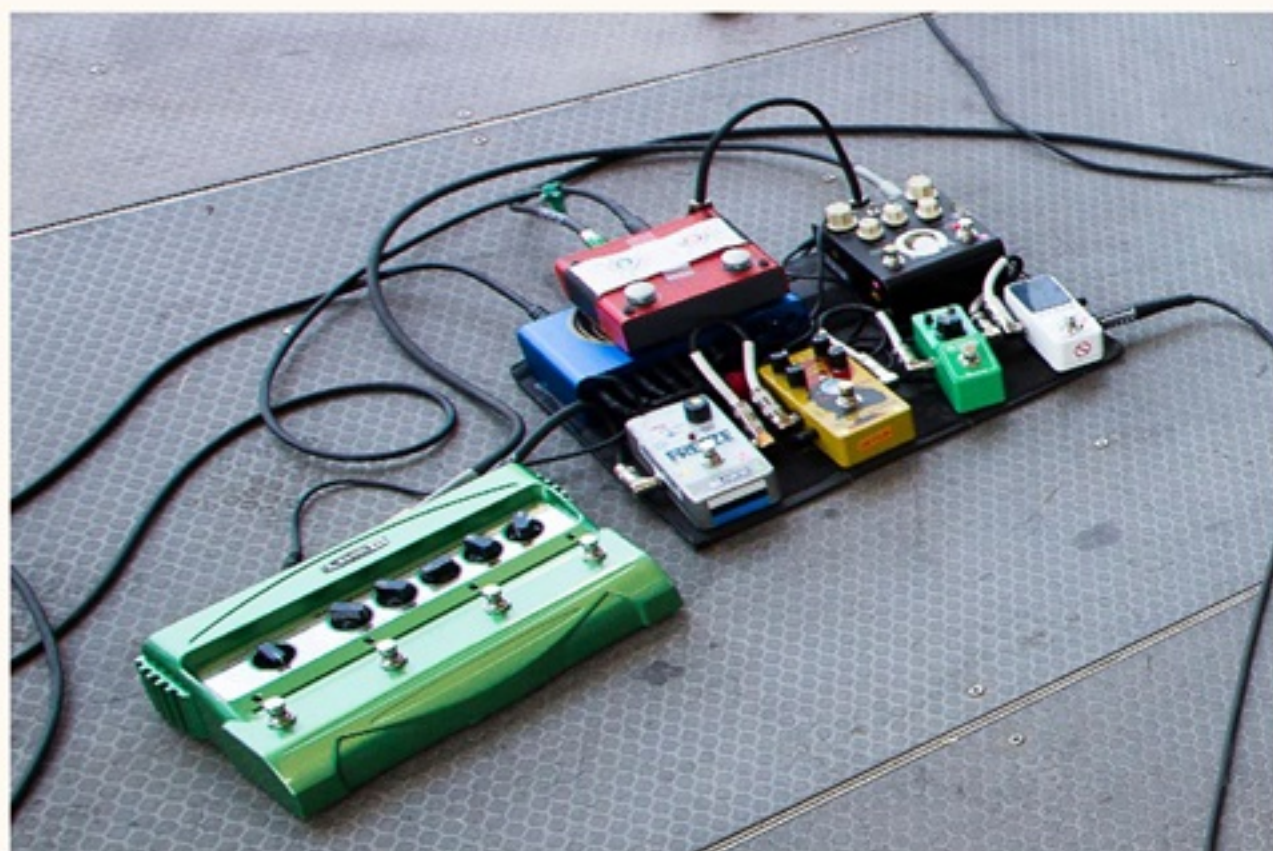
a seventh in it." So I was thinking it's C, E, G, B $\flat$ , D, but he says it's gotta be C, E, G, D. And when you leave out that one note, it sounds totally different. And that's the opposite of what they teach you in Berklee, where it's this thing about stacking everything up from the bottom to the top, like a pile of books or something. You just keep stacking the notes on top of each other. But if you start taking away some of the notes in the middle, all these other amazing things start happening.

**Is it possible to teach a Bill Frisell methodology? Maybe the first lesson is: Leave out notes in the middle of a chord.**

Yeah, with a lot of guitar books, it's about, "How can you make this G major chord something or other sharp this, flat that, and make it into this gigantic six-note chord?" I mean, there's so much information there. Again, I go back to Jim Hall. He played that way, where you try to pick out a couple notes within that whole rainbow of possibilities, and then it starts to set up a whole other rainbow, just with one or two notes. Or take Monk: He's just a master of the idea of you play the root of the chord and one or two other notes that can say so much. And that's what makes Monk sort of almost possible on the guitar. It's not like he's playing all 10-fingered chords on the piano all the time, which kind of wipes out what you can do on the guitar. Instead, he makes it more accessible to where you can actually play what he played. He played a low A, then he played a C $\sharp$  and a D $\sharp$ , and I can actually do that on the guitar. Part of that comes from just my limitations technically. If I could, maybe I would stick all the Joe Pass stuff in there too. But I can't really do that, so I just try to make little stabs at it. We all have to deal with our limitations. For me, I can't actually physically play everything that I wish I could, so I'm going to just imply it or try to take a stab at something that hits close to home.

**I guess the comparison would be Oscar Peterson, where he's just blazing on the piano on every tune,**

Glimpses of Frisell's pedalboard during the Bill Frisell Trio's soundcheck in Rome, July 10, 2019. (Clockwise from left) His Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler, Electro-Harmonix Freeze, Catalinbread Katzenkonig distortion, Ibanez Tube Screamer Mini, TC Electronic Polytune Mini, Strymon Flint and Lehle Little Dual Amp Switcher.



LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES





**filling in so much information, and Monk, where he's leaving so much out that it's hip. Two entirely different aesthetics on the same instrument, like you and Joe Pass.**

I mean, I wish I could do that Joe Pass stuff. I remember one time I heard John McLaughlin in the mid '70s. Now, I love John McLaughlin. He's just a huge hero for me, right? But I went and heard him with Shakti, and I almost quit playing. I was like, I give up. It's too much. I can't. There's no way I could ever do this. It was a terrible moment for me. Then after a while, I was like, Well, fuck it! Whatever it is that I can do, I'll just try to do it anyway. So I sort of gave up trying to play like John McLaughlin in that moment and I said, Okay, I'm going to just try to do the best I can do with whatever little bit I've got. And it sort of got me back playing again.

**There's quite a bit of room there between Jimmie Dodd and John McLaughlin.**

[laughs] Yeah! And there are so many ways to express yourself. I mean, Robert Johnson couldn't play like Segovia. And they're both about as heavy music as you could possibly imagine. That's what's so incredible about the guitar. When you think about it, Segovia, Robert Johnson, John McLaughlin, Jim Hall, Sonny Sharrock, Johnny Smith, Johnny Winter, Derek

Bailey, Wes Montgomery and Jimi Hendrix are all playing the same instrument, tuned the same way. And it's like, "What?!"

**That Quine guitar that you recently played on tour, the blue Telecaster: Did you ever record with it?**

The only time I recorded with it was on that McCoy Tyner record [2008's *Guitars*]. On that record it was just a straight, normal Telecaster. But since then, I put a humbucking pickup in it. I don't know if that's sacrilegious, but I think Quine would be okay with it.

**How many different instruments did you play on the new album?**

Just two. Mainly, I played my Jay Black Telecaster. I also played a 1966 Telecaster on "Monroe," but all the other stuff is done with that Jay Black Tele. I got it at the beginning of the pandemic, and it has these Jeff Callahan humbucker pickups in it, so it's quiet. But they sound more like P-90s. It's really a good guitar.

**You saw Jimi Hendrix in concert, didn't you?**

Yeah! I saw him twice. The first time was in a

**With pianist  
Gerald Clayton**

**"Those first couple of notes on 'Days of Wine and Roses'... that's a question. You answer that question, and it starts snowballing"**



gymnasium kind of room at a college near where I grew up. The audio of that gig [on February 14, 1968 at Regis College Fieldhouse in Denver] is actually available on YouTube [see [youtube.com/watch?v=H99CgXUnW\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H99CgXUnW_U)]. It wasn't the tour he did with the Monkees; it must've been his second tour in the States. Soft Machine was opening for him. *Are You Experienced* had just come out, and I didn't know what was going on at this concert. It was just so shocking. I don't even know if they had much of a PA; you're just hearing the amps coming off the stage, basically. And the whole combination of the way he sang with the guitar and the massiveness of the sound... It was just too much to comprehend, for sure.

**“The Fillmore marquee said ‘Jimi Hendrix, Dec. 31.’ I’m thinking, I already saw him. I don’t need this”**

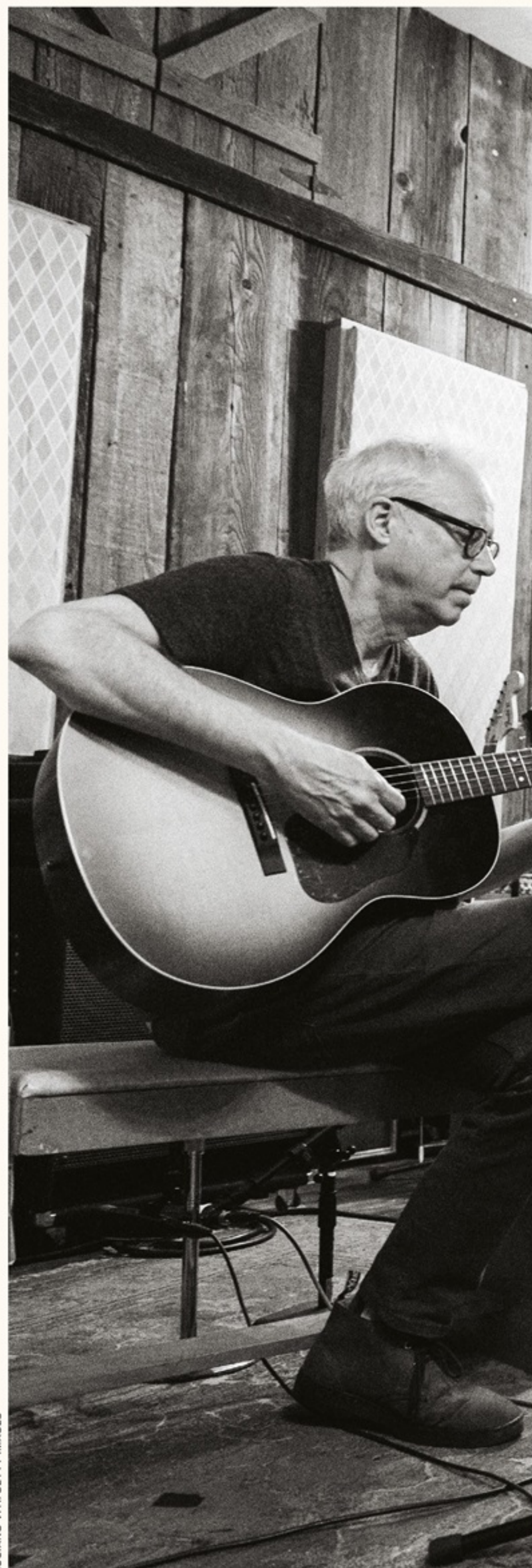
Then I saw him again the following year at Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Denver [on September 1, 1968]. I think it might have been the last gig that he did with Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding, and I remember there was something going on, like he was upset about something during the concert. By that time, my parents had moved to New Jersey and I was going to school in Greeley. I came to visit them during the Christmas break

and ended up going to the Fillmore East to see Blood, Sweat & Tears [on December 28, 1969]. And the amazing thing was, some unknown band from Georgia was opening that night for Blood, Sweat & Tears called the Allman Brothers Band. This was before they had recorded anything. They came out and were like, “Oh, hi, we’re kind of nervous being in New York for the first time.” It was their Fillmore East debut and they just fuckin’ kicked ass! This was just a few days before Jimi Hendrix’s Band of Gypsies played the New Year’s Eve concert, which became the famous live album from the Fillmore East. I remember noticing on the Fillmore marquee, it said: “Jimi Hendrix, Dec. 31,” and I’m thinking, Oh, I already saw Jimi Hendrix. I don’t need this. Man, I wish I had gone to that!

**You once told me of another eye-opening guitar encounter: seeing Larry Coryell for the first time at Red Rocks.**

Yeah, that was another amazing experience. He was playing a Super 400 with a DeArmond pickup, and he was getting it to feedback and everything. At one point during his solo, he walked back to his amp and just sort of rolled the volume knob on the amp with his forearm. It was so loud and wild! Hearing Coryell and having heard Jimi Hendrix just a few months before that too... Talk about having your brain explode! 🎸

Frisell plays with (from left) Luke Bergman, Petra Haden and Hank Roberts, with whom he recorded the 2019 album *Harmony*.



LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES











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# A GLIMPSE OF A FEELING

With his guitar, looper and effects, Danish guitarist **Jakob Bro** captures moods in dreamy improvisations. His three recent and new releases are remarkable reflections on the mystery of music.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHAN JACOBS

**T**HROUGH THE COURSE of five evocative ECM albums, Danish guitarist Jakob Bro has forged a distinctive musical identity with a deft fingerstyle approach to his instrument, along with a penchant for delicate lyricism and intuitive flights that often take him into the unknown. Making subtle use of looping technology, backward effects and the occasional onslaught of distortion has allowed him to go from soothing introspection to translucent soundscapes to angular skronking, sometimes within the same piece. The 44-year-old sonic explorer

made his ECM debut on drummer Paul Motian's 2006 album *Garden of Eden*, which featured the three guitars of Ben Monder, Steve Cardenas and Bro blending brilliantly in the mix. He appeared three years later on Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko's darkly introspective 2009 outing on ECM, *Dark Eyes*, then debuted as a leader on ECM in 2015 with *Gefion*, featuring bassist Thomas Morgan, a frequent collaborator of Bill Frisell's, and veteran Norwegian drummer Jon Christensen, a member of Keith Jarrett's celebrated European Quartet of the 1970s.



"It was really a big step when I went from doing my own records on my own label [*Loveland Records*] to recording for Manfred Eicher on ECM," Bro says. "I wasn't even sure I wanted to present a guitar trio on my first album with him, but he really helped me by stepping up and saying, 'You have a voice on the instrument.'"

Bro followed with three intimate offerings on ECM — 2016's *Streams*, 2018's *Returns* and 2018's live trio recording, *Bay of Rainbows* — all showcasing the guitarist's warm, inviting tone, tastefully fluid improvisations and engaging melodicism, mixed with a decidedly mysterious quality. His latest, 2021's *Uma Elmo*, was recorded during the pandemic in two days at a Lugano, Switzerland studio, with an international crew of Norwegian trumpeter Arve Henriksen, Spanish drummer Jorge Rossy, producer Eicher and Italian engineer Stefano Amerio. Named for his two small children, three-year-old Dagny Uma and seven-month old Osvald Elmo, *Uma Elmo* is a remarkably expressive and highly personal

statement by the accomplished guitarist and features tributes to two of his late mentors: the legendary alto saxophonist Lee Konitz ("Music for Black Pigeons") and Stanko (the minor-key lament "To Stanko").

Bro's dreamy, translucent and eminently open music is the result of him trying to capture moods through his guitar and textural looping techniques, done in real time rather than overdubbed. As he explained, "My compositions are

about catching a glimpse of a feeling, sketching it down and then unfolding these sketches and letting them take you places you haven't been before."

The rising star has a pair of albums coming out on ECM. *Once Around the Room: A Tribute to Paul Motian* is an all-star homage to the late drummer-composer and Bro's former beloved employer. It's a septet outing co-led by tenor sax great Joe Lovano and featuring double bassists Larry Grenadier and Thomas Morgan, guitarist-bassist Anders Christensen, and drummers Rossy and Joey Baron. Bro is also releasing *Live at the Village Vanguard* with his own quartet, which includes drummer Andrew Cyrille, tenor saxophonist Mark Turner and bassist Morgan. In addition, Bro and his music were the subject of *Music for Black Pigeons*, a 90-minute documentary by filmmakers Jørgen Leth and Andreas Koefoed that premiered at the Venice Film Festival in September 2022. It features interviews and performance footage with several of his colleagues, including Lovano, Motian, Stanko,

Morgan, Grenadier, Frisell, Konitz, Eicher, Jon Christensen, Midori Takada, Palle Mikkelborg and Cyrille Turner. The guitarist conducted this Skype interview from his home in Copenhagen.

#### **How did you cope during the pandemic? Did you do any remote teaching or live streaming concerts?**

No, nothing. I was playing with my band at the Village Vanguard in New York in February [2020], and then things shut down. I had maybe 80, 90 concerts canceled after that. The only thing that didn't get canceled was this album on ECM [*Uma Elmo*]. And for a while it just seemed like it was not going to happen because we were in the midst of a global pandemic and everyone was in lockdown in a different country. But there was a gap of two weeks where things actually were possible, and so we made that record. I wrote all the music during the pandemic. Instead of going on the road, I had time at home to write and be with my wife and children. And then the cancellations just kept coming. So, basically, I had all the time in the world to work on the music for this record. I composed most of the material for the recording in between Osvald's naps when he was a newborn.

#### **I remember seeing you at the Vanguard in 2004 or so with Paul Motian's Electric Bebop Band, just before you recorded *Garden of Eden*. I didn't know who you were at the time, and my first thought was, Three guitars? Is Paul crazy?**

Yeah, he was crazy, and that was my good luck. I did a three-week European tour with him in 2003, and at some point after that he decided that he didn't want to travel anymore; he wanted to just play in New York. And he invited me over for that week at the Vanguard. When Paul invited me into his group, I was really young. To me, it was the same as if Johann Sebastian Bach would have reached out to me. He's that big for me. And I learned a lot from just hanging out with him.

I think one of the main things that I got from Paul is an appreciation for the sort of mystery about music. Why is some music really affecting me? Why is some music moving me? Why is something stronger to me than other things? That's a mystery somehow to me still. And playing with Paul, playing with Tomasz Stanko or Lee Konitz, all of the older generation musicians put an emphasis on the fact that music is still a mystery. Lee will pick up the horn and play one note and I get goosebumps. The same with Paul when he hits a cymbal or Tomasz when he plays a single note on the trumpet. All those people have reached a point with their music where it went further than just being the instrument. It's almost

**"WHY IS SOME  
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THAT'S A MYSTERY  
SOMEHOW TO  
ME STILL"**







like it's their life coming out of the sound they create, which is fascinating to me, and also inspiring.

And it triggers me in a way, because I don't know how to do that. It's something completely abstract to me. But just being surrounded by that thing, it's really strong. That's probably the most valuable thing for me, in terms of having played with musicians from the older generation. Having Paul Motian wash you with his cymbal every night at the Village Vanguard for four weeks total is an experience that is so valuable to me that it will always be a part of me

somehow. And I like to think that it's also something that will come out in my music, in some way.

**"IT HAS BEEN A STRUGGLE TO FIND A WAY WHERE THE GUITAR WOULD NOT BE IN THE WAY OF WHAT I WAS HEARING. THAT TOOK ME A LONG TIME, ACTUALLY"**

**You went to the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where I imagine you encountered a lot of bebop and standard jazz repertoire while transcribing tons of solos. And it seems like you've evolved away from all that in your own music.**

Yeah, before Berklee I went to the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen when I was 17 years old. I was there for one year, and during that year we had a seminar with [saxophonist] Michael Brecker,

[pianist] Danilo Pérez, John Abercrombie and [bassist] Eddie Gómez. That seminar was kind of a turning point for me. Michael Brecker and Danilo and Abercrombie came up to me after the student concert; they sort of cornered me, and I was completely freaked out. And they were like, "You have to come to the U.S. to study." So that was my reason for quitting the Royal Academy of Music in Denmark.

**Jakob Bro and  
Joe Lovano**



That same summer I met Kurt Rosenwinkel here in Denmark. I was playing a concert with a trio, and we were playing a John Coltrane song called "26-2," and all of a sudden this guy comes up and asks if he can play a solo in the middle of the song. And I was like, What the fuck! But I give him my guitar and he plays a great solo, then gives me the guitar back and we finish the set. And I go up to him afterward and he says, "Thank you for the music. My name is Kurt Rosenwinkel. If you ever come to the U.S., look me up. I want to hang out with you."

So those two incidents that summer sort of made me want to quit my studies in Denmark and go to the states to study at Berklee. I was there for six months, not doing much, just practicing all the time. It wasn't until I came to New York a year later that I really started getting into being fascinated by standard material by listening to Kurt Rosenwinkel, Brad Mehldau's trio and, of course, Paul Motian's band.

**How were you able to find your own voice on the instrument?**

I think the real turning point was being in Paul Motian's Electric Bebop Band. Being surrounded by all these great musicians — Tony Malaby, Steve Cardenas, Jerome Harris, Chris Cheek, of course Paul himself — was so inspiring. And then playing Paul's original material night after night had such a strong and deep impact on me that I just started composing at that time. That's when I feel like I started making sense as a composer.

And I can see now that the first things I was writing after joining Paul's band were very similar to Paul's way of using breaks for the drums and using his arrangements. Then, somehow, I feel like I found a way that was sort of more in line with where I come from. I'm not from the U.S.; I'm not from New York. I'm from a tiny place near the beach in Denmark [Risskov]. And I feel like, slowly, my compositions started reflecting some of that as well.

So it's been a journey for me, having my sound as an instrumentalist develop, having my compositions develop, finding how much improvisation do you want, how much composed material do you need to make this music come alive somehow. And Paul Motian was a really big inspiration for all of that coming together.

**Isn't the very atmospheric opening track on *Uma Elmo*, "Reconstructing a Dream," one that you played in Paul Motian's band?**

We played it on gigs and we recorded it, though it never came out. And "Slaraffenland," which is on the album too, is another we played with the Electric Bebop Band. Paul would use it as an encore here and





there when we were playing in Europe. And for me, it was like a dream come true to hear him play my music. He was so kind to me and really supportive in that way.

**When you speak of Motian and the influence that he had on you, that necessarily brings to mind Bill Frisell, who played with him so frequently in Motian's trio with saxophonist Joe Lovano. Was Bill's approach to the guitar a direct influence on you?**

I love Bill. I've always loved him, mostly with Paul Motian. For me, that's some of the greatest music of all time. I can stay with Paul Motian's *On Broadway* volumes *I* and *II* for my whole life, basically. That's enough info right there. When I started out playing guitar — I actually started out on trumpet before I switched to guitar — I was listening to Bill, Pat Metheny, John Scofield, John Abercrombie, Mike Stern, Ralph Towner, Jim Hall, Pat Martino. Those were my main influences in terms of jazz guitar. But after a year or so I started regretting that I stopped playing the trumpet, because the music I was really loving at that time when I was learning jazz was Miles, Coltrane, Monk, Billie Holiday, Bill Evans. I was fascinated with the older generation and the more acoustic-sounding music. I was so fascinated by Sonny Rollins for a long time, and I was also transcribing all of Lester Young's solos. The trumpet players for me have always been Miles, Stanko, Tom

Harrell. And my all-time favorite is Louis Armstrong. My dad's hero was Louis Armstrong, so that was playing every day at home when I was growing up.

And I've gone through phases where I wished I played the trumpet or saxophone, because the guitar was hard for me somehow. It has been a struggle to find a way where the guitar would not be in the way of what I was hearing. That took me a long time, actually. Now I see the guitar as an essence. And while I have many heroes on guitar, I've never transcribed a Bill Frisell solo or a Pat Metheny solo.

That said, it's incredible to hear Bill with Paul, especially the way he accompanies, like on *On Broadway* volumes *I* and *II*. It reminds me of the way Thelonious Monk accompanies, where they can create a whole world. You don't even think of what chord Bill's making; it's just like a sound, basically. Jim Hall could do the same thing. For me, those two are probably the most fantastic guitar players in terms of accompanying other musicians.

I was listening today to the Paul Motian Trio's *It Should've Happened a Long Time Ago*, and the way Bill is comping and the whole universe of sound he gets... I still have no idea how he's doing it, but it's completely fascinating to me. Also, when you hear him in the different stages of his career, you can hear the whole history of guitar effects in Bill's playing. And the way he's using them is always so musical.



**“I’M NOT REALLY SO IMPRESSED BY THE GUITAR PLAYING; I’M MORE INTERESTED IN HEARING PEOPLE TALKING TO EACH OTHER ON THEIR INSTRUMENTS”**

**Bro performs with Paul Motian and the Electric Bebop Band, in New York City, January 7, 2003. (from left) Steven Cardenas, Bro, Paul Motian, Tony Malaby and Chris Cheek.**

**Frisell pioneered the creative use of looping devices, which is something you utilize in subtle ways**

**throughout *Uma Elmo*.**

Yeah, and it’s funny, because he’s still using that old green Line 6 looping pedal [*the DL4 Delay Modeler*], which is, like, ancient now in terms of what has been produced since then. But it’s perfect for him, and he can do magical stuff with it. And it’s so different from what I’m doing, not because I don’t want to do it, but simply because I have no idea how he’s doing it. But definitely, the whole thing about adding layers and textures to the music, and having things underneath, that’s been a thing that I’ve been inspired by and that I’ve wanted to do for a long time. And, of course, Frisell is the

grand master of all that. So I’m always inspired by Bill, but I’m also inspired by electronic music. I’ve been listening to Aphex Twin a lot lately. So the inspiration is coming from various sources.

**What kind of looping pedals do you have?**

It’s by an American company called Chase Bliss. I have their Tonal Recall and Blooper pedals and also an analog Red Panda Particle Granular Delay V2, which is a pedal that has a life of its own. My other effects pedals are a Zvex Ringtone sequenced ring modulator, a Gamechanger Audio Plus sustain pedal, and an Eventide H9 harmonizer, which is like a Swiss Army knife of effects. It has thousands of things you can do, but I have narrowed it down to 10 or 12 sounds that I like to use. I also have a Klon Centaur Overdrive and a Neunaber Immerse Reverberator.

My fascination with effects started when I was playing with Tomasz Stanko’s quintet. That setup was so traditional — drums, bass, piano and trumpet — and I thought the guitar was like an alien in that setting. But Stanko was encouraging me always to find my own spot in that music, so I started experimenting with effects pedals. A clean sound was cool in some settings — when playing a ballad or something — but sometimes the energy of the band was really high and I needed something where I could just step right in there and do something with my instrument, where everybody wouldn’t have to lower their energy. And for that reason, I just started experimenting with effects. I had a Tube Screamer, an old Boss looper, a Zvex Ringtone modulator, a reverb pedal, a delay pedal. And Stanko really just encouraged me to go off. So during my time in his band, I really went in different places. Sometimes I was afraid that it was too much, but he was always super cool about that, actually.

**You are part of a lineage of guitarists trying to sound like saxophone players in their long legato lines.**

Yes, there was a time when I wished I could play like Coltrane or Miles, Sonny Rollins, Lester Young. But one thing I’ve realized in my journey is that it’s not going to happen with this instrument. The way Coltrane is playing on the saxophone, the way George Garzone or Joe Lovano is playing on the saxophone — I’ve tried to convert that to my guitar, transcribing hundreds of solos, but I’ve never found a way to play like that on the instrument and make it fit into my overall vision of the music.

And I realized at some point that this instrument is doing other things. So I have to take the sort of expression from the people I love — the vibe, the atmosphere, the whole emotional part of it — and see if I can learn how to make that come out of my guitar. And that’s something that has changed my attitude.

There was a time when I started hating the guitar because I was frustrated with not being able to play those long saxophone lines. Now I sort of love it for this reason. Because I’m thinking that if I played the saxophone, it would have been much harder for me to have found a path of my own. There would have been so many heroes of mine that I wanted to sort of follow, and that’s not really the case with the guitar. It’s more of a musical thing for me.

**I understand you have a new guitar?**

Yes, I have a pink Nash Telecaster. It’s made by a luthier named Bill Nash, who Bill Frisell introduced me to about six years ago. It’s not a fancy instrument, but it’s really well-made. I got rid of all my old guitars for touring. I don’t want to deal with stress at the







airports and stuff like that. This is my guitar now. I only have one.

**Are you playing with fingers throughout *Uma Elmo*? Or are there some songs or passages where you are using a pick?**

I used to play with a pick, and I was practicing like hell with a pick. And then two, three years ago, I just threw it out. I kept seeing myself putting the pick in weird places, and then it was sort of in the way. I just felt like using a pick was one step removed from my fingers touching the instrument. And now playing with fingers gives me a different sort of freedom, though I'm definitely limited now. I mean, in terms of playing lines, I can't play what I could with the pick. Like, if I transcribed Coltrane's solo on "Countdown," for instance, I wouldn't be able to play that with my fingers right now. I could do it with a pick, but not with my fingers. But in terms of my own music, I've always felt like I could do the things I heard with just my fingers.

**Would you say you have evolved in your playing since *Gefion*, your debut album in 2015?**

Definitely. I remember recording that first record

I did for ECM with Jon Christensen and Thomas Morgan. Listening back in the control room with Manfred Eicher, I remember thinking that I sounded too much like Frisell here or Pat Metheny there or John Abercrombie at times. And at some point during the recording I just felt like I couldn't play anything, because all those guys were in the room. I think I went almost a year where I couldn't listen to the album because I was so ashamed of it. I was like, "I can't put it out. I'm bending a note at one place where you can clearly hear that's a Metheny thing or that's a Frisell thing." And I was giving myself such a hard time about it, really.

Now, I love those players. Frisell is an incredible human being, and he's an incredible musician. The same with Pat Metheny. The way he's playing the acoustic guitar on "Lonely Woman" from his *Rejoicing* album is just incredible. But it's just music to me. I've never really listened to something and said, "Wow, that's just virtuoso. I wish I could do that." I've always listened to the soul and the music around it.

So I'm not really so impressed by the guitar playing; I'm more interested in hearing people talking to each other on their instruments. That's when the music, for me, is happening. ■







# THE CUTTING-EDGE

From major stars to cult heroes, these players are experimenting across multiple genres, from jazz to metal and beyond.

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY,

STAN BULL AND SAM ROCHE

## TOM MISCH

LONDON-BORN TOM MISCH is something of a modern-day renaissance man, whose talents include DJ-ing, playing the piano and violin and having impressive vocal chops. But what separates the 27-year-old singer-songwriter-producer from his peers is his dexterity with the electric guitar, from which he effortlessly blends contemporary jazz, neo-soul, funk and R&B, his chameleonic style supplying an organic feel to his otherwise beat-focussed sound.

Misch studied jazz guitar at London's Trinity Laban Conservatoire, and his fingerstyle approach of using alternating chords spliced with short licks has formed the basis of some of his most well-loved compositions. A superfan of iconic crate-digging producer J Dilla, Misch uses modern tech to create lush worlds of texture, often multi-tracking his guitar atop washed-out synth pads and string drones. He frequently pulls from his affection for hip-hop by creating beds of loops and samples for his improvisational noodling, and his love of R&B gives his lead phrasing a strong

melodic quality. His understanding of funk often finds him purposefully playing behind the beat, a technique that's easy to identify but harder to emulate.

A good example of Misch's sonic world building through layered guitar parts comes from his appearance in a *Fact* magazine video, where he has 10 minutes on the clock to create a beat from scratch on a digital audio workstation. Armed with a vintage semi-hollow Gibson six-string, he first records a funky bassline across the lower frets, which he pitches an octave down using a plug-in. He then adds clean, jazzy chord inversions on top, which he pitches up to emulate the sound of an electric piano.

He finishes the track with an improvised solo, using his signature envelope-filter lead sound. Although that effect is created with a Logic plug-in in this example, Misch has been seen with an Aguilar Filter Twin on his pedalboard. Significantly, he demonstrates that being enthralled by technology doesn't have to limit your musical expression.



## SARAH LIPSTATE

**THIS LOS ANGELES-BASED** guitarist and filmmaker trades under the name Noveller. It's a solo project that casts Lipstate as a world builder, as she leans into the creative potential of a well-stocked pedalboard to create atmospheres so vivid and real, you can envision alien flora and fauna populating the landscape.

It was no surprise but still a great delight to see her performing tracks from Angelo Badalamenti's *Twin Peaks* score for solo guitar. Her sound is complementary to Lynchian dream worlds. That this dreamweaver of six-string atmospheres has collaborated with all-action artists such as Iggy Pop and defunct Brooklyn noise-rock act Parts & Labor makes her all the more of an enigma. Lipstate's guitar choices include Fender offsets, an Ed O'Brien Stratocaster, a late-'70s Gibson Marauder, Les Pauls, and of course her signature BilT with onboard fuzz that she used when playing with Pop.



## JULIAN LAGE

**JULIAN LAGE ONCE** attached a stethoscope to a Fender Telecaster so that he could explore its tone more thoroughly. The experiment was too harsh on the ear, he admits, but it was indicative of where his mind is at, and how restless his curiosity is. Lage started young, but even as a child prodigy — and, later, a Berklee grad — who at age eight could play jazz standards on a Tele held behind his head, he gave no indication of the player he would evolve into. Lage's compositions speak to something fundamental about the art form. Technically, he plays on the edge, a book-smart guitarist who is challenged by his own improvisational derring-do. And tonally, whether on his Fender Telecaster or signature Collings 470 JL, he leans into the treble-forward tones of jazz guitar trailblazers like George Barnes and Charlie Christian, leaving himself nowhere to hide as he exploits his guitar's iridescent overtones.

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 “JUST BECAUSE  
 IT'S IMPROVISED  
 DOESN'T MEAN IT'S  
 NOT A LEGITIMATE  
 COMPOSITION”

—JULIAN LAGE

JIM DYSON/GETTY IMAGES (LIPSTATE); BARBARA ZANON/GETTY IMAGES (LAGE)





# MANUEL GARDNER FERNANDES

**GERMAN GUITARIST MANUEL** Gardner Fernandes' playing is in a league of its own. His insane, vertigo-inducing compositions, loaded with bell-like tapped harmonics and eye-wateringly quick finger work, are so impressive, in fact, that he was accused of faking his guitar playing in 2019. The accusations came after a selection of content creators attempted to shine a light on alleged six-string trickery occurring in online guitar videos. Unfortunately for Fernandes, he was placed right in the firing line.

Setting the record straight, the guitarist confirmed that he does occasionally edit and pre-record his videos — as is the entitlement of any online content creator in 2022 — to ensure the music is the “best quality and to add an extra two percent of perfection to it.” But he asserted that not a single one of his videos had ever been sped up. And on a positive note, the controversy helped get Fernandes in front of a wave of new viewers, many of whom ultimately became fans.

Like his contemporaries, Fernandes selects poppier, more electronic backdrops upon which to lay his out-of-this-world lines. Take 2020's “Right Hand King,” for example, a track that finds him throwing down his trademark percussive muting and lightning-quick tapped slides over a hip-hop beat. Or his work with his progressive-metal band, Unprocessed, where he blend genres with the likes of the pop-djent single “Candyland,” and the pop-inspired cut “Portrait.”

Fernandes makes light work of rapid muted strums for percussive flair and octave-hopping harmonic chimes. “I started playing metal when I was a kid and started playing downstrokes back then,” he said of his signature style in 2020. “After that, I started combining Latin styles, and at some point I wanted to integrate dead sounds and notes. I found a way to play it the fastest and tightest way possible.”

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 “WITH ‘PORTRAIT,’  
 I IMAGINED MYSELF  
 PUTTING ON A MASK  
 OF ENTHUSIASM  
 AND HIDING FROM  
 MY PROBLEMS”

—MANUEL GARDNER FERNANDES





## LARI BASILIO

**LOOK ONLINE AND** you'll find no shortage of adept electric guitar players, but few possess an emotional feel with the instrument quite like Lari Basilio. While her music is mostly instrumental — which often presents an arrangement challenge to many guitarists — Basilio uses an absence of vocals to allow her Ibanez LB1-VL to really sing. Highlights of the guitarist's recent catalog include a breathtaking rendition of Derek and the Dominos' "Layla," with fellow guitarist Martin Miller, on which she painstakingly re-creates the blues classic's iconic pentatonic lead lines with killer precision, showcasing her soulful lead playing. Recently, Basilio made a foray into the world of seven-string guitars, a move perhaps unexpected for her playing style. On "Alive and Living," the second track from her latest full-length, *Your Love*, she leans on the lower registers offered by an Ibanez Prestige AZ24047, illustrating how her versatility with the instrumental is virtually boundless.



## JAKUB ZYTECKI

**A POLISH FRONTIERSMAN** of guitar technique and texture, Jakub Zytecki approaches electronic music with the virtuosic iconoclasm of a shredder who knows there's always something interesting over the horizon. "I've been fascinated with music as long as I can remember," he writes on his website, [jakubzytecki.co](http://jakubzytecki.co). "I started with recording 8-bit tunes from my old NES gaming console on a tape recorder. At the age of 12, I got my first electric guitar and I quickly forgot that anything in the world beside that instrument actually existed." Check out something like his 2019 album, *Nothing Lasts, Nothing's Lost*, or his latest single, "Heart," and you are confronted with a player who makes the guitar sound familiar, yet alien. With clean tones gently manipulated by effects, he'll deliver something melodically and technically audacious over relaxed, spaced-out and blissed-out dream-pop beats. Zytecki's sound is at once ambient and immediate, his strings freestyling in a hyper-composed world of electronica.

EDUARDO ORELHA (BASILIO); KAJA SOSNOWSKA (ZYTECKI)





## MATEUS ASATO

WITH SO MUCH of social media's guitar virtuosity concentrated on hot-as-hell shredding, Mateus Asato is like a cool drink of water on a summer day. Sure, what he does with the instrument is technically virtuosic. He can take a track by a pop group like the Beatles and reinterpret it for solo guitar in a way that somehow, magically, amplifies the original work's melody like never before. But it is his gift for combining technicality within an approachable neo-soul sound that gives his music its organic vibrancy, something that had led artists like Bruno Mars to secure his services.

Asato is both book-smart and street-smart. He studied at the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles in 2013, where he got a firm grip of the fundamentals. But he understood the power of social media, and how to use it to document his progress as a player and artist. In a sense, this makes him the quintessential 21st century guitar hero, evolving in real-time, and in full view of the audience.

What they'll see and hear is a dynamic player whose all-around game makes him just as comfortable with fingerstyle and hybrid picking as he is switching between alternate and economy picking, and a sensibility that teeters between the restrained and the spectacular. Boutique tones and hot musical tube drive spiced with the three-dimensional depth of reverb and delay are all hallmarks of Asato's sound. Once upon a time, his lodestar was shred — the big dogs, Petrucci, et al. But in September 2022, he named Slash, John Mayer and Steve Vai as three guitarists who he considers to be guitar's latter-day champions. "These are the last heroes imo," he wrote on Instagram. "Make sure to go and watch these ones LIVE!" Asato is that rare thing these days, a player whose sound evades easy categorization. He is stylistically omnivorous, but with a taste for the finer things.

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MATEUS ASATO IS  
LIKE A COOL DRINK  
OF WATER ON A HOT  
SUMMER DAY





CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

## JASON RICHARDSON

**FACE-MELTING SHRED** guitar has been done in the world of metal for years, but All That Remains' Jason Richardson continues to thrust the long-established discipline in new directions, sometimes to the detriment of his health.

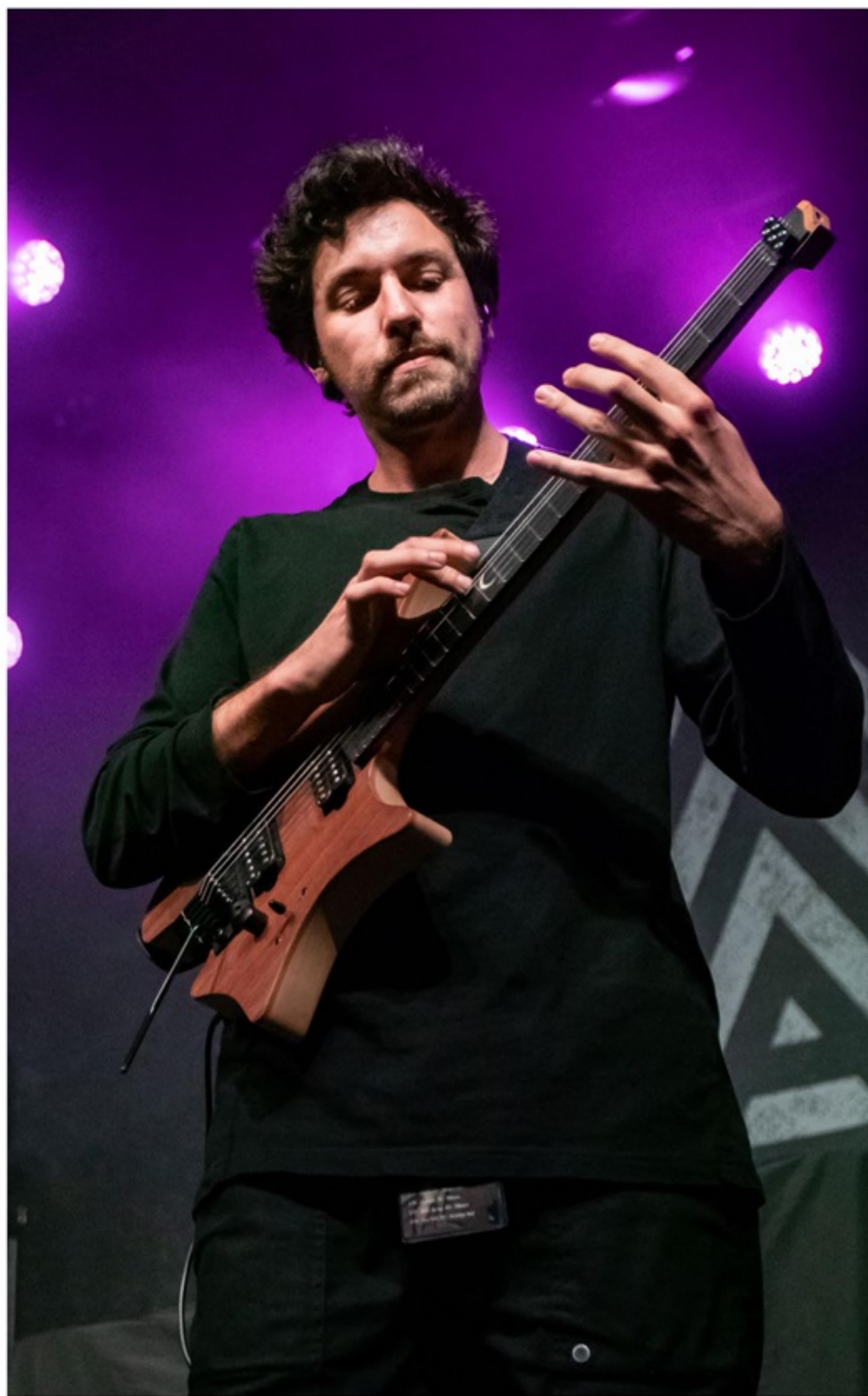
"Tendinitis," the lead track from *II*, Richardson's latest solo album, is so named as the guitarist has suffered the condition twice in

both arms. That was partly due to "working out six days a week, playing video games, constantly using my phone," he told *Guitar World* in a recent interview. But it was mostly in pursuit of

advancing his already-out-of-this-world guitar chops. Other highlights from *II* include the epic eight-minute "p00mbachu," and "Polyrhythmic Pug," a proggy homage to Richardson's late pet pug, who liked to drink his water in odd time signatures.

I WANTED TO START GETTING BETTER AT GUITAR SO I COULD START WRITING MY OWN SONGS"

—JASON RICHARDSON



MIikka SKAFFARI/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES

## PLINI

**EVERYONE SURELY KNOWS** by now what Plini Roessler-Holgate is all about, especially after Steve Vai declared him the future of guitar. But if you're one of perhaps a few who are just catching up, behold a player who might just change how you think of guitar in terms of rhythm, phrasing and style — and the design of the instrument, too, for Plini's headless Strandberg Boden Prog NX 6 is the ur-21st century electric guitar.

Over two solo albums — 2016's *Handmade Cities* and 2022's *Impulse Voices* — and a scattering of extended-play releases, Plini has positioned himself as the quintessential modern progressive guitar player. His sound is guitar music as fantasia, referencing the melodic audacity and musical grammar of videogame soundtracks as though to warn the audience that all reality is virtual, and you just have to surrender to that fact.





## ST. VINCENT

ANNIE CLARK, A.K.A. ST. VINCENT, is one of the most well-known and commercially successful artists at the forefront of cutting-edge guitar today. The Oklahoman singer-songwriter already has three Grammy awards to her name and has performed at the ceremony onstage with pop sensation Dua Lipa. But despite having one foot in the mainstream, Clark's unorthodox approach to guitar fully embraces the avant-garde.

St. Vincent's 2017 LP, *Masseduction*, cracked the top 10 in both the U.S. and the U.K., and its electro-pop sound saw Clark rethinking the tonal palette of her guitar rather than abandoning it in favor of synths, something more typical of the genre's core sound. *Masseduction*'s title track features heavy, fuzz-centric riffing that sounds far closer to a saw-wave synth than an electric guitar, or anything obviously played by a human for that matter. Clark uses a slide to allow a continuous glide between notes that gives the riffs a pitch-bending quality, and her use of the extremely obscure AAAAAE tuning allows her to hit multiple octaves at once for a thick, robotic sound.

Clark's most recent album, *Daddy's Home*, channels 1970s downtown New York City through soul-inspired vocals and a heavy use of a wah. The album highlight, "Down," features Clark on both guitar and electric sitar-guitar, layering variant riffs atop one another before coming together for a harmonized dual-guitar solo that pays homage to psychedelia while sounding inventive and unique.

Not just content to stretch the boundaries of her music, Clark's penchant for a bold, original idea is on full display with her signature Ernie Ball six-string, too. The model's light weight and ergonomic shape was designed with female players in mind, while still being tonally beefy enough for fellow fuzz abuser Jack White to use it onstage. As St. Vincent continues to re-write her own guitar rulebook she broadens the minds of many a mainstream pop fan in the process, proving that there is life in our beloved instrument yet.

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 "A LOT OF TIMES THE  
 STRIFE IN THE PROCESS  
 IS YOU GETTING IN  
 YOUR OWN WAY"

—ST. VINCENT





## ICHIKA NITO

**ICHIKA NITO IS** a modern-day guitarist success story. After making a name for himself on YouTube — where he posted quirky quick clips of himself playing guitar solos on one-string, and meme-like clips, including one titled “When you need to impress a girl but you only have a guitar and 20 seconds” —

Ichika has begun using his platform to promote his stellar original music, most recently with a dizzying seven-string-infused single, “Away.” His efforts have landed him noteworthy guest spots, too. Back in June, he lent his silky six-string chops to “More Than Life,” a track by rapper-turned-pop-punk-superstar

Machine Gun Kelly. Ichika said it was “a pretty crazy story” that a “guy from Japan that barely speaks English” wrote a guitar loop which now features in a Machine Gun Kelly track.

But this is not a guitarist that needs to lean on big musical names to prop himself up. Currently his following includes nearly 2.2 million YouTube subscribers, more than three quarters of a million Instagram followers, and over a quarter of a million TikTok followers. As of last year, he’s had a headless Ibanez signature model, the ICHI10, under his belt, too, so his influence is clearly working its magic on a wave of new guitarists.

Standing alongside the likes of Polyphia and Manuel Gardner Fernandes, Ichika Nito is a trailblazer of the modern guitar movement, one who fuses crystalline clean fingerstyle passages and tapped slides with hip-hop and trap beats, showcasing the limitless future potential of the instrument at a time when many have touted its death. Quite the opposite: The guitar is very much alive and well, and in the hands of immensely talented players like Ichika.

NITO HAS SHOWCASED  
GUITAR’S LIMITLESS  
POTENTIAL WHEN MANY  
TOUTED ITS DEATH



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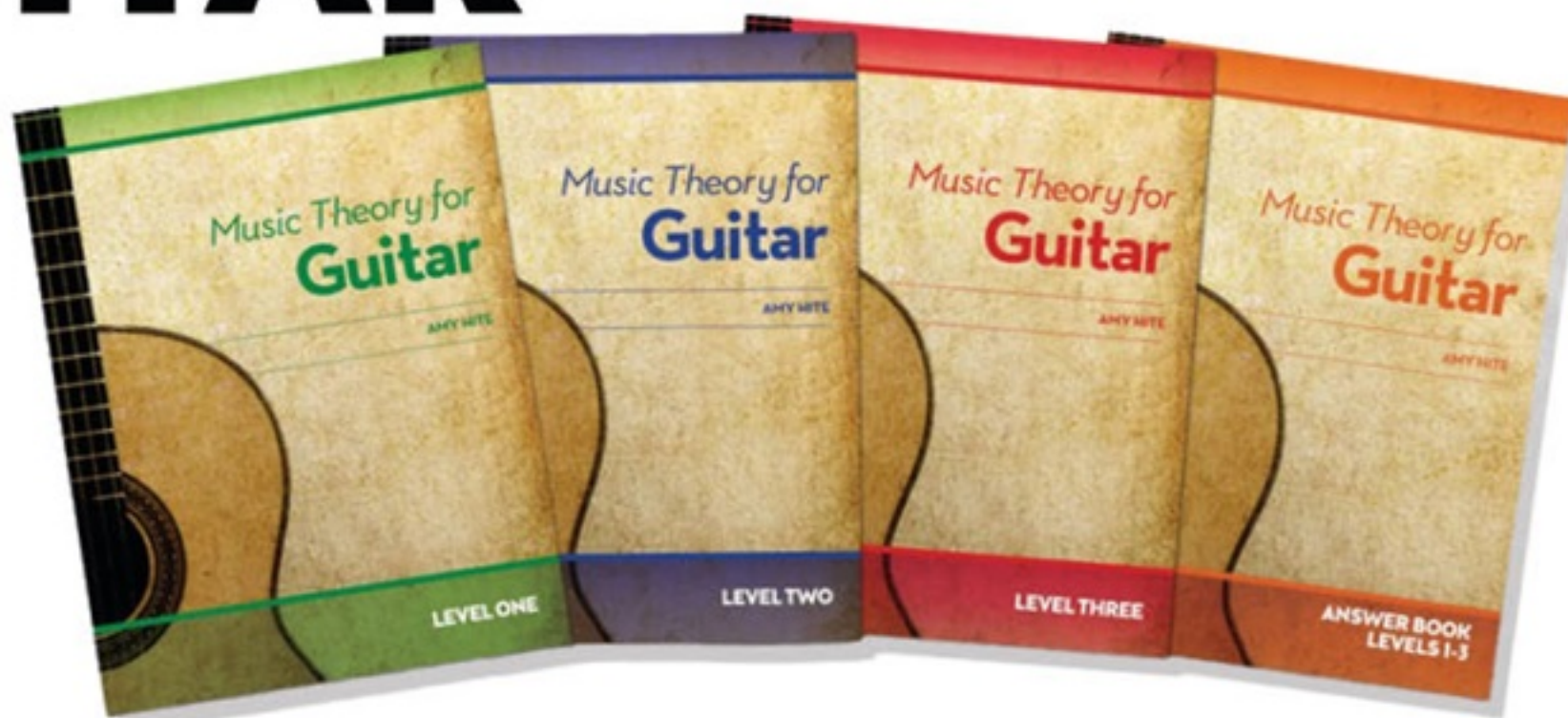
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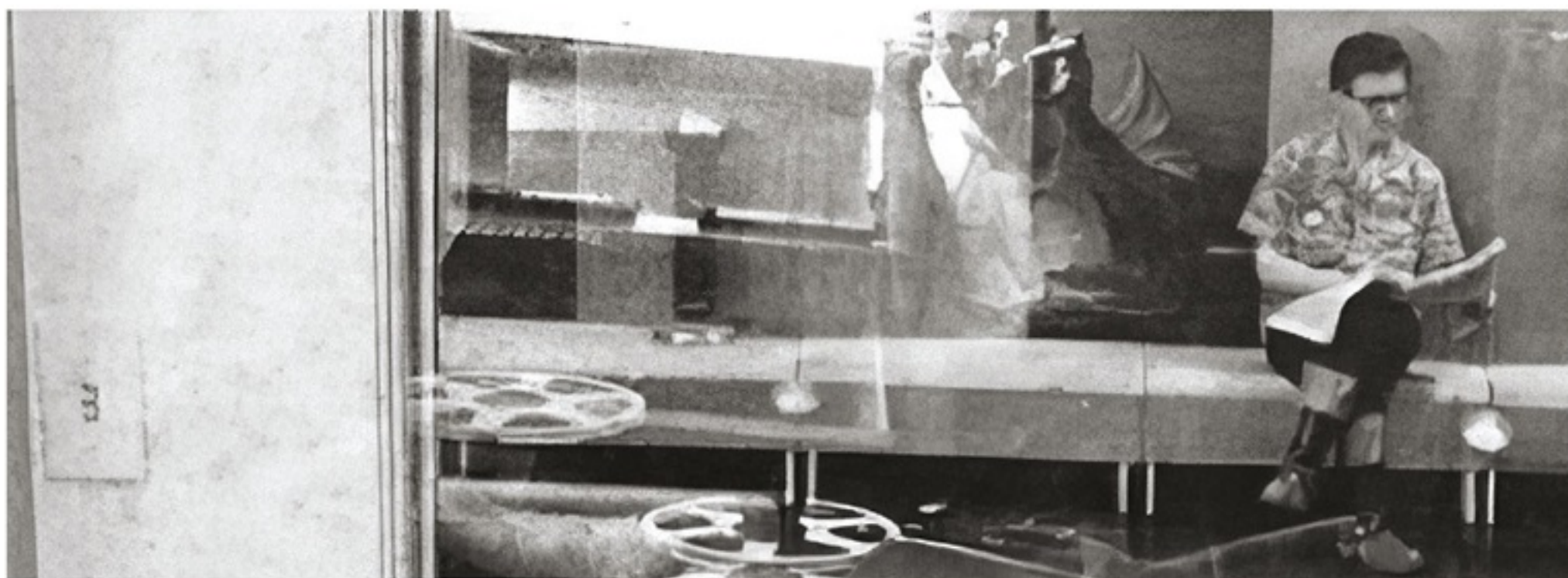
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# AT THE SPEED OF *Les*

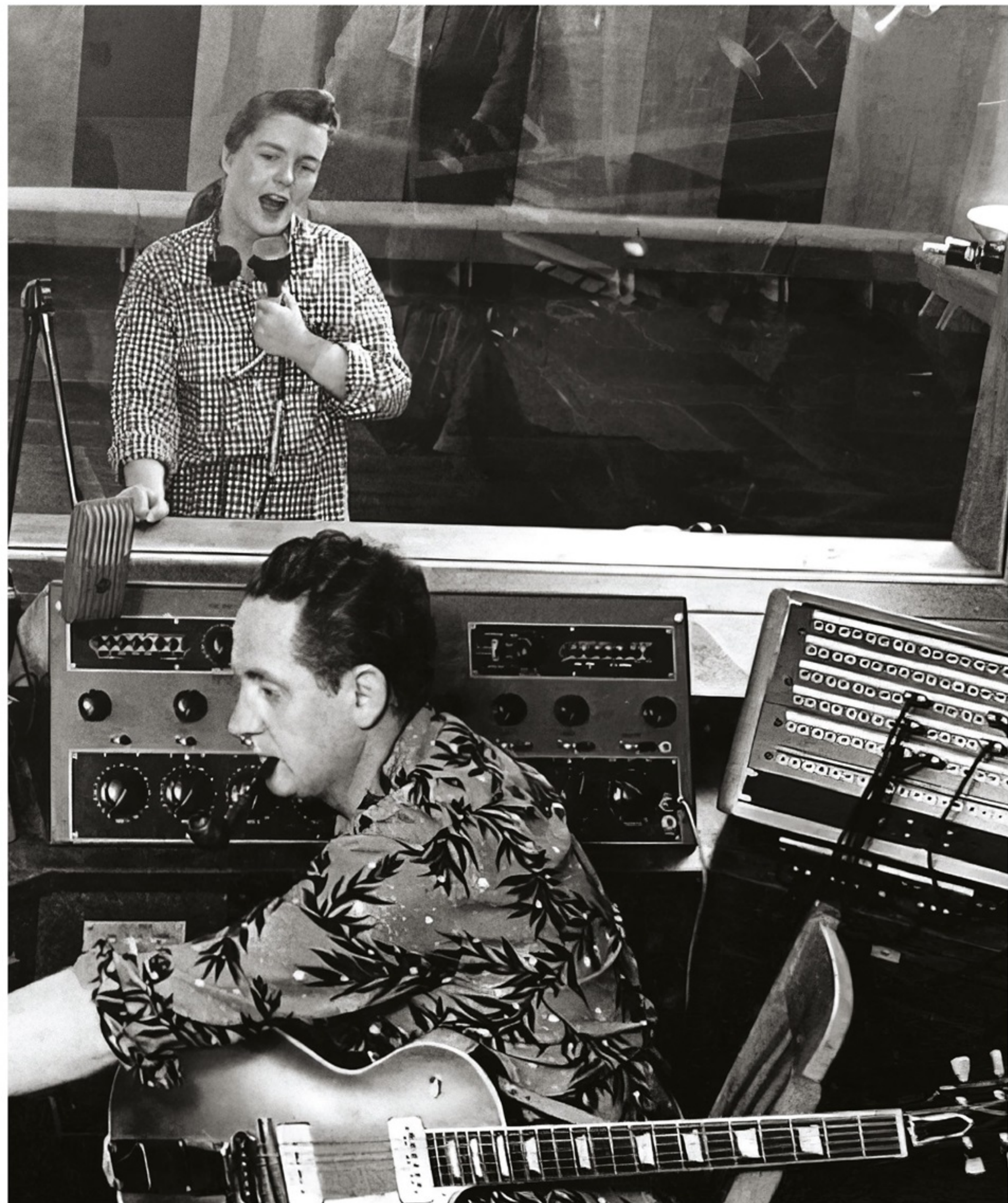
In 1948, Les Paul turned the recording industry on its head with “Lover” and its “space-age” guitars. Seventy-five years later, we’re still reeling from his breakthrough multitrack single.

BY MARTIN McQUADE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
THE LES PAUL FOUNDATION









## A transformational moment in music history occurred 75 years ago in February 1948, when Capitol Records issued a 78 rpm record.

It was “Lover,” the first multitrack popular music recording created by superimposing discrete audio tracks. The vision, intellect and grit which this disc-to-disc undertaking entailed belonged to guitarist Les Paul. The legend “The New Sound” appeared on the record label, heralding an era of new recording possibilities. From this singular achievement, the act of making records would become an infinitely more creative process through the advent of overdubbing. Among Les’s many accolades are inductions into the National Inventors Hall of Fame for creating the solidbody electric guitar and the Rock and Roll Hall of

Fame for his hit platters and leading-edge innovations. Indeed, Les is the father of modern sound, from whom some of music’s greatest recorded milestones and guitar players have sprung these past 75 years.

Les was 32 when “Lover” was released. He’d barely scratched the surface of what he would accomplish and be celebrated for. He was born Lester William Polsfuss in 1915 and grew up in America’s heartland, in Waukesha, Wisconsin,

playing harmonica and piano before switching to guitar. Drawing inspiration from Eddie Lang, Django Reinhardt and Andrés Segovia, he gained prominence in the late 1930s as a jazz and country artist and top session sideman. In September 1945, after serving with the Armed Forces Radio Network, Les, accompanied by his trio, waxed a postwar million-seller, “It’s Been a Long, Long Time,” billed with singer Bing Crosby. It was the first of his many hits.

### The Rail, Log and “Klunkers”

But it was the single “Lover” and its success that fulfilled Les’s calling. His roles as musician, engineer and inventor merged on the recording, making him a latter-day wizard. The recording represented his coming of age, the culmination of years-long experimentation with electronic sound and recording.

At 13, he had amplified his acoustic guitar using a phonograph cartridge and needle wired to a radio for amplification. For him, the manipulation of sound would grow to become an obsession.

“Les would say, ‘You could be wrong a million times. You only have to be right once,’” recalls Michael Braunstein, executive director of the Les Paul Foundation. Braunstein became Les’s manager after his grandfather and father served in that role, and in 1995 he helped Les form the Les Paul Foundation to further music innovation through grants to educational organizations and institutions.

As Braunstein explains, Les devised multitrack recording in the early 1930s, while in Chicago, using a two-armed record cutter of his own invention that allowed him to cut a new track onto a disc while simultaneously listening to a track he’d previously recorded on the same platter. “He built cutting lathes with a paring knife and a belt from a dental drill, and used them to first record his rhythm guitar,” Braunstein says. “He then used the second arm — the playback arm — to listen to what he’d recorded while he cut the record a second time.” The technique was primitive and produced less-than-satisfactory results. “But it was the beginning,” Braunstein says. “It took years to develop that technique.”

In the meantime, Les continued his attempts to amplify his guitar. He was unhappy that his phonograph pickup reproduced the sound of the guitar’s vibrating body. “He wanted the sound to only come from the string,” Braunstein explains. “That’s where the solidbody came in.” Les’s experiments in this regard involved a short length of steel railroad rail onto which he mounted a string and a telephone pickup wired to a radio. The Rail, as it was known, led him to build the Log using a four-by-four length of solid pine. It was the first solidbody electric guitar.

Les would eventually saw an Epiphone guitar body in half and attach these to either side of the Log. But

“Les would say, ‘You could be wrong a million times. You only have to be right once’”

OPPOSITE  
& OPENING  
PAGES: Les  
Paul records  
with wife Mary  
Ford in his  
home studio in  
the 1950s.










**“Les could think more than three steps ahead. He was already thinking, ‘My lead guitar has to be crystal clear. So that’ll come in last’”**

as Steve Rosenthal, the Foundation’s archivist, emphasizes, the wings were purely for aesthetics, to make the contraption look like a guitar. “Les didn’t want to hear the resonant frequencies created by the hollow body; he only wanted to hear the strings being amplified through the pickup,” Rosenthal says. “He ensured that by designing for the Log two wings that didn’t resonate.” Les’s arsenal of home-built guitars eventually expanded to include three “Klunkers,”

Epiphones modified with an access door in the back through which he could reposition the pickup. “He could move the pickup to find where it produced the best sound.”

#### **In the Beginning Was the Disc**

Equipped with his guitars, in 1947 Les applied his command of recording technology to make a record. At Crosby’s urging, Les had refurbished his garage into a recording lab, a precursor of the modern home studio. By now he had abandoned his two-pickup record-cutting machine as impractical. Instead, he employed two record-cutting lathes: After cutting a disc on the first, he would play it back while adding a new part and record both simultaneously to a disc on the second record-cutting machine, then repeat as necessary to create a complete arrangement.

It was the advent of sound on sound, and more. Through his experiments, Les figured out that he could slow the lathe to cut the disc at half speed and make any guitar part he recorded sound twice as fast, and an octave higher, when played back at normal

speed. Les called it his “space-age” guitar. Likewise, he could record at a higher speed to make his guitar sound lower, like a bass, upon playback. In short, he could be his own one-man combo.

The song he chose to record from a bucket of 20 was Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart’s “Lover.” Perhaps Les, known for his sly humor, selected this composition for a line in Hart’s lyric: “In my ear you breathe a flame.” Les’s electrifying sound-on-sound instrumental would do just that. As Rosenthal explains, it was the start of a technological firestorm: “You can look at ‘Lover’ as the start of the sound-on-sound revolution.”

The media for Les’s disc-to-disc recordings were blank 16-inch acetate discs. “Les used over 500 discs to create ‘Lover,’” Rosenthal reveals. Just a few years before, such luxury would have been impossible. In 1942, the War Production Board began rationing shellac — the main component in phonograph records at that time — due to the war effort. “Fortunately for Les, after the war’s shellac embargo ended, he had an unlimited supply,” the archivist notes. “There are probably 30 or 40 arrangement discs that we’ve digitized for ‘Lover.’”

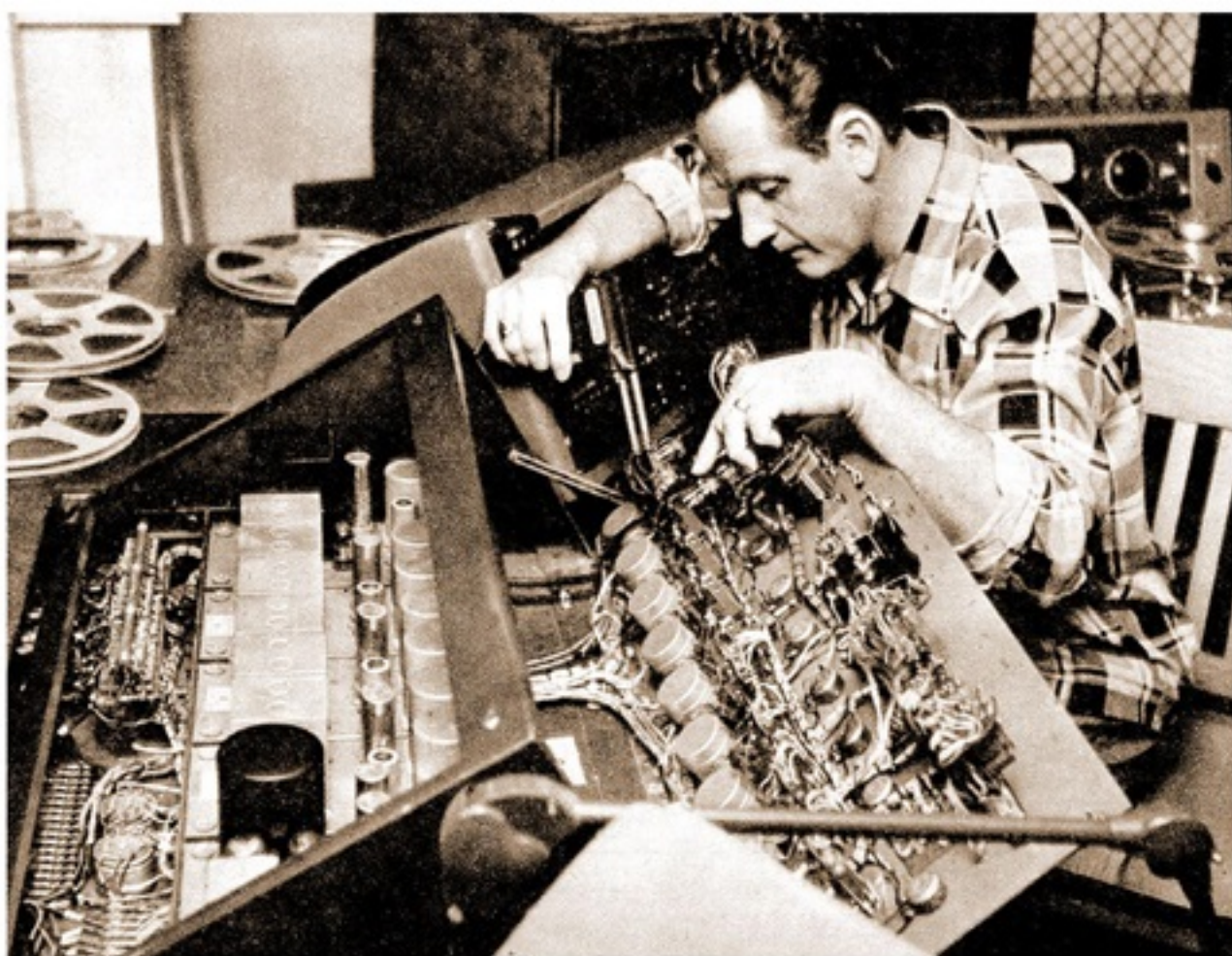
#### **Audio Layer Cake**

Rosenthal also details the order in which Les would meticulously build his recordings. “He would lay his first basic track on a disc,” he explains. “That could sometimes have been a snare drum, rhythm instrument or acoustic guitar track. He would then play along to it and create a second disc. Remember: There was no punching in, no dropping-in in 1947; if he screwed up, he had to throw out that disc and start over again. He would do that until he was satisfied. Then he took that newly created second disc, which would have parts one and two on it, and move that to the first turntable. He might say, ‘What we need now is a half-speed guitar.’ He would then work on overdubbing that guitar and add as many layers as he felt were necessary to complete the arrangement.”

As Les’s manager in the 1990s, Braunstein was an eyewitness to his perfectionism onstage, at the Iridium nightclub in New York City, where Les performed weekly for 15 years starting in 1995. “Les’s first Iridium show was at eight o’clock,” Braunstein says. “But he’d arrive at three o’clock. He wanted the soundboard to be perfect and would rehearse with the engineers until they got it sounding exactly as Les wanted. You couldn’t keep up with him. Doing what he did would have driven most people mad.”

Rosenthal delineates how “Lover” showcases this precision. “Les recorded the rhythm guitar part with a snare drum, or sometimes a tambourine with a metronome, to keep him in time. Les once remarked,

Les tinkers in his studio.







‘Instead of a metronome, I would often keep time by beating on the guitar’s neck and strings, then lay a rhythm track.’ There are also times where he, or his wife, Mary Ford, strummed a straight rhythm, which set the tempo upon which they would build the arrangement. In the case of ‘Lover,’ I found a stem where he played a snare drum along with a rhythm guitar.” Rosenthal adds that there are many instances where Les played the bass part on his guitar’s low strings, recorded at double speed. “On the record’s final version, it dropped an octave because he played it back at regular speed. We hear this on many stem arrangements.”

“Lover” is comprised of two sections, which Les worked on separately. Section one features guitar at regular speed overlaid with the “space-age” lead guitar, recorded at half speed to sound an octave higher on playback. “For the second part, he edited a separate double-speed section,” Rosenthal explains. “Sometimes he would layer the ‘space-age’ guitar two or three times, all while ensuring the consistent clarity of each track and meeting the challenges of distortion and noise.”

Indeed, with disc-to-disc recording, each subsequent generation resulted in a loss of fidelity

for previously recorded tracks, along with an increase in the noise floor. “Les understood that before every subsequent track or layer the first track that gets laid down gets a little distorted,” Braunstein says. “He had to arrange in his head the least important aspects of the song, which he would then put down first, and the most important aspects of the song, which he would put down last because they would need to have the best fidelity. He’d say, ‘Okay, this will get a little lost, but it’s not as important as the next part.’ There were lots of parts, but Les could think more than three steps ahead. His head was already at the end of the recording, thinking, ‘My lead guitar is the voice and has to be crystal clear. So that’ll come in last, especially my half-speed ‘space-age’ guitar, and I’ll have to put everything else first.’ He used the same technique when recoding Mary Ford’s vocals.”

#### Les Is More

Not surprisingly, Les kept meticulous documentation of his efforts, which the Foundation has in its archive. “He played all the instruments on ‘multiples,’ as he referred to them,” Rosenthal notes, “including drums, percussion, quasi bass, rhythm guitar, lead guitar and several additional guitars that played back at double-

**Les and Mary with Ed Sullivan (center), most likely at rehearsal for their appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, August 19, 1951. Les is playing his first Klunker, series no. 6867.**



 **“Sometimes he would layer the ‘space-age’ guitar two or three times while ensuring the consistent clarity of each track.”**

speed and consequently were pitched an octave higher. Before he would overdub again, he would make a copy, or a safety, of the master. We’ve discovered many safeties in the archives, a trove of the component parts of the disc-to-disc stem arrangements, as well as the later tape-to-tape mono stem arrangements. We’ve digitized these building blocks and can now see the stops along his ‘arrangement tree,’ as I call it, and know how he

constructed these songs, layer by layer, in many cases from beginning to completion. These multiples exist for ‘*Lover*.’ There are approximately 37 tracks on the finished recording!”

One of the first people to hear “*Lover*” upon its completion was the comedian and actor W.C. Fields, who came to Les’s garage studio to make a record. Confronted with Les’s dexterous juggling of sound, Fields — himself a juggler — exclaimed, “My boy, you sound like an octopus.”

Les shopped “*Lover*,” with its B-side, a similarly recorded cover of “*Brazil*,” a popular 1939 song by Brazilian composer Ary Barroso. He took it first to Columbia Records, where it fell on deaf ears. They didn’t comprehend the genius behind it. Les went next to Capitol Record’s president, Jim Conkling. Just one listen amazed Conkling, who predicted the record would shoot up the charts, which it did. Braunstein says “*Lover*” was revolutionary, affecting everybody and everything in the industry by combining all of Les’s inventive techniques into “one bag of tricks.” In the 2007 documentary, *Chasing Sound*, top engineers Al Schmitt and Phil Ramone say that, upon hearing “*Lover*,” they asked, “How the hell did he even do this? How are we going to do this?”

### **The Revolution Accelerates**

Even as Les was making “*Lover*,” he was helping to facilitate another recording breakthrough. As he explained to me during our 2008 interview, in 1945 Bing Crosby was seeking alternatives to the rigors of live radio broadcasting. Les had a solution: the Magnetophon, a reel-to-reel magnetic tape recorder the Germans had pioneered during the war. “I told Bing, ‘This will knock you out and change the world,’” Les told me. Crosby, who was eager for a way to pre-record his radio show, immediately saw the machine’s potential and went to Alexander M. Poniatoff, the founder of a then-fledgling electronics company called Ampex. “He said, ‘I’ll give you \$50,000 without interest. Just develop those machines so I can transcribe my broadcasts,’” Les recalled to me. In July 1949 Crosby provided Les

with an Ampex Model 200A, the first commercially produced audiotape recorder. Recognizing tape’s audio superiority over discs, he told Les, “Now you can perfect your multiple-track recordings.”

Les set out to do precisely that by modifying the deck, just as he had the disc cutter. The mono tape recorder had one head, and each newly recorded track would erase what was previously stored. Les’s solution was to mount a playback head in front of the existing head. “Les had a revelation,” Rosenthal says. “The concept of having a second arm on the turntable to enable simultaneous recording and playing was a forerunner of his idea of putting the second head on the Ampex machine. He ingeniously asked engineers, perhaps Ampex employees, to build an extra head. He then hired a technician to drill holes into the machine to mount the second head.” Listening to the previously recorded take played back on the second head, Les played along with it and recorded both the live part and pre-recorded track onto the tape via the original tape head. Recalls Rosenthal, “He wrote about how he literally jumped up and down with Mary, saying, ‘I did it! It’s actually going to work!’”

As with his disc recordings, Les carefully constructed his tracks to achieve the best audio results. “We have a Les Paul track sheet which shows how he built his recordings as he went through, layer by layer,” Rosenthal says. “He learned during the process what was going to degrade and what he would not be able to hear after 20 passes. To protect the master tape, Les later purchased a second recorder to bounce back and forth, using one for playback and the other to record an integrated track.

Still, it wasn’t perfect. Recalls Rosenthal, “Les said, ‘The Ampex model’s only drawback was if you were recording 12 parts, and blew the 11th, you had to start all over.’” In 1953, Les hit upon a better solution when he invented the multitrack tape recorder. His idea was to stack eight record/playback heads atop one another, with each recording and playing back its own track along the length of tape. In this way, each discrete track could be recorded, isolated and re-recorded if necessary, without affecting any of the other tracks.

Eventually, Les was able to free his recorder from the confines of his garage studio. Using a mixer created to his specifications by his friend Wally Jones, he was able to take the machine out and use it in performance. “The Wally Jones Mixer was important especially for going on the road,” Rosenthal says. “To quote Les, ‘Wally played a big part in our success by helping us cut loose from the garage to do our thing anywhere we went.’ The mixer is currently on display at Les’s exhibit in the Mahwah Museum, near where he lived in New Jersey.”





### A Bountiful Bequest

The Les Paul Foundation has several missions. One is honoring Les's legacy, which includes making available the voluminous equipment, guitars and pictures that he accumulated during his 75-year career. "The Foundation has completed a multi-year plan to curate, digitize and eventually release Les's output," Rosenthal says. "We've also developed a brand-new website, [les-paul.com](http://les-paul.com), with a section of videos made at the clubs."

Another area of focus is medical research on hearing impairment, with a specific attention to tinnitus. This was dear to Les, who suffered from various hearing issues. Education is another component, and Braunstein maintains this was Les' overarching goal. "He came from a humble background and wanted to provide assistance to low-income areas," he explains. "We're putting music back in these places, not necessarily to make musicians but to encourage overall development of young people through curricula at all levels. Whether you're a music or engineering student, listening to and figuring out Les is a great way to help you think outside the box."

### Bridging Generations

Braunstein accompanied Les during his twilight years, when he made his last album, 2005's *Les Paul and Friends: American Made, World Played*. It was his first new album since 1978's *Guitar Monsters*, his second collaborative album with his friend and fellow guitarist Chet Atkins, for which the two men received a Grammy nomination for Best Instrumental Performance. "That comeback re-energized Les," Braunstein says of Les's revival in the new millennium. "The '60s and early '70s were rough. He wasn't a household name. By the time Les died in 2009, he had become a living legend and rode out into the sunset to tremendous acclaim."

Les was celebrated for many achievements, including his work on the solidbody guitar, his recordings and technological breakthroughs in multitrack recording. But Rosenthal identifies what he believes is the essential reason for his renown. "Les was a juggler of sound," he says. "It's one thing to invent overdubbing. It's another to brilliantly execute it. Everyone from professionals recording in studios to kids recording in bedrooms with Pro Tools owe much to him."

**The Les Paul Trio with Bing Crosby in 1945. Crosby is holding the sheet music for the song "Whose Dream Are You," which appeared on the flipside of his 1945 hit with the trio, "It's Been a Long Long Time."**



**TOP:** With Slash at the grand opening of the new Iridium Jazz Club in New York City, August 13, 2001.

**BELOW:** Les presents a custom left-handed Gibson Les Paul to Paul McCartney in 1988.



Braunstein recalls testimonials to his friend. "There's a video of Paul McCartney at the Iridium, where Paul tells Les the first song he and John Lennon performed was a cover of his hit with Mary, 'How High the Moon,'" he says. He remembers seeing Jimmy Page at the opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2019 exhibition *Play It Loud*, which celebrated the instruments of rock and roll. "I told Jimmy, 'I've a picture of Les signing your shirt!' He

said, 'That was Les's 72nd birthday at the Hard Rock. I cherish that memory.'"

"Eric Clapton, Alice Cooper, Slash, Eddie Van Halen, Steve Miller and Richie Sambora were Les's buddies," Braunstein continues. "Les changed how musicians play music, how

engineers record music and how fans hear music. Every generation stands on somebody else's shoulders. Every generation of musician and studio technician stands on Les's shoulders. He's the source."

Likewise, there were individuals who uplifted Les. To him, "astronauts were the coolest dudes," Braunstein states. "Les put them in a special box because they're engineers, scientists and especially daredevils." Clearly, Les had plenty of the right stuff himself, having boldly achieved a supersonic moon shot, blasting off with his "space-age" guitars. ■

✪  
**"Every generation stands on Les's shoulders. He's the source"**







## Les Thru the Lens

A traveling exhibit of rare photos explores the guitar legend through his life, loves and friends.

BY MARTIN McQUADE

The Les Paul Foundation is honoring its namesake with the exhibition *Les Paul Thru the Lens*, a traveling gallery of rare photos that chronicle the life and career of the inventor, musician and icon. The Foundation has granted *Guitar Player* exclusive access to these treasures, as seen on these pages. Following a display at Memphis' Stax Museum of American Soul Music, the Foundation is arranging the 2023 schedule, which touts an added element. "[American artist] LeRoy Nieman once visited Les at the Iridium and sketched him in different poses," says Michael Braunstein, the Foundation's executive director. "The plan is to include those in the exhibit adding another chance to see how Les influenced people from all walks of life." Venues interested in hosting the exhibition may email [caroline@m2mpr.com](mailto:caroline@m2mpr.com)

1. Les performs as Red Hot Red in 1928 at his first professional performance.
2. With his "Red Hot" Ragtime Band in Waukesha's 1929 4th of July Parade.
3. With (from left) Jeff Beck, Dave Edmunds, Mick Jagger (partially hidden), George Harrison and Bob Dylan at the Third Annual Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Awards, 1988.
4. Les signs Jimmy Page's shirt as Beck looks on, in 1987.



# RENAISSANCE MAN

*A celebration of the musical artistry and technological ingenuity of Boston's Tom Scholz.*

BY JEFF JACOBSON

**WHEN I WAS** 10 years old, I began taking guitar lessons with Bob, a teacher who would become my all-time favorite. Sadly, after one year, Bob left to pursue life as a truck driver, and our paths would never cross again. True to form, though, at our final lesson, he gave me a couple of his favorite albums, one of which was Boston's 1976 self-titled debut. I can still remember putting the vinyl on my turntable and instantly being mesmerized. Years later, things would come full circle when, as a professional music transcriber, I had the opportunity to create the official note-for-note guitar tab books for *Boston* and its 1978 follow-up, *Don't Look Back*. I may have known Bob for only a year, but the records he left me — which are arguably Boston's most classic and enduring albums — continue to fascinate and inspire me, and they'll be our focus throughout this lesson.

Boston is the musical brainchild of songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Tom Scholz, who also has a background in electrical engineering and is an accomplished inventor. As a young man, Scholz attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and later worked as an engineer for Polaroid, a corporation best known for its instant film and cameras. This engineering prowess enabled Scholz to design and build his own outboard effects and pedals, all of which would become the foundation of Boston's signature sound.

Musically, Scholz melded searing rock guitar with songs you might feel you've known for years after having heard them only once. The hallmarks of his style are soaring melodies and harmonies — vocal harmonies, yes — but the core of Scholz's sound lies in his use of layered *harmony lead guitars*.

Other guitarists had already pursued this path, most notably Queen's Brian May, but Scholz took a simpler approach. Whereas May would sometimes layer as many as five or six guitars to create a virtual guitar choir, Scholz almost exclusively used just two. But it was the guitarist's knack for writing catchy, singable guitar melodies that set him apart. These melodies had much in common with the ones he would write for Boston's lead singer Brad Delp, as they were quite vocal-like, complete with expressive bends and Scholz's striking vibrato. We'll explore in depth how he created his harmony magic a bit later.

But first, how did he get that guitar sound? The fact is, Scholz's engineering skills enabled him to design and build his own effects gear when he simply

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couldn't find another way to create the sounds in his head. In the 1970s, he designed what would later be mass-produced as the Rockman, a handheld headphone amp housed in the style of the then-new Sony "Walkman" portable cassette player. The Rockman was marketed in 1982 by Scholz Research & Development (SR&D), the company Tom founded in 1980. One of his proudest moments as an engineer came when he received a Rockman warranty card in the mail from Jeff Beck.

While the Rockman is Scholz's most celebrated invention, it was not his first. He previously designed an attenuator that he called the Power Soak. The first of its kind, it enables a guitar amp to operate at full volume to achieve that famously highly saturated and satisfying tone while allowing the output volume level to be set as quietly as desired, with minimal loss of tone quality.

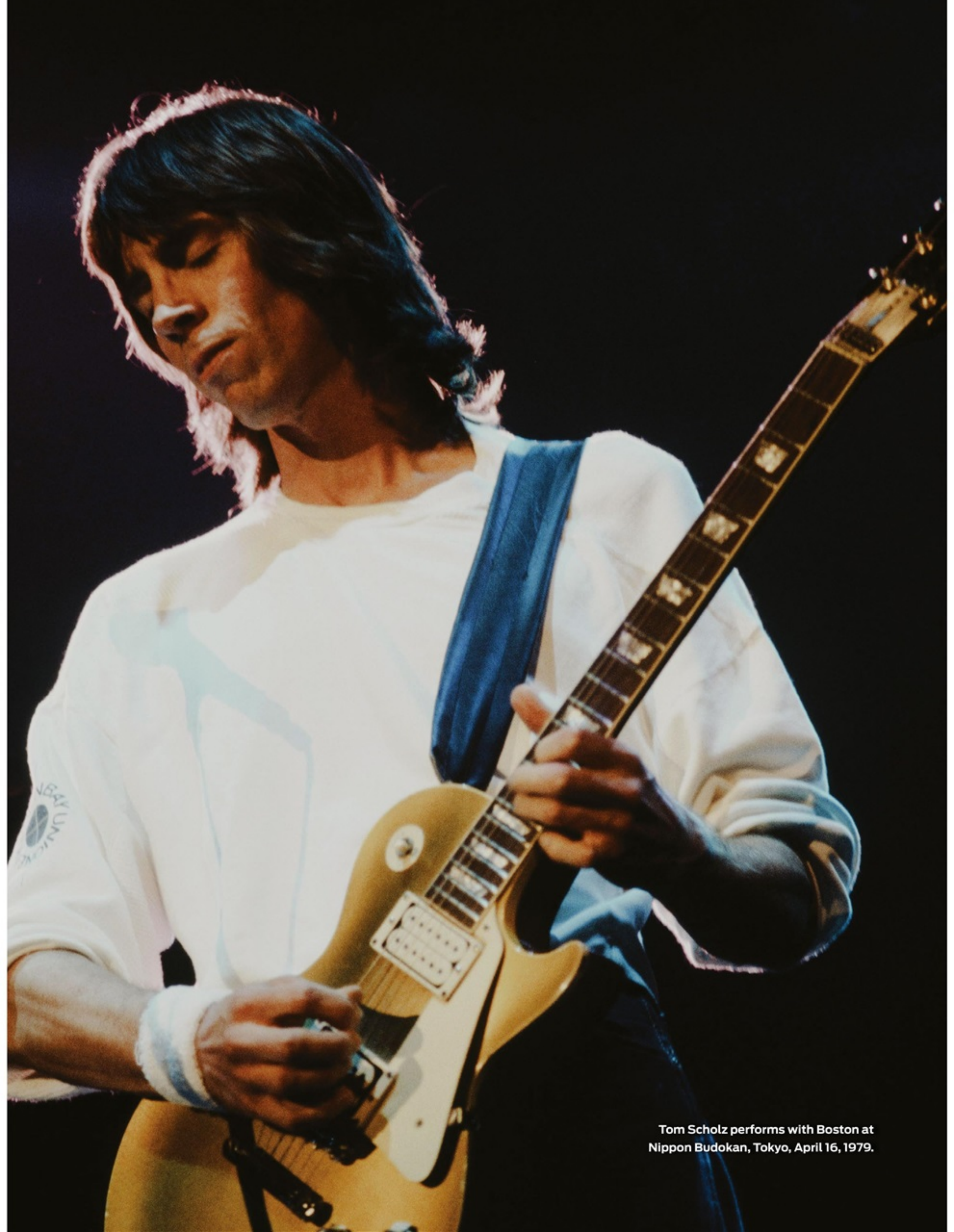
But there is one creation Scholz has always kept to himself — his Hyperdrive pedal, which is essentially a heavily modified Echoplex analog delay unit. Aside from providing literally infinite sustain, it can produce all manner of otherworldly sounds. For example, check out the pick slide (and its after effects) at the 5:14 mark of the title track from *Don't Look Back*. For a demo by the man himself, check out the YouTube video *Tom Scholz: Sound Machine*.

Despite my appreciation for Scholz, I don't own a Rockman. At first I was dismayed that I couldn't use one to record this lesson's musical examples. But then I thought it would be even more fun to get as close to Scholz's signature tone as I could, using pedals I already owned. You very likely have similar pedals in your own collection, so use the following as a guide.



KARJEAN LEVINE/GETTY IMAGES (LES PAUL); KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES (SCHOLZ)





Tom Scholz performs with Boston at Nippon Budokan, Tokyo, April 16, 1979.



Scholz's sound begins with an overdriven tone where the middle frequencies are boosted to be front and center. I reached for my Ibanez Tube Screamer pedal, which is well-known (or notorious, depending on how you see it) for this type of EQ structure. Still, I felt I needed to boost the mids a bit more, as well as cut the surrounding low and high frequencies. I accomplished this with a Boss GE-7 seven-band EQ pedal.

Scholz's sound is massively saturated, so I cranked the Tube Screamer's drive knob all the way up. Yet, somehow, it didn't have that *oomph* that I was looking for. I could have added another overdrive pedal here — a process known as gain-staging — but it wasn't so much that I needed a lot more overdrive; there was just something missing. So instead, I reached for my Xotic EP booster and also made it “go to 11.” But note that I placed it before the Tube Screamer, causing the overdrive pedal to be “pushed” by the booster and creating more overdrive and adding a bit of color and fullness. It may not be the perfect Rockman tone, but it'll do in a pinch.

For some finishing touches, I added spring reverb from a Fender Blues Jr., tape-style delay (from a DigiTech Echo Park), and compression (from a Bogner Harlow) for some warmth and sustain. (See photo for pedal order and detailed settings. The guitar is plugged into the lower right side, the amp to the upper left.) Lastly, Tom used Gibson Les Paul guitars almost exclusively on these first two Boston albums, so I've used mine here as well, on its bridge pickup.

Now let's create some lead harmonies. The most common musical intervals Scholz employed to create his harmonies — two or more notes played simultaneously — are the major and minor 3rd (two steps, and one and one half steps, respectively). On the guitar, a major 3rd is the span of four frets on a given string, and a minor 3rd is three frets. So, for example, to create a major 3rd, you can play the note C on the G string's 5th fret, followed by the E at the 9th fret. To play and hear the notes simultaneously, move the E over to the B string's 5th fret.



#### Ex. 1

#### C major scale, played in 3rds

Acous. Gtr.

\*M3 = major 3rd, m3 = minor 3rd

#### Ex. 2



**Ex. 1** shows the C major scale harmonized up the neck on the G and B strings in 3rds, as they occur *diatonically*, meaning within the scale. Note the pattern of major and minor 3rds, which is the same in every key. Unfortunately, playing 3rds this way, on one guitar, with our heavily overdriven tone, will sound quite muddy, due to the interaction and interference among all the prominent harmonics. The key to getting that crisp, clear Boston harmony-leads sound is to layer two independent single-note lines, each recorded on a separate track. As an alternative, you can record the lower line and play the higher line along with it on playback, or vice versa. Separating the parts like this will eliminate the muddiness, allowing each guitar to “speak” clearly. It’s interesting to note here that Scholz even recorded amplifier feedback in harmony.

If you’re not familiar with your major and minor scales, now would be a good time to brush up, so that you’ll be adept at visualizing intervals on the fretboard. Inspired by Scholz’s composing and arranging in the classic track “Peace of Mind” (Boston), **Ex. 2** emulates his approach to crafting ultra-melodic harmony-lead guitar hooks, here using notes from the C $\sharp$  natural minor scale (C $\sharp$ , D $\sharp$ , E, F $\sharp$ , G $\sharp$ , A, B), which is made up of the same seven notes as the E major scale (E, F $\sharp$ , G $\sharp$ , A, B, C $\sharp$ , D $\sharp$ ).

Scholz’s playing style and touch also directly contribute to the unique quality of his melodies. Most noticeably, it’s his use of a smooth and distinctively wide finger vibrato, particularly used in combination with bent notes. This bend vibrato technique, as it’s known, is a challenging skill that takes a bit of practice to refine. I’ve found the traditional rock-style fret-hand grip yields the best results. To perform it, hook your thumb over the top side of the fretboard, creating a fulcrum with the area between your thumb and index finger as it cradles the back of the neck. Finally, the movement for both your bends and vibrato should come from turning your wrist, rather than pushing with your fingers, as this won’t provide as much strength and control.

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**Ex. 3** shows the C major scale harmonized up the neck on the G and B strings in 3rds, as they occur *diatonically*, meaning within the scale. Note the pattern of major and minor 3rds, which is the same in every key. Unfortunately, playing 3rds this way, on one guitar, with our heavily overdriven tone, will sound quite muddy, due to the interaction and interference among all the prominent harmonics. The key to getting that crisp, clear Boston harmony-leads sound is to layer two independent single-note lines, each recorded on a separate track. As an alternative, you can record the lower line and play the higher line along with it on playback, or vice versa. Separating the parts like this will eliminate the muddiness, allowing each guitar to “speak” clearly. It’s interesting to note here that Scholz even recorded amplifier feedback in harmony.

**Ex. 4** shows the C major scale harmonized up the neck on the G and B strings in 3rds, as they occur *diatonically*, meaning within the scale. Note the pattern of major and minor 3rds, which is the same in every key. Unfortunately, playing 3rds this way, on one guitar, with our heavily overdriven tone, will sound quite muddy, due to the interaction and interference among all the prominent harmonics. The key to getting that crisp, clear Boston harmony-leads sound is to layer two independent single-note lines, each recorded on a separate track. As an alternative, you can record the lower line and play the higher line along with it on playback, or vice versa. Separating the parts like this will eliminate the muddiness, allowing each guitar to “speak” clearly. It’s interesting to note here that Scholz even recorded amplifier feedback in harmony.

**Ex. 5** shows the C major scale harmonized up the neck on the G and B strings in 3rds, as they occur *diatonically*, meaning within the scale. Note the pattern of major and minor 3rds, which is the same in every key. Unfortunately, playing 3rds this way, on one guitar, with our heavily overdriven tone, will sound quite muddy, due to the interaction and interference among all the prominent harmonics. The key to getting that crisp, clear Boston harmony-leads sound is to layer two independent single-note lines, each recorded on a separate track. As an alternative, you can record the lower line and play the higher line along with it on playback, or vice versa. Separating the parts like this will eliminate the muddiness, allowing each guitar to “speak” clearly. It’s interesting to note here that Scholz even recorded amplifier feedback in harmony.



**Ex. 3** offers a simple bending workout. First, focus on making sure your bends are in tune. The most accurate way to check a bent note's intonation is with an electronic tuner. You can, of course, use your ears: Bend a note, say, up a whole step, which is the equivalent rise in pitch of two frets, then check it against the identical unbent note two frets higher on the same string. However, using a tuner will simultaneously train your fret hand to feel precisely how far you'll need to bend and your ears to recognize when each bend is spot on. Also bear in mind that the amount of tension varies from string to string and in different positions. For example, bending down near the nut feels tighter than bending near the 12th fret, so you'll need to adjust your touch in each case. Once your bends are consistently in tune, work on adding some vibrato.

Next, let's explore Scholz's rhythm guitar style with some melodically arpeggiated chords inspired by another classic, "More Than a Feeling," also from *Boston* (**Ex. 4**). This type of ringing figure is ideally suited for either acoustic guitar, or a clean-tone electric with a little chorus added.

Scholz would sometimes present a rhythm part on acoustic guitar, only to later duplicate it on overdriven electric, for tonal variety and excitement. For example, check out the 3:22 and 6:57 marks in "Foreplay/Long Time" from *Boston*. **Ex. 5** is inspired by this classic opus. To perform the pitchless percussive strums (indicated by Xs in the notation), relax your fret hand's grip on the chord shape, just enough so that the strings break contact with the frets, but without letting go of the strings. Then strum them. This is a key element of Scholz's rhythm guitar style.

Scholz also employed his harmony guitar approach quite creatively in his solos. Inspired by his lead work in "Something About You" (*Boston*), **Ex. 6** demonstrates how this arranging approach enabled the guitarist to achieve dramatic melodic crescendos. Notice how the notes in the two parts are simply doubled an octave apart during the first two bars then switch to

**Ex. 6**

**Ex. 6** F#5

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

1

3

1/2

16 (16) 14 17 16 17 16 14 16 14 13 14 16 14 13

T A B

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/dist.)

1/2

9 (9) 7 9 8 9 8 6 9 7 6 7 9 7 6

T A B

A5 B5

8va

3

9 9 14 14 11 12 14 16 17

T A B

6 6 9 10 7 9 11 12 12

T A B

a climbing harmony of diatonic 3rds in bars 3 and 4, culminating with wailing, synchronized high bends and vibratos.

Since *Don't Look Back*, Boston fans have had to wait roughly a decade between album releases, either due to legal battles or Scholz's perfectionism. The subsequent four records, from 1986's *Third Stage* to 2013's *Life, Love and Hope*, have seen Scholz pursue his twin-

guitar harmony approach with less frequency, but his ability to write memorable guitar melodies endures, as does his signature Rockman sound. ■

Have a question or comment about this month's lesson? Feel free to reach out to Jeff Jacobson on Twitter @jjmusicmentor or at jeffjacobson.net. Jeff offers private guitar and songwriting lessons virtually.



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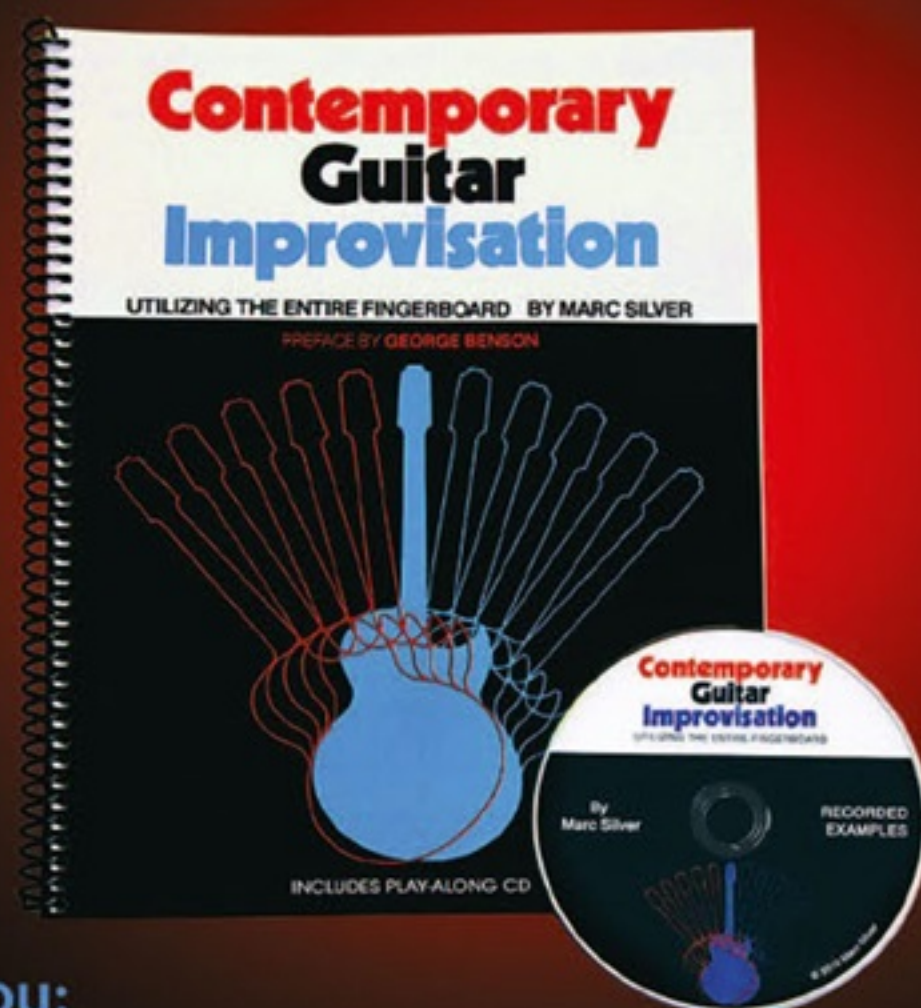
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# MAESTRO

## Agena Envelope Filter, Arcas Compressor Sustainer, Mariner Tremolo, Orbit Phaser and Titan Boost

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

**MAESTRO'S LATEST GROUP** of pedals stick to meat-and-potatoes effects that cover boost, compression, envelope filter, phase shifting and tremolo. Like the debut models we reviewed in the May 2022 issue, they feature wedge-shaped steel housings with vintage-style brushed-aluminum decal graphics and a lighted "three bugles" on/off indicator. They also

keep the same format of three knobs and a mini-toggle switch that, depending on the effect, provides two parameter options for enhanced functionality. The input, output and adapter jacks are on the front panel, which allows for placing the pedals close together on a board. All are true-bypass analog designs and, unlike the debut models, do not have internal trimpots. The enclosures open

easily when you loosen four screws (they don't have to be removed), allowing you to access the clip for a nine-volt battery (not included) — handy if it's inconvenient to be tethered to an adapter (also not included).

I tested all five pedals with a Tele, a Reverend Crosscut and a Slick SL56 [see *review, page 86*], plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a mid-'60s Vibro-Champ.

### Agena Envelope Filter



The Agena Envelope Filter delivers classic auto-wah effects via its sense (sensitivity), decay and attack controls, along with a Hi/Lo switch that selects the filter's frequency range. Set the switch to Hi for a sharper

tone or to Lo for a bassier response. The accompanying literature points out that a Maestro BG-1 or BG-2 Boomerang Wah pedal was used by legendary Stax Records session guitarist Charles "Skip" Spence on the 1971 recording "Theme From Shaft." It's not clear if the Agena is based on any '70s-era circuitry, but it is a sweet-sounding pedal that tracks picking dynamics very well, making it feel like you're working the rocker on a wah pedal to create sharper "toe-down" effects and rounder timbres — all with a nice vocal

character — when you back off on your picking. I like the sounds with sensitivity at noon or thereabouts (depending on whether I'm playing humbuckers or lower-output single-coils), attack (which sets how quickly the filter opens) at around one o'clock and decay (which adjusts how long the filter stays open) at two o'clock or higher.

The controls don't have radical amounts of range, and that could be a good thing because the Agena sounds warm and natural and is fun to play with. You can find a lot of reasons to just leave it on for rhythm and melodic parts, where the embellishing qualities of wah can be so organically woven into the music when you're not anchored to a rocker pedal. It's like wah-wah without having to think about it. It's an addictive thing, too, and the Agena gives you the essentials you need to get your Jerry Garcia groove on with this hip effect.

### Arcas Compressor Sustainer



A totally different experience is the Arcas Compressor Sustainer, which has sustain, attack and level controls, and a Low/Hi switch that, in the latter position, provides greater sensitivity to picking dynamics. The Arcas is very

unobtrusive, and you can basically have it on and get very comfy with the smoothing qualities it brings to your playing. This is where compression is at its best, in my opinion, but the Arcas can be more effect-y sounding with sustain (which varies the amount of gain applied during compression) set at around three o'clock, attack (which adjusts how quickly the compression engages) at two o'clock and level around one o'clock or whatever it takes to give a little boost to the output or mitigate level loss



caused by compressing the signal. With the switch set to Hi, Arcas added a nice juiciness to slide parts, and I liked how it doesn't change the dynamic feel but rather just makes everything sustain longer and sound meatier in the process. The Arcas does the job effectively and is very quiet and transparent, making it ideal for guitarists who can appreciate a compressor that doesn't overtly affect that all-important dynamic feel.

### Mariner Tremolo



The Mariner tremolo is another well-implemented pedal that offers the choice of Classic and Harmonic modes via its two-position mode switch. This pedal is a straightforward three-knobber, with controls for depth (varies the intensity of the effect), shape (progressively alters the waveform shape from triangle to square) and speed (modulation rate).

However, in combination with the aforementioned mode switch, a surprisingly wide range of tremolo textures are available here. Classic mode provides amplitude modulation to deliver warm, amp-style tremolo when you set shape to noon or thereabouts. The effect is nice and thick with the depth knob all the way up, and turning the shape control toward maximum yields progressively choppy sounds that really stand out at higher speed settings and can be useful for embellishing breaks or other dynamic shifts in a song. Harmonic mode introduces frequency amplitude modulation, which has pitch-bend color and sounds that are closer to a rotary speaker. I like it with depth at maximum, shape at around 11 o'clock, and speed either on the slow side, for a watery, Robin Trower-style tone, or faster, for a shimmering Lonnie Mack-style sound, especially played through a lower-gain amp boosted into breakup. The versatility of the Mariner makes it a good choice if you're looking for a basic tremolo pedal that has something extra up its sleeve.

### Orbit Phaser

It would be unthinkable not to have a phase shifter in the new Maestro lineup, and the Orbit Phaser answers the need in a juicy-sounding pedal that features controls for



width (adjusts the effect's intensity), feedback (sets the amount of vocal phase effect) and rate, plus a 4-Stage/6-Stage switch that provides classic, bold phasing textures in the former position and a slightly

thinner, smoother and perhaps more hi-fi response in the latter position. They both sound good in different ways, and I liked the overall response with the width and feedback controls at around one and two o'clock respectively, and rate set for a rich, chewy sound at around 10 o'clock. From there the tones can be easily slanted toward classic EHX Small Stone/MXR Phase 90 sounds with a little tweaking of the controls. The Orbit Phaser is a good choice if your tastes lean in a vintage direction and you love the swirly coolness of this primordial effect, whether using it to add tasty color, like '70s-era Keef, or as a tone shaper to help facilitate the "brown sound," as per early EVH.

### Titan Boost



The Titan Boost begins as a garden-variety booster with tone and level controls, but it adds a nifty twist courtesy of the mode switch, with its Flat and Hi Pass settings. The latter operates in conjunction with a third knob labeled HPF

that lets you adjust the high-pass filter's bandwidth and is only operable when the switch is on the Hi Pass setting.

The cool thing here is you can fine-tune the tones quickly and easily by using the HPF knob to do things like tame shrillness inflicted by single-coils or eliminate low-end muddiness that humbuckers can cause. In Flat mode the Titan simply adjusts tone and level, which may be all that's needed to give your guitar signal a girthy boost of 25dB or more to overdrive the front end of a tube amp. I found it worked well in that role, letting me get more grind from a Deluxe without changing its core tone, and the Titan proved to be a cool alternative to switching on an OD pedal, which invariably colors the sound to some degree, even though that may be exactly what you want. A booster can also be an essential part of the pedal chain when placed before or after a distortion pedal to

## SPECIFICATIONS

### All Pedals

**CONTACT** maestroelectronics.com

**EXTRAS** Battery power option

**SIZE** 5.044" x 3.45" x 2.5" (LxWxH), including knobs

**WEIGHT** 1.24 lbs (tested)

**BUILT** China

### Agena Envelope Filter

**PRICE** \$159

**CONTROLS** Sense, decay, attack. Hi/Lo switch  
**KUDOS** Tracks well. Hi/Lo switch provides useful tone options

**CONCERNS** None

### Arcas Compressor Sustainer

**PRICE** \$149

**CONTROLS** Sustain, attack, level. Hi/Lo switch  
**KUDOS** Smooth compression, quiet operation. Useful Hi/Lo function

**CONCERNS** None

### Mariner Tremolo

**PRICE** \$154

**CONTROLS** Depth, shape, speed. Harmonic/Classic switch

**KUDOS** Wide range of tremolo sounds available via the Harmonic/Classic switch

**CONCERNS** None

### Orbit Phaser

**PRICE** \$149

**CONTROLS** Width, feedback, rate. 6 Stage/4 Stage switch

**KUDOS** Delivers sweet-sounding phasing with a choice of 4- and 6-stage operation

**CONCERNS** None

### Titan Boost

**PRICE** \$154

**CONTROLS** Tone, HPF, level. High Pass/Flat switch

**KUDOS** Powerful clean boost. Handy HFP mode provides enhanced tone-shaping

**CONCERNS** None

give some extra lift when it's needed. The Titan is a very capable boost pedal that gives you two distinctly different ways to shape your tone, while retaining the simplicity and ease of use that are fundamental qualities of all these models in the Maestro line. ■



# SLICK

## SL56

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

**A GUITAR WITH** a Jaguar-style, offset semihollow body and a Tele/Gib pickup setup could easily describe a pricey boutique affair that borrows from Fullerton and Kalamazoo designs of the '50s and '60s to create a cool modern-day hybrid. It also describes to a tee the Slick SL56, which, besides being extremely affordable, goes all the way into boutique territory by featuring a P-90 in the neck position and a T-style single-coil sitting next to a custom solid-brass wraparound bridge with six chunky brass adjustable saddles. Brass was deemed the “musical metal” in the days of yore, and its use is straight out of the playbook of Alembic and others from the late '60s and '70s, when brass was thought to equal greater sustain

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### Slick SL56

**CONTACT** guitarfetish.com

**PRICE** \$309 direct

**NUT** Graphite, 1.693" wide

**NECK** Canadian hard rock maple

**FRETBOARD** Black walnut, 25 1/2" scale

**FRETS** 22 medium jumbo

**TUNERS** Slick 14:1 with brass buttons

**BODY** Chambered solid ash

**BRIDGE** Solid brass billet wraparound with six adjustable saddles

**PICKUPS** Slick Junior Alnico V P90 8.0 kΩ neck, Slick Fullerton Alnico V 9.6 kΩ bridge,

**CONTROLS** Volume, tone, three-way selector

**FACTORY STRINGS** .010–.046

**WEIGHT** 6.75 lbs (tested)

**EXTRAS** Aged brass hardware. Finish options. Tweed hard case

**BUILT** China

**KUDOS** Good playability. Potent bridge pickup tones. Great look

**CONCERNS** Neck pickup is a little dark sounding. Pickup switch is easy to hit unintentionally

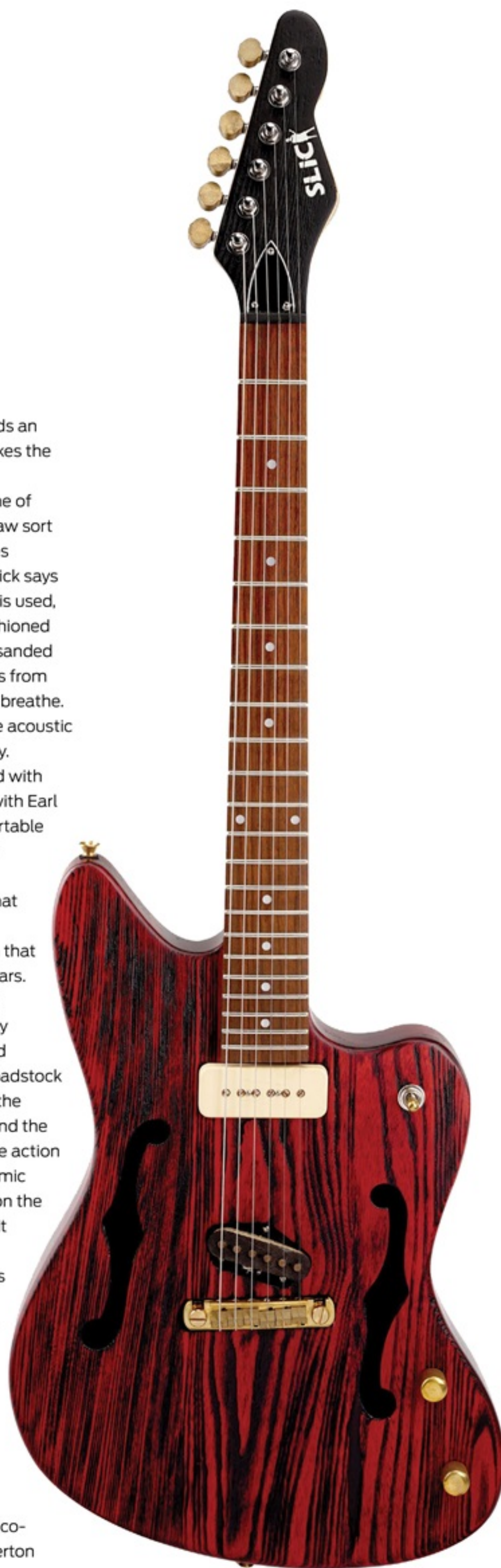
and generally better tone. Here it adds an interesting throwback twist that makes the SL56 a unique beast.

The Aged Crimson Ash finish (one of six available colors) looks neat in a raw sort of way, with the red and black shades highlighting the open-grain wood. Slick says no grain filler or polyurethane sealer is used, and that just a single coat of old-fashioned automotive paint is sprayed on and sanded back. The process prevents the pores from becoming clogged, so the wood can breathe. It seems to work, as you can hear the acoustic resonance when tapping on the body.

The solid maple neck is attached with a milled-aluminum plate engraved with Earl Slick's image, and carved in a comfortable C shape that feels awesome with its silky-smooth natural finish. The headstock wears a black paint job that shows off the tuners' brass buttons, themselves being Slick's own design that features bronze crown and pinion gears. They're smooth and precise, with no backlash, and the guitar stayed nicely in tune during testing. A hand-slotted graphite nut fitted to the tilt-back headstock provides the correct break angle for the strings, further enhancing stability, and the factory setup made for low, buzz-free action and solid intonation. My only ergonomic issue is the toggle switch's location on the lower horn, which makes it easy to hit unintentionally.

The black walnut fingerboard has white position dots and carries 22 medium-jumbo frets that are lightly polished, evenly crowned and rounded off on the tips. It makes for a nice-playing guitar that sustains well — as might be expected with several ounces of brass onboard — and offers easy playability.

Another department where the SL56 stand out is its hand-aged Alnico-magnet pickups: an overwound Fullerton





T-style in the bridge and a Slick Junior P-90 single-coil in the neck. They're wired via a three-way switch (with rounded brass tip) to volume and tone pots that are also topped with knobs made of machined billet brass.

Tested on some gigs and plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb with OD pedals from Warm Audio and Maestro for grind, the SL56 proved a good-sounding guitar that delivered the kinds of tones you'd expect from two very different types of single-coil pickups. My only caveat is that the neck pickup is very round sounding and doesn't have the top-end bite expected from a P-90. Perhaps that's intentional, as the neck position sounded good for rhythm and slide playing once the amp's EQ was adjusted accordingly. However, because the bridge pickup was so much brighter sounding, it was necessary to fiddle with the tone control more to get a balanced sound with both pickups on, which is also noise canceling because the P-90 is reverse-wound, reverse-polarity. In the end,

it was simpler to go with the bridge pickup, taking advantage of its crispness and cool dynamics for rhythm, and rolling back the tone control and/or tweaking the pedals' EQ for buttery high-gain sounds. As such, the SL56 was somewhat reminiscent of playing a thinline Fender Esquire, where the slice of the back pickup is tempered by the airiness that the chambered body brings.

The bottom is that the Slick SL56 is a fun guitar that delivers the boutique-on-a-budget experience in spades. In fact, it has so much going for it, you can't help being blown away by its crazy low price. It's a lot of guitar for the money and one that makes you appreciate this company's dedication to building high-quality instruments that punch well above their price class. ■



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# DONNER

## Rising-G Pro

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

**DONNER'S LATEST ENTRY** in the acoustic guitar market is the Rising-G Pro, a compact instrument made almost entirely of carbon fiber. Measuring 38 inches long and weighing a little over four pounds, it qualifies as a travel guitar, and is certainly well suited to taking into extreme conditions thanks to a one-piece body that is said to remain stable and nondeforming at temperatures as low as minus 20 degrees centigrade (-4 °F) and as high as 80 degrees centigrade (176 °F) while being immune to humidity.

To achieve its goal of creating a guitar made of carbon that sounds like a wood

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### Donner Rising-G Pro

**CONTACT** [donnermusic.com](http://donnermusic.com)

**PRICE** \$399 street

**NUT** Graphite, 1.69" wide

**NECK** Carbon fiber

**FRETBOARD** HPL (high-pressure laminate), 25" scale

**FRETS** 20

**TUNERS** Dark chrome die-cast

**BODY** Carbon fiber, one piece

**TOP** Carbon fiber

**BRIDGE** Carbon fiber, with compensated saddle

**ELECTRONICS** N/A

**FACTORY STRINGS** Elixir medium-gauge phosphor bronze

**WEIGHT** 4.42 lbs (tested)

**EXTRAS** Includes padded gig-bag, tuner, capo, strap, and picks. Four color choices: Cloud White, Carbon Dark, Apricot Yellow and Sky Blue

**BUILT** China

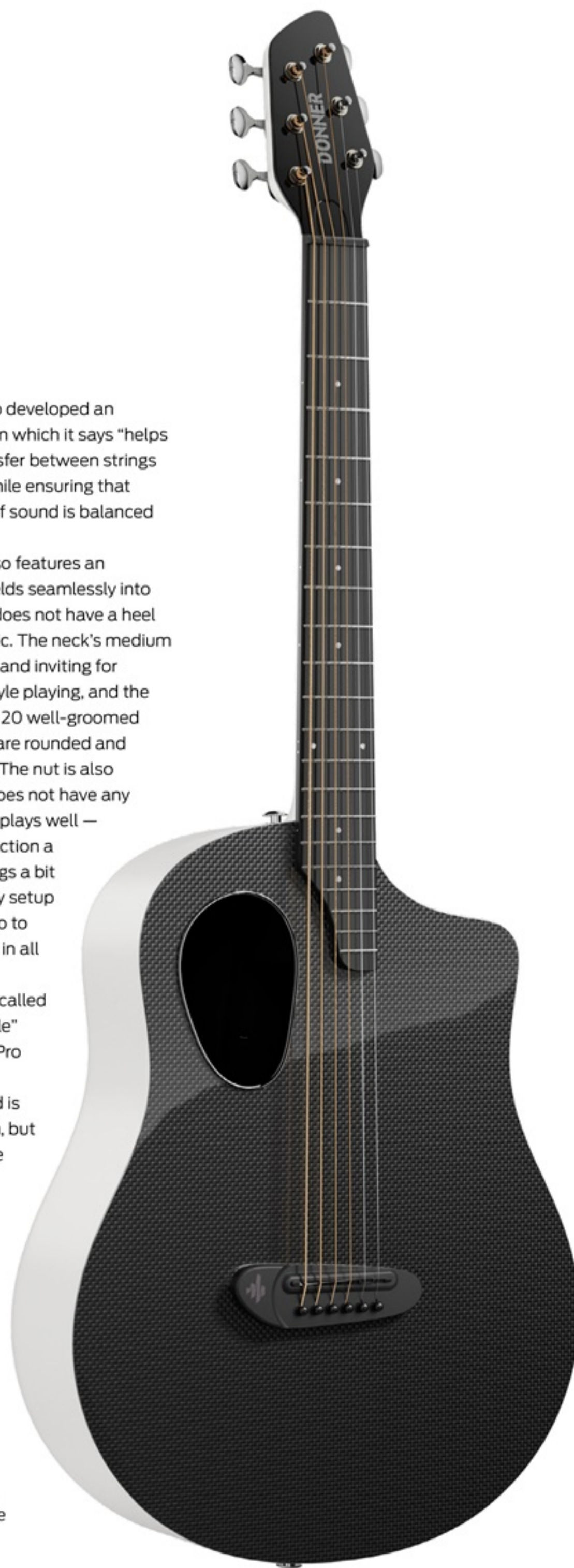
**KUDOS** Great look. Plays well and delivers impressive volume for its size

**CONCERNS** This guitar begs for a pickup system

instrument, Donner also developed an A-shaped bracing design which it says "helps make the vibration transfer between strings and body smoother," while ensuring that "each frequency band of sound is balanced and strong."

The construction also features an integrated neck that melds seamlessly into the cutaway body and does not have a heel like a traditional acoustic. The neck's medium C profile is comfortable and inviting for strumming and fingerstyle playing, and the HPL fingerboard carries 20 well-groomed and polished frets that are rounded and smoothed on the ends. The nut is also properly notched and does not have any sharp edges. The guitar plays well — although I'd prefer the action a little lower and the strings a bit lighter — and the factory setup allowed the Rising-G Pro to sound musically in tune in all positions.

Donner uses what's called a "parametric sound hole" that gives the Rising-G Pro impressive volume and low-end kick. The sound is balanced top to bottom, but probably because of the port's location on the upper bout, you can really feel the bass when playing, which is a cool thing. Donner says the parametric sound hole is also designed to direct sound to the listeners, and it definitely pushes air efficiently and projects well, considering the guitar's small body. I do wish the Rising-G Pro had





a pickup system so it could have been tested in a live-performance situation. A basic electronics package wouldn't add much to the cost and would greatly enhance flexibility, so hopefully a pickup will be made available in a future offering, which Donner says is in the works, so stay tuned.

All said, however, the Rising-G Pro has a nice acoustic sound and sustains well, making it an enjoyable guitar to play when jamming or doing a low-volume gig on a small stage. It's more fun to play than most dedicated travel guitars, and it looks sleek and modern with the woven-pattern top, curvy bridge and tapering of the fingerboard at the 17th fret.

The reasonably priced Rising-G Pro is a good choice for acoustic pickers and songwriters who don't need amplification. If you seek a guitar with a stylish appearance that sounds bigger than its small size suggests, the Rising-G Pro is certainly one worth checking out. 



The Rising-G Pro is available in (left to right) Carbon Dark, Sky Blue, Apricot Yellow and (opposite page) Cloud White.

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# ORIGIN EFFECTS

## M-EQ Driver pedal

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

**BRITISH MAKER ORIGIN** Effects ascended quickly into the upper echelon of high-end boutique pedal makers largely with its Cali76 compressor, based on the legendary Urei 1176 studio rack compressor. They're back at it with the new M-EQ Driver, which channels another classic processor, the vaunted Pultec passive EQ made famous in the 1950s for its ability to sweeten and boost, in particular, a signal's midrange.

Rather than tap the Pultec circuit purely for its frequency-adjusting capabilities, Origin takes advantage of the original circuit's ability to drive a signal into sweet, harmonically saturated distortion. It's a low-gain overdrive at best, but a succulent and musically enriching effect that has become as much a part of the Pultec's magic as its EQ capabilities themselves. Put it all together, and the Origin M-EQ Driver is an enticing mid-boost and drive pedal that speaks to some highly creative design thinking before you've even plugged it in.

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### M-EQ Driver

CONTACT [origineffects.com](http://origineffects.com)

PRICE \$319 street

**CONTROLS** Drive, Level, Mids, Cut; Adapt switch, FCS (midband) switch

**EXTRAS** Input and output, high-quality buffered-bypass switching, center-negative 9V DC adaptor input (external power only, min. 80mV)

**SIZE** 4.75" x 2.5" x 1.75" (excluding feet and knobs)

**BUILT** England

**KUDOS** A sweetly articulate, rich and dynamic low-gain overdrive that enhances our tone in marvelous ways

**CONCERNS** The pedal initially depletes gain until you get the knobs up toward noon (something you can easily learn to work with)



The M-EQ Driver is housed in a brushed stainless-steel enclosure topped with the simple but deceptively versatile control complement that is part of the company's calling card. This interface includes knobs for drive, level, mids and cut, with a two-way toggle switch for Adapt on/off, and a

amount of cut applied to the high end when you pick lightly or turn down your guitar's volume. This allows for a seamless transition from warmer lead tones to brighter, clear rhythm playing.

The M-EQ is designed and built in England using a plethora of quality components.



Origin's M-EQ Driver takes inspiration from the Pultec EQP-1A (top) and MEQ-5 Mid-Range Equalizer (bottom), shown left. Gene Shenk developed the passive EQ units in the 1950s, and manufactured them through his company, Pulse Techniques.

three-way KCS (kilocycles) switch to select three mid-boost frequency bands: 0.8kHz, 1.0kHz or 1.3kHz. The mids knob increases mid-boost within the KCS band as you turn it up. Cut rolls off high end as you turn it clockwise, while the Adapt switch works upon the cut control when engaged to reduce the

Internal features of the all-analog pedal include a transformer-driven circuit like that of the original Pultec M-EQ rack unit, as well as a push-pull output stage that mimics that of the vintage EQ. The input impedance is ultra-high to interact well with a wide range of guitar pickups, and switching is



high-quality buffered bypass to help condition your pedalboard overall and play nice with long cable runs. The center-negative adaptor between the input and output on the front of the box requires a nine-volt DC supply delivering at least 80mV, which is converted to 18V internally for optimal headroom, so converter supplies higher than nine volts are not recommended.

I tested the M-EQ with a Fender Telecaster and Jazzmaster, both with their traditional single-coil pickups, and a Gibson Les Paul and Firebird III with PAF-style and mini humbuckers, respectively, into a '66 Fender Princeton combo and a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab. And, wow, what a pedal! Perhaps the most important thing to convey is that it just makes everything sound better. And presumably that's the principle behind adapting this hallowed studio gear to guitar-pedal form: The best vintage analog rack gear has become legendary because just running through it adds a little extra magic to

your signal. In this case, it makes the guitar sound more alive, as if it's hot-wired from the strings to the amp's output stage and even the voice coils of the speakers beyond it. Put in less waffly terms, the M-EQ Driver delivers on the impressive ability to enhance both the articulation and the body of each guitar-and-amp combination I tried it with. Call it "clarity with grit." In addition to its mild overdrive, it enhanced character and personality, and simply made each guitar feel easier and more fun to play.

As already discussed, the M-EQ Driver is a low-gain overdrive at best, but that still offers a lot of toothsome, dynamic breakup with the gain maxed and the rest dialed in to voice the pedal to your taste (an effort that taps impressive versatility from the mids and cut knobs and FCS switch). Given the feel and responsiveness of the circuit — and its aforementioned blend of crispness and girth — that level of drive usually felt enough for rock leads and power-chord work for which

I might have sought a more saturated and distorted sound from other pedals. And that being said, this thing sounded equally good doing a near-unity-gain "clean-ish" boost, mild drive or going all-out. At all settings, it's also a very dynamic pedal, working symbiotically with your pick attack and your guitar's volume control to deliver an expressive range of touch sensitivity. And although the Adapt feature might be subtle in some uses, it cleverly increases this capability — exponentially so, when used right.

Oddities? It doesn't do much for your signal until you push either drive or level (and ideally both) past noon, with some mids dialed up to boot. The first time I plugged in, I wondered why my guitar was so anemic, then realized the pedal's gain and level were only at 10 o'clock and the mids turned off. Turn them all up a little, and this thing sounds utterly glorious, making it an Editors' Pick Award, both for its creative design and luscious results! 🎸



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# BOSS

## Boss DS-1W Waza Craft Distortion

TESTED BY ALEX LYNHAM

**INTRODUCED IN 1978**, the Boss DS-1 Distortion was the first such pedal released by Boss, arriving just two years after the release of the company's debut pedal, the CE-1 Chorus Ensemble. For this reason, it was many players' first distortion pedal. Like the ProCo Rat that arrived the same year, the DS-1 used two hard-clipping diodes for an aggressive edge. This became known as *distortion*, rather than the smoother *overdrive* of soft-clipping stompboxes. The DS-1 was not op-amp based. Instead, it used the Toshiba TA7136AP preamplifier, for a gritty and warm overdrive tone.

When the Toshiba preamp became harder to source, the circuit was redesigned in 1994. All three post-1994 DS-1 models would share the same circuit, and in turn, the same trio of quirks. First, they were not very loud, a problem most noticeable in the 1994 block. Second, they had significant noise at higher gain settings. And third, fizzy top-end

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### DS-1W Waza Craft Distortion Pedal

**CONTACT** boss.info

**PRICE** \$149 street

**CONTROLS** Tone, level, distortion. Switch to select Standard or Custom modes

**I/O** Input, output, power

**EXTRAS** LED indicator. Pedal runs on 9V DC center-negative or 9V battery (neither included)

**SIZE** 2 3/8" x 2 7/8" x 5-1/8" (HxWxD)

**BUILT** China

**KUDOS** Corrects issues related to volume drop, noise and fizzy top end found in the post-1994 models

**CONCERNS** Missed opportunity to make the Custom mode truly unique

frequencies were not filtered out, resulting in an unpleasant "waspy" edge to the distortion tone. This led many players, as well as companies like Analogman, to modify the stock unit.

Boss has now given the DS-1 the boutique treatment with the new DS-1W Waza Craft unit shown here. And while you might assume it hews to the specs of the original DS-1 pedal, the answer is somewhat more complicated. As you would expect, the DS-1W has controls for tone, level and distortion, but there is also a switch to select between Standard and Custom modes. The great irony is that the pedal's Standard setting is a faithful replication of the post-1994 DS-1 rather than the DS-1 with the Toshiba TA7136AP. The Custom setting, on the other hand, feels like an attempt to fix all the inherent artifacts that come with the post-1994 design.

Happily, it succeeds. There's better filtering, no fizz and a more stable high-gain distortion tone. The pedal is more mid-forward, punching through a busy mix far better than in Standard mode. Finally, it's 6dB louder, meaning that turning on the pedal no longer results in a volume drop.

At higher settings, the clipping is a square-wave, thanks to the hard-clipping diodes, but it cleans up surprisingly well. With humbuckers rather than single-coils it runs hotter, but there are some lower-gain tones there at a push.

The real question is why Roland engineers didn't take the opportunity to make this mode Standard when it is so superior to the actual Standard mode. They could then have pushed the boat out even further with the Custom mode.

It feels like a slightly missed opportunity, but with that said, there are doubtless some players who have grown accustomed to the post-'94 DS-1 tone, which remains intact here. For those who prefer the true original, the DS-1W is a two-mode pedal with only one usable mode, and at a price point where it's outclassed by both other Boss pedals and competitors. While the Custom mode is a vindication of the post-1994 unit, it rectifies rather than progresses the DS-1 story. The modding and DIY community have already shown there's a good pedal in there, and guitarists now have the chance to buy a Boss-approved modded DS-1 Distortion. **B**





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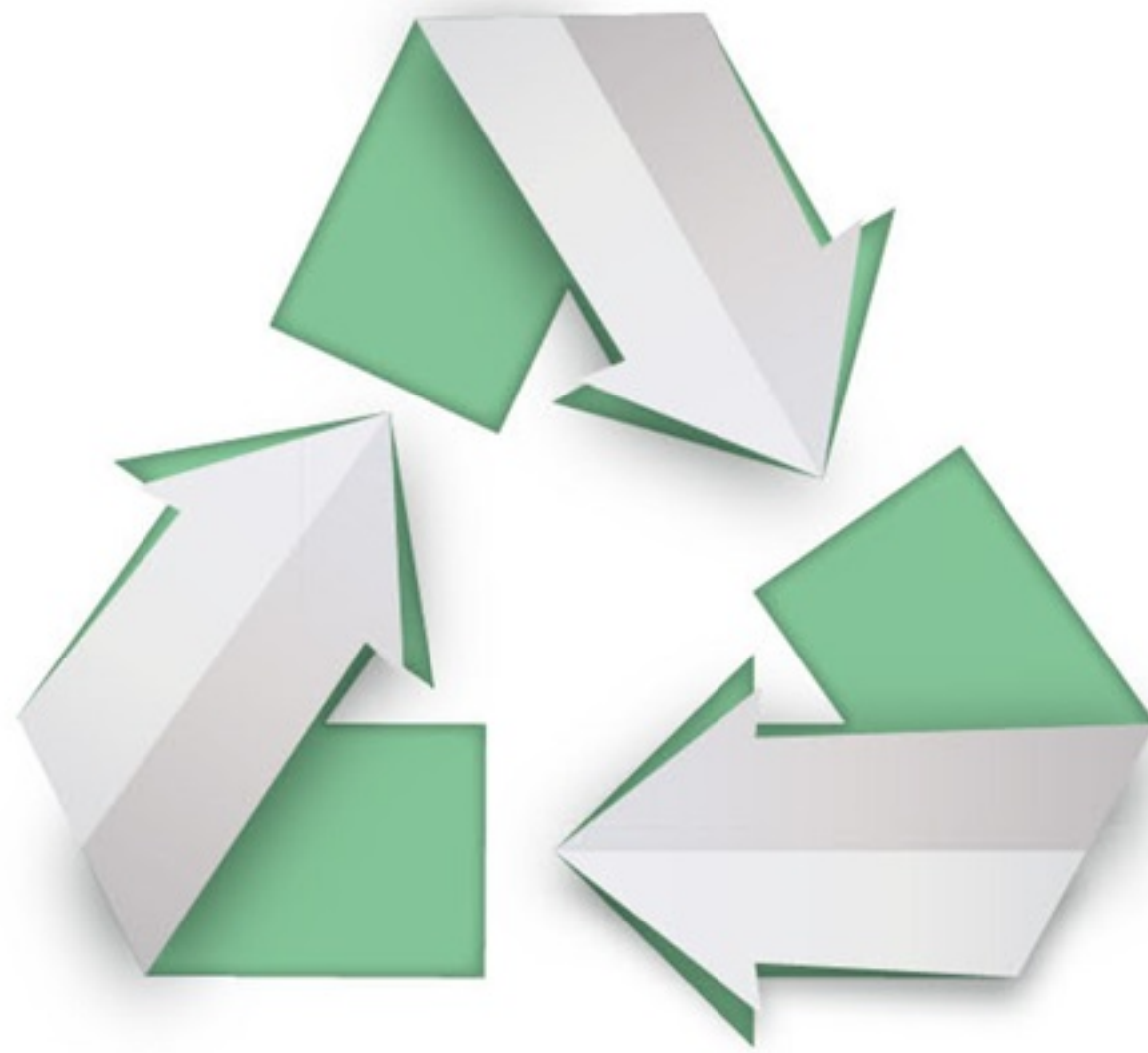
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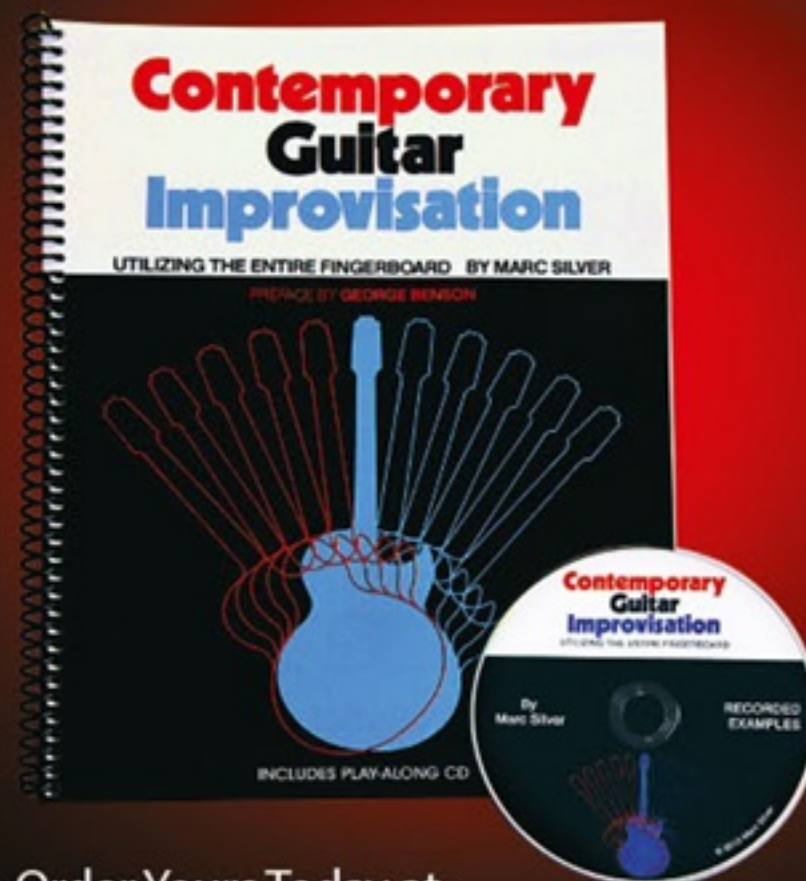
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How I Wrote...

# “Round and Round”

Warren DeMartini reveals how he spun a riff into Ratt’s pop-metal smash.

BY JOE BOSSO

**IT WAS LATE** in 1982 when Jake E. Lee tendered his resignation from the band Ratt after snagging the plum guitar spot with Ozzy Osborne. Rather than leave his ex-bandmates high and dry, he brought in his pal Warren DeMartini as his replacement. DeMartini, all of 19 at the time, drove from San Diego to Los Angeles with little more than a guitar, an amp and a cheap tape deck on which he had recorded a few rough song ideas he was messing around with.

“I had chord patterns and riffs, but I didn’t know how to connect any of the parts,” DeMartini says. “Writing songs was a process I was still trying to figure out. Once I joined the band, I got better at it.”

One of DeMartini’s chord patterns eventually became “Round and Round,” the ear-candy pop-metal smash that exploded on radio and MTV in 1984, propelling Ratt to instant stardom. “One minute, nobody knew us. The next, we were everywhere,” DeMartini says, “and all of it from one song.”

## SEALING THE DEAL

Funnily enough, it took DeMartini close to a year to show some of his ideas to his new bandmates. He shared an apartment in north Culver City with Ratt rhythm guitarist Robbin Crosby and singer Stephen Percy, and one day he set up his practice amp in the living room and began playing. “It was what I thought were the verse and chorus parts of a song,” DeMartini recalls. “Robbin came in and said, ‘What is that?!’ He was pretty excited.”

Crosby grabbed his guitar and started following along with DeMartini, and within moments Percy came into the room with

his antenna already up. The three sat around and began working together. “Robbin had a bit of another song that we used for the pre-chorus out of the verse,” DeMartini says. “Then I came up with the solo chords and the B section of the chorus. We fleshed out everything else and recorded it. Stephen had his own tape deck, so he recorded what we had into his. He started scatting and singing lyrics, and pretty soon everything took shape.”

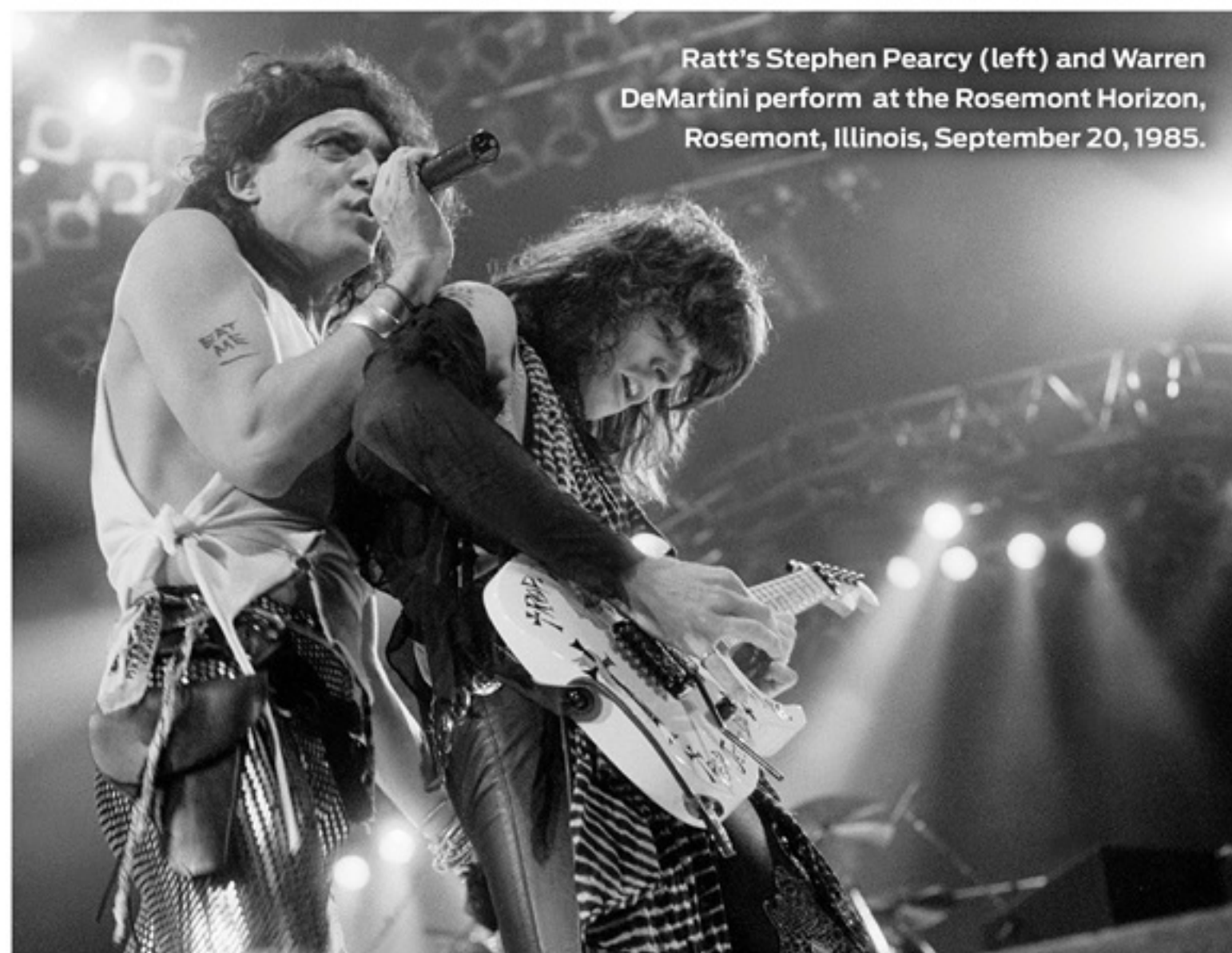
At gigs, Ratt had been playing selections off their self-titled indie EP, but they quickly added “Round and Round” into their live show. Atlantic Records president Doug Morris came to see them at the Beverly Theater and was stunned to see the crowd singing along to the new song. “He said, ‘It’s not even on the radio and they know the words,’” DeMartini recalls. “That pretty much got us our deal.”

## SEAT-OF-THE-PANTS SOLOS

While cutting the song with producer Beau Hill, DeMartini used his Charvel Bomber and Bloody Skull models, which he ran through Marshall Super Lead and Fender Super Champ amps. The rhythm tracks were a breeze to record, but when it came time for the solo section, the guitarist remembers a last-minute change-up to the arrangement.

“Originally, I was playing a lead section, and then Robbin would take his own part,” DeMartini explains. “He didn’t like what he was playing, so he suggested that I do it all. I didn’t want

Ratt’s Stephen Percy (left) and Warren DeMartini perform at the Rosemont Horizon, Rosemont, Illinois, September 20, 1985.



to do that, so for the second section I came up with the double lead that we both played. I pretty much did it right on the spot. We ran through it a few times, and it sounded great. It was really exciting to do it kind of seat-of-our-pants.”

## UNCLE MILTY + METAL = SUCCESS

“Round and Round” was picked as the lead single from the band’s Atlantic debut, *Out of the Cellar*, but while label execs were high on the song, DeMartini admits that he wasn’t sure how it would fare. “Honestly, I didn’t know if it was a hit at that point,” he says. “I thought it was good, but I think I lost all objectivity. I’d heard it so many times, so I was too familiar with it.”

Radio jumped on the track, however, and once MTV started airing the uproariously entertaining video, featuring TV icon Milton Berle in drag (his nephew Marshall managed the band), “Round and Round” raced up the charts, and *Out of the Cellar* quickly went triple Platinum.

“It was an incredible feeling,” DeMartini says. “It was like an out-of-body experience, like, Wow, this is really happening! We had a

huge lull between finishing the album and the time it came out. But the video changed everything fast. MTV was all over us, and we went from playing clubs to headlining large venues. We were off and running.” He pauses, then adds, “And then it became, ‘Be careful what you wish for.’” ■

**“I PLAYED THE VERSE AND CHORUS PARTS. ROBBIN CAME IN AND SAID, ‘WHAT IS THAT?!’ HE WAS PRETTY EXCITED”**

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