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Not something we
grew up listening to" }

GRETA VAN FLEET'S

JAKE KISZKA

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YOU DON'T KNOW JAKE

A WISE MAN once said, "You wouldn't put a five-minute solo in a song just because you felt like it. The song would have to request it in a way."

That man was Greta Van Fleet guitarist Jake Kiszka, and he knows a thing or two about soloing at length. At 27 years of age, he's mastered the art of the five-minute solo as well as a host of stylistic flourishes and skills that make up his arsenal of hard-rock techniques. From Greta Van Fleet's 2018 debut, *Anthem of the Peaceful Army*, to their latest, the brand-new *Starcatcher*, Jake has established himself as the biggest and most influential rock guitarist of his generation.

If you have any doubts, consider that *Total Guitar* readers in late 2021 voted his solo in "The Weight of Dreams" the best of the 21st century. For that matter, *Guitar World* readers last year voted him one of the 50 hottest new guitarists in that publication's September 2022 issue, which promptly sold out.

Critics and readers who lived through the 1970s can be quick to dismiss both Jake's guitar wizardry and his group's music as rehashed Led Zeppelin. So when contributing writer Joe Bosso sat down with the guitarist for this issue's interview, he was loaded with questions about just what everyone seems to overlook when it comes to him and his band's music, and — more importantly — what Jake brings to the game. Jake is smart and savvy, and he doesn't give everything away — which is why we enlisted guitar instruction whiz and Greta Van Fleet fan Jeff Jacobson to deliver a lesson on how to put Jake's stylistic moves to use in your own playing. Considering it's been more than five years since Jake appeared on our cover, with the June 2018 issue, we thought it was high time to explore how he's rebooted hard-rock guitar playing.

AS A NEW YORKER, I've experienced some heart-stopping concerts in the city's clubs, but nothing has ever compared to the thrills I've had at the shows of Jesse Malin, who we featured in Holiday 2019. The onetime singer for the glam-punk band D Generation, Jesse has in recent years found his strongest voice yet as an Americana troubadour. His latest albums, 2019's *Sunset Kids* and 2021's *Sad and Beautiful World*, are glorious rockers full of heart and soul. But nothing beats watching him perform live, connecting with you from the stage, before leaping off of it to work his way through the audience for an extended strut, dancing and singing his ass off the entire time.

Sadly, this past May, Jesse experienced a rare spinal stroke while dining with friends. He's been diagnosed with a complete spinal injury and is paralyzed from the waist down. While Jesse — like his fans — remains hopeful of a full recovery, it won't be cheap. Over the years, he's run benefits for everyone from friends in need to local bands and unemployed food staff during the pandemic.

Now it's our turn to help him, via the Sweet Relief Musicians Fund (sweetrelief.org/jessemalinfund.html). Your fully tax-deductible donations will go directly to Jesse's care. If you can't give, do the next best thing and send Jesse a little of what he's been preaching for years: P.M.A. — positive mental attitude — that he can, and will, recover.

Chris Scapelliti

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Jackson Maxwell Online and Social Media Managing Editor,

jackson.maxwell@futurenet.com

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CONTENT

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Christopher Scapelliti,
chris.scapelliti@futurenet.com

SENIOR EDITOR Art Thompson,
arthur.thompson@futurenet.com

ART EDITOR Philip Cheesbrough,
philip.cheesbrough@futurenet.com

PRODUCTION EDITOR Jem Roberts,
jem.roberts@futurenet.com

LOS ANGELES EDITOR Jude Gold,
judegold@gmail.com

FRETS EDITOR Jimmy Leslie,
jimmyleslie.com

LESSONS EDITOR Jimmy Brown,
jimmy.brown@futurenet.com

SENIOR IMAGE MANIPULATION TECHNICIAN
Gary Stuckey

CONSULTING EDITORS Matt Blackett,
Jim Camplongo, Dave Hunter, Michael Ross

ADVERTISING SALES

HEAD OF INDUSTRY: MUSIC Brian Preston
brian.preston@futurenet.com

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Robert Dye
robert.dye@futurenet.com, (732) 241-7437

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Jeff Donnerwerth
jeff.donnerwerth@futurenet.com, (678) 427-1535

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HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING, Rachel Shaw
licensing@futurenet.com

BRAND DIRECTOR, MUSIC: Stuart Williams

HEAD OF ART: Rodney Dive

CONTENT DIRECTOR, MUSIC: Scott Rowley

HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC): Brad Merrett

GROUP ART DIRECTOR: Graham Dalzell

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CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 2023 | VOLUME 57 | NUMBER 9

PLAYERS

32

Scott Holiday

38

Jake Kiszka

48

Grace Potter

54

Stevie Ray Vaughan

64

Stephane Wrembel

FRETS

70

The Milk Carton Kids

NEW & COOL

17

b3 Guitars Cielo Deluxe

ALBUMS

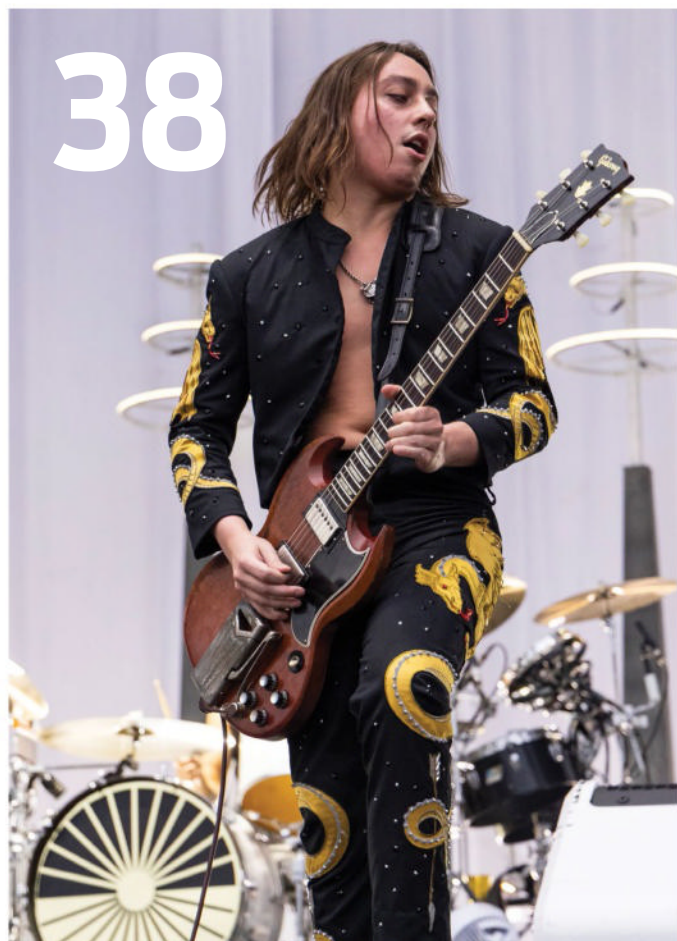
20

Vinnie Moore



ON THE COVER

Jake Kiszka photographed
by Paige Sara



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LEO QUAN



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SCAN ME

CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 2023 | VOLUME 57 | NUMBER 9

TIP SHEET

22

Nili Brosh

FIVE SONGS

24

Billie Duffy

COLUMNS

28

Dave Hunter's Classic Gear
Yamaha SG-2000

30

Jim Campilongo's
Vinyl Treasures

Alexandre Lagoya —
The Spanish Guitar

31

Terry Carleton's Whack Job
Delfi Kosmos

LESSONS

78

The hard-rock stylings of
Greta Van Fleet's Jake Kiszka

83

Peppino D'Agostino's
world of open tunings

GEAR

84

Universal Audio Del-Verb
Ambience Companion,

88



90



84

92

Galaxy '74 Tape Echo &
Reverb and Max Preamp/
Dual Compressor

88

Ellis Guitars X Series
Pickup Blending System

90

Taylor Builders Edition
814ce

92

Death By Audio
Disturbance Lockable
LFO Modulator Pedal

HOW I WROTE

98

Tommy James on
"Crimson and Clover"

98



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The Cielo hybrid acoustic-electric has a chambered body made of solid woods, with piezo bridge saddles and a traditional magnetic pickup in the neck position.

WEATHER CASTER

How climate extremes led Gene Baker to re-envision the acoustic-electric with b3 Guitars' **Cielo Deluxe**.

BY DAVE HUNTER

ARGUABLY THE BEST new guitar designs are created to fill a specific need. And when one of the country's elite guitar makers conceives of a model to suit his own particular tonal desires — as Gene Baker did with the new b3 Cielo Deluxe hybrid acoustic-electric — chances are it's going to be something special.

Building under his b3 brand and other banners that his guitars have worn in the past, Baker is far and away best known for alternative takes on classic solid-body electrics, an arena that his pedigree certainly reinforces. After being named a Master Builder at the Fender Custom Shop following a tenure building for Gibson, then moving on to head up the acclaimed Premier Builder's

Guild, Baker needs no introduction. But the Cielo Deluxe we're checking out this issue comes from entirely elsewhere, while still — perhaps counterintuitively — screaming “Gene Baker creation” from top to bottom.

When I propose that the Cielo model is a little different from what most people have come to expect from b3, Baker explains its origins. “The design was inspired by a special purpose,” he says. “Tehachapi, California, where we now live, is a high mountain desert town where it's very dry and we experience over 24 inches of snow per winter. I had a very nice boutique acoustic that was coming nearly unglued once we relocated to Tehachapi, whereas it survived perfectly for almost a decade in all other places we'd

lived. So I needed to get that guitar off the mountain for its survival and find a suitable replacement.

“Put simply, I needed an instrument that could withstand the elements. Tehachapi is also heavy in wineries, where we just don't have as many normal bar-type venues for bands. Acoustic music dominates the region, and those of us in the MGB [*Mean Gene Band*] find ourselves playing predominately acoustic gigs. After looking around a bit, I began reminiscing about the former Gibson Chet Atkins SST hybrid model, as it was essentially a chambered solid-body with a piezo pickup system. So they had an acoustic-like image, which was something I wanted to retain.”

Enter the Cielo, a thinline hybrid acoustic-electric guitar with a chambered body made of solid woods, piezo bridge saddles for authentic acoustic-like tone, and a traditional magnetic pickup in the neck position for electric-guitar tones. Of course, being a b3, there's a lot more to it than that, and the effort required Baker to overcome a few design challenges along the way. But the

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**“WE STRING THEM UP
WITH A 10-TO-46 SET
AND A PLAIN G FOR
ONE MAIN REASON:
BURNING LEADS!”**

Cielo is entirely hybrid by nature, and it suits a need that hasn't been addressed often in the world of boutique guitar makers.

A closer look reveals that the Cielo's construction is more complex than this in-a-nutshell assessment might imply. A central core of mahogany that's strategically chambered and hollowed out entirely beneath the sound hole forms the guitar's sides and neck joint. It's covered by a book-matched back of solid walnut and capped with a top of Ancient Kauri, a sustainable wood purported to be the world's oldest, which is grown on New Zealand's North Island. This is finished in nitrocellulose lacquer in a rich two-tone antique sunburst, with a golden hue toward the center that beautifully reveals some characterful knots in the wood.

The neck is solid mahogany, with a sculpted heel that merges seamlessly with the mahogany of the body, and features a rosewood fingerboard. The latter is where the decorative enhancements of the Cielo Deluxe model first shine through. Ringed in multi-ply faux-tortoise/black/white binding, it sports art deco inlays of mixed abalone and mother-of-pearl, with a mother-of-pearl b3 logo in its ebony headstock overlay. The body echoes these details in its tortoise outer binding and multi-ply purfling, double-bound tortoise sound-hole rosette, and tortoise pickguard and neck-pickup cover. The 22 medium-jumbo 6105 frets are stainless steel, and unlike even most cutaway flattop acoustics, the Cielo design allows playable access to all of them on the plain strings.

It's a pretty chunky neck — .890 inches deep at the first fret — but extremely comfortable regardless, with a soft-V profile that leans toward a rounded '59 C shape. The 24.625-inch scale length and 1.687-inch width at the nut also keep things feeling familiar to fans of the Gibson-inspired template.

As elegant as the Cielo Deluxe appears, an in-hand inspection immediately tipped me to several design challenges that were no doubt at the heart of the effort, and Baker is entirely forthcoming about several of the hurdles. “It was somewhat of a tricky sandwich, to say the least,” he tells *GP*. “The goal from the outset was to remove

the details I found problematic with acoustics, such as hard-to-adjust intonation and string height, easy access

to internal electronics or external placement of controls, and a comfortable design allowing upper-fret access. I also wanted to mitigate unwanted feedback issues and have more than one pickup for more common neck/bridge type tones, while keeping the

The Lollar Broiler is tied to the piezo via the L.R. Baggs CTRL-X preamp system, with a three-way mini toggle to switch between either or both.





instrument's top plate reactive to players that may tap drumbeats on their acoustics.

"Also, light strings just never feel right on a traditional acoustic, but the L.R. Baggs piezo-loaded bridge setup not only sounds great, it also enables the use of any gauge of

strings and allows for quick-and-easy string changes. We string them up like our electrics, with a 10-to-46 set and a plain G for one main reason: burning leads!"

The black-plated hardware includes a stop-bar tailpiece in addition to the

aforementioned L.R. Baggs T bridge, and Revolution Series Kluson tuners. The pickup in the neck position is a Lollar Broiler — that company's take on the single-coil Rickenbacker toaster-top pickup — and it's tied in to the piezo via the L.R. Baggs CTRL-X preamp system, with a three-way mini toggle to switch between either or both. Controls include master volume, tone and blend, and there's a recessed push-button stereo/mono selector to rout the output accordingly, via a TRS cable, to split the piezo and magnetic pickups to separate amps or board inputs.

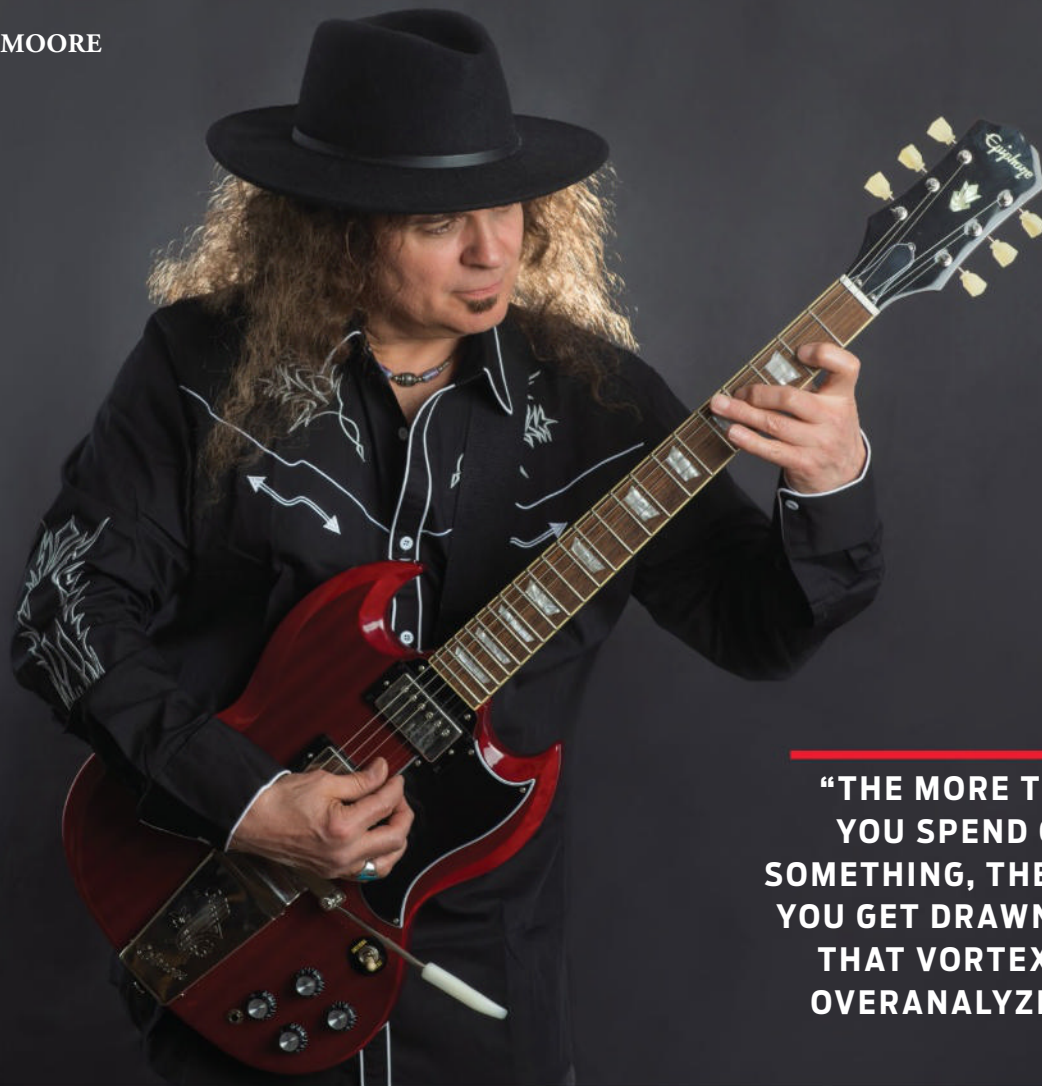
I played the Cielo Deluxe through several amp configurations: in mono into a tweed Deluxe-style combo and 65amps London head with 2x12 cab; in stereo to either of those, plus a powered PA wedge for the piezo; and in mono and stereo through dual channels of a modeler into headphones. In doing so I discovered a wealth of sound-sculpting options. Either of the guitar's primary voices is superb, with enough brightness from the traditional pickup in the neck position to handle high-gain lead tones without mudding out, and an extremely convincing acoustic tone from the piezo saddles that implied a quality flattop captured by studio microphones through signal paths designed for acoustics.

In addition to the myriad sonic options, it was the ability to apply my unfettered electric-guitar chops to acoustic or blended tones that really helped the Cielo Deluxe stand out, and made it a powerful creative tool in the process. Obviously, it's a massive boon if your live gig requires seamless transitions from electric to acoustic tones, but beyond that realm the potential for crafting atmospherics and diverse soundscapes is also massive. Lush ambient reverb on the piezo and tight medium-crunch on the magnetic pickup? Or change the latter to a synth tone or retro tremolo? Yes, please!

All in all, the Cielo Deluxe is a thoughtfully designed and beautifully rendered gateway to more alternative tone configurations than even the most creative guitarist is likely to initially imagine. Undoubtedly this type of guitar isn't for everyone, but for those who can make the most of it, it's a hands-down winner. **B**

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YOU GET DRAWN INTO
THAT VORTEX OF
OVERANALYZING”**

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

*On **Double Exposure**, Vinnie Moore unites both spheres of his rock guitar influences.*

BY JUDE GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRETCHEN JOHNSON

IT'S ONLY NATURAL that Vinnie Moore has been making instrumental albums ever since Mike Varney featured him in *GP*'s “Spotlight” column back in the mid '80s and immediately signed him to Shrapnel Records. After all, the first melody Moore remembers figuring out on his own as a budding teen guitarist was Jeff Beck's “Blue Wind.” “At that point I couldn't even bend notes,” Moore recalls. “I didn't know what a bend was. I played everything straight.”

But like any rock guitar virtuoso who started playing in the mid to late '70s, Moore was also profoundly affected by guitar acts with vocals — everyone from the Beatles, Led

Zeppelin and Robin Trower to Bad Company, Mountain and Michael Schenker—era UFO, the iconic German heavy rock band Moore has played lead guitar for since 2003.

And now, with the release of *Double Exposure* (Minds Eye Music), Moore has, for the first time, allowed both hemispheres of his musical influences to seep into a solo album. As you'd expect from a Vinnie Moore release, every song on the new record boils over with tasty guitar riffs, fills and solos that span every genre, from rock and metal to funk and Americana. Noteworthy, though, is that half of the songs on *Double Exposure* also — for the first time in Moore's solo career —

feature singers, including such vocal powerhouses as Keith Slack, Ed Terry, Mike DiMeo and Brian Stephenson.

And yes, Moore sings on it too — sort of. Perhaps as a testament to how much he values groove in every song he tracks, Moore, at the end of “In Too Deep,” can be faintly heard singing a classic phrase through his guitar pickups: “It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.”

After nine instrumental records, what inspired you to put vocals on your 10th?

I began this album during lockdown. I figured a quick and painless way to get six songs out would be to record an instrumental EP. But when I was listening back to one of the demo songs, I started hearing vocals in my head. I began singing along with it and went, Hey, this could be a good vocal song. Maybe I could have somebody sing on it.

I kept that in mind, and as I listened to the other songs, I had this lightbulb moment and thought, What if I did the six instrumentals, but then also recorded another version of each with a vocalist? Soon, my short little

project grew into a more massive undertaking than originally anticipated, but I'm glad I did something different. Of course, I have done vocal stuff with UFO, but this is something I've always wanted to do with a solo record.

From clean to dirty, there is a wide range of juicy guitar sounds on the album.

A lot of parts were done through my old Marshall JMP head, which has a great crunch sound. For extra gain, I kick on my [Analog Man] King of Tone overdrive. That amp sings with a pedal in front of it. I also used a 1965 Fender Super Reverb in places, too.

Another way I get different sounds is by switching between pickups. When I play live, I'm constantly switching pickup combinations — bridge, neck or both — and riding the guitar's volume control, all of which can create a lot of different tones. I don't always play on 10; I also like to crank it down to, like, four or so, to get more of a half-overdriven sound, which works great with chords.

You're known to play Kramer guitars, but you're holding an Epiphone SG on the album cover. Frank Marino fan?

I love Frank Marino. It's funny — when I first showed people the album cover, a lot of them wondered if it sounded like Marino. And I'm like, "Sorry to let you down, but not really." If I could just pick up a guitar and sound like the guy who played it, well, I might go buy one of Eddie's Frankenstein guitars.

I bought a "Red Knob" Fender Twin once because Robben Ford used them as backline amps. But when I got it, I didn't instantly sound like Robben Ford.

Funny how that doesn't happen. But stuff like that can still lead you in a good direction and get you part of the way there. From that point, you need to get it going with your hands, your mind and the way you set the controls.

Tell us about your Kramer.

My main guitar is the Kramer Pacer I played on the last UFO tour, as well as on my solo tour of Europe. Kramer did some mods to it for me, including custom pickups and fat frets. The main mod, though, is how they carved out some wood and recessed the Floyd Rose bridge so it's low on the body. This meant the neck had to come down closer to the body, too.

I like the bridge to be as low as possible because it just feels more comfortable for my picking hand. If the strings are high off the body, like on a Les Paul, when I go to play the low strings, my hand kind of falls off. Back in the early days of my playing that didn't happen. I have no answer to why it happens now.

Speaking of the early days, there's a blazing shred cadenza you did with Vicious Rumors in the mid '80s called "Invader." How did that come together?

That was done back in the time when it was popular to put a guitar solo on a record because Eddie had done "Eruption." My memory of that record is going in one night and recording all the solos in, like, four hours, and being kind of frustrated that I didn't play "Invader" as good as I had on the demo. I was kind of disappointed by that because some of the picking stuff wasn't up to my ability. It was that thing where on a certain day you go in to record, but something's not working a hundred percent.

I remember Eddie Van Halen, in interviews, saying something similar about "Eruption" — that there was a mistake in there that always bugged him. In a video of him in Jason Becker's living room, he explains



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Double Exposure

"In Too Deep," "Rise,"
"Vertical Horizon,"
"Hummingbird," "Rocket"

that it's during the tapping section at the end that the pattern gets slightly off for a second. I know the part he was talking about, but I have always liked that moment. It's like a race car almost going over the cliff but righting itself — it adds to the excitement.

That's the curse of being an artist. When you're laying stuff down, you're too hypersensitive and too aware of things, and they can bug you if you let them. But often when there are things that have bugged me, I come back even just a day later and it doesn't bug me at all.

Listeners don't analyze music under a microscope, which is the vibe you can get into when you're recording — and that's a dangerous place to be, because if you try to make things too perfect, you'll start killing the feel of what you've played. The more time you spend on something, the more you get drawn into that vortex of overanalyzing and looking too closely, and then you'll fix something that doesn't need to be fixed. You can get crazy with it! So when I'm recording, my main thing is to get in and get out quickly.

Have you gotten to know Michael Schenker much over the years?

I first met him around 1991, when Mike Varney introduced me. That was a real quick meeting, but in '99 we toured together and did 32 shows in America, sharing the same band each night. We all traveled on a tour bus, except Michael, who drove alone with his wife, so I didn't see him much on the whole tour, but he was always friendly. And I heard him play every night, which was awesome.

One time I ran into Michael at a hotel in Hanover, Germany, which is kind of where UFO is based. I had flown overnight, and we were about start a tour or a new record or something. I walk into the lobby, start checking in, and there's Michael, who was living in Hanover at the time. And for a second I thought, Man, if these guys made me fly all the way here to tell me Michael's back in the band and I'm gone, I'm gonna be pissed that they just didn't tell me over the phone. Turns out there was a heatwave in Germany and Michael was just staying at this same Marriott by chance. [laughs] ■

TIP SHEET

Nili Brosh shares hard-earned wisdom from her years as a solo and supporting guitarist.

BY JOE BOSSO

OVER THE COURSE of her career, guitarist Nili Brosh has performed with the likes of Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert, Jennifer Batten, Stu Hamm and Gretchen Menn, among others. Currently, she records and plays with her own band, and at the same time she juggles gigs with Danny Elfman, Cirque du Soleil and the fictional TV melodic death-metal band Dethklok.

Given her impressive resume, you might assume that she's got it all figured out. And you'd be very wrong.

"I've made so many mistakes over the years," Brosh admits. "My biggest problem was that I was always in a rush, especially when I was younger. That translated to how I approached my career. It wasn't so much about the music itself — I wanted everything *now*, and it drove me crazy. I'm impatient by nature, but I'm working on it. It doesn't do you any good to freak out because this isn't happening or that didn't work out. There's usually a good reason for it."

These days, Brosh tries to approach her career by adhering to the motto "It's a marathon, not a sprint." "Really, it helps to tell myself that," she says. "Playing the guitar is a lifelong journey, and if you want to make beautiful music, you need to realize that you won't get anywhere if you rush. You're not going to learn all you need to know by tomorrow, so just calm down and enjoy yourself. It doesn't matter if you can't play a piece of music by next week. You'll play it when you're ready."

The versatile virtuoso has some other choice bits of wisdom to share with players, and she puts her money where her mouth is. "All of these tips are lessons and concepts I've had to learn myself over the years," Brosh says. "I figure, why would I offer anybody advice if I don't know that it works?"



1. LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN BY EAR

"I'm a big advocate for ear training. If I logged my practice hours over the course of my life, I probably spent most of it playing by ear. Ever since I was a teenager, I transcribed anything I could get my hands on, all of it by ear. Part of it was out of necessity — this was before we had YouTube and transcriptions on the internet — but I was also committed to the idea that it was important to develop my auditory senses. Because, for me, it was the best way to learn music quickly. After a while, I didn't need charts or tabs. I could hear a piece of music and play it.

"I'm not knocking formal study or learning how to read music. If anything, I think it's great when you pair that with playing by ear. But think about it: You listen to music; you don't watch it. If you took all the charts away, you'd have to rely on your ears. And it helps you when you're playing with other musicians. You can respond immediately to what's going on because you've developed your musical awareness."

2. MUSICALLY SPEAKING, SLOW IT DOWN

"The metronome thing is big, and I would recommend using one to everybody. But you don't need to use a metronome — you can be your own timekeeper. Regardless of what you're playing, whether it's an exercise or a song, you have to find your comfort tempo. No matter how challenging something is, if you slow it down enough, you'll be able to break down all the different musical components. What was flying by you and didn't make any sense at first will now come at you in a way you can understand.

"We tend to practice so fast that we don't even take the time to hear what we're playing or understand what our fingers are doing. That's not helpful. Slow down and absorb what you're playing. You'll play it better when you perform it at a comfortable tempo."

3. CREATIVELY SPEAKING, PUT THE GUITAR DOWN

"Not everything I play excites me all the time.

TIM SALAZ



Like anybody, I have good days and bad days. I have a couple of ways to shake off the doldrums. One thing I try to do is learn something new in the hopes that it will broaden my vocabulary. It could be a different genre or a strange song — anything that takes me out of what I'm familiar with.

"If that doesn't work, I take a more abstract approach: I simply put the guitar down and immerse myself in anything that isn't music or guitar playing. I'll watch movies or read books. I'll go to a museum, or go out and explore nature. I'll play with my dog. It's a great way to shift gears and get into a fresh mindset. After a while, I find that I pick up the guitar again and I can't wait to play."

4. BE A GOOD PERSON

"You'd be amazed at how inconsiderate and unreliable musicians can be. Whether it's showing up late, not showing up at all, not doing their homework or preparing for a gig. It's astonishing the way some people behave. I've seen musicians be rude to other players or people on crews. There are ways

to do things and ways not to. Nobody wants to be around a jerk.

"This should be obvious, but I feel as though it needs to be said: You need to be a good person and be able to work with others. You need to be a friend to other people, one without an ulterior motive. Basically, you need to operate in the world as if you were doing anything else. Just because you're a musician, you're not special. You might be an incredible player, but there's somebody who can replace you."

5. WHEN IT COMES TO GEAR, IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

"Guitarists tend to obsess over the newest and latest guitar or piece of equipment. It's as if they think, if I just had that shiny new thing, that'd be the answer to all my problems. The reality is, the most expensive guitar in the world isn't going to improve your playing. That's up to you. You're the one who has to improve your musicianship.

"There's a good guitar in your price range, one that stays in tune, sounds good and doesn't fight you when you're playing it. And there are all kinds of affordable gear you can use to achieve whatever sounds you're

looking for. You might already have these tools, and if you do, don't worry about looking for something else."

6. FOR THE GIRLS: IT'S NOT ODD TO BE A GUITAR PLAYER

"I grew up with brothers and I didn't have any sisters, so it was very natural to me to be around guys. Nobody ever said to me, 'Playing the guitar isn't a girl thing.' That concept just wasn't in my mind. Playing

music with a guitar just seemed like something I did. It never really dawned on me that there weren't a lot of female guitar players because I never thought that gender mattered when it came to music.

"THE MOST EXPENSIVE GUITAR IN THE WORLD ISN'T GOING TO IMPROVE YOUR PLAYING. THAT'S UP TO YOU"

"That's my advice to other girls who are just getting started on the guitar: Don't think about it. It really shouldn't matter. If you want to play guitar, play guitar. You don't have to go into it thinking that you have to act any different. You're not a 'female guitar player.' You're a guitar player. Fortunately, things have been changing a great deal as far as women playing guitar in bands. It used to be considered novel, but now it just is what it is." 🎸



Nili Brosh with her Ibanez LA Custom Shop RG, featuring passive EMG pickups, a basswood body, a matching headstock, a maple wizard neck and signature "!!!!!!!" inlays.



MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

The Cult's **Billy Duffy** tells the stories behind the tunes that made him an alt-rock guitar hero.

BY MARK McSTEAD

BILLY DUFFY HAS been cutting his own groove as a guitarist for more than 40 years now. He first came to prominence in U.K. post-goth favorites Theatre of Hate, who capitalized on a huge underground cult following in the early '80s to break into the mainstream with a string of hit singles and albums. Duffy had previously worked at the über-hip Johnson's clothing store, where most of the era's coolest bands — including the Stray Cats and Adam Ant — bought their threads. "I took a huge pay cut to go on the road with Theatre of Hate," Duffy relates. "The first thing their manager said to me was that they didn't have per diems. I didn't even know what they were, but I soon found out. We'd be starving on the road, with no money for food!"

Duffy met Ian Astbury in 1984 and they hit it off so well that they formed a new band called Death Cult, which shortened its name to the Cult after recording a couple of singles. "We're actually going to be doing some Death Cult dates, as it's the 40th anniversary of that incarnation of the band, which was something that Ian really wanted to do," Duffy says. "We won't be playing anything newer than 'Rain.' It's excited me to listen to those early songs and think about doing them live after so many years."

Outside of his work with the Cult, Duffy has been collaborating with other musicians. "I really enjoy doing gigs like the one I just did with drummer Matt Sorum and Corey Taylor on vocals," he explains. "I've played with

people like the Professionals [*the English punk band formed by ex-Sex Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook*] and done things with Velvet Revolver. I never use to accept these opportunities, but I'm enjoying collaborating with other musicians these days."

Duffy says Sorum was instrumental in helping him achieve a recent personal career highlight. "I had some music I recorded with Matt at his studio in Palm Springs, for his Kings of Chaos project [*featuring members of Guns N' Roses, Def Leppard and other acts*]," he reveals. "He got Paul Rodgers to sing on it, so I had the incredible privilege of sitting in a room listening to him sing lyrics that he'd written because he liked my music. For me, given what I grew up listening to before the

ROB MONK/FUTURE

punk days, that was just amazing. I've met a lot of my heroes, but that was a special one."

Duffy has always been a huge Gretsch fan, and he has recently acquired a couple of exceptional instruments. "Stephen Stern, the master luthier at Gretsch, hand-made two replicas of my original Falcon, aging them to perfection, and they are astoundingly good, so I've started to use one of those live," he says. "It just has an extra bit of mojo. I still use my signature Gretsches on the road as well. I could take one straight off the shelf in a store, with just the usual tweaking that everybody does to personalize a guitar to their own personal tastes. When I had my first Gretsches, the pickup output was so low that I eventually got Seymour Duncan to wind me some hotter pickups in the '80s. The signature models have a version of that pickup in them, but when you look at the quality of the TV Jones pickups that are in many Gretsch models now, they sound fantastic as well. I would never sell a guitar with my name on it that I couldn't use live. It's just not my style. The Falcon is still selling really well as a production guitar. It was only intended to be a limited run originally, but 11 years later, it's selling more than it ever has."

Duffy is unsure when there might be a new Cult album, but there is plenty going on with the band in the meantime. "There are a couple of tracks that we didn't release from the last album that will come out in some form later in 2023," he says. "They would have been on the record, but we wanted to make it a shorter album, which I think is a good idea these days, as everybody seems to have a shorter attention span. Our 40th anniversary is coming up in 2024, so we'll probably be touring on that basis. While I'm not a big lover of those kinds of things, I definitely think it is a significant landmark in the band's history, so we may as well embrace it. And I do think there's a reasonable chance we might get into the logistics of making an album sometime after 2024."

For now, Duffy is happy to be touring. "Our current lineup is fantastic, and that is really invigorating the process of touring," he says. "We've just added Charlie Jones on bass, and he's really helped to refresh the band. He's a fantastic guy, and the chemistry and interpersonal relationships in the Cult are brilliant at the moment. It's great to be in a band with people who are not only great



Billy Duffy (center) performs in Theatre of Hate, in 1980.

"THE FACT THAT THERE ARE LITERALLY THREE LEAD GUITAR TRACKS RUNNING THROUGH THE WHOLE SONG IS COOL"

musicians but also great human beings, although that isn't to diminish anybody who has been in previous lineups. It's just that things are in a particularly good place for us at the moment, and these are extraordinarily good times to be in the Cult."

"THE HOP" THEATRE OF HATE — SINGLE (1982)



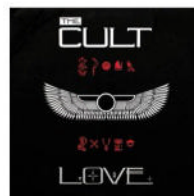
"This was one of the first songs I wrote a guitar part on, and it seemed to morph into an Ennio Morricone spaghetti-western vibe. It was

indicative of me beginning to think about making my mark with my own sound, with the Gretsch and reverb. There were a lot of great guitar players about in the early '80s and I felt like I needed to make my own space. This was the first time I'd been involved with a proper, cool band who'd been on the TV. [laughs] Kirk Brandon was the leader and main writer, but I'd started to contribute parts here and there.

"Truthfully, I didn't really like 'The Hop' that much. I still don't actually. There are many Theatre of Hate songs I prefer, but I've included it here because it was me beginning to find that cinematic feel. I will admit that

it is a bit close to being a parody of Morricone at times. Visually, the band had a strong '50s, rockabilly vibe, but musically we were in a different place. I always looked like I should have been in this band before I joined. I actually knew Boy George at the time and he told me I should get in touch with Kirk, as he knew we'd be a great fit, and that was how we met. There was a big rockabilly revival and an interest in semi-acoustic guitars, particularly Gretsches, in London at this time, and I think I was feeling that spirit myself, but also finding my own unique space."

"PHOENIX" THE CULT — LOVE (1985)



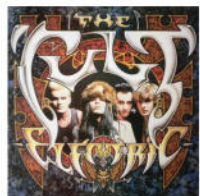
"This was a riff I had that was turned into a song literally two days before we went into the studio to record it. We used to do

preproduction, which was something that Steve Brown, the producer, got us into doing to save money, rather than work things out on expensive studio time. Drummer Mark Brzezicki came in for this album, and when I was playing this riff he came up with a kind of cool backward beat, which really started a great groove. This and 'Love' were the last two songs written for the album, and I think that if you took those off and put in what they replaced you'd have a very different record.

"'Phoenix' and 'Love' were pointing the way to where we were going to go next. I'm a big Stooges guy, and I can see that there are elements of 'I Wanna Be Your Dog' — that mantra-like, hypnotic vibe. The fact that there are literally three lead guitar tracks running

through the whole song is cool. I mixed the three parts together at the desk, as Steve Brown said it made more sense for me to do that. I think it was quite a unique final product. We had some great backing singers that Steve had found from one of his previous sessions, and they brought a hint of gospel flavorings to the stew that made it taste right. Imagine if the Stooges were ever a psychedelic band rather than a band that took psychedelics. That's what we were unconsciously channeling."

"WILD FLOWER" THE CULT — *ELECTRIC* (1987)

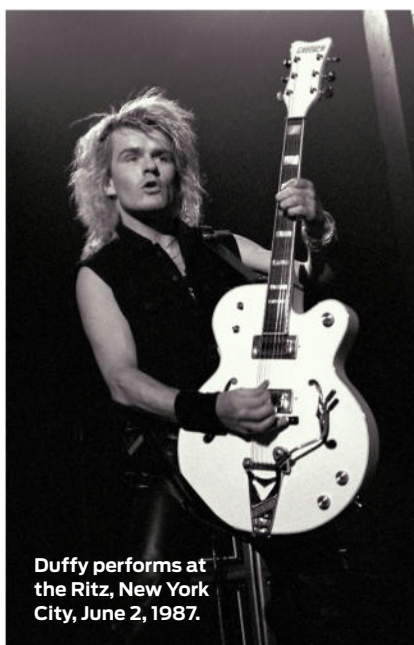


"It was actually our dissatisfaction with the first version of *Electric*, which we did with Steve Brown, that led us to bring Rick Rubin onboard to

remake it. We did the original version at the Manor in Oxfordshire, a really opulent studio, and we'd mixed it at the Townhouse in London — all really high-end facilities — and it was just overlayered and overblown. We spent so much money going down the rabbit hole and nobody had the balls to pull the plug on it. We'd just toured America and we wanted to make a heavier record. We met Rick in New York, and he basically said, 'You like early AC/DC, Zeppelin and Aerosmith?' We said yes, and he said, 'Then let's make a great record together!' The record company, Beggars Banquet, thought that he was just going to remix the album that we'd recorded, but he insisted that we cut one track with him from the ground up, before he did the remix.

"We went to New York with no gear, as we were only going to cut one track, and we rented everything. Rick asked which song we hated most on the album, and I replied 'Peace Dog,' as I thought it was turgid. So he said let's start with that. Remaking that one song sparked something in us, and it made us decide that we were ripping the whole album up and starting again. We did the whole thing in 29 days, including Christmas Day.

"I just love the dumb simplicity of the 'Wild Flower' riff. It's hard to write a song as beautifully stupid as this. It's obviously very much an AC/DC song, but it existed in a form that sounded like the Cult long before that.



"I THINK METAL PLAYS FROM THE WAIST UP, AND WE PLAY FROM THE WAIST DOWN"

All I'd say in my defense is that Angus Young once said to me, 'It's not as if we never borrowed anything from anybody ourselves.' [laughs] We rented two Les Pauls and they were all that I used — there's no Gretsch on the album at all. And I was always exclusively a Gretsch guy!"

"FIRE WOMAN" THE CULT — *SONIC TEMPLE* (1989)



"This is a very difficult song for us to play live. It has a weird little pocket, and it takes everyone in the band to have their shit together

to make it work. This was the first time that we worked with Bob Rock, although I should point out that Bob had only produced one band before us; he hadn't done Metallica and all those other big albums yet. I got drunk with Bob when we were on the *Electric* tour, and we really hit it off. After the success of *Electric*, Ian was wondering who we might get in to produce, and I suggested Bob. We were writing good songs and I wanted us to become a little more sophisticated. I saw *Electric* as a one-off — the minimalism, which was almost cartoon-like, with the whole AC/DC thing we had with Rick. I loved the album and I think it

was necessary for us to get out of the caterpillar and into the butterfly — or the other way around depending on your opinion. [laughs] I thought it was an amazing record, but I didn't want to do it twice.

"Bob suggested we should aim for an album with elements of *Love* and *Electric*, and that was my take on where we should be going. I picked it because I think it has everything, from a guitar perspective. It was commercial, yet it had a bit of rock swagger. We've always been as mindful as we can be of the backbeat, which is why I think that to describe us as metal misses the point. I think metal plays from the waist up, and we play from the waist down. It had the big rock video and this was the single that made the album go Platinum. I, being the careerist in the band, knew that we could have more success with our next album after *Electric*, and I was determined that we would."

"VENDETTA X" THE CULT — *UNDER THE MIDNIGHT SUN* (2022)



"This is probably the most complete guitar thing on the album. In the past we used to write songs, then record them, whereas these days we seem

to write and record songs simultaneously. It means that it's sometimes a very fragmented process, as the songs are constructed. What it also means, actually, is that it's almost as if you make the record and then you learn how to play it. 'Vendetta X' was done a little differently though. It has an organic, almost 'Don't Fear the Reaper' kind of Am-to-F progression that I came up with. The song is probably more Ian's than mine, but I felt inspired to put a lot of guitar on it. I think there's a real flow and structure to what I did on it. It's a great one to play live.

"Having said that, I think maybe if I made this list again tomorrow I might have picked a different song from this album. [laughs] Many people felt that this album marked a kind of return to the sound of the Cult in the *Love* era, which I would agree with, as there are certainly elements of what we were doing back then that are sprinkled through the album. So I guess it almost bookends what happened from *Love* through to now." 🎸

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When Japan Was the Future

Intended as a Les Paul killer when it bowed in 1976, **Yamaha's SG-2000** appealed to players fed up with declining U.S. quality.

THE SO-CALLED LAWSUIT-era copy guitars made in Japan during the 1970s and '80s have developed a cult following in recent years, seducing today's guitarists for their ability to often surpass the quality of the American-made originals from the same period. But the most successful and acclaimed Japanese guitar of the late '70s wasn't a direct copy of anything. Instead, the Yamaha SG-2000 was a creative and original design — a “Les Paul killer” that proved to be an able assassin in the hands of a long line of big-name players, starting with none other than Carlos Santana.

Flashback, if you will, to the mid '70s, when American-made electric guitars weren't quite what they used to be. The Gibson Les Paul was coming off a run as the rock and blues-rock guitar to own, but everyone was chasing the relatively few versions that were made between 1958 and '60, and those were reaching insane prices for the day: “Two thousand dollars for a used guitar? Are you crazy!?”

Meanwhile, Carlos Santana had segued from Gibson SGs to Les Pauls in a tone quest that was very much still underway when Yamaha approached him to endorse its new

guitar, most likely the SG-175, released in 1974 or early '75. Ostensibly a modified Les Paul, its neck was glued into a thick solid-mahogany body — albeit one with pointy dual cutaways — and sported dual humbucking pickups and other Gibson-inspired appointments. Yet, as far as Santana was concerned, it wasn't quite there.

Feeling the effort was a little lightweight and lacking in sustain, Santana told *Guitar Player* in 1978, “I sat down with them and said, ‘Look, I can't play the guitar, man.’ I asked them to put a big chunk of metal right where the tailpiece is. You hit it and it's like hitting a grand piano — it really resonates.”

Yamaha took these suggestions, and others, and ran with them, initiating an R&D and prototyping period that spanned nearly two years. The final results still looked something like a double-cutaway Les Paul — or a Les Paul Custom, given the elegant adornments — but the guitar was built like nothing else on the planet. Unveiled in 1976, the SG-2000 boasted myriad features and complex construction that seemed destined to define how top-tier electric guitars would be built from then on. That didn't happen, but that isn't to say Yamaha failed in its overall achievement either. Included in this ground-up redesign were:

- A neck-through-body construction, with a multi-piece laminate forming both the body core and the neck;
- A proprietary T-Cross System construction of the body and neck, which



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Maple and mahogany neck-through-body “T-Cross System” construction
- 24.75-inch scale length
- Dual open-frame Alnico V Yamaha humbucking pickups
- Modified Tune-o-matic-style bridge mounted atop a brass sustain block
- Multi-ply body and headstock binding
- Gold-plated hardware



BY DAVE HUNTER

an era that many longtime fans believe features some of his most distinctive and toneful playing. Standout moments include the live takes of “Europa” and “Let the Children Play/Jugando” from *Moonflower*; “Well All Right,” “Open Invitation” and “Wham!” from *Inner Secrets*; and similarly juicy SG-2000-meets-Boogie adventures from the albums *Zebop!* and *Marathon*.

Scottish new-wave guitarist John McGeoch logged several genre-defining moments playing his SG-2000 with Magazine and Siouxsie and the Banshees, Bill Nelson embraced one with Be Bop Deluxe, and Roxy Music’s Phil Manzanera, Little Feat’s Paul Barrere, Boz Scaggs and Al Di Meola all frequently played Yamaha’s dominant electric. As memorable as any of these are, some of the most distinctive examples of the guitar in action arguably came after Scottish guitarist Stuart Adamson ported his SG-2000 over from punk band the Skids when he formed Big Country in 1981. Alongside co-guitarist Bruce Watson, who also frequently played an SG-2000, Adamson applied the Yamaha electric to channel Celtic folk modes into hooky high-gain guitar riffs, logging hits like “In a Big Country” and “Fields of Fire” in the process.

Promoted alongside the SG-2000 were the SG-1500 — which initially had a set

neck with sustain block before moving to neck-through construction without sustain block in 1981 — and the set-neck SG-1000, plus a handful of lesser variations. The upper-tier SG-3000, less often seen, was adorned with abalone purfling and split

abalone and mother-of-pearl position markers, special pickups and other highly decorative treatments. The SG-2000 itself has occasionally been available from Yamaha in reissue forms, sometimes more prominently so in the domestic Japanese market, while used examples have begun enjoying collectible status. **B**

THE SG-2000 DISPLAYED AN OVERALL LEVEL OF QUALITY, FIT AND FINISH THAT PUT SIMILAR AMERICAN- MADE INSTRUMENTS TO SHAME

used boards of mahogany and maple glued together at opposing vertical and horizontal orientations, plus a three-piece maple top;

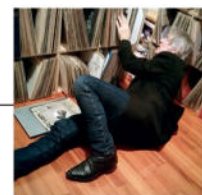
- An ebony fingerboard with mother-of-pearl, split-arrow inlays;
- Extremely bend-friendly jumbo frets;
- A brass sustain block sunken into a channel in the top of the body beneath the bridge;
- Enclosed, permanently lubricated tuners with a highly efficient 15:1 gear ratio;
- Fully shielded Alnico V humbucking pickups with three-point mounting for easy tilt adjustment;
- A ribcage contour in the upper back for more comfortable playing;
- In-house control knobs with fluted sides for easy gripping.

Aside from these details, the SG-2000 was just made very, very well, displaying an overall level of quality, fit and finish that put many similar American-made examples of the time to shame. Plus, it had a look that celebrated its intended elitism, with seven-ply body binding, five-ply headstock binding, gold-plated hardware and a decorative scrolling engraved in the tailpiece, along with other upscale details. Although the model was often compared to the Les

Paul it was intended to “kill,” Yamaha had clearly taken pride in the design and made every effort to create an entirely different guitar, despite some outward similarities. Back to back, even the body shapes are more different than they might at first appear, the SG-2000’s lines describing what would be a more fully rounded upper bout (if the cutaways continued) and a shallower waist.

Big-name players lined up to play it, and the SG-2000 made one of the sharpest ascents into the hierarchy of premium electric guitars experienced by any new model, much less one designed and manufactured in Japan, when the country was still largely known for producing copies. Santana embraced the new design, playing a couple of custom-made models with abundant decorative inlays (available briefly in 1976 as a Limited Edition Devadip model). He used it widely between 1977 and his move to Paul Reed Smith guitars sometime after 1982,

BY JIM CAMPILONGO



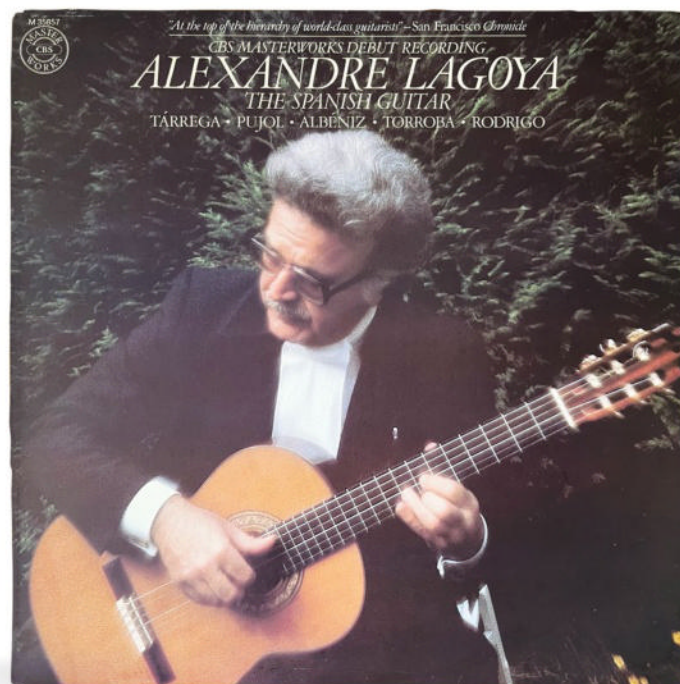
After the Flood

Devastated by his partner's death, **Alexandre Lagoya** reclaimed his life and artistry on his own.

I ALWAYS FEEL compelled to oversell a classical guitar record here in Vinyl Treasures. Why? It's my hunch some folks won't read this column because it's about some dude they've never heard of playing Spanish classical guitar, and not about Neil Young, Hendrix, the Allman Brothers and so on. After all, it's hard to maintain an ongoing curiosity these days. We're inundated by YouTube clips, Netflix recommendations, access to 500,000 songs and to every movie ever made, all while we're busy trying to be responsible adults. That said, if you're looking to expand your musical diet with something good, Alexandre Lagoya's *The Spanish Guitar* is just what the doctor ordered.

Although Lagoya is identified as Spanish because of his name, he was actually a French citizen, born to a Greek father and an Italian mother. His parents were not musical, but he could not recall a time when he wasn't completely moved by music. While still a child, Lagoya began playing a guitar owned by his brother (who strummed and sang a few songs), and at the age of 13 began a lifelong commitment to guitar, successfully giving solo concerts.

The Spanish Guitar was recorded in 1979 and released on the Columbia Masterworks label in 1980, when Lagoya was 57 years old. A long journey preceded this great LP, and his association with guitarist Ida Presti is essential and noteworthy. In 1950, Lagoya met the well-established Presti, his musical heroine, in Paris. Their mutual passion for



music and their undeniable chemistry as musicians led them to form a guitar duo and subsequently marry in 1952. They went on to play thousands of concerts together. In 1967, Presti became ill before a concert in Rochester, New York, and soon died of a massive internal hemorrhage due to a tumor. Lagoya was devastated. Nearly two

years passed before he could begin to work at playing solo, but he couldn't imagine performing without Presti, his musical and life partner. It took another five years until he had the confidence to go out on his own.

I have Lagoya/Presti recordings that are sublimely beautiful

and essential listening, but while Lagoya plays alone on *The Spanish Guitar*, it lacks nothing. It's a stunning display of beauty, technical prowess and humanity.

The opening track, "Guajira," was composed by Emilio Pujol and is worth the price of admission. It's basically a I-to-V exploration with eventful and charming key

changes. The playful performance, along with a mysterious bridge, keeps us at the edge of our seats. All the performances on *The Spanish Guitar* are exciting, and the freedom one feels from Lagoya's playing is captivating. The compositions by Torroba, Albéniz, Tárrega and Rodrigo are also played with an understanding and a mature looseness, sounding at times off the cuff and improvised. Lagoya takes perfect liberties with tempo, technique and dynamics, making each performance personal and intimate, yet he never shows off the four aces he holds via his technical prowess. That would just be a distraction. Lagoya serves the music, and we benefit from his maturity and generosity.

The Spanish Guitar is an album that I can turn over and over and listen to for days. I never tire of its music and always feel rejuvenated by the grandeur and soul of the performances. Alexandre Lagoya shows us the boundless potential of guitar. I urge you to check out his performance of "Guajira" (it's on YouTube). You'll be glad you did. ▶

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

**LAGOYA TAKES
LIBERTIES WITH
TEMPO, TECHNIQUE
AND DYNAMICS, MAKING
EACH PERFORMANCE
PERSONAL AND
INTIMATE**

BY TERRY CARLETON



Whack in the U.S.S.R.

This Delfi Kosmos is a Gibson Moderne copy and a relic of rock and roll's war against Soviet repression.

THE GUITAR FEATURED here has the distinction of having been smuggled out of Belgium some 20 years ago by Joe Bigley, of Wilmington, North Carolina. A guitarist and frequent business traveler to Belgium, Joe was in Leuven when he happened by a guitar shop/museum filled with oddball axes from around the world and run by the self-proclaimed Lord Bizarre. Joe was so taken by what he saw that he wrote a story about the shop and had it published in a U.S. guitar magazine. Lord Bizarre was so thrilled that he gifted Joe his choice of any guitar from his massive collection. Joe's choice? This Delfi Kosmos, a copy of a Gibson Moderne, made in the 1970s by Fabryka Lutniczych in communist Poland.

His decision was somewhat practical. "When I saw that the cable output had been converted from the typical DIN plug to have a ¼-inch jack, I selected it," Joe explains. Getting his prize home seemed problematic until he removed the three-bolt neck and carried the guitar through airport security in a black plastic bag. With the airplane's overhead bin full, and the guitar too large to fit below the seat in front of him, Joe propped the package up next to his leg by his window seat. "I deceived the flight attendants by throwing my coat over my legs," he reveals.

A similar scenario unfolded when he changed planes at London Heathrow. "So, 'all the way the plastic bag was on my knee,'" he says, paraphrasing the Beatles' "Back in the U.S.S.R.," "which I guess was appropriate." Once home, he took the instrument to guitar tech Will Kelly, who got it working as well as possible.

WEIRDO FACTOR

It may be rather uncommon to see a Russian bloc guitar today, but they were super-scarce 20 years ago. That aside, the guitar's resemblance to the mythical Gibson Moderne is sufficiently weird.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

The Delfi Kosmos has an alder body and a maple neck with a severe D shape and a 50mm slab of rosewood fretboard that makes it very thick. "Mine is somewhat warped, probably from being leaned against a wall for decades," Joe says. While it's possible to play open chords on it, barred chords are a real chore, and the neck buzzes past the ninth fret. The plastic-tipped tuners are cheap, and the tailpiece and bridge are pretty rough. "It's best to close your eyes when you tighten the upper strings to protect them when a string breaks," Joe advises. Additionally, as there is no selector for the two single-coil pickups, they're both on all the time. Fortunately, there are volume and tone controls for each. "The sound is okay," he says, "if you're doing early garage rock."

VALUE

The Kosmos' value is anybody's guess, as it was never sold in the U.S. and they rarely show up on the used market. One in the same rather rough condition as Joe's copy could make a good conversation piece for a price of \$150 to \$300.

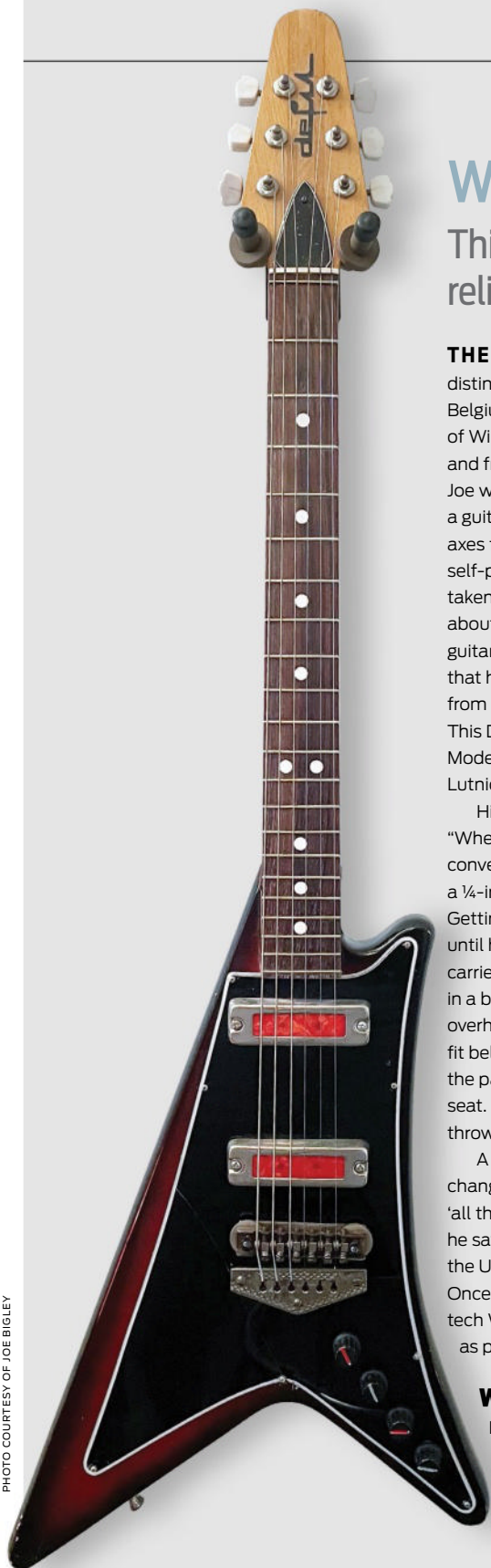
WHY IT RULES

As it is, it's a cool wall hanger with an interesting story. But it's also an artifact from the early days of rock and roll, when playing it, or even owning a rock and roll record, was considered subversive and sometimes even punishable in the Soviet Union. As a weapon in the war for rock and roll, the Delfi Kosmos is a reminder of how the war was fought — and which side won. 🇺🇸

Thanks to Joe Bigley for sharing his story and photographs with us. For more information on Lord Bizarre's shop, visit lordbizarre.com.

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOE BIGLEY



Rival Sons. (from left) Michael Miley, touring keyboardist Todd Ögren, Jay Buchanan, Scott Holiday and Dave Beste.



HOLIDAY IN THE SONS

With a new Rival Sons album in the charts, **Scott Holiday** is back in the spotlight following a four-year absence.

BY JOE BOSSO

Scott Holiday calls from his car while driving to a rehearsal with his band, Rival Sons. It's a long haul from his home in Huntington Beach to Hollywood, but he doesn't mind. "California's had a lot of rain recently," he says. "But right now the sky has opened up and it's beautiful out. I love it."

The guitarist is excited to play some of the new songs from the band's just-released album, *Darkfighter* (Atlantic) in preparation for what could be a year's worth of road work. "We tracked all of the songs in the studio, but now we're going to play them straight through as a band for the first time," he says. "They take on a whole new identity when you're not in recording mode, and when you play them for an audience they become a whole different animal."

It's been four years since the hard-charging classic rock enthusiasts released new music, but Holiday and his mates — singer Jay Buchanan, bassist Dave Beste and drummer Michael Miley — are rewarding their fans' patience with not one, but two albums: *Darkfighter* (produced, as always, by the band's studio main man, Dave Cobb) will be followed later this year with an already recorded companion disc, *Lightbringer*. "The first album is part of the story, and the second one, while a bit different, is the continuation," Holiday explains. "We wanted people to easily digest the new songs, so it made sense to split them up on separate albums. If you have an hour of music on a record, it causes fatigue for the listener."

Darkfighter's eight crushing tunes could hardly be a cause for weariness. Looking for a surrealistic, Zep-flavored

mini-epic? There's "Rapture." "Nobody Wants to Die" is a go-for-the-throat (or grab-you-you-by-the-balls) house rocker, and for whacked-out stoner rock, "Bird in the Hand" gets it done. Holiday rips and snorts throughout — he doesn't so much play a riff as blast it like buckshot. And his assortment of delirious, mega-fuzz solos are perfectly placed songs-within-songs.

"While I was coming up with my guitar parts, I didn't really listen to the same old rock stuff that I usually do," he says. "I got into a bunch of jazz, like Coltrane and Monk. I know people will say, 'Rival Sons isn't very jazzy,' but I used those records as a palate cleanser to aid my writing. I'd rather listen to a horn or a drum or a voice to determine what I want to do. We kind of know all the moves we want to make on the guitar, so I tried to take it somewhere else."

"I'M NOT LOOKING TO OVERPLAY TO BOOST MY EGO. I WANT INNOCENCE AND DISCOVERY"

more written at home. Jay and I would pass ideas back and forth. That said, we did leave room to cut some stuff off the floor. We didn't work too much with the other guys until we got to the studio. We

In the past, you've said that the band would show up in the studio and write on the spot. Was this album done the same way?

No, this one was

wanted to capture everything in the moment.

The first few songs on *Darkfighter* are pretty direct arrangement-wise, but as the album progresses it gets more progressive and elaborate. The last two tunes are over six minutes each.

That was the idea. It's been a while since people heard new music from us, so I wanted to start the album with things that were slightly familiar. After an organ intro, you hear the riff to "Mirrors" and go, Okay, I'm listening to Rival Sons. That was the first riff I wrote for the record. When I came up with it, I was like, All right, we're writing a record!

"Mirrors" has such brutal guitar distortion. It sounds like your amp is breaking apart.

[laughs] Yeah! I worked with a guy from Denmark at a company called KossekFX, and he came up with this super-weird octave fuzz. I recorded with it at home through a Supro amp. It's a cool sound.

Other tracks, like "Bird in the Hand" and "Rapture," have incredible overdriven tones. Are you using that same effect?

I tried to use different effects throughout. There was an octave effect we call the Deep Sea Kraken, and I really got into the Keeley Synth-1 pedal. It's not really a fuzz; it's a synth. I'm just attacking it, and I have it set in a way that makes it sound more like a fuzz. I love it. The guys at Isle of Tone make some exquisite vintage-style fuzzes. They made me one that's like a Mk 1.5 Tone Bender meets a Fuzz Face. It's special.



Holiday plays his custom semi-hollow Kauer Super Chief double-neck 12-/six-string, at the Fillmore in Detroit, October 27, 2021.



Holiday performs at the Fillmore with his single-pickup, Bigsby-loaded Kauer Banshee Baritone.

BOUGHT & SOLD

Scott Holiday reflects on great deals, bad trades, and why character beats pedigree every time.

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

I just bought two together. I bought a '65 Firebird III. It's a transition, so it's got a regular headstock instead of reverse, but it's a reverse body. And then at the same time I bought a '66 330 with the dog-ear P-90s, which is just dead mint.

What's your best guitar-buying tip?

It depends if you're buying for investment or playing. They're two different worlds. If you're looking for a player, don't worry about finding the perfect guitar. Personally, if I don't have a ton of money and want something serious, I'm looking for a ref. I'm looking for something weird, because you can get a wonderful guitar with character. And you're gonna save so much money.

What's the most incredible bargain you've had when buying guitars?

I really wanted a Jazzmaster, an old one, and I was waking up every day, going online, clickety-clacking in every dark corner for a deal. I came across a '62 slab 'board that is kinda strange; it could be a ref, I can't tell. I think it was maybe \$2,300.



Persistent searching led Scott to his greatest steal: this "weird and wonderful" '62 slab-'board Jazzmaster.

It had black knobs and had already been very beat-up but was beautiful. I wrote the guy immediately: "I want that guitar." And he wrote me back saying, "I have about 100 messages and you were first!" I didn't have the money, even though it was such a good deal, so I just put the whole thing on a credit card. It's still my greatest steal.

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse that you've ever had after buying a guitar or piece of gear?

I got one of the first Line 6 amps when they went from the bean-shaped pedal to the combo. I was playing in

an improvisational freakout jazz ensemble and it caught on fire — literally shot flames out the back...which was pretty cool during a gig. We unplugged it quickly and it was done. Cooked. I was banished to shaker for the rest of the gig. I don't know if I was ultimately remorseful, because I actually kinda liked that amp. But it did me wrong, man. It did me dirty.

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go of?

Years ago, I ended up trading a '67 335 to a local guy. And I traded it for nonsense. I don't know what I was thinking, but

I ended up trading this 335 with original PAFs — that sounded killer and looked beautiful — for a green '98 Strat and a Les Paul Classic. I don't even play Les Pauls, and the Classics are, like, whatever. I remember him pulling the pickups out and going, "Yep, these are real. You got a deal!" And I just feel like that was not a smart move.

If forced to choose, would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp, or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

Probably a good guitar into a cheap amp. Although the from-the-hip answer for me is that anyone worth their salt could make either combination work just fine. Of course, we know that if we put Jeff Beck on any shitty guitar and amp, he sounds like Jeff Beck, rest his soul.

If you could only use humbuckers or single-coils for the rest of your life, which one would you choose and why?

That's easy, Filter'Trons! Specifically, I like TV Jones. They're just particularly full of body and they have plenty of point. But what they also have — that I find a lot of PAF-style humbucking pickups don't — is a little more air. There's an airiness to a Filter'Tron, and I believe it lets the instruments breathe a little more. There's a lot of parts, a lot of wood, a lot of craftsmanship in a guitar, and if you put in something too aggressive, you don't get to use all that.

SCOTT'S LIVE RIG

"I have a Roger Mayer Octavia that's a real mainstay. Deep Trip makes a pedal called the Hellbender, which is their take on a Tone Bender. And I always have a delay I can turn into a slap or long delay. Which one? I'm gonna give you an answer that's less cool than you would think, but just trust me: the original Line 6 DL4. It has, like, 40 billion delays, and it does a few things that nothing else does. I'll use different stuff, but I've used that green Line 6 pedal for years. Live, I think the Orange Custom [Shop] 50 is a lovely amp. I could say I like a tweed or a [black panel] or a Plexi, but I'm telling you, that Custom 50 really does the job. For guitars, I use my blue '99 Firebird [seen here] quite relentlessly. I had the pickups rewired by a guy named Tom Short, and that guitar is a real Swiss Army knife for me."



Your solo on the song "Rapture" is pretty strange, but in a good way. Is something like that composed at all?

It's reasonably spontaneous. It's a weird solo in that it's textural. There's not a lot of burning hot licks all over it. It's fun guitar playing, for sure, but it's me trying to connect lines and create a mood.

What were the main guitars you used?

There were some new things. I used a really cool Gretsch Falcon. It's in the car next to me right now. I built it with Stephen Stern at the Custom Shop, and it's awesome. It's got TV Jones Super'Trons in it. It's already seen a lot of playing. I've also been working with Matt Hughes at Banker Custom. He's made me some really amazing instruments. He built me a korina Flying V, but I wanted to do the Lonnie Mack thing with the long crossbar for the

"I'D RATHER LISTEN TO A HORN OR A DRUM OR A VOICE TO DETERMINE WHAT I WANT TO DO"

a baritone on this record — a Kauer Banshee baritone. That was something different, although we've dabbled a little bit. I started writing with an old Danelectro baritone, and I loved how it sounded. I also used a Gretsch Duane Eddy, and I recently got a '66 ES-330. That guitar is like "the Beatles in a box." Those were the main players. I got a lot of cool sounds going with them.

Dave Cobb has produced all of your albums. How involved does he get in the songwriting and arrangements?

It depends. Sometimes he says, "What do you have?" We'll play him a song and then he'll hit the buttons. [laughs] A lot of times, we'll track parts and he'll tell us what's missing. He'll pick up a guitar

Bigsby, so it's a Flying A. [laughs] He also built a V Bird — it's like a Firebird and a Flying V mashed up. I use that one a lot.

I also used a baritone on this record — a Kauer Banshee baritone. That was something different, although we've dabbled a little bit. I started writing with an old Danelectro baritone, and I loved how it sounded. I also used a Gretsch Duane Eddy, and I recently got a '66 ES-330. That guitar is like "the Beatles in a box." Those were the main players. I got a lot of cool sounds going with them.

and say, "It needs a pre-chorus." We're pretty hard on ourselves. He'll tell us to shit-can parts. Sometimes we will and sometimes we won't. He's more of another band member than an authority figure.

Because you and Dave know each other so well, does he find new ways to push you creatively?

It couldn't be easier or more fun getting tones. I bring my live rig in, along with the stuff I use to write with at home. Dave's got the best stuff in the studio — it's just unreal. We know what works and what sounds good. I'll get a sound for one part, and Dave will go, "Go grab my '54 Esquire. It'll make a great contrast."

As far as playing, I don't feel like he has to push me. I'll try to get in a zone in the studio, but instead of being confident and in control, I'll be super-vulnerable. I'm not looking to overplay to boost my ego; I want innocence and discovery, and that gets harder to find the longer you do this. ■



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SHINE A LIGHT

As Greta Van Fleet prepare for a massive tour and the release of *Starcatcher*, **Jake Kiszka** talks tone, gear... and what everyone gets wrong about his 1970s hard-rock approach to guitar playing.

BY JOE BOSSO

SINCE JAKE KISZKA burst on the scene six years ago with his hard-rock band Greta Van Fleet, the 27-year-old guitarist has captured the imagination of six-string fans and fellow players like few of his contemporaries. His adventurous and sophisticated approach to the guitar, much of it based on the traditions of blues and classic rock honed decades before he was born, has made him the preeminent axe hero for his generation. He's topped readers polls — Best New Guitarist, Best Rock Guitarist, Best Guitar Solo... You name it. It's enough to make any young player's head swell, but Kiszka seems to be taking the acclaim in stride. When asked to explain why so many guitarists are drawn to his style, he addresses the topic thoughtfully.

"I do seem to encounter a lot of people who admire my playing," he says. "They tell me that my type of playing is a lost art form. It's like I'm a relic — my approach to playing is something from the past." He chuckles at his own words. "I think people appreciate the way I embraced that tradition and evolved it to the contemporary world. I think there's a lot of soul in what I do. I mean, people have said that they can feel my soul when I play. They appreciate that I'm trying to communicate."

From all appearances, Greta Van Fleet — which includes Kiszka's brothers, lead singer Josh and bassist-keyboardist Sam, along with drummer Danny Wagner — has caught all the breaks any modern-day rock band could possibly desire. They went gold with their first album, 2018's *Anthem of the Peaceful Army*, and their 2021 follow-up, *The Battle at*



Garden's Gate, hit the upper regions of music charts across the globe. Their live shows grew from small clubs to bigger clubs, and it wasn't long before they were packing theaters and sheds. This year they've graduated to the league of bona fide arena headliners, so it would seem when it comes to rock and roll bucket lists, the group's members just might check off every item before they reach the age of 30. It's enough to make Kiszka's head spin.

"I can't explain the success we've had, to be honest," he says. "I think people are responding to our authenticity, which stems from our influences and what we grew up with. The purity of it and the truth of it resonates with people."

New York City's Madison Square Garden is one of the venues on the group's 2023 itinerary. Kiszka's eyes light up and his face fills with a sense of wonder at the very mention of the hallowed concert arena. "I was thinking about it at breakfast the other day," he says. "I remembered how, when I was a kid and I wanted to be a guitar player,

it seemed like every big band played the Garden. Cream and Zeppelin, the Who — the endless list of rock royalty. Then I realized that I'll be playing Madison Square Garden. I'll be walking in the footsteps of all those who've influenced me." He smiles. "Madison Square Garden... It's like the Garden of Eden."

Greta Van Fleet appear to have nailed yet another rock tradition: The bigger they get with the public, the more critics have it out for them. When they arrived out of Frankenmuth, Michigan, with their first recordings — a pair of swaggering singles, "Safari Song" and "Highway Tune," followed by an EP, *From the Fires* — they elicited comparisons to

**"I'M STRIVING TO BE
A BETTER GUITARIST.
IF I ALLOWED ALL OF
THAT PRAISE TO GO
TO MY HEAD, I'D BE
STAGNANT"**

Led Zeppelin, and rightly so: Every element of that group's sound — from Robert Plant's siren-like wails to Jimmy Page's blues-drenched solos and John Bonham's thunderous drum attack — seemed to have been re-created with uncanny, reverent precision. But as Greta Van Fleet strove to expand their sound on subsequent releases with splashes of country-folk, psychedelia, progressive rock and even hints of world music, the critics came at them with sharpened knives. In its review of *The Battle at Garden's Gate*, entertainment-trade mag *Variety* likened them to Spinal Tap.

For his part, Kiszka dismisses the barbs like he's swatting away a pesky fly. "I don't think criticism has ever affected us," he says. "It's ponderous and intriguing to presume that somebody has spent time and energy to say how they're indifferent to us or don't like us, while we've put zero energy into caring what they think."

He gives hosannas as much attention. "The praise rolls off our shoulders," he says. "We're musicians and artists, and if we're to achieve any kind of perfection, then we have to let go of any sense of ego. It destroys talent. We're always striving to be better musicians, and I'm striving to be a better guitarist. If I allowed all of that praise to go to my head, I'd be stagnant."

Greta Van Fleet's new album, *Starcatcher* (Lava/Republic), doesn't depart from the band's classic rock-based style — if anything, the group turbo-charges each tried-and-true component and drives it home. The set's first single, "Meeting the Master," begins as a contemplative, acoustic-laced ballad that explodes into a frenzied rock monster. Similarly, the band eases its way into high-minded, trippy mood pieces like "Waited All Your Life" and "Farewell for Now," drizzling bits of pastoral folk and spacey prog flourishes, before Kiszka flips a switch and takes off with brawny, go-for-the-gusto solos. While nothing on the record comes close to the nine-minute "The Weight of Dreams" (from *The Battle at Garden's Gate*), each song feels like an epic, and Kiszka makes crafty use of every passage,



Jake Kiszka plays during Greta Van Fleet's *Dreams In Gold* Tour, at Rogers Arena, Vancouver, August 30, 2022.

ANDREW CHIN/GETTY IMAGES

(from left)
Sam Kiszka, Jake
Kiszka, Danny
Wagner and Josh
Kiszka perform
at BottleRock Napa
Valley, in California,
May 27, 2022.



layering elegant, arpeggiated lines and swooning leads between the various big spotlight moments. Sometimes the band needs no time at all to land a punch: On the aptly named “Runaway Blues,” they temporarily ditch their mystical shtick and blaze through a delirious rave-up that’s over in but a minute and a half.

The band relocated to Nashville several years ago, and for *Starcatcher* they tapped that town’s resident hitmaker, Dave Cobb (Brandi Carlile, Jason Isbell, Rival Sons and Grace Potter, among others), to produce. “Dave’s name was always on our radar,” Kiszka says. “He’s come into the scene as a prominent producer of rock and roll groups. We were like, ‘Is that a good thing or a bad thing?’ Maybe it would be stereotypical, but it was something we wanted to explore, regardless.”

A meeting between Cobb and the band went well, but Kiszka reveals that the members decided to “date” a few other producers before giving Cobb the nod. “In the end, we decided to marry Dave,” he says with a laugh. “It became

obvious that he was going to be the one to help us create this record. It’s very challenging for producers to work with such a tight-knit group as ours. We speak the same language, and producers have to pick up on that vernacular. With Dave, it was easy because he shares our influences. He fell in seamlessly.”

You’ve never tried to hide your affinity for rock music from the ‘70s. And, of course, some of the criticism you’ve endured is that you simply rehash that music. How do you think you take that influence and try to update it?

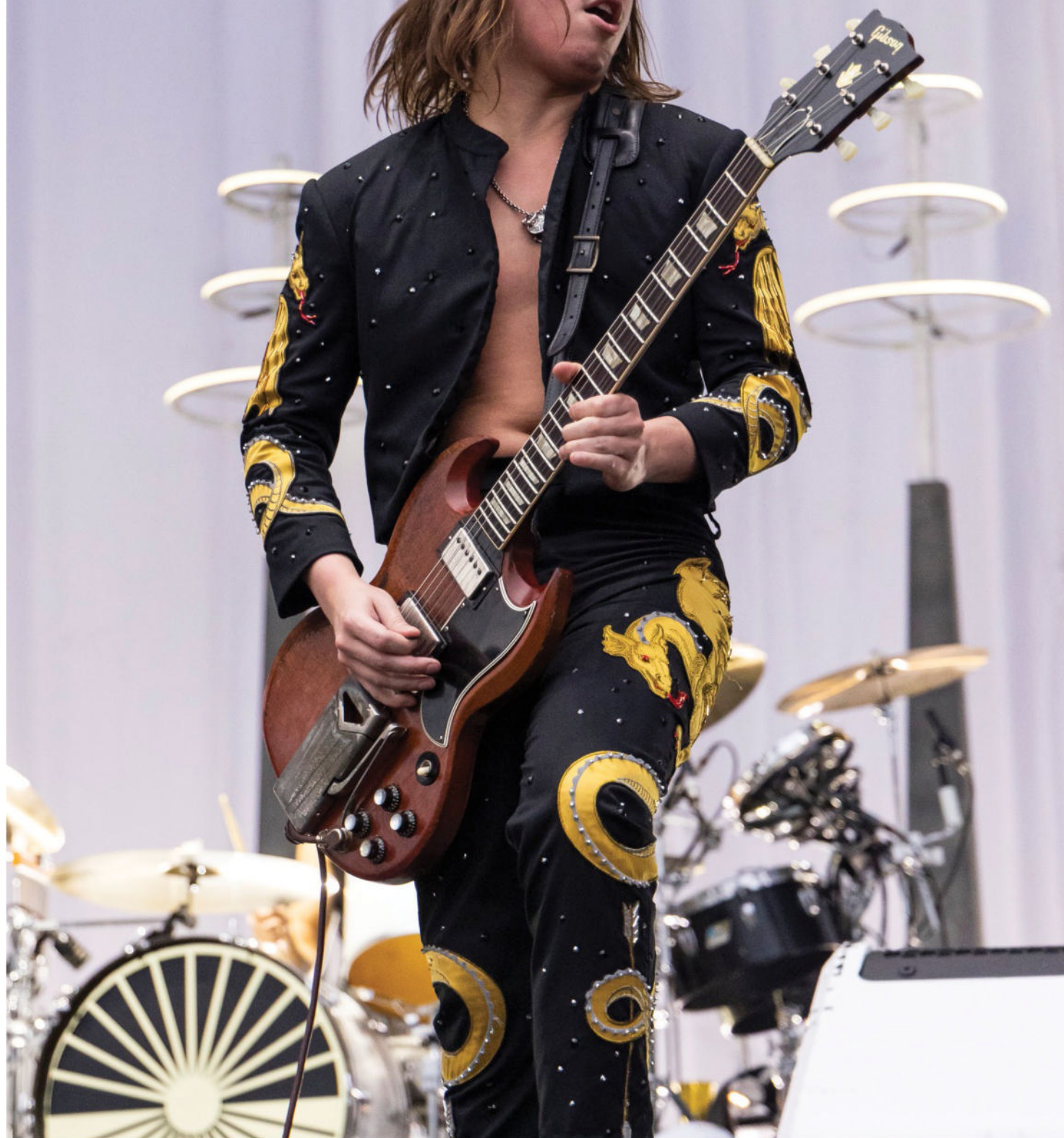
I believe our evolution, as well as my own progression, has always been a product of a contemporary world. A lot of the music and guitar playing which I’ve studied comes from a bygone era — the golden age of rock and roll. I’ve taken that heavy, guitar-based music and attempted a new approach, by giving it a modern perspective.

Can you elaborate on what that “new approach” means?

In terms of technique, there are many styles of contemporary guitar playing that have been seamed into my matrix. It’s an evolution of time and music; as the genres have progressed, so has the guitar playing. The sonic approach is complex and dynamic, because over the passage of time and technology, especially in terms of the studio, it has also advanced. This includes utilizing different microphones and different pedals, as the world of pedals has evolved as well. Given that expansion, I think a lot of the usage of those technologies has brought an absolute new and modern sonic approach to my guitar playing and our music.

The way I tend to write is coming from a very modern perspective. There have been many songs written since the advent of rock and roll until 2023 that observe the form of writing and its development — it’s come a long way. Let’s say if you’re using a 12-string in DADGAD, as opposed to a parlor guitar in standard, you’re going to hear and see an extraordinarily different outcome.

Kiszka performs on day one of the 10th Anniversary of Shaky Knees Festival, in Central Park, Atlanta, Georgia. May 5, 2023.



Obviously, you and your brothers share the same influences. Can you speak to the innate connections family musicians have when they play together and how they inform the music?

Yeah. I think we have this sense of reinforcement of what we're doing. It's a pretty complex undertaking to communicate in general, as human beings, but on an instrumental level it's an even larger feat. I think the fact that we all grew up together has certainly solidified our communication as musicians. When we're onstage and we're playing our instruments next to one another, it's a form of communication. We understand each other's nuances. We don't like to play songs the same way each night. We like to jam and improvise.

Let's pick up on that. When you jam — that is, when you're not writing songs — what do you like to play? What's a typical night like in the Greta rehearsal room?

It's great. It's everybody getting together and pulling out a bottle of tequila. I'll show up last. [laughs] We'll just kick it out. Even at soundchecks, we're always playing. It goes back to that form of communication. Somebody will start playing something, and then somebody else will walk in the room and start playing.

But what are you jamming to? Original tunes? Covers?

A little bit of both. Usually, it's original jamming, but other times I'll have learned something. "Rock 'n' Roll Ain't Noise Pollution" by AC/DC is something I just learned. I always liked the song and pulled it out. We all started playing it. You don't have to rehearse for something like that. But it's usually original stuff — that's how it works in the studio.

Was the *Starcatcher* track "Runaway Blues" a jam? It sure sounds like it.

It was a jam in the studio. We were having a slow, sort of methodical day, and I just wanted to rip out something new. Nobody was around, so I started playing that riff. Danny and Sam came



"WE HAD ALAN LOMAX RECORDS LAYING AROUND. IT WAS ROOTS OF THE GREAT AMERICAN SOUTH AND THE BLUE HILLS — BLUEGRASS MUSIC AND BANJO PLAYING"

in, and we finished a take of another song. Then I kicked off with the riff. Dave Cobb started freaking out: "That song needs to be on the record!"

I have praise, and a complaint. I absolutely love the song, but I was bummed when you faded it so quickly.

Yeah. The reason why it's so short is because Josh didn't like it, and he wanted it to be brief. I think there's an aspect to the song — you end up wanting more.

Van Halen used to do that. They would feature these awesome bits of rocking on their records that lasted only seconds.

Yeah. That song is part of the whole web of the record. It adds a lot of energy. It's something that we may extend live. We like to do that sort of thing.

Not to belabor Led Zeppelin, but as you know, the critics do bring it up a lot.

I wonder, is there something they're not seeing? What influences are there that they don't pick up on?

It's pretty broad. The complexity of musical influence and the depth of that is extreme within the group. But it's really everything — there's not a lot of music that we dislike. We grew up with roots music. As for Led Zeppelin — we weren't listening to rock music growing up; that happened in high school. So we're talking about the originations of the genres that we now consider to be folk music, like Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan. We had Alan Lomax records laying around. It was roots of the Great American South and the Blue Hills — bluegrass music and banjo playing.

And it goes into blues music and Native American music. People don't know that we grew up with some Native American music, which was informed by blues. So you've got Robert Johnson and Charley Patton, Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, Albert King, John Lee Hooker and Son House — all of these collective blues influences. We saw our way into all kinds of stuff, even classical music like Frederic Chopin and Mussorgsky, Bach and Beethoven. We listened to Peruvian music growing up.

So the influences go beyond Zeppelin.



Yeah. Again, it's pretty broad. And pretty extensive. Obviously, this could be a very complex answer, but these are just examples.

During the period when you were absorbing music and forming your style, was there a cut-off period for you? When you first heard what we call "shred," did you say, "Not for me"?

I was never a big fan of shredding. It didn't really interest me because I didn't hear the soul and dynamics of an earlier style of guitar playing. When Jimi Hendrix played guitar, you could feel the soul coming out of his body. That moment right there probably defined my direction and approach. For me, shred music didn't achieve that sort of thing.

We wouldn't necessarily put Eddie Van Halen in that category.

Eddie Van Halen is an outlier. I like his approach — he inspired and created a type of music, but there was enough nuance in what he was doing that you could still hear a human element. Nowadays, the amps are so cranked and there's so much gain and distortion. It's less like painting and more like digital art. It's like A.I. versus human art.

Moving forward, would I be right to assume that something like the djent movement

didn't hit you at all?

It does a little bit because, as a guitar player, I appreciate that it's a duality of many different styles and genres and instruments. Even in, for instance, the eight-string guitar or something.

Would you even know what to do with an eight-string guitar?

I would have to figure it out. As a guitar player, it's interesting to see the depth of complexity that people have brought in over time. Leo Kottke would be playing a 12-string steel guitar with a slide, so that's three elements that are very interesting that you wouldn't necessarily combine. But he did it, so we have that.

On this new record I toyed with new techniques and tunings. I used a B-Bender on "Fate of the Faithful." "Falling Skies" is in DADGAD, "The Archer" is in open C, and "Meeting the Master" is in some strange tuning I made up — it's a full step down, and then you drop the bottom D one more step. It's crazy. And I was using a Taylor baritone that had two B strings. I tried toying with different sounds.

Did you try soloing outside of the minor pentatonic scale at all?

Sure. There are blues boxes, which are extremely helpful to me. It's just a variation of the pentatonic scale from

the base of the neck all the way up to the top. There are other phrases and movements inside of that, and you can configure them all the way up and get into Dorian-like scales. If you're soloing in an open tuning, that's completely instinctual. You just find what feels good and play those notes. It's good to try open tunings.

A few years ago, you told me that you don't really practice. Is that still true?

I still don't practice. My practice is on the stage or when I'm writing songs on a guitar. In that sense, it keeps things frustrating. If I practiced all the time, it would be, for me, probably a moot point being that it's not really my form of expression.

Back to your record. During the planning stages, did the band sit down and map out an objective, or did the album just evolve as a natural outgrowth of the songs?

There was a certain set of objectives that we had. We came out of our last record thinking we created this cinematic, almost orchestral record. On this one, I wanted to do something fairly aggressive.

In what way?

In terms of the emotional approach. Many of these songs are intense both emotionally and sonically. We also wanted to have a lot of dimension within the dynamics of our performances. Between "Meeting the Master" to "The Falling Sky" to "Farewell for Now," the range is pretty diverse. Once we had those concepts in mind, it was really just going out and isolating ourselves in the country and writing these songs in two weeks. Then we went to RCA's Studio A and recorded them.

Where exactly did you go to isolate yourselves?

We went to a cabin just south of Franklin [a city south of Nashville]. We brought all of our gear and set up — that's how we like to operate. We like to get out of any city and be in the middle of nowhere, and live and breathe what we're doing every day.



**“TO BE CONSIDERED
A GUITAR HERO FOR MY
GENERATION IS A
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT”**

Was there anything significant in Dave Cobb's method of recording that had a real impact on you?

It was a maximum impact. Most people set a mic right next to an amplifier and go, "There's your sound." But you and I know that the technique is to pull that mic away and get the ambience and the live sound. Dave would set the mic 10 feet away, but then he'd listen back and go, "Nah, it just doesn't sound right." It would sound bigger at 12 feet. We did a lot of stuff with delays and things like that.

Dave got things sounding so good that I didn't have to worry about it. That was a big part of his impact. We didn't have to worry about the sound; we only had to think about the music we were writing and how we were going to perform it. Our attention was right where it needed to be.

This record is like your others in that you didn't use generic, dialed-in distortion. Your sound is big and powerful, but there's a natural element to it.

Yeah, again, that's a huge thing. Most

players tell me that I play very clean. I do, I think, but I like the nuance of that style. You can hear the detail of my playing; you can hear the complexities of it. I can whisper something or I can profess it loudly from the top of a mountain. I have the ability to work with dynamics in terms of tonality and approach, and I like that.

What was Dave like as a guitar coach? I don't assume everything you come up with is awesome right off the bat. When you played a part and it wasn't quite right, how would he guide you?

It's interesting: If I had a pre-chorus or

**"EVERY SEASON
CHANGES WHO I AM
AS A PERSON, AND
THAT INFLUENCES THE
WAY I APPROACH
THE GUITAR"**

something, he'd go, "That's cool." Luckily, he likes everything I do. But sometimes he'd say, "That pre-chorus is great and I like it, but it sounds really complicated. What if you simplified it?" And I'd say, "Okay, I can do that." That's the thing — he'd be into what I was doing, but he'd want to go more in this direction or that. I would just revise it.

Do you ever get bruised feelings in the studio? What happens if you play a part that you think is awesome, but you get criticism?

It has a lot to do with the producer. I've been hurt by constructive criticism in the past, but Dave works in a way that isn't offensive. It's not like, "Go rewrite that part. It's shit." Because I've had that way back, which was fine — I needed it then. Dave never changed anything that I wrote, but he made me utilize those notes and make a variation of it.

Beyond some of the new tunings and techniques that you've mentioned, do you feel like your overall guitar approach has changed in recent years?

I don't think so. I'll put it this way: I believe that every season changes who I am as a person, and that influences the way that I approach the guitar. I've played a lot of shows, and I've taken different approaches to the guitar both consciously and unconsciously. It's like a personality or a spirit — it evolves with time. It's difficult for us as human beings to identify our growth within ourselves. It's the same thing with my guitar playing. I'm not sure how it's evolved, but I feel like it grows as I grow.

One of my favorite solos is on "Frozen Light," where you go absolutely bonkers. Was that done in one take? It doesn't sound like something you played to death.

Yeah, that was another thing Dave brought to the table. I was like, "I want to take that solo again." And he said, "No, you can't take that solo again. That's the solo." The "Frozen Light" solo is probably a second take, I think. I don't think I played any solos or improvisations more than five times.

Josh and Jake Kiszka perform onstage at Smoothie King Center, New Orleans, November 1, 2022.



ERIKA GOLDING/GETTY IMAGES



Kiszka plays the Beale Street Music Festival, Memphis May 6, 2023.

You favor your '61 Gibson SG, but what were some of the other guitars you used on the album?

I used that '61 SG number one for the majority of some basic structures, but I used more guitars on this record than on anything else in the past. The RCA studio room is really big, so we took all these guitars off the wall. A friend of mine who owns the Chicago Music Exchange brought a bunch of guitars down. We laid them out on the floor, opened them up, and with every song I'd walk over and get another one to see how it sounded.

What were some of the guitars that made the cut?

There was the third ES-335 ever made — it had some country stars names on it. That one outshot all the other ones for a lot of things. It was amazing. There was a '60s Telecaster. It's challenging to remember all of them. Dave has his '58 gold-top — I used that. There was a Stratocaster that I used for dive bomb—

type sounds and stereo things. The acoustic world was crazy, too. We'd use old Martins and a lot of things like that.

Did Dave break out his nylon-string acoustic? I was talking to Grace Potter, who told me that she played that guitar and didn't want to give it back.

Yeah, I wanted to steal it, too. Actually, I used one of his Princeton amps and fell in love with it. I was looking for one at some guitar function in Nashville, and I bumped into Dave. I told him what I was looking for, and he said, "Oh, man, you can have it." Just like that, he gave it to me.

Have you decided on which guitars to use live?

I'm going to need a few more. I'm looking for some to replicate the parts on the record because of all the alternate tunings. I found this old Frankenstein Telecaster and I brought it to [guitar luthier] Joe Glaser. He put a B-Bender in it. So I've got that little creation to help

me play "Fate of the Faithful." I've still got to find some more guitars.

You mention the B-Bender. Did it take you a while to get used to playing with one?

How did you approach it?

To be honest, it came rather immediately. I understood what was going on, and I didn't really have to think about it. It came pretty naturally to me. Using it inside the solo of that song, as a technique within the soloing, was something I'd never heard before. I had to do it because it was totally weird and different. It's a dance, the way you have to use it.

What about your live rig? Any changes to that?

I certainly might use the Princeton amp. I'm working out a wet/dry system right now. We're playing these really big rooms, so I don't need the reverb stuff that I've always had. I need to be clearer to cut through these arenas. I was put in touch with Peter Frampton, and I talked to him about his wet/dry rig. He's really well versed in that system and how it works. He gave me some tips, and I think he'll probably come by production rehearsals and help me get this wet/dry thing going.

Peter is a lovely guy.

He really is. He's the kindest soul.

We started out this conversation by talking about how your fellow guitarists have responded to your playing. You're now being called a guitar hero. How does that sit with you? How do you feel about it, and in your view, who is a guitar hero?

That's kind of a broad concept. It seems to be a tradition, doesn't it? There are generations of players who become icons of their times. You can go back to the British Invasion and people like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page... And then there's Jimi Hendrix, Pete Townshend, Rory Gallagher — these people became figureheads. Move it further and you've got Stevie Ray Vaughan and Slash. They all inspired me. To be considered a guitar hero for my generation is a lifetime achievement. ■

DRIVE

SHE

SAID

As she drops her latest album, *Mother Road*, **Grace Potter** reveals what she learned from playing on nylon strings — and why a Flying V is still the best rock and roll guitar.

BY JOE BOSSO

LIVE PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMILY PAIGE PEREIRA

ROAD PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRACE POTTER



WHEN ASKED TO sum up the theme of her dynamite new album, *Mother Road* (Fantasy), Grace Potter

answers quickly and definitively: “Belonging,” she says. But as the singer-songwriter and guitarist hunts for words to expand on her explanation, it becomes clear that there’s a lot more to it than a simple one-word response. “Actually, that’s just part of it,” she says. “Along with a sense of belonging, there’s the alienation you can feel once you’ve declared your identity to yourself and the people around you. I wanted to understand my own feelings of alienation that started early on.”

As Potter explains, she grew up legally blind and earned bad grades. She recounts how she was kicked out of school bands because she couldn’t read music. “That all kind of plays with you, and you start to question where you fit in,” she says. “I just started to play music by ear, and I had this revelation that music and musicality were worlds apart.” She pauses. “Ultimately, fitting in became less important to me, and now I don’t even try.”

For a time, Potter had a comfortable place fronting Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, a hard-driving, roots-based quintet that included her then-husband and drummer, Matt Burr. Between 2005 and 2012, the band issued four well-received albums, but it was onstage where the outfit truly shined. A big and brassy singer who knew a thing or two

about instrumental showmanship — when she wasn’t laying it down with a Flying V, she was throwing her whole body into a Hammond B3 — Potter was very much the show’s focal point. “I think people got captivated by me, but I was captivated by the band,” she says. “I love playing in a band.”

Her exit from the Nocturnals coincided with the end of her marriage. At first, she felt disillusioned about the nexus between music and her personal life, but now she’s made peace with their inevitable — and it would seem, intractable — connection. “As you get older, it gets easier to let things go,” Potter says. “The Nocturnals were an important part of my life in so many ways. I was discovering what I could do — my voice, my instrumentation. It was the first time I heard the expansive sounds that could make my voice fly. And now I’m going through it again in a really interesting way.”

Since 2015, she’s been making records with her second husband, producer Eric Valentine, known for his work with Slash, Queens of the Stone Age and All-American Rejects, among others. Their first collaboration, *Midnight*, saw Potter ditch much of her earthy grit for a mainstream pop sheen, and in many ways she sounded like a musical tourist. On 2019’s *Daylight*, she recalibrated her approach and framed her songs with a more organic, bluesy edge.

Mother Road feels like she’s arrived back home. Much of the album was written during a two-year, back-and-forth road trip across America. On it, Potter is backed by an ace band that includes bassist Tim Deaux, drummer Matt Musty and pedal-steel guitarist Dan Kalisher, along with keyboardist Benmont Tench, from Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and lead guitarist Nick Bockrath, from Cage the Elephant. Potter smolders on the swampy country soul of “Ready Set Go” and the funky blues stunner “Rose Colored Rearview.” The spaghetti western-flavored “Lady Vagabond” casts an eerie, cinematic shadow, and tangled blues collides with wild theatricality on “Futureland.” There’s not a musical moment that rings



“The Flying V is still going strong,” Grace Potter says of her favored guitar model. “That’s where I’m most comfortable.”



false, and throughout the album Potter, a fluid, emotionally direct storyteller, comes to grips with the vicissitudes of life with unflinching candor.

Potter's fierce electric guitar playing is less dominant on *Mother Road* than on previous works. She serves it up judiciously while drizzling dashes of tasty strumming on a nylon-string guitar in various spots. Overall, the emphasis here isn't so much on riffs as it is on textures and sound treatments. "I was actually surprised at how less indulgent I was with the riffs, because anybody who knows me knows that I love a riff," she says. "Believe me, there's nothing better than writing a cool riff. But these songs were crying out for something different, whether that meant swearing it up or sending it to church. I had to serve the songs and what they wanted, which wasn't always about power chords and

"THE NYLON-STRING IS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ANIMAL — AND A HUMBLING ANIMAL"

specific lines." She chuckles. "I was looking for the charisma of the guitar."

As you get older, do you find that you have to find ways to renew your relationship with the guitar?

Totally. In fact, I was just having this conversation with one of the new guitarists in my band, Charlie Shea. He showed me a video of a little girl rocking out on a nylon-string guitar. She was playing this fantastic stuff, and the words she sang were so silly and rude — the kinds of things little kids sing when they make up songs. I loved it. I think having a kid has helped me to

understand just how irreverent music allows us to be.

Also, it's important to realize that guitars are just toys. That's it — they're complicated toys. Having just picked up a nylon-string guitar myself for this tour, I've really come to appreciate what a fantastic toy it is. I think a lot of guitarists lose sight of that. We get to play these brilliant toys and make music with them.

You've played around with a lot of genres over the years. Has that opened you up to any new guitar influences?

Oh yeah. All day, every day. The name Jack Nitzsche came up a lot during the making of this record. *[Nitzsche was a producer, songwriter and musician whose work spanned from Phil Spector and the Rolling Stones to films.]* That guy was a fucking badass. Also, the acoustic guitar playing on those early Bobbie Gentry records — she seemed to write all of her songs with these acoustic intros. They were simple yet hooky, and they drew you in. That kind of thing made it onto my record.

I was also listening to a lot of mariachi music, and that brought me down a rabbit hole of spaghetti-western composers. Ennio Morricone was the obvious one, but there were others. I got

into all the musicians and guitar players on those scores.

You mention Morricone. "Lady

Vagabond" has those eerie, twangy guitar lines running through it.

Precisely. I was absolutely going for that. Also, on that track, I'm playing Dave Cobb's beautiful 1948 Martin nylon-string guitar.

Let's get into that. How has playing a nylon-string guitar affected your technique?

A lot. The nylon-string is a completely different animal — and a humbling animal. I'm very absurd when it comes to introducing something new; I need to recognize the theatrics behind it. First and foremost, that guitar of Dave's has

a heart and soul. I started the song “Lady Vagabond” after touching that guitar. The guitar brought it out of me. It’s such a buttery-sounding instrument.

It sounds like you want to do more of this in the future. Do you want to study fingerstyle guitar?

Yes! I want to go down to Brazil and get me a Brazilian lover who will teach me some bossa shit. That’s my new thing. [laughs] My husband knows this, and he’ll be there with me. I’m devoted to learning, and I’ve been humbled by every instrument I’ve picked up. No instrument is easy. If you want it to sound good, you can make it sound good one time in a studio. If you’re going to bring it out into the world and try to look like you know what the hell you’re doing, you gotta put your money where your mouth is. I’d love to get more into fingerstyle and flamenco style, and I think it could inform my next record.

Looks like you’ll be buying more nylon-string guitars.

Actually, I have three — they’re all off-brand. My husband has a beautiful ’60s Martin that only has five strings. But nothing comes close to Dave Cobb’s

guitar, and trust me, we tried. I asked him, “What would it take for you to part with this guitar?” He said, “That won’t happen. Not a chance.” Understandably.

You remain a very strong rhythm player. Where did that come from?

It all started with Led Zeppelin and Gillian Welch. I thought that if I could do those two things, that would be great. I love Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings’ records, and I was born with Led Zeppelin in my blood. But when I started understanding that it all comes from the blues, it all made sense to me. Also, I realized I could put together a rhythm bed on the guitar for me to sing over. It’s come pretty naturally to me. I love writing riffs and lead guitar parts, but those elements are like film scoring. Rhythm playing is more physical.

“I LOVE GILLIAN WELCH, DAVE RAWLINGS, LED ZEPPELIN... BUT WHEN I UNDERSTOOD IT ALL COMES FROM THE BLUES, IT MADE SENSE TO ME.”

You play some wonderful rhythm guitar parts on the record on songs like “Rose Colored Rearview” and “Ready Set Go.” On “Good Time,” you get into a swampy rhythm that reminds me of Little Feat.

[laughs] Man, that’s cool! I never thought of that. I was thinking Dr. John, Billy Preston and the Meters. But Little Feat? That’s cool. I’ll take that.

Did you play the solo on that song? The tone and phrasing remind me of Keith Richards on “Sympathy of the Devil.”

Whoa, also cool! No, I didn’t play that. I tried it out at the beginning, but then I met Nick Bockrath, from Cage the Elephant, and that was the end of that. I was writing the guitar parts, as I always do, but once Nick came in I stopped worrying about what was going to happen melodically. He brought so many

new ideas into the record, and that’s exactly what I wanted. I echo-chambered these songs enough, so I was ready to bring other people into my weird universe.

Nick played a few solos, and I really loved how he could go in a lot of directions. I had written some parts to “Mother Road,” but I was kind of bored with them. Then I heard Nick sort of riffing around, and I said to the band, “Everybody listen to what Nick is doing. I want you to redo your parts.”

Did you road test any of the new songs before recording?

Not a one. I thought we were just going in to make demos in Nashville. It was all brainchild stuff that was supposed to be the beginning of a year-long series of recording sessions. But we got 14 songs cut in seven days, so that was that.

Is it a little scary doing it that way? When you test songs out live, you can tell which ones work. This way, you have no idea.

That’s true, but I didn’t care. Making this record, I wanted to see if music was still what I wanted to do. I went through



Potter performs with her Gibson J-45, one of her main stage guitars.

Potter and Charlie Shea, one of two new guitarists who have joined the band.



a process of trying to understand myself as a mom as well as my role in the world. That all goes with the sense of belonging I mentioned before. I needed to not care. The songs just fell out of me. It was a great experience. I laughed it up with everybody in the studio, and that was the vibe. Somewhere in there, music got made, and I could tell it was good.

Aside from Dave Cobb's Martin, what other guitars did you use on the record? I assume you pulled out your Flying V.

I sure did. The Flying V is still going strong. That's where I'm most comfortable. The nylon-string is a new sport to me, and it is a sport — an Olympic sport. I'll play the nylon-string live on some songs. We debuted "Lady Vagabond" at a raucous show the other night, and I didn't get booed for my attempts at nylon. I'll be playing my Flying V and my J-45.

We also have two new guitarists who've come aboard — Indya Bratton and Charlie Shea. They're both badasses

and they cover all the sounds and styles that my music needs. With them playing in the band, it matches the Nocturnals' sound, because I've got that dueling guitar thing going on.

How many Flying Vs do you have?

On the road, I have three, but I'm embarrassed to say how many I have at home. *[laughs]*

Oh, come on. Do you know the number?

Right now, there's 12. It's mainly because Gibson isn't making my signature model anymore. I like to keep some around just in case I get those random phone calls from Lenny Kravitz when he's looking for a Flying V. I sent one to Gary Clark Jr.

Wait a second. These are big-name players with their own connections to guitar companies. What are they doing calling you for instruments?

Oh, I think it's great! In my life, I want to be remembered as somebody who

made the guitar world a little bit better. I think my gritty elegance speaks to my irreverence, and the Flying V is one of the most irreverent instruments around.

Has playing the Flying V caused any particular quirks in your approach? You do have to position it differently against your body.

Oh, hell yeah. I one-hundred percent play differently. I specifically chose that guitar because it swings like a pendulum, and it kept me from overextending myself. If I played a Les Paul or a Telecaster, I would get more of an AC/DC feeling — I'd just jump off the stage. The first time I was onstage with a Flying V, I felt grounded. Plus, there's the way it sits on your body, and I've got a woman's hips, you know? *[laughs]* The V centers me and keeps my feet on the ground. I still like to flail, don't get me wrong, but I can't climb on many things with a V strapped around me. Its ergonomics are different from other guitars. The Flying V is its own thing. ■

FORCE_{of} NATURE

Faced with a choice between David Bowie and his own band, **Stevie Ray Vaughan** took a bet on the blues and unleashed a torrent 40 years ago with his debut album, *Texas Flood*. Double Trouble's Tommy Shannon and Chris Layton fill in the details.

BY MARK McSTEAD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRACY ANNE HART

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AFTER 10 YEARS of grueling one-night stands, forging a reputation as a one-of-a-kind new breed of electric bluesman, Stevie Ray Vaughan was poised to make 1983 his watershed year. Stevie's Strat sprayed blistering licks across David Bowie's *Let's Dance*, released that same year, punctuating the songs with a dose of Texas grit and primo blues flavorings and taking Bowie's songs to a whole new level. It was only half of the story, though, as shortly after the release of *Let's Dance*, he delivered his startling, game-changing debut album, *Texas Flood*. While *Let's Dance* was a fantastic showcase for Stevie to sprinkle some of his Texas hot-sauce stylings, *Texas Flood* was the full-blown, no-holds-barred, real deal — arguably the greatest blues-rock album made since Jimi Hendrix and Johnny Winter were in their prime. Sure, there were plenty of great discs that

might loosely fit the pigeonhole of blues rock, but their emphasis was always on the rock side of the tracks. With Stevie, blues was king.

At a time when there wasn't too much to excite anyone looking for a hefty dose of full-blooded, ass-kicking, guitar-focused blues, Stevie brought not only outstanding guitar pyrotechnics but a sense of style and flamboyance that made his every performance an event. Prior to his breakthrough, it had been his big brother, Jimmie, who, with his band, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, had managed to revitalize a tired genre that was mired in predictability and clichéd, extended wig-outs. The T-Birds returned the blues to the juke-joint concept of short, sharp songs that got to the point and moved one's soul via their feet. Stevie opted for a different route to express his unique mojo, channeling the wild excesses of Hendrix, mixed with



Stevie performs at the *Texas Flood* record release show at Fitzgerald's Houston, June 20, 1983. "I believe that the photo captures a bit of Stevie's passion for the guitar," photographer Tracy Anne Hart says. "But really, as Bo Diddley said, 'You shoulda heard just what I seen.'"



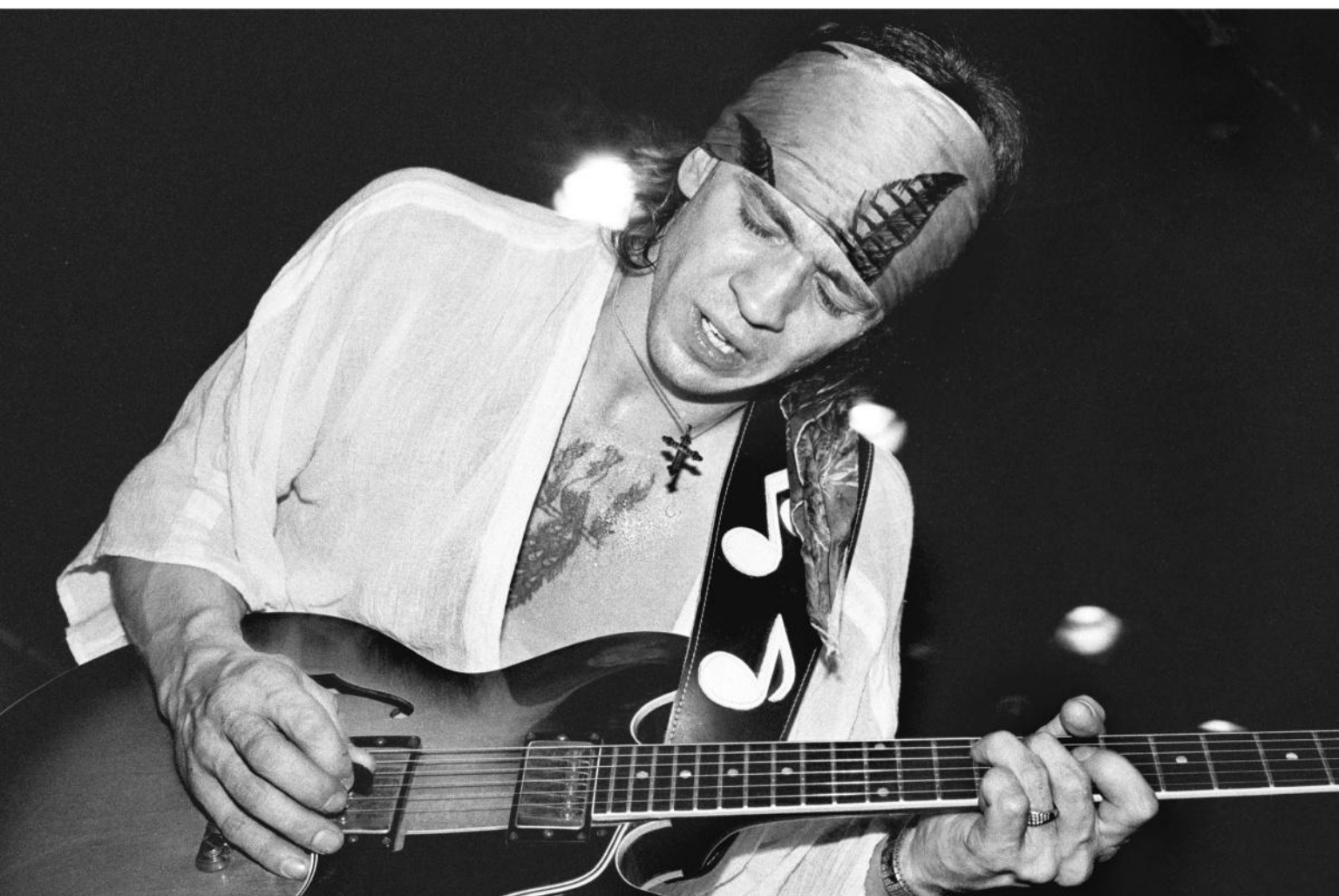
a big chunk of Albert King. While there have always been any number of great guitarists who can fire off Hendrix-inspired fusillades of killer licks, or cop Albert's trademark moves, no player combined the essential elements of what made those two guitarists so important while retaining a strong sense of their own identity. The fact that Stevie was held in the same high reverence as his iconic influences is testament to the magic that he wielded whenever he broke out his succession of road-worn, battered old Strats.

While 1983 was the year of his big breakthrough, the events of the previous year set the stage for what was to come. The catalyst for everything that came to fruition was Stevie's appearance at the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival with his band, Double Trouble, featuring bassist Tommy Shannon and drummer Chris Layton. The trio played their usual blistering set, as can be heard on *Live at Montreux 1982 & 1985*, but what can also be heard is a section of the crowd who were booing Double Trouble's ramped-up take on the blues. If Stevie and his band were dismayed by the response, they put those thoughts behind them when they met Jackson Browne backstage. The folk-rocker was so impressed by what he had seen and heard that he offered the group free recording time in his California rehearsal studio, Down Town. David Bowie was also in attendance, and what he saw stuck in his mind as he began recording his next album and needed someone who could really make an impact on his sound. "I figured that Montreux was the key to the whole thing, what with Jackson and Bowie," Layton tells *Guitar Player*. "And I really had a strong sense that everything was about to change anyway after that."

Stevie and the band made their way to Browne's studio in November 1982, working through Thanksgiving to spend three days cutting the tracks that would, unbeknownst to them at the time, become their debut album. "We managed to get two songs down the first day and eight the second day of recording," Shannon recalls. "We just set up like a live gig. We didn't have isolation."

Layton concurs. "We set up in a circle, just like we did onstage, put mics on everything and ran through the songs a couple of times," he says. "Everything was a first or second take I believe."

Stevie mostly played his "Number One" guitar on the sessions,



ABOVE: At the *Texas Flood* record release show “Stevie grabbed the Gibson [ES-335] when he broke a string on Number One,” Hart says. “I believe he’s playing ‘Rude Mood.’ In any case, I was happy to get a little variety in the weapon of choice. Of course, he sounded amazing on the ES-335, and, of course, he sounded just like Stevie!”

OPPOSITE: Lenny, Stevie’s heavily modded 1965 Strat, used (of course) to record the *Texas Flood* track “Lenny.”

an alder-bodied 1962 Fender Stratocaster he mistakenly referred to as a “’59” due to markings on the backs of the pickups. He also brought along Lenny, a brown, maple-neck Strat given to him by his wife, Lenora. For amps, Stevie used two Fender Vibroverbs and Browne’s own 150-watt Dumbleland Special and 4x12 cab with Electro-Voice EV12L speakers.

While Browne’s gift was much appreciated, the band were unimpressed with the assistance they were provided. Down Town engineer Greg Ladanyi had kindly offered up his services for the ragged band of Texans over the holiday weekend, but he wasn’t interested in doing much more than capturing the group on tape. Stevie was unhappy with the sound he was hearing.

As it happened, Richard Mullen, a musician and friend who had run sound for them in Austin, was in Los Angeles. Over the group’s dinner break, Mullen encouraged Stevie to speak up and demand the sound he wanted. Returning to the studio, they found Ladanyi was gone and another engineer in his place. Newly emboldened, Stevie told the man that Mullen would be taking over the session. Within an hour, things were sounding much better.

“I ANSWERED THE PHONE AT 3:30 IN THE MORNING. I REMEMBER THINKING THAT IT WAS PRETTY STRANGE TO BE GETTING A CALL FROM DAVID BOWIE”

— CHRIS LAYTON

As Mullen recalled to *Guitar World* in 2004, he used two Shure SM57s on Stevie’s amps: one on a Fender Vibroverb and one on the 4x12. “Stevie played through two Vibroverbs, but I only miked one of the speakers in one

of them,” Mullen said. “I positioned the mics about three or four inches off the cabinet at about a 45 degree angle to the cone. The only effect he used was an Ibanez Tube Screamer.”

The band only cut the backing tracks at this point — the vocals would be tracked at Riverside Sound in Austin — but as Layton recalls, the plan all along had been to record the equivalent of a demo. “We weren’t making the tapes to make an album,” he says. “It was just to record our songs. It just turned into an album later.”

Double Trouble played a few dates in L.A. to help pay for their room at the Oakland Garden Hotel while they were cutting the record. Layton recalls





TOP: Drummer Chris Layton performs with Double Trouble, October 14, 1985.

ABOVE: Stevie plays guitar over his head as bassist Tommy Shannon looks on during the *Texas Flood* tour, October 22, 1983.

OPPOSITE: Performing at Fitzgerald's, March 25, 1983. "He's playing a Tokai 1954 Strat copy, from a company well-known for their (often!) spot-on renditions of various classic Fenders and Gibsons," Hart says. "They were attempting to get Stevie to endorse the '54 knock-off."

being woken at 3:30 in the morning by a phone call. "I remember thinking that it was pretty strange to be getting a call from David Bowie," he says with a laugh. The British musician had not forgotten Stevie's performance at Montreux months earlier. Now in the middle of making *Let's Dance*, he decided Stevie's guitar work was the missing ingredient and tracked him down. "He wanted to speak to Stevie, so I had to go wake him up and tell him David Bowie's on the phone," Layton says. "They seemed to be talking for quite a while. When he came off the phone he told me that Bowie wanted him to play on his new album."

As it happened, he had never really been a fan of Bowie's music. "Stevie never listened to David Bowie," Shannon says. "The songs on *Texas Flood* showed you what Stevie loved, you know?" Adds Layton, "He respected Bowie, but he definitely wasn't a fan per se. He thought he was talented, and he'd obviously had a great career."

Regardless, no one could deny it was a great opportunity for Stevie. "Management told Stevie he really had to do Bowie," Shannon says. "They didn't anticipate that there would be a conflict with *Texas Flood*, because at the time we hadn't even secured a

deal or anything. We didn't even know that we were making an album!"

Of course, with the recordings for *Texas Flood* completed, there remained the task of deciding what to do with them. "We called our manager, Chesley Millikin, and suggested that he call John Hammond to see if there was something we could do," Layton says. An active musician, talent scout and producer since the 1930s, Hammond was behind the careers of countless musicians, including Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Michael Bloomfield and George Benson. "Apparently, when Chesley told John that we had a whole record's worth of music ready, he said he'd get us a record deal with Epic. The deal was on the table before Stevie even started recording with Bowie."

With things looking good on the band front, in January 1983 Stevie traveled to the Power Station studio in New York to begin working on *Let's Dance*. Hearing him for the first time, producer Nile Rodgers didn't share Bowie's enthusiasm for the guitarist, whose solos he felt leaned too heavily on Albert King. He soon changed his mind after Stevie loosened up and began to draw from his own unique palette of rich blues flavorings. Rodgers later admitted that he'd misunderstood Stevie's intention: Where a lesser player would have

unloaded licks all over the track, Stevie laid back, embellishing with just what the song required. He may have been a masterful exponent of the extended blues solo, but Stevie knew when to play and when to let the song

"MANAGEMENT TOLD STEVIE HE REALLY HAD TO DO BOWIE. THEY DIDN'T ANTICIPATE THAT THERE WOULD BE A CONFLICT"

— TOMMY SHANNON

breathe. He cut all his solos in a couple of days over the completed backing tracks, listening to each song once before adding his contributions in no more than two or three takes — although the first take was usually the one selected.

Stevie's playing and tone on *Let's Dance* was impeccable. Using a Strat and a Fender Super Reverb, he brought a richness of sensitivity and atmospheric depth to the songs that was transformative. Although Rodgers changed his opinion of his playing, Stevie himself joked that he basically played his favorite Albert King licks, and told one interviewer that Albert had ribbed him for doing so. But there is no doubt that Stevie's mojo was all his own.

When Bowie's album was released in April 1983, the reviews were uniformly strong. Stevie's playing was often cited as a particular highlight, with good reason. It's hard to imagine that the album would have hit home with such resonance without his dynamically sensitive Strat stylings. Although *Texas Flood* was set for release, Stevie was scheduled to play on Bowie's extended world tour to support *Let's Dance*. Reportedly, Bowie's camp intimated that Double Trouble could open for Bowie on selected dates, but Shannon and Layton have slightly different memories and perspectives on this. "David definitely told us that we could open for him from the outset," Shannon says. Layton, however says, "Bowie was actually a little vague about the prospect of us opening." Although he acknowledges that the

singer and Double Trouble agreed it would be great to tour together when they met at Montreux, "my instincts were that he wanted Stevie to play on the record, and having Stevie on that record was his prime concern, not what Double Trouble would do."

As rehearsals for the *Let's Dance* tour got underway in Dallas that April, it was evident

Stevie was bringing an entirely new dimension — a cool blues-nuanced vibe — to Bowie's older songs, something revealed in recordings that have surfaced over the years. But as Shannon recalls, Stevie was out of his element. "He didn't seem that happy about the music that he was playing with Bowie in the rehearsals," the bassist explains. "He was really unfamiliar with Bowie's material, and it wasn't in his heart musically. Stevie always lived by what was in his heart, first and foremost. I don't think he listened to anything before the rehearsals started. He just picked it up as they went along, same way as when he did the recording session with Bowie."

As the rehearsals drew to a close, the question of whether Double Trouble would come along was finally decided by Bowie's camp. Not only would they not open for Bowie but Stevie was not even allowed to discuss the band's upcoming debut album in interviews. For Stevie, this was completely unthinkable. "That really pissed Stevie off, because he didn't want to leave our band behind," Shannon says. "There was never any indication why Bowie changed his mind that we knew of. I wonder if it was possible that he was using the notion of us opening as some kind of persuader to make sure Stevie would do the tour. I'm sure he never expected Stevie to pull out at the last minute — to give up all

the big touring lifestyle, the top hotels and whatever to go back on the road in our milk truck." Whatever the case, that's exactly what Stevie did. "I really respected Stevie for that," Shannon says. "He was just so into what we were doing that he just couldn't leave it."

According to Layton, the crux of the problem was that Stevie was not able to discuss the matter with Bowie. "I think Stevie had a good relationship with Bowie when they first spoke and when they did the album together," he says. "But I think it suddenly started to turn into something else on Bowie's part when the tour came into the picture. When Stevie wasn't able to get a hold of Bowie to address the issue directly, I think he knew that he had to be true to himself. That was one thing about Stevie: He was one hundred percent natural. He couldn't fake things. Stevie just said, 'You know what? I'm going to stay with my band.'"

"Who knows what would have happened if he'd done the tour," he continues. "These were the conversations Stevie had with us: how he could do the tour and take care of us; how we could even get paid as a band. I said I couldn't really see how that was even practical. How could it ever work out, especially if the tour went on for a couple of years, or even longer?"

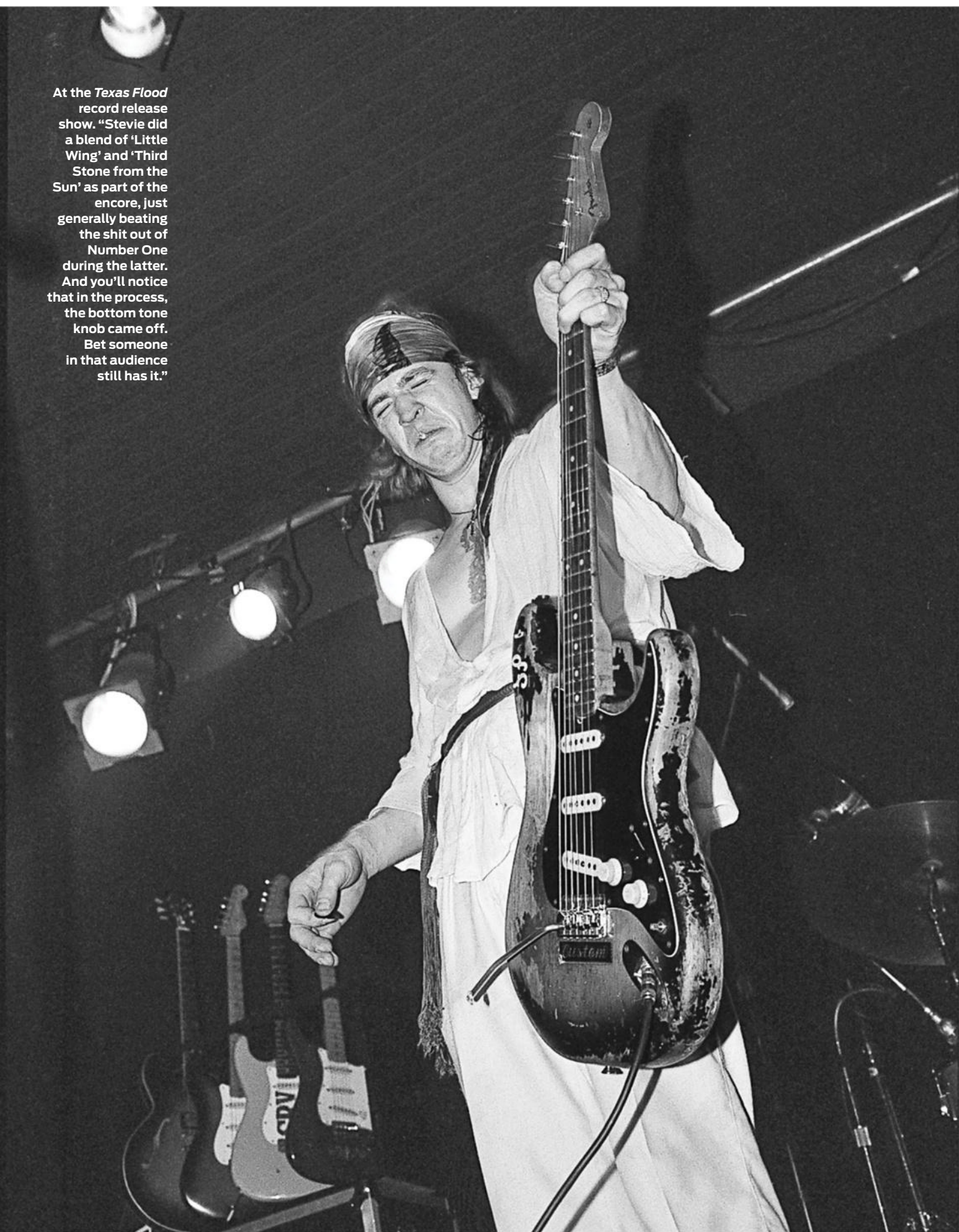
"But at the same time, I didn't want Stevie to think he had to make us his main concern. Stevie always said that the thing that he wanted in life, when it came to his music, was for us to all have our own band and to play what he loved, and I wondered how that could ever have figured in the idea of going on tour with Bowie. It troubled him that he could even do the tour on that basis, and it troubled me and Tommy, as we wondered how we could even have a band if we were on hold for two or three years."

Carlos Alomar, Bowie's guitarist and band leader at the time, has recounted in interviews that he and Stevie discussed the tour's potential to help promote Double Trouble and *Texas Flood*. He remembers cautioning Stevie that it was Bowie's show, and as a band they were all there to play their role in that show; the chance that the tour could make a significant impact on Stevie's fortunes as a solo artist were probably slim. Unwittingly, perhaps, Alomar helped firm up Stevie's resolve to abandon the tour, regardless of its immediate benefits for his career. Although Alomar was unhappy that Stevie left so close to the time they went out on the road, his departure opened the door for Alomar's long-standing musical partner Earl Slick, a frequent contributor to Bowie's albums and live show, to come onboard as Stevie's replacement.

"THE DEAL WITH EPIC RECORDS WAS ON THE TABLE BEFORE STEVIE EVEN STARTED RECORDING WITH DAVID BOWIE"

— CHRIS LAYTON

At the *Texas Flood* record release show. “Stevie did a blend of ‘Little Wing’ and ‘Third Stone from the Sun’ as part of the encore, just generally beating the shit out of Number One during the latter. And you’ll notice that in the process, the bottom tone knob came off. Bet someone in that audience still has it.”



Before Stevie pulled out of the Bowie tour, Epic had been unsure how to make the most of his appearance on it. The label had even debated whether to hold back *Texas Flood*. Despite this, a couple of New York City showcase events to promote the record were held in early May 1983, and it was clear to those present — including many big names in the industry — that Stevie’s charisma and raw, unbridled access to the deep core of his soul had the ability to transform the face of blues guitar. He was the ultimate crossover artist, a bluesman who could hold his own with any legend on the rock or blues side of the musical spectrum. Moreover, he commanded the respect from his peers that can only be earned.

With the Bowie matter now moot, it was all systems go. Stevie and Double Trouble threw themselves into the full-on promotion of their blistering new album. Released on June 13, *Texas Flood* received some surprisingly mixed reviews. Certainly, the climate was much friendlier to the kind of synth-driven, dance-oriented music featured on Bowie’s *Let’s Dance* than it was to Stevie’s more traditional blues-rock. Yet, against all expectations, *Texas Flood* started to pick up serious airplay. Once the record’s two singles, “Love Struck Baby” and “Pride and Joy,” received heavy rotation on MTV,

the die was cast. With his lean build and signature bolero hat, Stevie even had the visuals to compete with the style-obsessed bands that were dominating MTV’s scheduling. Together, they helped *Texas Flood* rack up sales figures that even the most optimistic execs at Epic couldn’t have hoped for.

The record’s huge success came as a surprise to the band. “Well, I know we were all real pleased with it when it was finished,” Layton says. “But of course, when you make a record, you live with it for a long time before the public ever hears it, so it’s not like, ‘Wow, that sounds amazing,’ if you hear it on the radio or something. But it was real satisfying to see that people picked up on that special thing that we had as a band, and Stevie’s genius. It happened so quickly for us though. When it was released and started selling right away, it was like, ‘Boom! Shit’s really happening for us now!’”

Forty years on, Layton still looks with pride upon the group’s achievement with *Texas Flood*. “The record is what it is,” he says. “I think everyone, to some degree, looks back at things they’ve done with a slightly critical ear, but I think it’s a real good picture of who we were at that time. It’s always too late to do what you could’ve done, and things are always what they are. From our way of living, it was an all-or-nothing kind of thing; our life was about

THE BLUES BROTHERS

Recently released by Freestyle Digital Media, *Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan: Brothers in Blues* is the first authorized documentary on the life and times of the Vaughan Brothers, made with the full co-operation of Jimmie. It’s a fascinating and informative film that includes interviews with the Vaughan brothers, as well as with contemporaries from the early days and household names like Eric Clapton and Billy Gibbons.

Using clips from Jimmie’s archives, the movie paints the fullest picture yet of how the two

brothers started out and went on to transform the face of blues in the late ’70s and early ’80s. Jimmie’s discussion of the events around Stevie’s tragic accident are particularly moving, as he recounts the tension between them prior to Stevie taking his fateful flight.

Essential viewing for any fan of these two titans of Texas blues, *Brothers in Blues* is a timely reminder of the magic of Stevie and Jimmie, and the unique connection that the two brothers had, both with each other and with the essence of the blues.





ABOVE: Playing at Fitzgerald's, March 26, 1983. Hart says, "I like to call this one my Clint Eastwood shot, as Stevie's leaning into my Leica with his black bolero and a hard squint that seems to say, 'Do you feel lucky, punk?'"

the music and the band. It wasn't like we had a big strategy, you know? We were a band, we played shows, made a recording and hoped to put a record out and see how things went. Everything that took off was almost a wonderful interruption of the basic way that we saw things going."

Shannon echoes those sentiments. "We were real happy with it. We all thought it sounded like a great picture of what we sounded like live — it wasn't a big production. Stevie was real happy with how it turned out. We didn't really have any expectations that it would be successful — we were just doing our record, y'know? We loved what we were doing, and Stevie loved playing with us so much that we were all real happy with how it turned out. Stevie was real excited when the record came out, but like me and Chris, he had no idea it would become the big success that it did."

Stevie and Double Trouble's career trajectory was vertical, with a rocket. He became the hippest name to drop among a rapidly expanding cadre of established legends, with the likes of Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Buddy Guy singing his praises. With the opportunities came the temptations that high-profile success brings, and Stevie developed

some serious addiction problems that threatened to derail his career for a couple of years before he finally managed to put his dependency problems behind him.

Whenever an artist is taken before their time, the temptation to wonder what they might have gone on to achieve is irresistible. The fact that the last two albums Stevie worked on, *Double Trouble's In Step* and *Family Style* — recorded with his brother, Jimmie — featured some of his finest playing certainly boded well for his future.

Once upon a time you needed the detective skills of Sherlock Holmes and some seriously deep pockets to track down live recordings and scratchy videos of Stevie and his band plying their wares around the world in 1983. Now all you need is YouTube and the ability to type "Stevie Ray Vaughan 1983" into the search to be rewarded with hours of astounding footage that will enthrall and amaze you. Unsurprisingly, the surviving members of Double Trouble never expected to be discussing their music 40 years hence when they laid the tracks down. "I don't even know what to think about that," Layton says. "I definitely couldn't have imagined we'd be here this far down the line discussing it."

There are always the inevitable 'what if?' thoughts when an artist is taken way too soon. "I've probably thought about everything a hundred different ways, a hundred different times," Layton says. "But I stopped going down that path, because it didn't really serve any real purpose, you know?"

Shannon believes that, had Stevie

**"WE WERE REAL
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lived, their music would have continued to evolve. "I think Stevie wanted to get some horns in the band and we were gonna change the style a little with a horn section in there," he says.

No doubt, Stevie would have been bemused to learn in 1983 that his music would be pored over and revered by blues fans and scholars alike for decades to come. It likely would have startled him to think future guitar greats would cite him as a primary influence, or to hear that he would be placed on equal standing in music history with the players he himself idolized. Remarkably, it all began with an album recorded on gifted studio time. But the fact that it had any impact at all is down to the phenomenal talent that was Stevie Ray Vaughan. ■



Stephane Wrembel performs at the Evening Muse, in Charlotte, North Carolina, April 18, 2015.





THE GYPSY IN HIS SOUL

As he wraps the 20th installment of his celebrated Django A GoGo Festival, **Stephane Wrembel** reflects on the guitarist whose musical essence inspires his own.

BY MARTIN McQUADE

APOTENT ALCHEMY IS at play in the artistry of Parisian guitar wizard Stephane Wrembel. Juxtaposed ingredients — including classical, flamenco, jazz, swing, bebop, blues and rock — combine in the mixture. However, the coalescing element is a facet of northern Gypsy culture, a sensuous music that has throbbled through his veins and cascaded through his strings for more than 30 years — namely, the Sinti guitar style, with its unique tone, vibrato and melodic improvisation. In the process, Wrembel's cluster of sounds acquires a dreamlike, even mesmerizing quality, echoing the aura of a surrealist mosaic, akin to the films of his favorite director, Luis Buñuel.

The exemplar of this tradition is Belgium-born Sinti Jean “Django” Reinhardt, the jazz icon who imbued the style with a sweep-picking intensity.

Wrembel found his muse in Reinhardt's red-hot repertoire and devoted himself to the propagation of his legacy. In 2003, he created the *Django A GoGo* Festival, which this year culminated in conjunction with the May release of Wrembel's new album, *Django New Orleans*. It's a merger of Reinhardt's string-driven jazz with the Big Easy tradition of wind instrumentation.

Wrembel started studying classical piano at the age of four in the Parisian commune of Fontainebleau, which he describes as “the home of the French Kings and birthplace of Impressionism.” It is also the wellspring where Reinhardt spent his final years. Although Wrembel showed great promise, there was a rival. “I never had a natural feeling for the piano,” he explains, “while with the guitar I had a fusion.”

“We all have an instrument corresponding to our personality, that spiritually fits with our body

JEFF HAHNE/GETTY IMAGES



and feelings,” he continues. “When I was five, Pink Floyd released *The Wall*. It was radical, an explosion that started my musical journey. I learned David Gilmour’s style. The Police’s guitar creativity amazed me too, as did Ralph Towner’s and Frank Zappa’s. When I was 15, I bought a little acoustic Epiphone. I took lessons and practiced daily for hours.”

His development as a guitarist would soon reach a turning point, just as Reinhardt’s did. At 18 and at the brink of his career, Reinhardt was in his caravan when it caught fire, and in the resulting inferno he burned his left hand, causing him to lose use of the third and fourth fingers. Remarkably, his recovery invigorated his playing. Wrembel was that same age when an event occurred that led to his vocation as the keeper of the phoenix who defied the flame.

“While taking lessons with my teacher in Fontainebleau, I said, ‘I’d really like to study jazz,’” Wrembel relates. “He said, ‘Let’s do Django’s ‘Minor Swing.’ I’ll show you some chords. We can play, and you can comp.’ I left obsessed, with that music in my head. I visited the record store, drawn to my first Django record, *Djangology 49*, featuring ‘Minor Swing.’ I’d never heard such notes. I thought they weren’t on the guitar. It was transcendent! Immediately, I tried to transcribe.

Wrembel performs on his cedar-top Nouveau Selmer model from Bob Holo Guitars during the Sounds of the Season Christmas Concert in New York City, December 21, 2011.

“Soon, Fontainebleau’s Django Festival took place. I had visited before, but now I attended as a guitarist. I heard the Django-inspired band Latcho Drom. A giant voice out of nowhere said, ‘That’s what you’re going to do. Learn to play like that, spread it, making it available to everyone!’”

Although Wrembel is not Sinti, he absorbed its heritage. “There’s a strong Dionysian element to Gypsy playing,” he says. “There aren’t many rules; you play and exchange solos. I started learning Django’s music with the Fontainebleau Gypsies around 1992. I spent seven years in their campsites constantly playing with them at weddings and parties. I learned Sinti-style guitar, otherwise known as La Pompe, or jazz manouche. My first master was Serge Krief. I studied later with Angelo Debarre and Moreno. La Pompe is Gypsy guitar accompaniment that’s a bit like pop music. There’s a simple and direct rhythm, like rock or swing, on the guitar that moves you. Josh Kaye plays La Pompe in our band. He also leads Baklava Express, where he plays the oud. There’s a direct connection between the fretless Gypsy oud and Django’s picking style. They both entail the right-hand technique.”

Although Wrembel’s talents are considered the epitome of Gypsy jazz, he avoids the classification.



JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES



Django Reinhardt shown playing his Selmer-Maccaferri backstage in New York City in 1946. He appreciated the instrument's tremendous volume, which allowed it to be heard in his ensembles.

"I don't like to be caught in one cage," he explains. "I concentrate on Django, a northern Gypsy, playing New Orleans jazz." There is, nevertheless, a metaphysical factor with which Wrembel identifies. "I found that my Gypsy friends are more connected to reality, nature and the real world, and are unconcerned with collecting objects, an obsession from our society. They're free from that desire and fear."

Wrembel's reputation grew as he assimilated Reinhardt's techniques and style into an idiosyncratic approach. "We're different people, different souls," he notes. "But I'm from the old school — I like the pupil-to-master relationship. Django's still my main source of learning and studying guitar, transcribing harmony and playing jazz. I have other masters and have studied traditional and Renaissance harmony and counterpoint for years. I often play classical guitar and love Andrés Segovia, Julian Bream, Mario Parodi and Alberto Ponce. I also play Bach. For me, Django is to the guitar what Bach is to the keyboard. The more you study Django, the better you progress. It's mathematical. I don't care what you play, study Django. It can only be good for you."

**"THE MORE YOU
STUDY DJANGO, THE
BETTER YOU
PROGRESS. IT'S
MATHEMATICAL"**

Among Wrembel's Reinhardt tributes, one project stands apart: *Django L'Impressioniste*, a 2019 double-album spotlighting his transcriptions of the master's solo repertoire. Wrembel, who also released the transcriptions in a book, calls this "my most personal testament."

"Since 2017 I've been transcribing and playing Django's repertoire of 17 solos to bring them to the concert level," he explains. "This had never been done before. There's a classical side to Django — the most essential part. Django integrated these preludes with the mood and atmosphere of Impressionist composers such as Faure, Debussy and Ravel. I recorded the album and wrote the book of transcriptions for anyone to learn them as a whole. I perform a few to start a Django show to achieve a certain feeling. I also perform a full recital. To this day I'm the only one to do that."

Naturally, Wrembel embraces Reinhardt's chosen guitar: a beautiful cedar-top Nouveau Selmer model from Bob Holo Guitars. "It's super-well-built and well-balanced, one of my main instruments," he relates. "Selmer was the brand of Django's guitar, but now it's no longer a brand — it's the name for a model of guitar. I also play a Busato, built around 1943, which once belonged to Joseph Reinhardt, Django's younger brother."

In the past Wrembel used a French Stimer magnetic pickup that Django favored, through an AER amplifier. "Now I use a better magnetic pickup, a Kleio 47 that goes to a Fender Blues Junior with a Jensen cabinet. I always use two sources. The other is an Ischell, handmade in France, an acoustic pickup which goes to my AER. Then I blend the two pickups. I blend the piezo-like sound on the AER and the electric sound on the Fender. They're complementary, giving a great sound: the crispness and attack from the acoustic and the roundness and the sustain from the electric, which also gives extra crunch."

After noticing there was no Django festival in New York City, Wrembel decided to create his own and brought his crusade there in 2003. It began as a weekend event at Barbes, a bar and performance space in Brooklyn, before moving to Joe's Pub, a popular performance spot in Greenwich Village. Once an East Coast tour was added, the event gained momentum. In 2017, Wrembel fulfilled what he calls "my ultimate vision" — Django A GoGo, a weeklong guitar camp/concert series at the Woodlands in his hometown, Maplewood, New



Jersey, followed by a finale concert jam at Barbes. “This year we’ve introduced a violin camp,” Wrembel says. “Now Americans can play with and get advice from masters such as Django’s great-grandson Simba Baumgartner, Sam Farthing, Paulus Schäfer and Samy Daussat.”

Wrembel’s primary band is his New York-based quartet, which includes Kaye, drummer Nick Anderson and bassist Ari Folman-Cohen. “Ari, with whom I’ve been playing for 20 years, is exceptional at the upright and electric bass, the only one who can make the electric bass feel like an upright,” Wrembel notes. There is also the Django Experiment, a specialty group comprising his band plus Nick Driscoll on clarinet and tenor sax, with which he released *The Django Experiment Volumes I–VI*.

Wrembel performs during opening night of the 2012 Django A GoGo Festival, held at Joe’s Pub, January 20, 2012.

“A GIANT VOICE OUT OF NOWHERE SAID, ‘THAT’S WHAT YOU’RE GOING TO DO. LEARN TO PLAY LIKE THAT!’”



In 2021, Wrembel introduced a specialty group at Dizzy’s Club, a jazz venue at New York City’s Lincoln Center, with which he recorded *Django New Orleans*, a collection of jazz standards that honors Reinhardt’s fundamental contribution to jazz. “The album is a fusion between the grooves and flavors of New Orleans and the frantic and chaotic guitar sounds in Django’s jazz,” he explains. “When Django was born, New Orleans jazz was mainly played on horns, clarinet and percussion. In 1934

Django, with violinist Stephane Grappelli, started the Quintette du Hot Club de France, with two extra guitars and a bass. They demonstrated how to play jazz and swing with just a string section, giving birth to a new sound derived from Django’s Gypsy origins.

“I wanted to blend, for the first time, both sounds:

old-time jazz, or swing, with the second line of Django guitars and violin. What really made the change is replacing the bass with the sousaphone. It grooves in a special way. This combination creates a unique vibe, part New Orleans, part Django. I’m not trying to sound like a ’20s band. You’ll recognize a flavor from nowadays.” Along with Kaye and Driscoll, the personnel includes Joe Correia on sousaphone, trumpeter Joe Boga, violinist Adrien Chevalier, percussionist David Langlois, drummer Scott Kettner and vocalist Sarah King.

In addition, Wrembel is a renowned composer. *Gypsy Rumble*, his 2008 album with his trio, contains a host of compositions, several with accompaniment from mandolinist David Grisman. Although it is currently out of print, Wrembel hopes to re-release the record in 2024. Grisman recently issued the digital collection *We Love Django*, featuring several of these tracks, one of which, “Big Brother,” Woody Allen chose for the soundtrack of his 2008 film, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. Wrembel’s waltz “Bistro Fada” was a highlight of the Grammy-winning soundtrack to Allen’s 2011 film, *Midnight in Paris*, and in 2020, Wrembel contributed to the score for Allen’s *Rifkin’s Festival*. He has also collaborated with colleagues such as Raul Midon for a song on his latest album, *Eclectic Adventurist*, and pianist Jean-Michel Pilc on a soon-to-be-released album.

Nonetheless, Reinhardt will always be Wrembel’s life’s blood. “Jazz guitar is Django,” he says. “He’s a different breed of musician. He created a new archetype. Django was a genius, one who knows without having to learn. We haven’t caught up yet with Django.” ■



Wrembel and his ensemble concluded this year's Django A GoGo festival at New York City's Town Hall.



HOLIDAY FOR STRINGS

Our intrepid writer reports from Stephane Wrembel's 2023 Django A GoGo.

BY MARTIN McQUADE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SACHYN MITAL

Dynamo is the word for Stephane Wrembel. Following three concerts and four days of intensive guitar and violin camp workshops, he brought the 2023 Django A GoGo event to a conclusion with a concert at New York City's Town Hall on May 5. Joined by his virtuoso instructors, Wrembel led a fever-pitched holiday for strings — except for the one that broke while he was playing “Mimosa” on his Busato. In contrast to his intoxicating music, which he concedes has chaotic and frantic elements, Wrembel calmly stopped, awaited replacements and dexterously remedied the situation while the show continued. Afterward, he remarked, “That happened yesterday too,” with the assurance of a man flush

with contentment from realizing his dream.

During the first set, Wrembel spotlighted Reinhardt's repertoire, beginning with “Improvisation #1,” one of 17 solos he has transcribed. “I like to start with the most unknown and most essential,” Wrembel explained. Subsequently, he announced, “Now we enter the opposite side of the spectrum and play our musical voodoo.” With accompaniment from guitarist Josh Kaye and bassist Ari-Folman Cohen, he performed the waltz “Indifference,” suggesting, “Let's play it in 6/8 time and see where it takes us.” After “Mimosa,” performed with guitarists Debi Botos and Sam Farthing, he offered “Hungaria” and “Dinette,”

with Reinhardt's great-grandson Simba Baumgartner and guitarist Paulus Schäfer augmenting the group. Violinist and vocalist Aurora Voilique rendered “Le Soir,”

“I LIKE TO
START WITH
THE MOST
UNKNOWN
AND MOST
ESSENTIAL”

after which they all blended on “Minor Swing,” the song that introduced Wrembel to Django's guitar playing.

The second set debuted selections from *Django New Orleans*, with additions to the

aggregation. Joe Correia's sousaphone commanded “Tiger Rag,” and the raucous gave way to the sublime with Reinhardt's “Nymphias,” an “Impressionist swing march.” Vocalist Sarah King lent Big Easy color to “Dinah,” “St. James Infirmary” and “Caravan,” the latter underscored by oud and pandeiro. The entire lineup merged for the finale, “Dark Eyes,” a vortex of eight guitars, three violins, horns, percussion, and David Langlois's scintillating washboard, fondue pot, dishpan and cheese grater.

When not touring, Wrembel and a rotating group of musicians perform on Sunday nights, in Brooklyn, at Barbès, the venue where the maestro and the Town Hall ensemble bring his annual festival to a close. At this year's farewell, he sang Charles Aznavour's “La Boheme,” a painter's wistful recollection of his poor yet free-spirited youth in Montmartre, a chanson echoing Wrembel's life in the Gypsy camps, where he found his destiny in Django.





BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

With their exquisite new album, *I Only See the Moon*, and ambitious new Los Angeles Folk Festival, Milk Carton Kids **Kenneth Pattengale** and **Joey Ryan** are leading a modern folk revival.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

THE MILK CARTON Kids have grown to become perhaps the premier Americana folk guitar-and-vocal duo on the modern landscape, with iconic fans including Robert Plant and the late David Crosby. Now they're using their position to cultivate a hip folk festival featuring a handpicked lineup of vital artists including Sierra Ferrell, Valerie June, David Garza, Tré Burt, Willie Watson (of the Old Crow Medicine Show), Haley Heynderickx and Waxahatchee.

The Kids have partnered with the L.A. Philharmonic to produce the Los Angeles Folk Festival at the Ford Theater over the first weekend in October. It will also serve as a hometown record release party for their adventurous new album, *I Only See the Moon* (Far Cry/Thirty Tigers). Produced by Pattengale, it finds the Kids expanding their tonal palette on a stellar song selection. In addition to their traditional dynamic, where Ryan holds down the fort on a larger instrument

while Pattengale colors on a parlor, they utilize a variety from Pattengale's extensive collection of mostly vintage instruments, as well as new additions. Pattengale adds textures on a David Crosby signature Martin 12-string, and Ryan plays banjo on the hypnotic "One True Love" and the bluegrass romp "When You're Gone." Both have also got brand-new Martins, including a 000-15. Pattengale has started playing when Ryan switches to banjo. When they do so, the Milk Carton Kids take a sonic step toward the Avett Brothers. At other times the added textural elements plus lush, melancholy vocals in epic songs such as "Wheels and Levers" and "North Country Ride" bring something more existential to mind, almost like a folky version of Radiohead.

Even though the album is mostly the two of them with a few overdubs, the sound is rich, full and varied. Some elements are obvious, such as Pattengale's signature melodic flights and the string section on the haunting

CHARLOTTE ALEX

title track, but there are also lots of moments where the interplay is so seamless and the overdubs so woven into the fabric, that tunes become tapestries, and traditional roles become blurred in the bigger picture. All in all, the whole story is one of evolution.

Can you provide a current take on your dynamic as a guitar duo?

JOEY RYAN In the simplest terms, I'm the rhythm guitar player and he's the lead guitar player. That's what it feels like when we have a backing band. But as a duo, I don't feel like a rhythm guitar player, because there is no outside rhythm I have to adhere to, and our dynamic becomes very fluid. We play with time a lot. We not only speed up and slow down within a song — sometimes it's within a measure or a part of a measure. We stretch, push and pull the time. The freedom to do that is one of the great joys of being a duo.

KENNETH PATTENGAL After a dozen years, it's pretty clear that those roles are always evolving. Before the pandemic, we spent a lifetime with ambitions, trying to build a career, worried about what the audience thought and trying to bring it. The first time we stood onstage together after we'd lost our job for a year and a half, I wasn't worried about any of that. Interestingly, the minute that changed, everything from the music to the show and the connection between us got better. On the studio side, we decided that I would produce this album. I knew if I actually had the producer hat, I could bring some different things out of Joey, and he could focus on the artist role.

A big part of your sonic dynamic is the extended range, with Joey tuned down a step from standard and Kenneth higher up, often capoed. How did that come about?

RYAN Since you mentioned it, I'll add that a more accurate way of describing my role is that I simply play the lower notes. We're both establishing the rhythm in the conversation between the two of us. The way I got tuned down a whole step was literally an accident. I broke my knee when I was 22 and



“WE MADE A DREAM LIST OF THE IDEAL BILL FOR A LOS ANGELES FOLK FESTIVAL, AND I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW WELL IT WORKED OUT” — JOEY RYAN



when they put tubes down my throat for the surgery, they scratched my vocal cords. I lost a lot of range off the top of my voice, so I started tuning down. I've played in a lower register ever since. It turned out to be kind of a happy accident that led to the sonic spread between the two of our guitars. For 10 years I played a 1951 Gibson J-45, and it sounded great down there. I recently switched to a Martin DSS-17, which is also a soft-shouldered dreadnought, and that seems to be a key element in my sound.

PATTENGAL That J-45 is a funny instrument that is both amazing and completely deficient. We've known there was a brace loose inside forever, but we've been advised not to mess with it until it falls apart because there's a good chance something else about the tone will change in the process of a major repair. When he strums, it sounds a bit thin and wobbly; when he fingerpicks, it sounds better. If captured the wrong way, there can be a harshness and significant string noise, but if captured the right way, that falls into the distance.

I've spent my life collecting guitars, and now all nearly 100 of them are at our studio in North Hollywood, where we made the record, so for this one we finally had the facility to pick and choose. For all but one of Joey's guitar songs, he played the low-end rhythm on my 1932 Gibson L-00. I found that around 2015 when we did an in-store performance at Mark Stutman's Folkway guitar shop in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. That '32 L-00 was sitting in the corner. It was in bad shape, but it sounded amazing. The belly of the guitar underneath the bridge is swollen up by a half to three quarters of an inch.

Mark told me that the guitar was rescued from Hurricane Katrina. It had literally floated off into the Gulf of Mexico for a few weeks, and it wound up at a guitar show. Mark is an expert at fixing pre-war Gibsons, but kind of like Joey's guitar, he didn't want to touch it because it sounded so magical and had already endured so much. It still has barnacles inside! But for the sound of Joey's low-tuned parts, it's pure magic.



FROM FAR LEFT:
Kenneth
Pattengale (left)
and Joey Ryan
backstage at
Baby's All Right, in
Brooklyn, New
York, May 15, 2023.

Ryan's Martin
DSS-17, which
replaced the 1951
Gibson J-45 he
played for years.

Pattengale strung
this vintage Martin
O-15 with nylon
strings and tuned
it a half step above
standard. "That
became my secret
weapon for the
studio," he says.

This new Martin
000-18 is his
guitar of choice
when Ryan wields
the banjo, having
the necessary
"dimension, clarity
and low end to
carry the track."

That model is also special to us because that's what Joe Henry and Rodney Crowell use. They're both incredible guitarists, and that tone, especially for their live shows, is unrivaled and something to which we've always aspired.

Is your stalwart 1955 Martin 0-15 still your main guitar on the new album?

PATTENGALE Yeah, that's my jam. That guitar has been around since the beginning of our band. It's what I'm known for, and the basis for my Martin signature model. I've collected seven or eight 0-15s from the early '30s through the late '50s, and I have several contemporary versions as well. One day I decided to string up an 0-15 with nylons to see what it would sound like. The funny thing is that if you tune it up a half step above standard, that little mahogany body comes to life. It's totally crazy, and that became my secret weapon for the studio.

Joey played it for the rhythm on the last song, "Will You Remember Me?" and he's capoed pretty far up the neck, so for the first time on our albums the rhythm is in a higher register on a nylon-string guitar. I used the nylon-string to add texture to the second-to-last song, "North Country Ride," which

has a lot of guitar on it. That song is meant to be like traveling to the other side and back, maybe to another plane of existence or another universe. It's nice to have the three-dimensionality of different textures in a wide sonic palette. The nylon is snuck in there to provide passing connective tissue counterpoint phrases that you really have to listen for, because that nylon-string sound is so warm, it fits in seamlessly. It's a cool way to add melodic information without distracting the listener.

The outro solo on "North Country Road" is perhaps the most prominent guitar on the album, and that's the steel-string, correct?

PATTENGALE The outro solo is definitely the 0-15 with steel strings, and we aimed at that as an important moment. If you make it that far into our album and you're a fan of my guitar playing, you're rewarded with a pretty classic Milk Carton Kids outro solo that takes its time and gets weird. It's a proper love letter to a Martin guitar that's now 80 years old. I feel like that recording makes it sound like you're sitting in the best seat in the house.

The two banjo tunes bring a very obviously different element to the Milk Carton equation. How did that come about?

RYAN I fell in love with old-time banjo music about seven or eight years ago. We joke about old-time music as "acoustic techno" because it's very repetitive and trancy. The banjo's biggest influence is on my songwriting. I want the banjo songs to be more looping and repetitive because that's what I like about them.

PATTENGALE When Joey fell in love with clawhammer banjo style, I bought him a custom banjo for his birthday.

RYAN J. Romero Banjos is operated by Jason and Pharis Romero up in Horsefly, British Columbia, and they build about five very beautiful banjos a year. The one that I designed with them is a five-string with a sound that goes beyond warm. It's as dark as a banjo can be. The visual aesthetic matches. The wood is all very dark and the metal is a stained brass color. It's also stark. There's no



embellishment whatsoever. It looks like a master craftsman could have been built it a hundred years ago.

PATTENGALE When Joey plays the banjo, my 0-15 doesn't hold down the bottom end in a satisfying way. The perfect prescription would be a Martin 000-18, and that was the one guitar missing from my collection. I've never been able to pull the trigger on a vintage one because my good friend Julian Lage has a 1941 000-18 that's maybe the best guitar I've ever played and heard, and none I tried measured up to his. But for this utilitarian situation where the banjo is the star of the show, I found that a brand-new Martin 000-18 right off the rack had enough dimension, clarity and low end to carry the track.

Are there any other new guitar voices in the mix?

PATTENGALE I thought a 12-string would be an interesting voice, because I've always loved the sound, and there's a deep tradition of 12-string guitar in American folk music from the Everly Brothers to Paul Simon to David Crosby. I didn't have a good one of those either,



CHARLOTTE ALEX (OPPOSITE); GEAR PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MILK CARTON KIDS



FROM FAR LEFT:
Ryan's custom
J. Romero banjo.
"They build about
five very beautiful
banjos a year," he
says.

This Martin David
Crosby signature
12-string is "all
over the new
record," notes
Pattengale.

Pattengale's 1932
Gibson L-00, a
victim of Hurricane
Katrina purchased
circa 2015.

Pattengale's
stalwart 1955
Martin O-15 (serial
number 144667),
which he bought
on eBay in 2009
"from a little old
lady living in
Arizona."

The Kids onstage
with singer-
songwriter
Jesca Hoop.

and Fred Greene at Martin sent me a David Crosby signature model that they had at headquarters as an office guitar. It sounds so cool. It's got that magic that comes from having 12 frets to the body. It's all over the new record and remains one of my favorite guitars to play.

Did either of you ever meet or play with Crosby?

RYAN I was working as creative director on the radio show *Live From Here* with Chris Thile as the host and Crosby as a guest. Crosby, Stills & Nash might be the band that I've listened to the most in my life. To sit around and hear him rehearsing was... I was a little too starstruck to even talk to him at first, but when I introduced myself, he said that he liked our band. It was validating, and so memorable to spend the day with him. There he was with his red beanie on at about age 80, and he sounded every bit as good as on the records. It was the sound of a different generation, but still absolutely amazing. It's tragic he's not around anymore. We definitely would have aggressively tried to convince him to come do a song unannounced at the festival.

What was the plan from the get-go?

RYAN We made a dream list of the ideal bill for a Los Angeles folk festival, and I can't believe how well it worked out. We got eight of the people that were at the top of our list for what we believe is a vital representation of American folk music in 2023.

PATTENGAL We're insanely lucky that the L.A. Phil was willing to come onboard as a production partner. To have that voice helping us find an audience is unparalleled, and they've been incredible in their deference to our ambition for this idea. We have huge esteem for the folk festivals that define very specific musical communities in our country, such as Newport and Philadelphia, and the Canadian folk festivals as well. We haven't had that in Los Angeles. But we didn't want to be all arrogant, like, "Here's a massive folk festival in Los Angeles because we're L.A. and we have big things. Pay attention because this is



“THERE’S GOOD REASON TO CONNECT THE DOTS BETWEEN MUSIC THAT MEANS A LOT TO US AND AN APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE” — KENNETH PATTENGAL

serious.” We wanted to plant a small seed in a little part of the community that we know, and see how it grows.

The coolest thing about our job in our community is seeing a next-generation artist grow into something that hasn't happened in music. A perfect example is our Saturday night headliner, Sierra Ferrell. Vocally, she's like the reincarnation of Patsy Cline, and she's a good guitar player, but she's also an unapologetic stoner and circus-like performer with a hilarious sense of humor and a stage presence unlike anybody you've ever known. For us it's like, Here's a water cooler that we can gather around. Let's check out what's pulling us into the future.

So rather than trying to pull out all the legacy artists and fill up the Hollywood Bowl, we found a smaller venue where we can book people on the verge of setting the next tone. We're trying to throw a little party that in no way encapsulates the whole thing, but gives a little taste of what we believe will continue to establish itself as important music.

RYAN Tré Burt, for example, is one of the great songwriters working today, and he's just getting started. I don't say that lightly.

PATTENGAL Joey and I have had colleagues over the past 10 years that aren't half as successful as us, but are 10 times more talented. If the gods were just, these artists would have much bigger audiences. We've learned that success in our business has very little relation to making moving, emotionally meaningful music. It's important to do any work within your musical community to help connect people that are making meaningful music to audiences that will receive it.

As far as we're concerned, it's not a good deed; it's not for anybody else. It's the reason that we're on Earth. If we've devoted ourselves to a life of music and those are the rules, then there's good reason for us to spend a lot of time trying to connect the dots between music that means a lot to us and an appreciative audience. That's time well spent. ■

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100% OF ALBUM PROCEEDS GO TO



TRIPPING THE LIGHT

Greta Van Fleet's Jake Kiszka bridges the past to the present and beyond.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

BACK IN THE early '90s, when the Black Crowes appeared on the music scene, my friends and I (and many critics of the day) promptly wrote them off as sounding just a bit too much like the Rolling Stones. But we soon discovered we were each listening to them on the down-low, won over by their hooky songs and solid guitar playing. They ultimately transcended that initial hasty comparison, and some of those same songs are now considered classics.

Greta Van Fleet, formed in 2012 by the Kiszka brothers — Jake (guitar), Sam (bass) and Josh (vocals) — along with original drummer Kyle Hauck, have similarly created a bit of a stir with critics' comparisons to classic Led Zeppelin. But the young band is quickly solidifying their staying power with the recent release of their third full-length album, *Starcatcher*. Powered by Jake's creative wielding of his Gibson SG, the quartet have won over an army of fans with their impressive high-energy songwriting. In this issue's lesson, we'll take a look at what makes Jake's playing tick. (Note that while the guitarist sometimes tunes down a half step, all music examples presented here are in standard tuning.)

"Safari Song," the first track from Greta Van Fleet's second EP, *From the Fires*, yielded a 2019 Grammy win for



Ex. 1

*Elec. Gtr. (w/dist.)

*let ring
bends executed downward, pulled in towards your palm*

*All examples

**Fret w/thumb

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Rock Song of the Year. Right off the bat, Jake employs a nifty combination of droned bass notes left ringing under bluesy riffing. **Ex. 1** is based on the song's intro, and the key to making it work is to perform each string bend downward, pulling the string in toward your palm, so as to avoid a collision with a held note on a lower string, which could stop it from ringing. Jake actually only employs a drone over the riff's first chord (A), but our example expands the technique to the following two chords, G and D. (Nashville session ace Tom Bukovac is a master of this type of playing, and his YouTube videos are well worth checking out.) Finally, be sure to fret the G bass note with your thumb, as indicated.

Jake often demonstrates an affinity for adding secondary guitar parts to Greta Van Fleet's songs, a great example of which is *Starcatcher*'s "Meeting the Master." **Ex. 2** is inspired by the song's high-energy middle section and demonstrates how to add some tension to basic backing chords. Composed entirely of dyads (two-note chords), the lower voice mimics the bass line of the backing guitar's chords, as the upper voice alternates back and forth between tension notes, which release to chord tones. Let's have a look at bar 1. Over a D chord (D, F#, A) the high voice darts back and forth between F#, the 3rd, and G, the suspended 4th. A similar and even spicier move occurs in bar 2, where an F# note functions as a suspended sharp 4 (sus#4) of C. An effective way to become aware of where your options for tension are is to associate them with chord shapes. **Ex. 3** shows where to find two common tension notes in relation to three D triad inversions on the top three strings, specifically the suspended 2nd (E) and the suspended 4th (G). This is some useful knowledge to have for creating musical rhythm parts and solos. Apply these shapes to other major chord shapes, then visualize where the tension notes are found in relation to minor shapes too, as demonstrated in **Ex. 4**.

Having these melodic-harmonic choices available is helpful, but oftentimes my students say, "That's great, but how do I even begin to come

Ex. 2
Ex. 3
Ex. 4

up with a secondary part?" A terrific approach is to listen to your initial rhythm part and ask yourself, "What can I do differently to complement the original part rhythmically?" Let's take a look at what Jake came up with for the secondary part just before his solo in "Lover, Leaver," from 2018's *Anthem of*

the Peaceful Army. Over a choppy stop-and-start rhythm, he adds a burst of continuous 16th notes, which creates new momentum from which to launch his solo. **Ex. 5** is reminiscent of this section. A quick position shift is required after each note pair, which is most easily accomplished by not

pressing down too hard on the strings with your fret hand. To reduce friction, use a light touch, applying just enough pressure to cleanly sound the notes.

Another way to add some rhythmic interest to your parts is to add accents, which simply means to play certain notes louder than others. As a band, Greta Van Fleet often does this by accenting the weak beats of a bar. In



a bar of $\frac{4}{4}$, the “strong” beats are beats 1 and 3 — not coincidentally, the ones on which you most often start or end a song. On the other hand, beats 2 and 4 are considered the “weak” beats, and accenting them can add some “rhythmic dissonance” to the proceedings. This effect can be heard in songs like *Starcatcher*’s “Farewell for Now,” and **Ex. 6** takes this same approach. Note how accenting the G5 chord on beat 2 of the second bar throws us slightly off balance for a moment. This sort of shifty rhythmic phrasing can often lead you to create dynamic and, most importantly, cool-sounding parts.

Now let’s bridge the divide between rhythm and lead playing by exploring how Jake will seamlessly add single-note riffs between strummed chords. He does this in many of Greta Van Fleet’s songs, a prime example being *Anthem of a Peaceful Army*’s “Age of Man.”

Ex. 7 is informed by the guitarist’s approach on this track. Played in the key of F# minor, the single-note passage that begins on beat 3 of the first bar starts out as a standard F# minor pentatonic (F#, A, B, C#, E) phrase. But then notice the addition of the G# note, borrowed from the natural minor scale (F#, G#, A, B, C#, D, E), which adds a new burst

Ex. 5

(Em) (D) (Em)

let ring

Ex. 6

C5/D D5 C5/DD5 C5 G5 N.C.

Ex. 7

E5 F#5 A5 D5

Ex. 8

(Dm) F#sus2 G5 A7 F#sus2 G5 C#sus4 C

let ring

of color. The fill in bar 2 covers similar territory. Sure, you can strum through those beats, but why not spice up the proceedings with some riffy goodness? Keep in mind that, as we had previously approached creating secondary parts rhythmically, we can also take a similar

tack here. Before even considering what notes to play, ask yourself what would fit rhythmically, as this can lead you to new and unexpected places. Plus, your drummer will be proud of you.

The intro to *Starcatcher*’s “Sacred the Thread” is a great example of Jake’s

talent for crafting a compelling part by combining the approaches we've discussed above. Here he mixes both single notes and dyads and introduces a nifty technique in which an open string is allowed to ring when shifting a chord shape up or down the fretboard. **Ex. 8** is based on this section and explores the concept of mixing things up. Notice how, in bar 1, the open G string is allowed to ring through the sliding chord form, creating a chime-like effect. Later in "Sacred the Thread," Jake takes this open-string technique even further. **Ex. 9** illustrates a similar approach. Here, the droning open strings are re-struck for each of the chords, and also ring longer, allowing the dissonances created to be even more noticeable.

In "My Way, Soon" from Greta Van Fleet's 2021 release, *The Battle at Garden's Gate*, Jake creates a melody line within a static chord to add some interest, instead of simply strumming. Like the song's intro, **Ex. 10** begins with an E chord that showcases an inner melodic line extending through beat 2 of bar 1. Notice how the open B string is used as a drone against the melody, giving it more weight. To accomplish this, when fretting the 4th-string F# on the eighth-note upbeat in beat 1, allow your pinkie to lightly touch and mute the 3rd string. The same muting technique is applied in



bar 2, where a fretted dyad on the 4th and 5th strings is sounded together with the open 1st and 2nd strings. Allow your fret hand's 1st finger to mute the unused 3rd string in much the same way. Having this muted string between the dyad and open strings also conveniently offers the

Ex. 9

Chord progression: Dsus2/A E5/B Fmaj7/C G6 Aadd2 Badd4

Ex. 10

Chord progression: E D# E

opportunity to add finger vibrato to the fretted notes without disturbing the ringing of the open strings. So the next time you're presented with a single chord played over a long period of time, try incorporating a simple melody to make your part stand out.

In "Stardust Chords" from *The Battle at Garden's Gate*, Jake flips things around by using muted strings, but this time incorporating a low drone. **Ex. 11** takes a similar approach, inspired by the song's intro. Notice at the outset how the melody notes on the 3rd string over the Cm/G and G chords sound more clearly due to the non-use of the 4th string, which is muted by the fret hand. By combining this technique with an interesting chord progression and rhythms that feature *syncopation*

(stressing "off-beats," which are anything other than the strong beats), Jake is able to create both an exotic and funky vibe in his song.

While much of Jake's soloing vocabulary fittingly draws from the tried-and-true minor pentatonic scale (1, b3, 4, 5, b7), he also thinks outside the box, at times conjuring ear-catching musical non sequiturs drawn from other melodic resources. Let's close out this lesson by referencing an unorthodox lick Jake plays in his solo in "My Way, Soon," from *The Battle at Garden's Gate*. At 3:24, he creates an abrasive-sounding minor 2nd interval (one half step) with notes on the 3rd and 4th strings, intentionally allowing them to ring together. Informed by this rather unusual application of dissonance, **Ex. 12** demonstrates how

chromatically moving this minor 2nd shape up the neck with a sequence of slippery finger slides creates some death-defying drama. (It's interesting to note that guitarist Elliot Easton of the Cars played a similar phrase toward the end of his solo in the 1978 classic "Bye Bye Love.")

Wherever you drop the needle on any Greta Van Fleet record, you'll likely find yourself face-to-face with Jake Kiszka's tasteful 1970s-style rock guitar riffing, subtly imbued with his own unique twists and turns. As the band leaves the critics' comparisons behind, they continue to satisfy their fans by creating analog-sounding music for a digital world. **D**

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

[illegible]

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Open Source

The world of open tunings, according to Peppino D'Agostino.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

GUITAR PLAYER COUNTED Peppino D'Agostino among its 50 Transcendent Acoustic Guitarists: Superheroes of Wood, Steel and Nylon in the August 2017 cover feature for myriad reasons, including his ability to make musical magic in alternate tunings. D'Agostino expressed some of his tuning methods among the many concepts included in *Peppino D'Agostino's New Acoustic Guitar*, a book originally published by Warner Brothers and currently distributed by Alfred Publishing in its Acoustic Masters Series. Now that material and more is available in a fabulous new digital format with a state-of-the-art educational presentation via Guitar by Masters on its website, guitarbymasters.com.

D'Agostino hosted a workshop on how he draws inspiration from open tunings at Freight & Salvage in Berkeley, California, where he graciously invited *Guitar Player* to attend and take notes. Here are some introductory ideas in his own words.

HOW MY WORLD OPENED UP

"I got the bug for open tunings in the mid '70s, inspired by Leo Kottke on an album he did with Peter Lang and John Fahey [Leo Kottke/Peter Lang/John Fahey is a split album released in 1974 on Fahey's Takoma label]. I found further inspiration listening to the great British guitarist Dave Evans on Kicking Mule Records, and John Renbourn is another folk player from the U.K. I came to appreciate. And of course there is French guitarist Pierre Bensusan, who is the



Peppino D'Agostino leads a class at Freight & Salvage this past June.

master of DADGAD tuning. Then I discovered Peter Finger from Germany, who is one of the greatest guitarists in the world. Joni Mitchell is a genius and one of the best at creating alternate tunings to help with her compositions."

FOLLOW YOUR FINGERS, USE YOUR EAR

"When using an open tuning, music theory and thinking in terms of scales and chords goes out the window, because everything is rearranged. Just that alone is enough to free your mind and open the door to new possibilities. People ask me all the time about how I can compose music in unusual tunings, and the answer is that it's more of an audio experience than a theoretical one. I follow where my fingers and my ears lead me. If it stays in my head, the next day I will record the embryonic idea to my phone. Then I consider writing it down. It would be too complex to write the idea down in standard notation, so I use tablature."

OPEN IS OLD

"This is not a new phenomenon. Classical players have been using open tunings for very many years [since the 17th century], and they have an interesting system. When transcribing that tuning on paper, they don't use

tablature. They use a system describing two things: the fingering and the sound that comes out of the guitar for each note, so there are two transcriptions for the song. It's an interesting way of transcribing music using just standard notation. I recommend checking out an incredible composition by Carlo Domeniconi called 'Koyunbaba,' that is in a very strange tuning."

FREE YOUR MIND

"Open tunings is a whole world that I believe players should explore. Some people are scared because it's like, 'Where is the C?' Well, I don't think you really need to know where the C is located — perhaps just experiment."

MORE ONLINE

Visit guitarbymasters.com/peppino to view an extract from D'Agostino's book. He is also offering a workshop in Sicily this September with Adam Rafferty on how to arrange and compose with open tunings, among many other topics. Go to musicworlddretreats.com for more information. 🎸

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.

UNIVERSAL AUDIO

Del-Verb Ambience Companion, Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb and Max Preamp/Dual Compressor

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

ON THE HEELS of the Dream '65 Reverb-Amp, Ruby '63 Top Boost Amplifier and Woodrow '55 Instrument Amplifier [see *GP April 2023*] come three new UAFX pedals: the Del-Verb Ambience Companion, Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb and Max Preamp/Dual Compressor. As with previous UAFX pedals, which also include the Astra Modulation Machine, Golden Reverberator and Starlight Echo Station [see *July 2022*], these units have metal housings, stereo ins and outs, and dual foot switches, as well as the ability to add bonus effects (on some models), change foot-switch assignments and access other functions via the UAFX Control mobile app (iOS and Android). All three pedals require an optional nine-volt DC power supply rated at 400mA minimum.



DEL-VERB AMBIENCE COMPANION \$349



Based, like all UAFX pedals, around dual-engine processing for enhanced sonic authenticity, the Del-Verb delivers emulations of classic delay and reverb effects lifted from the Starlight and

Golden Reverberator, which are selected via two mini-toggle switches. The left-hand switch offers Tape EP-III, Analog DMM and Precision (respectively a '70s Maestro EP-III, EHX Memory Man and UA's own pristine delay with studio-grade chorusing and flanging). The right-hand switch offers Spring 65, Plate 140 and Hall 224 reverbs that model the tank and circuitry of, in order, a 1965 Fender Deluxe Reverb, an EMT plate reverb (from the Record Plant in Sausalito) and an '80s Lexicon 224 digital processor.

The top row of controls are delay time, feedback (delay repeats) and mix (delay level). The bottom row controls are Color,

mod and reverb. Depending on the delay selected, Color alters the Tape EP-III record level, the Analog DMM input gain or the Precision delay tone. Mod sets modulation amount and is off at 12 o'clock. Mod also affects other parameters depending on the selected effect: Tape EP-III is N.O.S tape when mod is turned to the left and worn tape when turned to the right; Analog DMM is vibrato when turned left and chorus when turned fully right, and Precision is flanger when turned left and chorus when turned right. Finally, reverb adjusts an effect's level up to 100 percent wet at maximum.

The left and right foot switches both feature an LED and toggle, respectively, delay and reverb on/off. Note that this can be changed via the UAFX Control app to toggle delay and reverb on/off with the left foot switch and have delay tap tempo on the right foot switch. You can also select whether the trails stay on when the delay and reverb are bypassed (which is the default) or have the trails stop when the effects are bypassed. Another great function of UAFX Control is the ability to change the voicing of the delay and reverb — 12 choices for Analog DMM and 12 for Spring 65 — which provides numerous ways to shape sounds to suit your needs.

As we've previously stated in reviews of the Starlight Echo Station and Golden Reverberator, the delay and reverb emulations are stellar, and the Del-Verb delivers this same level of performance in a package that gives players quick-and-easy access to those sounds. Running the Del-Verb through a new Fender '48 Dual Professional JB edition 2x10 combo, a Fender Tonemaster Princeton Reverb, as well as through studio monitors, showcased how effectively echo sounds can be shaped via the delay time, feedback and mix knobs, and especially the Color and mod controls, which provide useful variance for



Del-Verb delivers emulations of delays and reverbs from UA's Starlight and Golden Reverberator.

the selected delay — for instance, adding texture to the Tape EP-III model by turning the recording level up past one o' clock with the Color control and using mod to give the repeats a touch of graininess when set to the worn-tape side. This sounded very hip through the Dual Professional amp and especially with a healthy dose of the righteous-sounding spring model. It's like a melding of Fender circuits from decades apart, with a vintage Echoplex along for the ride, and it's super-cool to play through.

I could also indulge in beautiful ricocheting, flanged delays using Precision in stereo, as well as trippy sci-fi effects from Analog DMM with Color (gain) cranked, feedback at maximum and the delay time swept manually. UAFX Control can also take Analog DMM into seriously twisted places via presets like Sync Oct X Dirty Try, Square Mod Octave and Dirty Double Octaves. Conversely, the tamer offerings, like Warm Slower Mod Speed, Extra Bright Attack and the colorful AM Radio, open the door to delay sounds that are different and very inspiring because of it. The reverb choices should satisfy most needs without necessarily diving into the app, but when you do you'll find plenty of alternate voicings for Spring 65 that are all based on the sounds of three different tanks (labeled A, B and C), with some standouts being Symphonic Reverb (a cavernous 'verb with pitch-shifted modulation), Spring C Rotato (reverb with lush rotary-speaker vibrato) and Spring Tube Drive B, which emulates another hand-picked tank with luscious reflection and decay characteristics.

SPECIFICATIONS

Del-Verb Ambience Companion

CONTACT uaudio.com

CONTROLS Delay time (echo rate), feedback (delay repeats), mix (delay level; 100% wet at max), Color (delay character), mod (modulation amount; off at noon), reverb (reverb level; 100% wet at max). Switches: Delay select (Tape EP-III, Analog DMM, Precision); Reverb select (Spring 65, Plate 140, Hall 224)

FOOT SWITCHES Delay on/off (left), reverb on/off tap

I/O Stereo inputs and outputs, USB Type-C (connect to computer for firmware updates), pair button (activates Bluetooth for UAFX



Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb is based on a mid-1970s Roland Space Echo tape delay.

Control mobile app) 9VDC adapter jack (400mA, adapter not included)

EXTRAS Buffered bypass. Turn delay and reverb trails on or off, add tap tempo and download custom voicings via the UAFX Control mobile app

SIZE 3.5" deep x 5.5" wide x 2" tall

WEIGHT 1.8 lbs

BUILT Malaysia

KUDOS Ideal for adding delay and reverb to an amp with no built-in effects, as well as in the studio for processing tracks with gorgeous delay and reverb

CONCERNS Not exactly a concern, but the effect options available via UAFX Control only pertain to Analog DMM and Spring 65

GALAXY '74 TAPE ECHO & REVERB \$349



UAFX's alternative option in the delay/reverb category is Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb, which is based on a mid-1970s Roland Space Echo. The pedal features echo rate, feedback and echo volume controls;

a Head Select switch (cycles through three tape-head combinations) and a two-position switch for Main and Alt, the latter of which activates tape age, bass and treble as alternate functions, respectively, for the bottom row of knobs: input volume, dwell and reverb volume.

The left foot switch is on/off, and the right switch is either tap tempo, or, by pressing and holding, a "performance mode" function in which Head 1 (on the Head Select switch) is a dotted 16th note, Head 2 is a dotted eighth and Head 3 is a dotted quarter note. Even better, these tempo effects swell with feedback volume until you release the switch

and the delay tempo reverts to what was set by the tap switch or echo rate knob.

This is a lot of fun to play with, as the ability to swell notes at different tempos can make even simple lines sound amazing, and when you release the foot switch the trails slowly fade out as you keep playing on top on them. If you prefer, the bypass routing can be set for trails off by using the UAFX Control app, which also lets you change the foot-switch order so the left switch is delay on/off and the right switch is reverb on/off. There are no alternate sound effects offered within the app for Galaxy.

The delay sounds are juicy and organic and can be beautifully textured with grainy wow and flutter as you turn up the input level when the right-hand switch is in the Alt position. It really sounds like changing speeds on a motorized tape drive as you sweep the echo rate control, and, true to form, here's where you can deploy runaway-echo mayhem by cranking up the feedback knob.

The Galaxy made it easy to get everything from rockabilly/slap-back sounds (think Brian Setzer with his Bassman/Space Echo rig) to soaring, richly textured echoes that sound amazing through a stereo setup with the Head Select switch on position three, where you can enjoy delay times of up to 974ms. The Space Echo always seems somewhat overlooked in the world of tape delays, so it's awesome that Galaxy puts its own spin on this classic to become yet another great-sounding offering in the UAFX line.

SPECIFICATIONS

Galaxy '74 Tape Echo & Reverb

CONTROLS Echo rate (delay time for active tape heads), feedback (echo repeats), echo volume, input volume (tape recording level. Alt function is tape wear, wow & flutter);

dwelt (drive into reverb tank; Alt is echo bass — flat at noon); reverb volume (Alt is echo treble — flat at noon)

SWITCHES Head select (cycles through three tape-head combinations); Alt select (activates the alternate tape age, bass and treble controls)

FOOT SWITCHES On (toggles echo and reverb on/off), Tap/Hold (sets echo tempo; hold for sustained performance FX: Head 1 dotted 16th note, Head 2 dotted 8th, Head 3 quarter note)

EXTRAS Buffered bypass. Turn delay trails on or off and change foot-switch order via the UAFX Control mobile app

KUDOS A cool take on the classic Space Echo that gives players multiple options for shaping echo tones

CONCERNS None

MAX PREAMP/DUAL COMPRESSOR \$399



Two is always better than one, right? That's the premise of the Max Preamp/Dual Compressor which features two identical and stackable sets of classic compressors: the

MXR Dyna Comp, Teletronix Opto LA-2A and Universal Audio UA 1176 (labeled here as FET 1176), along with an emulation of UA's 610 tube preamp/EQ (in fact, one for each side), which adds its own sonic charms to the brew.

The upper controls are preamp, comp and output (makeup gain), and just below them are three switches. At left is Comp 1, with settings for Dyna, Opto LA-2A and FET 1174. The middle switch is Comp Select, which selects whether Comp 1 or Comp 2 is controlled by the knobs (even when both comps are on, only one is affected by the knobs). The switch on the right is Comp 2, which has the same compressor selections. The lower row of knobs are attack, which works on FET 1176 only and controls onset speed; ratio, which produces harder compression when turned clockwise; and release, which is recovery speed — turning it clockwise gives a faster release.

Comp 1 drives into Comp 2 in serial fashion, and the left and right foot switches turn them on and off in that order. If desired,

you can change to parallel configuration in the UAFX Control app, in which the input signal is split to feed both comps and then mixed at the output stage.

There is also an Exclusive mode in which the input signal is fed into both comps, but only one can be turned on and off by either the left or right foot switches. Lastly, the Control app provides low and high EQ adjustments (up to 6dB boost/cut) for each of the two UA 610 preamps, and you can also configure a side-chain bass filter (FET 1176 only) to reduce compression and pumping on bass-heavy signals without affecting tone.

The LEDs above each foot switch show on/off status and change color to indicate how the compressor is responding to input signal: Green is no response, amber is moderate and red is heavy. The metering on the early review sample I received wasn't working, but fortunately that was easily fixed by updating the software via UAConnect, which requires an optional USB-C cable for the computer connection.

Max works great using Dyna to impart crush to an overdriven guitar riff or make your slide solos sound smooth and liquid. The studio comps up the game from here as both have distinctive coloration that can impact your tone in compelling ways: Opto LA-2A offers its signature tube warmth and soft limiting, and the added ratio control lets you increase compression beyond that of the original unit or the UAD plug-in. FET 1176 is a classic UA squeeze-box with a hallowed reputation as a go-to studio limiter for recording guitar. You've likely heard it on some of your favorite solos.

But it's when you start stacking different comps with various amounts of compression and preamp drive that Max really comes into its own as you explore the different tonal and dynamic textures that can be created by

running, say, Dyna into FET 1176 with its controls set for heavy squash, quick attack and a long release; or Opto LA-2A with the compression turned up, ratio around 20 and release at noon (where it matches the original's non-adjustable release time) into FET 1176 set for moderate compression and a fast release. Turn up the 610 preamp to inject a little graininess, add distortion and delay, and it doesn't get much cooler, because with Max you can set the knobs wherever you like and just bliss out on playing this super-interactive tone machine. 🎸

SPECIFICATIONS

Max Preamp/Dual Compressor

CONTROLS Preamp (UA 610 tube preamp), comp (amount of compression), output (makeup gain), attack (onset speed; FET 1176 only), ratio (turn clockwise for harder compression), release (recovery speed). Switches: Comp 1 (Dyna, Opto LA-2A, FET 1176); Comp select (1, 2); Comp 2 (Dyna, Opto LA-2A, FET 1176)

FOOT SWITCHES Comp 1 and comp 2, each with an LED that indicates on/off and also functions as a meter for compression amount

EXTRAS Buffered bypass. Compressors can be configured in series (default) or parallel via UAFX Control app. Exclusive mode allows left or right foot switches to toggle Comp 1 or Comp 2 on/off (only one comp active at a time). Also provides adjustable low and high EQ for each of the two UA 610 preamps. FET 1176 also has a configurable side-chain bass-filter to mitigate pumping on bass-heavy signals

KUDOS Stackable compressors provide dynamic and tonal options that are a blast to deploy on the fly

CONCERNS None



Max Preamp/Dual Compressor features two identical and stackable sets of classic compressors.

TRIPTYCH

THE POWER OF THREE

Pushing the boundaries of vintage Strat tones into uncharted territories of super heavy fuzz-drenched riffing



"For me, the perfect Strat tone has been an ongoing journey for the last few years, and I'm happy to say that the journey has ended with the Triptych single coils"

RABEA MASSAAD

BEA



bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Bare Knuckle



Ellis provided a TX2 model (shown here) for our test, but the X Series system can be installed in the guitar or bass of your choice provided your pickups have no fewer than two, and no more than five, output wires.

ELLIS GUITARS

X Series Pickup Blending System

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

BASED IN HOUSTON, Texas, Ellis Guitars offers a series of guitars and basses as well as this novel passive electronics system that is designed to deliver sounds similar to popular Fender and Gibson guitars from any instrument equipped with one, two or three standard humbuckers, as well as single-coils and P90s. The idea behind it is that, instead of hauling multiple guitars to a session or live gig, you can bring just one instrument and have those distinct tones at your fingertips.

The X Series is offered as a kit for DIY retrofitting to a guitar or bass of your choice, the only requirement being each pickup needs to have no less than two and no more than five, output wires. An installation video demonstrates the system being installed in a Les Paul-style guitar and the procedure is relatively straightforward. The original

SPECIFICATIONS

X Series Pickup Blending System

CONTACT ellisguitars.us

PRICE \$300 for two-pickup system with pre-soldered connectors (as tested). \$350 for three-pickup system. \$150 for one-pickup system

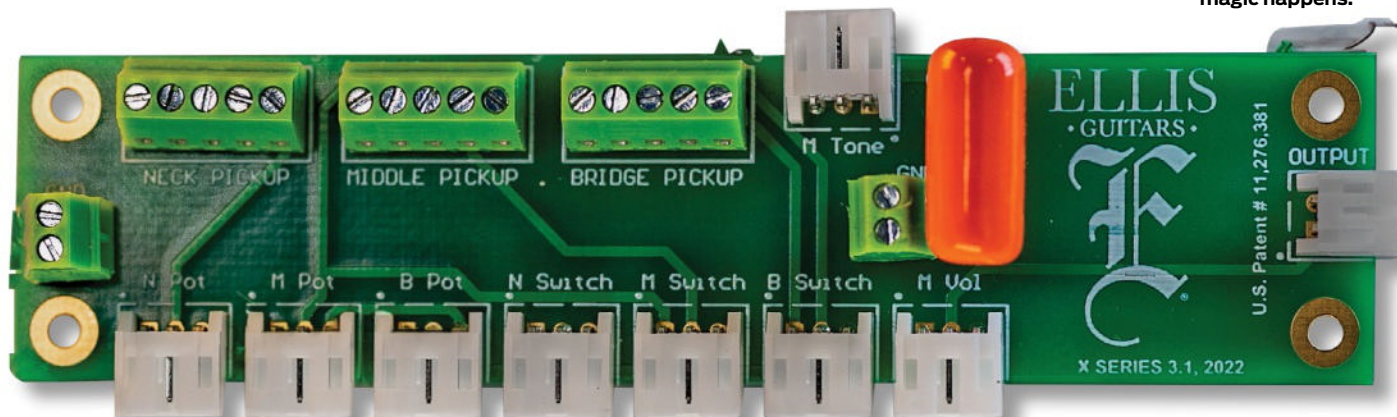
CONTROLS Individual pickup volume controls and 3-way mini-toggle switches for pickup-coil selection

EXTRAS PCB with push-in connectors for the pickups, controls and output jack. System works with any electric guitar or bass equipped with passive pickups regardless of type

KUDOS Unlocks a myriad of sounds from an otherwise standard guitar with one, two or three pickups: humbuckers, single-coils and P90s are all supported

CONCERNS None

The PCB
is where the
magic happens.



hardware (potentiometers, toggle switches and output jack) are removed, requiring a few leads to be cut or unsoldered, so all that's left inside the control cavity are the wires from the pickups and the bridge-ground wire. Strips of copper-foil tape (included) are used to connect the holes where the original pots went. The install requires two holes drilled for the system's mini-toggle switches (one for each humbucker), and it may also be necessary to enlarge the holes for the four pots that are included with the system (details are provided in the instructions).

The new components are designed to drop right in, and from there you just need to connect the hardware to the printed circuit board (PCB) with the snap connectors, attach the pickup wires to the solderless screw connectors in the correct order (the pickup manufacturer's wiring code needs to be referenced here), and then connect the bridge and potentiometer ground wires to the solderless screw terminal. Tuck the wires in place, put the cover plate back on and start enjoying the sounds the system unlocks.

We were spared the trouble of finding a suitable donor guitar for this review because Ellis sent one of their TX2 models (\$2,700 as tested) fitted with two Custom Humbuckers — a Mighty Rigel in the neck position and a Johnny B at the bridge — and the X Series system pre-installed. The controls consist of master volume and tone, two smaller knobs for the individual pickup volumes and two

mini-toggle switches for selecting coils on each pickup.

With the guitar plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a new Tonemaster Princeton Reverb, I started out using Ellis's suggested settings to get Tele-, Les Paul- and Strat-style bridge pickup tones, which was just a matter of turning the bridge pickup volume to 100 percent, neck volume off, and setting the rearmost toggle switch to, respectively, the rear, middle or forward positions. With the actual guitars on hand for comparison, these approximations of the bridge-pickup tones and corresponding output levels were on target, although to my

ears the TX2 sounded a little thicker than the single-coil Fenders, and my Historic '59 Les Paul had more snarl in its voice than the TX2. Nevertheless it's pretty good considering that the TX2 is such a different animal construction-

wise, as it features a body with an oak top and back, a Honduran mahogany center, and a bolt-on mahogany neck with a flame-maple fretboard.

Sampling neck-pickup tones for the same guitars — and using the recommended settings of neck volume at 100 percent, bridge volume off and the forward-most toggle switch in the bridge, middle and forward positions, respectively — yielded similar results, with the Tele setting sounding characteristically warm and somewhat anemic on the output side; the Les Paul more muscular, bright and open; and the Strat

setting yielding a tone that sounded great clean and went naturally into the blues zone when given some grind from a TWA SH9 pedal.

Turning both volume controls all the way up resulted in tones that sounded in the ballpark of the reference guitars in their dual-pickup positions, and while I wasn't able to get the chimy tones of the Strat's neck/middle and middle/bridge combinations, there are a lot of nice sounds on tap here that are available by using different combinations of settings. The suggested "custom" configurations included turning both knobs full up and setting the switches to their inner and outer positions — two alternate and very satisfying rhythm tones — or putting both switches in the middle, which delivered a cool mids-forward tone that sounded great with distortion. Alternately, setting the front pickup switch to the middle position, the rear pickup switch to the bridge position and rolling the neck volume down a bit yielded a meaty lead tone that sounded badass and cleaned up well by backing off on the picking strength or simply turning down the TX2's master volume. All these sounds can be dialed-in to taste by blending the pickup volumes in different ratios, which is a very effective way of shaping tones on the fly. It's also very accommodating whatever your playing style or preference for cleaner or more heavily overdriven tones.

Bottom line, the X Series can add a lot of flexibility to any guitar, and the clever design and pre-fab wiring package minimizes the effort required to install it. All said, if you're seeking to enhance the tonal capabilities of a guitar or bass, this system is definitely worth considering. ■

INSTEAD OF HAULING MULTIPLE GUITARS, YOU CAN BRING JUST ONE INSTRUMENT AND HAVE THOSE DISTINCT TONES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



TAYLOR

Builder's Edition 814ce

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

IT'S HUGE NEWS when a company introduces a new version of its main model, and the Builder's Edition 814ce is exactly that for Taylor. The Grand Auditorium cutaway body style with a modern neck profile not only put the company on the map, it also made Taylor the acoustic king of the West Coast. The standard 814ce with solid Indian rosewood back and sides coupled with a Sitka spruce top has been Taylor's flagship since *Moby Dick* was a minnow, and now there's a fresh take on the classic design, sporting top-shelf ergonomics and appointments, and with an upgrade to an Adirondack spruce top. The kicker is that the top is made of four pieces, marking the first time Taylor has done so using spruce.

The overall aesthetic of the BE 814ce is sleek and sophisticated. It boasts a beveled armrest and cutaway, a subtle

alteration in the body taper and a refined gloss finish that helps highlight subtle body contours.

That's a first for a Builder's Edition.

The back is seamless, gorgeous dark rosewood with a Kona edgeburst presentation. Antique gold Gotoh 510

tuners are a hardware highlight, and a contoured Curve Wing bridge,

exclusive to Builder's Edition models, provides a lovely

dock for the black pins with abalone caps. The shape

of a thin rosewood pickguard echoes the curvaceous body, bound around the top with alternating maple and black purfling, with rosewood edge trim.

A stunning rosette made of just-the-right seashells in a stained-glass style

setting provides the perfect

complementary pink, green and blue hues, set in the bold white wood.

The BE 814ce feels like it looks. Simply setting the guitar on your lap and holding its body against your own is a sensual experience. The contoured flow is sexy and smooth everywhere you feel it, with not a rough edge to be found. The armrest is ultra comfy and ergonomic, facilitating strumming and fingerpicking. One thing I found particularly interesting was the placement of the strap button on the back, just inside the neck heel, rather than on the far side of the neck stem, which is far more common. It seems this was done to make the instrument hang the same as it's positioned when a player is sitting down, due to the special body taper and beveled armrest. When you switch from sitting to standing, the guitar seems to maintain its position, rather than becoming more bunched up toward the chest.

Playability is mere perfection in any position, sitting or standing, or anywhere on the neck. Strumming or fingerpicking notes and chords, or playing anything from rock to jazz, feels fine. Intonation is spot-on, and the factory action is ultra easy. Most folks will likely appreciate that quality, but it was all a bit too easy for me, so I eventually swapped out the light strings for a set of mediums to accommodate my more aggressive and sometimes percussive tendencies. That made a huge difference, upping the action a bit and making the tone more robust.

The BE 814ce sounds like it looks and feels — very modern, light and lively, and high fidelity. Sustain is long and dreamy. While a solo player might opt for a beefier option, the BE 814ce will shine through a group mix. It has the hallmark rosewood-and-spruce sound that's rich and complex in the body, with plenty of sparkle on top in the context of a Grand Auditorium's balanced quality.

Adirondack spruce is generally regarded as an upgrade from Sitka spruce and is renowned for its ability to maintain complex tones at high volumes while being visually pleasing due to its grain symmetry. Adirondack was standard fare during the golden years of guitar making leading up to World War II, but manufacturers switched to Sitka when supplies dwindled. That's what makes this four-piece top particularly intriguing.

Taylor has made many koa guitars with four-piece tops (and four-piece backs),



The stunning rosette features complementary pink, green and blue hues against the guitar's white wood.



mainly GS Mini guitars. But this is the first time the company has made a guitar with a four-piece spruce top, which means pieces that used to be too small are now fair game. Doing it on a flagship instrument is evidence of the company's confidence. And as Taylor president, CEO and chief guitar designer Andy Powers told *GP* at this year's NAMM Show, the trick is in the build. As long as the builder knows what he's doing and is willing to put the time in to do it, a top made of multiple smaller pieces can actually sound better than a traditional two-piece top.

From a visual standpoint, this top didn't appear to be made any differently, as the seams are so naturally incorporated into the grain structure. From a sonic standpoint, I couldn't discern any big difference resulting from the four-piece top, and I'd bet most players would be stumped to hear one when comparing it side by side to a two-piece version of the exact same instrument.

Of course, the Builder's Edition 814ce ships with Taylor ES2 electronics, and it delivered a rock-solid sonic representation of the guitar's acoustic qualities when pumped through an L.R. Baggs Synapse Personal P.A. When I left the control dials on the guitar and the amp at noon, not only was there nothing lost but, if anything, the tone seemed a bit beefier. It's a supreme stage instrument.

The product literature says, "The Builder's Edition 814ce makes a compelling case as the most quintessentially 'Taylor' guitar we've ever built." I agree, particularly as it pertains to the Andy Powers era. If you're not a fan of the contemporary Taylor tone, you're not likely to go for this guitar, but it's hard to imagine any player who appreciates his work not digging this "Pinnacle of Powers." His attention to making the guitar feel the way it looks, as well as his environmental appreciation, are also well reflected and represented here.

It all comes at significant cost, of course, as four-and-a-half grand is a chuck-load of cheddar. You could practically have a custom instrument built for that much. On the other hand, just go ask a custom shop for those



beveled edges, premium woods, fancy seashells, and high-end tuners and you'll come to appreciate the value on offer in this flagship Builder's Edition, which is about as close to a custom shop instrument as you'll find in a production guitar. It's gorgeous, plays and sounds like a dream and will only improve as the wood ages. If you're a fan of Taylor's modern marvels and you've got the green means, you'll likely fall in love with the BE 814ce. For its environmental ingenuity, ergonomic playability, refined tone, stageworthiness and overall sophistication, the Taylor Builder's Edition 814ce earns an Editors' Pick Award. **E**

SPECIFICATIONS

Builder's Edition 814ce

CONTACT taylorguitars.com

PRICE \$4,499 street, deluxe brown hardshell case included

NUT WIDTH 1.75", black Tusq

NECK Neo-tropical mahogany

FRETBOARD West African ebony, 25 1/2" scale, mother of pearl inlays

FRETS 20

TUNERS Gotoh 510 antique gold, 21:1 ratio

BODY Solid Indian rosewood back and sides with beveled armrest and cutaway, solid 4-piece Adirondack spruce top with modified V-Class bracing

BRIDGE Curve Wing, West African ebony with Micarta saddle

ELECTRONICS Taylor ES2 with volume, bass, and treble controls

FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario XS coated phosphor bronze light (.012-.053)

WEIGHT 4.3 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Ingenuitive. Eco-conscious.

Ultimately ergonomic and playable. Sexy look and feel. Stageworthy hi-fi tone

CONCERNS If you go for a chunky tone, there are other Taylors such as the new 417e that offer more of that for less money



DEATH BY AUDIO

Disturbance Lockable LFO Modulator Pedal

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

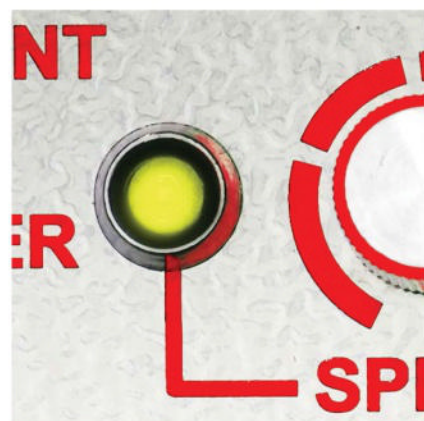
THE QUEENS, NEW YORK—based effects maker Death by Audio has been thrilling us with inspiring sound-sculpting devices for several years now, and its new Disturbance pedal promises another boatload of creative aural mayhem. Billed as a Lockable LFO Modulator pedal, Disturbance includes filter, flanger and phaser capabilities with the bonus of an option to lock the LFO modulation in order to freeze eerie soundscapes in place within the sweep. The result yields a plethora of textured synth-like tones for guitar, bass or whatever you plug into it, in addition to more traditional modulation effects. And, as with most things

from DBA's mad scientists, the pedal is capable of more than first meets the eye.

For all of its eponymous disturbance, the pedal boasts a relatively straightforward layout, although the controls are so interactive and interdependent that it really behooves you to take time to explore the myriad combinations unearthed by various twists of the knobs, as we shall see later.

The Tensity knob is a bidirectional control with center detent that controls the feedback amount and therefore the intensity of the effect. (DBA's chosen spelling makes some sense given the tense nature of many tones available here.) Center Point controls the LFO's width and center point and therefore interacts closely with the width knob next to it, which controls the LFO's range. The red speed knob governs the rate of the modulation, which can be frozen entirely by stomping on the Trip foot switch; a green LED beside the speed knob means the modulation is active, while red means it's frozen. The other foot switch is the pedal's traditional bypass, and the three-way mini-toggle selects the basic effect type: filter, flanger or Fazer (an eight-stage phaser).

Input and output are mono and mounted on the front face of the box, on either side of the center-negative nine-volt DC input that



draws 67mA of current. But there's also a sneaky CV (control voltage) output on the right side of the unit that can be connected to other effects with expression inputs to take over their modulation rates. (A CV output voltage trimmer lurks inside the pedal, so you can match it to the required specs of other pedals.) It's all housed in a rugged metal box with a mirrored finish that's arguably rather disturbing in its own right, depending on your band's light show, and adorned with retro-leaning red graphics. Inside, the pedal, Disturbance reveals DBA's usual rugged, high-quality construction, bolstering a digital circuit that does the heavy lifting.

I tested Disturbance using a Fender Jaguar and a Gibson non-reverse Firebird V into a custom tweed Deluxe-style combo and a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, alongside a selection of other pedals, and I quickly discovered a mind-boggling range of sounds. I predict the bulk of demo videos for this pedal will lean heavily into the more

extreme sounds it's capable of generating and some of the harsher voicings achieved with the LFO paused — and they are in here, for sure. But I would be remiss not to mention right up front the beauty and musicality of the three types of modulation available here. These can also be pushed to the far reach of seasick wobbliness if you want, like any of the more complex phaser or flanger pedals available. But if used judiciously and set to enhance your tone rather than (ahem) disturb it, all three will deliver lush, multidimensional depth and movement. I, for one, was loath to turn it off once I'd gotten rolling.

In use, the eternally morphable nature of the pedal's controls comes quickly

SPECIFICATIONS

Disturbance Lockable LFO Modulator Pedal

CONTACT deathbyaudio.com

PRICE \$250 street

CONTROLS Depth, Center Point, Tensity (intensity), speed. Three-way Filter/Flanger/Fazer switch; foot switches for on/off and Trip

EXTRAS Input, output, CV out, center-negative 9VDC adaptor input

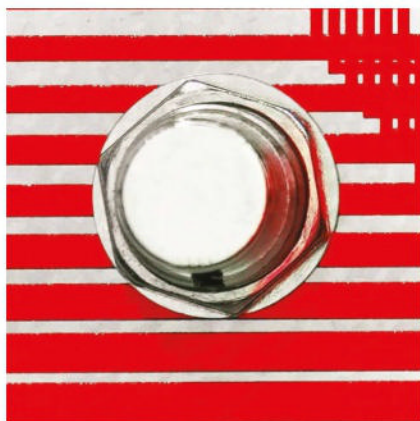
SIZE 4.5" x 3.65" x 1.9" (excluding feet and knobs)

BUILT Assembled in USA

KUDOS A deceptively powerful soundscape sculptor that nevertheless delivers subtle and musical traditional-leaning modulation sounds

CONCERNS Returning quickly to favorite settings might require extended use and experience





into focus. The Tensity knob essentially increases the intensity of the effect either way you turn it, but does so in different ways depending on whether it's pointed toward the plus or minus sign. It also changes its function further depending on the effect you're using it with, and to greater or lesser extremes depending on the Center Point and width settings.

While the pedal as a whole really begs for some exploring, all this interactivity allows you to apply a surprising amount of control to

DISTURBANCE IS A PEDAL YOU COULD LIKELY EXPLORE FOR A LIFETIME WITHOUT GETTING BORED

— and extract an astoundingly diverse sonic palette from — the filter, flanger and phaser within the box, and get more range out of them than some single-effect pedals with more controls.

Many of the pedal's more distinct sounds come from settings in between the subtle and the extreme. For example, there are sounds here that emulate a modulated auto-wah, rotary speaker, harmonic vibrato, a chewy merging of phaser and flanger, and more. The only immediate downside to all of

this might be that there is no programmable/preset feature in the pedal, so revisiting any favorite settings discovered likely requires extended familiarity, and a good memory.

In addition to all the modulated sounds, the paused-LFO feature delivers everything from subtle revoicings of your core tone to aggressively smashed and honky or percussive sounds. Think of it as a cocked-wah, of sorts, yet with a near-infinite and instantly re-selectable range of settings. In short, Death by Audio's Disturbance is a pedal you could likely explore for a lifetime without getting bored. For that and its unique;ly creative approach to modulation effects, it earns an Editors' Pick Award. **■**

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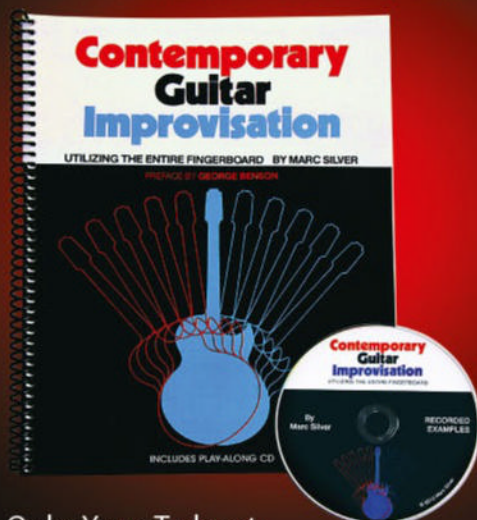
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How I Wrote...

“Crimson and Clover”

Pop icon **Tommy James** reveals the magic combination behind the Shondells’ timeless psychedelic hit.

BY JOE BOSSO

BY MID 1968, Tommy James and his group, the Shondells, had enjoyed a string of good-time AM radio singles, like “Hanky Panky,” “I Think We’re Alone Now” and “Mony Mony.” But after the band returned home from a summer tour, James sensed a sea change was taking place. “FM radio was happening, and singles were being replaced by albums,” he says. “Songs were getting more serious. I realized that we had to move with the times, or else we’d be extinct.”

With that in mind, James and Shondells drummer Peter Lucia Jr. wrote “Crimson and Clover.” The transcendent, psychedelic-pop gem became the band’s biggest hit, spending 16 weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in late 1968 and early 1969, including two weeks at number one. “Its

impact was incredible,” James says. “It gave us the second half of our career.”

VERSE AFTER VERSE

James began with the idea of combining two of his favorite words, which he thought sounded poetic as a phrase. After playing a concert, he and Lucia retired to their hotel room, where James played a Gibson Hummingbird while Lucia laid down a beat on pillows. “I played these three ‘backward’ chords — B, F# and E — at the same time I did the lyrics,” James says. “We didn’t have a recorder with us, so we jotted it down on paper.”

“I GOT IN MY CAR AND I HEARD, ‘HERE’S A WORLD EXCLUSIVE ON WLS.’ THEY PLAYED THE FREAKIN’ ROUGH MIX! IT WAS CRAZY”

They tried a few iterations of the song, one being, as James describes it, “kind of like James Taylor, with acoustic fingerpicking, but it sounded too dreamy, so we toughened it up.” Within a few hours, they had enough of it sketched out. “It was kind of a funny thing,” James says. “It was verse after verse, which was also the chorus. That was the hook. We knew we could make it work in the studio.”

THE SECRET INGREDIENT

“Crimson and Clover” marked James’ debut as the producer of his own material and his introduction to recording in a 16-track studio, which allowed instruments to be kept separate for greater control during mixing. “Stereo had become the big thing, and we

had to keep up,” he says. The song was recorded in just five hours with Lucia, Shondells bassist Mike Vale and James, who played the bulk of the instruments, including the tremolo-laced guitar that became the song’s ear-catching sonic signature. “I did the guitars using a Fender Jazzmaster through an Ampeg Gemini amp,” he recalls. “The tremolo became a crucial element of the song, and I even put it on my vocals for the fade.” Album buyers were treated to even more ear candy with an extended mix that featured Shondells guitarist Eddie Gray playing steel guitar and wah and fuzz leads over a lengthy solo break.

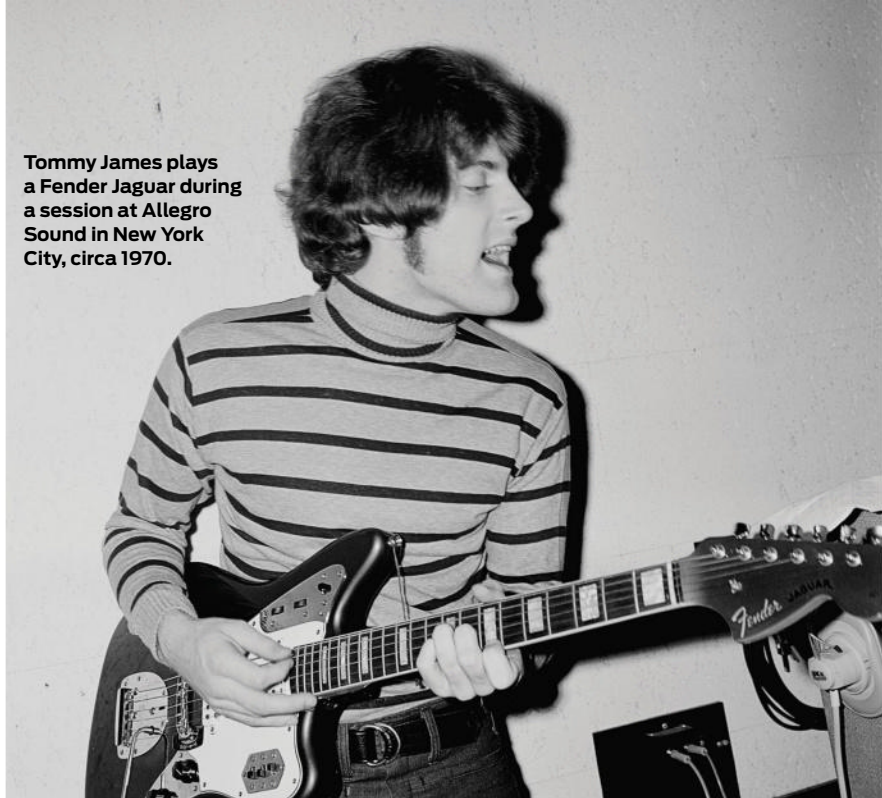
“TOM, YOU’RE DONE”

Once the session was complete, James made a work tape of the song. “I knew it was a hit,” he says. “It was undeniable.” While visiting the program director at WLS in Chicago, he played him the tape, and people at the station bootlegged it without his knowledge. “I got in my car and I heard, ‘Here’s a world exclusive on WLS.’ They played the freakin’ rough mix! It was crazy.”

By the time James got back to the New York offices of his label, Roulette Records, he had a situation on his hands. “We were afraid we had blown it with the other big Chicago station, WCFL, and we tried to get WLS to stop playing it, but they refused,” he says. With “Crimson and Clover” lighting up the phones at WLS, Roulette rush-released the rough mix as the single. “I wanted to do a polished final mix, but I guess it was God’s way of telling me ‘Tom, you’re done.’ Several weeks later, we played the song on *Ed Sullivan*, and the next day it hit number one.”

“Crimson and Clover” went on to sell more than five million copies and has been covered by artists ranging from Joan Jett and the Blackhearts (who hit number seven with their version in 1982) to Cher (as a duet with her son, Elijah Blue). James professes his love for all the covers he’s heard, but he singles out Prince’s version (which blends in a blast of the Troggs’ “Wild Thing”) as his favorite. “Prince did such a futuristic treatment of the song,” he says. “His guitar playing on it was out of this world. He was always such a brilliant guitarist. I was really honored by what he did with ‘Crimson and Clover.’”

Tommy James plays a Fender Jaguar during a session at Allegro Sound in New York City, circa 1970.





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