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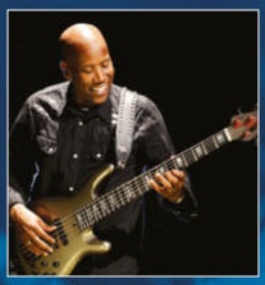

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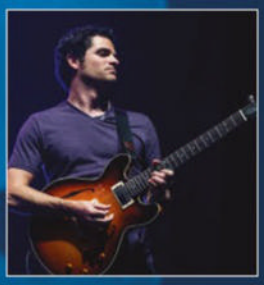

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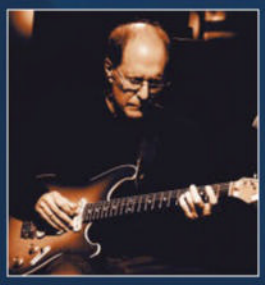

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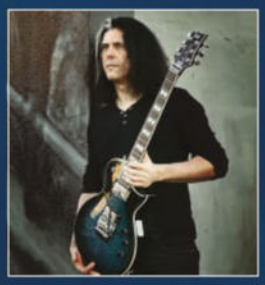

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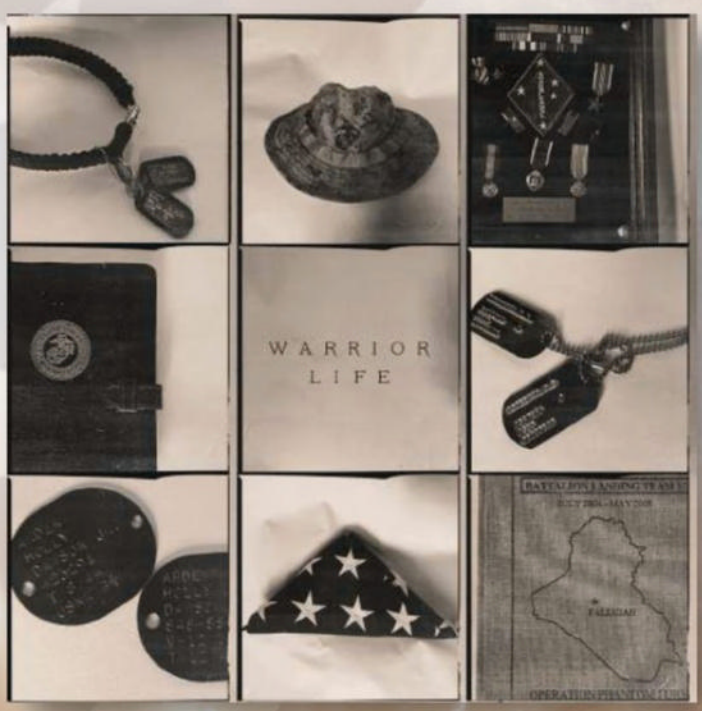

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"It was a real pleasure working with Billy on this project. I could see the passion that Billy has for our heroes and I was happy to be a part of this tribute to all that serve." —**Tom Lord Alge**

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BEST BETTS

ANY GUITAR-CENTRIC history of the Allman Brothers Band will rightly celebrate the visionary leadership and soulful, expressive slide guitar playing of Duane Allman. From his guitar chops to his larger-than-life personality, Duane was and remains an inspiring figure more than 50 years after his death. The sad fact that he died so young and tragically, just as he and the band were beginning to get the attention they deserved, has only made him all the more revered.

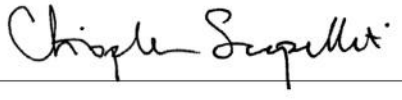
Perhaps Duane's legend is the reason Dickey Betts seldom gets equal love or recognition. Betts is a remarkable and gifted guitarist whose playing has as much fire as Duane's and certainly a fair dose more polish. Where Duane worked the blues rock box from every angle and wrote the book on southern-rock slide playing, Dickey circled outside it, adding elements of jazz (witness his early compositions "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed" and "Les Brers in A Minor") as well as country and bluegrass ("Blue Sky," "Ramblin' Man," "Jessica," and many others). And it can't be denied that the ABB might have remained an underground act, along with southern rockers like Lynyrd Skynyrd, were it not for Betts' hit songs like "Ramblin' Man" and "Jessica," which both raised the group's profile and opened the door for the Dixie rock genre.

Dickey gets his due in Alan Paul's new forthcoming biography, *Brothers and Sisters: The Allman Brothers Band and the Inside Story of the Album That Defined the '70s* (St. Martin's Press). Alan is a recognized authority on the ABB who has covered the group for well over 30 years and conducted hundreds of interviews with its members, managers, roadies and others in their circle. As the follow-up to his 2014 *New York Times* bestseller, *One Way Out: The Inside Story of the Allman Brothers Band*, his new book is a vivid chronicle of the group's revival following Duane's death in 1972 and sheds light on Dickey's significance in the Allman Brothers Band's relevance and influence during the 1970s. Moreover, Alan reveals the group's previously uncelebrated role in shaping that decade's music, as well as its politics via Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign. I'm thrilled to bring you an excerpt from *Brothers and Sisters* in this issue.

The timing was also perfect for us to interview former ABB guitarist Warren Haynes about the new Gov't Mule album, as well as speak with Duane Betts about his full-length solo debut. We had also been planning an appreciation of Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarist Gary Rossington following his death in March. Put it all together and you get an issue with a decidedly southern rock bent. I hope you enjoy it.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Our July 2023 issue's interview with Neil Giraldo contained errors that we can only put down to a bad phone connection. The guitarist misheard contributing writer Gary Graff's question about "Promises in the Dark" and instead described the impetus behind his solo for "Precious Time." Neil also referred to the "spaciousness" — not the "specialness," as we reported — of the vocal in "Heartbreak Hotel." In addition, Neil produced John Waite's first solo album, not his second.



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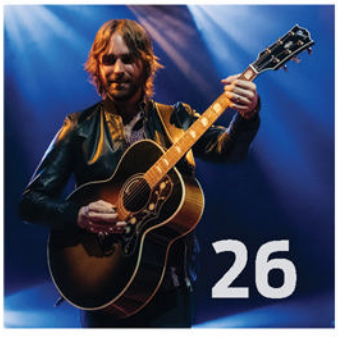
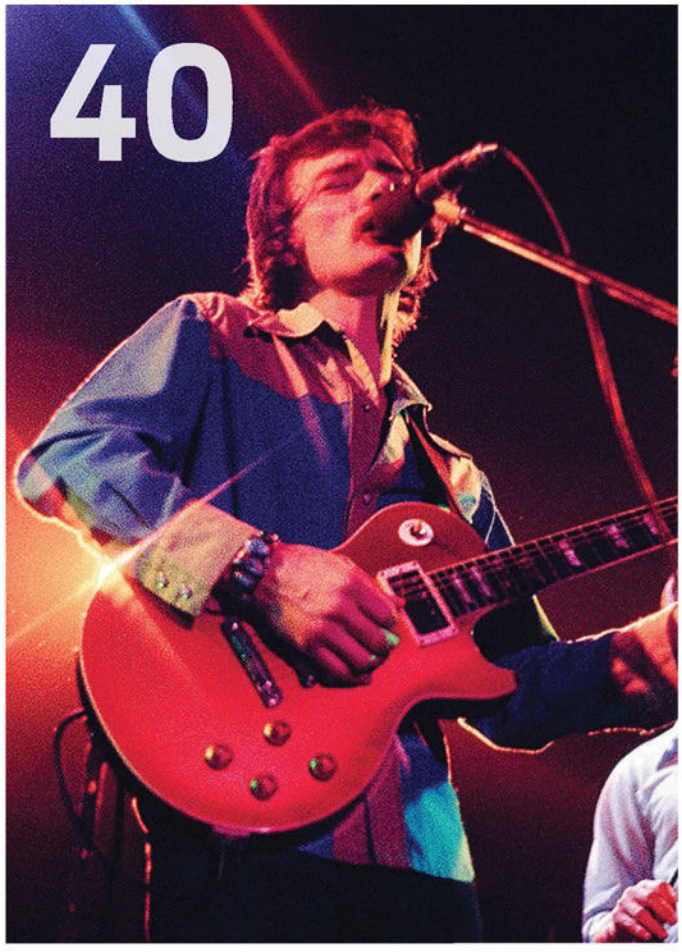
Dickey Betts photographed September 15, 1975. Fin Costello/Getty Images





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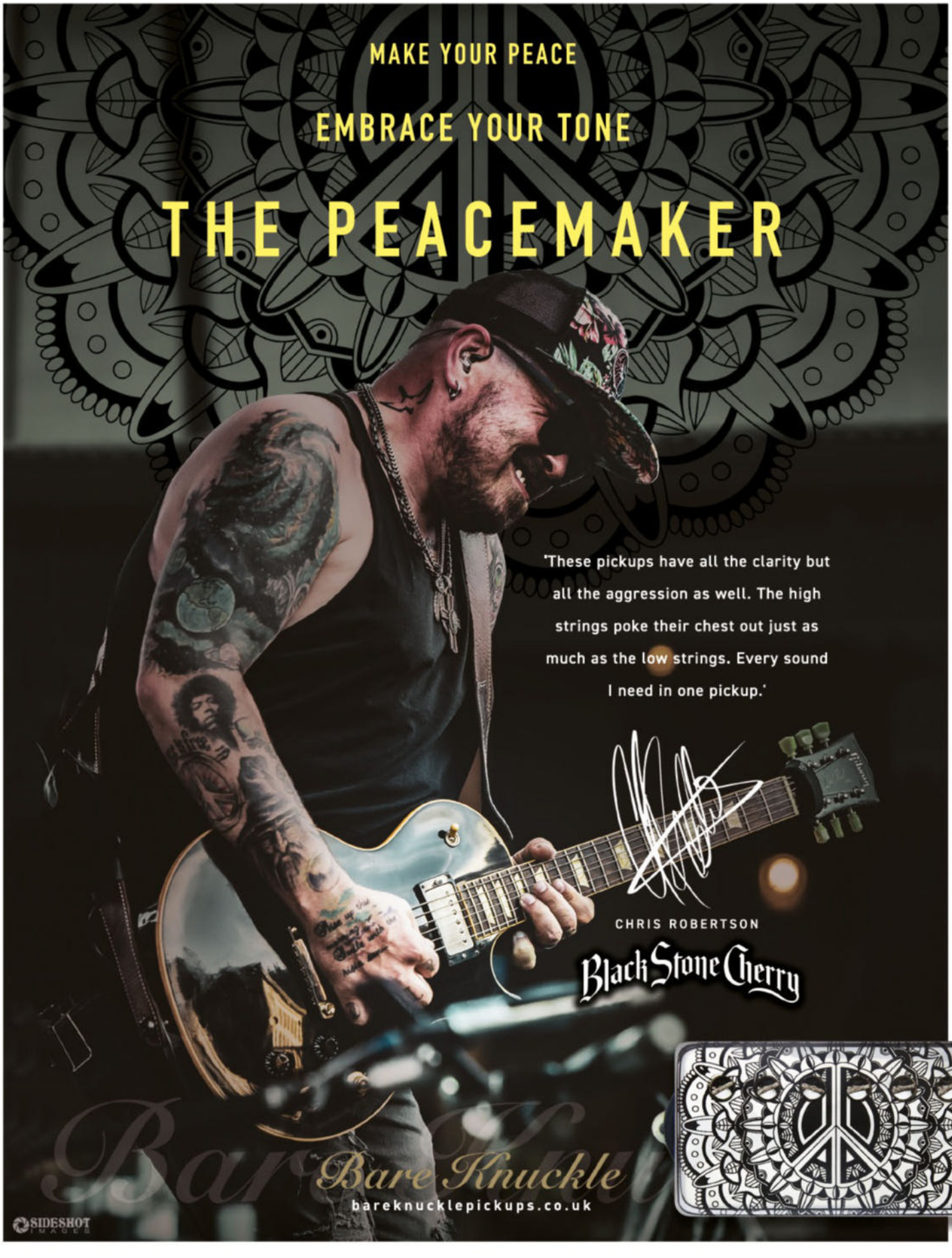
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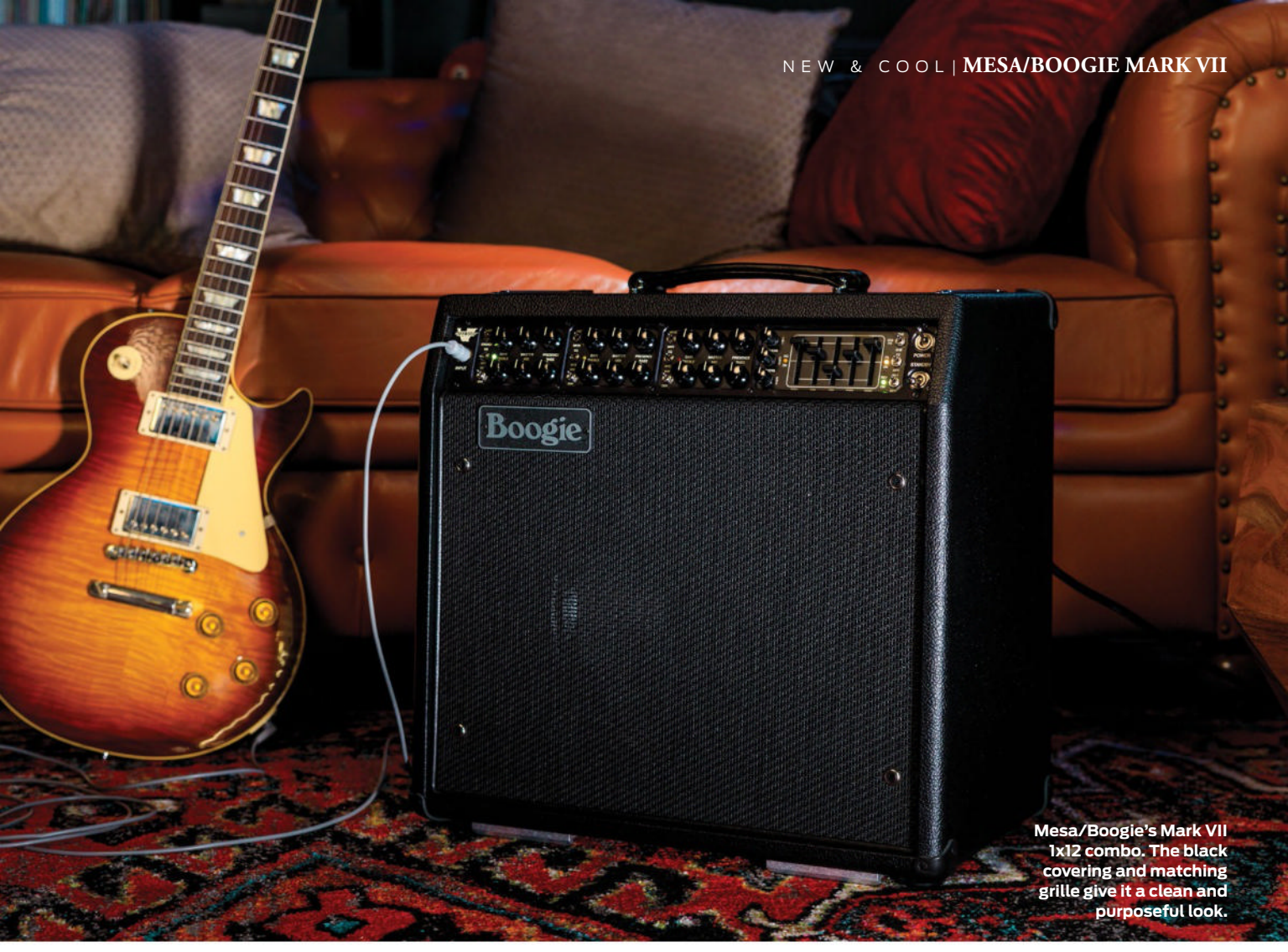

Mesa/Boogie's Mark VII 1x12 combo. The black covering and matching grille give it a clean and purposeful look.

MESA'S GREATEST HITS

The company's **Mark VII 1x12** combo puts the long-running amp maker's best-loved circuits in one compact rig.

BY ART THOMPSON

AS THE MOST comprehensive and flexible amplifier in Mesa/Boogie's line, the new Mark VII expands on the Mark V's impressive tonal capabilities to become what Mesa calls its simplest to navigate, most versatile and smallest Mark series 90-watt amp ever.

The 1x12 combo version we received for this review (also available in head and rack-mount formats) is powered by four 6L6s running in Simul-Class and features a three-channel, nine-mode preamp that is intuitive to navigate via three identical sets of controls — gain, master, presence, treble, mid and bass — and a trio of mode switches: Clean, Fat and Crunch for channel one; Fat, Crunch and Mark VII for channel two; and Mark IIB, Mark IIC and Mark IV for channel three. Each channel also has a two-position switch labeled EQ/O/FS — the upper position selects the five-band graphic EQ; the lower position is the EQ off/foot switch — and a three-position switch that selects 90-, 45- or 25-watt operation.

Continuing across the front panel are three vertically stacked reverb-level controls (one per channel), the channel-assignable five-band graphic EQ, and another three switches: a three-position for channel-select, a two-position for the FX loop (on, off/foot switch) and another two-position for reverb (on, off/foot switch).

On the back side is the CabClone IR DI direct interface, which provides eight Boogie speaker cabinet emulations in open- and closed-back configuration that are independently assignable to the channels. The controls here consist of three Cab Select knobs, an input control with a "clip" LED ladder and an output control. An XLR out facilitates connecting to a mixing console or recording interface, and there's a ¼-inch line out for sending a dry signal to an external IR reader, a recording interface for re-amping or any other application where cabinet simulation is not needed. Other details include a ground-lift switch, a USB port, and a ¼-inch stereo headphone out for silent practicing or monitoring the direct feed. The Mark VII is also MIDI controllable for channel and switching functions and sports thru/out and in jacks.

Lastly, there are two four-ohm and two eight-ohm outs to accommodate single and multiple speaker cabs ranging from four to 16 ohms, send and return jacks for the series FX loop, a bias switch for 6L6 or EL34 operation, and a five-pin jack to connect the included

six-button foot switch for channel select and reverb, FX loop and graphic EQ on/off.

Now if you're curious as to why Mesa skipped over a Mark VI in the evolution of the series, they didn't. Rather, the VI existed in prototype form and became a test bed for developing two new tone circuits specifically for the Mark VII: the IIB mode in channel three and the new VII mode in channel two, which brings a high-gain British-influenced flavor into the mix, giving players more options for lead and heavy rhythm sounds.

"I dreamed that one up one morning when I designed the circuit and chassis layout back in 2018," Mesa/Boogie founder Randall Smith explains to *Guitar Player*. "It later became the basis for the [*Rectifier*] Badlander that John Marshall and Doug West did. It shifts the tone stack to the back, where it's located in Marshall, tweed Fender and Rectifier amps, and that was the inspiration for the Mark VII mode.

"Then we duplicated the Fat and Crunch modes on channels one and two, because they're so expansive by themselves. A lot of guys wanted two different settings of those modes, so now they've got the option of having, say, Fat, Fat and Mark IIB, or Clean, Crunch and any of the other high-gain modes."

The inclusion of the Mark IIB lead circuit is noteworthy because adding this oft-requested Boogie amplifier as a mode on channel three addresses players who wanted a tone circuit that allows the guitar's character to shine through more clearly on high-gain settings, as compared to the more saturated response of the Mark IIC mode. This was apparent when playing a Strat, a Les Paul Junior with a P-90 and a Les Paul '59 Historic though IIB mode with the gain cranked, as there was no masking whatsoever of those guitars' distinct sounds. It's definitely cool for blues and rock, where its gutsy, touch-responsive grind is killer for solos and slide licks, and should be appreciated by those who might find the IIC mode's aggressive, '80s-shred demeanor a bit over-the-top in some situations.

"I WANTED TO FOCUS COMPLETELY ON UNADULTERATED TONAL IMPACT"

Rounding out channel three is the Mark IV mode, a perennial favorite for its smooth distortion and easy-playing feel — although activating the graphic EQ with a "V" curve can bring it right into the shred-metal zone too.

So between the high-gain choices on channel three, plus the new Mark VII mode, there are options aplenty for finding your ideal lead and dirty rhythm tones, not to mention total flexibility to how the channels are arranged. For example, reserve channels one and two for Clean and Crunch tones, and use channel three's IIC or IV modes for a wicked lead sound; or use channel one for Clean, channel three on Mark IIB for gritty rhythm and channel two on Mark VII mode for lead. The possibilities are enormous for setting up channels and modes to suit your needs.

Something noticeable right away, no matter what mode you're running, is how clear and present the Mark VII sounds when you slather on the grind, and how responsive it is to picking attack and changes in guitar volume. Since these tend to be characteristics we attribute to relatively straightforward vintage amps, there does seem to be a "less is more" element at work in the Mark VII's reduced tube count — specifically five 12AX7s instead of the seven used in the Mark V.

As Smith explains, "I wanted to focus completely on unadulterated tonal impact, and, to that end, the output control and the Solo function [*found on the Mark V*], useful features as they are, did reduce that tonal impact somewhat because of the extra tube stage and the attenuation that occurs through the controls and all that. So if that feature is vitally important to someone, they can still get a Mark V and enjoy it, but I think the time was right to change it."

At just 18 ½ inches wide, 17 inches tall and 11 inches deep, the Mark VII is very compact, although its weight of 56-plus pounds — much of it due to the large transformers and ceramic-magnet Celestion Black Shadow C90 12 — makes you appreciate that casters are included for easier transport. The black covering and matching grille give the amp a clean and purposeful look, and the intuitive arrangement of the knobs and switches

The Mark VII is also available in rack-mount format...

...and as a head.

belies the depth of the circuitry housed within its densely packed aluminum chassis. Mesa amps are still built largely by hand in Petaluma, California — Gibson's acquisition in 2021 didn't change that, and if anything there's been a production benefit to the partnership. "Gibson upgraded our production equipment so each component is further tested before assembly," Smith notes. "Plus, the VII's design is superior to the Mark V thanks to 12 more years of experience doing what is truly my art form.

"So in addition to our visual inspection, which we've always done, we now have optical inspection equipment that does a super-high-resolution photo comparison of each side of the circuit board. And if anything isn't right, it flags it. And apparently it's not finding anything! There are 710 parts in the circuit board, and every circuit has to be bulletproof. Now bear in mind, we've been doing this for 50 years, so the idea of a multi-mode, multi-channel amplifier isn't new to us. But with that high parts count and the new assembly machinery that measures every component prior to being stuffed into the board, that's pretty freakin' great."

Given the complexities involved in putting a selection of "greatest hits" Mesa amplifier circuits at your fingertips, the Mark VII is very easy to use. Select the modes you want to foot-switch between, adjust gain and volume levels, and tweak things for single-coils or humbuckers with the well-voiced tone controls. The VII mode worked great for lead and dirty rhythm, so I used it constantly and just toggled between Crunch on channel one and either Mark IIB or Mark IV on channel three for a selection of tones ranging from gritty clean to super-sustaining.

It was also fun to elicit some small-amp vibe by using the 25-watt setting on channel one, which reconfigures the two inner power tubes to Class A triode. It's still plenty loud, thanks to the hefty transformers and high voltages, but this low-wattage setting sounded cool when using the Clean or Fat modes to cop a Vox or Matchless vibe. For added realism, swapping in a set of EL34s let the Mark VII sound even closer to a Matchless Chieftain combo used for comparison. In contrast, the 45-watt setting rewires the inner power tubes to Class A pentode, yielding a brighter tone with a somewhat looser low end and more upper-midrange sparkle. It's cool for Americana, blues and roots styles, where its quick segue into clipping was reminiscent of playing

Two four-ohm and two eight-ohm outputs accommodate single and multiple speaker cabinets.

through a medium-power tweed-leaning amp, like a Victoria Double Deluxe.

Overall, the 90-watt Simul-Class setting is where the Mark VII remained for most of my testing, because it just sounds good. Mesa introduced Simul-Class in the 1980s with the Mark IIB. It utilizes all four power tubes — the outside pair in Class AB and the inside pair in Class A — combining the respective efficiency and tonal advantages of these operating classes to yield a dynamic, touch-sensitive and high-headroom response that's tempting to leave on, regardless of the tones you're chasing.

"THE VII IS SUPERIOR TO THE MARK V THANKS TO 12 MORE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE DOING WHAT IS MY ART FORM"

The Mark VII sounds very detailed and authoritative when the volume is cranked up (credit the beefy Celestion Black Shadow for its role here), but you don't necessarily have to be that loud onstage thanks to the CabClone IR direct interface (previously available only on the Rectifier Badlander), which provides a convenient way of DI-ing amp tones via IR responses of eight closed- and open-back Mesa Rectifier and Boogie speaker cabinets, which are selected with an eight-position rotary switch for each channel. Even better, the CabClone's built-in reactive load lets you enjoy the dynamic playing feel of the amp's full output stage (even with no speaker connected), making it handy for live use or silent recording.

The Mark VII's onboard assortment of Mesa cab IRs facilitate good tones in situations where it's not practical or desirable to plug into cabinets, and the options here are mind-blowing when you consider that each channel can be independently configured to suit your tastes — say a Recto 4x12 with Celestion V30s for lead, a Lone Star 1x12 or 2x12 with proprietary Celestion C90s for dirty rhythm, and a California Tweed 23 1x12 with a Jensen 100-watt Alnico Blackbird for a vibey clean tone. The system also supports third-party IRs, so the sky's the limit. Manipulating files requires connecting to a computer (Mac or PC) via USB, and the processor can hold hundreds of IRs in the Cab Library that can be dragged into any of the eight preset locations on the amp's channels for a customizable set of cabinet choices.

Adding to the enjoyment of CabClone IR is the stereo headphone output, which employs all of these cabinet choices to provide a very satisfying experience. You need to unplug the speaker for silent practicing (Mesa recommends keeping the channel-master levels below 11 o' clock when speakers are disconnected), and with some delay added in the FX loop from a pedal or processor you can get lost in playing with all the tone and feel of the amp's response..

In all, the Mark VII — ironically introduced as Randall Smith himself hits 77 — is an impressive feat of engineering that delivers an astonishing array of choices for summoning pristine clean to wickedly overdriven sounds and all points in between. Smith has hinted it's the last Mark amp he'll design, and while it's anyone's guess if that actually turns out to be the case, the Mark VII is a stunning achievement and a tribute to Smith's five decades of dedication to developing ultimate tone tools for guitarists.

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DUANE BETTS STEPS OUT SOLO

The guitarist makes his full-length debut with *Wild & Precious Life*, featuring guests Derek Trucks and Marcus King.

BY ALAN PAUL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DYLAN JON WADE COX

ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND fans of a certain age may remember Duane Betts as a teenager taking the stage to sit in with his father, Dickey, and the ABB in the mid '90s. But 30 years later, the younger Betts has been around the block a few times, touring with his father for more than a decade, playing with California folk-rockers Dawes for a stretch, and forming the Allman Betts Band with Devon Allman. Together, they recorded two albums and toured extensively. But while Betts' 2018 EP, *Sketches of American Music*, laid down a marker for him as a solo artist, the just-released *Wild & Precious Life* (Royal Potato Family) is his proper solo debut.

Recorded to two-inch analog tape at Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks' Swamp Raga Studio in Jacksonville, Florida, the album features Betts' "dream team" — guitarist Johnny Stachela, bassist Berry Duane Oakley, keyboardist John Ginty and Tedeschi Trucks Band drummer Tyler Greenwell. Stachela and Betts continue to expand the impressive guitar team harmony they established in the Allman Betts Band, and are accompanied by guests that include Trucks and Marcus King.

"We tracked everything live and kept whichever takes had the magic," says Betts, who co-produced the album with Stachela and Ginty. Infused with Americana swagger, the album is a major step forward for Betts in establishing himself as a solo artist infused with, but not frozen by, his family legacy. "You write and record music and just hope it lights a fire in people's hearts," he says.

The first thing we hear on the album is the harmonized guitars on "Evergreen." Was that an intentional statement?
Sort of. I just liked the song. I wrote it with a more standard opening, but my writing partner, Stoll Vaughan, was adamant about putting the harmonies on the front of the song because it was a little more unique, and once we tried it, it felt great.

The song is underpinned by a strong acoustic guitar part. Did you play that?
Yes. I played all the acoustic on a post–World War II Martin D-28, which belonged to my dad and he used a lot for writing. I know he wrote "Seven Turns" on it. I would see him playing that a lot in the early '90s. It's just a great-sounding guitar that is very fun to play.

Some of the most fun I had was playing acoustic rhythm on "Waiting on a Song" and "Evergreen."

What were your electrics and amps? And did you use any effects? It sounds pretty clean.
My main guitar was what I play the most onstage, the number-one prototype of my dad's Gibson goldtop, which they made in 2001. I also played my 1961 Gibson 335 and a 1930s Gibson L-00. I used my mid-'60s Fender Deluxe Reverb and late-'50s Fender Tweed Deluxe. The only effect is a Dandrive Secret Engine fuzz pedal that J.D. Simo gifted me. Johnny played his 2000 Gibson '62 LP/SG Custom Shop, which he calls Stormy, my 335 and a 1960s Guild S-50 Jet Star from Derek's collection, running through a 1960s Silvertone 1448, which is also Derek's and a mid-'60s Fender Vibrolux Reverb.

Some of the songs recall *Highway Call*, your dad's 1974 solo album, particularly the first single, "Waiting on a Song." Was that a conscious point of reference?
I was passionately interested in having pedal steel on a few songs to capture some authentic old country-rock sounds. That music has a lot of character, with good honest, meaningful songs. "Waiting on a Song" originally had a dreamier, big rock flow, but I gave it different treatments to see what works, and it became clear it should be an up-tempo, gliding, uplifting song. Once it took that shape, we were absolutely influenced by *Highway Call* and not afraid of going for that authentic gangster country vibe, which is the best. Of course, it's not just *Highway Call* but Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Billy Joe Shaver...

There's a lot of great stuff in that vein right now. Do you relate to contemporary country?
For sure, the Americana side of things. I love guys like Sturgill Simpson, Tyler Childers and Charley Crockett, and I would love to play with them and be more in that scene, which is really hip.

How did the Allman Betts albums and touring set you up to do this?
I had a lot of fun doing these records and playing all those shows. It just felt like it was time to take this next step. My time with Allman Betts gave me space to get better overall, and more comfortable as a singer onstage — which is a lot different than sitting on your bed singing to your dog with an acoustic guitar!

What's the status of Allman Betts?
We're on hiatus, doing other things and occasional shows, at least two this summer.

How did you end up recording at Derek and Susan's studio?
We were hanging out at a friend's wedding, where I was a guest and they were performing. I said I was going to make a solo album, and Susan said I should do my record at their place, so I took her up on it. It was just such a comfortable environment. They are such gracious hosts, and the property is really inspiring — on a river, with a lot of beautiful nature. And Bobby Tis, who engineered, is so gifted at what he does.

Derek and Marcus King both play great on "Stare at the Sun" and "Cold Dark World" respectively. How did that happen?
Marcus is a really talented friend, and I knew he would play amazingly on "Cold Dark World." With Derek, it was established that he would play from the first conversation we had about me recording at their studio. That song title actually came from something he said to me: "Your dad's a player who's not afraid to stare directly into the sun." It only made sense to have him on that one.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Wild & Precious Life
"Evergreen," "Waiting on a Song," "Under the Bali Moon" "Stare at the Sun," "Cold Dark World"

"WE TRACKED EVERYTHING LIVE AND KEPT WHICHEVER TAKES HAD THE MAGIC"

"Under the Bali Moon" is a beautiful instrumental. What's the significance of the title, and can you describe the writing process?
Bali is a beautiful, sacred place, where my wife and I spend time whenever money and our schedules allow. I had an instrumental idea with a lot of parts, and when we got into the studio I wasn't sure how it was going to work out or if it was right yet. Tyler thought that the coolest part of the song came and went too fast, so he added the beat and made that part more of an emphasis. Then we incorporated all the parts that we had already written and it just came together as you hear it. It's much more focused and has a fresher sound. He could hear the good parts and grasp what was missing.

"Colors Fade" has a very Dead feel, although the harmony playing echoes western swing and the Allman Brothers. Was that an intentional homage?
It wasn't conscious, but as we worked up the song, it was apparent that it had a Dead vibe, and we embraced it.

You just played some shows with Phil Lesh. How was that experience?
Phil Lesh is a legend, and it's an honor to play that music with him and the astounding cast of characters he puts together. It's a comfortable, friendly vibe, which is good, because it's also nerve racking — you don't get the setlist until about 24 hours before the show, and it's a lot to process. I would be all in to learn the stuff inside out, but there's a lot of it and it's not simplistic music.

AN AMERICANA SALUTE TO VETS AND LIFE BUDDIES

Nashville's **Billy Dawson** makes a musical tribute that supports soldiers and service dogs, with help from Billy Sheehan and others.

BY JOE BOSSO

ON HIS DYNAMIC new album, *Warrior Life*, Nashville-based singer-songwriter and guitarist Billy Dawson delivers a set of anthemic, deeply emotional Americana-laced songs that pay tribute to the members of the U.S. military. To call it a concept record wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration. As Dawson describes it, "The album is my way of honoring the men and women who think nothing of putting their lives on the line to protect our freedoms."

The origins for the project date back to several years ago, when Dawson attended a Wounded Warrior football game in which one of the teams was sponsored by Sierra Delta, an organization that trains and pairs service dogs with veterans. At the game, Dawson met Chris Bishop, one of the founders of Blue Buffalo pet food, and before long the two devised the idea of recording an album to benefit Sierra Delta.

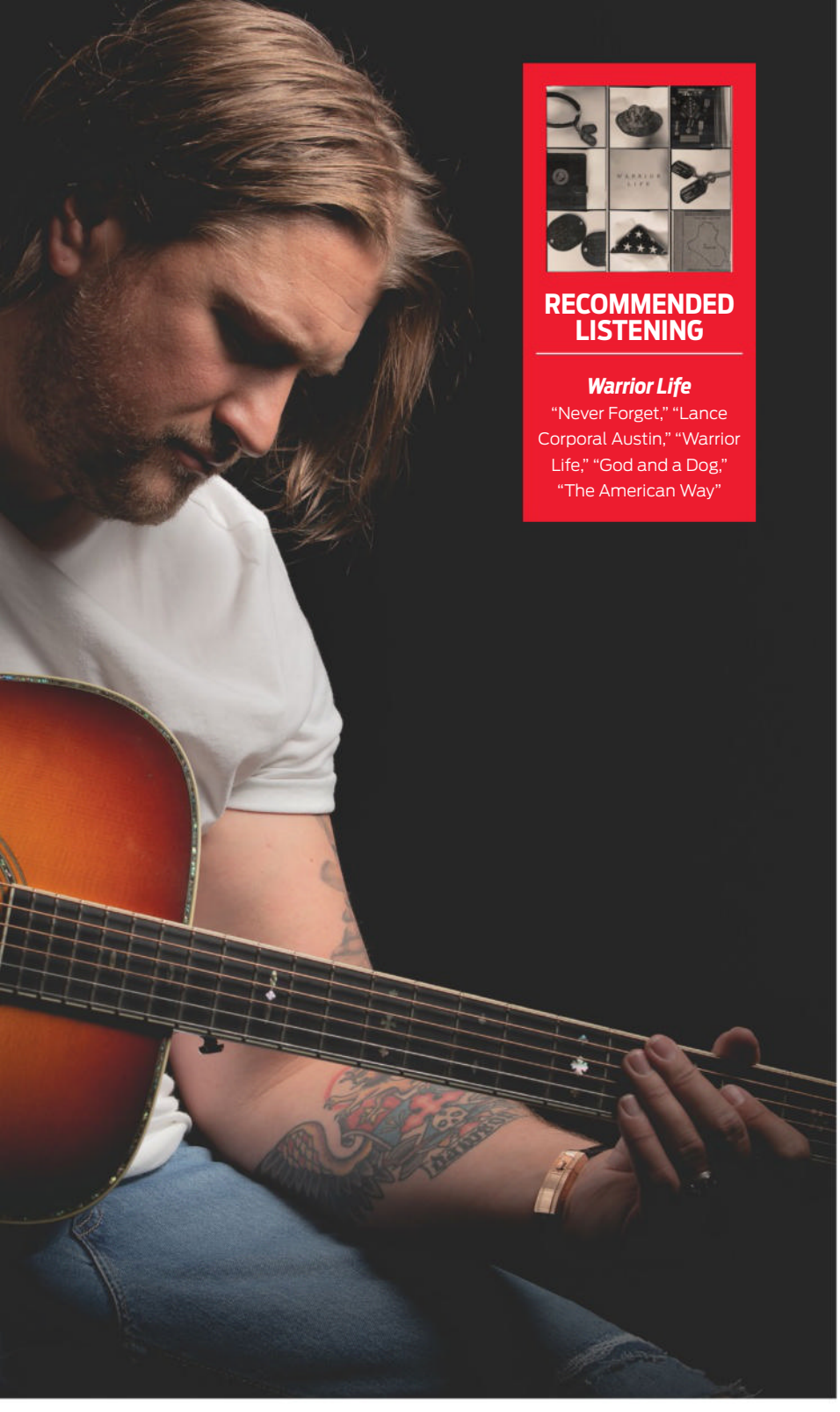
"BILLY SHEEHAN IS JUST A MONSTER. HE WAS LIKE, 'I'VE NEVER PLAYED WITH A WAH BEFORE. HOW ABOUT YOU WORK IT?'"

"It's such an incredible program in that it helps vets learn to communicate with their dogs and set routines for them and their pets," Dawson says. "Dogs need somebody to love, and veterans' hearts grow like magic because of their dogs. The bond they share is unbelievable. Chris funded the album and backed me the whole way. I couldn't have made the record without his support."

Dawson grew up in the Texas Panhandle and started learning how to play guitar after hearing Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)." "To this day, Jimi is my number one guy," says Dawson, who also lists players such as Stevie Ray Vaughan, John Petrucci, Andy Timmons, Eric Johnson and Steve Vai as influences. In his early 20s, he hit the road as a side musician, touring America and Europe with a variety of acts, including the Christian rock band Skillet, before turning his efforts to songwriting.

For many songs on *Warrior Life*, Dawson collaborated with fellow Nashville singer-songwriter Kelli Johnson, while on others he teamed with a number of actual veterans, such as Sgt. Maj. Robert E. Eriksson and Sgt. Maj. Carlton W. Kent, among others. "It was an incredible experience writing with such beautiful and talented people," Dawson says.

Warrior Life is full of poignant musical moments. Dawson co-wrote the plaintive ballad "Lance Corporal Austin" about a friend who lost his life in Fallujah. "He was a very



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Warrior Life

"Never Forget," "Lance Corporal Austin," "Warrior Life," "God and a Dog," "The American Way"

Billy Dawson plays his father's '66 Strat

special human being," Dawson relates. "He protected Muslim families and Americans. It was very hard losing him." The wistful country folk song "God and a Dog" is a sing-along gem that traces the special bond between veterans and their four-legged companions. "Dogs don't talk audibly, but they have communication powers that humans can feel," the guitarist says. "I think there's a reason why 'dog' spelled backward is 'God.'"

Of the rousing country rock title track, Dawson recalls playing it for a veteran whose reaction was especially significant. "He had tears in his eyes and said, 'How did you get inside my head, man?' Something like that means a lot."

For his guitar tracks, Dawson used a 1966 Fender Strat and a Collings acoustic, and with the exception of paint-peeling lead on the raging rocker "Never Forget," he played all of the solos himself. "I'm a pretty good soloist," he says, "but 'Never Forget' needed some crazy shreddy stuff, so I called in Nathan Keeterle. Around Nashville, he's called 'mini Slash.' The guy's brilliant." Other guests include Nine Inch Nails drummer Ilan Rubin and bass great Billy Sheehan. "Ilan is one of the best drummers in the world," Dawson exclaims, "and Billy is just a monster. I put a wah on him. He was like, 'I've never played with a wah before. How about you work it?' So I controlled it myself. That was awesome."

A who's who of production legends contributed to the project, including mixers Bob Clearmountain, Tim Palmer, Ben Grosse, Tom Lord-Alge and Chris Lord-Alge, among others, along with mastering aces like Howie Weinberg, Bob Ludwig, Brad Blackwood and Ted Jensen. "I'm so grateful to all of them for their incredible work," Dawson says. "They loved the music and the cause."

For Chris Bishop, who now serves as CEO of the automotive company American Metal Custom, *Warrior Life* has been a dream undertaking. "When Billy and I came together, we wanted to do a great music project that was also geared toward a higher purpose. Healing was the main goal," he says. "Sierra Delta finds service dogs to aid veterans with extreme needs. They have another program called Life Buddy that rescues service dogs. The organization makes a big impact on the lives of both the veterans and the dogs. We're hoping that this album can benefit everybody concerned, because they deserve everything we can do."

TIP SHEET

"Put the guitar down." On his solo recordings or with Jason Isbell, **Sadler Vaden** lives by these pointers.

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH WEICHMAN

IT DOESN'T HAPPEN often, but every once in a while, Sadler Vaden feels like his guitar playing needs a bit of a recharge. Not that he's ever at a loss for opportunities to play. Between his main gig as lead guitarist with Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit and a burgeoning solo career, the Grammy-winning musician happily notes that his dance card is usually full. Even so, he occasionally notices that some of his licks need a little sprucing up.

"It happens to everybody," Vaden says. "I was talking to Butch Walker the other day, and he was like, 'I feel like I'm playing the same licks for years.'"

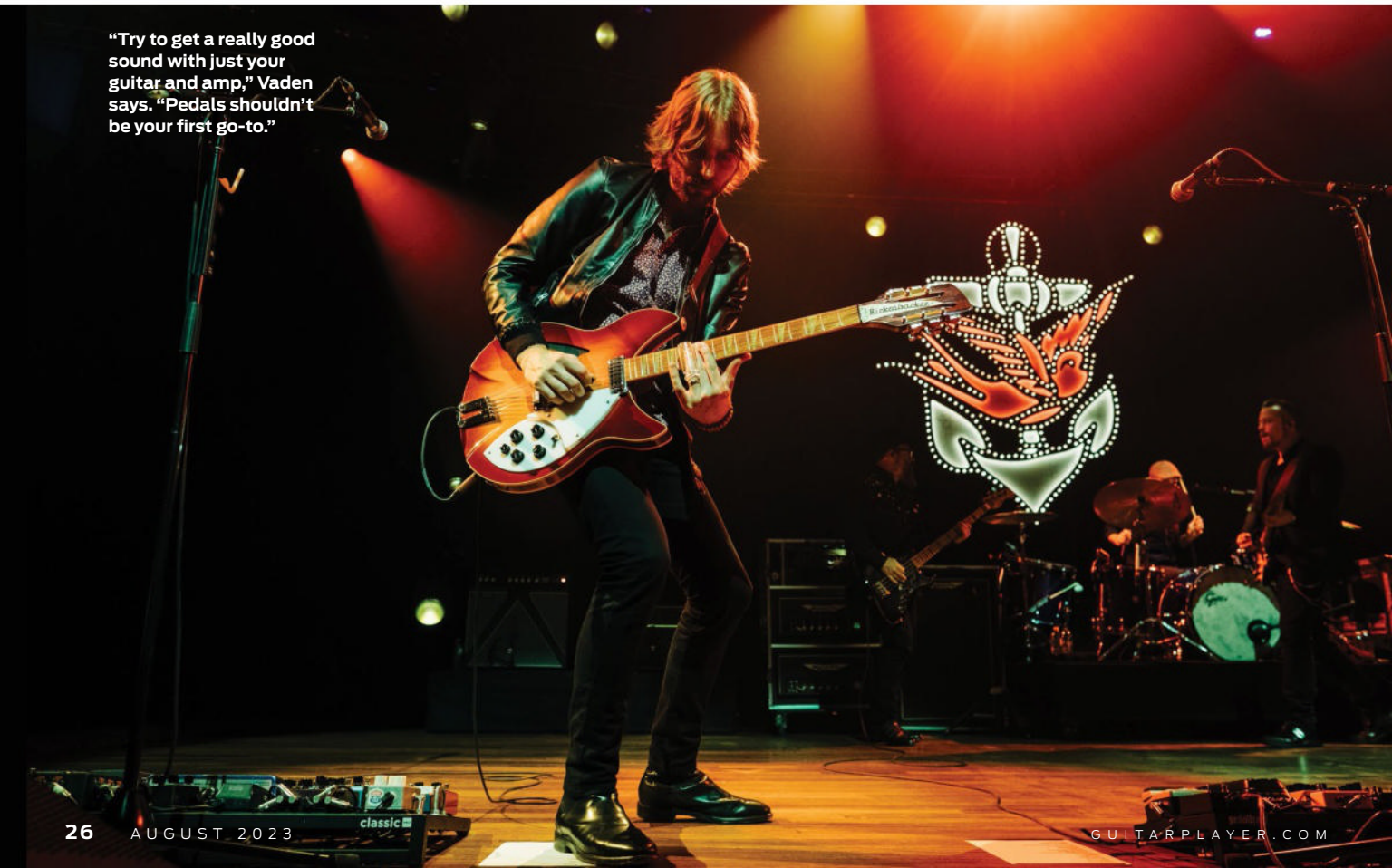
One of Vaden's tricks to shake off the cobwebs involves learning the solo of a song he loves but has never attempted to play before. "A couple of weeks ago, I started doing that with 'Kid Charlemagne' by Steely Dan," he reveals. "I've been crazy about the song since forever, so I said, 'It's finally time I learned that solo.' I haven't gotten to the end yet, but I feel like it's already opened my brain a bit. I had a gig the other night, and I was slipping little things from Larry Carlton's soloing into what I was doing. Sometimes you have to force your mind into going new places — and your fingers will follow."

He has other helpful suggestions as well, like knowing when to put the guitar down. "There are times when you come to a brick wall," he says. "Your first instinct is to try to smash through it, but sometimes the best option is to look for a way around it, and the answer isn't always obvious. Allow yourself a moment to assess and reflect."

1. PLAY THINGS YOU KNOW ON ACOUSTIC GUITAR

"This tip is for electric players, of course. If you have things you know — solos, riffs, what have you — try playing them on an acoustic guitar. Right away, you'll spot some weaknesses in your style and ability. It'll improve your chops, as in your facility on the fretboard, as well as your timing.

"Playing the electric is fun, no doubt, but we tend to hide behind the power of the amp and our effects pedals. It's like, 'Okay, I can play this part a little sloppy. Nobody will notice.' But guess what? When you get in a studio situation, a producer or engineer will notice. You might be asked to play a part



"Try to get a really good sound with just your guitar and amp," Vaden says. "Pedals shouldn't be your first go-to."

clean, without a loud amp or distortion, and if you're not articulating a passage precisely, you'll get some comments you might not want to hear."

2. PUT THE GUITAR DOWN

"I've said this on some podcasts, and people were like, 'What's this guy talking about? That doesn't make any sense!' But I'll say it again: Put the guitar down for a while. Stop playing, stop practicing. Whether it's a few days, a week, two weeks even. Just give yourself a break already. It won't be the end of the world, trust me.

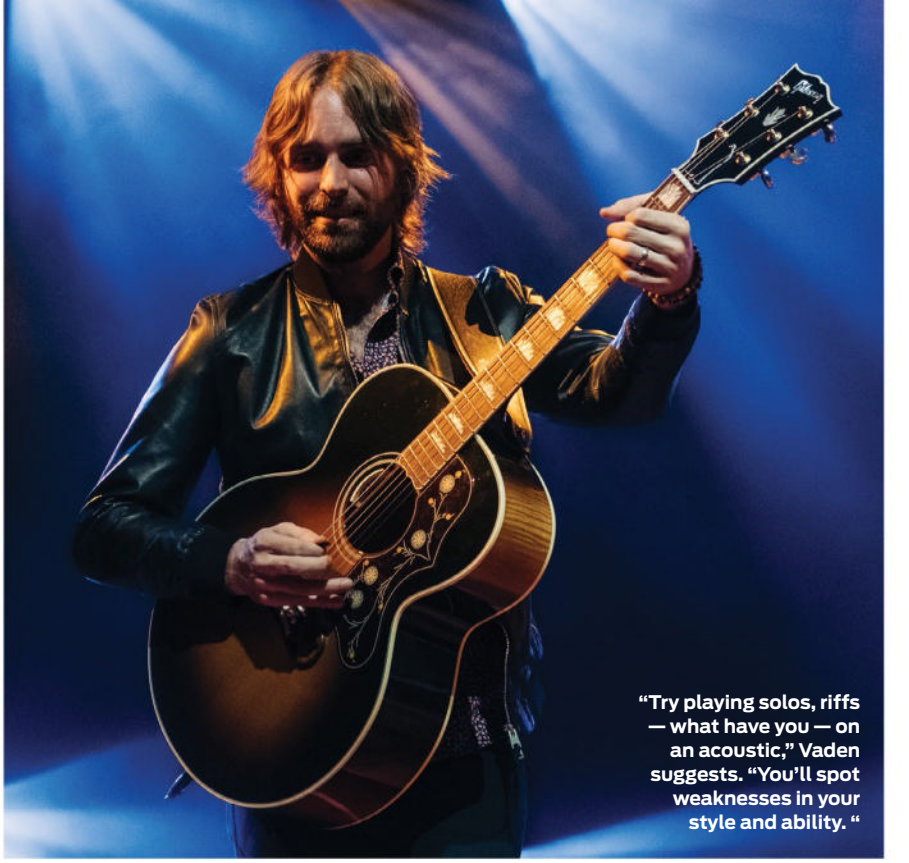
"I do it all the time. I'll come off tour and the last thing I want to do is play the guitar. I need to let my brain take in other information. I want to take in some regular life again. Since I've played professionally, the longest I've gone without playing is probably two weeks, and at that point I feel like I really want to play again. Sometimes I have to get back into it and make my fingers do what I want them to — my muscle memory is gone a little bit. But I find that it helps me. I feel fresh and excited again, and I'm not playing those same patterns."

3. WORK ON THE SOUND OF YOUR AMP BEFORE YOU USE PEDALS

"I've seen guitarists get all their pedals going before they've even played a note through an amp. That strikes me as counterintuitive. Pedals should enhance a sound that's already good; they shouldn't have to mask a problem. It's like southern barbecue: My favorite barbecue doesn't need any sauce; if I put sauce on it, it's because I want to make something good a little better.

"There are singular players like The Edge. The way he uses pedals is part of his art, and it's a large part of U2's sound. He's a very special type of player, though, and I've heard him rock out without effects. He knows how to get it going just fine.

"For practically everybody else, though, I would say try to get a really good sound with just your guitar and amp. Pedals shouldn't be your first go-to. If you're looking for some power, get it out of your amp's gain before you go stomping on distortion pedals. I used to be an offender. I thought my pedals were everything. Once I started working with people in studios, I found that pedals sometimes made my sound seem smaller. Dialing up a really nice full sound with just my amp gave me something good to work with. That's the other thing: If you're playing a part and it's not happening, maybe you need to work on that part a little more — a pedal won't improve it."



"Try playing solos, riffs — what have you — on an acoustic," Vaden suggests. "You'll spot weaknesses in your style and ability. "

"WHETHER IT'S A FEW DAYS, A WEEK, TWO WEEKS EVEN — JUST GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK ALREADY"

4. LEARN TO PLAY VOCAL LINES

"Let's face it: Guitarists are enamored of solos and riffs. It's all we play, and it becomes our vocabulary. But something I've found that really helps is when I learn how to play vocal lines of songs. There's just certain things the human voice can do that an instrument can't. It's almost like another language.

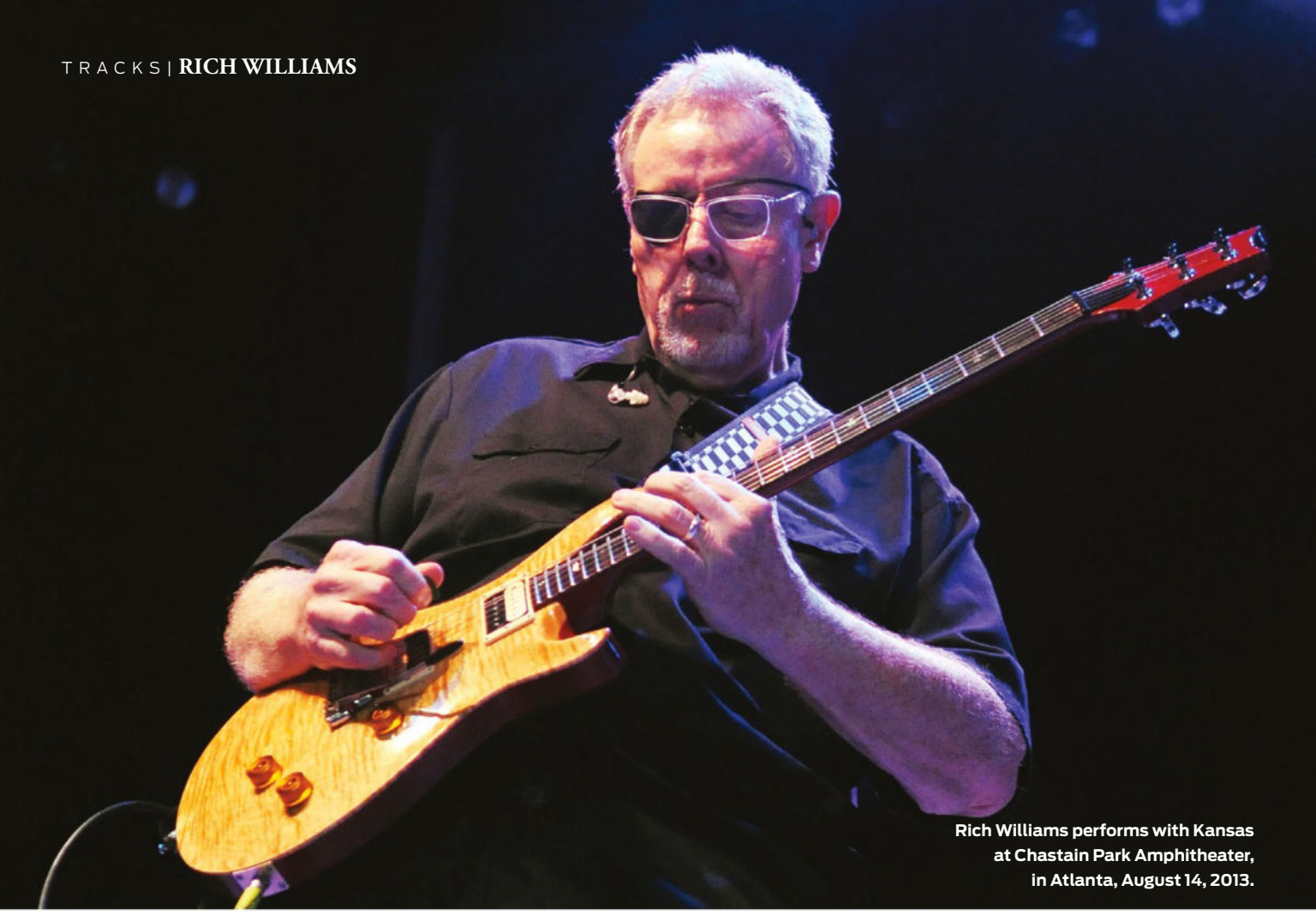
"I stumbled onto this about five years ago and found it allowed me to get out of a rut. It opened me up melodically and sonically, but I think it helped my compositional abilities, too. If you can see where the vocal melody lives inside a scale, then you're thinking differently. Maybe you can come up with different chord inversions to work under the vocal. It's just a really good practice to get into."

5. LEARN SONGS THAT ARE RHYTHMIC

"Rhythm guitar is an often neglected and maligned aspect of playing. It's a great idea to learn songs in which the lead lines are rhythmic riffs instead of lead lines. I'm talking 'Substitute' by the Who, 'All Right Now' by Free, 'What I Like About You' by the Romantics or Bachman-Turner Overdrive's 'Let it Ride.' Rhythm guitar is the bedrock of everything. If you can play great rhythm guitar, you're going to be a real asset in a band.

"I'm always working on my rhythm playing. Sometimes I'm like, 'Man, I'm ahead of the beat!' Other times, I feel like I'm dragging. I don't know if you ever master it. To me, it's a constant work in progress. Live, I take plenty of solos, but I also love to just hold down the rhythm. When you're not playing solos, you should think of the guitar as part of the rhythm section with the bass and drums.

"In a studio, this is key. I've been in situations where someone didn't nail the rhythm part, and it's like, 'We're going to have to redo that.' John Lennon knew how to play rhythm — talk about an underrated player. George Harrison, too. And Pete Townshend, obviously — one of the best. Keith Richards! He's one of the most well-known and respected players of all time. He's a legend, and he's a rhythm player. He doesn't even need all the strings. Take a cue from those guys and get your rhythm going."



Rich Williams performs with Kansas at Chastain Park Amphitheater, in Atlanta, August 14, 2013.

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Kansas founding guitarist **Rich Williams** picks his greatest cuts from the group's 50-year history.

BY GARY GRAFF

"KANSAS HAS A knack for distributing parts where they're needed," guitarist Rich Williams notes proudly, "rather than saying, 'We've got to find something for everybody to do here!' It's just a process of getting everybody involved the right way, not stepping on toes, and serving the songs with only what they need."

Of course, you'd expect that to be the case after 50 years, but Kansas had their game plan in good shape largely from the get-go. The group was forged in Topeka by what Williams calls "the last man standing of our peer group that wanted to continue on with a musical life rather than get a straight job." The original six members — Williams, guitarist-keyboardist Kerry Livgren, singer-keyboardist Steve Walsh, singer-violinist Robbie Steinhardt, bassist Dave Hope and drummer Phil Ehart — had played in a variety of groups, including White Clover and the Reasons Why.

After a few false starts, this lineup formed Kansas in earnest in 1973, forging a unique blend of heavy blues-based rock and complex, progressive opuses. According to Williams, "Everybody had different influences" that included Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels, the Rolling Stones (for whom Kansas opened during the summer of 1978) and the classical music of Steinhardt's formal training. "We were tired of playing the required music you'd play in a bar. We were trying to remove the box of, 'This is what a band does. This is what rock music is today.' We were very inspired by what became called 'progressive music.' That taught us there is no box; there are no parameters. You can sing about anything you want to. You can use any time signature, any approach you can think of, any instrumentation that appealed to us.

"We just wanted to do something that came naturally to us, not emulate anything we'd been doing previously or copy the trend of radio. We wanted to do things our way. We were very stubborn in that want and need. What drew the six of us together was to do something special."

The inaugural, self-titled Kansas album of 1974 was certainly that, an amalgamation that started with the gritty gut-punches of "Can I Tell You" and a cover of J.J. Cale's "Bringing It Back" and moved into soaring pieces such as "Journey from Mariabronn,"

CHRIS McKAY/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"Apercu" and "Death of Mother Nature Suite." A pattern was established that would be maintained on subsequent albums, finally breaking big with the multi-Platinum one-two punch of 1976's *Leftoverture* and the following year's *Point of Know Return*, and hit singles such as "Carry On Wayward Son" and "Dust in the Wind."

Along the way, Williams became a player of the moment in the studio. "Many times, I don't know what I'm going to do until I hear, 'Roll it,'" he explains. "I don't like going in too rehearsed because I like the panic of not knowing where I'm going." He recalls that Steve Morse, a member of Kansas from 1985 to 1991, dubbed him "Mr. One-Take." "I've been very fortunate at creating in the moment."

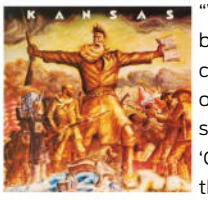
Williams and Ehart have been Kansas's stalwarts throughout the group's history, having seen 22 other members play on the group's 15 studio albums. The current lineup, which is responsible for 2016's *The Prelude Implicit* and 2020's *The Absence of Presence*, is one of the group's strongest yet and is on the road this year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the band's formation. The band is also working on new material for an album to be released in 2024, and the 73-year-old Williams — who moved to North Carolina during the pandemic following a long tenure in Atlanta — doesn't see himself getting out of the act any time soon.

"I kind of grasped the concept early on, actually before I even started taking guitar lessons, that I wanted to be part of something like this," he notes. "I'm just fortunate that it worked out. There have been some rough moments — usually they're travel-related — but I've been through so many weird times that we just laugh at it now. It's a complete surrender to and acceptance of whatever all of this is. We just roll with it and keep taking the next step forward, and suddenly 50 years is here. It's a wonderful life."

"I DON'T LIKE GOING IN TOO REHEARSED BECAUSE I LIKE THE PANIC OF NOT KNOWING WHERE I'M GOING"

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"CAN I TELL YOU" *KANSAS* (1974)



"We had started the band and were more concerned about original music, so we started writing the song 'Can I Tell You.' I wrote this little chord pattern that's basically the beginning of the song and brought it to rehearsal. Steve Walsh took it home and came back with the chorus and the three verses, and I came up with the middle section while Robbie added all the violin parts and stuff, and a song was born. We made a demo tape, 'cause we thought, Wouldn't it be cool if we could actually make an album? It wound up on [*producer/manager*] Don Kirshner's desk, and he liked that song. There were six songs on the demo tape, three on each side, and I don't think he ever heard the second side. He really liked 'Can I Tell You,' and that got us our record deal.

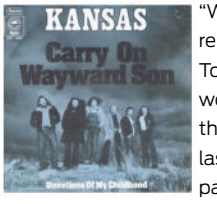
"In 2022, we did [*the compilation*] *Another Fork in the Road*, and record companies traditionally want something new in a package like that. While we do have a few songs in the can, since we're working toward releasing a new record in 2024, we thought, What if we remade 'Can I Tell You' with the current lineup, since that was the song that brought us to the table. We thought it was a way to bookend our career and to see if we could do that song in a modern way.

"So Phil went to the studio in Georgia where he always does his drum tracks, and I did my guitar tracks here where I'm sitting at home. Everything went through [*keyboardist*] Tom Brislin, who was assembling all the parts at home. Ronnie [*Platt*] sang his parts in Chicago, [*David*] Ragsdale did his violin parts in his bedroom, and Chad Singer — who's our front-of-house sound man and knows what we sound like more than we do — produced the project and did all the mixing.

"We'd never really tried something like this before, and I'm really happy with the outcome. We were attempting to recreate the vibe as much as we could and just freshen it up. It's funny: [*Amazon's virtual assistant*] Alexa plays stuff randomly around our house, and I was up early this morning to make coffee, and in the background 'Can I Tell You' came on. It was at a low enough volume that I couldn't tell if it was the new or old recording until my guitar solo came along. I play something different on the new one, and it wasn't until it got to that spot that I could tell it was the new recording."

Williams performs in 1977.

"CARRY ON WAYWARD SON" *LEFTOVERTURE* (1976)



"We were in our rehearsal room in Topeka and had been working on material for the album. It was the last day. We were gonna pack up the gear and head to Bogalusa, Louisiana, where we had done the third album, *Masque*. Then Kerry comes in and says, 'I've gone one more song.' There was a lot of moaning and groaning, 'cause we were tired of the process and ready to get in the studio and start recording. He started showing us the song, and the general consensus was, 'There's a lot here. This could be a really good song.'

"We went down to the studio and worked out an arrangement — a rough one; we hadn't really learned the song yet. The tape was rolling and we were playing the song until, finally, [*co-producer*] Jeff Glixman said, 'I think we've got one.' The version on the recording is probably the first time we got it correct.

"At the time I was using my red 100-watt Marshall Lead amp, which was the only amp I had, and my Gibson L6s, which I'd used on the three previous records. But from traveling on the road, the amp got a little beat up, and there was another musician who worked out of that studio who said, 'Just use my Marshall head.' It had Gretsch tubes in it. So I did.

"Me and Kerry double the riff at the song's beginning. For the verses, Kerry was on piano and Steve Walsh played background organ. It didn't need electric guitar during that part,

so I played acoustic, mimicking the piano part. When it advanced into the chorus, we didn't want to go full balls-out yet, so I just added a clean electric behind the chorus. That way, when the main riff kicked back in, it had more *oomph* to it. It was just a process of leaving room for each other, not stepping on each other's toes but giving everybody something to do.

"We felt really good about it. Don Kirshner kept calling in, and we were holding the phone up to the speakers so he could hear it. Everybody in New York was excited. When we rolled the mix, that's when it hit all of us: This is something different. That's when we were high-fiving. We knew we had delivered something that was a game-changer for us."

"THOSE METAL PICKS SOUNDED LIKE A TEAM OF HORSES RUNNING THROUGH THE SONG"

"THE WALL" *LEFTOVERTURE* (1976)

"Kerry was on this weird, miraculous writing streak during *Leftoverture*. He comes in one day and says, 'I got a song I wrote last night,' just on an upright piano he had. And he starts playing all these parts and changes, and shows us the lyrics. We were like, 'You wrote this last night? Where did that come from?!' There are songs that for me are quintessential Kansas songs, and that is definitely in the top five.

"I can remember there was a sound that I really wanted to try for this song, one that I hadn't previously used much. Once again, it was my trusty Marshall 100-watt Lead — the bass channel, with everything on 10, with my Les Paul, bass pickup, treble off, volume stopped. It creates such a cool lower overtone, with really good sustain but not an in-your-face kind of feel. That was the approach I took on this song for the solo part at the beginning. Since it re-occurs before the final verse, I did something a bit different. The rest of the song is basically keyboard-driven, so I'm playing a clean guitar and arpeggios through the chorus. I wasn't sure what to play there, and Steve suggested that, and it was a good idea, so that's what I added at that point.

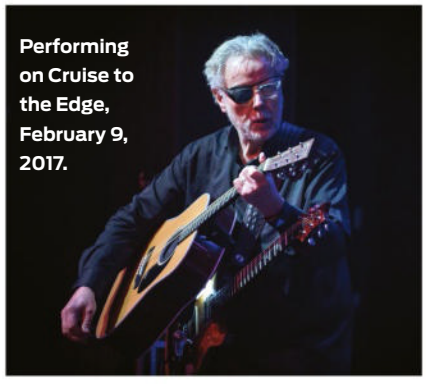
"I remember I was sitting outside at the studio, which was in the country in Louisiana, and I could hear that opening being played through the door of the studio. It was my opportunity to really listen to it. Phil Ehart's first wife was listening to it, too, and she said, 'God, Rich, that's beautiful!' And that reaffirmed to me that I had created something there."

"POINT OF KNOW RETURN" *POINT OF KNOW RETURN* (1977)

"As I was saying about 'Wayward Son,' our approach here, once again, was to serve the song and just give it what it needs. We had the basic tracks done, with the violin, the heavy organ parts and stuff, and I thought, Do I really need to play here? As a result, I didn't play in the opening — there just wasn't room for it. For me, it was a very simple process of elimination: This sounds really solid with the Hammond organ and violin. I don't need to be here, and we don't need to keep me busy by creating a part, so let's leave it alone.

"And I have to say, that's hard. It's really fear-based, like, 'I can't think of anything to do that would add anything. What's wrong with me? I think I'm a professional guitar player, but I can't think of anything!' But you just have to accept that your instincts are right. So while I was scared that I sucked for a minute, in the end I did the right thing.

"For the verses, I played single notes, outlining a triad. We'd take the third up and play the corresponding part, and then play the fifth, and we created this triad with a very clear-stringed guitar sound and mixed that in with the piano. You really have to listen closely to hear that it's there, and even then, you probably wouldn't know it was a guitar. So that's what I added to the verses. Then in the B section — 'Your mother...' — that seemed like a good spot to add a new Martin acoustic that I had. We were looking for a change in texture before it goes back into the 'How long' part, where I'm gone again."



Performing on Cruise to the Edge, February 9, 2017.

IGOR VIDYASHEV/ZUMA WIRE/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

"DUST IN THE WIND" *POINT OF KNOW RETURN* (1977)

"Kerry had written the song, but it wasn't really a song when it was being written. He brought in a really rough recording with an acoustic guitar, kind of mumbling the words. Me and Phil are going, 'Whoa, this is a cool song!' It was put on the back burner, and eventually we got to it. I played the basic tracks. I had never done much acoustic guitar finger-picking at all. I had once borrowed a banjo from a friend of mine and taken some banjo lessons, so I was used to playing with metal picks, which is what I used on this.

"Now, back then, on those old tape machines, you couldn't even punch in a part; you had to record it in its entirety. So it took all day to record, just me alone with a naked, acoustic guitar. It was double-tracked on a Martin, and then I added a nylon-string guitar and double-tracked that with a high-strung guitar. I'd get to the end and hit a clam, and then it was, 'Damn, now I've got to start over again!' After a while, ear fatigue was really wearing on me, but I got it done.

"I came in the next day, and everyone was hanging their heads, saying, 'We've got to re-do it. Listen to this.' It all sounded great, except in the background you could hear this noise from all the layering of the guitars. Those metal picks sounded like a team of horses running through the song. So we couldn't use it, and I started all over again. My fingers were bleeding by the time we were done with it. And, obviously, I got to know the song very well. [*laughs*] I knew it inside and out by the time we were done."

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The Vintage Acoustic Maker No One Talks About Today

In the early 1920s, **Lyon & Healy** rivaled Martin with X-braced tops and plenty of bling.

For all its build quality, the guitar's bling is what catches vintage-guitar fans' eyes today.

UNLESS YOU HABITUALLY peruse the dusty corners of acoustic-guitar specialty shops in search of petite-bodied parlor guitars from yesteryear, you might not know the name Lyon & Healy. But the brand was once one of the most prominent American guitar makers, and for a time it was a central fixture in Chicago's massive instrument-manufacturing scene.

It was also one of the best when judged by its upper-level flattops of the early 20th century. In terms of both build quality and presentation-grade ornamentation, the 1920s Lyon & Healy auditorium model featured here could have given Martin's 00-45 of the era a run for its money, although it arguably wasn't put together with quite the same depth of craftsmanship, nor has it attained a comparable status over the past 100 years.

George W. Lyon was a long-term employee of Boston's Ditson Company, a music publisher that also dealt in musical instruments, which was a common practice in the day and for many decades after. Ditson partnered Lyon with the younger Patrick Healy and sent the pair west to Chicago in 1864 to establish what would initially be another Ditson outlet. Lyon & Healy eventually built the enterprise into much more than that, even overtaking their original employer in scope and market reach.

Among the better-known creations from Lyon & Healy are Washburn guitars, originally branded "George Washburn," using Lyon's first two names. Many early 1900s Washburns were virtually interchangeable with the other guitars that Lyon & Healy manufactured and distributed. While all Washburn guitars of the day were made by Lyon & Healy, not all Lyon & Healy guitars carried the Washburn brand. The distinction can be confusing, and as far as we know the guitars were never sold to the public as Lyon & Healy models, either. This guitar, while clearly a Lyon & Healy creation, carries no Washburn branding or markings, such as an interior label, or the logo of a belt emblazoned with "George Washburn" encircling a tiny guitar, as usually found stamped onto the center back brace beneath the sound hole.

LYON & HEALY GUITARS DISPLAYED GLITZY AND COMPLEX INLAYS THAT SEEMED TO EVOLVE AT THE WHIMS OF THE CRAFTSPEOPLE

Lyon & Healy opened a large factory in the early 1880s, where they made guitars, banjos, mandolins, harps, zithers and other stringed instruments. The company grew rapidly through both a network of retail outlets and mail-order distribution of its more affordable models. George W. Lyon, by then in his late 60s, retired in 1889 and passed away five years later. Healy pressed on, and the company continued to go from strength to strength for the next few decades, passing into the hands of his sons and other management personnel after Healy's death, in 1905.

Lyon & Healy guitars from after the turn of the century range broadly in quality, construction, ornamentation and price. Like many manufacturers, the company resorted

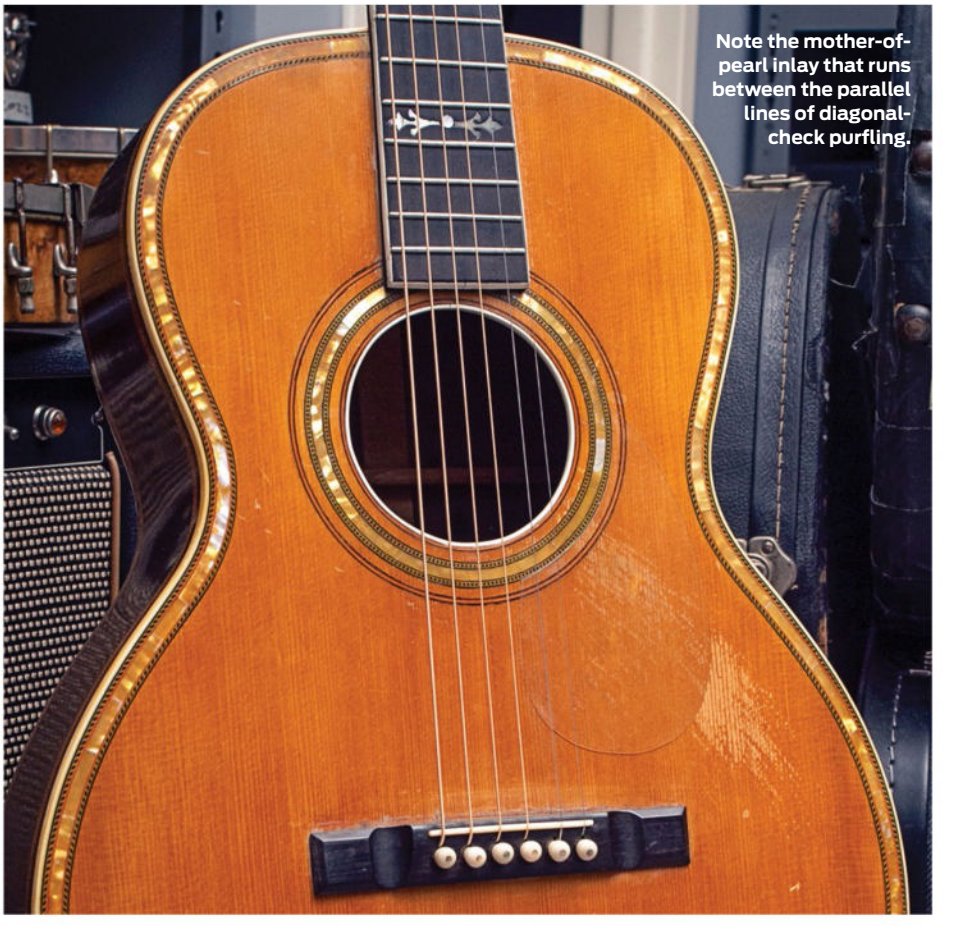
BY DAVE HUNTER

to marketing more affordable instruments during World War I to keep the line afloat. Some of the best flattop guitars of Lyon & Healy/Washburn's history arrived in the decade following the war's end, when they were designed to carry steel strings instead of gut, and delivered the bolder, crisper tone that went along with it.

While many of the company's lower-priced guitars were made with lesser woods and the parallel bracing that had been standard through most of the industry, its upper-tier models were different beasts entirely. Although factory made, most of the more expensive Lyon & Healy–built guitars of the post-WWI period used X-bracing, which was only becoming prevalent at Martin in the 1920s, even though founder C.F. Martin had invented the technique around 1842 and used it on some of his early gut-string guitars. They also employed tonewoods as fine as any used throughout the industry. The auditorium model pictured here has not only X-bracing but also a solid spruce top and solid Brazilian rosewood back and sides. And, while many student-level Lyon & Healy guitars carried trapeze tailpieces and rudimentary bridges (which minimized stress on less-robustly made tops), this model has a glued-down ebony pin bridge of the type reserved for higher-quality guitars in its day.

For all this constructional virtue, however, it's the prominent bling that usually catches vintage-guitar fans' eyes today. Lyon & Healy guitars displayed glitzy and complex inlays, in patterns and degrees that often seemed to evolve at the whims of the craftspeople who assembled them. This 1920s auditorium model is no slouch, with a broad mother-of-pearl inlay that runs between parallel lines of diagonal-check purfling around the perimeter of the top, and ornate fleurs for position markers. Even more unusual than this, though, is the colored-wood purfling that rings the guitar's sides just below both the top and back binding, something you don't often see other than on the most elaborate presentation guitars.

In the late 1920s, the huge Chicago wholesaler Tonk Brothers bought out both Lyon & Healy and the rights to the Washburn brand name, and soon after all the guitars bearing these names were made by Regal, another major Chicago manufacturer. The production of Washburn-branded guitars ceased during World War II, and after passing through the hands of several owners, the name was revived in a more lasting fashion in the 1980s. For the past several decades, both Washburn acoustic and electric guitars have been produced mostly overseas, with a few special runs emanating from American manufacturers. Lyon & Healy still exists today as a Chicago-based distributor of several brands in the musical instrument industry.



Note the mother-of-pearl inlay that runs between the parallel lines of diagonal-check purfling.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Solid spruce top with X bracing
- Solid Brazilian rosewood back and sides
- Elaborate decorative inlays
- 12-fret neck with slotted headstock

GUITAR COURTESY OF T.R. CRANDALL GUITARS. PHOTOS BY DREW GANSZ

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

How Django Changed My Life

The gift of a **Django Reinhardt** album has kept on giving.

WAY BACK IN 1974, when I was in high school, I took a ceramics class from a teacher named Mr. Rafello. My specialty was ashtrays. The big perk of the class was that we had a community stereo. Students could bring music to play as we worked. After a month or so, Mr. Rafello noticed I was bringing albums by Cream, Jimi Hendrix, the Allman Brothers Band and so on. One day he pulled out a selection of his own: *Django Reinhardt et Stephane Grappelli*, a compilation of recordings with the Hot Club of France. The album jacket was covered with dried clay and dust, and featured an illustration of a debonair Django. "Jim, you should hear this," Mr. Rafello said as he put the disc on the turntable. It was like hearing music by divine aliens. I was knocked out: the shredding guitar phrases, the driving quarter-note rhythms, and a sound so real it was like nature.

Immediately, I stopped bringing in my own music and would play *Django Reinhardt et Stephane Grappelli* every day. After a few weeks, Mr. Rafello gifted the album to me. Of the small mountain of records I own, it remains one of my most cherished.

Released in France in 1970 on Pathé Marconi/EMI, *Django Reinhardt et Stephane Grappelli* features the classic sound of the Hot Club of France with Django on a Selmer guitar, Grappelli on violin and Django's younger brother, Nin Nin, on rhythm guitar. A second rhythm guitarist may be present, and there is a mystery pianist I suspect might be Grappelli doing double duty. There are hardly any album credits, and what's there is in French, with no mention of the sidemen.

NEVER MIND THAT HE PLAYED THE FRETBOARD WITH TWO FINGERS — DJANGO SOUNDS LIKE HE HAS AN EXTRA FOUR

Django was a Gypsy. As is well known, when he was 18, he was badly burned in a caravan fire that left the third and fourth fingers of his left hand partially paralyzed and pulled tightly against his hand. Despite this, he adapted his style to fret with only two fingers and went on to play fully developed iconic music with a technical prowess that is absolutely breathtaking. Never mind that he played the fretboard with two fingers — Django sounds like he has an extra four digits on his fretting hand. Influenced by recordings of Louis Armstrong, Joe Venuti and Eddie Lang, he went on to collaborate with Grappelli and formed the Hot Club of France.

All of Django's fire, technique and limitless musicality are evident on *Django Reinhardt et Stephane Grappelli*. Classics like "Minor Swing," "Sweet Georgia Brown," "My Blue Heaven" and "Over the Rainbow" are played with a fresh perspective and a bravado of discovery. One standout is "Nagasaki," where Django sounds like a stallion busting out of the gate. His solo is stupendous, full of life and certainty as he plays basically everything a guitarist can: ripping arpeggios, crying bends, flashy pull-offs and rapid-fire 64th-note rhythm accompaniment. And this is all as early as 1936! This and every track on the record is a must-hear.

That said, one can't go wrong with almost any Django selection. Fortunately, he was one of the most-recorded guitarists of his era. Personally, I love his underrated electric guitar playing, and the bootleg recordings of Duke Ellington with Django are fantastic. He combines his Gypsy roots with a post-bop Charlie Christian vocabulary. Django was a musician who kept growing and evolving until his unfortunate early death in 1953, at the age of 43. Sadly, he didn't trust medicine.

Sometimes I think good deeds cause a "ripple." If I hold a door for someone, they might be kind to someone later. Sometimes a ripple can turn into a tidal wave. I experienced this firsthand when *Django Reinhardt et Stephane Grappelli* changed the course of my life. Thank you, Mr Rafello.

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

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Rhythm of Nations

How former West African star **Peter One** returned to music on his solo debut, *Come Back to Me*.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN HARTLEY

SECOND CHANCES IN music don't come often, but Nashville-based singer-songwriter Peter One is living proof that lightning can strike twice. In the 1980s, in the West African country of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), One ascended to fame playing music inspired by regional Afrobeat artists, folk luminaries such as Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, and classic country singers like Don Williams. Along with his collaborator, Jess Sah Bi, One played to thousands of fans at soccer stadiums and festivals, and entertained several presidents of African nations. In 1990, the duo's song "African Chant" soundtracked media coverage of anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela's release from a South African prison.

Unfortunately, politics soon played an unwelcome role in One's decades-long exile from the music business. Later that same year, he founded the first musician's union in Côte d'Ivoire, while pro-democracy protests broke out across the country. When One became a political target, he decided to try his luck across the Atlantic Ocean.

One landed in New York City, then bounced around a few other places, never quite finding the musical kinship he sought. Unable to restart his music career, despite the success he once enjoyed at home, he eventually settled into a quiet American life, working as a nurse in the decidedly unglamorous world of healthcare.

The story hadn't been all that different in Côte d'Ivoire, though. Despite the fame he had achieved, One knew success wasn't sustainable there. "At that time, musicians were not really living from music," he says. "That's one of the reasons why I focused on my own schooling — to have a good job, to have a career while I was doing music."

But Nashville turned out to be the perfect place for him. That's where he was in 2017 when a message from a record company named Awesome Tapes From Africa put One back in the game. The label, which introduces African artists and music to Western audiences, reissued *Our Garden Needs Its Flowers*, his 1985 album with Bi, and simultaneously resurrected his career.

Peter One performs at Stubbs for "SXSW Presents," in Austin, March 15, 2023.

One was more than prepared to return to the stage. During his sabbatical, he had continued to write and record original music, amassing somewhere around 100 songs he tracked at home using various DAWs. "Every time I was upgrading my studio, I was recording songs," he says, "making my songs better, even re-recording the same song and bringing up the new songs."

The years he spent woodshedding without an audience gave One an endless horizon to continue writing music, rearranging and perfecting it for the opportunity he always felt would come. *Come Back to Me*, his debut solo album, released this May, bears the fruits of all that thankless labor, as well as his trilingual singing, which alternates from English to French to Guro, a language spoken in parts of his native Côte d'Ivoire.

"Cherie Vico" and "Kavudu" introduce One's thumb-and-forefinger fingerpicking style and West African sense of rhythm right out of the gate. On "Staring at the Blues," one of only a few cuts to feature traditional Western drums, he channels a mid-'70s Rolling Stones vibe, while pedal-steel guitar accentuates his melodies on "Sweet Rainbow." He lays back for a shuffle feel on "La Petite," while his frailing style of strumming drives the song forward. One's blend of musical influences from around the world, rich in harmonies and organic tones, and decorated with tastefully restrained Nashville licks, makes *Come Back to Me* an intoxicating, even exotic, listening experience.

While he has traded the right-handed Yamaha acoustic (re-strung for a leftie) which he played during his 1980s high point, One now strums Martin and Ibanez acoustics in front of a six-piece backing band. On the rare occasions he goes electric, he plugs a Fender Squier into a Line 6 Helix and runs direct to the soundboard. One spoke with *Guitar Player* about the music that inspired him in West Africa, his relationship to his instrument, and his return to music.

When you arrived in the U.S. in the 1990s, was it heartbreaking to realize you weren't going to be able to support yourself by playing music?

It was a little bit hard, but I was still hoping and I was still learning. I was still writing songs all the time. I said to myself, Let's just keep doing it until we get a door open, because we are not gonna wait for the opportunity to come and then restart working on music. Let's be ready, so whenever we get the opportunity, we are prepared. That was my philosophy. You can try and win, or you can try and lose. But you have to try first. If you don't try, you lose already.

> "When I started playing this kind of music, for some time I didn't know it was called country music"

Did you collaborate with anybody during that time?

No, not really, because it wasn't easy finding musicians. I spent one year in New York when I first came over, but I met only African musicians there, and I didn't really learn anything from them. We were not thinking about the same music, so I didn't do anything with them. They were interested in reggae, Asian music, jazz fusion. Then I moved to Delaware and tried to meet some musicians, but most of the people that I met were in R&B and rap music. It's only when I came to Nashville that I really started meeting musicians and playing with them.

Did any songs from that era end up on *Come Back to Me*?

Yeah, I had a lot to choose from on this album. "Sweet Rainbow" and "Cherie Vico" were already written, but I gave them different arrangements. "La Petite," same thing.

How did you keep up your guitar chops during those years of professional inactivity?

By working on guitar harmonies, and working on chords. But as far as picking and guitar technique, not much. A little bit of soloing, also, because I wasn't playing solos at all until I got here, and I noticed that every time I had people playing a solo for me, it wasn't right. So on all my demos, I do my solos myself, and I send it to people when we have to play, to give them an idea of what I want, where I want my music to go.

How closely does the music on the album match your demos?

On "Kavudu," I did everything myself; the demo is on the album; "Birds Go Die Out of Sight," just a little bit. But the thing is, I'm open to new ideas when we're recording. I don't tell the musicians to just copy what I did. If you bring up something better than what I played, I'll take it. On "Sweet Rainbow," the guy who played the solo was really great: Pat Sansone [*of Wilco*]. And he did things way better than what I did.

What music inspired you to play guitar?

Ivory Coast is a place where all kinds of

STEPHEN OLKER/GETTY IMAGES FOR SXSW

music could come and pass by — American music, English music, French music, African — I was listening to all that, but my preference went to music with acoustic guitar and nice vocal melodies very early. The first time I heard [*Simon and Garfunkel's*] "The Boxer" on the radio, it touched me. And later on, I heard a lot of other songs and other artists from the U.S. Some of them I even thought were from England, like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. [*laughs*] But some African artists were doing music that was close, like G.G. Vikey, Eboa Lottin and Francis Bebey.

There are so many African music styles around. I was listening to Congolese music just to train my fingers, and also Afrobeat, just to be able to play with friends. You bring up songs and you invite friends to play. Even if you don't like this kind of music, when you get with a group of friends, you have to participate. So that's also why I was learning all the Congo music.

What about playing Congolese music was helpful for you?

On the Congolese music, I was just playing chords, because I was mostly singing. Actually, it's because of the singing that I came to play guitar, because there were some songs that I had a hard time getting the beat on time. African music is sometimes weird; the beat is difficult. So I said to myself, If I play an instrument like guitar, I'll probably get it. That's how I came to start learning guitar.

What guitar techniques or scales did you study?

I did not really study. [*laughs*] *Study* is a big word. I just looked at the charts and saw new chords, like the nines, the major seven, the 11, the minors… All these things. I played them to see if it sounds nice to my ears. If I can find a melody, I go ahead.

You're a fingerstylist. Did you pick up your style somewhere or develop it on your own?

I learned it by listening to other African musicians. Then I started listening to American music, Simon and Garfunkel especially, and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. As a matter of fact, one of my songs on that first album, "African Chant," I got [*the intro*] from the CSNY song "Helplessly Hoping." If you listen to them both, you'll see it's close.

> "You can try and win, or you can try and lose. But you have to try first. If you don't try, you lose already"

West African audiences called you "country," but it's not down-the-middle country. You bring some other elements and a singer-songwriter's approach to it.

When I started playing this kind of music, for some time I didn't know it was called country music. Even when I met my friend, Jess Sah Bi, by that time I already knew "The Boxer." I knew Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel; I knew about Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; I knew about Cat Stevens. But to me it was just folk music. We were doing just folk music and African music. But people will label that country music, so we took that name just for marketing purposes.

Stylistically, there's really so much to love about *Come Back to Me*. What is your writing process?

Sometimes a melody comes to me, and I pick up my guitar and try to put music on it. Sometimes I take the guitar and look for something — I don't really know what I'm looking for — and melody comes. I get the song right there, and put a melody on it. Sometimes when I'm driving, a melody comes to me, so I record it on my cell phone. If it interests me, then I work further on that.

You're a trilingual artist. Does the natural rhythm of the language in which you're singing dictate how you play guitar?

Sometimes, but it depends on how I want to build the song. If it's a song that is inspired from traditional music, traditional beats or things like that, the beat will be more based on the rhythm of the language. But if it's a song that has nothing to do with the traditional style, then it's different. Not all the songs follow the rhythm of the language.

How does it feel, after all these years, to be playing shows and making records again?

Young again, and happy. It's just wonderful. I'm lucky to be able to get what I've been longing for.

STEPHEN OLKER/GETTY IMAGES FOR SXSW

Duane Allman's funeral, Snow's Memorial Chapel, Macon, Georgia, November 1, 1971.

JEFF ALBERSTON PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION/UMASS AMHERST LIBRARIES

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Duane Allman's death might have been the end of the **Allman Brothers Band**. Instead, it marked the start of a remarkable era in the group's life — and rock history.

BY ALAN PAUL

WHEN DUANE ALLMAN died in a motorcycle accident on October 29, 1971, it seemed as if the Allman Brothers Band were history. In fact, their greatest days still lay ahead of them. Duane's co-guitarist, Dickey Betts, stepped into the breach and took control. First he rallied the group to tour in support of 1972's *Eat a Peach*, the follow-up to *At Fillmore East*, the 1971 double live album that brought the Allman Brothers the commercial and critical acclaim they so deserved. He then led them to create what would become their commercial breakthrough: the 1973 studio album *Brothers and Sisters*.

Supported by such stellar Betts compositions as "Jessica" and the chart-topping hit "Ramblin' Man," *Brothers and Sisters* went on to sell seven million copies and established the Allmans as one of the decade's biggest groups. But the album's wildly successful infusion of Betts' country-rock also helped to pave the way for the success of other southern rock bands, like Lynyrd Skynyrd, who made their record debut that same year.

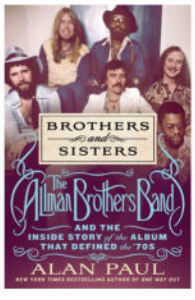
Without a doubt, the Allman Brothers dominated this era of American culture, from their massive shows with the Grateful Dead (their Summer Jam at Watkins Glen in July '73 was attended by some 600,00 fans) to their support for Jimmy Carter that helped elect him to the presidency in 1976. Betts and keyboardist/guitarist Gregg Allman also enjoyed solo success when their respective 1974 albums — *Highway Call* and *The Gregg Allman Tour* — landed in the Top 20.

But the good times were marred by tragedy, from the death of bassist Berry Oakley shortly after the band began recording *Brothers and Sisters*, to the drug-fueled lifestyle that followed. The Allman Brothers Band dissolved in 1976, ending the first chapter in their long run.

This era in the Allman Brothers Band's history comes to vivid life in Alan Paul's new book, *Brothers and Sisters: The Allman Brothers Band and the Inside Story of the Album That Defined the '70s*. Out this July 25 from St. Martin's Press, the book is the much-anticipated follow-up to Alan's *New York Times* bestseller, *One Way Out: The Inside Story of the Allman Brothers Band*, the definitive biography of the celebrated group.

In this exclusive excerpt from *Brothers and Sisters*, we present an inside look at the group's recording session for "Ramblin' Man." The action picks up shortly after the group hires keyboardist Chuck Leavell, fresh from his sessions for Gregg's solo debut, *Laid Back*, and brings in guitarist Les Dudek to assist Betts. — *Christopher Scapelliti*

CHUCK LEAVELL'S MUSICAL imprint is unmistakable on the first two tracks the band recorded, Gregg's "Wasted Words" and Betts' "Ramblin' Man." He added a bounce that elevated "Wasted Words," undergirding Betts' slide guitar, which was less fluid and expansive than Duane's and more attuned to playing a defined melodic part. Gregg had recorded a demo of "Wasted Words" in Los Angeles on August 9, with Johnny Winter on guitar and Buddy Miles on drums. Betts' slide line sounds like it was inspired by what Winter had played on the demo.



The lyrics of the song are a brutal kiss-off to Gregg's first wife, Shelly Winters (not the actress), including his own admission of failure:

Well, I ain't no saint and you sure as hell ain't no savior…. Don't ask me to be mister clean, baby, I don't know how.

This was followed by a brutal line:

Your wasted words, so absurd / Are you really Satan, yes or no?

The song kicked off the sessions with swagger, which continued in a totally different vein with "Ramblin' Man." The two songs, one an Allman rock blues, the other a Betts country rocker, are entirely different but sonically linked by Leavell's honky-tonk bravado. His sound is singular, even as you hear elements of the musicians the pianist cites as his prime inspirations: Ray Charles, Nicky Hopkins, Dr. John, Leon Russell and Elton John. He wasn't particularly influenced by country music, but his instincts naturally took him to some traditional playing on "Ramblin' Man," bringing to the song a genuine country swing.

"I just followed my ear and played what seemed appropriate," Leavell said.

"Ramblin' Man" was different from anything the band had ever recorded before. The only thing close was "Blue Sky," another major-key song with a country bounce. But "Blue Sky" wasn't all that country, as Betts would note. "It was more of that country/rock thing that was popular at that time. It could have been done by Poco or the Dead."

"Ramblin' Man" was much closer to being an actual country tune. Betts said the Hank Williams song of the same name inspired his initial idea, with Dickey's lyrics adapting Williams' "when the Lord made me, He made a ramblin' man." Betts originally thought he'd offer it to a country artist but was surprised to learn that he was the only guy in the band who thought it was too country for the Allman Brothers Band to record. "I was going to show it to Hank Williams Jr. and ask if he wanted to cut it," he said.

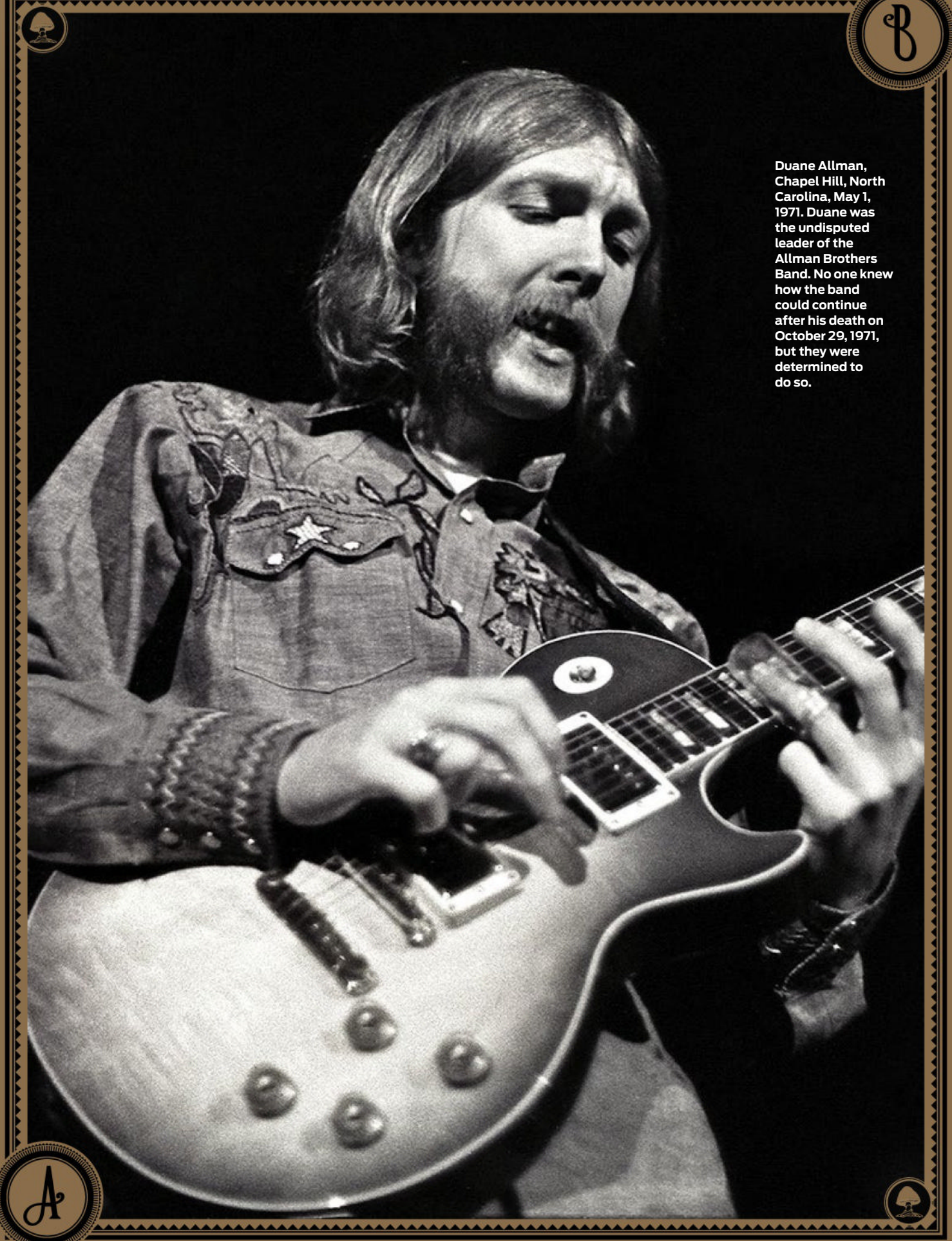
Gregg had no issues adding the song and broadening the band's range. "Hell, that song cooked," he said. He was glad the band recorded it and that Dickey didn't save it for a solo album, as he had suggested he might do.

Decades later, after years of conflict with Betts, Trucks would scoff at the song, alluding to Dickey's initial inclination to give it to a country artist, by saying the band thought they were "recording it as a demo for Merle Haggard or someone." But all indications are that the song was always intended to be an Allman Brothers release and that the group almost immediately knew that they had hit on something beautifully different.

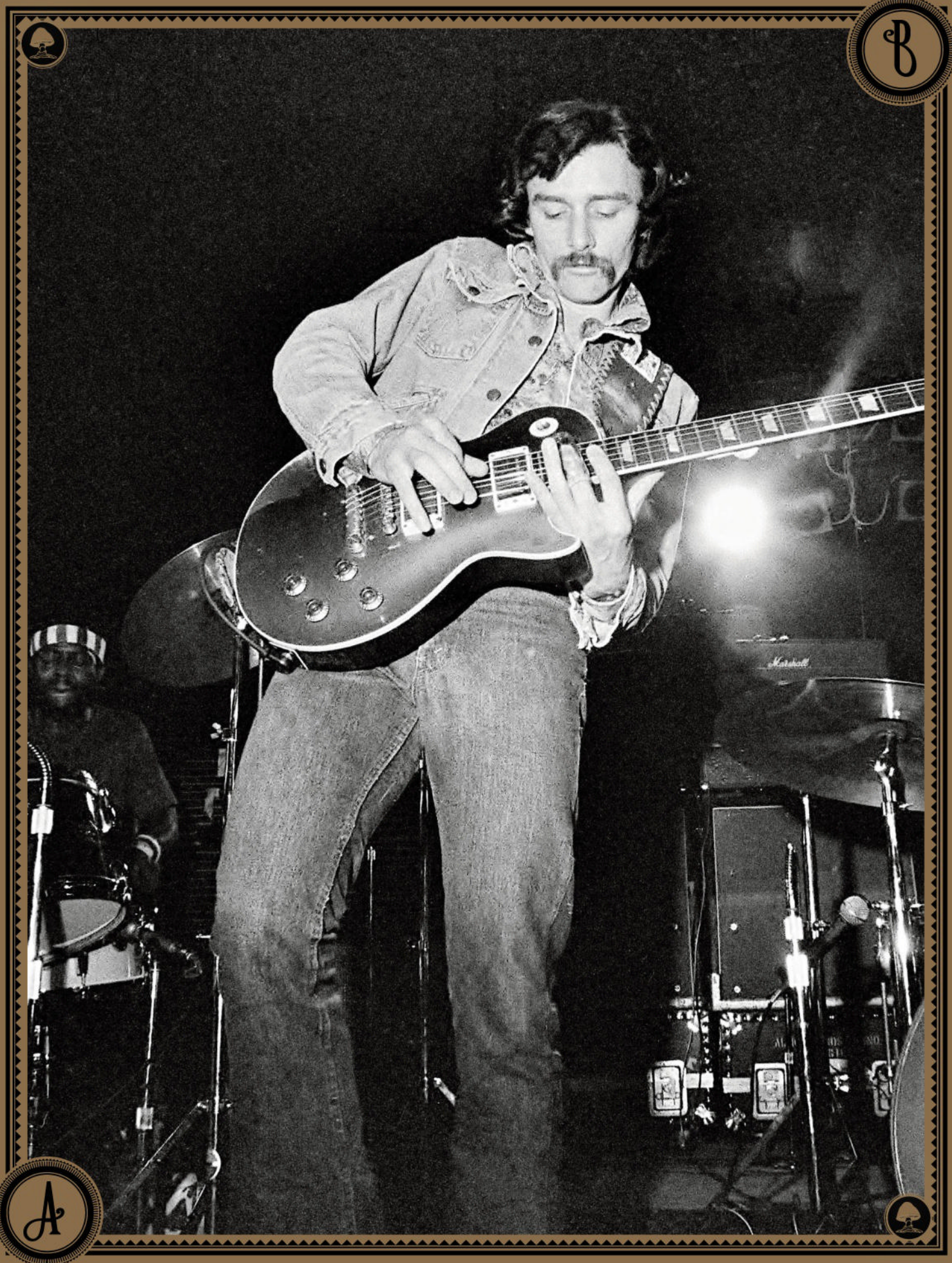
"I can't remember any discussion whatsoever about 'Ramblin' Man' being too country to include," said Leavell. "I certainly didn't feel that way. I thought it was a marker of how great of a band it was that you could do a song like 'Melissa' followed by 'Liz Reed' followed by 'One Way Out' — and now Dickey was pushing that out to country rock."

As much of a departure as it was, "Ramblin' Man" was not a new song. Betts had been working on it for a few years and had played an embryonic version for Duane. He can be heard working through the song on *The Gatlinburg Tapes*, a bootleg of the band jamming in April 1971 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, during *Eat a Peach* songwriting sessions. At that stage, the lyrics refer to a "ramblin' country man," but the chords, structure and concept are all in place. He finished writing the song about a year later in the kitchen of the Big House, the Allman Brothers' communal home at 2321 Vineville Avenue (which now houses the Allman Brothers Band

JOHN GELLMAN



Duane Allman, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, May 1, 1971. Duane was the undisputed leader of the Allman Brothers Band. No one knew how the band could continue after his death on October 29, 1971, but they were determined to do so.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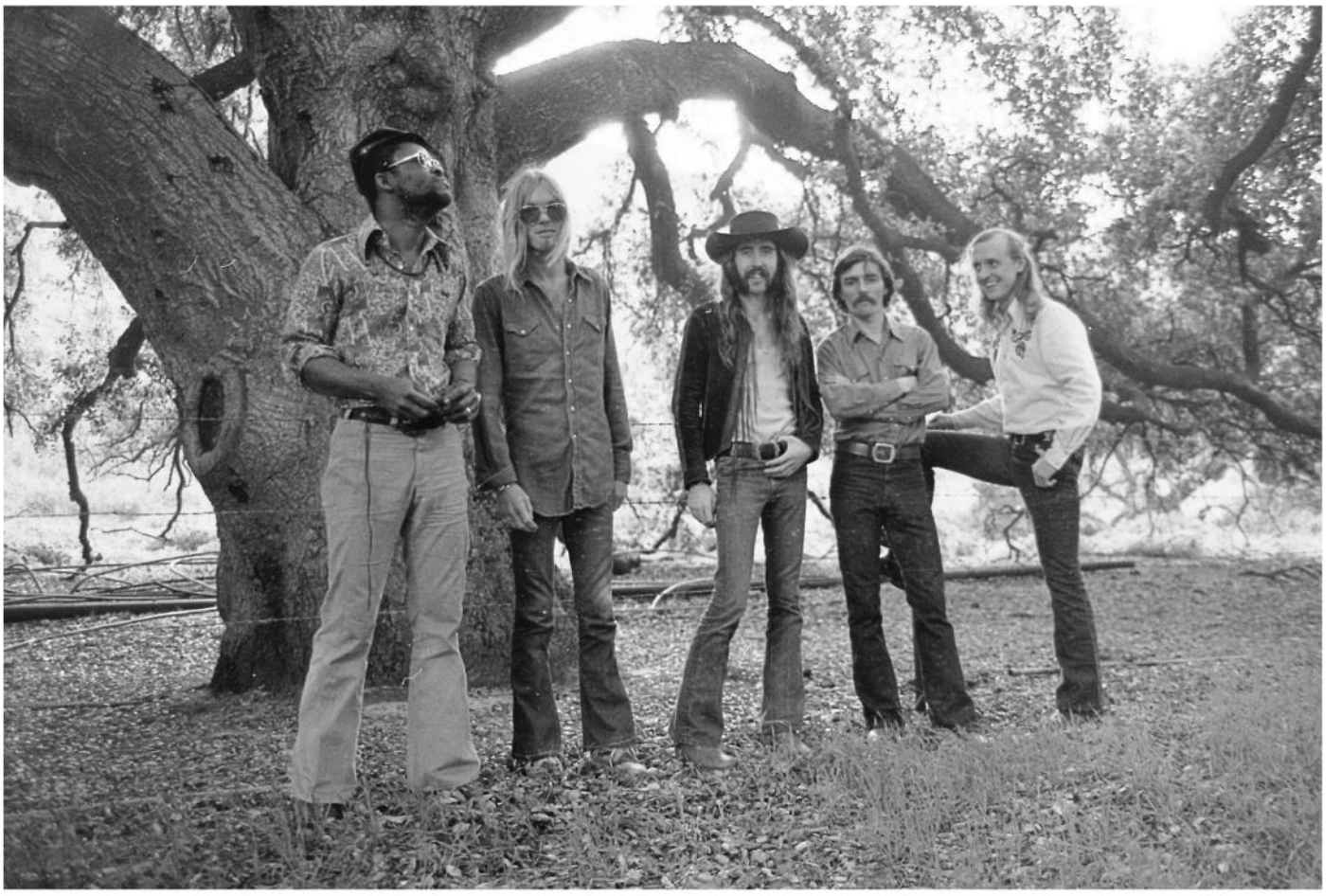


THIS PAGE: The five-man Allman Brothers Band, which performed from November 1971 through November 1972. (from left) Jaimoe, Gregg Allman, Berry Oakley, Dickey Betts and Butch Trucks. OPPOSITE: Dickey Betts, Hollywood, Florida, December 27, 1972. After Duane's death, Dickey stepped to the fore. His new responsibilities included playing slide onstage for the first time.

TWIGGS LYNDON/THE BIG HOUSE MUSEUM ARCHIVE (THIS PAGE); SIDNEY SMITH

Museum at the Big House). He had written "Blue Sky" in the living room.

Betts said that he carried the germ of the idea around in his head for several years. Before the Allman Brothers Band's formation, whenever he didn't have a place to sleep, he'd crash at the Sarasota apartment of his friend Kenny Hartwick, whom he described as "a friendly, hayseed cowboy kind of guy who built fences and liked to answer his own questions before you had a chance."

"One day," Betts told writer Marc Myers, "he asked me how I was doing with my music and said, 'I bet you're just tryin' to make a livin' and doin' the best you can.' I liked how that sounded and carried the line around in my head for about three years. Except for Kenny's line, the rest of the lyrics were autobiographical. When I was a kid, my dad was in construction and used to move the family back and forth between central Florida's east and west coasts. I'd go to one school for a year and another the next. I had two sets of friends and spent a lot of time in the back of a Greyhound bus. Ramblin' was in my blood."

BETTS WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT HE WAS THE ONLY GUY IN THE BAND WHO THOUGHT 'RAMBLIN' MAN' WAS TOO COUNTRY FOR THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND TO RECORD

On the final version, Les Dudek, who had been jamming with the group and thought he might be hired as Duane's replacement, plays sterling guitar harmonies with Betts, making a huge contribution to the song's success. The two men had worked out all the parts together, but then Betts decided to play them all himself, cutting multiple tracks.

Dudek was in the control room watching as Betts repeatedly came in and asked his opinion about various takes, before finally just saying, "Why don't you just come out and play?" Dudek said they played their harmonies live, with Oakley "staring a hole" through him. The sight of another guitarist playing with Betts seemed to hit Oakley hard. "That was very intense and heavy," Dudek said.

Brothers and Sisters producer Johnny Sandlin agreed that the entire band knew they had something special the moment Dudek and Betts finished their guitar parts. "We all knew it was really good," he said. "The guitar playing is just amazing."

ABOVE LEFT: The Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia sat in for much of the Allman Brothers Band's New Years Eve, 1973, show at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. It was broadcast via radio to an estimated 40 million listeners around the world. TOP RIGHT: Dickey Betts and Vassar Clements with the Great American Music Show, Winterland, San Francisco, December 14, 1974. BOTTOM RIGHT: Dickey hangs out at the Allman Brothers Band farm in Juliette, Georgia, with crew members (from left) Kim Payne, Buffalo Evans and Tuffy Phillips, spring 1973.

As Trucks said, "Les added a lot to 'Ramblin' Man.' He was a good, slick player and he and Dickey worked well together."

In addition to its obvious country influences, "Ramblin' Man" also shows Betts' love of jazz big bands. For the coda, he wanted an orchestral approach with a huge sound. The song's instrumental section had four guitars playing two different harmonies an octave apart and Betts's final overdub, which was a slide guitar line. "I added that long instrumental ending in the studio to try and make it sound more like an Allman Brothers song," said Betts.

THE SIGHT OF ANOTHER GUITARIST PLAYING WITH BETTS SEEMED TO HIT OAKLEY HARD. "THAT WAS VERY INTENSE AND HEAVY," DUDEK SAID

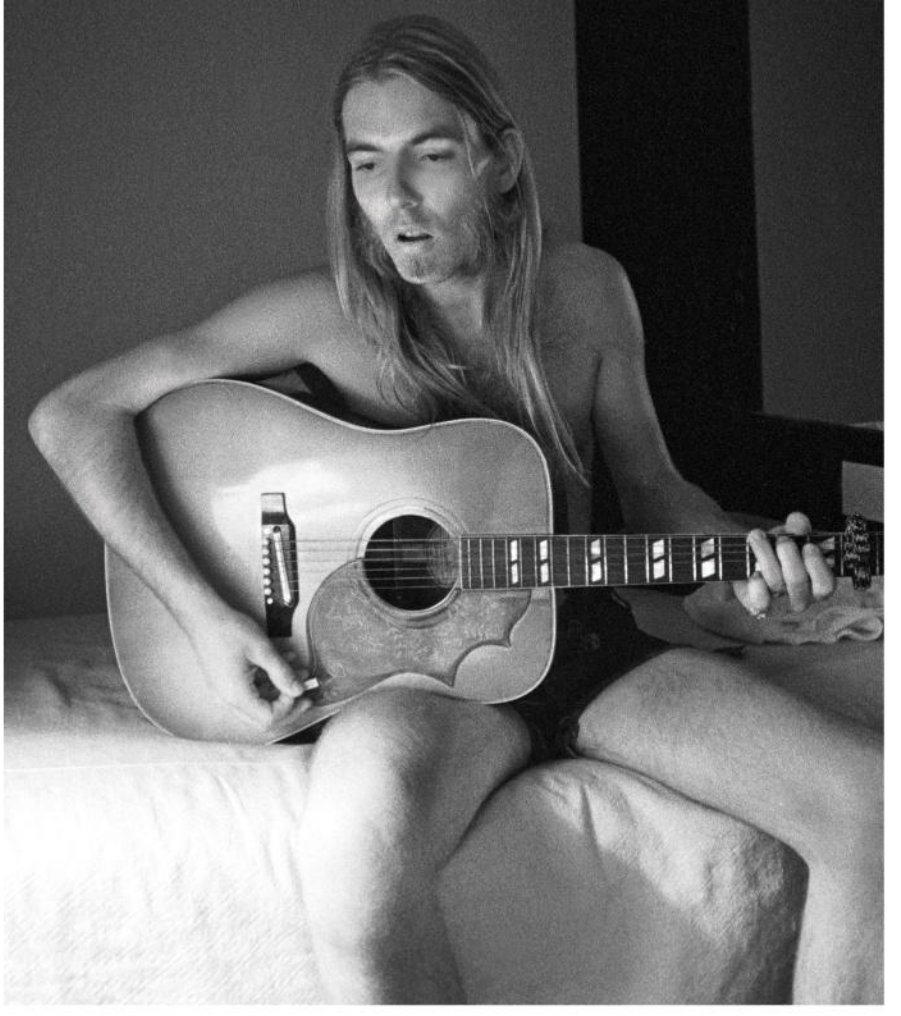
Knowing that the song needed a strong intro to "grab the listener," Betts turned toward the string band music he played with his family as a boy in Florida. He wrote a fiddle-style major pentatonic guitar line, which he then worked out as a call and response with Leavell. The pianist's "Ramblin' Man" contributions and his bouncy, swinging work that elevated the blues structure of "Wasted Words" illustrate the brilliant decision to add Leavell instead of replacing Duane with another guitarist. His role at the heart of the music would only grow over the rest of the album sessions.

"It was just a happy accident — certainly nothing that was by design," said Leavell. "Nobody said, 'Let's get a piano guy!' It happened by osmosis, more or less out of the blue from an unexpected direction, which is maybe why it wound up working as it did."

EVEN AS THE recording sessions were going well, the band remained concerned about Oakley and his drinking. Sandlin said that many of the initial sessions had to wrap up early because Berry became too inebriated to continue. The producer said that he played bass as the band learned "Ramblin' Man" because Oakley hadn't shown up and that the band even questioned whether Oakley "would be able to be on the album at all."

They were all aware without openly discussing it that the first anniversary of Duane's death was approaching. Heaviness hung in the air, particularly around Oakley. Still, his playing on "Wasted Words"

SIDNEY SMITH (JERRY AND DICKEY, AT THE FARM); ALVAN MEYEROWITZ/RETRO PHOTO ARCHIVE (BETTS)



NEAL PRESTON

Gregg in his Phoenix, Arizona, hotel room, September 23, 1973, while being interviewed by Cameron Crowe, who called him "a generational rock star — a towering, suspicious, incredibly vivid guy."

and "Ramblin' Man" was excellent, and there was hope that he was coming out of the year-long depression. Oakley was particularly buoyed by Leavell's arrival. "He started playing his ass off again after Chuck joined," said Jaimoe. "It was like he saw the light and the old Berry was back."

An enthused Oakley went out of his way to make the new member feel at home. "Berry and Jaimoe were the first ones to really welcome me into the band," said Leavell. "Berry would put his arm around me, check on me, make sure I felt comfortable. He was very keyed into the dynamics of being the new guy and smoothing over that transition. He was also just the coolest guy."

Harmonica player and frequent ABB musician Thom Doucette was at the first rehearsal the band had after Duane's death. There to support his friends and maybe to be a part of the new band, he sensed heavy tension between Gregg and Dickey over who was in charge the moment he walked into the room. It was a feeling that Oakley shared, Doucette said.

"Berry and I looked at each other and understood what the other was thinking," said Doucette. "What was is now over. It's gone. It was just too weird. With Duane around, the Dickey/Gregg rivalry was never an issue, but without him, it was inevitable."

WITH TWO SONGS in the can, the group played live for the first time after a nearly two-month hiatus on November 2, flying to New York for a short set at Hofstra University, as part of Don Kirshner's *In Concert* TV show, which also featured Blood, Sweat & Tears, Chuck Berry and Poco. They debuted not only "Ramblin' Man" but also their new lineup, back to six pieces and featuring Leavell. The pianist was thrilled to finally be onstage as a member of the Allman Brothers Band and was particularly keyed into Oakley's distinctive playing.

"Berry was the most unique bass player I had ever played with," said Leavell. "Rather than holding down the bottom end, he was very adventurous, constantly listening to the other instruments and popping out with great melodies. He was there to support anyone's improvisation. I could feel Berry following me when I started a melody and it was just fantastic. He also had the most powerful rig and the coolest bass sound; you could feel it inside."

While the characteristics of Oakley's playing were apparent in the studio, Leavell said that they were especially evident onstage, where he drove the band. Leavell would only perform in concert with Oakley that one time. Just nine days later, on November 11, 1972 — one year and 13 days after Duane's crash — Oakley, too, was killed in a motorcycle accident when he sideswiped a city bus, less than a quarter mile away from Duane's crash site. Like Duane, Oakley was just 24 years old when he died.

Despite everyone's acute knowledge of and concerns over Berry's struggles, his death jolted the band. As they pondered their next moves, they immediately canceled two shows with the Grateful Dead, which would have represented their first official billing together since February 1970.

"We had finally gotten some good positive energy going again," said Trucks. "The dynamic had turned with Chuck. Dickey was writing and singing his ass off. Everything felt like it was moving in the right direction for the first time since Duane's death and then, bam, we were right back in it again."

The band once again stood at a seemingly unthinkable crossroads. Not only had they lost two of the original six band members in one year, but

THIS PAGE: From 1973 through 1975, the Allman Brothers Band rarely took group photos. Macon photographer Gilbert Lee spent two weeks camped out at their practice space trying to get one. Dickey had a black eye, Gregg had a cast on his hand, it was over 100 degrees, and no one really wanted to pose. This photo is unusual because Allman and Betts were both present. One of them was usually missing. OPPOSITE: Dickey and Vassar Clements perform on tour for Dickey's 1974 solo album, *Highway Call*.

GILBERT LEE (THIS PAGE); SIDNEY SMITH (OPPOSITE)

they were essentially missing their corporate board. Duane and Berry were the group's undisputed leaders, a general and his colonel, the two everyone else looked to for direction. "Duane had the vision and Berry got it done," said Doucette. "They were so close."

"Duane was very outspoken and Berry was a lot easier to deal with," Jaimoe said. "You couldn't talk Duane out of anything once he made his mind up. He was just so intense. Berry was more the voice of reason, a bit more diplomatic. In fact, Berry Oakley was the brains behind the Allman Brothers Band. He knew enough about how to do business, and he knew how to deal with people. Duane didn't have Berry's patience."

Oakley's loss left everyone in and around the band reeling. Gregg was in New York, on his way to Jamaica with his new girlfriend, Janice Blair, when he got word of Oakley's death from Carolyn Brown, Walden's secretary. "She called me and said, 'Honey, if I was you, I'd go right on to Jamaica. You don't need this, not again,'" Gregg recalled. He did not attend Oakley's funeral, held at Macon's St. Joseph Catholic Church on November 15. The remaining band played a desultory set of music, with Joe Dan Petty on bass.

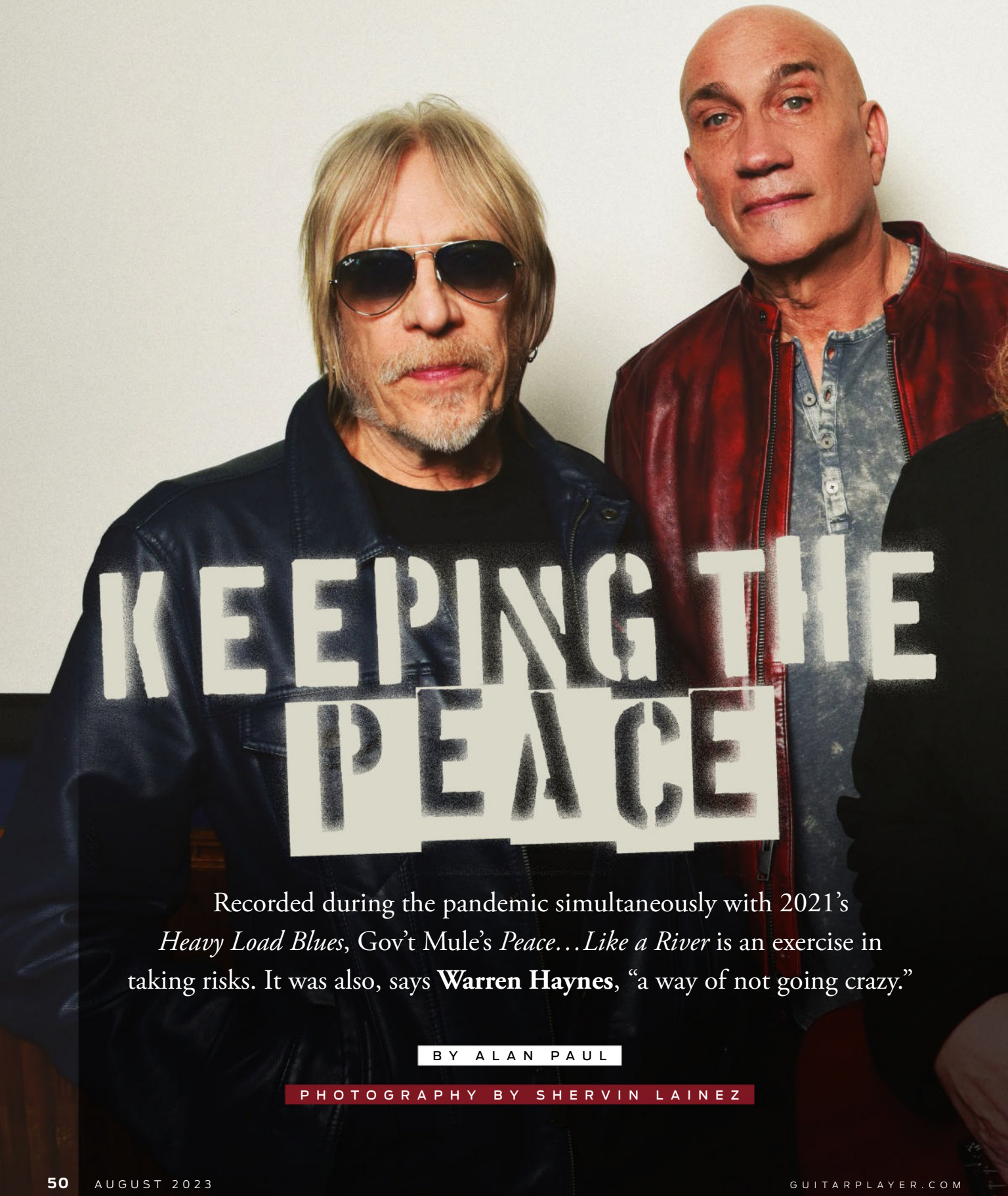
"EVERYTHING FELT LIKE IT WAS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE DUANE'S DEATH AND THEN, BAM, WE WERE RIGHT BACK IN IT AGAIN"

"Berry's death fucked me up the way Duane's death did to him," said Jaimoe. "Berry was my man. I got high on smack just to go to his funeral. Later that night, I nodded out in my car."

Sleeping at a red light in downtown Macon, Jaimoe was rescued by a friend who happened to see him, ran to the car, and drove Jaimoe home to the Big House. It was a reflection of how deeply impacted the entire group was by this second tragic death.

"It was just like when Duane died," said Sandlin. "Suddenly you're just going through the motions of daily life. I really didn't know how much more any of us could deal with. At that time, at our age, we didn't know how to grieve properly. Most of us had not lost many people yet."

"It was so hard to get into anything after that second loss," Gregg said. "I even caught myself thinking that it's narrowing down, that maybe I'm next."



KEEPING THE PEACE

Recorded during the pandemic simultaneously with 2021's *Heavy Load Blues*, Gov't Mule's *Peace…Like a River* is an exercise in taking risks. It was also, says **Warren Haynes**, "a way of not going crazy."

BY ALAN PAUL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERVIN LAINEZ

DEEP IN THE midst of the pandemic, with touring halted and no clear indication of when the road may open up again, Gov't Mule guitarist Warren Haynes paced his New York state home like a caged tiger. He had to make some music.

Haynes was tempted when his wife and manager, Stefani Scamardo, suggested it may be a good time to record that blues album he had been kicking around for years. But he had also written stacks of new songs he was anxious to record after channeling all his restless musical energy into songwriting during the pandemic.

"I loved the idea of doing a blues album, but I was dying to record all these new Mule songs," Haynes says. "So I proposed doing two records at the same time, and everybody was into the idea. Which meant finding a place where we could set up in two different rooms with two completely different sets of equipment and make two records that sounded completely different from each other.

"Under normal circumstances, that would be a lot to take on," he continues. "But during lockdown, it was the perfect solution. We needed to be creative, play music and get in the studio, because we couldn't tour. It was a great way of expending our energy and being creative. And it was a way of not going crazy."

Working on both albums with co-producer John Paterno (Elvis Costello, Bonnie Raitt, Los Lobos), the Mule set up in two adjoining rooms at the Power Station New England, with no shared gear or instruments, keeping the two concurrent projects with their own unique identity and character. *Heavy Load Blues* was released in November 2021 and nominated for a Grammy for Best Traditional Blues album. Less than two years later, this past June, the Mule released its companion album, *Peace…Like a River*. Haynes says he considers this, the band's 12th studio album, to be the true follow-up to 2017's *Revolution Come… Revolution Go*.

It's an ambitious album that hearkens back to *Dose*, Gov't Mule's 1998 second release, in its wide range and musical risk taking. Haynes, bassist Allen Woody and drummer Matt Abts formed the Mule in 1994, when Haynes and Woody were playing together in the Allman Brothers Band and longing for an outlet to stretch the boundaries of music and

indulge in the power-trio music they loved from bands like Cream, Mountain and the Jimi Hendrix Experience. After Woody's 2000 death, the band expanded to a quartet with the addition of keyboardist/second guitarist Danny Louis. Jorgen Carlsson has been the band's bassist since 2008.

On *Peace…Like a River*, the band is augmented by guests Billy F. Gibbons, Billy Bob Thornton, Celisse, Ruthie Foster and Ivan Neville. With its release, the ambitious, simultaneously recorded two-album song cycle is complete, and Haynes is excited to be back on the road and playing it all. Later in the summer, the group will appear with Willie Nelson on some of the Americana legend's Outlaw Music Festival dates, and tour with Dark Side of the Mule, an expansive exploration of the music of Pink Floyd.

Describe the process of recording two very different albums at the same time.

We set up in two adjacent rooms with completely different gear. In the small room, we set up all these little vintage amps: a Supro Tweed Champ, a Gibson Vanguard, a Gibson Skylark, an Ampeg B-15 for Jorgen, a piano and organ, and Matt had this tiny little vintage Ludwig kit. It was a small room with low ceilings, and we set up really close to each other. I sang through a monitor; we used no headphones. Basically, every instrument was bleeding into every microphone, which forced us to keep everything we played: no punching in to fix things. We were stuck with the live performances, which is exactly what you want for a blues record.

Meanwhile, we set up all our normal Gov't Mule gear in an adjacent big room with a high ceiling. There was virtually no gear overlap between the two, except my '59 Les Paul, which I used on a few songs of each. Otherwise, the guitars, amps, keyboards and drums were all completely different. We would go in around noon and work on *Peace... Like a River* songs till about 9 p.m., take a break, have a bite to eat and go next door to the little blues room and play blues for the rest of the night. That was every day for a few weeks.

Did playing blues all night impact you when you went back in the morning, or were you bifurcating your brain — get one thing out of the way and then go focus on something totally different?

It was a way of shutting off our brains after a long day of working on these songs with more complex arrangements and a lot of moving parts, where we're constantly rethinking about changing this or that section. At the end of the day, we'd just play blues and stop thinking, and it was the perfect remedy. I'm not sure I would recommend it under normal circumstances, but under these circumstances, it was perfect.

I LOVED THE IDEA OF DOING A BLUES ALBUM BUT I WAS DYING TO RECORD ALL THESE NEW MULE SONGS

So you played the Les Paul some on both albums. What else did you use on *Peace...Like a River*?

I played my signature model Les Paul the most, as well as my blond Custom Shop 335, and played a bunch of non-reverse Firebirds, some with three P-90s and some with two Burstbuckers. The '59 Les Paul is on three songs, I think, and I played the Grace Potter Flying V on "Blue Blue Wind." I played a Tele on one song and an Epiphone 12-string on a couple of songs. I also played a D'Angelico Excel on "The River Only Flows One Way," on the jazzy stuff. Most of the acoustic stuff was on Danny's 1970 Gibson Hummingbird, and I used a J-200 on one song. I also borrowed Allen Woody's '70s Gibson 12-string. That sounded beautiful! I used a lot of different amps — some old Marshalls and my Homestead [*HS100*] and Diaz [*CD100*], always mixed in with my little Alessandro amp that I use in recording. I always like to blend the big amps and the small amp together.

It's great that you got a Woody instrument on there!

His daughter, Savannah, has his collection. On "Snatch It Back and Hold It," from *Heavy Load Blues*, I played his three-pickup SG that's exactly like the

Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks (left) onstage with the Brothers Band at a 50th anniversary concert of the Allman Brothers music at Madison Square Garden, March 10, 2020.

RON POWNALL/GETTY IMAGES

STEPHEN OLKER/GETTY IMAGES FOR SXSW

one I had when I was a teenager. And Jorgen borrowed an EBO and a purple Alembic, which is what he's playing for that Chris Squire–style bass stuff on "Same As It Ever Was." I think we borrowed three basses and three guitars and wound up using all of them. The 12-string acoustic is on "Your Only Friend" a little bit and maybe on "Under the Tent."

***Peace...Like a River* opens with "Same As It Ever Was," which is a really cool, complex composition, starting with gentle fingerpicked acoustic and then opening up into a prog feel. It feels like a statement about the album. Is that why you decided to open with it?**

Sort of. I think a lot more about sequencing than most people probably do these days. I was brought up on the concept of an album having an overall personality and people listening to it in sequence. A lot of the world doesn't listen that way anymore, but I do, and I think that a lot of Mule fans do as well. This is our 12th studio record, so obviously, there are going to be a lot of things about it that are different from previous records. It was Jorgen's idea to open with "Same As It Ever Was," and I thought that was really cool. As you said, it starts really mellow and acoustic, and as soon as the bass comes in, with this Chris Squire–style thing, it takes your head off and you go, "Oh, I get it!" It's very different from most of the stuff we've done in the past and I like that. There's some Yes influence, some Zeppelin, and one reviewer mentioned Procol Harum, which I had never thought of. But I really like them!

The other song that has a similar approach is "Made My Peace," though that's more of a Beatles-like feel. Do you see a connection between those two songs?

Yeah, especially in the way that they're very different from what we've done in the past. "Made My Peace" has the most Beatles and John Lennon

ABOVE: Haynes played a range of Gibson models on the new record, including his signature Les Paul, Custom Shop ES-335 and non-reverse Firebirds.
LEFT: Gov't Mule performs at the opening night SummerStage Benefit concert at New York City's Central Park, May 17, 2017.

influence that we've ever committed to in the studio. But it also has all these different moving parts and an ambitious arrangement that goes all over the place. There are several songs that have seven or eight different sections, which is kind of not the norm in most of today's music and is something that I fell in love with years ago.

That's why the album reminds me of *Dose*. Does that make sense to you?

Yeah, it does. It's kind of an odd choice, but the first four songs on *Peace...Like a River* have that ambitious arrangement concept where there's all these moving parts and a bunch of different sections. And rather than separate the ones that had the most of that, we put them all back to back to give you a sense of the personality of the record.

I'm curious about the composition of the ambitious songs. For instance, "Your Only Friend" has this great guitar riff that would often be the heart of the song, but it's just one component. Did you write that as a more standard song and then add everything else? Or did you go into it thinking, for instance, a string section would be perfect?

"Made My Peace" and "Your Only Friend" have strings, which we've never used before, and in both cases I had not thought of it until we were listening back. It just made sense. But the compositions themselves were largely written as cohesive songs.

In Mule's early days, you were dedicated to doing everything live in the studio. Do you still?

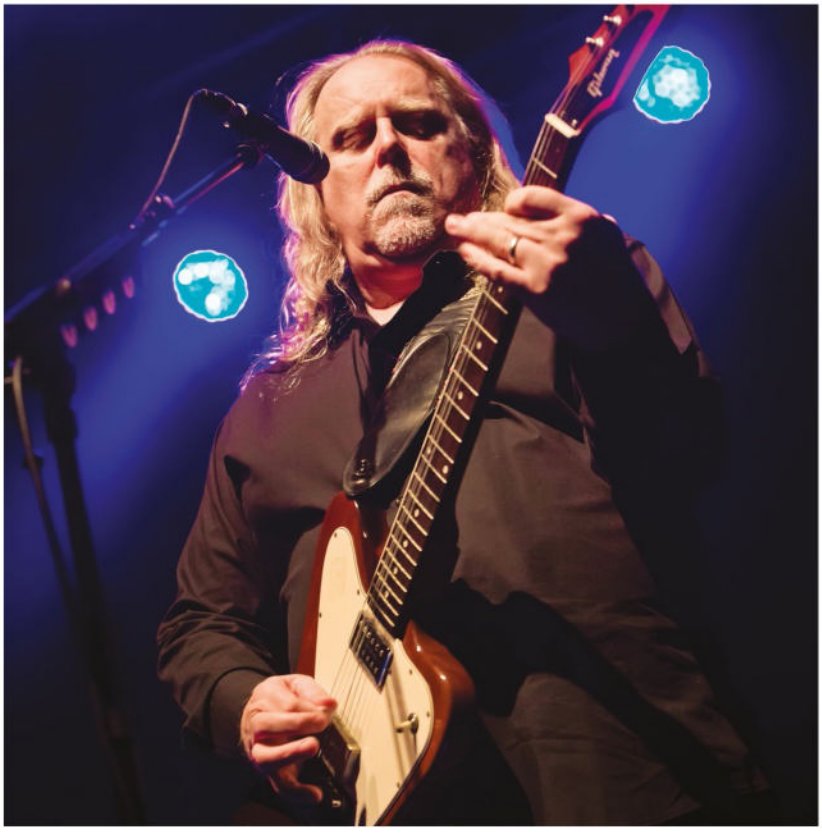
It's still predominantly live. I think I overdubbed three solos here and there — all short. All the jamming and long solos are what I played live on the track, and the only overdubs that we do are in addition. We don't go back and replace this or replace that. If we feel like we could add to it, we do. Even the effects are usually me stepping on a pedal, like I do onstage. It's all just kind of in the moment.

IT WAS A GREAT WAY OF EXPENDING OUR ENERGY BEING CREATIVE AND NOT GOING CRAZY

Let's talk about the guests on the album. Did you write the songs with these people in mind? Some of them fit it so well.

It was usually after the fact. Like, we would start working them up at rehearsal, and it would occur to me, "Oh, this would be cool with so and so." "Shake Our Way Out" obviously has some ZZ Top influence, so getting Billy[*Gibbons*] to sing on it was obvious. With "Dreaming Out Loud," I wanted the verses to be like Sly and the Family Stone, with different people singing different lines, and then singing together in the choruses. And I thought about Ivan and Ruthie [*Foster*], 'cause they both sang on my solo record *Man in Motion*, and I love the way our voices work together. With "The River Only Flows One Way," I had that kind of spoken-word, beat poetry idea for the verses, and I didn't think it should be my voice. Billy Bob [*Thornton*] just has one of those voices — that spooky, demented narration that draws you in — that I thought was perfect for it. Celisse, the other guest, I've only discovered in the last couple of years. I watched some videos of her and was really knocked out. She only sang on "Just Across the River" — I thought it would be cool to have a female voice counter my voice to give it a gospel back-and-forth thing. I'd love to do some stuff with her playing, because she plays her ass off.

After a spring Mule tour, you're hitting the road this summer with Dark Side of the Mule, playing Pink Floyd. What spurred that?



Haynes performs in concert at the Huxleys, in Berlin, November 3, 2017.

FRANK HOENSCH/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

MICKEY BERNAL/GETTY IMAGES

I love doing it, but we all felt like it had run its course and we didn't think we would do any more of it. Then we were reminded that this is the 50th anniversary of *Dark Side of the Moon*. If you were ever going to do it again, now would be the time. Dark Side of the Mule is not just us playing that album; it's really us playing whatever Pink Floyd songs we want to do, with this crazy production and laser show and an enhanced band that includes Ron Holloway on saxophone, T Bone Anderson on guitar, keys and vocals, and Machan Taylor, Mini Carlsson and Sophia Ramos singing background. It's just this cool interpretation of the music. We're not trying to do exactly what Pink Floyd did, but we also don't want it to be too far from what people expect when they think of those iconic songs. It's fun trying to summon up the spirit of it while being yourself.

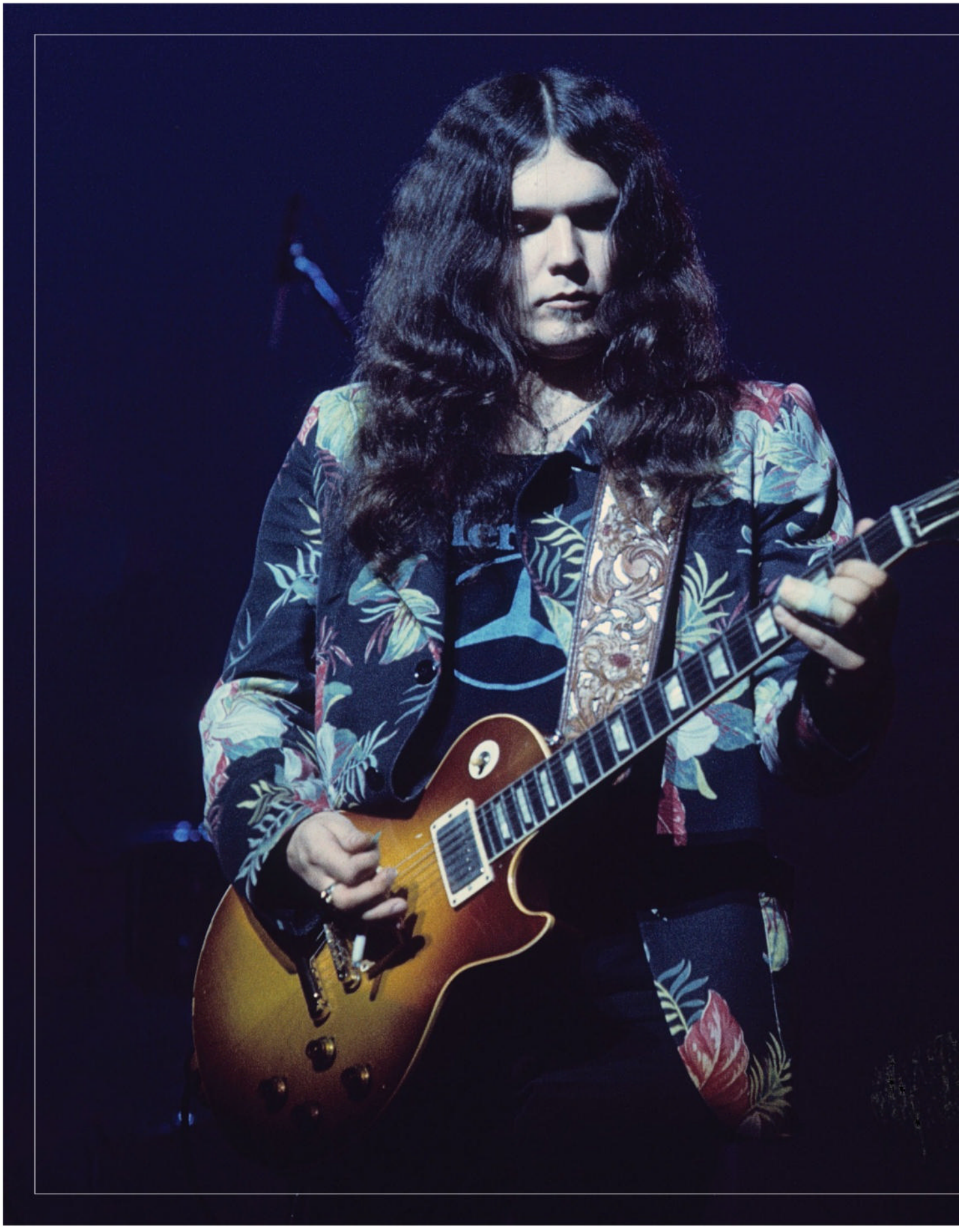
That's a line you're used to navigating after all your years in the Allman Brothers Band.

Yes, there are things that you have to play precisely or a song sounds wrong, but then you do your own thing. And I'm playing a Strat, which I hardly ever do. It's fun, and it's the only way to honor the spirit of David Gilmour.

It's great to see Mule with a full touring schedule after you had to cancel shows. [*The band postponed its spring 2022 tour after Haynes fractured his shoulder blade, and canceled its New Year's Eve concerts due to a medical emergency.*] How are you feeling?

I'm feeling very good, thanks — and very ready to get back on the road. I've never had to cancel shows until recently and it was really, really frustrating. Between being sick and breaking my shoulder blade, and the whole COVID lockdown — that was a lot of not touring. I'm psyched to get back.

ABOVE: Gov't Mule. (from left) Matt Abts, Danny Louis, Haynes and Jorgen Carlsson. LEFT: Haynes performs at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium, May 12, 2023.



THE LAST REBEL

When **Gary Rossington** died, Lynyrd Skynyrd lost its last link to the band's hell-raising origins. In this tribute, Johnny Van Zant and Rickey Medlocke recall his music, legacy and southern spirit.

BY GARY GRAFF

BACK IN 1993, Johnny Van Zant wrote "The Last Rebel," a song for Lynyrd Skynyrd's album of the same name. Its lyrics paint a picture of a defiant but tired soldier left on a battlefield: "You can see the shadow of his past written in his eyes... His friends are all gone." Coming from a band that sang about "Sweet Home Alabama" — and did so with a decidedly southern accent — the impetus seemed obvious. But in fact, "the boy with his old guitar" who's "got a dream that will never die" was actually someone closer to home for the singer.

"That one was about Gary," Van Zant explains. Gary Rossington, Skynyrd's mainstay guitarist, was the only founding member to be part of the group's entire active career, until his death on March 5 at the age of 71 after long-term health issues, primarily heart-related, took their toll.

"I just started thinking about Gary being the last of the three who started this band," continues Van Zant, who's been Skynyrd's frontman since 1987, filling the shoes of his brother Ronnie, who was killed in the October 1977 plane crash that put the band in dry dock for a decade. "We made it into him being a soldier. That was my thought with that song: He was one of the soldiers, and he fought through to the end. He was the last rebel, man. Forever."

There's no question that, at the time of his death, Rossington was the heart and soul of Lynyrd Skynyrd, even if his health prevented him from joining the band onstage regularly during the past couple of years. He began playing with Ronnie Van

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Zant and late Skynyrd guitarist Allen Collins during the mid '60s and was the force behind Skynyrd's resumption back in 1987. He saw the group through its 14 studio albums and numerous live sets and compilations. Rossington was writing up until the end, too, penning material for a proposed farewell album that, so far, is represented only by the aptly named 2020 single "Last of the Street Survivors."

"I didn't mean to be the last original, or the last man standing, but here it is," Rossington said back in 2018, when Skynyrd announced the album and a planned two-year farewell tour that was scuttled by the COVID-19 pandemic. But that role resonated with Rossington, and he felt a purpose in playing the music he'd created with Van Zant, Collins and other deceased bandmates such as bassist-turned-third-guitarist Ed King, drummer Bob Burns, bassists Larry Junstrom and Leon Wilkeson, keyboardist Billy Powell and guitarist Steve Gaines and his sister/backup vocalist Cassie Gaines, who were also killed in the 1977 plane crash.

(from left) Ronnie Van Zant, Gary Rossington and Allen Collins work with producer Al Kooper on *(Pronounced 'Leh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd)* as engineer Bob "Tub" Langford looks on, at Studio One, Doraville-Atlanta, Georgia, May 6, 1973.

TOM HILL/GETTY IMAGES

"It's heavy," Rossington acknowledged at the time. "I'm just happy to still be doing it, going out and spreading the word about Skynyrd and all the great songs, and talking about Ronnie and Allen and Steve Gaines, and Leon and Billy and all the guys we lost, just keeping them alive. And every time we play, I feel the other guys' spirits with us, and they're helping and making sure everything is all right. So I feel like there's a whole bunch of people up on that stage."

Through the group's many incarnations, Rossington's presence was the essential tie to the band's legacy, a black-clad, hat-wearing, Les Paul–slinging embodiment of credibility, speaking softly but hitting hard with his guitar, whether it was the fire of "Free Bird" or the aching gentleness of "Simple Man."

"Gary Rossington played a very integral part in the creation of all of that," notes Rickey Medlocke, the Blackfoot founder who played drums in Skynyrd circa 1970–'71 and rejoined as a guitarist in 1996. "His presence and his talent was a very important part of the music and that band. If you go back into the early years when I first joined the band, just watching those two guys, Gary and Allen, work on those parts and the dual leads that would become great songs later on... It was Gary's sound and the tone and his connection with Ronnie in writing the songs that brought it all together."

Adds Van Zant, "I always thought Gary played like he acted. He was a shy guy, kinda quiet, and he had that mysterious quality, playing guitar with the long, drawn-out sustain. And the riffs he came up with and his leads were always like his personality. You could really hear the guy in his playing."

Born in Jacksonville, Rossington found his first passion in baseball, playing sandlot and in organized leagues, with aspirations to one day join the New York Yankees. He actually met Van Zant and Burns through the sport, playing on different teams. They became interested in music as teens, however, and wound up playing the Rolling Stones' then-current single "Time Is on My Side" in the carport of Burns' home, the same day Van Zant had struck the drummer with a pitched ball. "The music was changing us," recalled Rossington, who was raised by his single mother in West Jacksonville after his father died, shortly after Gary was born. She fronted the eight dollars for his first guitar, a Sears and Roebuck Silvertone, and he later named a prized 1959 Les Paul "Berniece" after her. (It now resides in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland.) "We still loved baseball, but we were connecting with the Stones, the Beatles — what we were hearing on the radio."

Lynyrd Skynyrd in June 1974. (from left) Collins, Billy Powell, Van Zant, Rossington, Artimus Pyle, Ed King and Leon Wilkeson.

JIM MCCRARY/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

And, he acknowledged with a laugh, "The girls were starting to like the rock stars better than the jocks. So there was that."

With bassist Larry Junstrom, they formed the Noble Five, which became the One Percent before taking the name Lynyrd Skynyrd from Leonard Skinner, the strict gym teacher at Robert E. Lee High School who suspended Rossington for having long hair. Van Zant's father, Lacy, cajoled administrators into letting the maverick aspiring rock star back into school, although Rossington ultimately dropped out to concentrate on the band.

Jacksonville had a vibrant music scene, recalls Medlocke, who got his music jones from his grandfather Paul "Shorty" Medlocke, a touring bluegrass musician. There was a preponderance of teen clubs — the Woodstock Youth Center, the Good Shepherd, the Riverside Women's Club — as well as the Comic Book, which was all ages until midnight, when the kids were sent home and the liquor came out. "Ronnie's mom and dad would come out to my granddad's dances, so that's how I knew Ronnie — and then got to know Gary," Medlocke says. "We all played the teen centers, and we intermingled with each other. You were able to trade conversations back and forth of who you were into, who you liked at the time, what record was out that was best. With Gary, it was all about the music. Nothing else. That's how we all bonded."

> **"IT WAS GARY'S SOUND AND THE TONE AND HIS CONNECTION WITH RONNIE IN WRITING THE SONGS THAT BROUGHT IT ALL TOGETHER"**
>
> — RICKEY MEDLOCKE

Exerting a particular influence on Rossington at the time was Paul Kossoff, then playing lead guitar with Free. "We saw them live once," he remembered. "We saw them play right up close, and they just blew our minds. That's when we really got serious about playing and working hard. We worked every day and night after that, so they helped us make it and were such an influence on us. And I just love 'em to death."

Medlocke, meanwhile, had a front-row seat to that impact. "Paul Kossoff was so huge for Gary," he says. "He had a 1959 Gibson Les Paul. Well, Gary ended up getting a '59 Les Paul. And then out of that Gary created his own thing that was a very integral part of Lynyrd Skynyrd: the sound."

There were other sources of course, including the then-burgeoning Allman Brothers Band that was planting a flag for the South in rock and roll in a different manner than the likes of Little Richard and Sun Records' Tennessee gang — Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins.

But Rossington claimed that the idea of southern rock as a genre was not intentional on Skynyrd's part. "We were just rock and roll, y'know?" he explained. "We were labeled southern rock through writers. 'Cause all of a sudden a lot of southern bands were doing great — us and the Allmans, Charlie [*Daniels*], Wet Willie, Marshall Tucker, the Atlanta Rhythm Section — it was a whole new scene taking off down here, and they needed to give it a name. I was proud to be from the South. We always were. But we didn't think about the South as part of the sound. It's just who we were."

The southern heritage did come with baggage, though. "We showed the Confederate flag when we started out," Rossington acknowledges. "We didn't mean any kind of harm or hard feelings or anything racist. It was just 'cause we were a southern band, and we were just really proud of that, and [*the flag*] was more a part of the culture down there. But when it started to upset people we understood, so we stopped using it."

Skynyrd were one of Jacksonville's most popular bands by 1970, when they headed to Quinvy Studios in Sheffield, Alabama, to record early demos, including a first crack at "Free Bird." Later, the group checked into the famed Muscle Shoals Sound Studios with Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section guitarist Jimmy Johnson and bassist David Hood, the studio's co-founders, who Medlocke says "really showed us what the difference between recording and playing live was all about. We really cut our teeth in there." The band members were also still finding their way as songwriters. "We used a lot of D - C - G progressions," Rossington told *Guitar World* in 1993. "It's all about what you do with them."

Van Zant, Rossington and Collins take center stage at John F. Kennedy Stadium, Philadelphia, June 11, 1977.

TOP: Lynyrd Skynyrd performs at the Omni Coliseum, Atlanta, July 5, 1975. BELOW: The tandem of Collins, and Rossington strut their stuff, October 1976.

It was at Muscle Shoals, in fact, that "Free Bird" began to take flight. After some experimentation Collins found the chords for "the slow part," as Rossington calls the song's first half, which is how Skynyrd began to play the song in the clubs. The lyrics were inspired by a conversation Collins had with his wife, which was ultimately fleshed out by Ronnie Van Zant. "Ronnie could never quite come up with a melody, but Allen kept playing it over and over again, and it finally clicked with Ronnie," remembers Medlocke, who was playing drums during the sessions. "It was a magic moment." Except, he explains, "It was actually a love song and they played it like that, and it never quite went over." Van Zant came up with the idea to extend the end, according to Rossington, who created the chord pattern that he and Collins began soloing over. It was the frontman who urged them to keep stretching it out.

"To us it was just a love song, and it had a lot of great guitar playing at the end for me and Allen to do," Rossington said years later. "But it was really just a simple love song he wrote. We didn't know it would do anything like it did, but it was mind-blowing. And it just hit."

In 1972, the group's onstage ferocity hooked Al Kooper, a music impresario from New York City who had played with Bob Dylan — most famously as the organist on "Like a Rolling Stone" — and founded the Blues Project and Blood, Sweat & Tears, among other groups. "I heard them play for six nights in a row at a bar [*Funochio's in Atlanta*]," recalled Kooper, who at the time had launched a label called Sounds of the South. "And by the sixth night, I offered to sign them." Skynyrd was aware of Kooper's reputation and seduced by his stories. "We were Hendrix freaks, and [*Kooper*] had played with him [*on* Electric Ladyland], so we wanted to hear everything we could about him," Rossington said. Despite a lot of head-banging between their sensibilities, Kooper produced Skynyrd's first three albums, all of which hit the Top 30 on the *Billboard* 200 and ultimately went Platinum, or better.

"He had a lot of ideas, but we just kinda had a band and we had all the songs written," Rossington said. "We argued a lot, because he wanted to put in different things and different techniques or keyboard parts. We locked horns with him a few times. Ronnie and him would argue about things, and me and Allen Collins would write our own leads and have it down pat what we thought was best for the song, and [*Kooper*] would say, 'No, go out and play it different' or 'Do this.'

"I remember on 'Sweet Home Alabama,' Ed King did the solo and the song is in D, but Ed played it in the key of G, which worked but sounds a little different. And him and Al Kooper fought for days about that. [*Kooper*] hated that solo and Ed liked it, and they fought over that for a while. But it all worked out, and turns out it's a great solo."

"ED KING DID THE 'SWEET HOME ALABAMA' SOLO. HIM AND AL KOOPER FOUGHT FOR DAYS. KOOPER HATED THAT SOLO"

— GARY ROSSINGTON

There was also some drama around "Simple Man" from the band's 1973 debut, (*Pronounced 'Lĕh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd*), which Rossington wrote with Van Zant and considered one of his all-time Skynyrd favorites.

"[*Kooper*] didn't want us to do that song. He didn't think it went anywhere and didn't say much," Rossington said. "But we loved it. So he had to go to New York on a quick weekend one time, and we recorded 'Simple Man' without him there. And when he got back he heard it and went, 'Oh, wow, that's great. Let's do it,' and he played organ on it, so it worked out in the end."

"I really enjoyed the time I spent with them and the music that they made," says Kooper, who will join Skynyrd in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this year. "And I think they were grateful. They had been with a couple of people before me and it didn't work out, and it worked out this time."

After those first three albums, however, Skynyrd hit a creative malaise due to a combination of booze, drugs and exhaustion from heavy touring, including opening for the Who. Ed King departed in 1975. That left Rossington and Collins to make *Gimme Back My Bullets*, Skynyrd's lowest-selling album to date, as a two-man unit. But the addition of Gaines, who was suggested by his sister, fired things back up just in time for the group's landmark 1976 live album, *One More From the Road*.

"Me and Allen were just getting by with it and doing all right with it, but we missed that third guitarist for double leads and more power-packed rhythms and stuff," Rossington said. Skynyrd actually had several songs written quickly for a new studio album, but, Rossington noted, "We were due to do an album, and our new producer, Tommy Dowd, had [*engineered*] *Live Cream* and *Wheels of Fire* and a bunch of other [*concert records*], so it seemed like a live album was a good idea.

BELOW: Rossington and his wife, singer Dale Krantz-Rossington, in Atlanta, September 24, 1986. The couple formed the Rossington Band and released their debut album in 1986. OPPOSITE: Rossington and Pyle onstage at the Beacon Theatre, New York City, April 10, 1976.

"We had just gotten Steve a month or two before, so he was really new and hadn't played that much with us, and some of the songs we hadn't gotten around to teaching him yet." Rossington laughed at the memory. "He'd just jam along or play what he knew of 'em, and it was great and we all loved him for that. It was nerve-wracking, but it worked out better than we could've hoped."

Coming in the wake of live album hits by Kiss, Peter Frampton and Bob Seger, *One More From the Road* was a Top 10, triple-Platinum smash, with an 11-and-a-half-minute version of "Free Bird" that eclipsed its studio predecessor, and was even a Top 40 hit. Skynyrd took that momentum into 1977's *Street Survivors*, arguably the band's best studio effort and its highest-charting title, reaching number five. The free bird was flying high when the Convair CV-240 airplane transporting the band to a show in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, crashed near Gillsburg, Mississippi, killing Van Zant, Steve and Cassie Gaines, assistant tour manager Dean Kilpatrick and the two pilots. The rest of the band and crew suffered severe injuries. As far as Rossington was concerned, "we were through. There was no way to still be Lynyrd Skynyrd without Ronnie and Steve and Cassie. It just wouldn't be right."

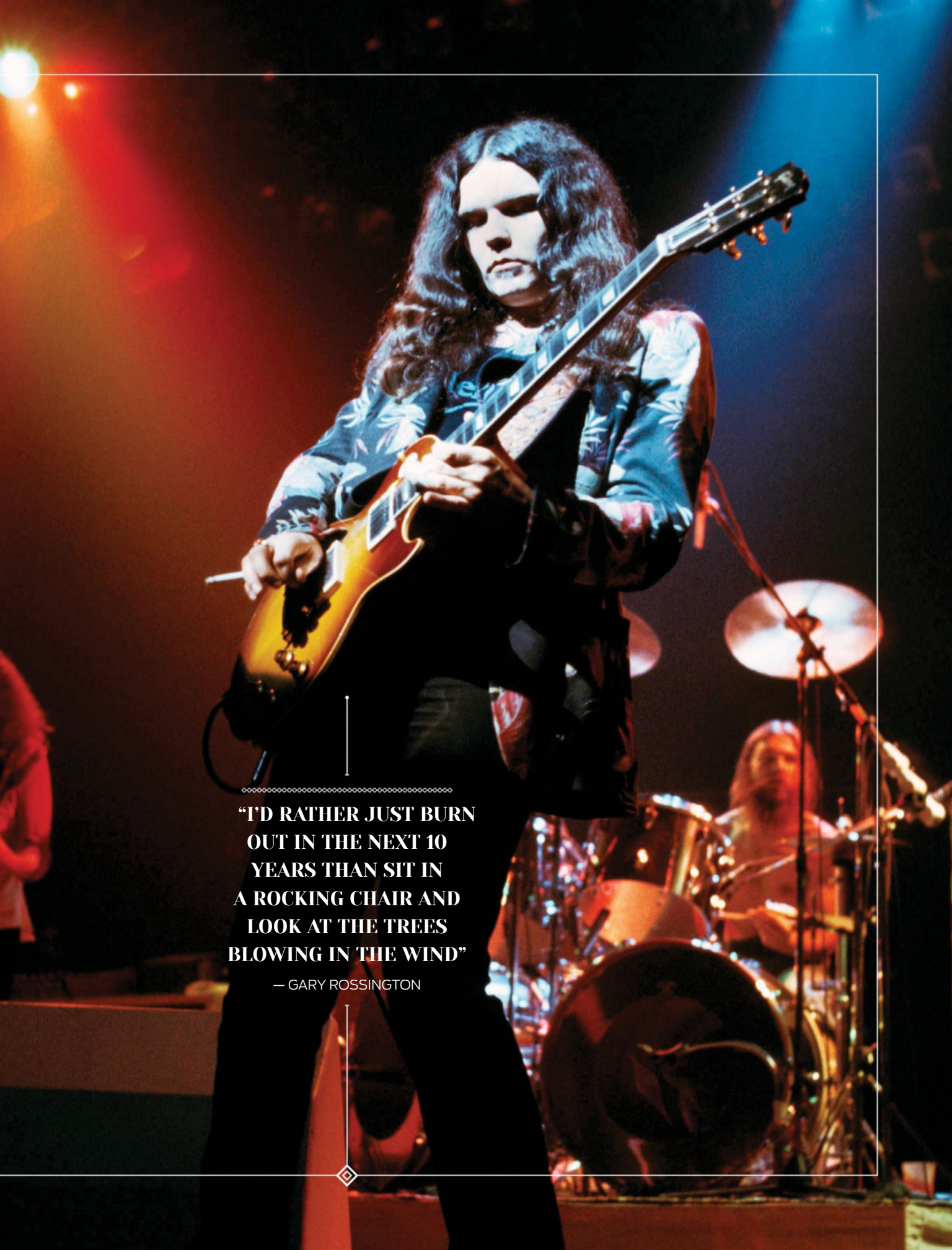
After a bit of time, Rossington and Collins launched the Rossington Collins Band, which released two albums and disbanded in 1982. Rossington and his wife, Dale Krantz-Rossington, started the Rossington Band, which released another two albums, but the guitarist gradually warmed to the idea of putting Skynyrd back together.

"The last thing we did together as a group was have a plane crash. We'd like to go out on a better note than that," Rossington explained in 1987, as he, Powell, Wilkeson, Ed King and drummer Artimus Pyle regrouped for a tour, with Johnny Van Zant singing. Collins had been paralyzed in a 1986 car crash but served as a co-musical director for the troupe. The trek was designed as a one-off tribute tour but quickly became a full-scale resumption that led to nine more studio albums and some rather characteristically heavy road work.

"I never dreamed it would go on this long," Rossington said 20 years later. "We really thought it was over after [*the crash*]. But we got a lot of fan mail and stuff saying, 'Please keep going, we love having you back.' And there were so many promoters saying they were getting a lot of requests. We decided that if we could write together, get something happening that was good and new, then maybe we could go on."

Van Zant, who put aside a new solo record deal to take part in that initial tour, says now, "I think

TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (THIS PAGE); RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (OPPOSITE)



"I'D RATHER JUST BURN OUT IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS THAN SIT IN A ROCKING CHAIR AND LOOK AT THE TREES BLOWING IN THE WIND"

— GARY ROSSINGTON

there was unfinished business there for Gary and the other guys. Of course it was very scary, and very intimidating. The first thing I told them was, 'Listen, I can't be Ronnie. I'm gonna be me,' and they said that's what they wanted. And it worked out."

Lynyrd Skynyrd 1991 was the band's first studio album since *Street Survivors* and the first of a streak of new music that's so far run through 2012's *Last of a Dyin' Breed*. Four years after that, Rossington and his wife made their own album, *Take It on Faith*, their first outing outside of Skynyrd since the Rossington Band's second album, in 1988. Produced by David Z, the set featured an all-star lineup of players, including the late Richie Hayward of Little Feat fame, Delbert McClinton, Bekka Bramlett, Double Trouble keyboardist Reese Winans and others, as well as songs co-written by ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons. "It was just spontaneous," Rossington said shortly before its release. "It only took a couple of weeks of recordings and a few overdubs and we were done. I got to use my Dobro on a song, and then I actually took a few different guitars up there to play in Nashville. I didn't use my Les Paul a lot — maybe on half of it. I tried to get some different kinds of sounds, to sound different than Skynyrd. It was such a fun thing to do."

Rossington plays at Buckhead Theatre, Atlanta, March 15, 2018. The show was performed for *Free Bird*, Lynyrd Skynyrd's southern rock channel, on SiriusXM.

RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES FOR SIRIUSXM

Rossington had already begun having heart problems by that time, and some Skynyrd dates had to be canceled during the previous year after he suffered a heart attack. But the guitarist had no interest in succumbing to those health issues and dialing down. "I just take every day on faith," he said. "I guess when it's my time, I'm ready. I'd rather be playing and living life up than… Like Neil Young said, it's better to burn out than to fade away. I'd rather just burn out in the next 10 years than sit in a rocking chair and look at the trees blowing in the wind. It's just in my blood, y'know? I'm just an old guitar player, and we've spent our whole lives and the 10,000 hours of working to understand how to play and do it. So I think once you've got something going for yourself, you should keep it up and keep your craft going. When you retire, what's next? I like to fish, but how much of that can you do, right? So I want to keep doing what I do now."

Krantz-Rossington agreed. "After Gary's [*2015*] problem, we really had a serious talk about just letting it go for now and being happy to be alive," she says. "But after a few days, he was just miserable, and he said to me, 'I would much rather go out kickin' it than sitting here in my chair.' And that was the last time we talked about it. After that we just decided to ask for God's mercy and do it till we drop."

"Gary was a trouper, man," Medlocke adds. "The guy was a tough individual." Even when Rossington was off the road, he and Van Zant consulted with him as an active part of the band's leadership, reporting in from the road, going over set lists and other arrangements. Van Zant's usual salutation was, "Captain Kirk? Spock calling," while Medlocke would discuss their shared passion for *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Gunsmoke* reruns. "He was still part of the band, even if he wasn't there," Van Zant says.

Both Van Zant and Rossington himself had said there would be no Skynyrd without the guitarist, with Rossington predicting, "I think it's gonna have to end when I'm gone — not that I'm so great, but because of all the legalities and stuff." But less than a month after his passing, the band, along with Krantz-Rossington, issued a statement that Skynyrd would indeed continue, with the approval of all other interested parties.

Rickey Medlocke and Rossington perform during the first annual La Grange Fest at the Backyard, Austin, October 22, 2011.

GARY MILLER/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES

"I've been here over 27 years now," Medlocke, says. "I've been here to see quite a few members move on, pass away, and it doesn't get any easier. We had been at a crossroads several times about whether to go on or whatever, and we had always maintained that it wasn't about each individual or anything like that. It was about the music that was created by those guys — Ronnie, Gary, Allen. So we made the decision to carry on with the music because, bottom line, the music is what is important."

Van Zant confesses that "my heart was so broken that I couldn't imagine going on," but other voices intervened. "Talking to the estates and various people and talking to fans, I'm like, 'Oh God, yeah, they're counting on me to carry this on.' Y'know, what kept me going was calling [*Rossington*] and having these conversations. He was my cheerleader. So now I'm gonna have to remember his voice to keep my spirits up and keep me going."

What lies ahead for Skynyrd is open-ended. Van Zant and Medlocke talk about finishing an album, which would include other songs Rossington co-wrote. But mostly they want to honor their last rebel as well as those that went before him. And they flip a big middle finger to those who would say they can't.

> **"HE WAS MY CHEERLEADER. SO NOW I'M GONNA HAVE TO REMEMBER HIS VOICE TO KEEP MY SPIRITS UP AND KEEP ME GOING"**
>
> — JOHNNY VAN ZANT

"People have beat us up over the years: 'Ah, you guys ain't nothin' but a freakin' tribute band,' and 'blah, blah, blah,'" Medlocke says. "There's a lot of Lynyrd Skynyrd tribute bands out there, but none of them holds it as dear to their hearts as the guys who have been there as long as we have. We have the history; I played on the first [*recording*] sessions. We just know that we have to portray the music with the integrity and the sound and the love as close as we can to when it was originally created. It's only right."

FRESH LEFTOVERS

From slide to fingerstyle, **Catfish Keith**'s modern technical virtuosity makes old-time country blues simmer with new flavors.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF FASANO

THE ACOUSTIC PERFORMANCE highlight at this past April's NAMM Show was a stellar showcase by Santa Cruz Guitar Company signature artist Catfish Keith and his dynamic approach to primal blues. It was somewhat surreal to watch him coax sky-high harmonics from a low-tuned, parlor-sized instrument as his feet kept a heartbeat on his "stomping board," all while he belted out guttural vocals from the Marriott stage. Here was a rural roots artist from Iowa performing to a primarily rock crowd in the shadows of Disneyland, re-imagining tunes such as "Stomp That Thing," which according the liner notes from Keith's latest album, *Still I Long to Roam* (Fish Tail Records), was first laid down by Memphis guitar pioneer Frank Stokes nearly a century ago. Killer musicianship is timeless, and Catfish Keith's technical virtuosity had all the player junkies hooked.

Catfish has copious licks in his bag of tricks. He's a slide ace who makes a resonator sing, as well as a deft fingerstylist who knows the tradition inside and out. What's so cool about Keith is how he furthers traditions by breaking new ground in an old-time context. The aforementioned harmonics might first bring to mind traditional greats such as Lenny Breau, Chet Atkins and Tommy Emmanuel. But as Catfish explains later, his original inspiration goes all the way back to Harpo Marx, and the way he conjures "skank harmonics" is more akin to the squeals of Billy Gibbons, Eddie Van Halen and Zakk Wylde. His understanding of the guitar idiom is encyclopedic. You'd be hard pressed to find a player that knows more about music from the way back to the right now.

This is clearly not nearly Catfish Keith's first rodeo. Keith Daniel Kozacik was born in East Chicago, Indiana, just over six decades ago, and was inducted into the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame in 2008. A tried-and-true DYI guy, he has 21 albums under his belt on Fish Tail Records, the label headed by his wife, Penny Cahill. Santa Cruz Guitar Company introduced its custom 1929 O model Catfish Special in 2018. In addition to the formerly mentioned tunes from the new album, "the little guitar with the giant voice" sings distinctively on Keith's "Cherry Red," Mississippi John Hurt's "Louis Collins," Professor Longhair's "Go to the Mardi Gras," the Mississippi Sheiks' "Bed Spring Poker," Blind Willie Johnson's "When the War Was On" and Tommy Johnson's "Cool Drink of Water."

Keith has been a regular at the NAMM Show for many moons, and in the years leading up to the pandemic he could regularly be caught at the SCGC house party. I'll never forget meeting him there just as he'd gotten his dream signature guitar crafted by Richard Hoover and company. When I asked Keith if I could play his new baby, he quickly replied, "No," and held it close to his body. For a man who'd worked so hard and long, the guitar was understandably too precious to pass around at what was becoming a raucous party rather than a subdued folk house affair. It was good to see the Santa Cruz gang back in Anaheim this year, and fortunate that they brought Keith. When *GP* dropped by the house to see if anything was happening, everyone was out to dinner except Penny and Catfish, who had already rustled up some vittles. It was the perfect opportunity for a deep dive with Keith, who was kind enough to offer up leftovers and a beer from the fridge as the conversation turned from casual to shop talk.

How did you develop a contemporary approach to primitive music?

I am definitely a modern student of all guitar that's come along. What captured me early on was the one-guitar-as-orchestra kind of approach, where you're playing bass, melody, harmony, counterpoint and all sorts of ideas within the song structure. I'm talking about players like Ali Farka Touré, John Lee Hooker, R.L. Burnside and Fred McDowell. It all goes back to that Mississippi Hill Country sound, so it's a modal thing at its most basic, but also its most effective.

Modern guitar techniques came along that were not used in old-time country blues, but I'll use them in a song like Jessie Mae Hemphill's "Eagle Bird" that you heard me play today in my own

Catfish Keith performs with his signature model guitar at the Santa Cruz Guitar Company's booth at NAMM 2023.

re-imagined way. I took her song and wrote my own song, really. [*Hemphill's tune also inspired "Eagle Birds" by the Black Keys*.] The structure is a modal, one-chord thing, but it's both the easiest and most difficult song in the world for me to play. The notes are very simple, but then there's the depth of sound coming from the deep-tuned guitar as well as chiming harmonics.

Hawaiian players and some jazz guys, particularly Lenny Breau, influence the kind of harmonics that I try to play, and there was a solo jazz performer named David Winters that I remember seeing when I was just a kid. He would play a whole chorus of a song like "Autumn Leaves" in fingerstyle, and then he'd play a whole chorus all in harmonics. It blew my mind. There was the sound of the harmonics and that they could be used to make every note happen. So I studied how to create harmonics, gathering techniques from a lot of places, including Harpo Marx. [*laughs*]

Really? Lenny Breau is probably the primary point of reference from a guitar standpoint. Can you elaborate?
Well, Lenny Breau did the whole cascading thing, and that might use different elements, but oddly enough Harpo Marx is the first guy, because it's originally a harp technique. Harpo Marx used it in a Marx Brothers movie where he played a whole chorus in harmonics. You start with a deep note and then split it in half. He didn't have the advantage of fretting the lower notes the way I do on a guitar, but it's basically a simple version of the same thing, just splitting the note in half, even if the string is fretted.

"I LIVE IN AN OBSCURE CORNER OF THE BLUES WORLD PLAYING SONGS FROM 100 YEARS AGO"

What exactly do you mean by "splitting the note in half"?
Well, there's the first octave harmonic, then there's the second octave harmonic, and then there's all the other stuff way up in that region that I call "skank harmonics." If you fret the G string at the second fret to establish the deep note, then you get the first octave harmonic by placing your index finger lightly on the same string over the 14th fret and plucking behind it with your thumb. That's a very specific spot, but there are a whole bunch of other kinds. You can play the second octave of the low A by using the same technique up higher on the fretboard somewhere over the sound hole. And all around that spot is a whole world of "skank harmonics." I essentially place them with the index finger and pluck up with my thumb or middle finger behind it. It's complex. There's a whole lot of technique happening up there that I'm not even conscious of when I'm playing.

It seems that what you call "skank harmonics" is akin to the pick squeal technique associated with Eddie Van Halen, Billy Gibbons and Zakk Wylde.
Right. It's related to the stuff you hear on Van Halen, ZZ Top and Ozzy Osbourne songs, except they're doing it with a pick and I'm doing it with my thumb and first finger. You end up getting some approximated things, but it's a cool sound and a way of extending the range of the acoustic guitar. I tune down a full step, so my lower notes are a bit lower than usual, and then by going up into the second octave range of the harmonics, the total range is more like a piano.

Doesn't it seem like a 12-fret acoustic opens up all sorts of harmonics in that sound hole–to-bridge zone while making it much easier to bend the notes as well?
Yeah, it seems to make a big difference. My signature Santa Cruz is 12 frets to the body, and it really helps make that stuff come alive. It's been a wonderful tool for me because of my history developing this style mostly on a Gibson Nick Lucas, the earliest version, like an L1. It was a 12-fret with what Roy Book

JOSHUA HUVER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Binder calls a "peanut shape." My first experience with a Santa Cruz guitar was around 2010 at MerleFest. It was a 13-fret [*H13*], and I was attracted to it very much because it was a beautiful guitar that was kind of like an old [*Gibson*] Nick Lucas. So it makes sense that a few guitars later we'd arrive at this design with Richard at Santa Cruz.

How did you connect?
It was at NAMM. I was with National Reso-Phonic, and their booth was always near the Santa Cruz booth. I still play Nationals quite a bit, and you can hear them on a few tracks from *Still I Long to Roam*. That's a National resonator on "I'm a Wanderer, Fare Thee Well," and the custom National Baritone Estralia — what I call my Sister Rosetta Tharpe guitar — on "He'll Understand and Say Well Done." There's also a National Exploding Palm Baritone Tricone on the bottleneck slide showcase "Sewing Machine Blues." Harmonics work well on Nationals as well because they're like guitars with built-in speakers.

Anyhow, Penny and I were at the NAMM Show. We loved Richard and were always impressed by his instruments. She noticed the Don Edwards model [*the Cowboy Singer*], which was a small guitar made of all mahogany. That led to my signature model being made of a very unique mahogany that's a bit less mid-rangey than most mahogany. I instinctively went toward a small-bodied guitar with 12 frets to the body with that short scale length, because the response is just the way you described it, of having these harmonic zones that are easy to chime, especially when I detune. Sometimes I drop the lowest string, so it ends up being drop C. Sometimes I'll go with some mysterious detuning.

That takes the already bend-y strings and makes them practically like rubber bands.
Yeah, I love to bend and get as much movement as I can way down in the low end and way up in the harmonic range. The idea is to get the most juice out of the guitar. When I'm handed a guitar tuned to standard pitch, the strings feel tight and I have trouble bending them.

Are your nails acrylics?
No, I use fake nails on the thumb and first two fingers, but they're the plastic stick-on kind. Well, actually they're glued on with Super Glue. They last for about a week before I need to change them. I wouldn't be able to pull off the whole style I've invented without using those nails.

At what point did you understand what sort of style you wanted to develop?
I've been on the same quest since about age 10. By about age 15, I knew that I wanted to be a solo fingerstylist. It came to me as kind of a vision.

At age 10, most guitar kids want to be a rock star, like Eddie Van Halen.
I wanted to be Leo Kottke.

You stick your thumb way out hitchhiker-style like Leo.
Yeah, and I do a whole lot of things with the thumb in the bass that are sort of like pulling through the string as you pluck it, and then really rattling the note back and forth with the fretting hand. It's very wild and springy sounding. Joseph Spence was one of the players that tickled me the most in that sense. He'd play such beautiful, syncopated things, and there's so much happiness in that music. You can hear him chortling and sort of laughing at himself almost. But you can tell it was pure joy.

When people say, "Oh, the sad old blues." I say, "What are you talking about?" The whole world of life is in that music. Sister Rosetta Tharpe put all of her ebullience into her fun little virtuosic flurries. She was so cool. She used to look up at the sky when she sang, like looking toward heaven. A lot of people loved her, and I do too. I had such fun putting my spin on her song "He'll Understand and Say Well Done." There's such a treasure trove of songs to mine. I still find endless inspiration in ancient blues. There are still at least a hundred songs I'd like to record in my own style.

What keeps you coming back?
I'm engrossed in how deep the culture of blues music goes, and how powerful a cat can be when it's just one person with a guitar. How much magic is in that? There is so much. Everybody that picks up a guitar, you just reinvented the guitar. You don't know it, but you do it just by putting your hands on it and coming up with something. And so in that sense, it's the most re-inventible instrument. You can put anything into a guitar. It's a wonderful world.

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THE OTHER BROTHER

A tribute to Dickey Betts' inspired writing and playing on the pivotal 1973 Allman Brothers Band release, *Brothers and Sisters*.

BY CHRIS BUONO

THE 1970S CONSTITUTE classic rock's grittiest and perhaps most prized decade. With the dawn of 2020, it also became a decade full of half-century milestones, with 1973 the current epoch du jour. In addition to herculean releases like Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* [*see July 2023*], Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy* [*see March 2023*] and the Who's *Quadrophenia*, the Allman Brothers Band's *Brothers and Sisters* album ascended the charts, despite the band's considerable personnel challenges. With the group still reeling from the tragic loss of bassist Berry Oakley during the recording process — his demise was eerily reminiscent of guitarist Duane Allman's monumental passing only one year earlier — guitarist Dickey Betts took the reins and led the band into what would be its most commercially successful era.

The band recorded the album's tracks between October and December 1972, with the help of Chuck Leavell on piano and Oakley's replacement, LaMar Williams, on bass, as well as session guitarists Les Dudek and Tommy Talton. Released in August 1973 on Capricorn Records, *Brothers and Sisters* went on to sell more than seven million copies, making it the ABB's all-time best-selling album. At this juncture, Betts assumed an unofficial leadership role and wrote more than half the songs on *Brothers and Sisters*. In doing so, the guitarist-vocalist augmented the band's groundbreaking amalgamation of rock, blues and jazz with country music elements, most notably on songs like the Dobro-driven "Pony Boy" and the autobiographical "Ramblin' Man." The latter validated

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

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the shift as "Ramblin' Man" would go on to reach number two on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and become a beloved southern rock anthem.

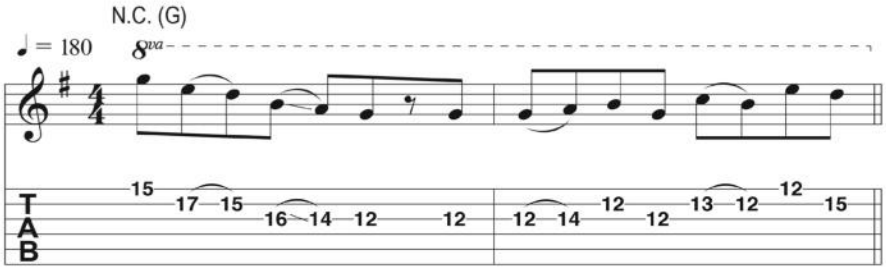
Alongside the success of "Ramblin' Man," which would be the last song Berry Oakley would record with the band, *Brothers and Sisters* included two more future staples composed by Betts. Contrary to the emerging country influence was a more Brothers-like blues-rock vibe in "Southbound" and the commemorative instrumental "Jessica." The latter was an homage to Django Reinhardt — one of Dickey's idols — as much as it was a loving tribute to his daughter, for whom the song is named.

Despite losing two founding members, the Allman Brothers Band prevailed with *Brothers and Sisters*, while Betts furthered his own legend. In this lesson, we'll investigate some of Dickey's signature playing approaches on the album — including some that may fall under the radar — starting with a look at "Ramblin' Man." Take note: "Ramblin' Man" was recorded in standard pitch and played as if it were in the key of G, but a tape machine function called varispeed was deliberately used in the mastering process to speed up the song a little, causing it to be heard a half step higher, in the concert key of A flat.

Sometimes all it takes is a modest call-and-response hook to sear a song's identity into the hearts of millions, and "Ramblin' Man" does just that. **Ex. 1** is a two-bar lick inspired by Dickey's eloquence in the track's opening moments. The gold here is his use of the six-note G major hexatonic scale (G, A, B, C, D, E). The major hexatonic excludes the 7th degree (F♯) of the conventional seven-note (heptatonic) G major scale (G, A, B, C, D, E, F♯), and it fuels much of what Dickey plays throughout his melodic and soloistic performance on this song as well as many others.

Before we inspect any more lead-playing action, it's important to acknowledge the rock-solid rhythm playing of Dudek. On "Ramblin' Man,"

Ex. 1



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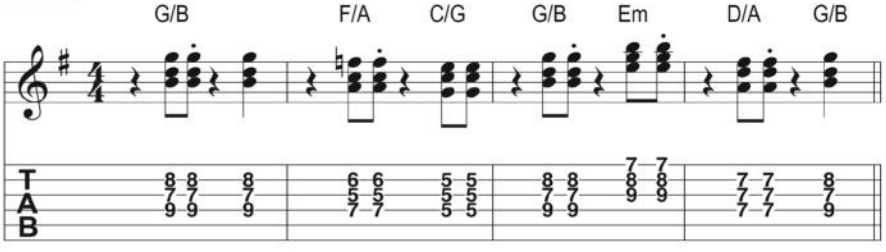

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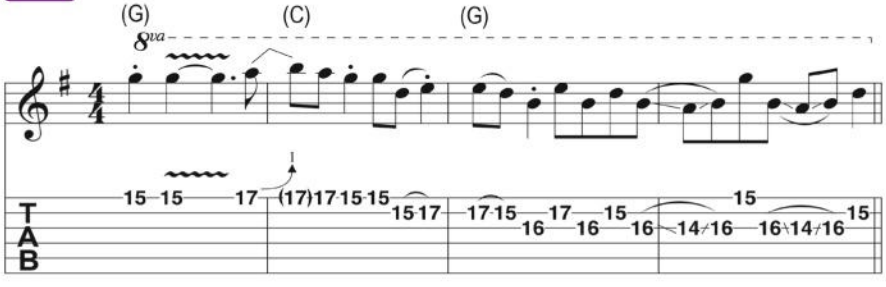

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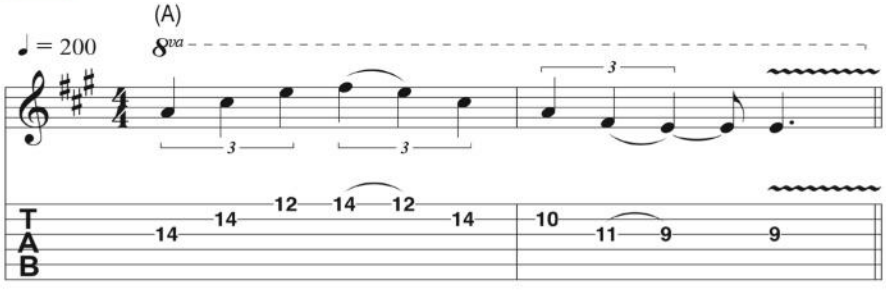


the guest sideman lays down, on a clean electric, a bed of crisply articulated chords for Betts and the band to play along with throughout the arrangement, much as he does with acoustic guitar on "Jessica." Stationed mostly on the D-G-B string group, Dudek plays close-voiced triads with an emphasis on beats 2 and 4 — what are known as the *backbeats* — and peppers them with a staccato attack on the following upbeat. **Ex. 2** similarly presents a condensed version of the chords played throughout the song's verse and chorus sections. With the exception of the root-position Em shape played on the top three strings,

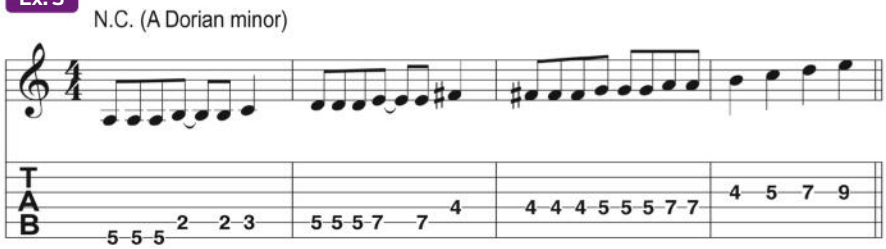
these voice-led triads are evenly split between pairs of 1st- and 2nd-inversion voicings: G/B and F/A, and C/G and D/A, respectively.

Betts' soloing style is characterized not only by his copious use of the major hexatonic scale but also by his tastefully poised melodic phrasing. Looking at **Ex. 3**, a reworking of what the guitarist plays at the beginning of his "Ramblin' Man" solo, you can see two key elements on display. First is the use of space in the form of staccato quarter notes, which serve to punctuate the eighth-note rhythms nicely. Second is the use of legato articulations, such as string bends, hammer-ons and pull-offs, which function like "vowels" that break up and smooth out the picking while still clearly conveying the eighth-note rhythms. Bars 3 and 4 demonstrate another signature Betts move, with the use of descending and ascending whole-step finger slides on the G string that playfully ricochet while also ping-ponging with picked notes on the B and high E strings, all while targeting the tones of the underlying G chord — G, B and D. Dickey employs these and other techniques in endlessly fresh ways with a characteristically lyrical approach to arpeggio-based soloing that never sounds contrived.

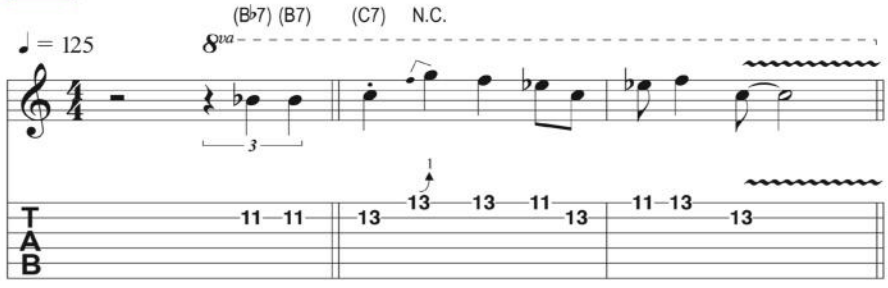
Another hallmark of Betts' phrasing style is his penchant for dramatic rhythmic shifting and parallel modulation. **Ex. 4** is modeled after a moment in "Jessica" where the band completes the song's third cycle through the head melody. Here, the guitarist throttles back the vibrant momentum of the A major hexatonic (A, B, C♯, D, E, F♯) two-part harmony licks that are played with a straight-eighths feel by "downshifting" to quarter-note triplets.

Following Leavell's brilliantly melodic piano solo over Dudek's locomotive acoustic rhythm in "Jessica," Betts once again transforms the streaming-eighth-notes rhythmic feel, this time while also transmuting the tonality, with a climatic, syncopated ensemble riff that's an ascending line based on the parallel A Dorian mode (A, B, C, D, E, F♯, G), which informs **Ex. 5**.

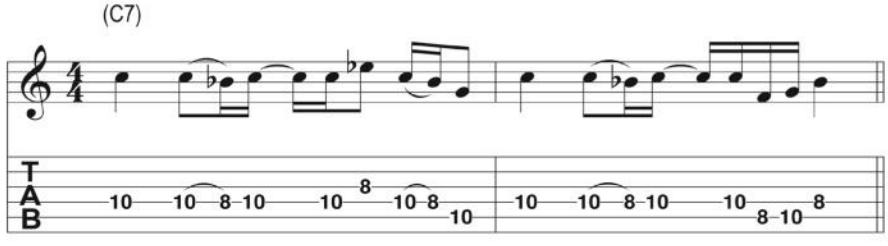
Ex. 5



Ex. 6



Ex. 7



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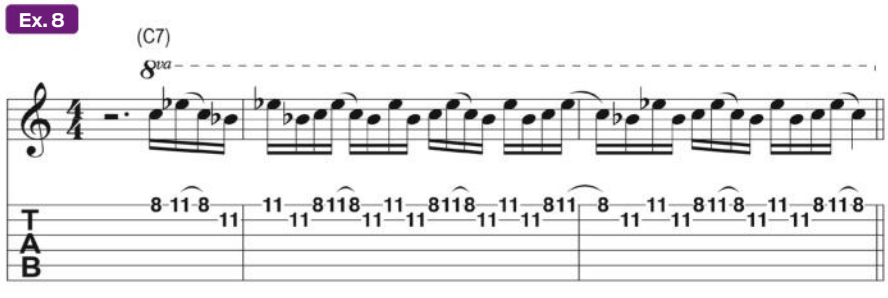
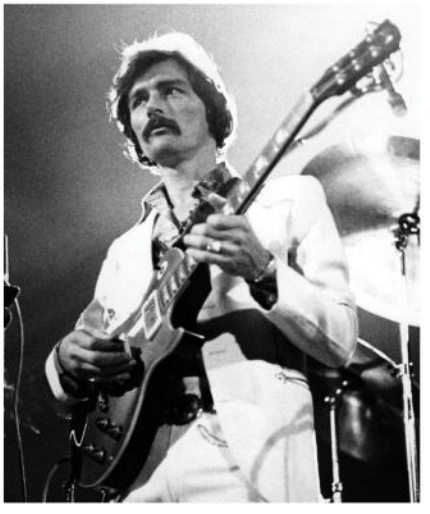


If you're unfamiliar with Dickey's soloing style and sound, and you are starting to develop an overall assessment of his playing and tonal choices based on what's been laid out so far, hold the phone. The guitarist's improvising prowess does not solely make use of subdued overdrive tones as he expertly wields major-based melodic devices. Consider "Southbound," a funky uptempo Memphis soul-flavored jam song based on a I - IV - V 12-bar blues progression in the key of C, made up of all dominant 7th chords (I: C7, IV: F7, V: G7). Betts reels you in from the track's opening lick, which is based on the C minor pentatonic scale (C, E♭, F, G, B♭), by sporting a comparatively pronounced increase in gain, with an upward tick in the mids to spice up his infamous

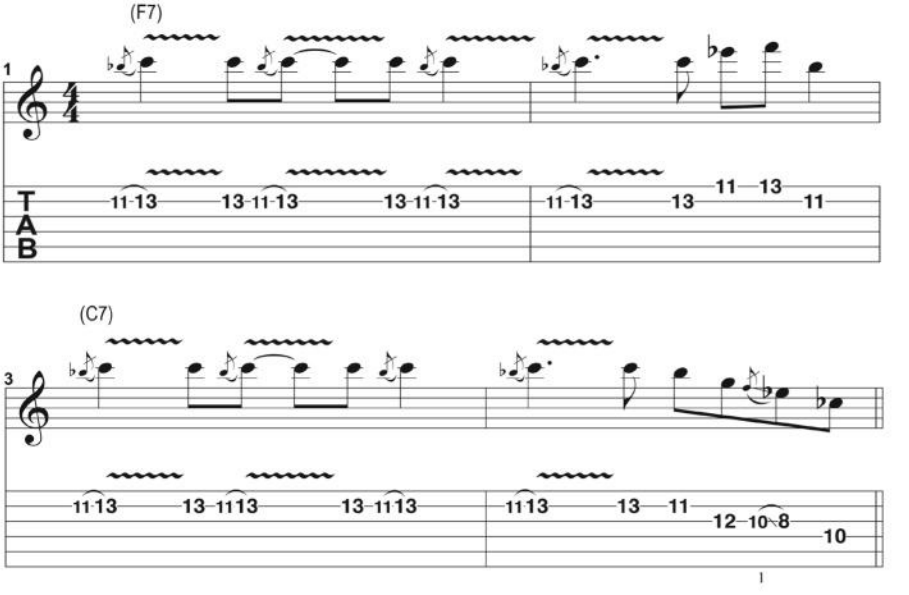
middle-pickup setting on a humbucker-equipped Les Paul plugged into a 100-watt Marshall stack. **Ex. 6** does something similar, offering a taste of the tension created by playing the minor 3rd, E♭, over the major 3rd, E, that lives in the underlying C7 chord (C, E, G, B♭), which, in "Southbound," the band chromatically ascends to from B♭7 (B♭7 - B7 - C7).



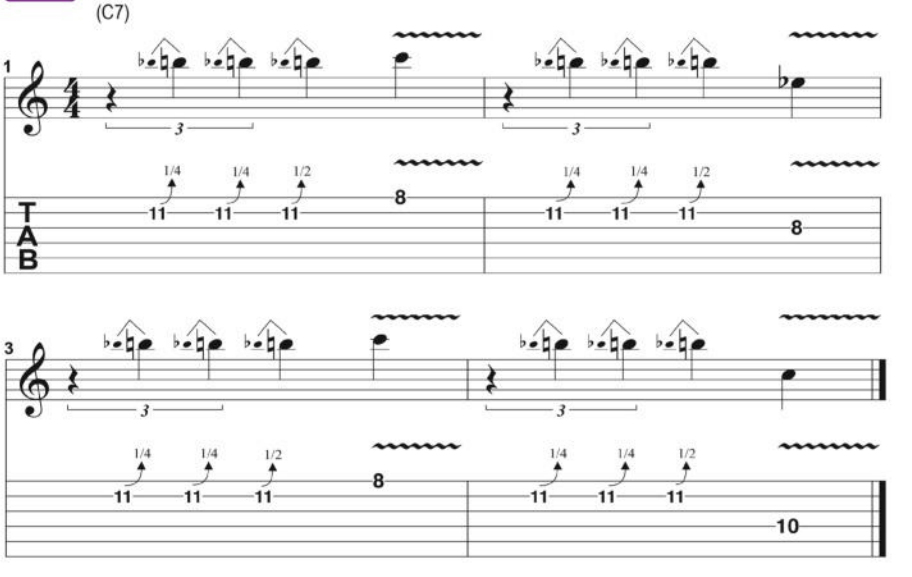
Dickey's two solos in "Southbound" also highlight a few more of the guitarist's celebrated moves, such as his use of call-and-response phrasing, with which he crafts catchy, unforgettable hooks. **Ex. 7** is inspired by a salvo in his first solo, where he digs in with a short motif over C7, again using notes from C minor pentatonic. Based on the same scale, **Ex. 8** is modeled after a dense 16th-note phrase Dickey plays over two bars of C7 a little later. Notice the way the six-note pattern repeats, producing a rhythmically dramatic hemiola as the motif shifts forward by half a beat with each repetition.

Ex. 9 presents a reworking of what Betts plays in his second solo, where he offers some southern musical hospitality in the form of poised call-and-response coupled with repetition over F7 and C7 chords. Finally, **Ex. 10** is in the spirit of what Dickey lays down over the I chord to open his final pass through the changes. Super-catchy licks like this not only take the audience to the peak of a musical rollercoaster ride but also cue the band to close out the song.

Ex. 9



Ex. 10



While Dickey Betts' creative contributions on *Brothers and Sisters* are undeniable, that's not to say the remaining blood brother was absent from the process, nor did his legendary gruff go unheard. In fact, most of the original album's side one features Gregg Allman singing his own tunes, including the opening track "Wasted Words," "Come and Go Blues" and the Billy Eckstine standard "Jelly Jelly." As for side two, it's the Dickey Betts show. And while Gregg's vocal growl is crucial to the soulful impact of "Southbound," it's Dickey's guitar lines that steal the show as they weave in and out of Allman's vocal performances with his unmistakable and tasteful style.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

SKYN DEEP

As Lynyrd Skynyrd's debut album turns 50, we dive into its guitar stylings, as performed by Gary Rossington, Allen Collins and Ed King.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

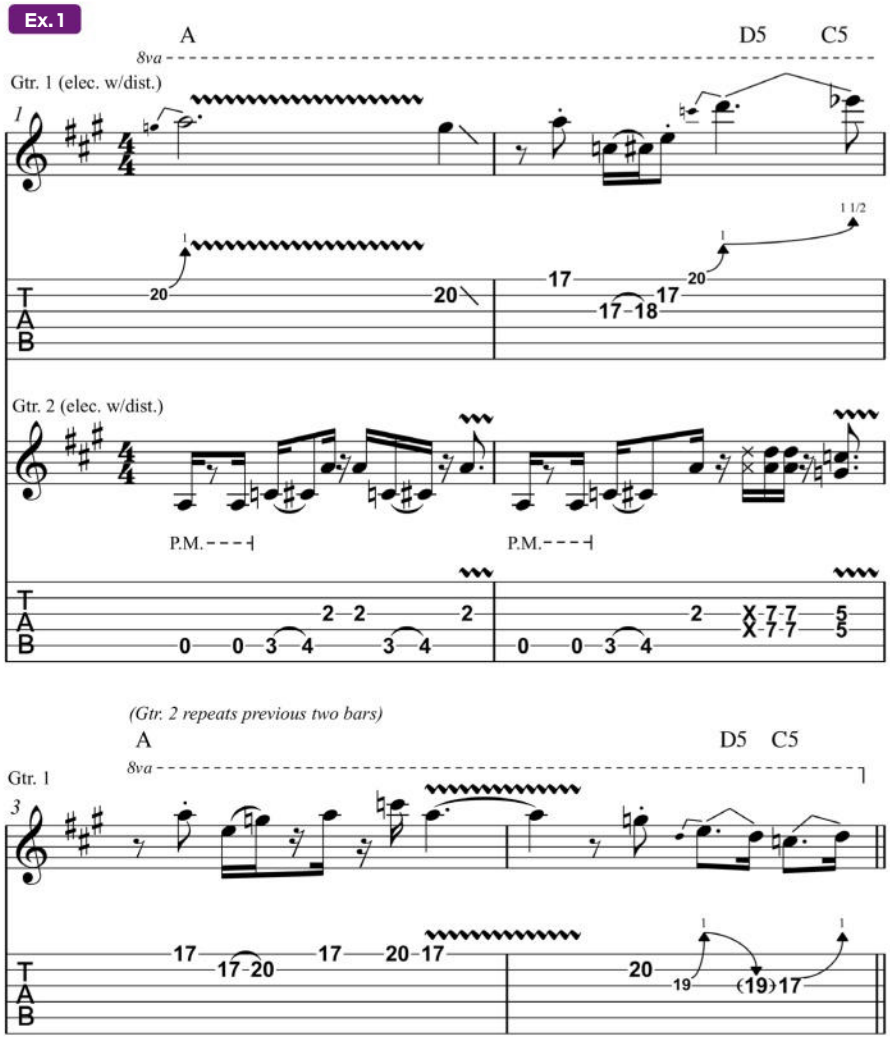
LYNYRD SKYNYRD'S ROAD to superstardom began in 1964, inside a small cabin at the end of a field in Jacksonville, Florida. They called it Hell House, which gives you a general idea of the accommodations — or lack thereof — afforded by the intense Florida heat. Nevertheless, in its confines, they spent years writing and rehearsing the songs that would be featured on their classic 1973 debut album, *(Pronounced 'Lĕh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd)*, and establish them as an iconic southern rock band.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the album's release, and in this lesson, we'll celebrate its enduring popularity and appeal by mining the musical gold found within each of its tracks, including the classic that would be a highlight of the band's concerts for decades to come: "Free Bird."

Throughout its nearly 42 minutes, *Pronounced* is spearheaded by the electrifying guitar work of Gary Rossington and Allen Collins. In fact, the band had a third guitarist: Ed King, formerly of Strawberry Alarm Clock, who had joined to replace bassist Leon Wilkeson shortly before recording began. (Wilkeson rejoined after the album was completed, and King moved to full-time guitar duties.) Even so, King contributes

Lynyrd Skynyrd in 1973. (from left) Allen Collins, Billy Powell, Gary Rossington, Bob Burns, Ronnie Van Zant, Leon Wilkeson and Ed King.

Ex. 1



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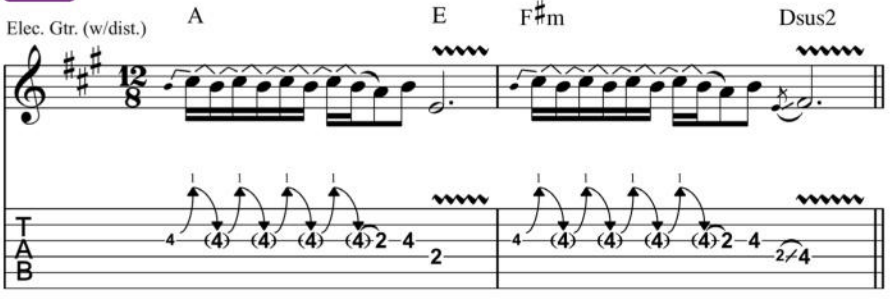
guitar to two songs — "Tuesday's Gone" and "Mississippi Kid" — on which producer Al Kooper handles bass duties.

While the band's performances all sound as if they teem with an excitement born from spontaneity, all the guitar parts were actually crafted with great thought and care, with nothing put to tape that didn't pass muster with the band. What resulted was a record that sounds as if a bunch of longtime friends were just jamming — albeit with ready-made classic guitar parts. And as we'll soon discover, much of the band's sound springs from the savvy interplay between its guitarists. Let's have a closer look at the album's eight tracks.

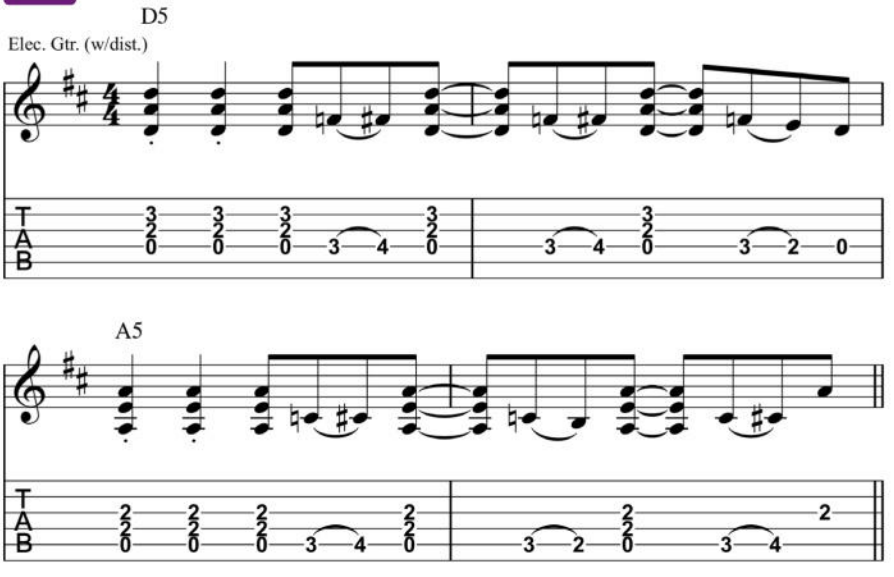
Pronounced kicks off with "I Ain't the One," and its intro is classic Skynyrd — a funky, bluesy guitar riff provided by Rossington on his Gibson Les Paul, complemented by Collins wielding his Gibson Firebird to provide some trademark lead work. What's remarkable about Collins' playing is that he's able to eschew the common pattern- and lick-based approach to blues-rock playing in favor of a more melodic take, allowing him to create soulful lines. **Ex. 1** is inspired by both guitarists' playing on this song, which is in the key of A major. They create their uniquely southern sound mainly by drawing from the A minor pentatonic scale (A, C, D, E, G), most commonly heard in blues and rock, while deftly borrowing the major 3rd, C♯, from the major pentatonic scale (A, B, C♯, E, F♯), which lends a brighter country flavor.

In addition to their talents for writing catchy rock riffs and songs, Skynyrd could compose ballads like nobody's business, each stirring in its own way. Our introduction to this facet of their songwriting comes with *Pronounced*'s second track, "Tuesday's Gone," which features Rossington's thoughtful lead work. The guitarist uses repetitive bends that evoke the sound of a slide guitar (he plays some real slide guitar later in the album). **Ex. 2** is influenced by his lyrical playing here. Note that King quietly makes his first appearance on guitar on this track, adding subtle fills during Billy Powell's piano solo.

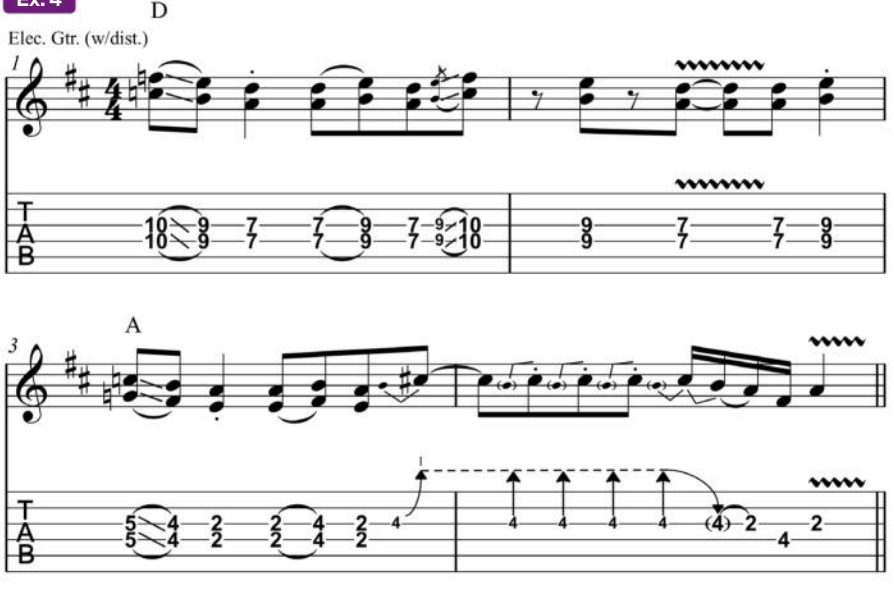
Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Ex. 4



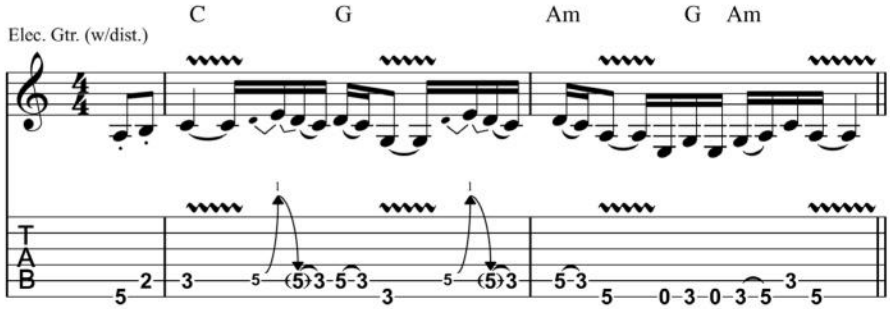
Collins' rhythm guitar part in the chorus of "Gimme Three Steps," one of the album's singles, is a lesson in how to transform basic elements of rock guitar into fresh-sounding hooks. Here he does so by employing some simple, yet ear-catching rhythms. His part loosely mimics the rhythm of vocalist Ronnie Van Zant's melody, with each supporting the other. **Ex. 3** is inspired by this very effective guitar part.

In the song's guitar solo, Collins continues a variation of the same rhythm part, with Rossington adding some nasty lead lines featuring the interval of a perfect 4th (two and one-half steps). The hollow-sounding nature of this interval lends itself to creating harmonized melodic lines in which each note speaks fully, even when played with a distorted tone, as there is little interference among the prominent harmonics involved. Rossington's repetition of the three dyads at 2:20 can be seen to slyly evoke the "three steps towards the door" for which Van Zant is pleading, so as to avoid a nasty bar fight. **Ex. 4** brings this catchy phrase to mind.

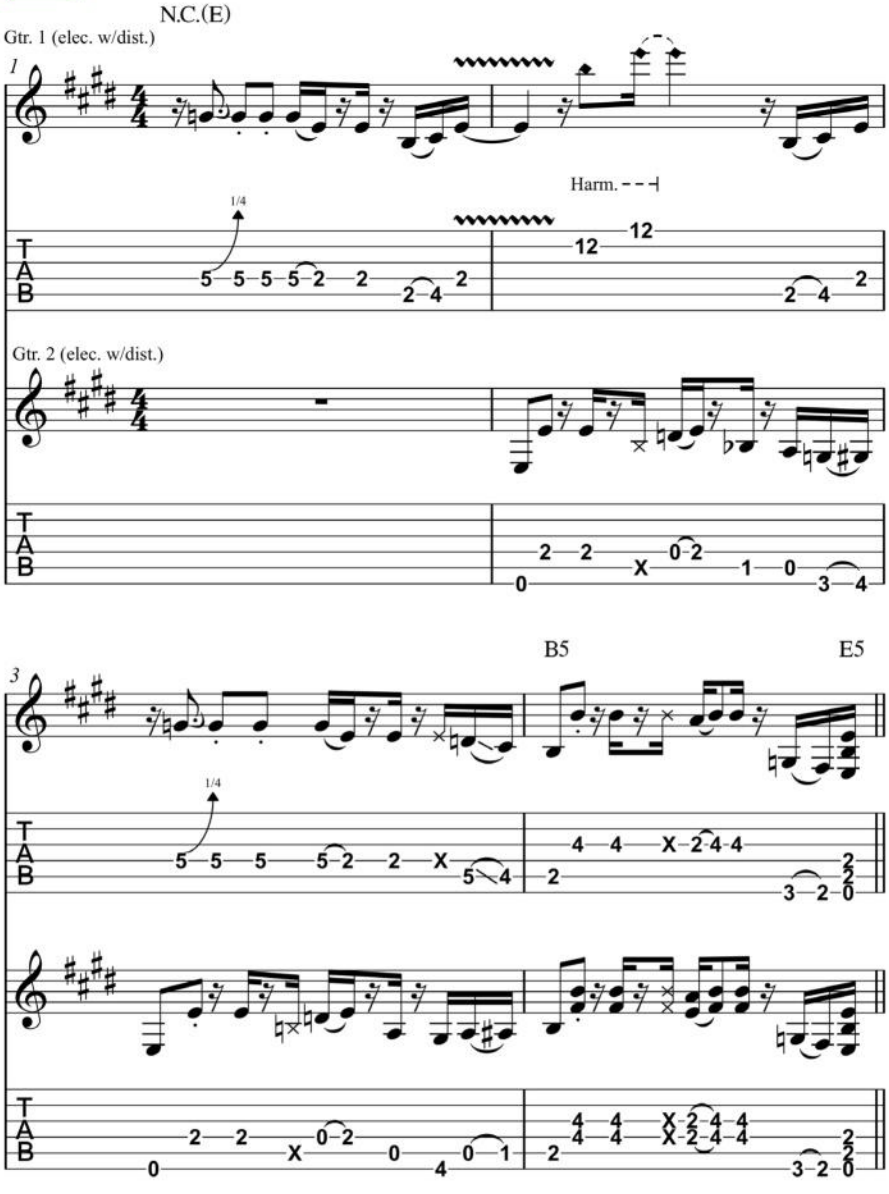
Next up is another ballad, "Simple Man," which introduced a hallmark of the Skynyrd sound, whereby Rossington and Collins interject searing riffs and powerful lead lines into what begins as a seemingly subdued affair. **Ex. 5** is inspired by the low-end riff that thunders in at the 1:04 mark and foreshadows more storm clouds ahead. On the recording, all the guitars are tuned down one half step (low to high: E♭, A♭, D♭, G♭, B♭, E♭), which adds to the track's brooding quality, but Ex. 5 is played in standard tuning.

If we were listening to the record on vinyl, this is where we'd flip it over to side two. "Things Goin' On" reminds us once again that Skynyrd's twin-guitar assault is unlike the usual fare. In two-guitar bands, when both guitarists play simultaneously, their parts are usually doubled or arranged in different musical registers, or pitch ranges — one playing low and the other high — in order to clearly distinguish the two parts. Throughout "Things Goin'

Ex. 5



Ex. 6

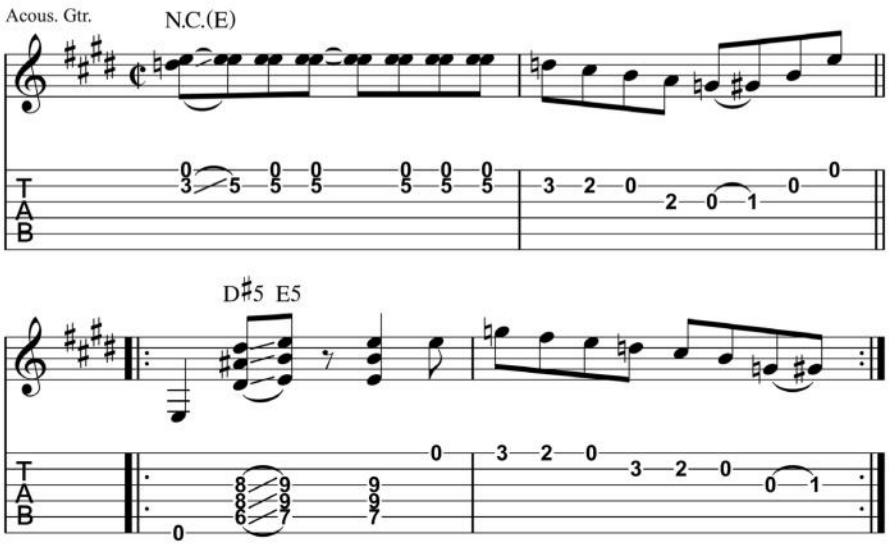


On," however, Rossington and Collins defy convention by playing different parts in the same register. They deftly pull this off by creating two completely independent lines that, while close together in pitch, never step on each other. This produces an ear-catching effect, as upon first listen it can be difficult to tell who's playing what. **Ex. 6** is inspired by the song's intro. Note again how using interesting rhythms can bring bluesy riffs new life.

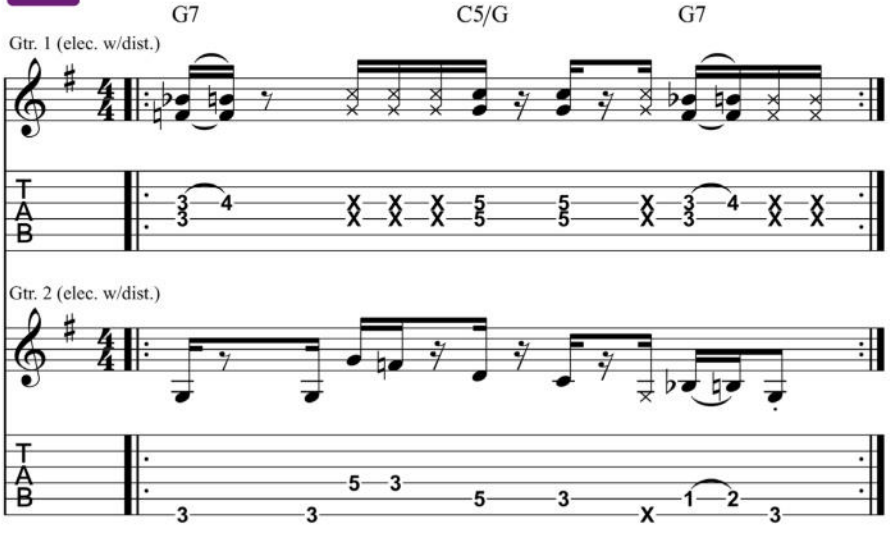
The next track, "Mississippi Kid," demonstrates how Skynyrd were capable of delivering the unexpected. The bluegrass-based song takes a stylistic departure from *Pronounced*'s previous songs but fits right in. King makes his second and final guitar appearance here, contributing a nifty acoustic slide guitar solo. But it's Collins, accompanied by Kooper on mandolin, who lays the song's foundation, juxtaposing some fine flatpicking with sliding chordal strums. **Ex. 7** is influenced by his playing throughout.

How does one take a simple G7 chord and make it rock with bluesy funkiness? Rossington and Collins answer this question in "Poison Whiskey" by deconstructing the chord into two separate parts. In the intro, Rossington subtly implies G7 with a rock-solid low single-note riff. Basing the line primarily on the G minor pentatonic scale (G, B♭, C, D, F), the guitarist again borrows the major 3rd (B) from its parallel major pentatonic counterpart (G, A, B, D, E). Collins, in turn, takes the top half of the chords, alternating between two dyads implying G7 and C5/G. Notice how he omits the root of G7 and simply plays the 3rd (B) and ♭7th (F). These two notes, the interval of a tritone (three whole steps), clearly define the sound of a dominant 7th chord, even in the absence of its root. Why leave it out here? Well, Rossington's got it covered! Plus, by omitting it, Collins prevents the two parts from covering similar ground. **Ex. 8** is reminiscent of the duo's playing here. Next time you're faced with a dominant 7th chord, try taking a similar tack by leaving out its root, even if you're the sole guitarist.

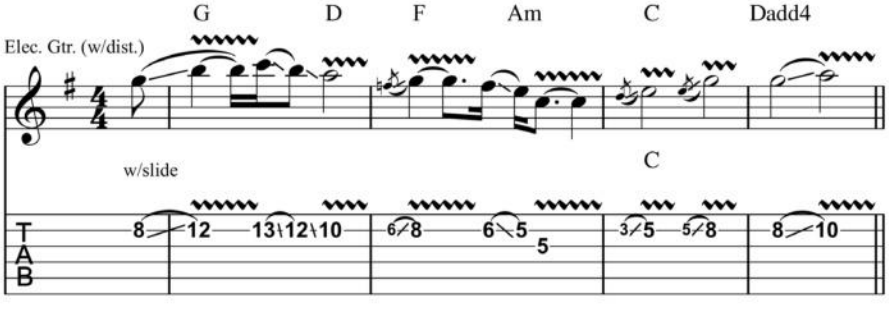
Ex. 7



Ex. 8



Ex. 9



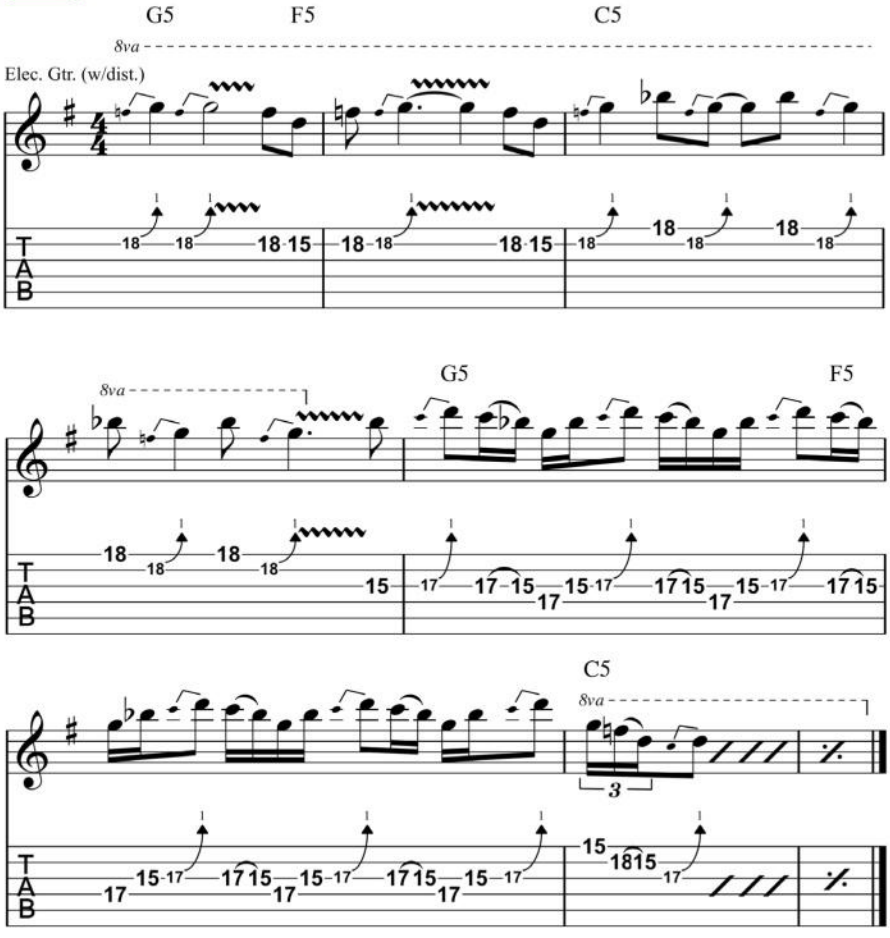
When Ronnie Van Zandt asks, "What song is it you wanna hear?" on Skynyrd's 1976 live album, *One More From the Road*, the crowd responds with a resounding cry of "'Free Bird'!" To their delight, the band obliges by offering up a searing 14-minute rendition of the song. Clocking in at well over nine minutes on *Pronounced*, "Free Bird" firmly established Skynyrd's place in southern rock royalty from the get-go. In the 1970s and beyond, being able to play Collins' epic outro solo became a rite of passage for generations of aspiring rock guitarists. Before examining it, however, let's take a closer look at the song's gentler intro.

The song, *Pronounced*'s final track, begins as a ballad, in which Van Zant tells the story of a man who feels compelled to leave a loving relationship to search for himself in far-off places. Powell's plaintive organ is first to enter. When the band follows suit, we find Collins playing clean, arpeggiated chords on his Gibson Firebird, while Rossington plays the song's signature slide guitar melody using a glass slide and his Gibson SG. **Ex. 9** is inspired by Rossington's instrumental expression of intense longing and regret.

The song and album end with Collins' five-minute outro guitar solo, played over a repeating three-chord progression at a brisk tempo. The solo offers a veritable clinic in using repeated motifs to build melodic tension and create a series of escalating musical climaxes. Based almost entirely on the G minor pentatonic scale (with a bit of G major pentatonic thrown in), the solo never fully resolves. Instead, it fades out with the guitarist continuing to spit fire, as we're left to imagine what was left on the cutting room floor.

Ex. 10 is reminiscent of Collins' rhythmic approach to creating this southern blues-rock lead guitar tour de force. It begins with a lick based on notes of mostly longer value — half notes, quarter notes and eighths. The intensity is then ratcheted up by the introduction of 16th notes, finally reaching its peak in a whirlwind of 16th-note triplets. Focusing more on the rhythms you're playing than on the actual notes is a potent way to create memorable and dramatic solos. The rhythms you choose will almost always imply certain notes, while the opposite is often not the case.

Ex. 10



"Free Bird" expresses a different sort of vulnerability than *Pronounced*'s previous ballads, again showing Lynyrd Skynyrd's remarkable range even at this early stage of their career. Its sorrow also now seems prescient, as tragedy would interrupt the band's runaway success in the form of a 1977 plane crash, which took the lives of Van Zant as well as members of the touring band. Rossington and Collins were severely injured, but recovered, although Collins was left paralyzed by a car accident in 1986. Despite all of this, Skynyrd ultimately relaunched in 1987, sadly without Collins, but with Johnny Van Zant now taking over vocal duties for his late brother Ronnie. Rossington was onboard up until his death on March 5, 2023, at the age of 71. Lynyrd Skynyrd were deservedly inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2006, and the group's long-running appeal cemented them as one of the most enduring bands of the past half-century. And without a doubt, (*Pronounced 'Lĕh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd*) had a lot to do with that.

Jeff Jacobson is a guitarist, songwriter and veteran music transcriber, with hundreds of published credits. For information on virtual guitar and songwriting lessons or custom transcriptions, feel free to reach out to Jeff on Twitter @jjmusicmentor or visit jeffjacobson.net.

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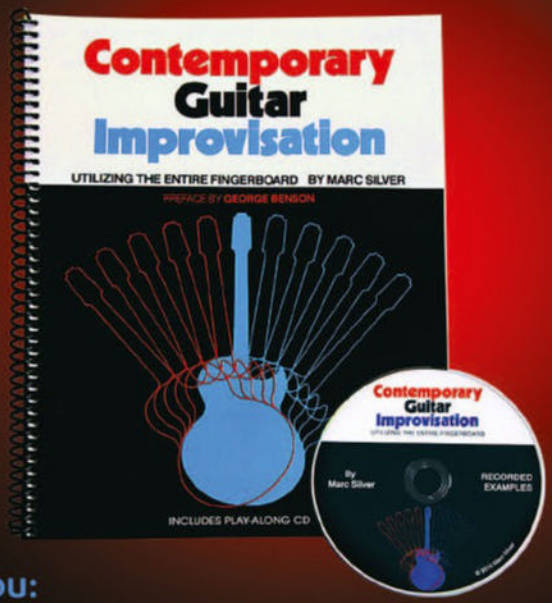

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Django Explained

Stephane Wrembel delivers insights on Django Reinhardt's style of gypsy jazz.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

COURTESY OF FREIGHT & SALVAGE

STEPHANE WREMBEL IS one of the primary contemporary purveyors of gypsy jazz, the style laid down by Django Reinhardt in the '30s and '40s that made him the first global guitar star. He remains popular with myriad "hot jazz" clubs and festivals dedicated to his enduring legacy. Wrembel curates the Django A Gogo Music Festival and Guitar Camp in Maplewood, New Jersey, New York City and Brooklyn, where he celebrated its 20th anniversary with the release of *Django New Orleans* on May 5 [*watch the September 2023 issue of* GP *for our story*]. The Freight & Salvage in Berkeley, California holds an annual soiree celebrating Django's birthday, and *GP* Presents helped promote this year's event. Wrembel performed and held a clinic. Here are a few introductory and core concepts in his own words.

DJANGO SOLO IS ESSENTIAL LISTENING

"Between 1937 and 1950, Django composed and recorded 17 compositions for solo guitar," Wrembel says. "It's the most essential audio; it's the true essence of Django. Everything that you need to know about Django's playing is contained in there, barenaked. It's pure Django, and you can hear exactly what's going on. It's so amazing that I spent five years working on transcribing them into a collection called *Django L'impressionniste*. There is a book with tablature, so everyone can learn it. And I recorded them all with modern equipment as an album, so now it exists as a recital. In it you can find the entire mechanism of Django's mind. His concept of harmony is fascinating. You also encounter jazz, and that's the first point here."

IT DON'T MEAN A THING IF...

"Jazz equals swing, which equals a triplet with the second note muted. It's a very simple formula, but like all music, there are two parts: the rational and irrational. The explainable part is that jazz equals swing. You can practice by releasing the notes from the fretboard in the space between for the missing part of the triplet, and then play legato for the first and the third so that they run together. Then try playing everything more legato, staccato or mix it up. That's the rational center. Outside of that, whatever happens happens, because the irrational part is a great mystery. Unexplainable. All you can do is play and see where it leads you. And what separates the gypsy style from the rest of jazz is the right-hand technique."

PLUCKING TECHNIQUE

"Django's technique is close to the technique used for the oud and lots of traditional instruments. It is very powerful. Django didn't invent it; he was initiated by a great gypsy player of his time named Jean Poulette Castro, who taught him the right-hand technique. To play gypsy jazz, you must use a pick. You might be able to play the notes fingerstyle, but you will never achieve the projection of the Django tone. To achieve the tone, there is a trick to holding the pick. Upright yields a rounder tone. To get the edgy gypsy tone, relax the wrist a bit so the pick strikes the string at an angle.

"The two elements that are also in classical and flamenco guitar are the *apoyendo*, which is the rest stroke, meaning that the pick lands on the string below after plucking the one above. But it's the opposite of the classical fingerstylist who plucks the other way. *Tirendo* is the free stroke, which is the up stroke. It doesn't land, and it has a different tone. Only change strings with the down stroke. The push, or sweep is the third type of stroke. Push only going down after a rest stroke that changes strings. You don't re-attack the same way because you've already rested on that string. It's more of a push, and that push is crucial. By only changing strings with down strokes, and placing consecutive down strokes where other styles would have used an upstroke, it produces a certain groove. That frames the music in a certain way within the vast ocean of musical possibilities."

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player*– and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.*

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PRS

SE Zach Myers Signature

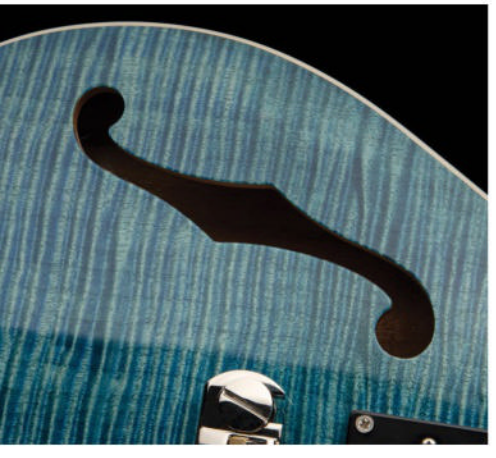
TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

FOR ALL THE big-name players who have been drawn to Paul Reed Smith guitars, Zach Myers' dedication to the brand is hard to beat. A faithful devotee since acquiring his first Custom 22 at the age of 14, the Shinedown lead guitarist was honored with his first SE signature model — a triple-humbucker single-cut — in 2010. The recently released SE Zach Myers is the third PRS model to bear his name, and it does so while adding a new degree of elegance.

In addition to his incendiary chops, Myers' guitar-tech experience made him well primed to spec out an impressive new signature model, and the SE Zach Myers displays several thoughtful design touches as a result. Based on the PRS single-cut shape and construction, it sports a chambered mahogany body with maple cap and flame-maple veneer. The top is bound in single-ply white plastic — rather than the traditional PRS "maple reveal" edge — other than within the cutaway, which displays the depth of the maple cap. The top is finished in what PRS has dubbed Myers Blue, complemented by the clear knobs from his previous signature model, with a matching flame-maple veneer on the headstock face (the first time such a feature has adorned an SE model) and "Zach Myers" engraved on the truss-rod cover.

Like a lot of players, I tend to find the familiar PRS wide-fat neck profile one of those just-right shapes. This one doesn't disappoint, and it's arguably all the more comfortable thanks to its satin finish. It's carved into a glued-in neck of solid mahogany, which is capped by a bound rosewood fretboard with bird inlays. It's 1 11/16 inches wide at the nut, which is the usual black synthetic affair, and the top end carries Kluson-esque vintage-style tuners with black buttons. Scale length is the slightly shorter 24.5 inches that PRS has used when chasing a more traditional single-cut vibe.

The guitar has a Myers Blue finish with matching veneer on the headstock face, a first for an SE model.



The bridge is the guitar maker's adjustable wraparound with brass saddles and studs — which Myers calls his favorite bridge of all time — and pickups are 245 "S" humbuckers wired to individual volume and tone knobs and a three-way selector.

Tested through a Princeton 1x10 combo, a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, and several high-gain presets on the Neural DSP Quad Cortex, the SE Zach Myers proved to be an able-bodied rocker with plenty of nuanced character of its own. With clean settings on the amp, the chambered mahogany lent a certain roundness and airiness to the clear, articulate pickups, which enhanced the depth and body of the guitar's tone. I was impressed with how well the overall sound held together when shown some more drive, however, which enabled very tight, aggressive heavy-rock voicings without slurring the guitar's inherent character.

Through a louder amp with overdrive, the guitar allowed easy feedback when desired, and excellent sustain, but it remained impressively controllable throughout, short of any foolish close-proximity high jinks with the 2x12 cab pumping hard in my studio. Using the 245 "S" humbuckers with more vintage PAF–leaning winds (at 7.94k ohm neck and 8.72k ohm bridge) seems a wise move here, and they help the guitar stay clear and bright for rhythm chordal or arpeggio work, yet still chunky and well defined when pushing, say, a Boogie Mark IIC+ preset on the Quad Cortex — which, I have to add, was a lot of fun on this guitar. All together, it makes for a versatile package that isn't limited by any overly pigeonholing design choices.

THE GUITAR DISPLAYS SEVERAL THOUGHTFUL DESIGN TOUCHES THAT RESULT FROM MYERS' GUITAR-TECH EXPERIENCE

All in all, this signature SE is an impressive model that should appeal to many players well beyond the Zach Myers fan base, and a great value at this price, earning it an Editors' Pick Award.

SPECIFICATIONS

SE Zach Myers Signature
CONTACT prsguitars.com
PRICE $849 street

NUT Synthetic self-lubricating, 1 11/16" wide
NECK Mahogany, wide-fat profile
FRETBOARD Rosewood, 24.5" scale, 10" radius
FRETS 22 medium-jumbo
TUNERS Vintage style
BODY Chambered mahogany with maple top and flame-maple veneer
BRIDGE PRS Adjustable Wraparound
PICKUPS Two PRS 245 "S" humbuckers
CONTROLS Two volume, two tone, three-way toggle switch
FACTORY STRINGS PRS Classic .010–.046
WEIGHT 7.4 lbs (as tested)
BUILT Indonesia

KUDOS A beautiful and well-made guitar at this price (or virtually any), with versatile rock leanings but a voice all its own. A great value that has plenty to offer players beyond Myers' fan base
CONCERNS None

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

COLE CLARK

True Hybrid TL2EC-BLBL-HSS

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

HOLY HYBRID! WHAT an intriguing acoustic/electric premise, promising the best of both worlds. Straight outta Melbourne, Australia, Cole Clark has been in business since the millennium flip and is probably most associated with Hawaiian superstar Jack Johnson's acoustics. They ceased making electrics in 2012, and have recently focused on manifesting the perfect fusion by blending advanced electronics with easy playability. Noticing the trend of players adding magnetic pickups to their acoustics, Cole Clark launched a range of dual-output thinlines with built-in humbuckers in 2019. Their popularity led the company to dig deeper into the hybrid concept, ultimately releasing three models that truly straddle the acoustic/electric fence. The True Hybrid range features Cole Clark's three-way PG3 acoustic system augmented by their three-way electric system consisting of either three single-coils, a pair of humbuckers or the HSS configuration on this review model, the True Hybrid TL2EC-BLBL-HSS. Being a bit of a crossbreed connoisseur, I was intrigued when the guitar caught my attention at the NAMM show and eager to take it for a test drive.

This True Hybrid's aesthetic embodies its crossover concept. Sustainably sourced Australian Blackwood with a natural nitro satin finish provides an earthy backdrop for white single-coil pickups with white control knobs and a bowling ball-style pickguard that look like they could have been plucked from a vintage surf guitar. The teardrop-shaped sound hole on the top upper bout adds a cool splash, as does the golden humbucker that matches the golden control knobs and the tuners on Cole Clark's classic headstock crest. Teal abalone dot inlays adorn a she-oak fretboard. Somehow it all comes together harmoniously. The only element my eye finds slightly askew is the hard corner of a rectangular bridge bumping up against the curvaceous pickguard. A bit of rounding off would make it flow together better, but for being a bit of a unicorn, the True Hybrid looks pretty swift.

The unamplified tone from this thinline with thin strings and essentially a single f-hole isn't going to win any campfire competitions compared to a pure acoustic, but it has a solid, well-balanced sound that's far fuller than any hollow, semi-hollow or chambered body coming from an electric base. Sustain is particularly noteworthy. One of Cole Clark's hallmarks is a Spanish heel, an integral neck-through design where one piece of wood goes all the way to the sound hole, as on a classical guitar. The neck is glued to a carved top and back, along with the sides, joined internally with a ridged system rather than a notched lining (i.e. kerfling). It's all designed for maximum vibrational conductivity, which relates to the pickups.

Speaking of which, the patented PG3 acoustic system, introduced in 2022, is a combination of six individual undersaddle bridge piezos plus a top (face) sensor and a mic. The idea is that the bridge pickups gather most of the low end, the top sensor grabs the middle body information and the microphone captures the high end. The result is flexible, powerful and realistic. The controls facilitate blending any balance you'd like, and Cole Clark has the crossover points dialed in wonderfully. The body sensor is incredible at capturing percussives. The most surprising aspect is how much body and mic ambience one can achieve without getting feedback. The PG3 system gave this thinline a grand sound through a little AER Tommy Emmanuel signature amp. How important is the PG3 in the manufacturer's view? Cole Clark states, "We designed a pickup and built a guitar around it."

They've done tons of research on the electric system as well, and it sure sounds like it paid off. Cole Clark has found a way to balance its patent-pending magnetic pickups in a way that delivers a full steel-string tone

from a typical acoustic phosphor-bronze set. According to the Aussies, most electric-style magnetics only capture the nickel core on the wound strings, but they've turned up the magnetism on the wound strings and down on the plain strings. The crazy thing is how much these magnetics also deliver a killer electric guitar sound from an acoustic set. Plug the magnetic output into a classic tube amp, such as the '66 Fender Pro used for these tests, and they sound like a hollowbody version of a Strat, Tele or Les Paul, depending on the pickup selection. The single-coils sing, and the humbucker in the bridge is just right — neither too dull nor too bright.

Put the two systems together and enter a vast wealth of uncharted tonal territory. What bliss to enjoy endless combinations of a percussive, robust acoustic tone along with a slinky, snappy electric tone. Use pedals to add gain and effects to either or both outputs, and the possibilities are practically boundless. I blissed out on everything from jazzy warm and clean tones to raging blues-rock sounds facilitated by a devilishly delicious mix of thick overdrive from a Wampler Pexi Drive Deluxe coupled with harmonically rich grand-auditorium tones soaked in lush reverb. I had a ton of fun using the new Fishman AFX Broken Record to loop an acoustic bed on the AER while ripping away over the top through the Fender.

The neck has the voluptuous feel and flatter radius of an acoustic, and since it's designed to accommodate phosphor-bronze strings including a wound third, it certainly has an acoustic feel under the fingers. But the strings are extra light (gauges .011–.052), and the action is so easy that the True Hybrid practically plays like an electric. I actually found the factory action to be a slightly too low to deal with aggressive fingerstyle or plectrum playing without some fret splat. A lighter touch was rewarded with nicely nuanced dynamics, and the action is easily adjustable via the truss rod.

A full 25.5-inch scale length yields a snappy string response, and in turn, bending requires a bit of gumption, especially in the upper register. Like a classic Strat, there are 21 frets. To me, that translated to 15th position being the uppermost where I felt full accessibility to all the licks I would normally play in the key of G. You can get to the key of A in the 17th position, but even with the cutaway it's a tight fit as the neck joins the body in typical acoustic fashion at the 14th fret. So the kind of leads one might wail up in the short rows on, say, an SG or a Les Paul isn't readily available, but it's darn close to that classic Strat situation, and I found the overall slinkiness very Strat-like as well. Riffs from the Hendrix/Vaughan canon flow easily from the fingers, and it's wild to be able to wield them with the tonal flexibility of this True Hybrid.

COLE CLARK'S TRUE HYBRID DELIVERS A BLISSFUL BALANCE OF ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC MOJO

As a bona fide Libra performer who often brings an array of acoustics and electrics to a gig, I'd be thrilled to have the Cole Clark True Hybrid TL2EC-BLBL-HSS as my sole traveling companion on a flyaway. I tend to lean towards the acoustic side, and this instrument seems more of an acoustic with electric features than the other way around. That's fine. Solidbodies or semis with piezos in the bridge tend to sound like an electric with a little lagniappe, even through dual rigs. Acoustics with magnetic pickups tend to yield something similar from the opposite angle.

The True Hybrid delivers a blissful balance of acoustic and electric mojo. Kudos to Cole Clark for manifesting its double vision with clarity on both sides of the paradigm, with respect to tone and playability. It's a singular experience via dual outputs into dual amps, and the flexibility is awesome. For its execution of pure analog ingenuity, the Cole Clark True Hybrid TL2EC-BLBL-HSS earns an enthusiastic Editors' Pick award.

SPECIFICATIONS

True Hybrid TL2EC-BLBL-HSS
CONTACT coleclarkguitars.com
PRICE $3,399 street, with tweed hardshell case

NUT WIDTH 1.73", Tusq
NECK Queensland maple
FRETBOARD She-oak, 25.5" scale, abalone dot inlays
FRETS 21
TUNERS Grover, gold
BODY Thinline grand auditorium with solid Australian Blackwood back, sides and top
BRIDGE She-oak with Tusq saddle
ELECTRONICS Dual 3-way pickup systems feed dual outputs: Cole Clark PG3 acoustic is six individual undersaddle piezos plus a body sensor and a microphone. Onboard preamp with master volume knob and treble, middle and bass sliders. Bridge/Face and Mic blend knobs plus FC (Filter Contour) button. Cole Clark electric system is three balanced magnetic pickups in HSS configuration (bridge humbucker, middle and neck single-coils) with 5-way selector switch, volume and tone with push/pull pot on tone control for series or parallel on humbucker. Global 3-way mini-switch toggles between acoustic, electric or both systems
FACTORY STRINGS Phosphor bronze extra light .011–.052 as tested. Will ship with .010 to .047 in future
WEIGHT 6 lbs (as tested)
BUILT Australia

KUDOS Ingenious hybrid design delivers awesome amplified acoustic and electric tonal array from several pickup options and dual outputs. Fine playability and craftsmanship. Eco-conscious woods
CONCERNS Mainly that skeptics may write this off as odd or obscure

DANELECTRO

'59 Triple Divine

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

BACK IN 1959, Danelectro founder Nathan Daniel introduced the Deluxe model, an innovative and low-cost electric guitar that featured a "shorthorn" double-cutaway body made of pine and hardboard, a pair of single-coil pickups housed in lipstick tubes (originally sourced from cosmetics maker Max Factor), and a bolt-on neck with a distinctive Coke-bottle headstock. Springing from that platform, the new '59 Triple Divine embodies all the Sputnik-era charm of the original while adding features that make it suitable for guitarists of the SpaceX generation.

The most obvious update over Danelectro's recent dual-pickup '59 Divine is the Triple's trio of lipstick pickups, which recalls Danelectro's DC-3 model of the late '90s (discontinued in the early 2000s) that had three lipsticks and an adventurous switching scheme comprising a six-position Select-o-Matic rotary control and a separate toggle to activate all three pickups. The Triple Divine keeps things simpler with volume and tone controls and a five-way blade switch that offers the usual pickup selections: neck, neck plus middle, middle, middle plus bridge, and bridge. The three "'50s-spec" pickups feature tape-wrapped coils around sand-cast Alnico VI magnets, which are stuffed into tubular casings made of 80/20 brass/zinc alloy. The hand-soldered wiring inside the control cavity is neatly bundled, and with the shielded cover plate removed you can view a section of the center block nestled within the body of this gloss-finished black beauty (see specs for other colors). This chunk of solid spruce running down the middle provides better resistance to feedback and helps the sustain too, something that's noticeable when playing this light, resonant guitar acoustically. The glossy, C-shaped maple neck with its fairly flat 25-inch scale fingerboard and nicely polished frets has a great playing feel, and the factory setup provides low action and musically solid intonation, aided of course by a chrome-plated bridge fitted with six adjustable bent-steel saddles. Details like smooth fret ends and a precise-fitting bone nut with rounded corners also help in the playability department.

Plugged into a selection of amps that included a Mesa/Boogie Mark VII [*see New & Cool, page 17*], a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Boss Katana-50 Mk II combo (as well as a selection of overdrive pedals from EHX, JHS and TWA), the '59 Triple Divine served up a cool range of characteristically clear and vibey tones. These twangy-sounding, low-output single-coils are smooth and balanced, and with three to choose from you can cover a lot of bases. Played cleanly, the neck pickup dishes out warm timbres that can sound jazzy with the tone knob rolled down a little, and it delivers a sweet blues

SPECIFICATIONS

'59 TRIPLE DIVINE
CONTACT danelectro.com
PRICE $799 street

NUT Bone, 1.650" wide
NECK Maple bolt-on, C profile
FRETBOARD Rosewood with dot inlays, 25" scale, 14" radius
FRETS 21 medium
TUNERS Gotoh, 15:1 ratio
BODY Spruce/plywood with hardboard top and back. Spruce center block
BRIDGE U3 with intonatable saddles
PICKUPS Three 1950s Vintage single-coils with sand-cast Alnico VI magnets and 80/20 brass/zinc alloy tubes
CONTROLS Master volume and tone, five-way blade switch
EXTRAS Available in Black, Blue Metallic, Dark Burgundy and Red
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario .010–.046
WEIGHT 6 lbs (as tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS A nice playing and well-made guitar that delivers a wide range of roots-flavored tones
CONCERNS Gig bag not included

The three "'50s-spec" pickups feature tape-wrapped coils around sand-cast Alnico VI magnets.

tone when fired up with distortion from a pedal or high-gain amp channel. The middle position is janglier and a little more hollow in the mids, making it cool for all sorts of rock/funk/pop rhythm duties (it even worked for faux-flattop strumming through the Katana's Acoustic preset), and it combines nicely with the neck pickup in switch-position two for a round, slightly phasey tone that also sounds good with some grind.

The bridge setting was killer for lead and dirty rhythm through the Boogie's Mark IV and VII modes with the gain cranked up. In cleaner modes, or through the Deluxe, it sounded plucky and Strat-like when combined with the middle pickup on switch position four. These options enhance the Triple Divine's flexibility and make it a fun guitar for gigs and especially for recording, where you can really appreciate the pickups' textural coolness.

As the latest evolution of a guitar that Danelectro introduced more than six decades ago, the Triple Divine offers the same working-player appeal in an instrument that looks cool, plays and sounds terrific and delivers a lot of bang for the buck. Danelectro has always done things its own way to serve guitar players' needs, and the '59 Triple Divine puts a modern spin on a classic, nabbing an Editors' Pick Award in the process.

18+

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EHX

Lizard Queen Octave/Distortion

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

SPECIFICATIONS

Lizard Queen Octave/Distortion
CONTACT ehx.com
PRICE $99 street

CONTROLS Volume, octave, Balance
I/O Input, output, 9VDC center-negative, power jack (adapter not included)
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical, true-bypass
EXTRAS 9V battery installed
SIZE 4.25" x 2.25" x 1.25"

KUDOS Delivers a wide range of octave-fuzz tones courtesy of an octave level knob and a unique balance control. Operates on battery power or optional 9VDC supply
CONCERNS None

THE RESULT OF an unusual coalition between Electro-Harmonix, JHS pedals founder Josh Scott and graphic artist Daniel Danger, the Lizard Queen Octave/Distortion is a compact version of JHS's "big box" pedal of the same name. Created in the spirit of a "love letter" to Mike Matthews (who founded EHX in 1968), and made to echo the style of pedals that EHX produced in the mid 1970s, the limited-edition run features period-correct sheet-metal housings with silk-screened graphics, N.O.S. transistors and old-school circuit-board construction, complete with hand-drawn traces rendered artistically by Danger himself. (For the full story about the LQ, visit jhspedals.info)

The nano Lizard Queen has the same graphics and complement of volume, octave and balance controls, but adds modern conveniences like a jack for external power and an on/off LED, as found on the JHS version. Removing the bottom plate from the die-cast enclosure provides access to the already installed "super-heavy-duty" carbon battery sporting Mike Matthews' image, and allows you to see all of the circuit components instead of just the back side of the PCB, as is often the case.

Scott maintains that the Lizard Queen is not a clone of a Roger Mayer Octavia, Foxx Tone Machine or, for that matter, any other vintage or modern octave-fuzz. The pedal is particularly interesting because it's a fixed-gain fuzz that dispenses with a standard gain knob in favor of a balance control that operates with a sort of dual personality. As Scott says, it's "not a tone control, but it affects the tone; and not a gain control, but it affects the gain."

The distortion sounds thickest and heaviest with the balance control turned counter-clockwise to the Shadow position. It's more biting and gated sounding when turned clockwise to the Sun position, particularly when the highly interactive octave control is also halfway up or so. Having a dedicated octave control is also somewhat unusual (although EHX's Octavix also has one), and it's a cool feature because you can turn the octave almost completely off or progressively add it to get the desired amount of shrill, ring-modulation-infused sound. The pedal has a lot of output too, so plenty of boost is available, if needed.

Played through a Fender Deluxe Reverb with a variety of single-coil and humbucker guitars from Fender, Gibson and PRS, the Lizard Queen was easy to dial in for tones that can be very reminiscent of the previously mentioned classic octave-fuzzes — or for that matter non-octave pedals like the Big Muff or Fuzz Face — while also having plenty of latitude to conjure sounds that are just fun and pleasing to hear. For instance, turning the octave knob all the way up with the balance control set to Shadow elicits gated, modulating swells that sound like a backward effect. Turn the knobs the other direction and the tones become smooth and vocally in a "woman tone" sort of way with the guitar turned up (especially when using a neck-position humbucker), before descending into spittiness with a halo of octave chime as you turn down. Neat stuff.

The Lizard Queen is such a blast to play, and for the admission price of $99 you're essentially getting a boutique pedal for a pittance when compared to the original JHS offering, which is a piece of sonic art in its own right. Bottom line: If you're looking to summon your inner Jimi Hendrix or just want the most flexible octave-fuzz available to add fresh color to your distortion tones, the Lizard Queen is the bomb, and it gets an Editors' Pick Award.


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GTR Minivault E2

TESTED BY JUDE GOLD

ROCK STARS OFTEN tour with guitar vaults — huge rolling cabinets that open to reveal an arsenal of eight or so guitars, each upright in the rack, ready to be strapped on and played. Conveniently, rock stars also often tour with semis or chartered jets — or at least with a trailer behind their bus — to make their massive guitar arks easy to transport.

Luckily for the rest of us, Gator has just released the GTR Minivault E2, which means more players can enjoy a little slice of "vault life," whether they're doing local gigs or fly dates on commercial airlines.

Accommodating everything from Les Pauls to Strats to Jazzmasters to long-scale baritones, the Minivault gives two solidbody (or solidbody-sized) guitars a snug, foam-lined ride to the gig in one convenient, quiet-rolling vessel. My ES-335 almost fit, but unfortunately the edge of its body stuck out of the opening just enough to prevent the lid from closing.

When you're at the gig, simply wheel the Minivault to your side of the stage, open the lid and *voilà!* — your guitars are ready for you, sitting comfortably in a two-guitar rack that eliminates the need for guitar stands or a place to stash dead cases, and making it easy to switch instruments mid-set.

With the Minivault, all you have to stash during the gig is the lid — which is why it has been cleverly endowed with two magnets. Just lean the lid against the back of the vault and it sticks! This trick worked great everywhere, except on my living room's highly polished bamboo floor, where the lid sometimes slipped away from vault under its own weight, perhaps because the magnets don't sit perfectly flush against the contact points.

Another plus is that a whopping five twist latches hold the lid on during transport, ensuring that even if TSA agents miss one when reattaching the lid after inspection (I've seen this happen with other cases), the Minivault remains plenty secure. This is important, because it's the perfectly slotted foam in the lid that holds your guitars in place when traveling.

Having toured with the Minivault, I have only one question: Were Gator's design engineers perhaps overly generous with headroom? Even when toting an MJ Guitars baritone, there was more than three inches between the guitar's headstock and the foam ceiling. (A cool aftermarket product for that extra space might be a storage box or pouch in which to stash picks, strings and the like.) Add to that an exterior top handle that sticks up two inches above the Minivault's top plane, and you have a 50.5-inch-high case — small by rock star standards, yes, but rather bulky if your Uber driver shows up in a Sentra.

A little extra height, though, is a small price to pay to ensure your two favorite guitars always get a first-class trip to and from the gig — even when you're up above, flying in coach.

SPECIFICATIONS

GTR Minivault E2
CONTACT gatorco.com
PRICE $549

DIMENSIONS 11.75" x 19" x 50.5"
MADE USA

KUDOS A tough, flight-ready rolling guitar vault that, even with a pair of 12-pound Les Pauls inside, comes in well under 50 pounds. Low-noise wheels
CONCERNS A tad taller than it has to be

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How I Wrote...

"Long White Cadillac"

Dave Alvin opens up about the many lives of his long-running ode to country music icon Hank Williams.

BY JOE BOSSO

"IT WAS MY attempt at gospel blues," Dave Alvin says of his signature song, "Long White Cadillac." "I was trying to write something for a recording session that never happened with Lightnin' Hopkins and the Swan Silvertones. But then I started to write about the last night of Hank Williams' life. I mixed up a lot of American music in my brain."

Alvin recorded the tune twice: as a rockabilly rave-up with his former band, the Blasters, on their 1983 album, *Non Fiction*, and again four years later as a slower blues number on his solo debut, *Romeo's Escape*. Two years later, Dwight Yoakam recorded a harder-edged take for his album *Just Lookin' for a Hit*. "It's had several lives," Alvin says. "Whichever version you like is up to you."

BLASTING IT

"Some songs arrive all at once," Alvin explains. "I'll be playing the guitar, I start singing and it's like, 'Hi, I'm a song. Nice to meet you!' Other songs you have to work at and finesse. 'Long White Cadillac' was a finesser, because I was grappling with big topics."

For Alvin, the theme of losing oneself was central as he sat around one night in 1982, plunking around on his brother Phil's Epiphone archtop acoustic. "It was a funny time for me," he recalls. "I had gone from being a fry cook to making a living as a musician, but I thought I was losing myself. I thought, What was it like for Hank Wiliams? How could he go from being Hank Williams to dying in the back of a car?"

Alvin kept playing, working up a gospel blues feel. "Once I got the line 'Night wolves moan,' I was like, All right, I know where this is going," he says. "But I didn't want to make the song obvious, like, 'I'm Hank Williams, and I'm dying in the back of a car.' I tried to write around saying that."

Once he showed the song to the Blasters, his idea of gospel blues went out the window. "We didn't do slow songs. Our audience wouldn't have it," he explains. "The more we played it in rehearsal, the faster it got. And because of that, guitar parts changed." Alvin credits the band's drummer, Bill Bateman, for coming up with the tune's twangy opening riff. "One day, Bill said, 'I've got it!' He played this fast chugging lick, and that was it."

"DWIGHT SAID, 'F* COUNTRY RADIO!' I WAS LIKE, 'NO, NO, NO, NOT WITH MY SONG. MAKE THEM LIKE MY SONG'"**

TAKE 20

The Blasters' version of "Long White Cadillac" sounds like a breezy, one-take wonder, but in fact the band members — producing themselves at L.A.'s Ocean Way Recording — labored over the sessions. "Typical stuff. Somebody screwed up a part," Alvin says. "We would hear the song played back through these big speakers, and it was like, 'What are we doing? You — don't play that. This part's too busy.' It took about 20 takes to get it right."

The guitarist's spunky, surf-flavored lead, however, was right on the money every time. "I worked the solo out live, so I ripped right through it," Alvin says. "I used a Fender Mustang through a Randall amp. No pedals — just the amp and studio reverb."

When recording the song for his solo album, Alvin corrected his two beefs with the Blasters' version. "The band never figured out how to end the song, so we just came to this abrupt halt," he says. "For my record, we faded it — and it's slower, which allows you to understand what the song is about."

THE YACHT THAT WASN'T

After leaving the Blasters in 1986, Alvin was in rough shape financially. *Romeo's Escape* failed to sell, and Columbia Records dropped him. So he was elated when his old friend from the early '80s, Dwight Yoakam, by now a big country star, gave him a call. "He said, 'Hey man, we're at Capitol Studios and we cut your song. Come on down!'" Alvin recalls.

Alvin entered the studio expecting to hear a modern country-radio version of "Long White Cadillac." "I thought, I'm gonna buy a yacht!" he says. But when he heard Yoakam's recording, his hopes dimmed. "It was long, hard-rocking, neo-psychedelic... I was like, 'Man, can't you put some pedal steel and fiddles on it?' Dwight being Dwight said, 'Fuck country radio!' I was like, 'No, no, no, not with my song. Make them like my song.'"

Even so, Yoakam's recording hit number 35 on *Billboard*'s Country chart. "It did really well, and it got me out of debt," Alvin says. "I'm thankful for that."

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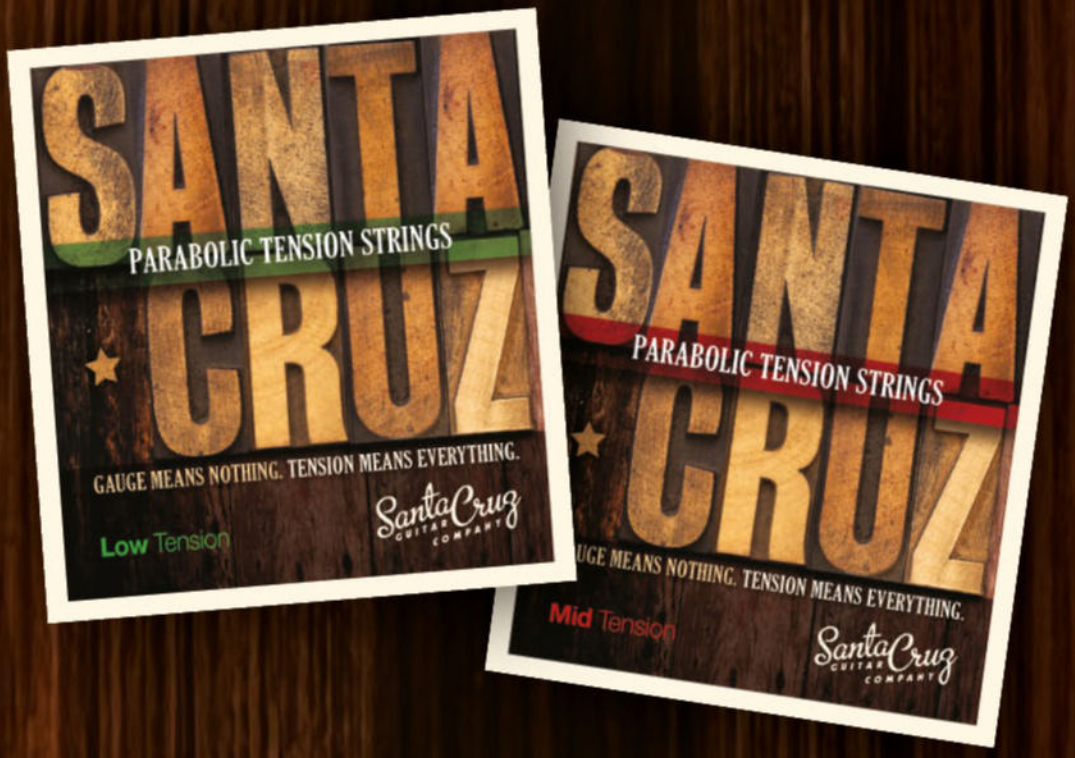

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