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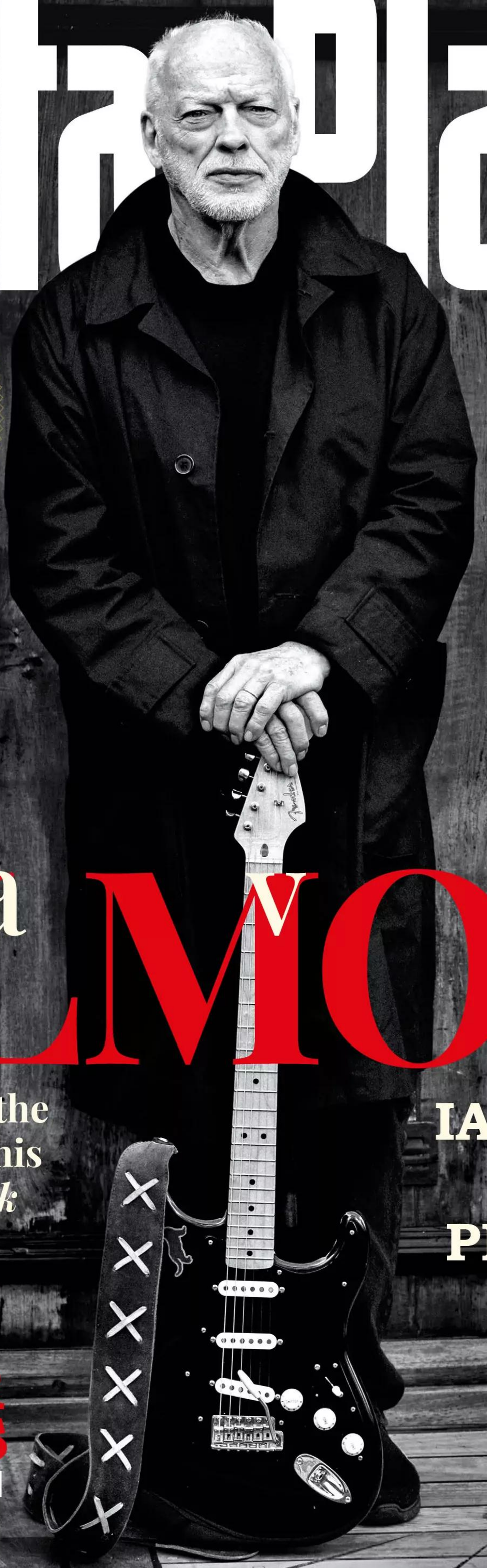

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SPEAK TO ME

WHEN WORD CAME that a new David Gilmour album was due this fall, you can be sure it created a buzz throughout the music press. This is, after all, a legendary guitarist from a legendary band that has made legendary albums — not to mention a musical artist whose solo album output remains fresh, imaginative and imperative. Since the demise of Pink Floyd, Gilmour seems to have distilled his songwriting talents and guitar work to an essence, like a heady, potent liquor you can soak in.

Knowing how press-shy the man is, I put in our interview request, crossed my fingers and checked in with my co-editors across the pond at regular intervals to catch up on the latest Gilmour scuttlebutt. What I heard was deflating: He'd done one U.K. interview and might perhaps, maybe, possibly do another. There were claims he was doing U.S. press as well, but you might be luckier buying a Lotto ticket.

So it was a relief when word finally came that *Guitar Player* had been reserved a time slot with David. Contributing writer Gary Graff, no stranger to the Black Strat–loving guitarist, was enlisted to discuss *Luck and Strange*, Mr. Gilmour's new spell-cast charm of an album. Over the course of their talk, David offered insights into his soloing, his instruments and the sort of thing that really stokes his creative fires: working with a group of happy, like-minded collaborators, as he did when creating *Luck and Strange* with his family — wife and famed scribe Polly Samson and their children Romany, Gabriel and Charlie — and a team that includes drummer Steve Gadd, keyboardist Roger Eno, bassist Guy Pratt and co-producer Charlie Andrew.

With a sly nod to his at times difficult past creative life, David told Gary, "I started off in a pop group and I found myself eventually in the position of leading that group, not a position I was hoping for or looking forward to. And being a solo artist — also not what I asked for. I always preferred being part of something, and this album feels much closer to that than anything I've had over all those years."

It's a great interview, and we're proud to bring it to you. My deep thanks to David for his generous spirit, and to the wonderful Fran DeFeo, who has otherworldly patience, faith and talent for opening stubborn doors.

And while I have your attention, I'd like to point you to another big story in this issue: our star-studded tribute to the late great David Lindley. We've been anticipating a feature on the multi-instrumentalist virtuoso since his passing on March 3, 2023, but we knew it could only happen with the help of his closest friends and associates. The stars finally aligned — nudged into place through the steadfast persistence of Frets editor Jimmy Leslie — and we are proud to bring you the results of his colossal effort. No less than Jackson Browne, Ry Cooder, Bonnie Raitt, Sonny Landreth, Ben Harper, Henry Kaiser, Wally Ingram and Papa Mali have offered up their beautiful memories of David and his many talents. With one reading you will come to know this singular musical magician more than you ever did before. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

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Guitar Player

Vol. 58 No. 11 NOVEMBER 2024

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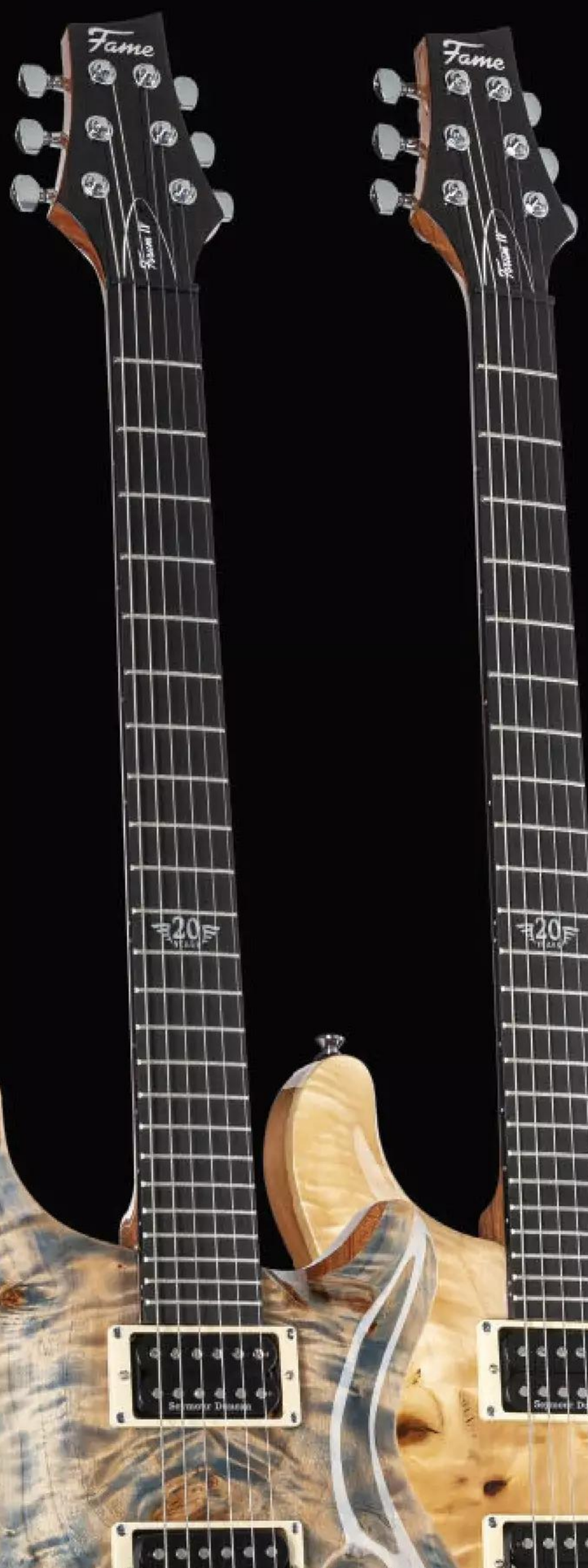

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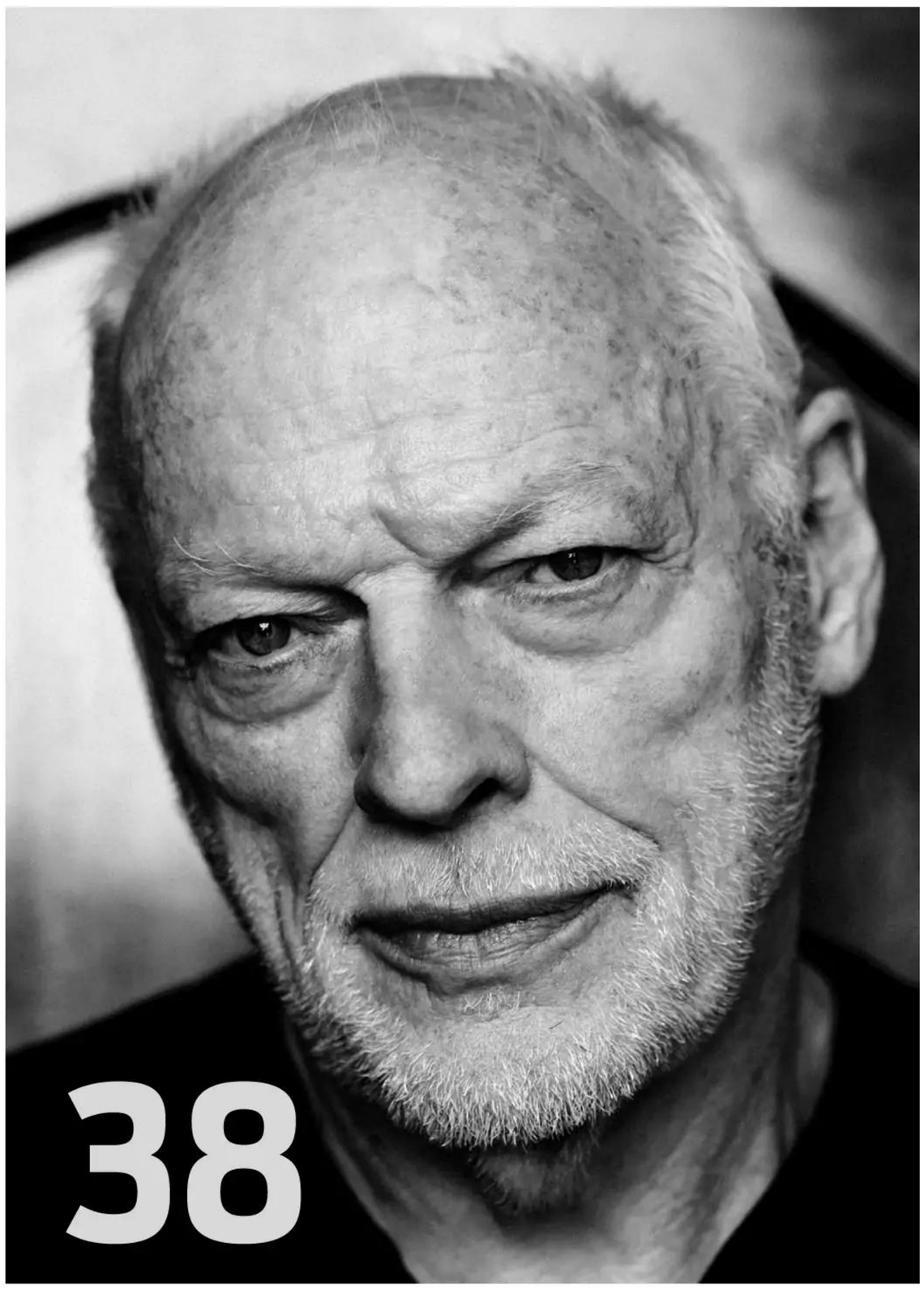

ON THE COVER
David Gilmour, photographed in London by Anton Corbijn

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Guitar Player (ISSN 0017-5463) is published monthly with an extra issue in December by Future US LLC, 130 West 42nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036 Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement #40612608. Canada Returns to be sent to Bleuchip International, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Guitar Player, P.O. Box 2029, Langhorne, PA 19047-9957.

JIM ARBOGAST (BURNSIDE); COURTESY OF GIBSON (ISBELL); J.B. LAWRENCE (DICKINSON); ALISON DYER (VAI & BELEW); IAN ALEXANDER MARTIN (LINDLEY); LE STUDIO (GILLARD); ANTON CORBIJN (GILMOUR)

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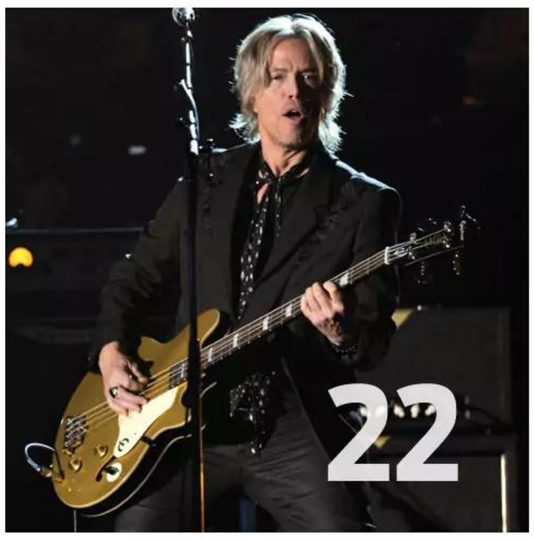

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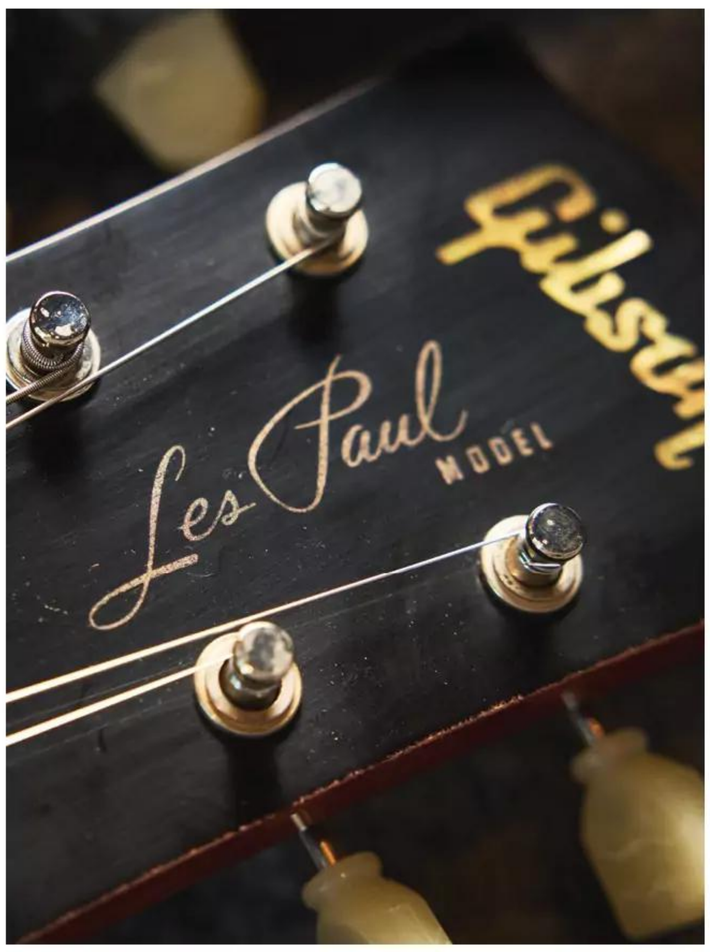
NEW & COOL

MADE IN THE SHADE

The Gibson Custom Shop created just 59 examples of the **Jason Isbell "Red Eye" 1959 Les Paul Standard.** We got our hands on one of them.

BY DAVE HUNTER

The guitar gets its name from the red finish patch near the pickup selector.



A DETAIL-PERFECT clone of a 1959 Gibson Les Paul is sure to set players' and collectors' hearts aflutter. So when the Gibson Custom Shop and Murphy Lab apply their skills to re-creating a legendary 'Burst from that same year, you can bet it will result in off-the-chart excitement.

The guitar in question is Red Eye, the '59 Burst formerly owned by the late Ed King of Lynyrd Skynyrd, which now resides in the collection of Jason Isbell. While music's best and brightest tend to excel in one or two directions, Isbell does it all. Not only is the six-time Grammy Award winner a top-flight solo artist, band member, session guitarist and vocalist, he's also the rare singer-songwriter who is deeply obsessed with vintage guitars and knows how to suss the very best out of them.

"Joe Walsh told Billy Gibbons that that's the best guitar in the world," Isbell relayed in a conversation with me shortly after he landed Red Eye in 2018. And if the Walsh-to-Gibbons pedigree isn't enough to stamp the seal of approval on a vintage 'Burst, then maybe nothing is.

While King owned some fine guitars, Red Eye is the finest, and perhaps most distinctive looking, of them all. The guitar gets its name from the red finish patch on its upper left shoulder around the lower half of the pickup selector poker chip. It acquired the mark years ago when the instrument stood on display in a guitar shop window: A hang tag attached to the pickup toggle blocked the sun's rays, keeping the finish beneath it bright, even while the rest of the sunburst faded to a russet brown.

Of course, for the average guitarist, owning an original Les Paul of this caliber would require putting the family house up for sale and living in your car for the rest of your days. And to be fair, that calculation wasn't far off the mark even for a hard-working road warrior like Isbell. The Nashville guitarist first encountered Red Eye in 2018 when the owners of Carter's Vintage Guitars asked him to come in and record demos of the Les Paul and others in the Ed King collection.

"Just unplugged, before I even put it into an amp, it was so resonant. I was obsessed with it," Isbell told me. "I knew it was ridiculous, but I made the mistake of playing it in the store, and I couldn't stop thinking about it. I got lost on the way home. I couldn't sleep that night. I called my business manager and she said, 'No way!' Then I called my manager, Traci [*Thomas*], and said, 'I need you to do this for me: I need you to find me X-amount of dollars in big-money gigs, private shows and whatever.'"

Thomas booked the gigs, and if you attended a Bitcoin billionaire's lawn party in the Hamptons during the summer of 2019 only to find Jason Isbell performing out by the swimming pool, now you know why. Eventually, Red Eye went home with him.

While the Gibson Custom re-creation is exponentially more affordable, it's still quite an investment. And with just 59 examples in the run, it's extremely limited. But what you get is a no-holds-barred clone of the original that will delight your senses. To get every aspect of the foundation right, Gibson Custom used new 3-D scanning technology to match precisely the neck carve, body shape and dish — or arch — and other design

Red Eye's case candy includes a blue Les Paul Protector Series hardshell case and a Jason Isbell strap made from midnight-blue wild alligator leather.

and construction details of Isbell's guitar. The mahogany used for the back and neck were carefully selected for grain and weight, and Isbell himself approved the figured maple employed for each top to get the final look as close as possible to the appealingly detailed flame beneath Red Eye's glowing, faded-to-amber finish.

With such attention to detail, clearly only a near-black slice of genuine Brazilian rosewood would do for the fingerboard. In addition, Gibson Custom wound a pair of Custom Buckers to closely match Red Eye's original PAFs, with unpotted zebra coils in the neck position and double classic white in the bridge, both of which reside beneath aged-nickel covers.

But as Isbell will attest, there is more to Red Eye than appearances. Among '59 Bursts, it remains something special. "There are a number of things that conspire to make those guitars great," he says. "I've played quite a few of 'em, and I really think that that one's got the edge. And I've heard the same thing from a lot of people around town who have traded in guitars for decades."

Chief among Red Eye's gifts is its tone in Isbell's favored position. "The middle position on that guitar's really the most magical spot," he says. "And for me that's perfect, because that's the position I like best on a Les Paul. And I think a lot of players, as you get older and your playing matures and your hearing matures, you end up drifting to that middle position on two-humbucker guitars, just because you can get so much out of it, and it has such a character."

All things considered, my expectations were extremely high by the time the Jason Isbell "Red Eye" 1959 showed up. And indeed, the overall result yields a Les Paul that looks stunning, feels great and plays superbly when tested unplugged. I love this neck profile, which is rounded to sublimely fit the palm, yet deep enough to yield a handful (measuring a first-fret depth that's a hair over .9 inches) without feeling clubby or cumbersome.

And then there's that finish. Having honed their skills under the direction of renowned guitar ager Tom Murphy, the Murphy Lab crew matched the finish, fade, lacquer checking and play wear of the original, and the results are stunning. From the minute fissures throughout the thin nitro, to the minor pinhead dings in the top, the edge wear along the bottom bout at the back, and the darkened line of bare mahogany below the neck's treble-side binding where a player's ring wore away the finish, it all looks and feels utterly authentic upon close examination. And chief among these "personality marks" is the "red eye" finish patch itself. With each guitar, Gibson Custom has included a cheeky little poem on the re-created tag that reads, "I sat in a window / And my cherry burst faded / But thanks to this tag / My red eye was shaded."

Played through a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, and a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo, the Gibson Custom Jason Isbell "Red Eye" 1959 Les Paul Standard delivers big on inspiration and expression. It's crisp and clear into clean settings, yet still has lots of dimension and swirl — thick without being bloated. Unsurprisingly, the guitar really shines into edge-of-breakup or fully overdriven amp settings, with tons of texture to individual notes and a three-dimensional feel induced by the abundant harmonic overtones. Even into a hard-driven amp, it retains great string articulation, with no hint of mud from the neck pickup, while the bridge is snarky and mean, and that in-between position — as discussed by Isbell — offers loads of nuance and shade in the blending.

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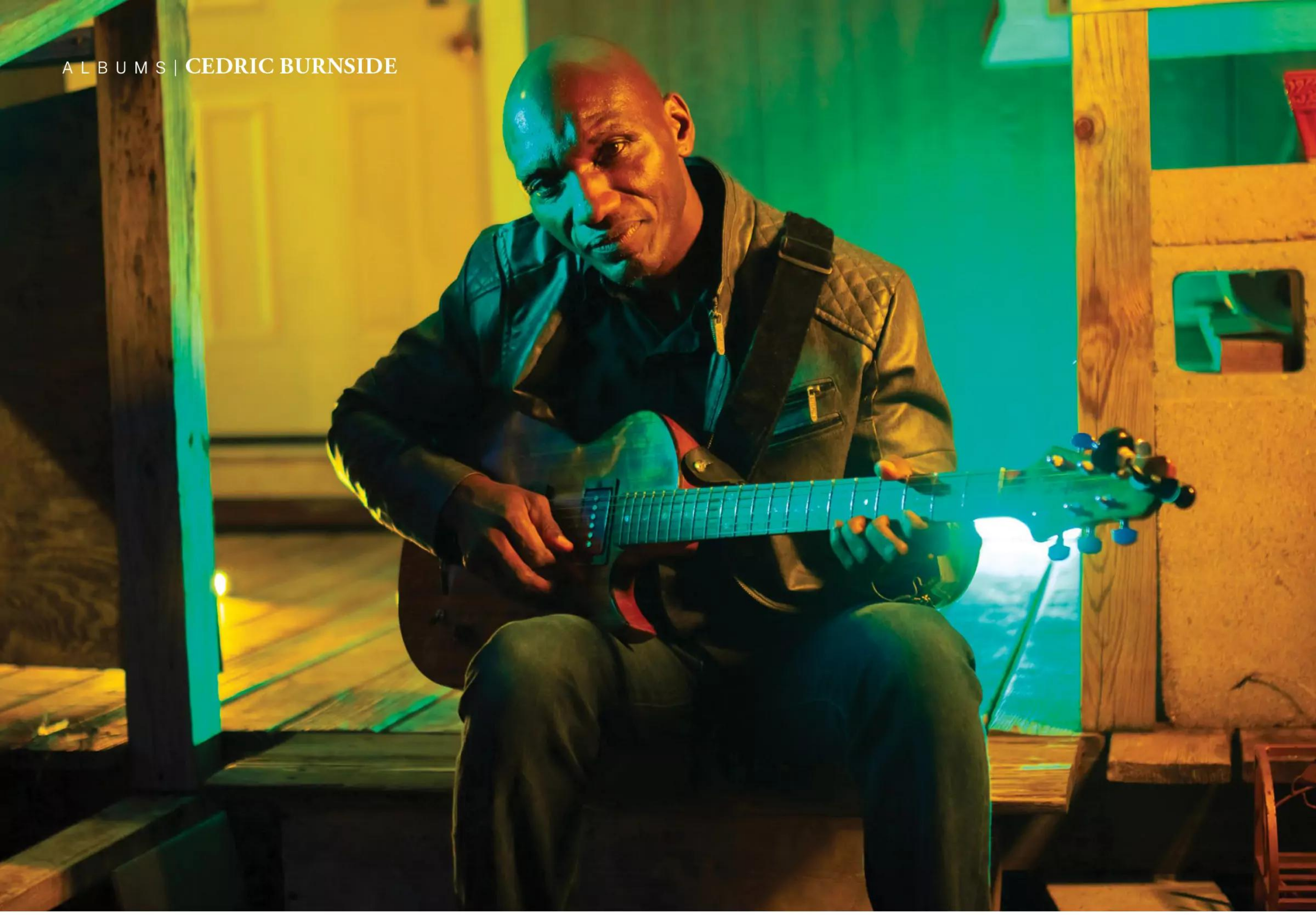
Jason Isbell often records and performs with Ed King's original Red Eye 'Burst, seen here, since he acquired it in 2018.



MAN AT WORK

A juke joint just wasn't in the cards. So **Cedric Burnside** turned the old building into a studio for his hardcore blues workout, *Hill Country Love*.

BY MARK McSTEA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM ARBOGAST

IN THE WORLD of blues, the name Burnside attracts a lot of respect. R.L. Burnside carved out a legendary status for himself in the hill country blues genre, and his grandson Cedric has been building a reputation that would make his grandfather proud. Following in the raw, primal tradition laid down by the man he calls Big Daddy, Cedric's new album, *Hill Country Love* (Mascot Label Group), is a prime slice of timeless blues that could have been recorded anytime over the past 60 years. Given that *I Be Trying*, Burnside's last album, won a Grammy in 2022, it would seem the stakes were high when it came to recording the new record, which was produced by North Mississippi Allstars guitarist and producer Luther Dickinson. That didn't turn out to be the case.

"I actually wrote this record at the end of 2021. I was done with it before I won the Grammy," Burnside says with a laugh. "I never do anything under pressure. I just try to do what my heart tells me to do in the moment. I feel like the universe always gives you something to write about and you have to just snatch it when it comes."

The Grammy did have one very palpable effect though. "What did change was the size of my audiences," Burnside says. "There was a lot more people, and plenty of them didn't know about hill country blues."

The album's liner notes say it was "recorded in an old building in Ripley, Mississippi." Why did you choose such an atypical location to record?

Yeah, I guess it was kind of a strange choice. I'd originally planned to make it a juke joint. I spend a lot of time in Ripley — I have a good friend there — and I bought the building in 2022 when I was on the Voices of Mississippi tour [*the multimedia event celebrates Mississippi's music, art and storytelling traditions*]. The building is about 150 years old, and I believe it used to be a law office. But when I realized how much work it was going to take to convert it and how much that would cost, I started to have second thoughts. But I had played my guitar in there, so I knew the room had great acoustics. I thought it would be a good place to make this record.

Was Luther onboard with the idea of recording there?

It was his idea! Luther was on that tour with me when I bought the place, and when I'd told him it had great acoustics, he actually asked *me* if I'd like to make the album there. I hadn't thought about it before that, but it

seemed like an interesting notion. It was kinda funny, because he brought a load of recording gear in from his own studio, but I didn't really clean the place out, so there were piles of junk and garbage lying around. We got a real good sound. Maybe it's because the place was completely made from wood, but whatever it was, there was definitely some magic in the air. Luther played bass on the album as well as producing. We worked real quick and recorded everything in two days.

You've become a pathway into the hill country blues genre for a lot of people.
Yeah, that's right. I get people telling me they didn't know anything about my Big Daddy before they heard my music, which is kind of strange to me. But you know, I guess that's what happens when you suddenly find yourself with a new audience who might be checking you out for the first time. I guess there's plenty that discovered me through my Big Daddy as well, of course.

What were your main guitars and amps for the album?
I used two electric guitars that were handmade for me by Mike Aronson. One is based on a Les Paul style and the other is based on a Strat. They both have really fat necks, which I told him was my main preference in a guitar. I felt right at home as soon as I played it. Martin gave me a 000-15M acoustic that got used for the acoustic stuff. My amp is a Fender Tone Master. I used to also go through an Ampeg PF-500 [*Portaflex bass head*] for added depth, but I don't use that now as I've been taking a bass player out on the road. I never use any effects. All I have is a tuner up there with me.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Hill Country Love
"I Know," "Hill Country Love," "Juke Joint," "Toll on They Life," "Po Black Mattie"

"THERE WERE PILES OF JUNK AND GARBAGE LYING AROUND, BUT WE GOT A REAL GOOD SOUND. THERE WAS DEFINITELY SOME MAGIC IN THE AIR"

Your story is unusual in that you started out on drums, playing your first shows with your grandfather when you were 13, and didn't start playing guitar until you were 25. What made you decide to start playing guitar?
Playing drums with my Big Daddy gave me my start into this hill country world, but I wanted to keep going after that. Not being able to play, I had to try to sing what I wanted to hear to guitarists, but I couldn't get people to play exactly what I was hearing in my head, so I knew that I had to learn to play the guitar. I still love drums, but guitar is my newfound love. The guitar didn't come easily at all at first. I put in a lot of work to discover my sound and get everything connected to where I was comfortable. I started out playing in open G for a long time and wrote a lot of songs in open G. And that was a favorite key of my Big Daddy as well.

Did your background with the drums help in any way?
Yeah. I know that it did. I think that I had a real strong feel for rhythm and timing. There is something a little different in hill country blues. The rhythms aren't as straightforward as a lot of blues music. There's a lot of instinctive pushing and pulling of the feel, and as a drummer I had a good understanding of how that variation can make things more intense. Of course, with hill country, we don't worry too much about keeping to a regular 12 bars or nothing. It's all about the feeling.

Songs like "Thank You" and "Smile" wouldn't be a million miles away from funk with a little shift in feel. Who are your non-blues influences?
I do listen to a lot of different things. Earth Wind & Fire are one of my favorite bands, and Stevie Wonder is one of my favorite singers. But I guess what comes out of me is what's in me. I don't try to sound like anybody else. I like R&B and some rap, but I guess blues is in my blood. Whatever my heart tells me to put out there, that's what I put out.

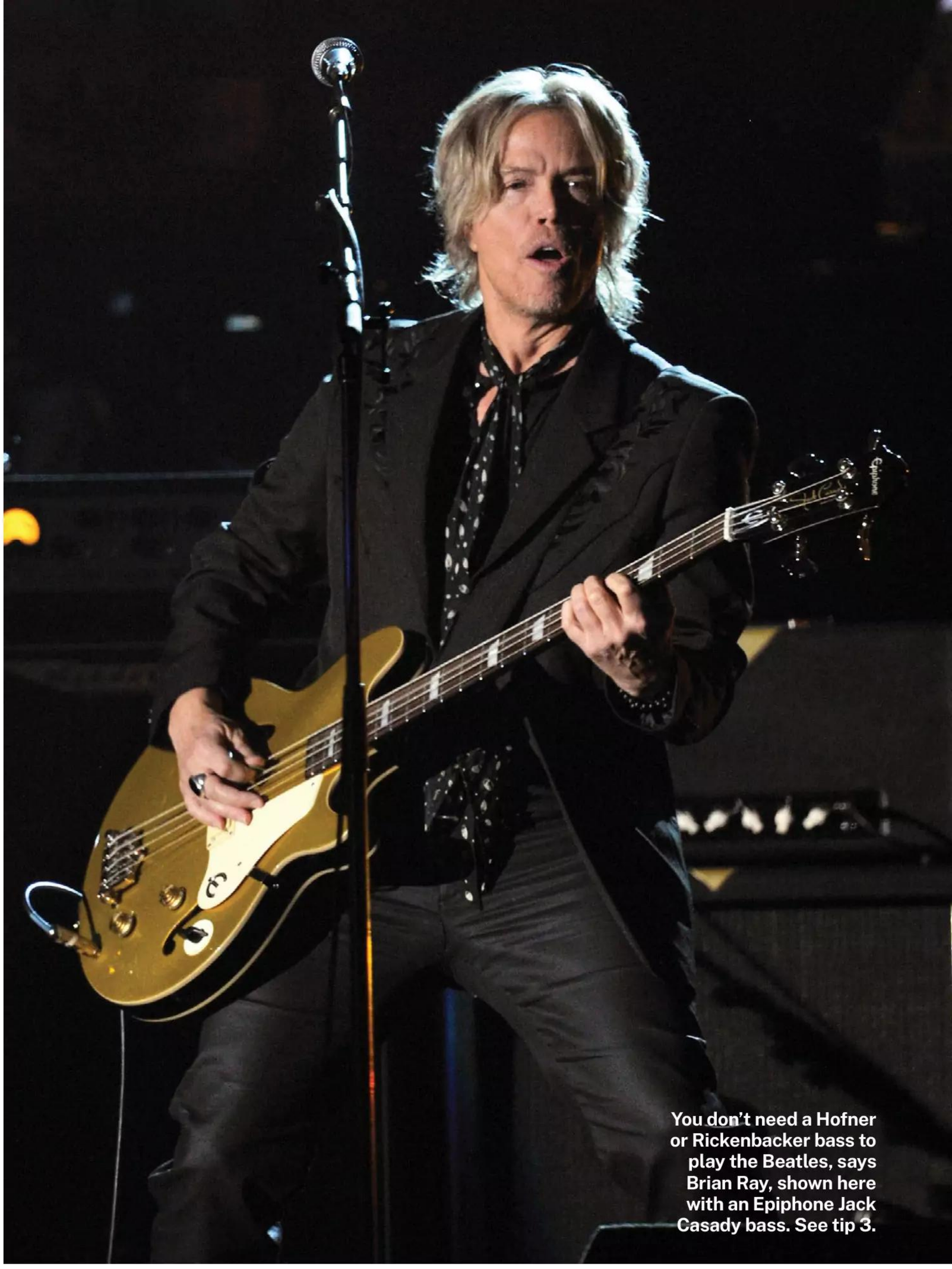
What's coming up next for you?
I'm always writing. There's always something happening that makes me think of an idea for a song. I've got enough songs for the next album, so when I finish touring to promote *Hill Country Love*, I'll be recording the new album at the end of the year. I feel like there's a lot of interest in blues these days and I'm real happy to be able to benefit from that, not only because it promotes my music but more so that I can help spread the word about the hill country scene and its great artists. I feel like I've had some tests in life where my faith got me through. That and the music. And if I can give something back to the music I grew up with, that's a pretty good deal all round.

Cedric Burnside plays his handmade Les Paul–style Mike Aronson electric. It has a single volume for its two Harmonic Design Z-90 pickups.

TIPSHEET

We asked **Brian Ray** for his advice on playing Beatles tunes. After all, he learned from the best.

BY JOE BOSSO



You don't need a Hofner or Rickenbacker bass to play the Beatles, says Brian Ray, shown here with an Epiphone Jack Casady bass. See tip 3.

WHEN BRIAN RAY joined Paul McCartney's band in 2002, he was tasked with the responsibility of learning more than 40 songs — in one week. "Fortunately, I listened to the Beatles nonstop throughout my life, so I already knew most of them," he says. "Of course, it's much different when you're playing in a band that, oh yeah, is led by Paul McCartney himself. Needless to say, I immersed myself in the material."

He also had to learn another instrument. The gig with McCartney required Ray to switch between guitar and bass on songs where McCartney played guitar or piano. "I definitely had to woodshed on bass, but Paul made it very easy for me," he says. "I could never re-create his parts exactly, but as long as I got close and it sounded good, everything fell into place."

These days, Ray estimates he and his bandmates — guitarist Rusty Anderson, drummer Abe Laboriel Jr. and keyboardist Wix Wickens — have played roughly 150 songs over the past 22 years. "Between the Beatles, Wings and Paul's solo work, it's such an incredible body of work," Ray says. "The great thing about this band is that we perform the material with fire and energy, rather than a clinical approach. We all came out of clubs similar to the Cavern and the Star Club, places where Paul cut his teeth."

Given his rarefied position, Ray has some unique insights for guitarists (and bassists) who are looking to incorporate Fab Four material into their repertoire. "It's one thing to listen to these songs and appreciate them as a fan, as we've all done," he says. "But when you start digging into them and analyzing them, you're just astounded by the creativity and depth. Even stuff that sounds simple isn't simple at all. I'm constantly amazed at the brilliance in these songs, and that feeling grows stronger all the time."

1 RESPECT THE RECORDINGS, BUT...

"It's important to have respect for the Beatles' records. On the other hand, you don't want to sound like karaoke. And if you're like me and you grew up on these records, they're part of your DNA. You've memorized every upstroke and downstroke.

"Given all that, I think it's important to remember these records were made in a room by real humans. The Beatles played what they felt, and they responded to one another. Some of their recordings were done in one take, but others required multiple takes, and each one varied from the previous recording.

"When I play with Paul, he isn't trying to play every single note on piano, guitar or bass like he did on the record. He doesn't sing the songs like he did on record. Nobody is trying to duplicate the recordings. And that's the advice I have for anybody who wants to play Beatles songs: Play them the way you feel. Use the records as a framework, and then go for it."

2 APPROXIMATE THE GUITAR TONE

"Even though I don't try to play parts verbatim, I want to approximate the tone as much as I can, especially when I'm playing guitar with the band. I think this is a crucial part of putting the songs over live. If you want to play the material in the spirit of the originals, it helps to stay true to them tonally.

"For example, when I play older Beatles songs, I'll use a big hollowbody Gretsch along the lines of what George Harrison used at the time. I'll dial up some EQ on my

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES (BOTH PAGES)

"I DIDN'T WANT TO GET DISTRACTED BY THE FACT THAT PAUL McCARTNEY WAS 15 FEET AWAY FROM ME. I WOULD HAVE LOST MY MIND"

pedalboard to get them a little more trebly. When I play the rockabilly-type solo on 'All My Loving,' I'll add a quick slap delay — that seems to work just fine. On later Beatles songs, I'll veer off into SGs and Les Pauls, both of which George played.

"Remember that you don't need to have a massive guitar collection to approximate the tone of Beatles recordings. If you've got a Fender and a P90 guitar, like an SG, you should be able to handle the sound of most any Beatles song. Just choose the one that gets you pretty close to what you're hearing. You can amp and EQ each guitar to get clean or dirty sounds, maybe add a bit of compression, and you'll be fine. You don't need to use a lot of effects."

3 REALIZE THAT YOU WILL NEVER PLAY BASS LIKE PAUL

"Paul McCartney is inarguably the most important bass player in popular rock and pop music. What's funny is, I'm a guitarist who was hired to play guitar and bass in Paul's band. Bass doesn't come naturally to me, while it comes very naturally to Paul. For the first six months, I barely looked up because I just wanted to play the parts right, and I didn't want to get distracted by the fact that Paul McCartney was 15 feet away from me. I would have lost my mind.

"I would tell people who want to play Paul's parts to listen to what he did on the records, but realize that you're never going to replicate them perfectly. His touch on the fretboard was so deliberate, but at the same time so light. On some of those records, it sounds like he's playing a fretless bass; you can hear him just gliding on those flatwound strings. His playing is idiosyncratic. Maybe it's because he started out as a guitarist who switched to bass. Like me, it wasn't his first instrument.

"I don't think it's important to use the same bass as he did. I don't use a Hofner or a Rickenbacker. I play a 1963 Fender P Bass that looks like it's been dragged from behind a motorcycle. It's totally beat up, but it sounds just wonderful.

"And remember that certain parts are really hard to nail. For instance, on 'Getting Better,' on the first chorus he plays a wonderful walking quarter-note bass line, but on the other two choruses he mixes in sustained half notes. I want to honor that when I play it live. But one time in rehearsal, I made a mistake in the chorus, and Paul asked, 'Why don't you just play it the same way each time?' I said, 'Because it's so cool how you did it on the record.'

"I say all this with the knowledge that nobody can ever play these songs the way Paul did, but as always, what matters is that you play with spirit and love."

Respect the recordings, but don't sound like a karaoke band. See tip 1.

4 LET THE DRUM PARTS BREATHE

"Ringo Starr's drum parts are as essential to the songs as any other musical element. No doubt your drummer has studied and analyzed his drumming, so as a guitarist or bassist you need to think about how you lock in. Ringo played hooks, so you don't want to dominate those parts — you want them to stand out. And it's important to listen to each verse and chorus, because Ringo had a way of playing different things. He didn't always stick to one pattern for all the verses or chorus.

"At the same time — and I keep going back to this — you don't want to drive yourself crazy trying to be a karaoke machine. The music has to breathe and sound like real people responding to each other. We're fortunate to have Abe Laboriel Jr. on drums, and he's a total musician. He plays in a way that's entirely his own and natural to him, but like all of us he honors the recordings and the key bits. Abe plays the hooks and fills that everybody knows and loves.

"I realize I'm talking a lot about drumming, but if you play guitar or bass and you're doing Beatles songs — and maybe even if you're not — you really want to zero in on what the drummer is playing. Ringo didn't just keep a beat; he performed musical parts."

5 KNOW WHEN NOT TO DEVIATE FROM THE RECORDS

"It's important to play things the way that you feel them, but there are lots of parts on Beatles' records — the guitar solos, for example — that demand to be played as accurately as possible.

"Take John Lennon's solo on 'Get Back.' He was mirroring Paul's vocals. I think John had a very reverent approach to that solo because he was a songwriter. I do my best to play that solo the way John did — both solos, actually. At the end, Paul has encouraged me to stretch out a bit, so I'll do an extra four bars or something. I'll throw in a little B.B. King or Clapton thing — something that feels appropriate. But I wouldn't do that without first nailing the solo that everybody knows. I couldn't imagine playing it any other way."

Gavin Rossdale performs with Bush at the 4th Annual Sunset Strip Music Festival, August 21, 2011.

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Joe Walsh's Jazzmaster, Billy Cobham's bass line... As Bush head out on tour, **Gavin Rossdale** reveals the history behind a handful of their best tunes

BY JOE MATERA

AS FRONTMAN FOR the British rock group Bush these past 32 years, Gavin Rossdale has grown accustomed to hearing plaudits for his vocals. But the 58-year-old is also the band's rhythm guitarist, a role for which he's less likely to earn praise. So he says he was genuinely surprised when Billy Gibbons, one of rock's legendary tonehounds, singled him out.

"Billy came to our show once and was so floored that he came backstage after to ask me about my tone," Rossdale says. "Our guitarist, Chris Traynor, who is a way better guitar player than I am, was ignored, yet my searing tone got Billy Gibbons' attention! It was a great moment in my guitar life."

Rossdale's guitar tone has propelled Bush's alt-rock anthems since *Sixteen Stone*, their multi-Platinum debut album, landed on the post-grunge landscape in 1994. The seeds of what became Bush were first sown when Rossdale met original Bush lead guitarist Nigel Pulsford at a Bryan Adams Wembley Stadium concert in London in 1991 and they bonded over their shared musical tastes, in particular the Pixies.

"We jammed together in my kitchen after that show and throughout the night," Rossdale recalls. "I asked him if he would start a band with me, and he replied that he was too busy, but that if I had songs he would develop them for me. So I got my songs together and took them to him. I asked him, 'Are you interested now?' And he said, 'No, not at all, but if you can write more songs, I'll do them for you.'

"And that's how we began working together. I would write the songs and program the drum beats with a rhythm machine, and he would realize the songs and demo them up. That's how I wrote all my songs."

With their distorted guitars and angst-ridden lyrics, not to mention Rossdale's throaty vocals, Bush slotted in perfectly among the grunge acts of the day. And while they were often compared to '90s juggernaut Nirvana, Bush went far beyond the usual grunge mold by incorporating electronica sounds into their template, which for Rossdale was informed largely by his pre-Bush years spent soaking up the sounds in the clubs of his native London.

"Punk music turned into house music, which was happening when we went out to the clubs," he says. "And though I didn't connect with all of that at all, I did like the lifestyle. It was such a melting pot of styles. And that whole sound-system culture, where music is run off of basses — for me, with so many Bush songs, it's all about the bass line."

JOE KOHEN/WIREIMAGE

As for guitars, Rossdale approaches the instrument's role in his music with an experimental spirit — and an advantageous talent for playing Ping-Pong. "There are two approaches I use when it comes to guitar parts," he explains. "In the first incarnation of Bush, if I had a part that I thought would work better for a song, Nigel and I would play Ping-Pong, and whoever won got to record their part. It was a bit unfair, though, because I was a much better Ping-Pong player," he adds with a laugh.

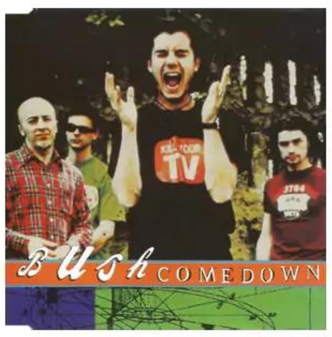
"My other approach to guitar is related to my songwriting," he continues. "I've found that creating lead guitar parts helps me write. And besides, it's more fun to sing to something that has more to it than chords."

As he approached his selections for this column, Rossdale offered that he's heard his fair share of critics who say his tunes — particularly those of the four-chord variety, such as "Glycerine" — tend to sound formulaic and similar to other songs.

"The more you understand music, the more you see that certain chord changes and motifs are used a million times over," he explains. "And then there's the top line, the melody: It's the thing that differentiates one song from another. So even if you and I might have the same chord structure for our songs, what we sing on top of it is really what separates it from everything else that uses those same chord patterns."

Bush in 1994. (from left) bassist Dave Parsons, guitarist Nigel Pulsford, Rossdale and drummer Robin Goodridge.

"COMEDOWN"
SIXTEEN STONE (1994)



"This was the first song that I wrote the music and words for. I was listening to a lot of Massive Attack, and to Billy Cobham too, and that bass line from [*Massive Attack's*] 'Safe From Harm' is what really inspired me [*the song uses the bass line from Cobham's 'Stratus'*].

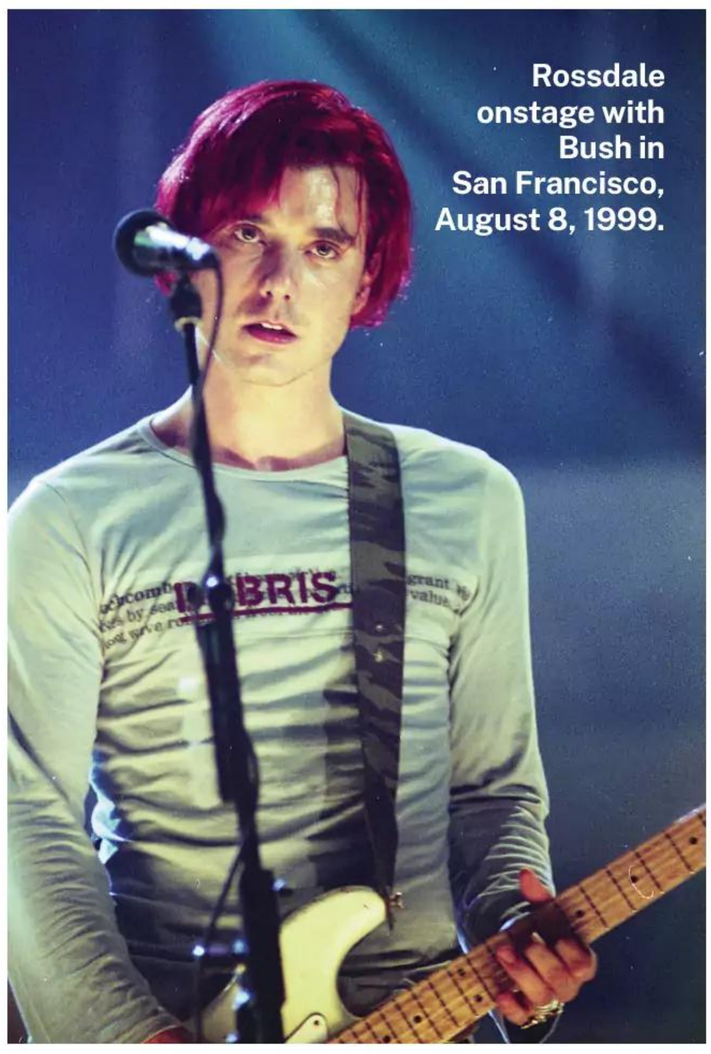
"For this song, I played my 1961 purple Fender Jazzmaster [*previously owned by Joe Walsh, who verified that he used it for the verses on 'Hotel California'*] in standard tuning. At that point I was using a Vox AC30 and probably a little bit of Mesa/Boogie too. This was back in the day when we were mixing amps a lot more. That's something I haven't done in a couple of records now."

"GLYCERINE"
SIXTEEN STONE (1994)

"This was the first time I ever wrote a ballad. It was one of the quickest songs I've ever written too. I think I did it in just two takes into a tape machine. That doesn't happen often. I remember wondering if it was someone else's song because it was really good. I was thinking, Whose song is this? Did I learn someone's song overnight? It was a bit like finding a lottery ticket: Is this really mine? I was convinced, I had nicked someone's song, but I was happy to find out that it was something that I had thought of. This song has done more for me than I can ever put into words, really. Even [Sixteen Stone *co-producer*] Clive Langer got something out of it. He had a chalet in a ski resort that he was on the cusp of losing until he did the record. And he later renamed that chalet Glycerine.

"I was really limited in my gear as I didn't have that much stuff. I had an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, an Ibanez Tube Screamer and a Boss Digital Delay 2 pedal. Interestingly 'Glycerine' was going to originally have drums on it, and we did record a version with drums. Normally, you'd take a song like 'Glycerine' and use a clean guitar tone or an acoustic guitar over the drums. I don't know what gave me the confidence to say, 'No, I'm just going to have a really heavy, chuggy guitar without drums,' and fair play to Clive that he just kind of went with it. This is a man who had made Madness records, so for him to just let me do that and not say 'Have you thought about a clean tone?' was very generous."

"FOR ME, WITH SO MANY BUSH SONGS, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BASS LINE"

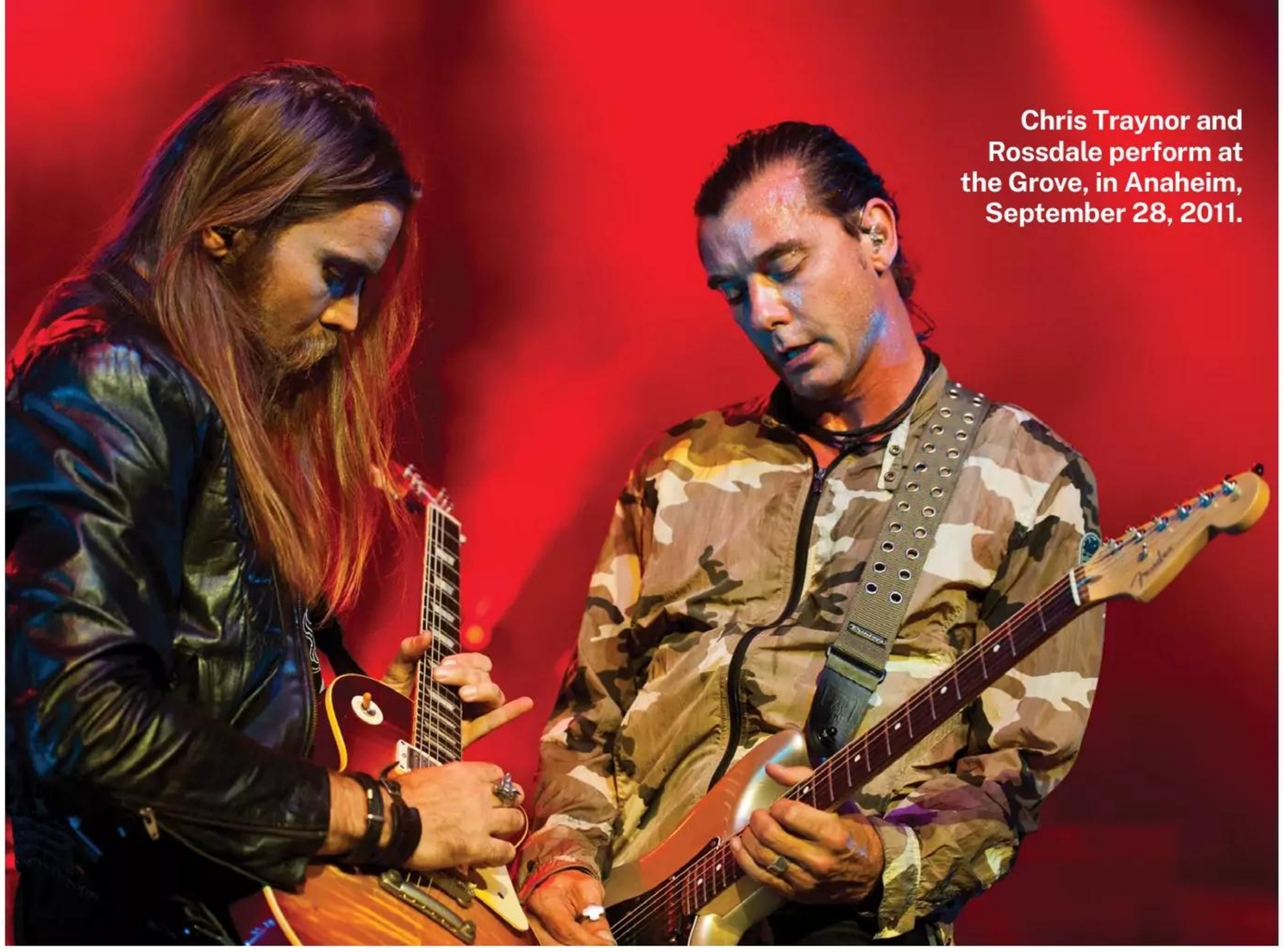


Rossdale onstage with Bush in San Francisco, August 8, 1999.

BOB BERG/GETTY IMAGES (1994); BILL TOMPKINS/GETTY IMAGES (1999)

"SWALLOWED"
RAZORBLADE SUITCASE (1996)

"This is the only song on the record that was both a hit in England and referred to as a turkey by [*producer-engineer*] Steve Albini. I think it's due to the quiet-loud dynamics thing that Steve got a lot of flak for doing with so many groups.



Chris Traynor and Rossdale perform at the Grove, in Anaheim, September 28, 2011.

"By the time of this record, I had changed some of my gear. Though I still had the Big Muff, I now had a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier as well as a Bixonic EXP-2000 Expandora. My approach to guitar tone was so irreverent. I just pushed it all so much — that's what I liked. I loved Sonic Youth, and their live shows seemed to be all about feedback and madness. I've always liked guitars that are like sort of unruly animals and right on the edge, with some really lovely harmonics and notes that just sort of go across everything in a very irreverent but cool way.

"By this point I had also moved on to a Fender Custom Shop Strat as I was tired of not being heard over the Gibson. The Strat just cut through a bit more than the Jazzmaster. I think the Jazzmaster is the kind of guitar that really does its best when there's no other guitars in there, certainly when there's no other Gibson middling through and pushing it out the way."

"THE CHEMICALS BETWEEN US"
THE SCIENCE OF THINGS (1999)

"We were back with Clive Langer for this record, and — it being our third record — we started getting really indulgent. And while there was some live studio and more traditional-sounding songs on that record, like 'Prizefighter,' I really wanted to pursue electronica. We'd done *Razorblade Suitcase* with Steve, and I felt he had very much captured the live sense of the band. But now I wanted to make a more hi-fi record, where it was not quite so raw, so that it would sound amazing on your car stereo — the perfect driving record.

"This time out I had a Diezel amp and had gotten into using Line 6 gear along with more Electro-Harmonix pedals, especially the Stereo Electric Mistress. Though I liked the Electric Mistress, I didn't like the [*flange*] part of the pedal, so I turned that off and pushed the other one much harder so it sounded really machine-like. That's the slightly more spacey sound you hear on the track. Line 6 were also really generous to us back in the day. We had their modeler pedals, including the blue [*MM4 Modulation Modeler*] and the green [*DL4 Delay Modeler*]. Eventually we got the Line 6 [*FM4 Filter Modeler*], which was the more sweepy, weird one, and a gold [*DM4 Distortion Modeler*]. I was very into pedals and messing around with all of that stuff."

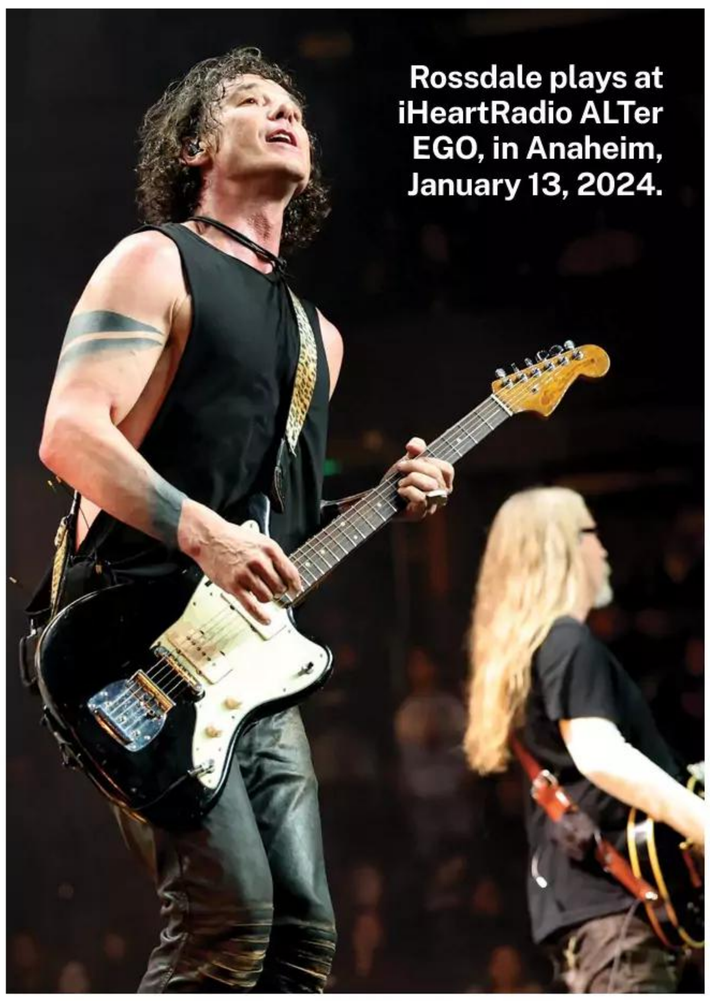
"MY APPROACH TO GUITAR TONE WAS SO IRREVERENT. I JUST PUSHED IT ALL SO MUCH — THAT'S WHAT I LIKED"

"THE SOUND OF WINTER"
THE SEA OF MEMORIES (2011)

"We did this album with Bob Rock after we got the band back together and following my solo record [*2008's* Wanderlust]. I used my Fender Strat and the Diezel, but none of the pedals I'd used previously, so it was pretty straightforward. With Bob it was more about blending the amps. The amp mixture on this song comprised my Marshall JMP, a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier, a Fender Bassman head and a Fender Twin Reverb. I know there are easier ways to get that sound nowadays, but it seemed to work for us back then. Bob was a genius at guitars and tones and mixtures, so it was just good fun to learn off of him.

"With this song, Chris [*Traynor, who took over from Nigel Pulsford in 2002*] actually had a whole different approach. When it came time to record, he turned my guitars off and went about doing his stuff. I was like, 'Are you sure? Isn't there anything you want to use from it?' Chris is an incredible guitar player, so I let him do his thing, which is always in the spirit of 'less is better.' And I think on a record you can get away with less instrumentation.

"Chris also came up with a cool idea for his solo section. He wanted to develop a solo as part of the choruses. And I was like, 'No, that doesn't work. We should use this technique, because when your solo comes, we want a surprise'. But he tried arguing academically, like, 'This is a jazz thing, this is an extension of the melodies and of the chords, and the solo will develop a sense of what lay in the choruses.' So we recorded both his version and my version of the solo, and I went around to a bunch of people to have them listen to them both. I did a real committee approach to it, and everyone liked Chris's. They said, 'Yep that's the one!' So that's what we went with."



Rossdale plays at iHeartRadio ALTer EGO, in Anaheim, January 13, 2024.

PAUL R. GIUNTA/GETTY IMAGES (2011); RICH POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR IHEARTRADIO (2024)

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Introduced in 1971, the second incarnation of the Telecaster Thinline sported Seth Lover's Wide Range pickups, giving it tonal options previously unavailable on Fender guitars.

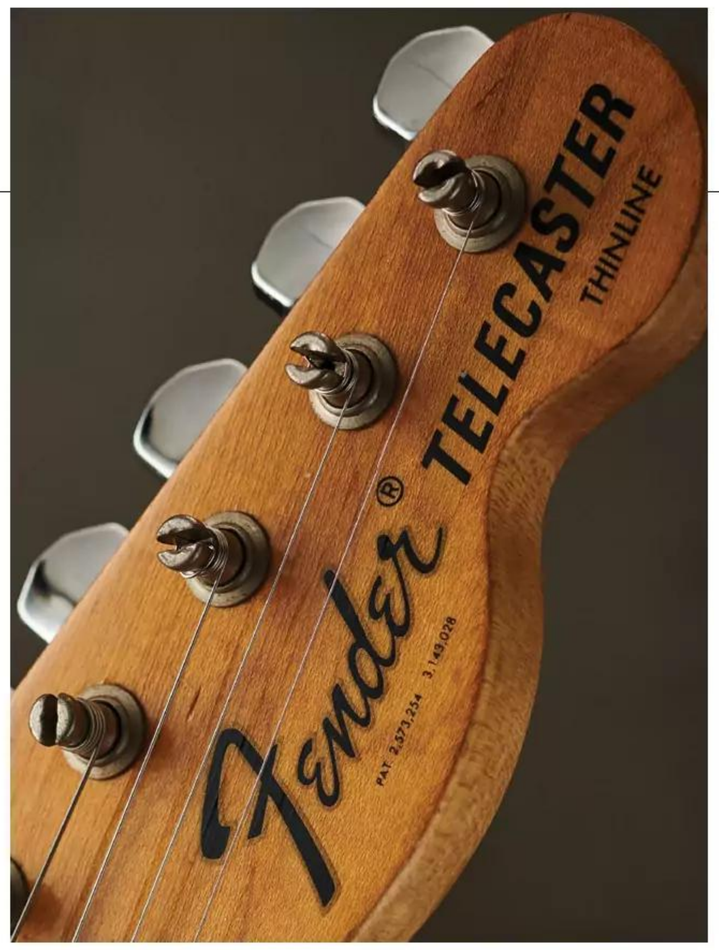
Pickup Artist

With its Wide Range humbuckers, the 1970s **Fender Telecaster Thinline** scores better than most of its contemporaries.

FENDER NEVER OFFERED a "deluxe" rendition of the Stratocaster until 1987, more than three decades after that model's introduction. By contrast, the Telecaster proved ripe for modification on several occasions long before the Strat reached that milestone. I'm not talking about the evolution of components and appointments that defined the chronological march of all Fender guitars through the company's early years, but rather the unveiling of a souped-up or upgraded rendition that appeared alongside an original model.

Leo and company did just that with the Telecaster Custom in 1959, a mere nine years after it was introduced as the Broadcaster. The Telecaster Custom featured a bound body and a then-new rosewood fingerboard. The next change came nearly a decade later when Fender lightened the load of heavier ash stocks with the Thinline model, a chambered Telecaster with an f-hole on the upper bout.

But the Telecaster Thinline would soon undergo significant revisions of its own. In 1971, Fender's owner, CBS, began to implement a series of major design changes that would impact its guitars, including the Tele Thinline. Midway through that year, a version of the guitar appeared bearing the company's new Wide Range Humbucker pickups. Designed by Seth Lover, the former Gibson engineer behind the humbucking pickup, the Wide Range was designed to sound characteristically Fender — bright, crisp and articulate — while being fuller and more powerful, and rejecting 60-cycle hum. With it, Fender could finally compete in the rock territory dominated by Gibson.



This 1974 Tele Thinline has all the key features found on the ’71 revised model.

BY DAVE HUNTER

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Chambered ash body with f-hole
- Two Wide Range Humbucker Pickups
- One-piece maple neck with 25.5” scale length
- “Bullet” headstock truss-rod adjustment nut
- Three-screw neck plate with Micro-Neck-Adjust feature
- Through-body stringing with six-saddle bridge

The Wide Range pickup even looked somewhat like the full-size humbucker Lover had developed for Gibson a decade earlier, although it was approximately 3/8 inches longer and ¼ inch wider, and had its visible adjustable pole pieces in a three-and-three formation, in opposing rows.

Significantly, those threaded pole pieces were made from CuNiFe magnets, an alloy of copper, nickel and ferrite. This blend of metals produced a magnetic material hard enough to cut threads into (something not possible with alnico), allowing for adjustable pole pieces. Simultaneously, it retained the Fender pickup-design archetype of positioning the magnetic poles within the pickup’s coils, rather than using bar magnets beneath the coils, feeding steel poles within, as in the Gibson archetype. Such construction was a big part of the Fender tone formula, helping to retain the maker’s signature twang, even in a humbucking pickup.

Following their 1971 debut on the Telecaster Thinline, the Wide Range pickups showed up the following year in the neck position of the Telecaster Custom, with a traditional single-coil Tele pickup in the bridge position. The Custom also gained a new four-control layout and toggle-style pickup selector switch, similar to Gibson guitars. The move was clearly designed to appeal to the many blues, rock and jazz players who for years had been modifying their Teles by adding a Gibson humbucker in the neck position for a thicker, warmer tone. An entirely new Telecaster, the Deluxe, was released in early ’73 according to most accounts and featured the Custom’s switching array, Wide Range humbuckers in the neck and bridge positions, and an enlarged Strat-style headstock.

WITH THE WIDE RANGE PICKUPS, FENDER COULD AT LONG LAST COMPETE IN THE ROCK TERRITORY DOMINATED BY GIBSON

The ’74 Telecaster Thinline shown here displays all the key features and so-called innovations introduced with the model’s redesign in 1971. They include Fender’s then-new “bullet” headstock-positioned truss-rod adjustment nut, as well as the three-screw neck attachment with Micro-Neck-Adjust (a.k.a. Tilt Neck) neck-angle adjustment bolt, all of which were seen on the Stratocaster beginning partway through 1971. Rather than the standard Telecaster’s three tone-enhancing steel bridge saddles, these models employed the same die-cast Mazak (a.k.a. Zamak) saddles used on the Strat. This pot-metal alloy of zinc, aluminum, magnesium and copper allowed cheaper and easier component fabrication, but many guitarists found it detrimental to the guitars’ sustain and resonance, even if the six individual saddles arguably allowed for more precise intonation adjustment.

Promoted as beneficial new features at the time, the three-bolt neck and bullet-head adjustment nut have, together, long been regarded as the most obvious outward demarcation point between the “good” early CBS Stratocasters and the inferior examples that followed. Most Telecaster fans have similar feelings about their preferred model. Still, these solid, versatile early humbucker-loaded Fenders now retain a certain cache with rock, blues and roots players.

While the quality of Fender guitars made in the ’70s in general tends to be derided, and occasionally with good reason, the second version of the Telecaster Thinline has a lot going for it. Despite being aimed at the rock guitar market, the guitar proved more appealing to blues, punk, grunge, alternative and indie-rock players in the decades that followed. The list of major names who have wielded one or another of these Wide Range Humbucker–equipped Teles — Thinline, Custom and Deluxe included — is long and includes Tab Benoit, Carrie Brownstein, Keith Richards, Leroy “Sugarfoot” Bonner, Thom Yorke, Chris Shiflett and several others.

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Sol Salvation

The genius of **Sol Hoopii** is preserved in 16 timeless cuts on *Master of the Hawaiian Guitar*.

AS TIME GOES on, I've become more acutely aware of the musical history that's been lost with each new generation. People today can't imagine not having access to a billion songs, instantly available via voice command, but the wealth of options on tap means many important artists from past eras are simply lost in the musical shuffle. I happily admit that most of the young musicians I know are significantly better informed — and qualified — than I was at their age. Still, some of our greatest guitar pioneers have been lost to time like needles in the proverbial haystack.

Sol Hoopii is one of them. He was born in Honolulu in 1902 and reportedly was playing ukulele by the age of three. By his teen years, Sol was fluent on Hawaiian steel guitar and on his way to becoming a virtuoso with a singular style that combined traditional Hawaiian music with blues, jazz, country-western swing and Tin Pan Alley. His musical endowment rightly earned him induction in the Steel Guitar Hall of Fame in 1979.

The brilliance of his musical virtuosity is evident on *Master of the Hawaiian Guitar Volume One*, released on Rounder Records in 1977. This 16-track collection of 78-rpm sides is filled with great musical moments and stands as an excellent representation of his talent for merging Hawaiian and modern Western stylings.

Side one starts off with a fiery "12th Street Rag" on which Sol makes numerous daredevil moves and lands each of them successfully. It's a refreshing take on an often-played tune, and an instant classic. "I Ain't Got Nobody" grabs the listener by force as Sol plays muscular phrases before turning on a dime to pluck out delicate harmonics. He also switch hits by playing the melody an octave lower, replicating a horn. "Hula Blues" is a nod to Hoopii's Hawaiian roots à la Hank Williams, with 64th-note chromaticism that makes this piece a showstopper. The lovely "Chimes" follows, ringing out with harmonics while retaining the lovely principles of Bach. "Sweet Lei Lehua" is my favorite, a Tin Pan Alley–style tune that features a troupe of Hawaiian singers. It's followed by "Most of All I Want Your Love," a beautiful waltz played with a ton of heart and soul, after which Sol brings side one to a close with the bluesy "Feelin' No Pain" and the elegant "Kilohana," penned by the guitarist himself

SOL HOOPII NEVER PLAYS FOR HIMSELF, OR ARROGANTLY. HE PLAYS WITH LOVE THAT'S FELT IN EVERY GROOVE

Side two opens with "Stack O'Lee Blues," driven along by Sol's vocal-like phrases. The classic "St. Louis Blues" follows, and while I've heard Louis Armstrong and Billy Jack Wills play this tune, Hoopii's take on it is my favorite, as his steel guitar mimics the human voice against a backing of bare-bones simplicity that delivers an intimate listening experience. He even makes an unusual departure from his sunny melodies as the tune goes to a minor key. On "Farewell Blues," Sol plays with strength and flash, while on "Singing the Blues" — a song reminiscent of Hank Williams' "Lovesick Blues" — his guitar does just what the title says. "Hilo" follows with traditional Hawaiian vocals before "Tin Roof Blues" closes the record, as Sol plays its repeating melody with emotion and interest.

Throughout these tracks, Sol Hoopii's performance informs me of his personal generosity and warmth. Music sometimes is that way: You get to know the character of someone by their playing. Sol Hoopii never plays for himself, or arrogantly. He plays with love that's felt in every groove.

Look for Jim Campilongo 4TET's brand-new album, She Loved the Coney Island Freak Show, *out now.*

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DOUG GILLARD IS INDISPENSABLE

His six-string genius has proved vital to the music of Guided by Voices, Nada Surf and other indie-rock favorites. But all he really wants is to make good music.

BY TOM BEAUJOUR

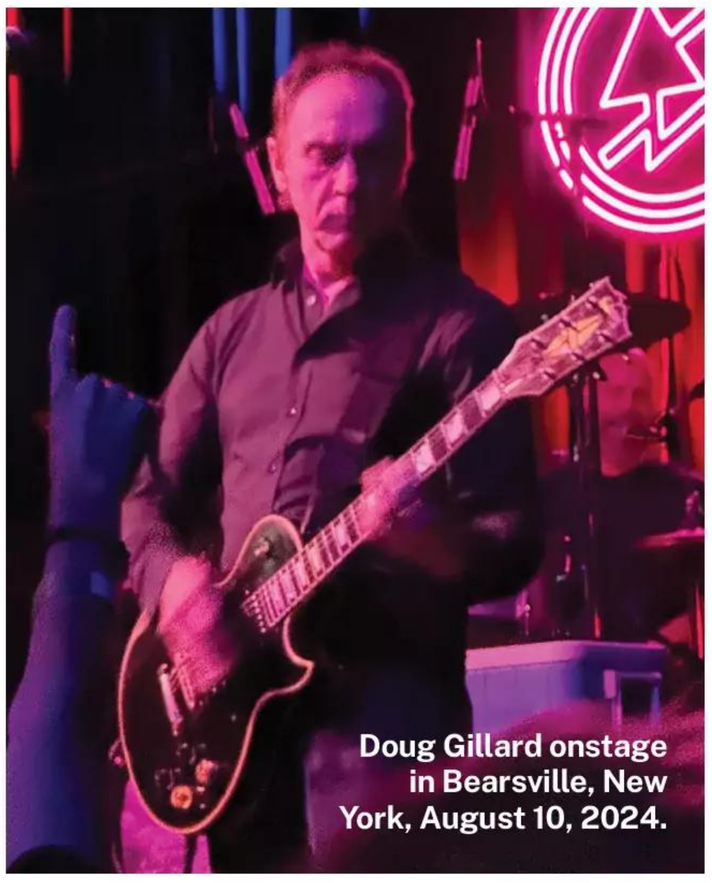
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LE STUDIO

IF YOU'RE A regular at Guided by Voices shows — and most of the band's rabid fans have seen the group dozens, if not hundreds, of times — you'll know what to expect when you turn your gaze stage left: lead guitarist Doug Gillard, legs apart, feet firmly planted on the ground, heavily worn black Les Paul Custom slung over his shoulder, while an equally well-used Mesa Dual Rectifier blasts out the cascading licks, signature riffs and tightly clustered chord voicings that have made him one of indie rock's most celebrated players and landed him on *Rolling Stone*'s list of "The 250 Greatest Guitarists of All Time."

"Doug is original and also diverse in technique," says Robert Pollard, Guided by Voices' frontman and principal songwriter. "He can let loose when he wants to, but he doesn't wank. He shows restraint, and his playing compliments the songs." Since first catching Pollard's attention in the 1980s while playing in the Cleveland group Death of Samantha, Gillard (who also played with Ohioan provocateurs Cobra Verde) has done two tours of duty in Guided by Voices: the first from 1996 to the group's "retirement" at the end of 2004, and again from 2016 to the present.

In the interim, Gillard spent more than five years touring and recording extensively with alternative-rock group Nada Surf. "We'd always admired Doug's playing from a distance," Nada Surf frontman Matthew Caws says. "But when we met and he sat in on a couple of songs as a guest on our 2010 covers album, *If I Had a Hi-Fi*, he made up parts so catchy that within half an hour he felt indispensable."

Gillard has also released several solo efforts, including 2014's excellent *Parade On*, produced albums by the Eternal Summers and others, and contributed to discs by artists as diverse as Neko Case, the Mice and the Hold Steady.



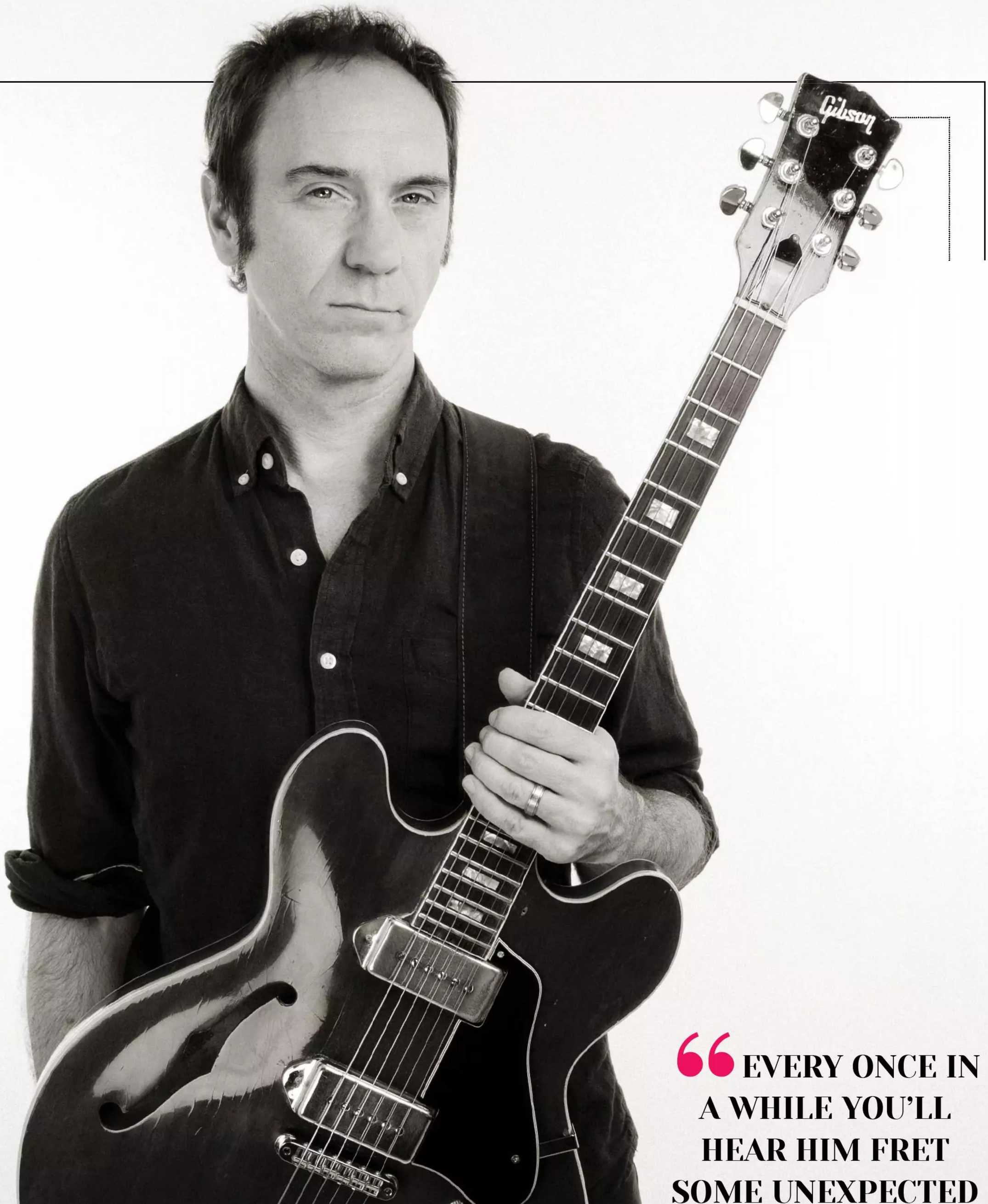
Doug Gillard onstage in Bearsville, New York, August 10, 2024.

In addition to his work with Guided by Voices — who tour regularly and release albums at the dizzying pace of three per year, the most recent of which is the rousing, rock-forward *Strut of Kings* (GBV Inc.) — Gillard can be found time-traveling to the dawn of the 1960s with Bambi Kino, a Hamburg-era Beatles tribute band featuring Nada Surf drummer Ira Elliot, Cat Power bassist Erik Paparozzi and noted author/guitarist Mark Rozzo. "It's a high-concept tribute band," Gillard explains. "The conceit is mainly just to play the covers that the Beatles did from 1960 to '63 at the Cavern Club and in Hamburg, Germany. We throw in a few of their originals, like 'Cry for a Shadow,' a very early instrumental John and George wrote. We also play 'I Saw Her Standing There,' because it was so heavily influenced by Chuck Berry and was a pivotal song for them, as well as 'Ask Me Why' from the Beatles' *Please Please Me* album, because it had such a large girl-group influence."

Regardless of which band he's performing with, Gillard serves the music with originality. "Doug may just be the most musical guitar player I have ever heard," Paparozzi says. "And in Bambi Kino, he brings all of that musicality to his role but never ever strays from the period of early rock and roll we are honoring." The bassist also notes that Gillard is a polymath who can play drums and is an excellent bassist and vocal arranger. "But every once in a while, if you're listening closely, you'll hear him fret some unexpected chord with open strings that you didn't know existed, and those moments always make me smile."

Like his peers, Gillard seems secure in the knowledge that he can cut heads with the best of them. Still, at this point

TOM BEAUJOUR



> “EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE YOU’LL HEAR HIM FRET SOME UNEXPECTED CHORD WITH OPEN STRINGS THAT YOU DIDN’T KNOW EXISTED”
>
> — ERIK PAPAROZZI

in his career, he's more focused on other aspects of his musicianship. "I don't really care anymore about being a guitar player of note," he says. "I'd rather just make good songs and make good music."

Was guitar your first instrument?
I started by beating on things to try to play drums, but my dad had always played guitar — he was only a hobby player — and I was fascinated with that. He had one of those Kay Thin Twin guitars with the tiger-stripe pickguard that Jimmy Reed used, and he would plug it into his 1955 Montgomery Ward amp. We traded that guitar in around 1974 for a 1972 Gibson SG II.

You started writing songs very early. In fact, Scat Records once released *It'll Be Such a Thrill*, a collection of songs that you'd recorded between the ages of about five and nine. How did you get into recording at such an early age?
We were the only house on our road at the time. It was a rural delivery route in sort of the farmlands. Sometimes I would just hike in the cornfields with my dog and make up songs about animals and stuff. My parents got this reel-to-reel recorder to record their voices and airmail tapes back and forth to my sister, who was stationed in Germany at the time, and I started realizing you could use it for musical purposes. I would have my mom turn it on for me and press "record" and "play." It was very low-fi, but it got the job done. When I was in fifth grade or thereabouts, there was a talent show in my reading class, and for my entry I recorded the backing to "Calling Dr. Love" by Kiss, took the tape to school, played it and played lead guitar as the melody.

> "I DON'T CARE ANYMORE ABOUT BEING A GUITAR PLAYER OF NOTE"
>
> — DOUG GILLARD

Besides Kiss, evidently, what other bands or guitarists shaped your playing early on?
I grew up listening to my sister's early Beatles albums and the Monkees, and there was a Paul Revere & the Raiders album in the house. Also, whatever was on CKLW, which played a pretty well-rounded representation of what was on the charts. [*The AM radio station is based in Windsor, Ontario, near Detroit, and has a strong signal.*] And when I was at the grocery store with my mom, I saw this album where the cover and its colors were thrilling to look at. And that was *Magic Bus* by the Who. I actually had them confused with the Guess Who, which CKLW played a lot because they're Canadian. And so I started to learn Pete Townshend's style. And then in 1976 or 1977, *Frampton Comes Alive!* came out, and I just kind of started playing along with the record. It was a very melodic style that I've kind of just stuck with.

At what point did punk and new wave come into the picture for you?
I started seeing bands on *Saturday Night Live* and just went, "What the hell is that? That's amazing!" And because it was so weird, I was just drawn to it. I mean, I'm in a suburb of Cleveland and I'm 12 years old; none of my friends were talking about any of this stuff. But it was on major labels, it was on the radio, and it was on *SNL*, so it was in the stores. I definitely started to become a devotee of the Cars' first album and *Candy-O*. Those were played very often in my room. And I was also just discovering college radio. When I heard XTC's "Life Begins at the Hop" and "Making Plans for Nigel," both off their album *Drums and Wires*, I said, "Okay, that's it. This is great."

Gillard's well-worn 1970s Les Paul Custom has been his main guitar for years.

Your black 1970s Les Paul Custom has been your main instrument for decades. How did you happen upon that guitar?
By the time 1985 rolled around, I had been through underground punk and a period where I was really into goth stuff

Gillard (far right) performs with Nada Surf on *Late Night With Seth Meyers*, February 29, 2016. (from left) Daniel Lorca, Ira Elliot and Matthew Caws.

LLOYD BISHOP/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES

like Siouxsie and the Banshees and Killing Joke. But then I became a DJ at a college radio station and I started getting into Mark Bolan and T. Rex, Bowie's early stuff with Mick Ronson, Slade, Gary Glitter and the Glitter Band, the Sweet… you name it. I'd see that kind of guitar in so many of those pictures, but I never told myself, I have to get a black Les Paul.

Then I saw a listing in a newspaper called the *Tradin' Times* — a black 1976 Les Paul Custom for sale in Akron, Ohio, for $450 — and I drove down to get it. It came with a DiMarzio Super 2 in the bridge that's still there, and some sort of cream DiMarzio in the neck that I later replaced. That guitar is very heavy, very sturdy, and it's always been a stalwart companion.

For several decades, you've primarily used a Mesa Dual Rectifier, which is an amp much more prevalent in metal than indie and alternative circles.

I know how to work those amps, and I like them because you can use the clean channel for clean, the dirty channel for distortion, and they have a solo channel with a dedicated solo potentiometer. It just boosts whatever channel you're on exponentially. Most other amps that I know of don't have that.

Are there any pedals or other effects you're currently digging?

I've been using a Fulltone Deja 'Vibe a lot recently in the studio, doing the basic rhythm tracks through that, but just to add a subtle modulation, which makes things a little more atmospheric. For solos, I really like the EarthQuaker Devices Park Fuzz Sound pedal, and Kogoy Musical Devices made me a great distortion they call the HSL9000. Depending on where you set the preamp bias, it can really get really furry and into Neil Young territory.

Do you remember your first encounter with Robert Pollard?

I was at the apartment of Robert Griffin, who owned Scat Records, along with some other people who were stuffing a compilation album I contributed to into envelopes for mail-order customers. We ordered pizza and Robert went over to the turntable and put on either Guided by Voices' *Propeller* or *Self-Inflicted Aerial Nostalgia*, and I said, "Wow, what's this?" He goes, "It's this band from Dayton, Ohio, that I'm thinking about signing called Guided by Voices." I thought it was really great and different and heard the sense of melody involved, and I kind of put it in the back of my mind.

Not too long after that, I was at a party after a show I had played that Bob had been at as well. I was standing in the kitchen talking to him and he told me he liked my band Death of Samantha, and then he sang one of the riffs from the song "The Set-Up (of Madame Sosostris)" to me. And I thought, Wow, that's really cool.

"I Am a Tree," with its descending hammered-on intro riff and triumphant solo section, has become your signature song. Did you know you had something special as soon as you wrote it?

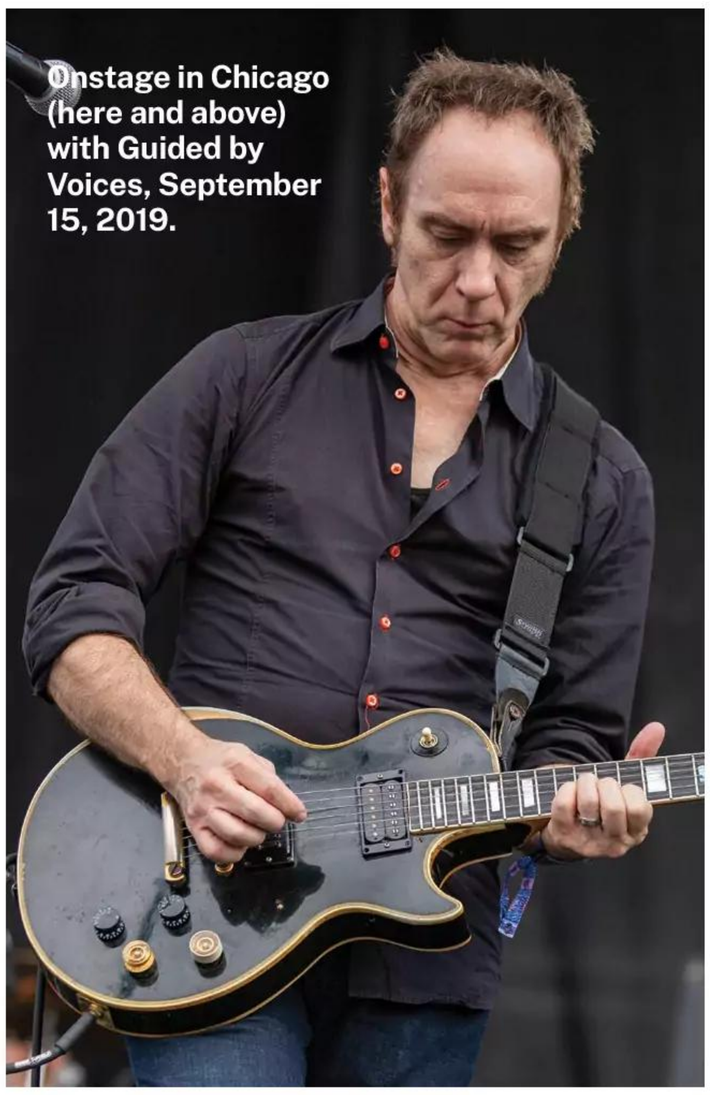
I wrote that in 1991 or '92. It was just one of those nights where I was jamming, coming up with stuff for fun. I had a capo at the seventh fret because I was trying to play "Go Your Own Way" by Fleetwood Mac. And then as I kept

playing in that capo position, I started making my own riffs. I didn't think of it like this at the time but the intro riff is basically just Keith Richards hammer-ons in the fifth-string barre chord position at the ninth fret, and then a couple of Hendrix "Wind Cries Mary" double-stops when you get to the low part. The song was in the set of another band I played in called Gem, but it didn't end up on our record. So when Guided by Voices were doing *Mag Earwig!*, Bob said, "You know what? I've always liked that one song Gem didn't do anything with it. We could do it on this record."

Guided by Voices has such a vast and ever-growing repertoire, and you also play very long sets. How many songs do you have stored in your brain at any given time that you can play on the spot?
We do about 50 songs per show and usually have about 60 or 70 ready to go. If it's not in the batch of songs we're drawing from at the time, it's not in my mind. But if it's not in the set and Bob for some reason gets a wild notion and says, "You know what? Let's play 'Quality of Armor' right now," or something like "Postal Blowfish," I can do that because it's a one-note song. But anything else, I'd need to re-learn unless it was something I was really involved with recording from the ground up, like *Mag Earwig!*, *Do the Collapse* and a couple records after that.

Do you improvise much live?
I do like to improvise live if possible. I don't want to stray away from the chords, but if it's a lead section, and especially if it's a lead that I made up, I will. When we make the records, the songs aren't lived-in yet, and the concern is to nail the parts and be true to the way they were written. And then, after you're playing them live for a while, you discover new possibilities in the songs and the embellishments start happening. Vocalists do that all the time too.

You're very involved in the production of the current Guided by Voices albums, including the newest release, *Strut of Kings*. Can you describe how they're made and your role in the process?
Bob, who is in Dayton, Ohio, initially records himself on a cassette playing acoustic and singing. And then he has his own self-editing process where he will take a CD burner and maybe cut in a different section to the song here and there, also from a cassette. Our producer and engineer Travis Harrison, who is in New York, will get those demos and kind of put everything on a grid, which we can choose to use or not. He will give us cleaned-up demos without click and demos with click. There are songs on the records where we don't record together as a whole band. And sometimes we do. Most albums are a hybrid.



Onstage in Chicago (here and above) with Guided by Voices, September 15, 2019.

You do some guitar tracks at home through the amp simulators in GarageBand, correct?
Given that Guided by Voices used to record in Bob's basement in the early '90s, I think any level of technology, low or high, is allowed in this band. That said, I liked going to Travis's studio to track the guitars through an amp and a speaker and a microphone, because you really get the best results that way.

And you also arrange the strings and other instrumentation and generate those tracks in GarageBand?
Exactly. On my own songs, I'll do arrangements if they call for it, and if there are strings in a Guided by Voices song, they are per Bob's production notes. If he hears a horn or a string somewhere or a string section or something, he'll put it in the notes, and I'll just go from there and then come up with something. I never know what the end result will be: I'll start with the central part and then I'll just kind of build around it and hopefully know when to stop at some point.

Are there specific ways that you modify your playing to channel an 18-year-old George Harrison in Bambi Kino?
I know what to prevent myself from playing. There are certain types of vibrato that you don't use. And that era of music employed different chord shapes. There's a lot of sevenths, and I've had to learn to play a lot of the tops of chords. So it's pretty much the opposite of the way I've played my whole life.

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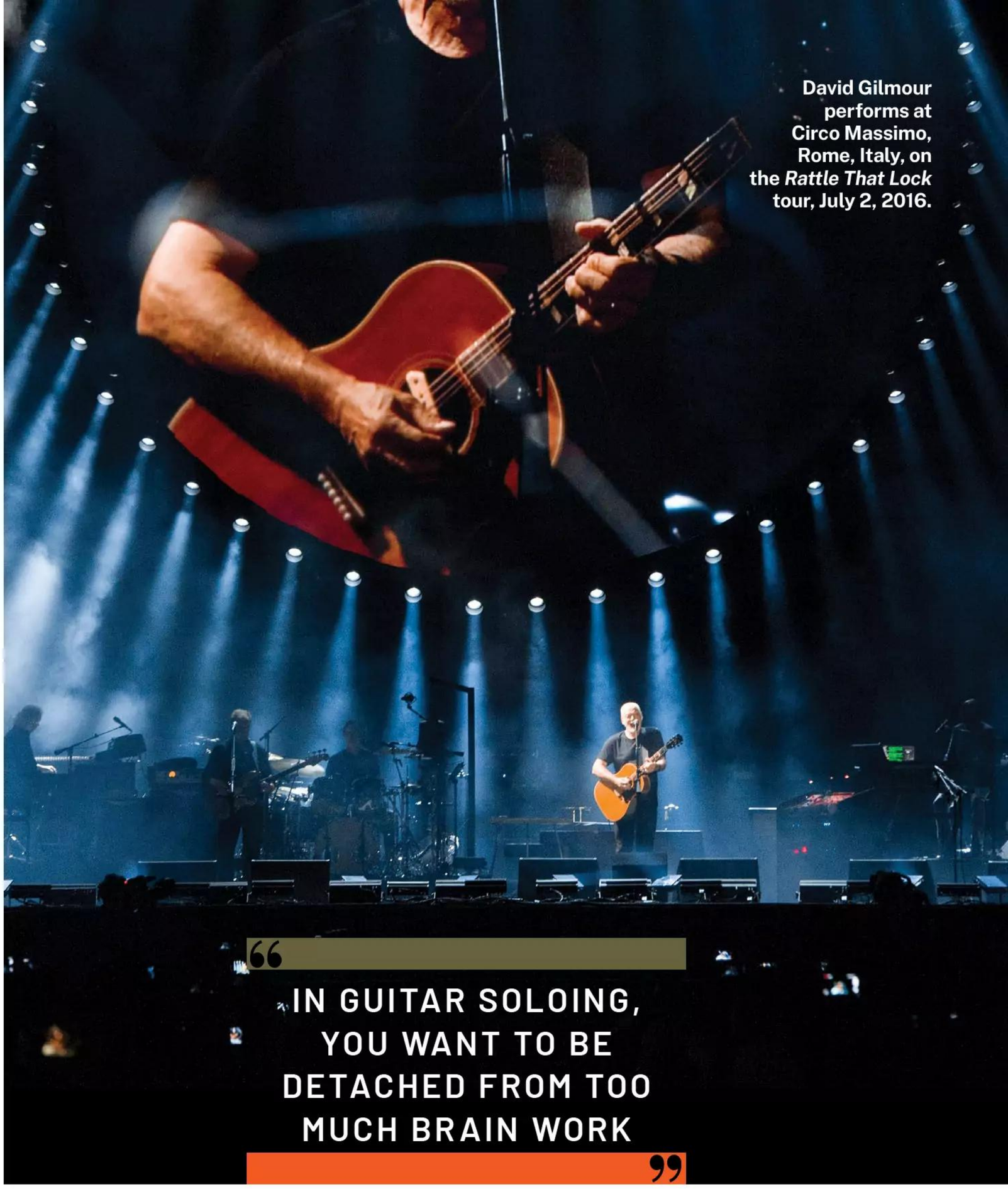
‘I’M 100 PERCENT HAPPY WITH THE WORK I’VE DONE WITH PINK FLOYD. BUT...

‘MY FOCUS IS DIFFERENT RIGHT NOW’

Leading a rock group and being a solo artist were “not what I asked for,” **David Gilmour** says. For ***Luck and Strange***, he assembled a team that shared the weight of his creative efforts. The result? “The best album I’ve made since *The Dark Side of the Moon*.”

BY GARY GRAFF

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTON CORBIJN



David Gilmour performs at Circo Massimo, Rome, Italy, on the *Rattle That Lock* tour, July 2, 2016.

PROLIFIC IS NOT the word we use to describe David Gilmour, at least not when it comes to putting out music. His new album, *Luck and Strange* (Sony), comes nearly nine years after its predecessor, *Rattle That Lock*, which likewise ended a nine-year wait (although to be fair, he'd been working on the posthumous Pink Floyd set *The Endless River*, which came out the year before). Gilmour's never been one to crank 'em out, of course, and since Floyd's final tour, in 1994, he's given us just three studio sets.

"I don't have a huge ambition any more," Gilmour, now 78, told us during the *Rattle That Lock* campaign. "In past years there was a lot of thinking about the career and wanting to achieve success. It's sort of turned into something more calm and less ambitious in my later years. I'll get round to doing something again before too long, I hope, but I have no idea. I haven't planned anything."

Fair enough, but we'd like to disagree with the "less ambitious" part. When Gilmour does put something out, it *is* the product of great ambition and invention, and of a good deal of work that's gone on even before he and his team of choice get into the studio. It perhaps hasn't produced a substantial amount of music over the years, but it's always resulted in work that's vital and compelling, something new and interesting each time.

Luck and Strange is simply the latest case in point. It's Gilmour's fifth studio album overall. His first, a self-titled affair, came out in May 1978 while Pink Floyd were on a break prior to making *The Wall*, with Gilmour producing and leading a core trio that included bassist Rick Wills and drummer Willie Wilson from his pre-Floyd band, Jokers Wild. *About Face* followed in 1984, helmed by Gilmour with *The Wall* cohort Bob Ezrin, and featuring a rhythm section of Toto's Jeff Porcaro and journeyman Pino Palladino, with Steve Winwood and Deep Purple organist Jon Lord among its musical guests. The latter also set Gilmour out on his first solo tour, with Bad Company's Mick Ralphs riding six-string shotgun.

> "IN GUITAR SOLOING, YOU WANT TO BE DETACHED FROM TOO MUCH BRAIN WORK"

After a Pink Floyd resumption (sans bassist Roger Waters) during the late '80s and '90s, Gilmour took his own counsel again on 2006's *On an Island*, with Floyd keyboardist Richard Wright, Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera, David Crosby, Graham Nash, latter-day Floyd bassist Guy Pratt, Jools Holland and others among the illustrious company. Gilmour's wife, Polly Samson, after contributing to Floyd's *The Division Bell*, became his chief lyricist on six of the 10 tracks and provided piano on one and backing vocals on another. Gilmour teamed up with The Orb for the 2010 electronica outing *Metallic Spheres* before making *The Endless River* and *Rattle That Lock*, again co-producing with Manzanera on the latter and with many of the same cohorts, and Samson penning five more sets of lyrics.

Gilmour's Floyd-like touring extravaganzas were captured on album and video packages such as *Live at Gdansk* and *Live at Pompeii*, while he netted $21.5 million from a Christies guitar sale in June 2019. Music was still being made at home when the pandemic hit in 2020 and turned the world pear shaped, but it was a fruitful time for Gilmour, who, in helping Samson promote her novel *A Theater for Dreamers*, began doing virtual performances. Those helped bring their daughter, Romany, and sons Gabriel and Charlie into the musical mix, too, and when lockdowns lifted and Gilmour turned his attention to a new album, he was ready to rattle any locks that had become part of his creative world.

To that end, he and Sampson brought in new co-producer Charlie Andrew, a U.K. award winner whose credits include working with indie rockers alt-J (including their Mercury Prize-winning *An Awesome Wave*), Matt Corby, Marika

ROBERTO PANUCCI/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Hackman, James, Bloc Party and more. He's of a different generation and a different sensibility. Gilmour's admitted that Andrew even questioned the need for guitar solos on the material.

"I did start by saying, 'Do we need another guitar solo here?'" Andrew acknowledges. "I just want what's best for the song." That said, Andrew agrees it's nice to have a big solo, "because that's what he does. I definitely came at it with an angle of 'We don't need to have things if they're not essential to the song.' Obviously, saying that, David is a truly exceptional guitarist, and it was lovely to have moments in the studio when he was trying to work out a part and all I had to do was sit there with my coffee and listen. I definitely have a greater love for guitar solos now. Well, *David's* guitar solos."

What's clear is that Andrew made Gilmour think fresh, and more new faces — drummers Steve Gadd, Adam Betts and Steve DiStanislao, and keyboardists Roger Eno and Rob Gentry, as well as old-hand Pratt — brought energy and an ensemble sensibility that made Gilmour even more excited about the proceedings at Mark Knopfler's British Grove studios.

The freshness fills *Luck and Strange*'s nine tracks, from the brief instrumentals "Black Cat" and "Vita Brevis" to a cover of the Montgolfier Brothers' "Between Two Points," sung by Romany and featuring a couple of Gilmour's trademark majestic solos. The title track dates back to 2007 and the jams Gilmour held with the band that had toured to support *On an Island,* including Wright. A lengthy "barn jam" version included on the album reveals how the track was winnowed from much broader ideas at the time.

Most of the songs are in a measured, midtempo manner, with "Yes, I Have Ghosts" mining acoustic-folk territory. The compact "Dark and Velvet Nights" is the album's most upbeat track. And despite any of producer Andrew's reservations, Gilmour happily solos throughout, taking flight on tracks that include "The Piper's Call," "A Single Spark" and "Scattered."

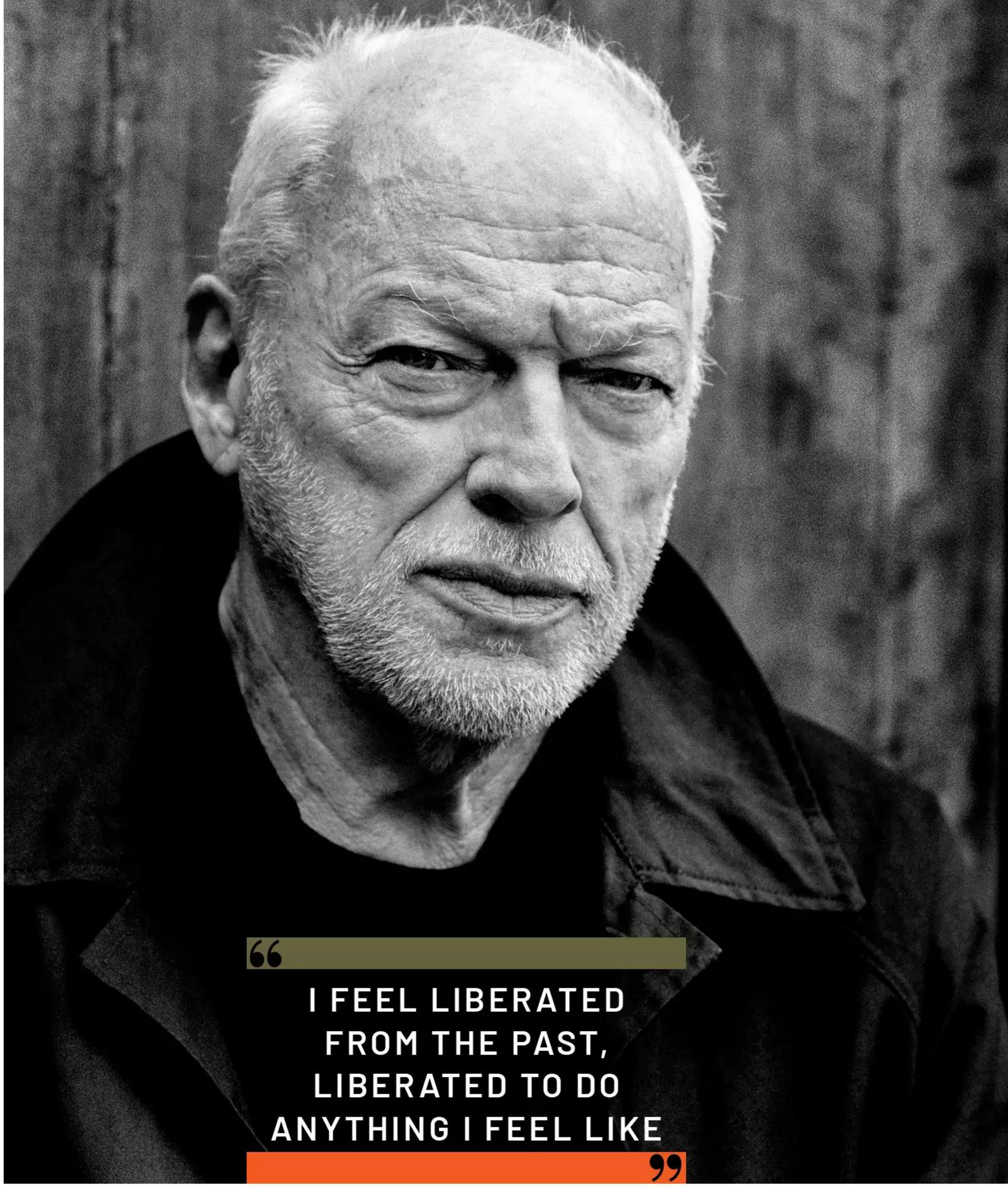
JOBY SESSIONS; POLLY SAMSON (INSET)

GILMOUR'S GALLERY OF GREATS

The Black Strat

The most famous of Gilmour's guitars, the so-called Black Strat is a much-modded guitar that he purchased at Manny's in New York in 1970. It was originally a Fender 1968 to '69 alder body with black painted over the original sunburst finish. It had a Fender late-'60s maple neck (large headstock) and 21 frets, but a rosewood-necked version features on *The Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*. To muddy the waters still further, the guitar was later fitted with a Charvel neck. The Black Strat was on display at the Dallas and Miami Hard Rock Cafes until 1997, after which Gilmour played it for Floyd's 2005 Live 8 show and continued to make modifications.

The guitar can be seen in the concert film *Live at Pompeii* when it was new for Gilmour, and features on "Money," "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," "Comfortably Numb" and other Floyd classics. The Black Strat was the star of Christies' 2019 *David Gilmour Collection* auction, where it broke records when it sold for $3,975,000. Judging by the recent photo below, Black Strats still figure in Gilmour's world. — *Michael Leonard*



Luck and Strange has given Gilmour a great deal to talk about, of course, including a selection of live dates at London's Royal Albert Hall and in New York and California. On the day of *Guitar Player*'s visit, he's onboard the *Astoria*, his houseboat, which is docked on the Thames. Gilmour bought it in 1986 and outfitted it with a recording studio, where he made the final three Floyd albums and some of *Rattle That Lock*. On the day of our visit, his T-shirt is black, his tightly trimmed beard is white, and his satisfaction with *Luck and Strange* bubbles over throughout our chat as he considers this latest chapter in his long career.

It's been a minute since *Rattle That Lock*. Do you feel the passage of time, and does it affect how you approached *Luck and Strange*?
I don't know if it's the passage of time, but there have been lots of things that have gone on in our world in the last few years that have definitely impacted my thinking and approach to where this album grew out of.

Some of those things would seem obvious.
Well, I mean, first of all I'd have to say COVID and the lockdown, being locked at home with my family, with the thought, and the general, broader thought of experts, that old folks like me were liable to get wiped out any minute by COVID, and some vast percentage of the population was going to die. [*grins*] Those were real thoughts, real sort-of semi-accepted ideas in 2020, which proved to not be quite as dangerous as we thought at first. But I was locked down with Polly and with some of my kids, and the topic of discussion was often toward the aging process and the dangers of this COVID thing. So those topics are things that have surfaced, through Polly, in a lot of the lyrics on this album. And of course the other thing is family, working with family, indulging in a nice bit of nepotism.

Which we got a first taste of in the virtual performances you did during lockdown.
Polly's book, *A Theater for Dreamers*, was supposed to come out the week we had lockdown in England, and that was tricky for her, because the whole sale and promotion of her book was put in jeopardy, and she wants people to read her book, of course, as you do. It's a brilliant book.

Anyway, Charlie, our son, when we had to cancel some shows we were going to do around England — semi-literary, partly music — Charlie said, "Why don't you stream them from home?" This is not an idea we were used to, but we went there, and it started pretty much only on Polly's book as a focus.

But then it became broader. I was singing songs every week — usually Leonard Cohen covers, 'cause he's a character who appears in her book. Then we got our daughter Romany to sing along and play with me, and that showed me that we have got that lovely sort of family tonality that happens — the Beach Boys, Everly Brothers and other people. These are things that we loved in the past. So all these things came together to create a different mood and a different feeling for the making of this album.

Kind of a clean slate, or a new palate?
Liberated. Liberated from the past. These things, the COVID and the aging and the family — all these things left me feeling I don't need to stick with any rule book or anything that's gone before. I can be freer, liberated to do anything I feel like. I'm not tied to it sounding like this or that. That sort of became emphasized for me.

How did that manifest itself in the album itself? You worked with a lot of new people, producer included. What did that allow you to do differently than before?
That's all there in the music, and they're there in what Charlie [*Andrew*] brought to it and my acceptance of what he was showing me and the direction he was proffering. It all just helped move things in a different direction that felt like a liberation to me.

This is a guy you've said walked in asking if there had to be guitar solos. You're David Gilmour — how do you answer something like that?

[*laughs*] That's a very interesting thing about the whole situation. He's 43 or 44 or something — he's not a tiny kid or anything — but in his passage through music, Pink Floyd wasn't one of those influences. Amazingly enough there still are people like that. [*chuckles*] But he liked the music that I was working on, and I liked him. Polly liked him very much. She found him, really, and I thought it was an interesting and exciting way for us to move forward.

Was there a different ensemble sensibility on *Luck and Strange* than you've had on your other albums?

This feels like a team in a way that the other solo albums didn't. On those albums, I felt like there was a bit more of a burden on my shoulders in the writing and in the execution of the whole thing. I started off in a pop group, and I found myself eventually in the position of leading that group, not a position I was hoping for or looking forward to. And being a solo artist — also not what I asked for. I always preferred being part of something, and this album feels much closer to that than anything I've had over all those years. It all felt much more like a family, much more like a group of people working toward a common end, than I've felt in quite awhile. And it's exciting. It's fun.

Did that burden being lifted allow you to do anything different as a player or singer or otherwise on the album?

I don't know if I can go to concrete examples. It's just a general overall feeling of a weight being lifted and allowing you to just plow forward, with all the people around you putting their five cents' worth in and helping to get to where we got to. I couldn't be happier than working with this group of people. I will definitely do so again.

You've said you feel this is the best thing you've done since *The Dark Side of the Moon* — a pretty heavy comparison. What

GILMOUR'S GALLERY OF GREATS

The Red Strat

Like the Black Strat, the Red Strat has been extensively modded. Gilmour eventually replaced the single-coils with active EMG pickups — 1979-made forerunners of what became the signature DG20s. The EMGs feature an EXP control to boost treble and bass and an SPC control to boost the midrange, for a humbucker-esque tone. Gilmour also added his custom shortened 4.25-inch vibrato arm. As well as being used on *The Endless River*, it was featured extensively on *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason* and *The Division Bell* albums and tours, and some of *On An Island*. It was also used in solo live shows for "Shine On You Crazy Diamond." The Red Strat sold for $615,000 at Christies' 2019 auction.

— *ML*

GILMOUR'S GALLERY OF GREATS

Custom baritone Fender Telecaster

Gilmour owned a 1963 Fender Bass VI with a 30-inch scale length, but his guitar tech, Phil Taylor, wanted to have a new one custom-made to a shorter length. "I wanted it to be more like a guitar, shorter scale," he explained, "but it also had to have a vibrato on it. I talked to Fender, and they made two." Both were made to a 27-inch scale, but Taylor wasn't finished. "I put a Vibramate String Spoiler on the back-end of the Bigsby and replaced the electronics with Callaham Cryo electronics. I wanted to get as much detail out of the strings as possible. The strings were unbalanced on the regular Fender Tele pickups, so I got Ron Ellis to make some custom baritone pickups. I was very pleased, thought it was marvelous."

Despite Taylor's efforts, Gilmour took his time to put the guitar to use. "It sat here for a year before David even picked it up!" Taylor said. "Only for *The Endless River* was it played. We were here with [*album co-producer*] Youth, who said David maybe needed a more baritone sound. David shrugged and says, 'Okay... have I got a baritone?' Finally, he played it." The custom baritone sold for $68,750 at Christies.

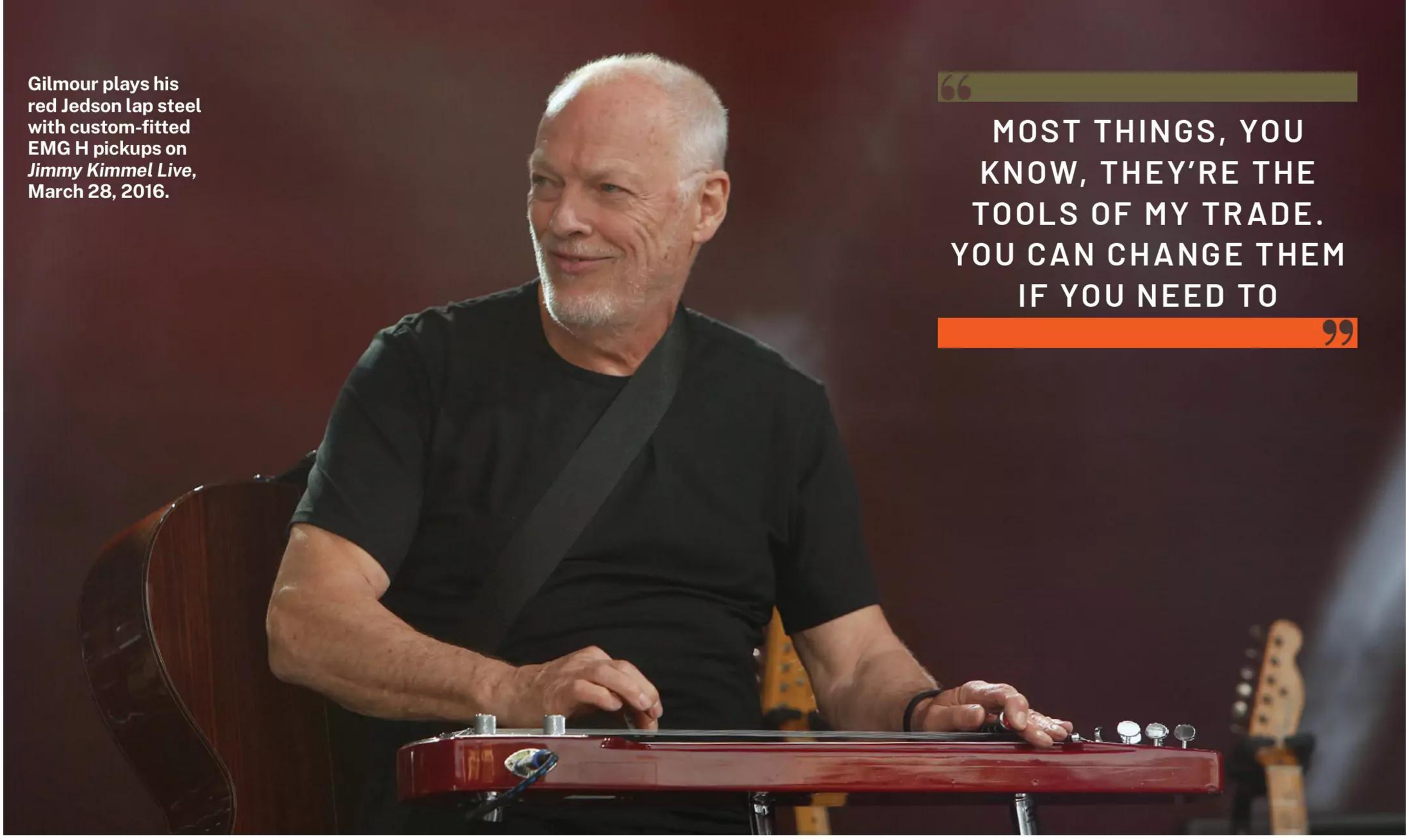
— ML

makes it feel that way?
The album feels like a solid body of cohesive work that is a reflection of some of those things that I've tried to describe to you. It's the cohesiveness of the whole thing — the writing, the work, the thrill it still gives me to listen to it all the way through as an album. We're not talking concept album here, but there's a consistency of thought and of feeling that runs through it that excites me in a way that makes me make those sort of comparisons.

You've produced your previous solo albums, or co-produced with familiar company such as Bob Ezrin and Phil Manzanera. What was it like turning it over to someone new and younger?
Charlie's lack of being overawed by my reputation was a big plus for me. Obviously in the position that I find myself there is likely to be too much... sycophancy, if you like; too many people saying, "What you're doing is wonderful." It's just a natural way that things tend to work out. But Charlie didn't have any of those particular, specific problems, and that was very refreshing. So when he's firm in his convictions on the way we should try to do something a certain way, you give it a go and you give it some time, and if you don't think it's right, you try a different approach. You can go to these things and try them one way, try them another way.

What directions did he push you in that felt new, or even uncomfortable?
There's things to do with the sound, the way he wanted to record, and how long I'd be willing to keep going at something until we got whatever it was he was searching for out of me or the other musicians. He worked us very hard, all of us. It was very good for me to be there while he worked some of the other musicians on the tracks before I got to the singing parts. I knew what was coming for me, and it was the same thing he'd done with Steve Gadd and people. So the sound was what he was going for.

JOBY SESSIONS



Gilmour plays his red Jedson lap steel with custom-fitted EMG H pickups on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, March 28, 2016.

> MOST THINGS, YOU KNOW, THEY'RE THE TOOLS OF MY TRADE. YOU CAN CHANGE THEM IF YOU NEED TO

RANDY HOLMES/DISNEY GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT VIA GETTY IMAGES

The demo for the song "A Single Spark" is one of the extras that's on the bonus CDs, and you can hear the difference that he brought to that. With that track in particular, it took me a little while to get used to the radically different approach he took from my version of the song, but now I couldn't love it more. So those things that he brought to us went right through the process, from the beginning of the album to the end.

Did he develop a little awe for you by the time it was finished?
I think he did learn to love guitar solos more by the end of the album than he did at the beginning. [*laughs*]

Let's talk about solos, then, and how you approach them. The fact that someone else was doing some of the heavy lifting in the production, did that allow you to approach your playing, especially the solos, more unconsciously?
In guitar soloing, you want to be detached from too much brain work. You want it to flow freely, like a spirit, and find exactly the right sort of mood for playing things. For some of the solos on it, that approach worked really well. There are other songs where you've got a plan for the solo and you're gonna work in a specific way toward achieving something that you've already got in your head. Sometimes when you're working on a guitar part or a guitar solo, you can already have the idea for it in your head and you really have to work at it. And there's another approach where you empty the head and you don't think. You just let the track take you wherever your brain, your fingers and the muse take you.

Now that the album is done, when you listen back, what are the surprises?
I don't know that I can answer that. I mean, every time I listen to it I'm surprised anew at how much I love it and how satisfying it feels to me.

When *Rattle That Lock* came out, you mentioned that you still had a lot of ideas left that you planned to explore further. Do any of those ideas show up on *Luck and Strange*, or is it mostly newer material?
I'm a bit of a magpie. I have lots of pieces of music, and I pick and choose between things. Sometimes out of nowhere I'm thinking of one piece of music and then I think of another one that's completely disconnected that's at the same tempo and same sort of feel, and I think, Well, could they work together? There's another track, "Sings," for example. I wrote the basic music for it not long ago — five years ago maybe — but I didn't have a chorus. I eventually remembered a chorus I'd done many, many years ago, in '97 in fact. The chorus comes from then, from a demo I did on a minidisc recorder, with my son, who was then two, telling me to sing — "Sing daddy, sing!" — and we actually put that demo on that track. He's now nearly 30. So I'm certainly not against digging back through the hundreds of pieces of music that I've got stashed away somewhere.

On *Luck and Strange* you include a "barn jam" version of the title track, which has Rick Wright playing on it. How did the song transform from that to what we hear on the album?
At the end of the *On An Island* tour [*in 2006*], I thought the band was really sort of hot and playing great together. So I took the core of the band — four guys, drums, bass, guitar and keyboards — and we set up in a barn at my house and recorded for two weeks, just jams. This was the first one we did on the first morning. I just started playing that little guitar piece and they all joined in.

And then, quite a while ago — I suspect it was some time before the *Rattle That Lock* album — I wrote and recorded bridges and choruses to that backing track. And again, I puzzled myself: I don't know why in 2015 or '14 I didn't listen to that track and go, "Yeah, let's go!" But this time it demanded to be heard and worked on, so we did.

Does it mean a lot to you to still have Rick in your musical world?

GILMOUR'S GALLERY OF GREATS

1956 Gibson Les Paul "Goldtop"

Gilmour owned a 1955 hardtail Les Paul "goldtop" (since sold at Christies for $447,000) and played it on "Another Brick in the Wall." As for this 1956 example, "We got this because it had an original Gibson factory Bigsby on it," Phil Taylor explains. "David wanted a Bigsby one. And he didn't want a modified one, with a later-added Bigsby. He played this a lot on *On An Island*. "It's got P90s. The only humbuckers David uses are on the Gretsch Duo Jet — and although they are humbuckers, they sound more like single-coil pickups."

— ML

Yeah, it's wonderful to have a track that he's actually a part of. Rick's unusual playing style pours out of it and makes me sad that he's not around to take more part in what I'm doing.

With so many different things going on in the making of this album, did you bring out different gear for the occasion?

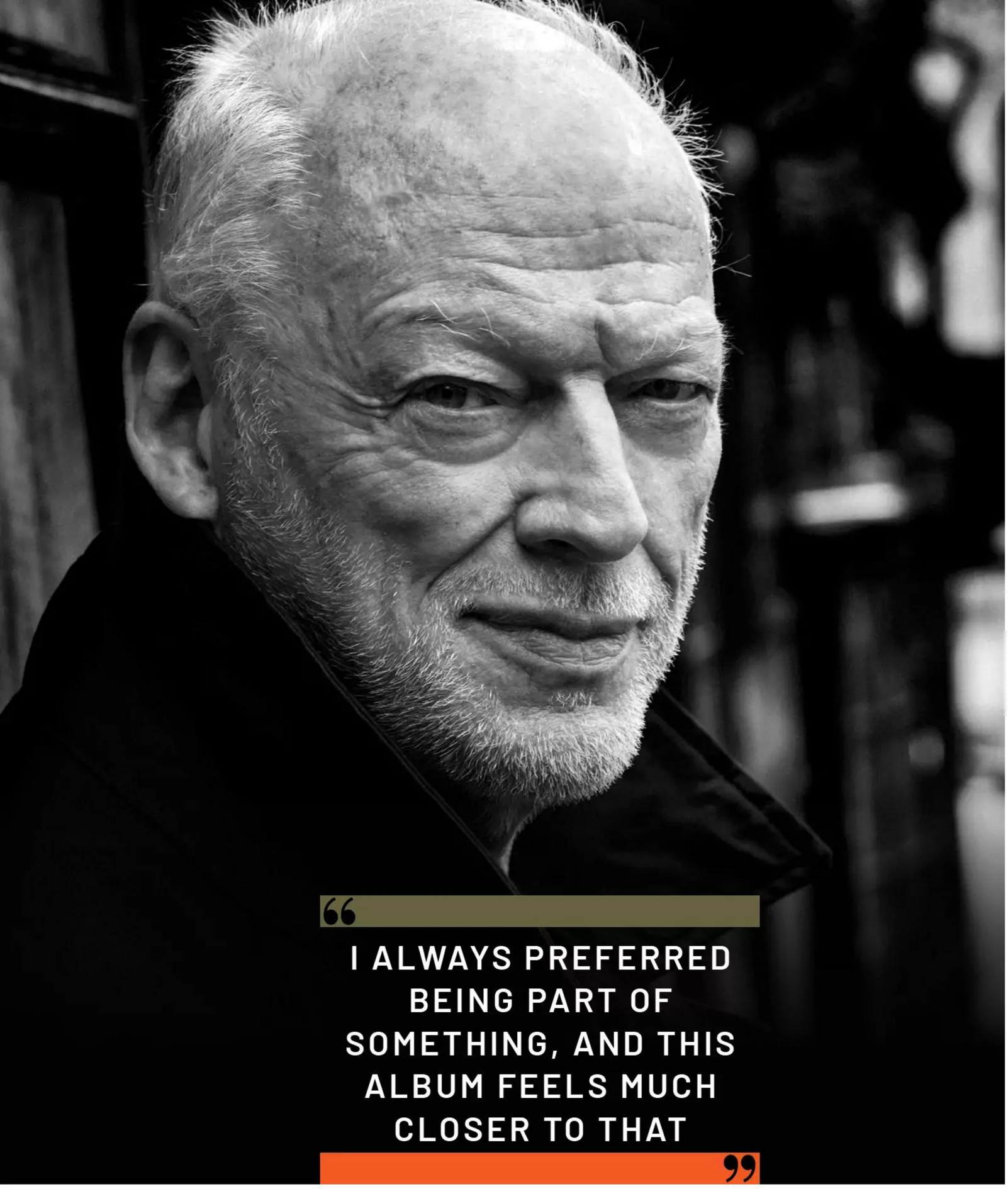
Er... probably. [*laughs*] I don't know. Phil [*Taylor*], my guitar tech, has a studio board that you can have 20 things [*plugged*] in and you stomp them in and stomp them out. But I'm not that precious about it. I know I use a lot of pedals and things all the time, but I don't have any sort of magic ones that I've got to use or that I don't use. I just fiddle until things sound right. I'm not that precious about it, really.

The video for "Piper's Call" feels like a kind of primer to your approach. You do the solo on a Les Paul, rhythm on a Stratocaster, you're playing what looks like a [*Rickenbacker*] Frying Pan lap steel. The mix of instruments is you in a nutshell.

Well, the song started with me strumming on a ukulele — a Martin '50s ukulele I think it is — and that's the two chords that I swap over at the beginning. There's a lot of Strat on there as well, going through my Zoom [*multi-effects*] processing box that I've used for 30 years; I can't even remember what it's called, but it's got a lower octave and a vibrato, and that's somewhere in "The Piper's Call." The other thing in there is a 12-string fretless banjo made by a guy in Turkey. I bought it there in a little shop in a coastal village. It's very tricky to play 'cause it's got 12 strings and it's fretless. It's got a very Eastern sound to it, which I love.

You sold off a number of your guitars back in 2019. What do you still have that you'd never consider selling?

Well, you know, I have my old beat-up Tele that I'm very fond of. I have a Gretsch Duo Jet that I love and wouldn't sell. I have a Martin D-18 from 1945 I wouldn't sell. But most things, you know, they're the tools of my trade. You can change them if you need to.



Did having fewer "tools" have any impact on the choices you made for *Luck and Strange*?
Not consciously, no, I don't think so. The black Strat that I now use — the Black Cat Strat, as we call it — I even forget that it's not the same one I used before on all those albums.

Returning to *Luck and Strange*'s lyrical theme, especially on the title track, what is that idea about?
It's the luck of the very strange moment that me and baby boomers in general — all of us who were born in the post-war period — have lived through, to have had such a fortunate moment, with so many positive ideas that we thought were moving us forward. This is a conversation that Polly and I have had and she has written about in those lyrics.

It's really a question: What's normal? Was that baby boomer era — what some people call a golden age — was it normal? Or is it these darker times — the wars and the politics, and the lunatic Trump that you've got, and the lunatic Putin over in Russia — is that the norm? That's the conversation, between which moment is the norm and what have we got to look forward to in the future?

Writing lyrics with one's wife seems like it could be a bit... dangerous?
[*chuckles*] Polly and I really are a team. We've been writing songs together for over 30 years now. We are very much in sync with each other in what we want to do, and this album is the result of that reaching a firm... er... better point in that process.

Polly's just a great person to work with, and having been a professional writer most of her adult life she's extremely good with words. Her influence goes as far as which pieces of music go on the album, to some extent. If there's something that she really likes and wants to write to, then obviously it stands a better chance of being on an album. She used to try very hard to imagine herself as me and to be writing things for me, but I think she's liberated herself a bit from that view and now realizes she can write for herself and it will still — because we share so many views, political or philosophical — work perfectly well for me. I'm singing them, so they come out sounding like me. I've got a lot of experience singing other people's words, but with Polly, it's working really well as a partnership, and I'm thoroughly enjoying it.

What can we expect from the live shows this fall?
Well, you know, I'm currently planning it. I haven't gotten that far in terms of the musical set list. I'm thinking more modern times than old times, but there'll be some songs from the '70s, '80s, '90s. All the way through there'll be some stuff, but I'm focusing perhaps a bit more on the new album and the newer material.

Will we have to wait another nine years for your next album?
My intention is to gather some of these people together and get back and start working on something else in the new year. What you want is a few things to get started with and hope it all starts flowing, and that's what I'm hoping will happen.

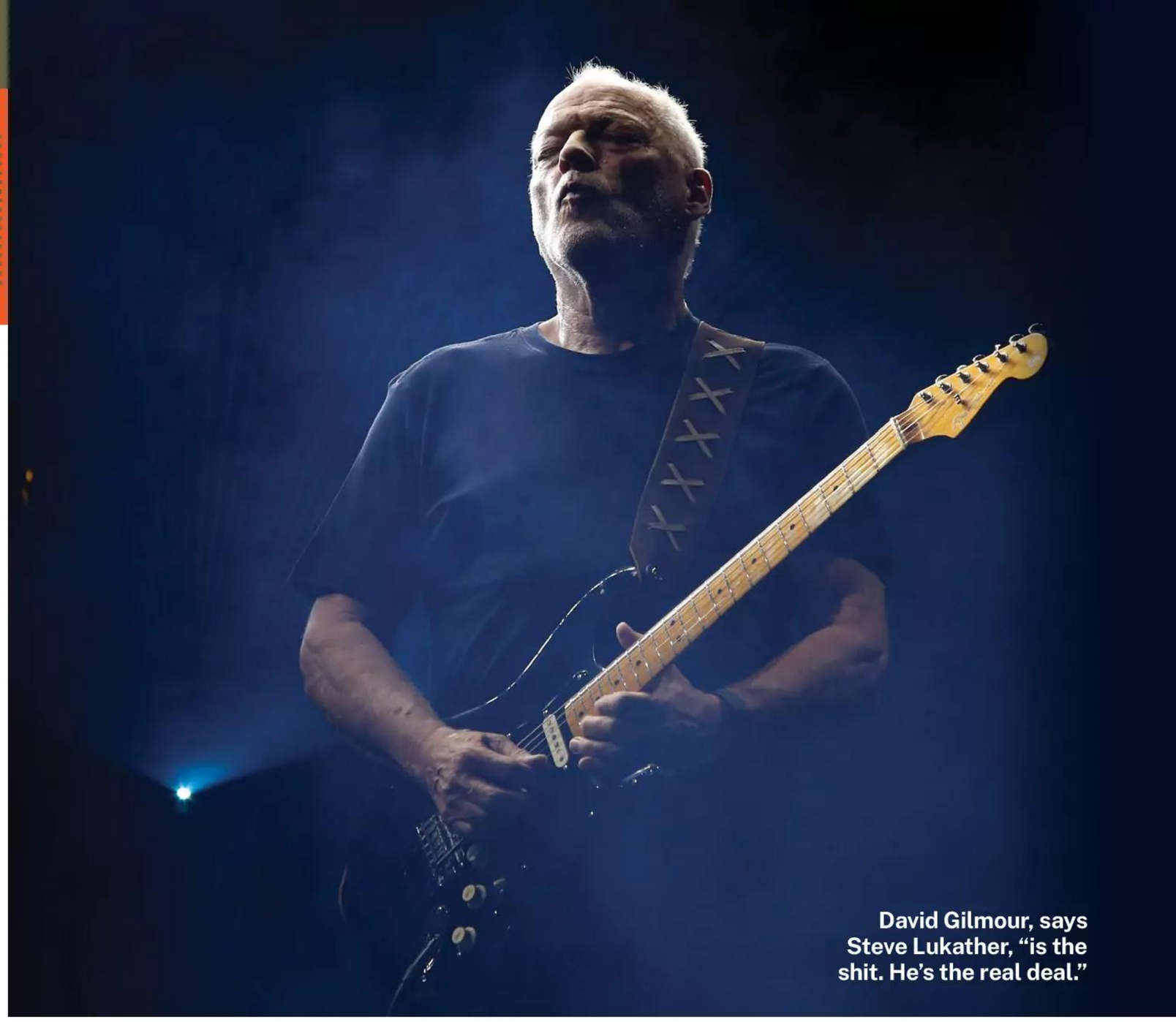
Pink Floyd — dare we ask?
I put the whole Pink Floyd thing to bed many, many years ago. I mean, it's impossible to go back there without Rick, and I wouldn't want to. It's all done. I'm very happy and satisfied with the little team I've got around me these days. We had a lot of offers to go and tour and so on and so forth, but I'm in this selfishly lucky position of having more than enough money and having had more than enough fame. I just don't need that stuff these days.

I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression that I am not 100 percent happy and satisfied with the work I've done with Pink Floyd over the years, which were productive and satisfying and joyful, mostly. It's fantastic. But my focus is different right now.

SHINE ON!

18 guitarists (and one producer) weigh in on what makes Gilmour great.

COMPILED BY ANDREW DALY AND KEN SHARP



David Gilmour, says Steve Lukather, "is the shit. He's the real deal."

STEVE MORSE

Favorite solo: *"Comfortably Numb"*

"The soaring melodic tone is an inspiration for me to try to find the right notes and really play from the heart. I've had the honor of working with Pink Floyd producer Bob Ezrin on many projects, and he always jokes with me when I'm having difficulty finding a solo he likes. He'll say, 'You know, Gilmour played the solo on 'Learning to Fly' in one take on a little practice amp,' which will elicit a predictably dour comeback from me about how we can't all be David Gilmour!"

KIRK HAMMETT (METALLICA)

Favorite solo: *"Shine On You Crazy Diamond"*

"There is a riff in that song, but it's so sideways and so around the back. It's a freaking blues progression, but it doesn't sound like it, and that in itself is a real accomplishment. But my favorite part is when he flubs a note and then turns it into an open G during the solo. I know everyone knows what I'm talking about! I love that David left it in."

DAVE NAVARRO (JANE'S ADDICTION)

"David Gilmour is far and away my favorite guitarist of all time. In Pink Floyd, his inward reflection is the perfect complement to Roger [*Waters*]'s outward aggression. His solos alone are memorable, melodic and technically proficient while simultaneously simple, heartfelt, angry and melancholy. He takes his time. He tells a story within the story of whatever track is played. In fact, one could say the lyrics give the information, and the guitar shows how that information feels."

VINNIE MOORE (UFO)

Favorite solo: *"Time"*

"I remember hearing it for the first time while on a school bus, and I got chills from the solo. Still do. It's always been one of my all-time favorites. His playing is so melodic, soulful and deliberate, and you can almost sing every note. His work always makes you feel something. Just typing this makes me want to grab a Strat and a delay and jam."

NANCY WILSON (HEART)

Favorite solo: *"The Blue"*

"I've watched David Gilmour's Royal Albert Hall video [Remember That Night] many times and he does a newer song called 'The Blue.' In the solo section, he uses a [*DigiTech Whammy*] pedal to take the note he's playing and pull it up and up and up, into the stratosphere, beyond where a guitar would go. To me, that's a really wildly original inventive guitar-playing moment that I don't think people have singled out."

VERNON REID (LIVING COLOUR)

Favorite solo: *"Money"*

It's a tour de force example of his extraordinary execution of tone, placement and iconic soloist choices. The shocking blast of tremolo after the opening tape-looped cash register intro, the subtle 7/4 doubling of Roger Waters' bass and the sparseness of his clean rhythm guitar parts interwoven with Richard Wright's keys — all of it leads to David's fiery, soaring solo, which was an emotional corollary to Waters' bitter lyrics about materialism. Gilmour influenced how generations of players approach what's possible to express on guitar, not predicated on bombastic technique but on subtlety. Phrasing. Tone. Innovation. And Gilmour is arguably the first guitarist to successfully utilize compression as an effect for creative expression."

STEVE LUKATHER

Favorite solo: *"Breathe"*

"There are two versions of it. There's a reprise, where he has this unbelievable solo, and he hits this note... It's one of those magic moments, the way he hits that note and how it comes off the vinyl. The sound of that solo is huge and it's buried in an echo, but not to the point where you lose the intensity of the original sound. It's all about the way he picked the notes and his choice of notes. David Gilmour is the shit. He's the real deal. I love his calm greatness."

ALEX SKOLNICK (TESTAMENT)

Favorite solo: *"Comfortably Numb" (second solo)*

"Often overshadowed by the song's first solo, that second solo somehow manages to be screaming, despite the slow tempo, and is a true lightning-in-a-bottle moment. It's a masterclass in using space, bends, melodic development, resolution of ideas, effective tone, blues in a non-blues context and pure emotion."

CHIAKI NOZU/GETTY IMAGES (GILMOUR); MICHAEL KOVAC/GETTY IMAGES (HAMMETT)

> **GILMOUR INFLUENCED HOW GENERATIONS OF PLAYERS APPROACH WHAT'S POSSIBLE TO EXPRESS ON GUITAR**
>
> — VERNON REID

BRUCE KULICK

Favorite solo: ***"Money"***

"It starts aggressive and melodic, with sweet amounts of reverb and delay as well as an awesome stereo imaging, but it's really a setup for the two sections that follow. Part two of the solo is very dry, with stabbing riffs with great phrasing, and part three shows the wilder side of Gilmour, where he uses exciting overbends that thrill the listener. This solo is a fine example of his ability to be so expressive and to always take the song to another level."

BILLY GIBBONS (ZZ TOP)

"There's certainly more to the David Gilmour guitar prowess than his stellar work with Pink Floyd might indicate to the uninitiated. Sharing a stage slot alongside him a few years back at Mick Fleetwood's London Palladium Tribute to Peter Green and the Early Years of Fleetwood Mac remains a personal highlight. When he undertook Green's iconic 'Albatross,' there emerged evidence of an accomplished bluesy soloist of the highest order. That was a moment that certainly sealed the deal for me."

BOB EZRIN (PRODUCER)

Favorite solo: ***"Comfortably Numb" (first solo)***

"That was essentially a first take. He played that part that's on the record while ripping on top of the guide track that we were doing. Then he spent a bunch of takes trying to make it better. And my recollection, as is his, was that we went back to the original take — if not the original, then one of the very early ones. But that melody — that unbelievable, uplifting, memorable, bring-people-to-their-knees melody — that just came out of him all at once. I fell on the floor when I heard that solo. And for me, that solo is actually the emotional high point of the song, a moment of pure musical joy."

NILI BROSH

Favorite solo: ***"Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)"***

"It's such an accessible and widespread example of everything he does best. From his timeless feel to his note choice, melodicism and overall ability to make the guitar sing like no one else. That solo has everything, not to mention the rare quality of being so singable. It's more memorable to many people than vocal hooks."

KIKO LOUREIRO (MEGADETH)

"Gilmour's ability to evoke emotion and create memorable musical landscapes with his guitar has made his work timeless. His playing is both inspiring and distinct, finding the perfect balance between pentatonic blues licks with triadic chord tones following the beautiful chord progressions from the band. It has often served as a reference when I imagine my own solos."

CHARLIE STARR (BLACKBERRY SMOKE)

Favorite solo: ***"Comfortably Numb"***

"It has not one but two perfect guitar solos, brilliantly crafted, soulfully executed. And most importantly, the entire world can sing every note of both of them."

ANDY WOOD

Favorite solo: ***"Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)"***

"I'm gonna be cliché and say 'Another Brick in the Wall Part 2.' That tone is just so juicy, and the phrasing is 11/10."

PETER FRAMPTON

"He's not a straight blues player, but he pulls from the blues, like I do. His note choice is what attracts me. You don't have to play a million notes to give me goosebumps, and Dave's playing gives me goosebumps. When I was living in England and doing my first two or three solo albums, I was introduced to Dave by Rick Wills, who was in my band, Frampton's Camel, and then went on to Foreigner. We went back to Dave's house and jammed, and it was the most thrilling thing for me. When he got a new gadget, he'd lend it to me. He'd say, 'I hear you're recording, why don't you try this?' Dave and I were in league in that way for a little bit."

ANDY TIMMONS

Favorite solo: ***"Money"***

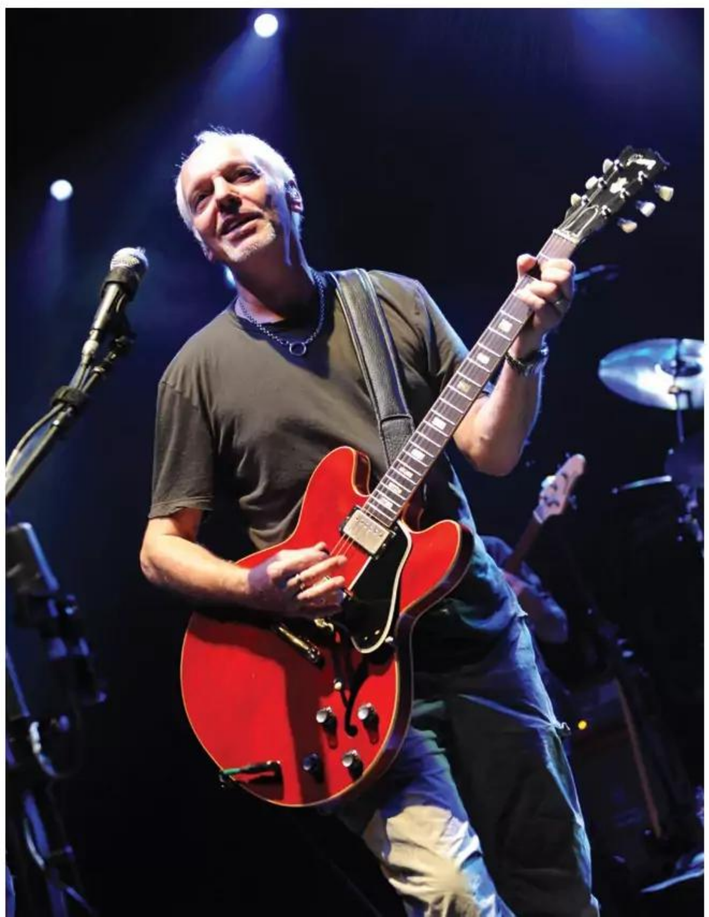
"It's always been one of my favorite guitar moments. On its own, it's a great solo, but the context is what really makes it such an emotional delight. It seems the entire song is building and leading up to this pinnacle moment: essentially a blues in 7/4, creating incredible tension that finally releases into an incredibly satisfying 4/4 shuffle. And that tone!"

ORIANTHI

Favorite song: ***"Shine On You Crazy Diamond"***

"I just love that intro. It's so spacious, clean, intentional and beautiful. It brings people in and settles their spirits when you hear that kind of playing. And when he goes into the solo, it's emotional. It's not overly crazy; it's very honest sounding. That's what I love about his playing. It serves the song emotionally. His phrasing is bluesy, but it's not, at the same time. It has its own fingerprint. When you hear him, you know it's David Gilmour playing."

JOBY SESSIONS/GUITARIST (GIBBONS); KEVIN NIXON/CLASSIC ROCK (FRAMPTON AND PERRY)



JOE PERRY (AEROSMITH, HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES)

Favorite solo: ***"Comfortably Numb"***

"He's got probably the best Strat tone I can think of. He relies very little on distortion, and the stuff just sounds so sweet. It's almost like what he doesn't play that's most important because he's such a tasteful guitar player. It's not about what speed; it's about telling a story. He's one of those guitar players who is few and far between who really understands that."

THE BEAT GOES ON

Together with Tony Levin, **Adrian Belew** and **Steve Vai** join forces for a Robert Fripp–endorsed revival of King Crimson's groundbreaking 1980s music.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISON DYER

"FOR 40 YEARS, fans — and especially a lot of musicians — have told me that this era of the band was a watermark," Adrian Belew says, discussing the version of King Crimson that he led alongside founder and visionary Robert Fripp in the 1980s. "Was it popular and well-known by MTV lovers? No. But that's not what the intent was in the first place. We weren't trying to make hit records. We were trying to be adventurous."

"Adventurous" is an understatement. The three records that Belew, Fripp, drummer Bill Bruford and bassist and Chapman Stick wizard Tony Levin released during that period — 1981's *Discipline*, 1982's *Beat* and 1984's *Three of a Perfect Pair* — represent some of the most groundbreaking, challenging and creative music of the band's lifetime.

The original Crimson, under Fripp's guidance, tended to cloak its proggy compositions in heavy drama and encase them within epic song structures. The '80s iteration instead embraced the contemporary sounds of new wave, post punk and funk, along with exotic and avant-garde styles like Indonesian gamelan and minimalism, and used new technology like the Roland GR-300 guitar synthesizer to create music unlike anything in the Crimson canon. This was a new type of progressive rock: short, sharply played songs that were rhythmically taut, harmonically dense, and often built upon knotty and repetitive interlocking note patterns — what Belew calls a "rich tapestry."

"The sound right out of the box was kind of shocking," he says. "When you put those records on and you hear them now, they still, to my ear, sound ahead of their time. There's been nothing like them before or since."

Which is why Belew has decided to revisit this era of the band with a new group, Beat. The idea came to him a few years back when he had designs on commemorating the 40th anniversary of King Crimson's *Discipline* era by getting the band back together and playing some shows. He brought the proposal to Fripp, who was receptive but opted out. "Robert wrote me a long email itemizing all the things that he had already agreed to take on, and those were the reasons why he would have to decline," Belew says. "But he told me, 'If you feel strongly about this and you want to drive it, then you have my support.'"

All well and good, except for one thing: How exactly, does one replace a singular, imposing talent like Robert Fripp? "The only person I thought of," Belew says, "was Steve Vai. And not only because of his phenomenal ability but also because I had read years ago in a magazine how much he loved and appreciated Robert's work. And I also knew that they had played together."

Plus, he adds, "Steve can do basically anything he wants on the guitar."

Fast forward a few years (the actual 40th anniversary, 2021, came and went due to COVID), and Vai has signed on to the project. What's more, Tony Levin has returned on bass, and, in place of the now-retired Bruford, Belew drafted Tool drummer Danny Carey. Together, the quartet are spending the fall and winter of 2024 touring venues across North America. "This feels like one of those strange moments where everything came together just right," Belew says. And while the musicians are committed to honoring a particular era of King Crimson (the "Beat" name was suggested by Fripp), Vai stresses that the goal is to "create something that's not a cover band but rather a reinterpretation, and a celebration."

With that in mind, Belew and Vai sat down with *Guitar Player* to discuss the particulars of Beat, from the challenges of playing — and learning how to play — this music to the unique gear requirements involved. They also discussed what they believe makes these three King Crimson records so special and unique, the brilliance (and, perhaps, madness) of Robert Fripp, and whether there's a future for Beat beyond this current tour.

> **"ROBERT TOLD ME I DON'T HOLD MY PICK CORRECTLY. WHICH IS TRUE. I NEVER CONCENTRATED ON THAT"**
>
> — ADRIAN BELEW

Adrian, Robert has a reputation for being a very demanding and exacting musician. What was his response when you brought up Steve as the guy to assume his role in the band for this tour?

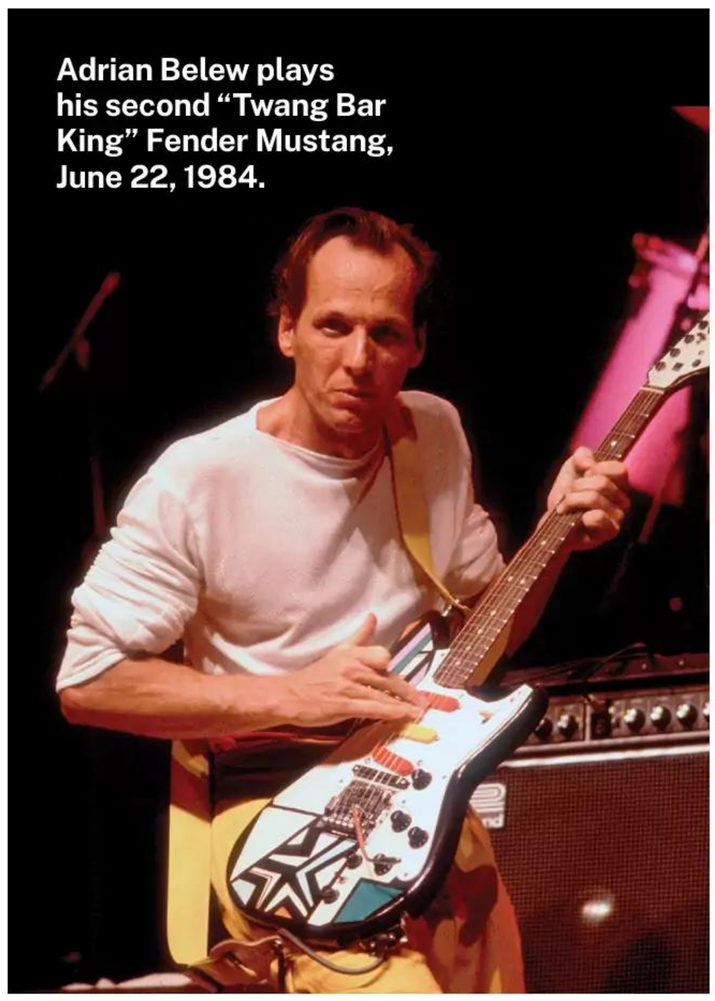
ADRIAN BELEW When I went to Robert and told him that I had engaged Steve Vai, I think that's when his ears really perked up. He said, "Well, Steve is the only guitar player I can think of who can really do this properly." And he gave us his full support.

How did that make you feel, Steve?

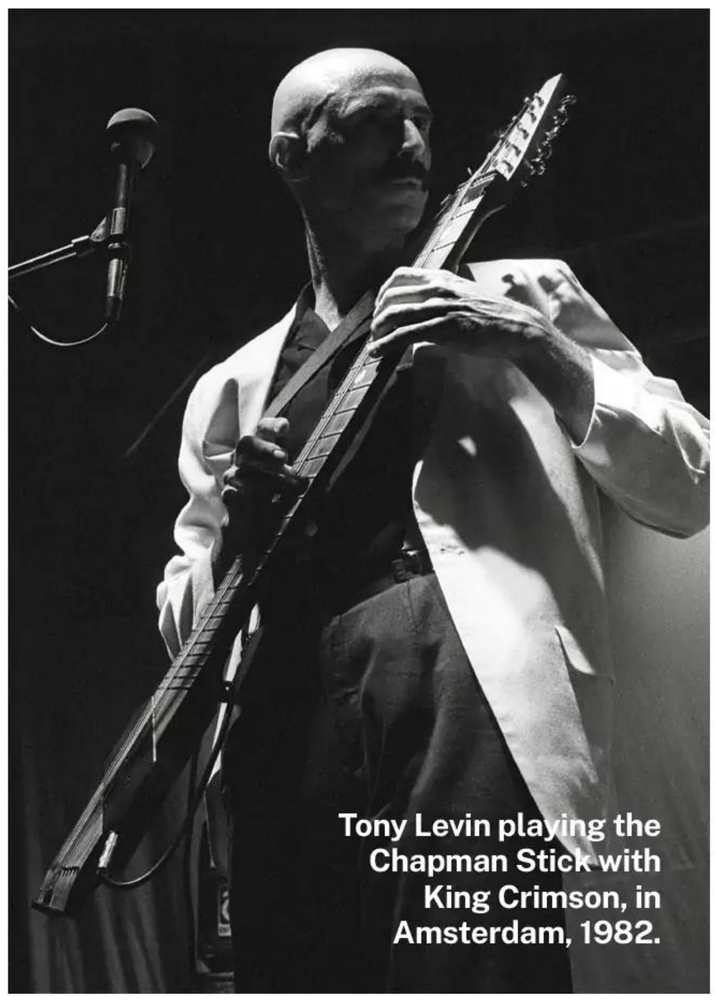
STEVE VAI Fortunately, I know Robert from G3 [*Fripp took part in two G3 tours alongside Vai and Joe Satriani, in 1997 and 2004*], and I've always revered him. I've actually kind of avoided him sometimes because there's such awe there. [*laughs*] But he was always a lot of fun. He would come out and join me on "For the Love of God" sometimes. He's so brilliant and creative, and he's also so open. During this process [*for Beat*], he sent me a video — he wrote out this incredible little scale and revealed to me some of his chordal secrets. And they were actually fresh and new to me, which is hard to find. He said, "This is how I did it. But you've gotta do what you want to do. And it should sound like you."

Eighties-era King Crimson music is incredibly complex and precise, but also poppy. It's funky and angular, but also slick and atmospheric. It's heavily layered and full of interlocking melodies, but also minimalist. And even 40 years later, it sounds so modern — post-modern even. What do you think was so exceptional about the character of King Crimson at that time?

BELEW You had four different people who had a lot to say and a lot to bring to the picture. And so it wasn't just one thing. I also think there were a few things going on: the uniqueness of the gamelan guitar style, which involved two players playing in sync, and then separating from each other and then coming back into sync — that was something that had not been heard.

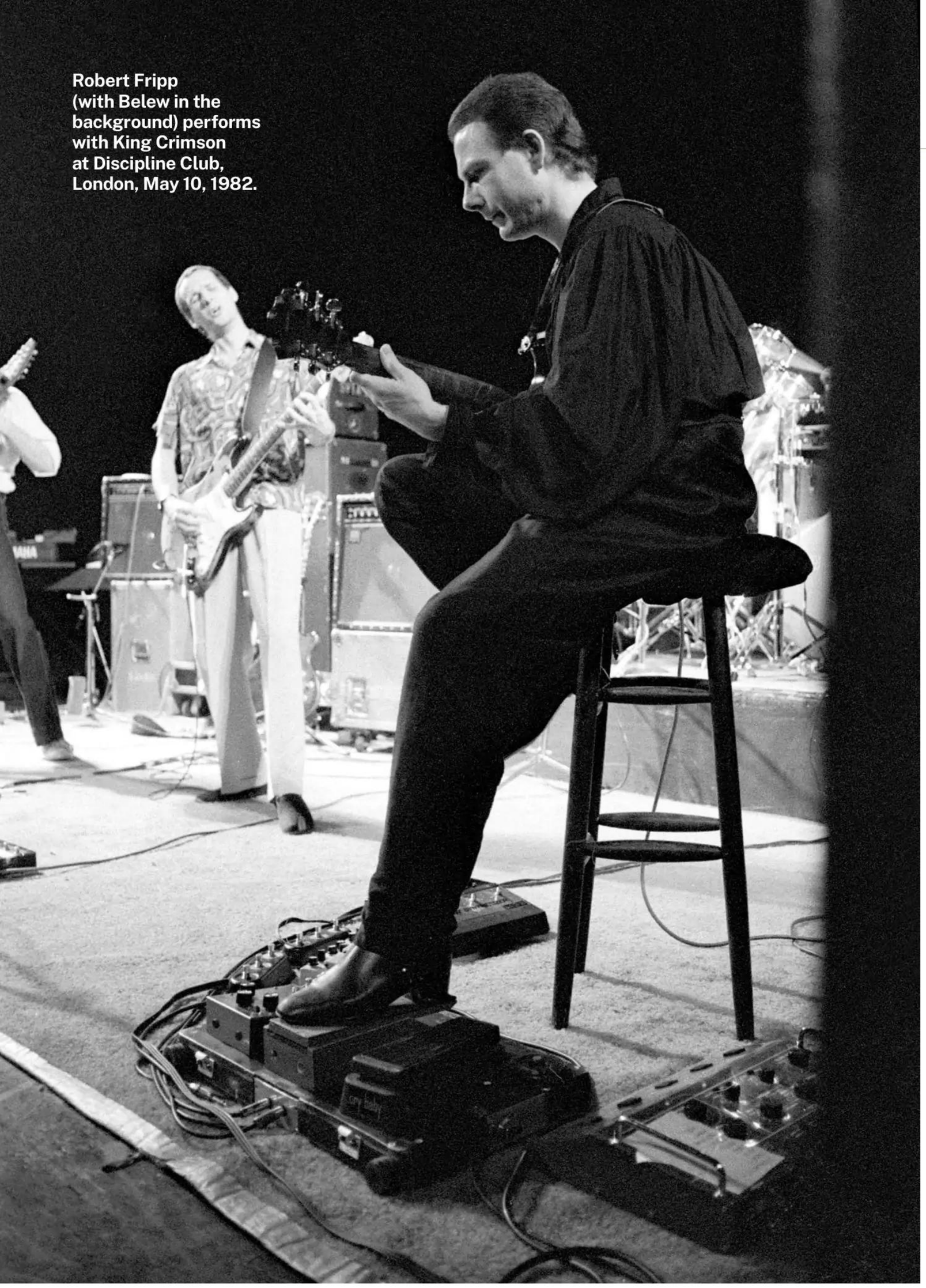


Adrian Belew plays his second "Twang Bar King" Fender Mustang, June 22, 1984.



Tony Levin playing the Chapman Stick with King Crimson, in Amsterdam, 1982.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (BELEW); ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS (LEVIN);



Robert Fripp (with Belew in the background) performs with King Crimson at Discipline Club, London, May 10, 1982.

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS

Plus, Robert and I both had new guitar synthesizers. No one was using guitar synthesizers much up to that point. And then Bill had his electronic drums, and Tony was playing the [*Chapman*] Stick. No one was doing these things.

VAI I first heard those records on the radio — there's songs from all of them that were hits, at least in Southern California, in the '80s — and there was nothing like them at the time. I *still* think there's nothing like them. When I heard "Elephant Talk" [*from* Discipline], I was like, Okay, I know what Adrian's doing, but boy, he's doing it so well. And then I'd listen closer and just marvel at how Adrian and Robert were able to take such intense complexities and make them sound so accessible and enjoyable. The songs move in ways that nothing else can unless you apply the techniques they were using. But it was also done in such a melodic way. They reinvented prog, in a sense.

Much of this music hinges on very rigorous interplay between the two guitars, with lines that are sometimes played in tandem and sometimes very deliberately played out of sync. Adrian, was it difficult for you to play this way with Robert when you first joined the band?

BELEW It was very difficult for me. And I had to adapt my playing to that style, because it was not at all what I do. It took me quite a while to be able to lock in with him. Robert told me I don't hold my pick correctly. Which is true. I never concentrated on that. I've never really tried to be a fast-picking guitar player. There are other things about the instrument that I preferred. So I had to rehearse with him a lot of hours, every day. You get it to the point where we call it being "in the body." That means you can do it without really having to think about it all the time.

Steve, you're the one who will be replicating Robert's "fast-picking" parts, which is no easy task. I'm thinking of things like "Frame by Frame," from *Discipline*, for one example. Was there anything that you found particularly challenging?

VAI Absolutely. But the thing about Robert's parts is not necessarily the complexity; it's the relentlessness. If you take something like "Frame by Frame," the riff itself is hard enough — you have to have a particular picking technique in order to be able to play it. But what makes it so excruciating is the relentlessness. It doesn't stop. It's fast and it's hard and incredibly difficult. The thing about Robert Fripp is, he runs very deep. He's a holistic player. He takes into account not only body posture and hand posture but also inner-being centering: the need for bulletproof attention. He is highly disciplined. It's the only way you could achieve the kinds of things he achieved on the guitar.

BELEW A song like "Discipline," it's so easy to get lost in that, because everyone's playing in different time signatures. And if you don't connect at the point where everyone changes, you have to go through the whole sequence again. And Robert would always be there with a grim look on his face, like, "How could you make a mistake?" [*laughs*]

VAI When the band is in four and you're in 13, and then you're dropping an eighth note here and there, and it doesn't let up, that requires a particular brain muscle. Lucky for me, I cut my teeth with Frank [*Zappa*]. So I have an understanding of those kinds of polymetric situations, and I enjoy them.

Let's talk gear. Adrian, in your early days with King Crimson you relied heavily on

your 1969 Fender Stratocaster [*see sidebar, page 56*]. By the time of *Three of a Perfect Pair* you were using a customized Fender Mustang.

BELEW Yes. Between *Discipline* and *Beat* I made the *Lone Rhino* record [*Belew's first solo effort, released in 1982*], and that was Strat territory still. And then between *Beat* and *Three of a Perfect Pair* I released *Twang Bar King* [*Belew's second solo album*]. That's also when I started to rely more heavily on synth sounds. And so I had a guitar with built-in synth stuff [*a heavily-modified Fender Mustang known as the Twang Bar King*]. It's very crude by today's measures — there's a big 25-pin D connector — but that was what we had then. There weren't a lot of things to choose from at that point.

You and Robert were also both using the Roland GR-300 guitar synth — brand-new technology at the time — which really colored the sound of the Crimson records. What led you to the instrument?

> "YOU HAVE TO BE BULLETPROOF TO PLAY THIS STUFF. BECAUSE WHEN YOU'RE RIDING THE RAZOR BLADE, YOU CAN'T SLIP"
>
> — STEVE VAI

BELEW I had, I think, the first one that came in the States. In late 1980, I went to Japan with Talking Heads, and there was no GR-300 out in America at that time. Roland were really friendly to me — Mr. [*Ikutaro*] Kakehashi, the man who invented the company, he just liked me personally and gave me a GR-300. I brought it back home, and within not that many months I was playing with Robert. Then I got one for Robert. So now we had this thing, and it instantly became a part of what we did together.

Another distinctive tonal element of those records is your use of the Roland JC-120 Jazz Chorus amp.

BELEW Yes. By the time I joined what would become King Crimson again, I think Robert had gotten a Roland Jazz Chorus too. We loved the idea that both of us could kind of match our tones, put the chorusing on, and then, when we played those gamelan lines together, you couldn't really tell who was playing what. It almost sounded like somebody playing with the strangest delay in the world on their guitar. What was interesting is we found that in the studio you can't have both people playing live with their choruses on, because they start sounding out of tune. So we turned one off and then put it on later.

Will you be using the JC-120 on this tour?

BELEW I really do want to try to do that. I have my original one, and

The Beat. (from left) Levin, Steve Vai, Belew and Danny Carey.

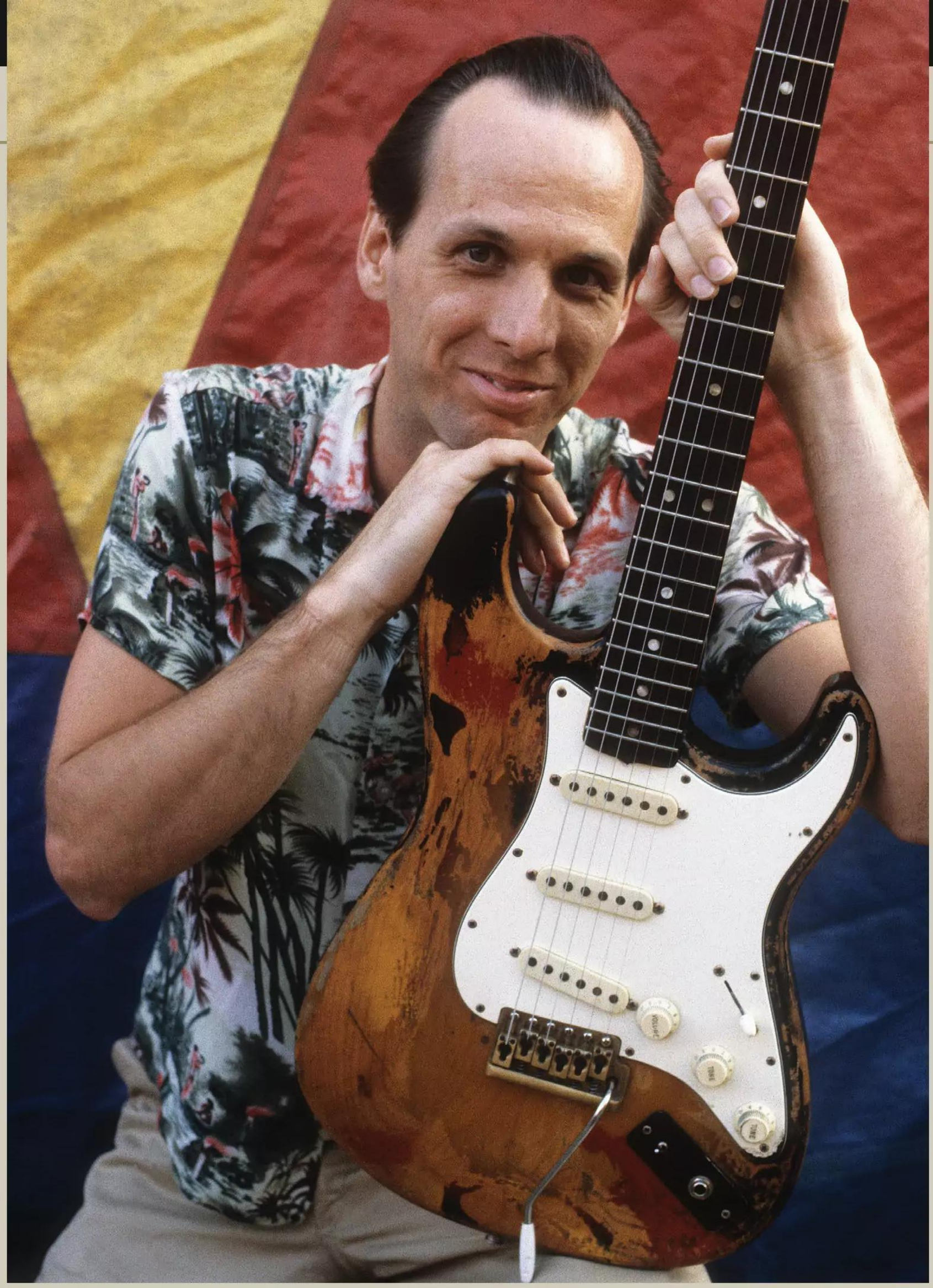
KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

King Crimson Mark II at Hotel New Otani Garden, Tokyo, December 1981. (from left) Fripp, Bill Bruford, Belew and Levin.

‘A REALLY UGLY STRAT HANGING ON THE WALL’

It wasn’t pretty, but Adrian Belew used his second-hand beat-to-hell Fender Strat to perform with everyone from Zappa and Bowie to Talking Heads and King Crimson.

BY ANDREW DALY



FROM HIS TIME with Frank Zappa through his work with David Bowie, Talking Heads and King Crimson, Adrian Belew could be spotted onstage with a battle-scarred sunburst-finish Fender Stratocaster. Given its history, that guitar may be one of the most storied Strats in the history of avant-garde rock. How it came to play such a vital role in Belew’s career is a tale in itself, one that began in the 1970s, when the guitarist was still a young unknown from Covington, Kentucky, who was suddenly dropped alongside Frank Zappa, an unflinching perfectionist guitar virtuoso.

As Belew reveals to *Guitar Player*, his Stratocaster was certainly not the prettiest or most expensive example — just one that he could afford. And he rode it all the way to his breakout success as one of the premier Strat-slingers in history. Here, the guitarist talks us through his history with the Strat.

How did you come to own your first Strat?

I was in a band and had been playing drums, but I was starting to play guitar again. I’d always wanted a Strat, so I bought one with a natural wood finish at [*Chuck Levin’s*] Washington Music Center [*in Maryland*]. I drove up from Nashville and bought it off the rack — the plainest, simplest, cheapest Stratocaster that I could buy.

This was the same Strat you went to California with when you auditioned for Frank Zappa?

It was. I took it to California and auditioned with Frank. After I got the job, I used it during our three-month rehearsal and then on a two-month tour of the United States. But that Strat never returned to my house; it was lost in the shuffle. It’s out there somewhere.

How did you go about replacing it?

At the time, I was living here in Nashville. I went down to a little music store, and in the back they had a kind of really ugly Strat hanging on the wall. It was a brown sunburst, and it didn’t have a case. But that was okay, because with all the travel we were doing, I knew I would get a serious road case for it. I paid $285 for the Strat.

And that’s the guitar you ended up recording with while with Frank and beyond?

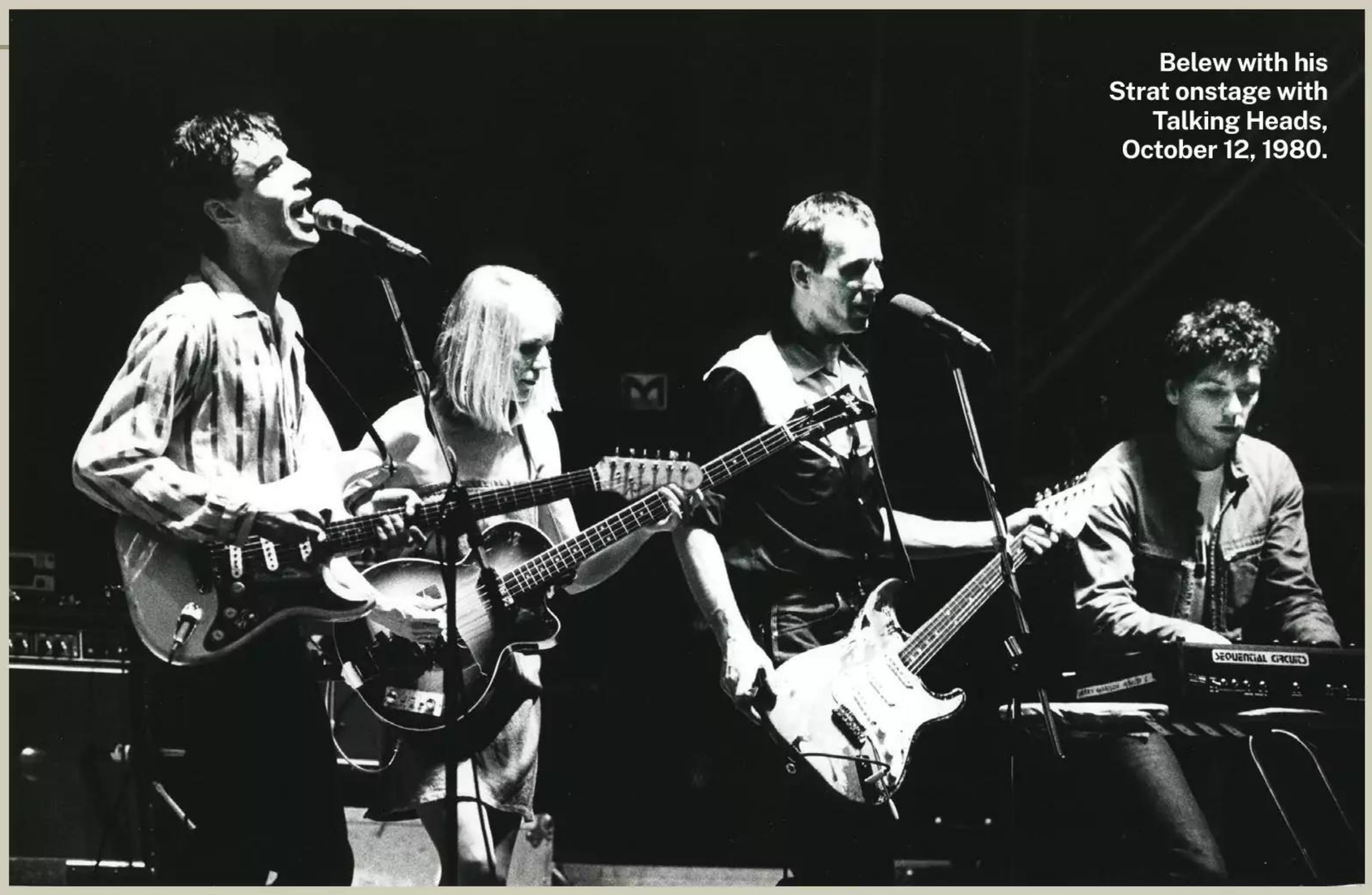
Yes. That’s the Stratocaster that I played on Frank’s records. And then I played it on David Bowie’s *Lodger* and toured the world with David with it. Then

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS

I played it with the Talking Heads, did the *Remain in Light* album with them, the Tom Tom Club album [*with Talking Heads drummer and bassist Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth*], Jerry Harrison's solo debut, and so many other things.

Was that the same Strat you used in the 1980s with King Crimson?
It was. I played it with King Crimson on *Discipline*, and on my first solo record [Lone Rhino]. And then I finally switched to a guitar synthesizer. So that Strat has an amazing amount of history. It's on a lot of records, and it only cost me 285 bucks!

What were some of the mods you performed on it?
When I first had one in the late '70s, I put a [*Alembic*] Strat-o-blaster [*preamp*] in it. That really helped, but before that I just plugged the guitar straight into the amp. That's the Stratocaster sound. It doesn't have everything in terms of richness, overtones and sparkle... Well, maybe it does. It would depend heavily on the amp. But I've always gone into a compressor first, and that helped bring those sparkly notes and added sustain.



Belew with his Strat onstage with Talking Heads, October 12, 1980.

> "THAT STRAT HAS AN AMAZING AMOUNT OF HISTORY. IT'S ON A LOT OF RECORDS, AND IT ONLY COST ME 285 BUCKS"

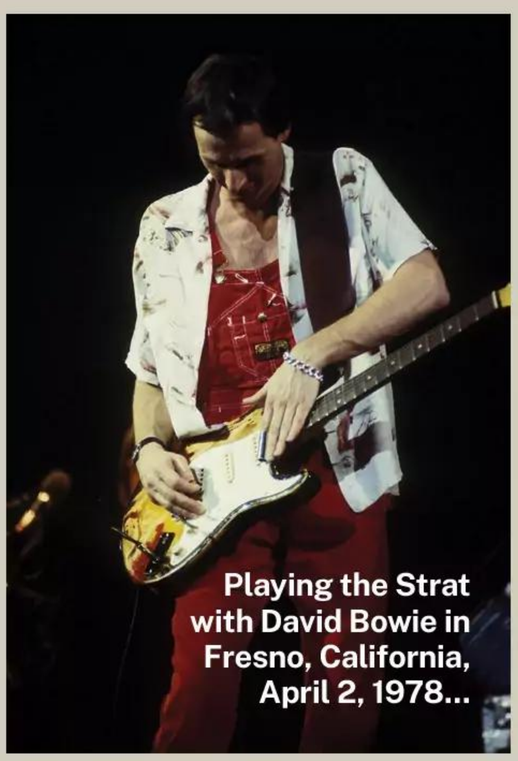
You found two winning Strats in succession in the 1970s. Is that indicative of the quality of older Stratocasters?
If you want to go right into the piece of wood called a Stratocaster, they're different. You might pick one up and it seems flat sounding, but then you might try the one next to it and decide that it's the one you should buy. I don't know why that is. They're made to the exact same tolerances, but they're not the same.

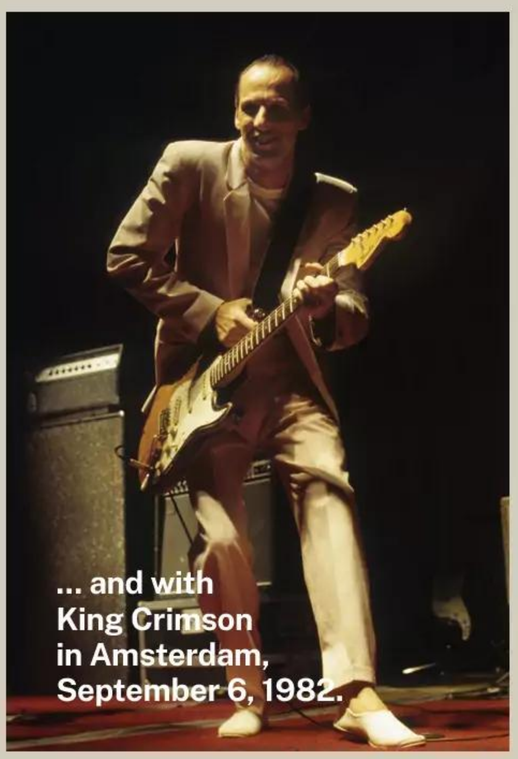
What's the key to finding the right one?
I think this is true for any guitar: It's not about the sound coming off the guitar alone; it's about how it feels under your fingers. Sometimes you pick up a guitar and it just feels right. I think that's the Stratocaster you should have. For me, a Stratocaster is a fabulous tool. I think Leo Fender got it absolutely right, but there are other ways to go about it now and other improvements that have been made.

Do you prefer the depth of rosewood necks or the spank of maple?
I always loved rosewood necks. Recently I had some guitars made for the Talking Heads shows that I've been doing [Remain in Light] and I wanted to go back to Strats and get whatever was the best now. For example, I found a wonderful new tremolo to put on, and I went with a maple neck, thinking it was brighter for me. But I made a mistake; I think I'm a rosewood guy. I love the guitars, but if I had the chance to do it over again, I would have stuck with the rosewood.

You mentioned amps a moment ago. You've long championed the Roland Jazz Chorus. Is that what you'd choose to pair with a Strat, especially since it's a great pedal platform?
Oh, gee. A Strat sounds great through a Fender amp. Now, with pedals... I don't know. Like I said, I don't play guitar — except acoustic guitar — without first putting it through a compressor. But that's just me. Some people don't like that sound. It seems to make the guitar hum a little better, and the notes have more sustain. I've always liked that.

But in general, Strats are really something. Once you have a good one and a good amp, you have 90 percent of the battle won. From there, it's down to personal taste.


Playing the Strat with David Bowie in Fresno, California, April 2, 1978...


... and with King Crimson in Amsterdam, September 6, 1982.

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES (HEADS); LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (1978); ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS (1982)

eventually I bought a second one, which I also still have. I'm not sure I can get someone to figure out the electronics part of this for me, but what I would really like to do is play through my normal set of amps, and when I want what I need from the Roland, I can just tap a button and have it switch to that. So sometimes I'll go through the Axe-Fx area of my gear and sometimes I'll go through the Roland. That's what I'm hoping to do. Because there are things that I can do with the Jazz Chorus that will make it sound so much more like it did in the '80s and would be very difficult to do otherwise. So I'm trying to figure all that out.

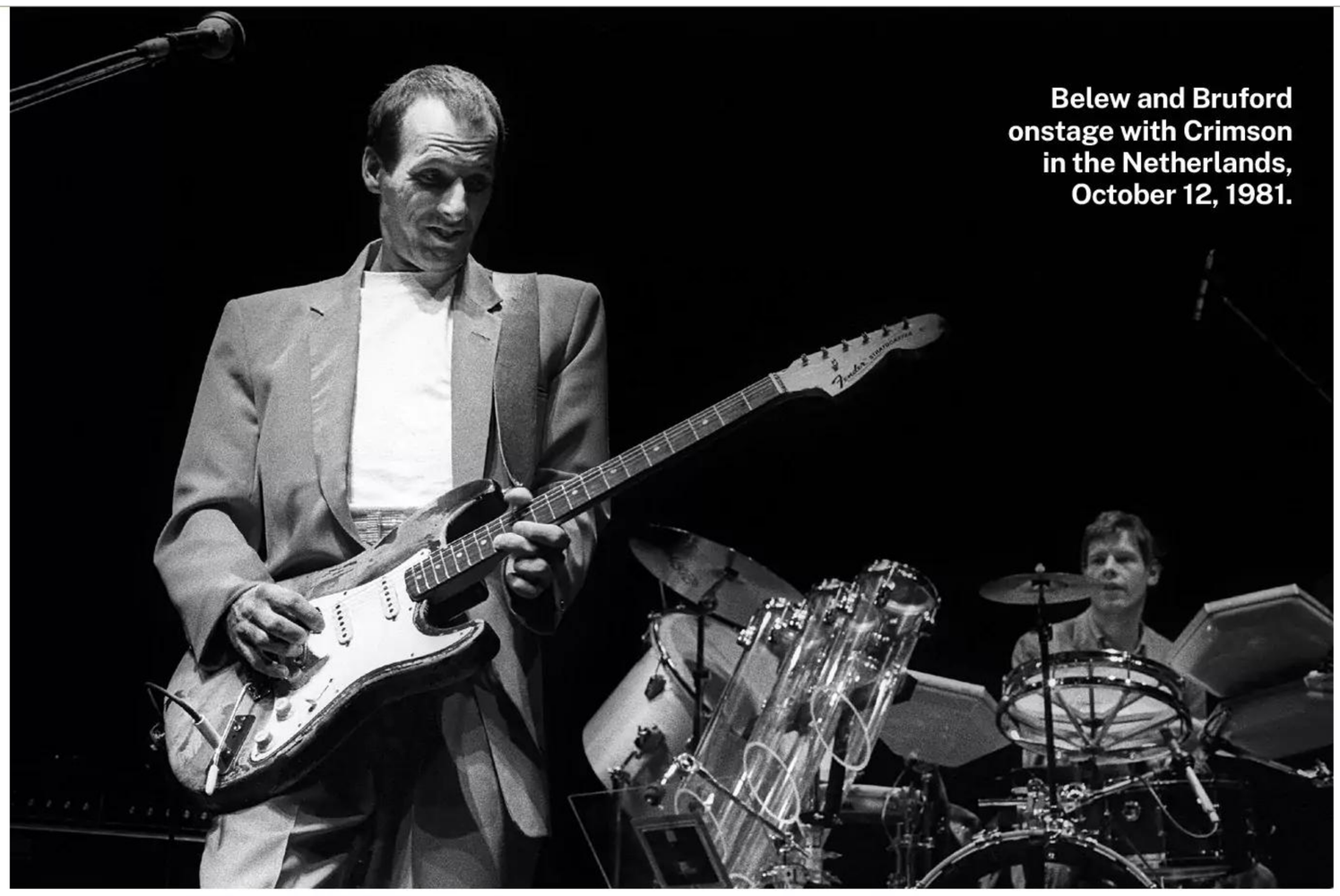
Steve, how are you approaching your gear for this tour?

VAI When it comes to the guitar synth, I want to use those iconic original sounds, but my goal in this is, how can I also bring something contemporary? We did some research into the transmigration of patches from early gear, and there are some real challenges there. Ibanez built two guitars for the tour, and they're equipped with the appropriate pickups and everything for the synths. And Roland is being unbelievably supportive and helpful and working with us. I have one of the guitars, and just last night, for the first time, I was playing through the different synthesizers.

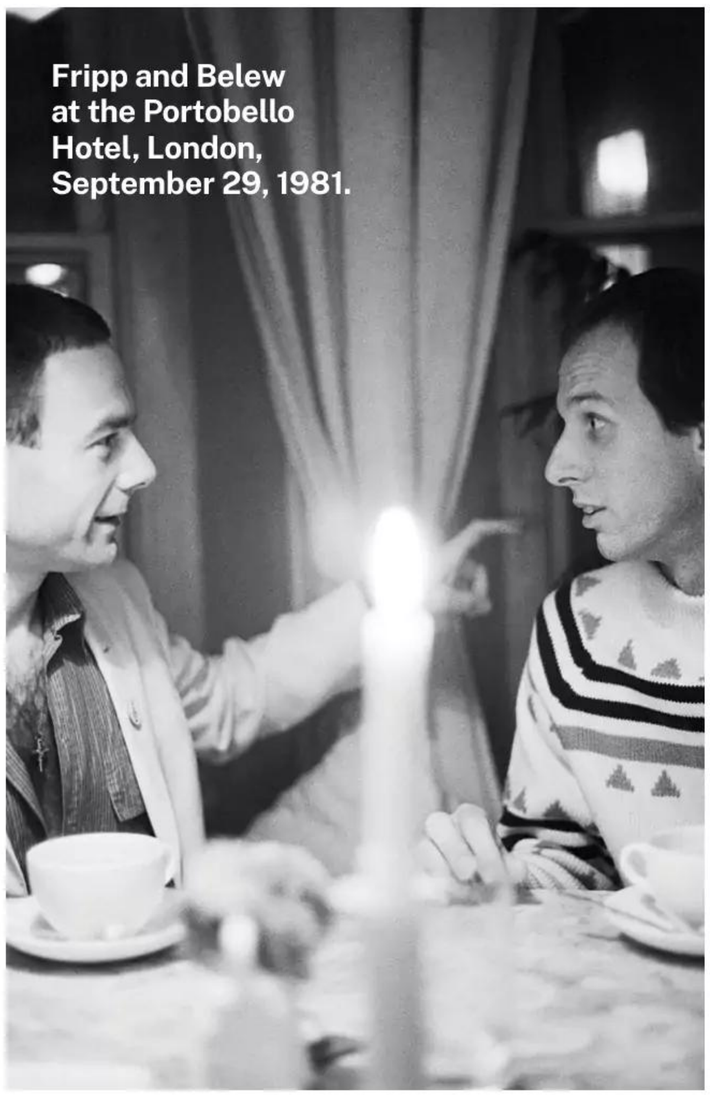
What are you thinking for amps?

VAI The first thing that came to mind was to keep it "in the box" — meaning, stay with the Axe-Fx III and make that my engine. Because it can do anything, and it has that King Crimson tonality in the sense that it's a piece of digital modeling gear. But I've never been a big fan of having my stage rig supported on modeling. It never seems to stand up to the gauntlet of audio bombast that's happening onstage.

So I'm playing with that idea, but I'm not sure. My instincts keep pulling me back to my Synergy [*Amplification*] rig, which is very expandable. I can do all that stuff with it, and I can have some stuff that's modeled. The big answer will come when I get together with Adrian and I see what his tone is. Because we have to match them. They have to be organically entwined, because that's part of the charm of this music.



Belew and Bruford onstage with Crimson in the Netherlands, October 12, 1981.



Fripp and Belew at the Portobello Hotel, London, September 29, 1981.

King Crimson fans are obviously elated that you're bringing this music back to life. But have you thought about how Robert will react when he hears how you interpret these records?

VAI It's hard to say, but he's been so encouraging to me. He would say, "It should sound like you, because if I'm sitting in the audience, I want to see Steve Vai going crazy." And that's nice.

BELEW I know we're going to do this music justice, and that's really all that I think he would care about. That's why I waited five years to get these particular players together. I knew I had to have a band playing this stuff that's right up there with the band that originated it, in terms of intent, ability, capabilities... all of it. And I think we have it.

And so I'm not worried about what Robert will think. Steve's talked to Robert in person, and I've talked to him on the phone a few times. And Robert loves Steve. He really admires his ability and knows what he can do. Robert said, "I'll be in the front row." [*laughs*]

Now that you guys have tackled this project, is there any chance we'll hear original music from Beat?

BELEW Well, there was a moment early on where Steve and I were in his studio, and he said, "You know, I've got this little thing here." And he started playing a couple of chord changes. And I said, "So you're saying there's a possibility..." [*laughs*] But we really haven't broached that subject, because there's so much work to be done.

VAI As far as new music goes, these are the type of guys that I would adore being in a creative ensemble with. So if the stars align and it makes sense, I'm not opposed to looking into it.

BELEW Will it happen? I don't know. I think if it doesn't happen, then that's what's meant to be. And if it does happen, it will be amazing.

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS (LONDON); ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS (NETHERLANDS)

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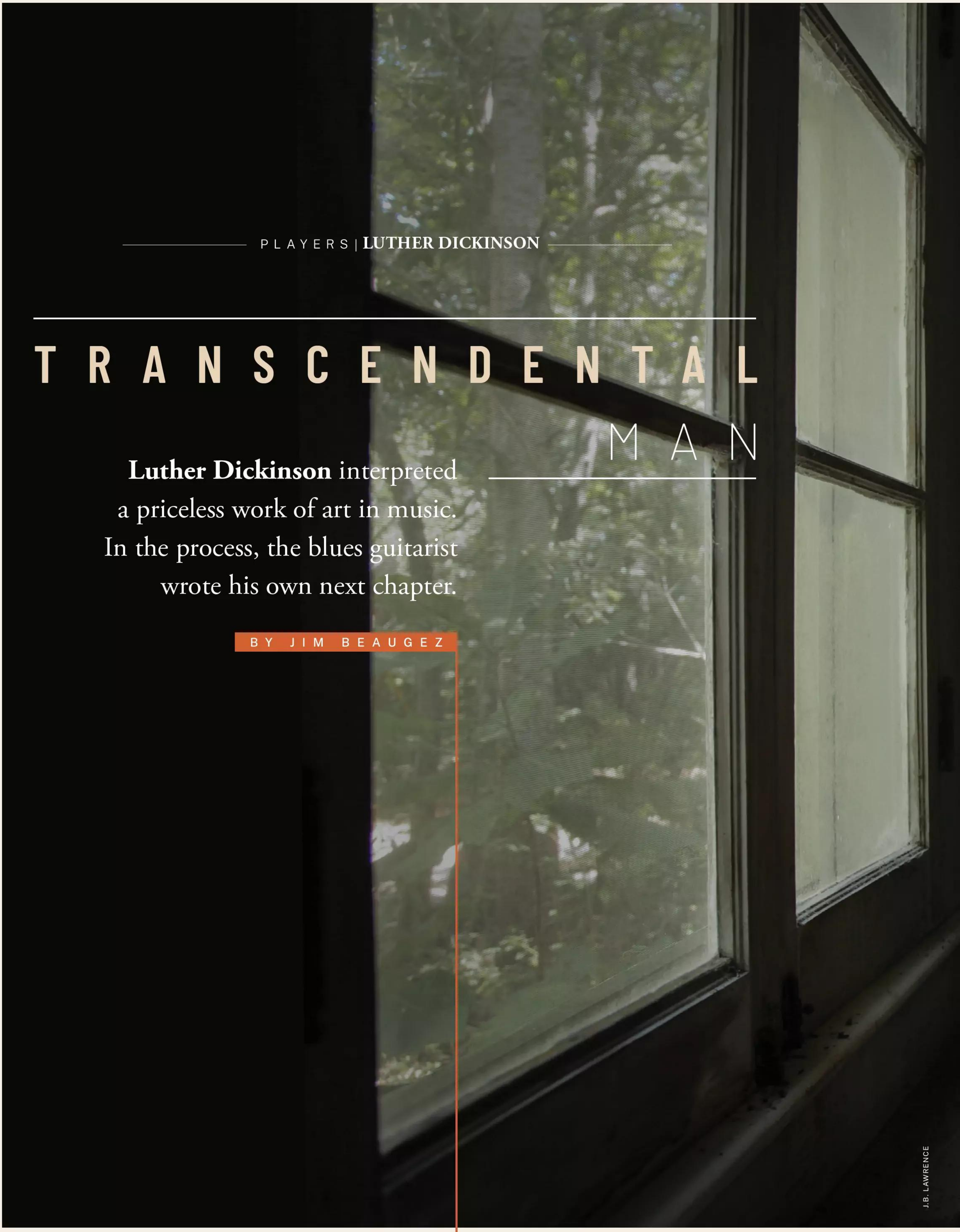
TRANSCENDENTAL MAN

Luther Dickinson interpreted a priceless work of art in music. In the process, the blues guitarist wrote his own next chapter.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ



J.B. LAWRENCE

Luther Dickinson has made a career of taking musical left turns without ending up where he began, spiraling up toward new horizons instead of turning back onto worn paths, as so many artists with a catalog as deep as his do.

BUT WHILE THE prolific North Mississippi Allstars co-founder, former Black Crowes lead guitarist and side-project extraordinaire remains rooted in the hill country blues of Mississippi's northernmost counties, his latest project amounts to a curveball even for his own adventurous audience.

The new album, *Mississippi Murals* (Spaceflight), is a live recording of largely improvised interstellar funk, jazz and blues, inspired by a series of 70-year-old murals created by Walter Inglis Anderson known as *The Seven Climates of Ocean Springs*. Released in September, *Mississippi Murals* is credited to Dickinson and a trio of collaborators: keyboardist John Medeski, drummer Johnny Vidacovich and bassist Dominic Davis.

"As soon as I heard the ambience of the room and felt the vibe of the murals, I knew I had to play music in that room and conjure up the sounds the art evokes in my imagination," Dickinson says of his first encounter with Anderson's artwork. "The experience sent me on a conceptual journey of composing and drawing diagrams that we now revisit and reinterpret year after year, resonating in the space that inspired the music."

Anderson, who died in 1965, was an eccentric master of the visual arts, renowned for his watercolors, block prints, pottery designs and murals, as well as his fascination with the natural world. From his home base of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, he rode his bicycle through Texas and Florida and hitchhiked through China, chronicling his adventures in writings recently published as *The Bicycle Logs of Walter Anderson*.

His most consistent endeavor, though — and the one that most informed the murals — were his sojourns on nearby Horn Island, an offshore wilderness Anderson considered his personal Eden. The artist visited it regularly for two decades, rowing 12 miles across the Mississippi Sound in a skiff that doubled as his shelter, and painting the native flora and fauna in his inimitable style.

In the 1950s, Anderson spent two years filling the walls of the Ocean Springs Community Center

PREVIOUS PAGE: Luther Dickinson sits in the cottage of artist Walter Inglis Anderson, in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

J.B. LAWRENCE

ABOVE: These photos and others here are from the 2017 performance at the Ocean Springs Community Center featured on *Mississippi Murals*.

LEFT: Dickinson at the community center. His fascination with Anderson's work began in childhood.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY THE WALTER ANDERSON MUSEUM OF ART, PHOTOGRAPHS BY TREVOR REID

with a 3,000-square-foot, floor-to-ceiling mural that tells the history of the coastal town. As the murals wrap around the room, they depict the region's Native American tribes, historical events such as its 1699 settlement by French explorers, and Anderson's extensive interpretation of mankind's relationship to the natural world.

Much of the *Seven Climates of Ocean Springs* fills the remainder of the space, its colors exploding across the walls in a dynamic exposition of the harmony between nature and art, linking celestial bodies to the seasons while swirling energy draws in fish and birds from sea and sky.

When he first saw the murals, Dickinson heard the hardy, wide-canopied live oak trees as bold major chords; his final composition sketches deal in arpeggios of chord extensions and superimpositions in rhythmic cycles. Diminished and augmented variations represented the limbs, and melodies danced lithely on fluttering leaves before rising into the spiral motifs that repeat across the walls.

"Roots, tree trunks, branches, leaves, the veins on a leaf, and seeds spiriting new trees — that I can hear but can't yet play," he says. "I've been practicing arpeggios and odd groupings of fives and sevens to further express this in the future."

Although Dickinson says he doesn't experience synesthesia, a sensory crossover that can give some people the ability to see visuals representing sounds they hear, Anderson did. His youngest son, John Anderson, says music was a largely unrecognized inspiration in the direction his father took as an artist and human — isolating himself from the "dominant mode" of life on the island as a way to live in a more natural world.

"Music was extremely important to him," Anderson says. "One of the most important events in his life was triggered by an outdoor music festival in Baltimore, when he canoed back home down the Mississippi River and caught malaria. Those experiences, with the complication of a fever on top of it, caused a complete transformation of his life. After that, he no longer completely fit back into the dominant mode. That was the turning point."

> "I KNEW I HAD TO PLAY MUSIC IN THAT ROOM AND CONJURE UP THE SOUNDS THE ART EVOKES IN MY IMAGINATION"

Dickinson's fascination with Anderson and his work began in childhood. His mother, Mary

BUM RUSH

Luther Dickson and J.D. Simo turn in booty-shaking blues workouts on their first-ever collaboration, *Do the Rump*.

BY ANDREW DALY

Dickinson, Simo and Abarashoff have made improvisation key to their approach.

CHICAGO NATIVE J.D SIMO and Memphis-bred Luther Dickinson each harbor an affinity for the blues. At 39 and 51, respectively, they've been banging around for years but had never crossed paths. That all changed pre-COVID, when Dickinson dropped Simo a line via Instagram, launching a slow but steady trudge toward the duo's new debut, *Do the Rump*. It was apparently a match made in heaven. "We just fit," Simo tells *Guitar Player*. "We speak the same roots language but phrase completely differently."

"We have similar tastes and aesthetics," Dickinson concurs, "but express ourselves differently through our guitars. Our tones, phrasing, and note choices are different, but they complement each other.

That all becomes apparent on *Do the Rump*, an album that's brimming with the classic blues cuts that have inspired the two men. They include faithful covers of Bobby Charles' 1972 tune "Street People," Junior Kimbrough's "Lonesome Road," John Lee Hooker's "Serves Me Right to Suffer," R.L. Burnside's "Peaches" and J.J. Cale's "Right Down There." But alongside those tunes are radical reinventions of Kimbrough's "Come and Go With Me," and a fusion of his "Do the Rump" and McDowell's "Louise," presented here as "Do the Rump Louise."

> "I FEEL LIKE I'VE FINALLY FOUND A PARTNER. WE COULD DO ANYTHING TOGETHER"
>
> — DICKINSON

Simo and Dickinson are aided and abetted on the album by drummer Adam Abarashoff, whose background in Afrobeat and jazz helped push the music into unexpected directions. "Adam is a true force of nature," Simo says. "No one can do what he does. He'd start some insane groove and we'd find something that fit over it. Then we'd cut it really fast."

"Every song starts with Adam," Dickinson adds. "His feel, his aesthetic and his instinct of how to interpret the idea at hand is vital. Adam sets the mood and groove as well as curates what becomes a song. If he doesn't dig it and feel inspired, we bail and move on."

With such a closely aligned trio, improvisation came easily and proved key to their approach. "We recorded long and loose, with nothing planned out, knowing we would edit later," Dickinson explains.

As for the two guitarists, they found it easy to carve out their own space without stepping on one another. "We never played over each other or played the same thing," Simo says. "That's rare, especially when you share similar influences."

It's so rare, in fact, that Dickinson — a well-traveled guitarist and producer with credits that include John Hiatt, Mavis Staples, Robert Plant and Patty Griffin — is intent on continuing their collaboration. "The spontaneous chemistry we have is exciting and unique to my experience," he says. "I feel like I've finally found a partner. We could do anything together. We would love to back up other artists together or make more records together."

For gear, Simo chose his favorite amp — a Headstrong Lil King Reverb — and main guitar, a Danocaster. "It's a Telecaster-style with an old '64 PAF humbucker out of a [*Gibson*] ES-345 in the neck and a rewound '56 Telecaster pickup in the bridge," he says. "I also used my '52 Gibson ES-5 and my Wade Cofer Baritone. Luther played that some, too."

Dickinson, for his part, stayed true to his usual setup. "Normally, all I need is a couple of tube amps: one dirty amp, and one clean with tremolo and reverb," he explains. "I love Category 5 Amps. I usually use a stereo delay with tap tempo to split the amps, but for this project, I went with a mono delay and added fuzz. My friend, Spencer Ross of SRossFX, hooked me up with his Hill Country Fuzz pedal, and it was perfect in name and response."

The end result is an unmistakable sound that resonates with vintage undertones and hardcore blues. "I haven't cranked up a fuzz in a long time," Dickinson says. "This collaboration pushed me to go places I haven't been for a while, or have never been."

ZAC CHILDS

J.B. LAWRENCE

Dickinson says the songs he's written are "mainly inspired by Walter's love of nature and how it relates to music."

Lindsay Dickinson, had been a fan since attending a showing of Anderson's artwork at the Brooks Museum of Art in Memphis, held shortly after his death from cancer. When Luther was growing up, he noticed the artwork hanging around the house, and after his father, the producer and musician Jim Dickinson, passed away in 2009, he began helping his mother cross off items on her bucket list. Among them was a long-awaited visit to the place that inspired Anderson, and a stop at the Walter Anderson Museum of Art, which connects to the center housing the murals.

"This group of songs is mainly inspired by Walter's love of nature and how it relates to music," he explains. "His use of spirals to represent a hurricane, and yin–yang symbolism expressing the contrast of day and night, positive and negative, and spring and summer spoke directly to my pre-existing tritone fascination."

Dickinson left Ocean Springs borderline obsessed with finding harmonious ways to bridge the tritones, spending nights at the piano and guitar at home and on the road as he worked out the riddle of expressing the murals in music.

He and Medeski were touring in Australia as Dickinson wrestled with the concept and wrote the music they would eventually play together. Like a frenzied mad scientist, he drew geometric chord charts and diagrams — artifacts of the process, he notes — and introduced Medeski to pictures of the murals in a book he carried.

"I showed Medeski the panel that contained the alligator, pointing out the pattern of the scales," he says. "Medeski said, 'Oh that's easy, just play the alligator.' I thought, Easier said than done, Medeski!" But he would soon unlock the keys to connecting the seven climates in his own way.

Dickinson traces his fascination with tritones to the mid '90s, when he and his former band D.D.T. — a precursor to the North Mississippi Allstars that also featured his brother, the drummer and multi-instrumentalist Cody Dickinson — backed fusion shredder Shawn Lane. He designated C major and its tritone, F♯ major, to represent the yin and yang and light-and-dark themes of the murals, he says. He also concentrated on the E minor and B♭ minor tritone group.

"Focusing on the keys expressed my love of how some keys are inherently natural on different instruments," he says. "For one example, the keys G and C major and their relative minors, E minor and A minor, are laid out in a very natural and powerful way on the guitar and piano, utilizing the white keys of the piano and the first-position chords and open strings of the guitar.

"If you tune a guitar down a half step, the open strings correlate to the black keys of the piano," he continues. "The elementary fingering of G major

"MEDESKI SAID, 'OH THAT'S EASY, JUST PLAY THE ALLIGATOR.' I THOUGHT, EASIER SAID THAN DONE, MEDESKI!"

and E minor on a guitar — tuned down a half step — becomes F♯ major and E♭ minor on the piano, which is comically inherent on the piano. I literally used the white and black keys of the piano to represent day and night, light and dark."

Matching the mural work for work, *Mississippi Murals* features seven loosely structured songs played by a lineup of musicians Dickinson curated specifically for their ability to play within the concept of ensemble improvisation, guided only by the chord charts and time signature suggestions. The chord movements inform the melodies, and a big part of why it all works comes down to personal chemistry among the players.

"We had all played together before in different configurations, and the chemistry was perfect," he says. "We were set up on the wooden floor of this great-sounding room, surrounded by these paintings, sunshine beaming in the windows, with the audience behind us. This group could toss the music around like a ball as opposed to soloists taking turns."

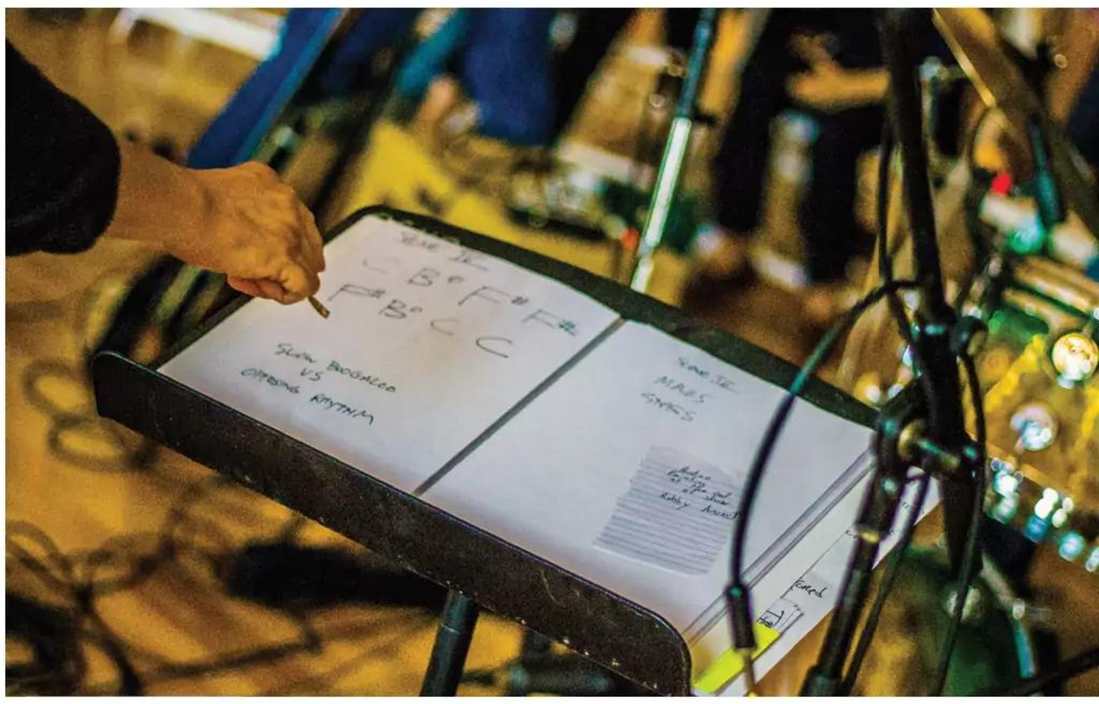
Bassist Dominic Davis, on loan from his day gig with Jack White, had previously played with Dickinson in the North Mississippi Allstars, while Medeski and Dickinson collaborated on projects like *The Word*, an instrumental gospel record. Vidacovich, a New Orleans funk lifer, often invited Dickinson to sit in with him and George Porter Jr. of the Meters at the Maple Leaf Bar in the city's Carrollton neighborhood, developing an unspoken language that helped Dickinson improvise his guitar lines.

"I could have never navigated the Phil Lesh and Friends improvisational territory without what I learned from Vidacovich and Porter," he says. "What they taught me on that hallowed bandstand served me as well as what I learned recording in Memphis, touring with R.L. Burnside, or playing guitar on Otha Turner's front porch.

"I would come down there with set lists and chord charts so we could play a show. But not only did they

"There is a shared intention to make music that transcends and embraces," Dickinson says.

TREVOR REID (VIDAKOVICH); J.B. LAWRENCE (DICKINSON)



The quartet on the 2017 recording — (from opposite left) drummer Johnny Vidacovich, bassist Dominic Davis and keyboardist John Medeski — dove in without so much as a rehearsal.

IMAGES PROVIDED BY THE WALTER ANDERSON MUSEUM OF ART, PHOTOGRAPHS BY TREVOR REID

not want to have a set list, they didn't want to even play songs," he reveals. "They taught me how to improvise all night and strive to keep it interesting. The New Orleans musicians call it 'rollin.'"

In the performance captured on *Mississippi Murals*, recorded in 2017 at the second reading of Dickinson's charts — which has become an annual event as he surrounds himself with an evolving cast of players — the quartet dove into the project without so much as a rehearsal.

Dickinson's jazzy chording on "Venus — Inherent 69," brings an early Allman Brothers vibe to the interstellar passages that follow, while his soloing resolves into Medeski's majestic piano figures on "Either/Or." The funk odyssey "Speaking in Tongues" comes on like a classic Meters tune, with Vidacovich's percussion carrying the groove under blasting organ vamps and Dickinson's Leo Nocentelli–informed single-note riffs.

"In searching for my own ways to bridge the tritones — not to mention, ways to comprehensively make my way through the 12 tones in the cycle of fifths, not just getting halfway and then circling back — I was thrilled to find augmented chords can serve as bridges or links to the tritones."

The song "Uranus (Herschel) — Demented Augminished," for example, transposes a simple blues progression four times. By shifting the inversion of the augmented V chord, he guides listeners to a new key a minor third up. "Do that four times from C to E♭ to G♭ to A, and you're back where you started, in C," he notes. "That was my favorite device I discovered for embracing all 12 tones."

When the time came to play Herschel the alligator, Dickinson was curious to see exactly what Medeski would do. "Of course, it was perfect," he says. "He held the last augmented chord of the song and went hard whole tone, evoking the patterns of the scaly gator perfectly."

Despite the esoteric process of composition, as well as the rigorous intellectual preparations he made for the supporting musicians, on the day of the show Dickinson reached for familiar tools, taking up a road-dog Gibson ES-Les Paul, a Dunlop slide, a delay pedal, and a black-panel Fender amp with reverb and tremolo.

"All the fascination, preparation and conceptualizing led up to just another night on the bandstand," he explains. At that point, he was trying to be fully in the moment, listening to the other musicians and endeavoring to create a special moment and then extend it as long as possible.

"I hope the music resonates in a way that you can feel there is more to it than just a group of folks improvising on a group of songs," he says. "There is a shared intention to make music that transcends and embraces." ◧

David Lindley photographed in Los Angeles, 1986

AARON RAPOPORT/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

MASTER OF HIS OWN JOURNEY

For more than 50 years, **David Lindley** graced albums and concert stages with his singular talent on a vast range of stringed instruments. In this ***Guitar Player*** exclusive, his musical friends — including Jackson Browne, Ry Cooder and Bonnie Raitt — pay tribute to an original.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

DAVID LINDLEY WAS the epitome of a musician's musician, not only for his comprehensive skills but also for his infectious personality. Lindley was best known as the ultimate sidekick, with crazy credits ranging from Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton to John Hiatt, James Taylor and Jackson Browne. His melodic lap steel and signature searing tone totally transformed Browne's sound in the '70s, so much that Lindley was practically a second lead voice in his band. "Running on Empty" and "Stay" wouldn't likely be the classic rock staples they've become without Lindley's presence. (That's him singing the impossibly high falsetto chorus on the latter track from the *Running on Empty* album.)

Lindley, who died of complications from Long COVID on March 3, 2023, founded his pioneering world-fusion band El Rayo-X in 1981, and secured Browne to produce their eponymous first album that same year. El Rayo-X received much critical acclaim, respectable commercial success and opened new avenues for Lindley. Along with George Harrison, he brought melodic slide playing to music lovers around the globe, proving its worth beyond the blues.

Organized by Wally Ingram and Papa Mali (far right), the second annual David Lindley tribute took place in New Orleans last May.

JIMMY LESLIE

As a musician Lindley embraced playing second fiddle, figuratively and literally. He could play practically anything with strings from anywhere in the world, and he was a master of folk music vernacular. His virtuosity made him the perfect foil for the likes of Ry Cooder, Leo Kottke and Henry Kaiser as well as drummer/percussionist Wally Ingram, with whom he toured and recorded extensively.

Lindley was highly inspirational to some of the planet's premier players. He

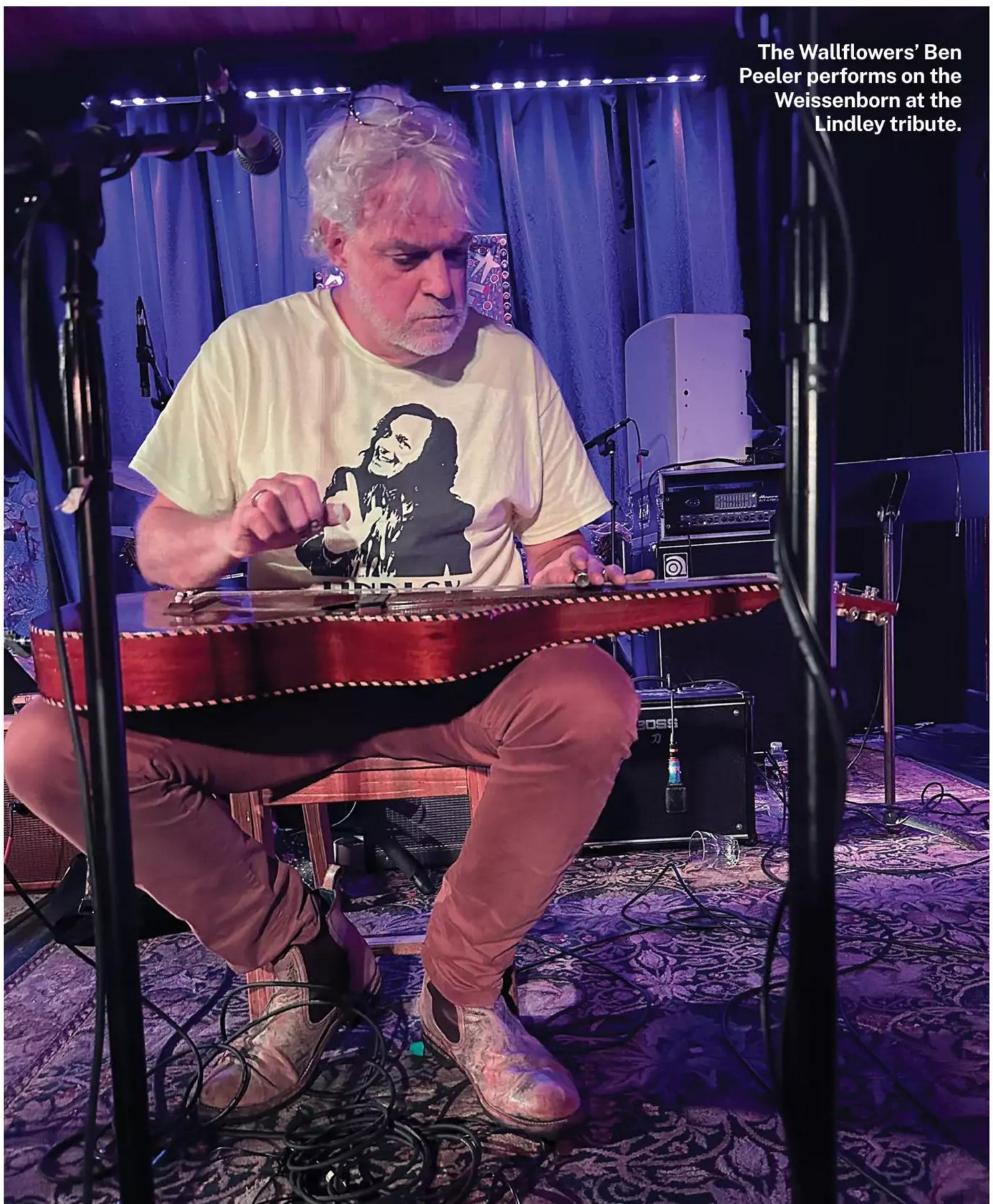
lived near the fabled Folk Music Center in Claremont, California — the music store and museum founded by Leonard and Ellen Harper — and his playing there provoked a young Ben Harper, who practically grew up in the family music store, to take up the Weissenborn Hawaiian lap slide. Harper eventually went electric and bought one of Lindley's coveted Dumble amps. The Overdrive Special he always has onstage might be the exact one that Lindley used on his signature El Rayo-X recording, "Mercury Blues," considered by many to be the wickedest slide tone ever put to tape. Sonny Landreth had his tonal epiphany after hearing Lindley as well. He and Harper get about as close to the Lindley tone as anyone.

Guitar Player Presents teamed up with Ingram and cosmic blues guru Papa Mali this past May during the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival at the club Chickie Wah Wah to help promote a Lindley tribute that's become an annual theme at Papa Mali's Birthday Bash. A parade of Lindley lovers brought his diverse catalog to life. They included Alvin Youngblood Hart, the Wallflowers' Ben Peeler, the Revivalists' Ed Williams, Texas blues guitarist Carolyn Wonderland, Layla Musselwhite, Lindley student Kota Kato, the Iguanas, Jeff Plankenhorn and Marc Stone.

That event, in turn, greased the wheels for this print tribute. I put out a few feelers for comments, and the next day the phone rang from an unlisted number. I answered and a gruff voice said, "Hi, this is Ry Cooder." The stars had aligned and would eventually bring forward a host of Lindley's friends — including Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Sonny Landreth and Harper — to share their memories with us.

"HE WAS NEVER A PRISONER OF SOMEONE ELSE'S IDEA. HE ALWAYS MADE IT HIS OWN"

— JACKSON BROWNE



The Wallflowers' Ben Peeler performs on the Weissenborn at the Lindley tribute.

JACKSON BROWNE
MEETING DAVID LINDLEY

"I FIRST HEARD of David on the day of the Topanga Banjo and Fiddle Contest when I was accompanying the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band [*circa 1966–'67*]. He was a judge at that point, having won the competition several years in a row. He would win invariably by doing something iconoclastic, such as frailing a bluegrass song on banjo and suddenly adding flamenco rasgueados, which would blow people's minds.

"David was always eclectic. He just got around on anything with strings. His parents had a vast collection of music from around the world. When he joined Kaleidoscope [*the psychedelic group Lindley co-founded in the late 1960s*], he was at the nexus of a band that was bending various traditional styles to fit into some other discipline, and at the same time writing its own songs, which lies at the heart of folk music. That was the coin of the realm: casting your own trajectory into an unknown future."

SLIDE MAN

"I first heard David play slide on one of those battleship-grey National electric

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS (BROWNE); JIMMY LESLIE (PEELER)

Lindley breaks into a rendition of "Stay" following "The Load-Out" for the first time at soundcheck for Jackson Browne's concert that evening at Pine Knob, Clarkston, Michigan, August 22, 1977.

JOEL BERNSTEIN

lap steels in England, when he was on a gig with Terry Reid. He didn't make it back to the states in time to be featured on my first record [Jackson Browne, *a.k.a.* Saturate Before Using, *1972*]. When it was an unexpected hit, I wound up taking Lindley on the road because it was more manageable, and everything we did together sounded compelling. I became a better singer, and my timing got better as a player working alongside David's effortlessly impeccable timing.

"David played through a Champ, and it sounded amazing. He got this growl and sustain. He's a fiddle player, and he wound up making the slide sound very much like a violin. He could do some things that the violin couldn't, although he could do some show-stopping tricks on the violin too. He was very rhythmic. And playing the violin through the amp, he could use harmonics to make it sound like a Japanese flute. He also traveled with a mandolin. He would play whatever he was inspired to play.

"I really started using his slide work on my second record [For Everyman, *1973*]. I'd cut the track with the rhythm section and David would play chord pads on that same National electric lap steel. And then we began the process of overdubbing his solo. [*laughs*] I wanted it to sound like Ry [*Cooder*], but David wasn't playing a bottleneck. We were at Sunset Sound and he was in a vocal booth. I thought it would be a good idea to put a microphone in there with him to capture the sound of the bar on the strings, as the amp was in another room, but all I wound up getting was the sound of David drooling in between phrases. [*laughs and makes slurping sounds while heavily inhaling*]

"Anyway, we'd left space for the leads when we made the basic tracks. We added David once the vocal and the piano were locked in with an arrangement. A basic tracks session would only take about three hours with studio musicians, and then we'd overdub David multiple times. I would go through and pick the great passages, and he was a part of that process. So it wound up as an accompaniment, like the way it was onstage when it was just me and him. I comped his slide part the way I would comp a vocal, and David would play it enough times to have it well practiced by the end.

"Jim Keltner, who was on drums and an old friend of David's, had played the ride out on 'These Days' imagining a great lead guitar, so he'd played with that dynamic, and David just caught a wave. I think that end solo is put together out of two passes. To me, he defined what that instrument could do, for himself and for a lot of other people, right in that moment. The intro to 'Redneck Friend' was another one."

THE IMPROVISER

"Having done that, he could go out and do the same sort of thing live, although he would never play it the same way. He didn't learn his part and then play it repeatedly; he would only play to the conditions that existed in the moment. He was incapable of committing something to memory and simply playing it back. It just didn't happen that way for him. He had amazing taste and sense of song, no matter what he did. The conditions had to be right for him to play what he felt, and he always played what he was feeling. I may sing a song with different feelings, but I sing the same notes. I'm not improvising. *He* was the improviser."

HALLOWED TONES

"David used to play through a Fender Bassman with Vox speakers in the cabinet. When he started playing a Dumble, it accelerated what he was already doing, but I don't think he's playing a Dumble on 'Running on Empty'; he's playing a Bassman. He was in search of something, and he eventually became the prominent Dumble player of that day.

"Lindley's tone is the whole thing, especially with an acoustic instrument. Forget about the amp — he would get the sound of the instrument to speak. He could sound great going from instrument to instrument, because he

would only play what each instrument sounded good doing. It's easy if you do it that way. Going back to playing that first tour together as a duo, he was like another expressive voice in my songs, and the songs needed that. If you take Lindley away, it's much less dynamic."

EVOLUTION

"By the third album [Late for the Sky, *1974*] we were working with a band, so it was much more complicated. I got into arrangements during and after *The Pretender* [*1977*]. There were things I wanted the music to do that were not a part of our folk conversations or influences. I was a novice arranger, so I'd spend hundreds of takes looking for something, but I wouldn't know what it was until I found it. One of my favorite things from the later era is his solo on "That Girl Could Sing" [Hold Out, *1980*] but by that point our musical relationship had changed. Our friendship was deeper than ever."

EL RAYO-X

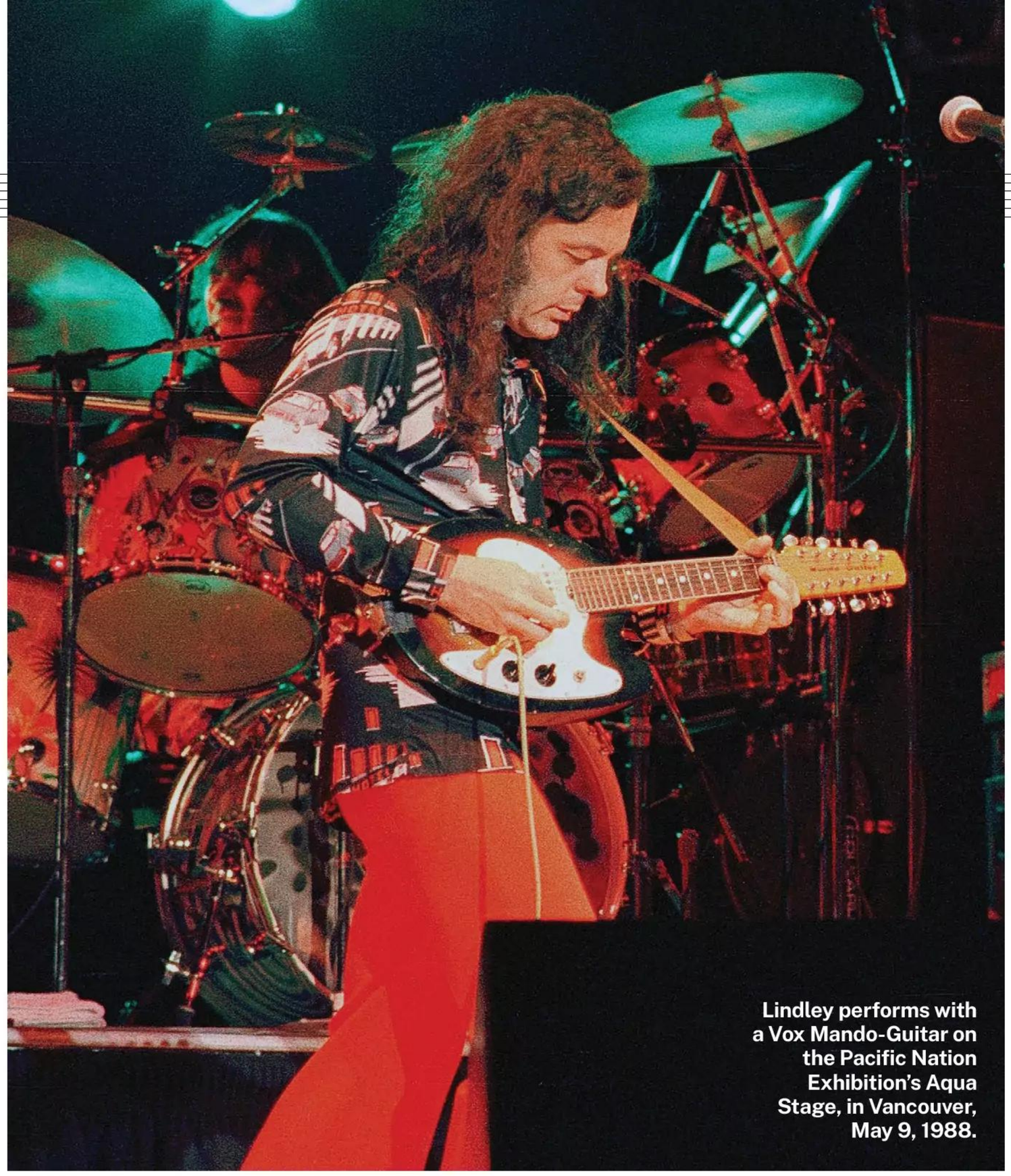
"At a certain point David got really into reggae, and he was playing reggae on everything. When he started to do El Rayo-X, I told him, 'If you're also playing with me, it's going to be viewed as a side project.' In retrospect, I'm not sure that was a good decision on my part, because it meant that then I didn't have David's influence and his presence going forward. Although at times I would bring him in and we'd work together, it wasn't the same as having him in my band. But I think I was right in thinking that if he didn't say 'El Rayo-X is who I am and what I'm doing now,' it wouldn't have been given as much credence as it deserved. And of course, I produced that first album. I went to my record company saying, 'You've got to record this guy. He's unbelievable.'

"What he did with El Rayo-X was astounding in terms of the way we viewed David. I've been working on making a film about Lindley, and until he passed he was working on it with me. It's been put on the back burner for a few reasons, but in guitarist Danny Kortchmar's interview for the film he summed up our feelings: Suddenly this guy that everybody thought of as the ultimate sensitive accompanist became this monster rocking lead guitarist and frontman in a band that presciently harnessed all the interest we had in reggae, which all of us loved but none of us knew how to do.

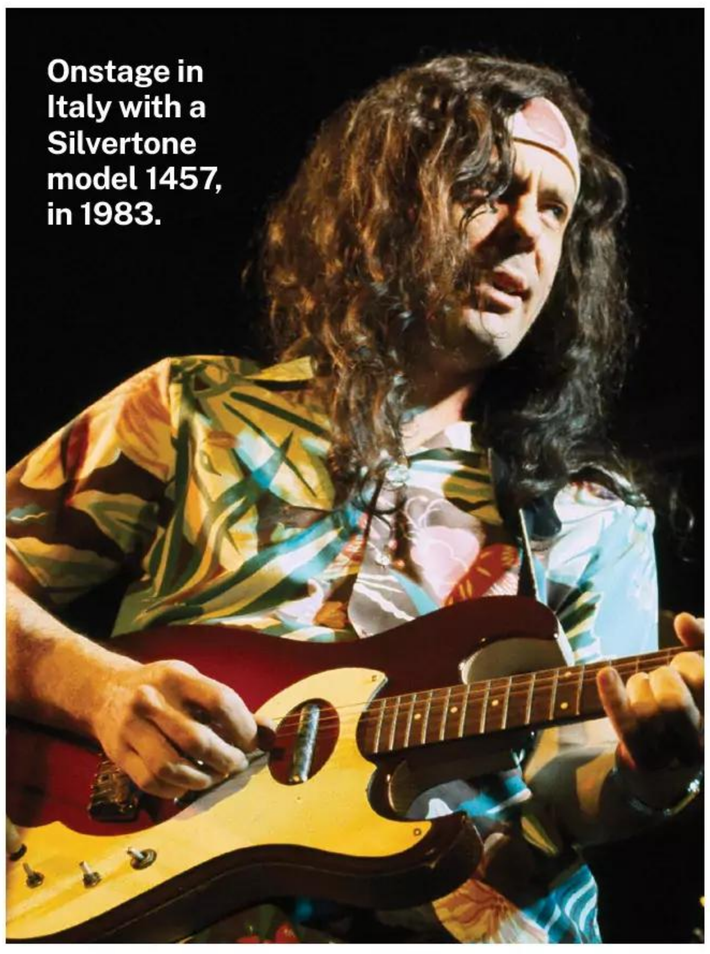
"I sang on El Rayo-X and worked on some technical stuff with my engineer Greg Ladanyi. But all I really did was preside over the sessions. You need somebody on the other side of the glass. I get the credit, but David was always the master of his own journey. He always did what he wanted to do. He was never a prisoner of someone else's idea. He always made it his own. And when he made El Rayo-X, he truly came into his own. He was the leader of that band. He chose every song and every player. But I am so proud of the record and having been there."

THE EVERYMAN FOR EVERYONE

"David was a unique player who affected and influenced so many people, and he participated in so many people's music. For Lindley to go play with Ry, a master of so many idioms, was the perfect join-up. So was the stuff David did with Henry Kaiser, traveling all over the world as a master American musician to connect in musical conversations with others from all these different cultures. What I'm hoping to eventually do with the film is shine a light on this: Lindley's kind of an everyman in that he was not



Lindley performs with a Vox Mando-Guitar on the Pacific Nation Exhibition's Aqua Stage, in Vancouver, May 9, 1988.



Onstage in Italy with a Silvertone model 1457, in 1983.

LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM); IAN ALEXANDER MARTIN (TOP)

famous, but everyone wanted to play with him. It's like being let in through a side door to see how this guy was so respected and so valued, why he was so valued, and how that kind of musical life is available to anybody who wants to try to find it."

RY COODER

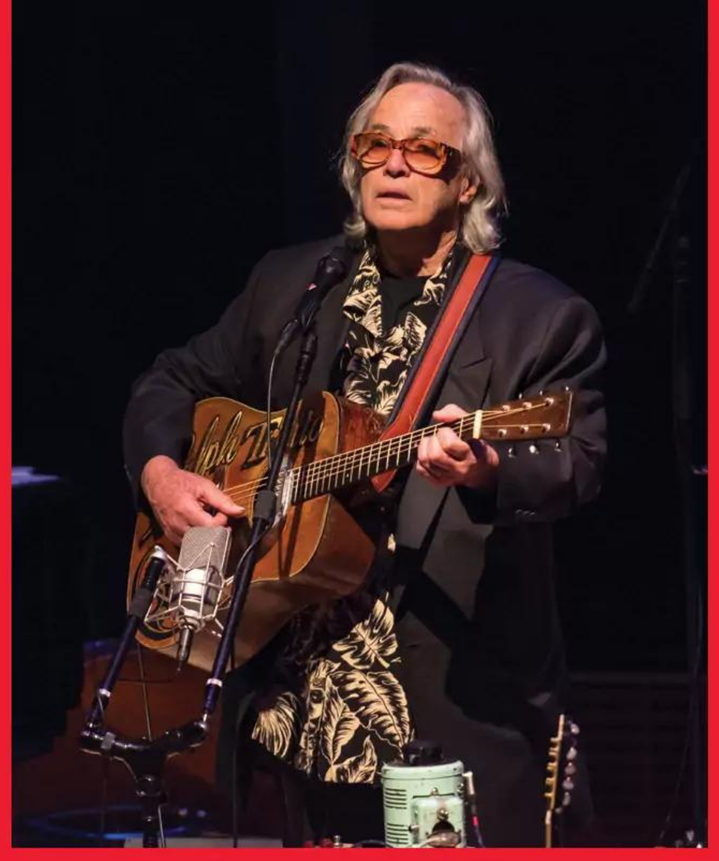
SERIOUSLY FUNNY

"I ALWAYS ENJOYED David as a person because he seemed so warm-hearted. He was very kind. People demonstrate their personal quality in their music. Sometimes you meet somebody with a like-mindedness, and that's why we used to play well together.

"Aside from being a very humorous fellow, David had great dedication as an improviser. So on one hand he'd clown around and wear funny shirts, but he was also very serious. I appreciate that. Music, especially folk music, is like tools. You master these tools so that you can polish these folk styles into something useful to do. That's what David did. He had the fiddle, banjo and guitar, so he could fit into any situation and add his color."

KUNG FU TRICKS

"David had great hands with perfect control. That's quite a combination, to have the fluency and the control down tight. He had physical training from doing kung fu and shooting guns. I once asked him, 'How do you always beat the guys at target practice on the shooting range?' He said, 'Count heartbeats and squeeze the trigger. It's a kung fu trick.' He was a very inventive, very eclectic guy. To get that kind of control when he played, he went into this kind of trance. Not like out of his mind, more of a discipline that allowed him to make a good sound."



"HE SAID, 'COUNT HEARTBEATS AND SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER. IT'S A KUNG FU TRICK.'"

— RY COODER

ONE SLIDE ACE TO ANOTHER

"As a slide player, you must have control and be able to hit notes. It's a bowing thing. You're moving the slide, vibrating it however you do, and it sounds weird if you don't hit the notes. David's good ear could hear the good note, find the center of it and play the goddamn thing. It's very effective when you do that and shape it like a violinist. He had great technique playing with the guitar lying flat, rather than as I do, playing bottleneck in the regular guitar posture. That tends to put you down different roads. He would play one way, and I would play the other way, just by nature. So it was very complementary."

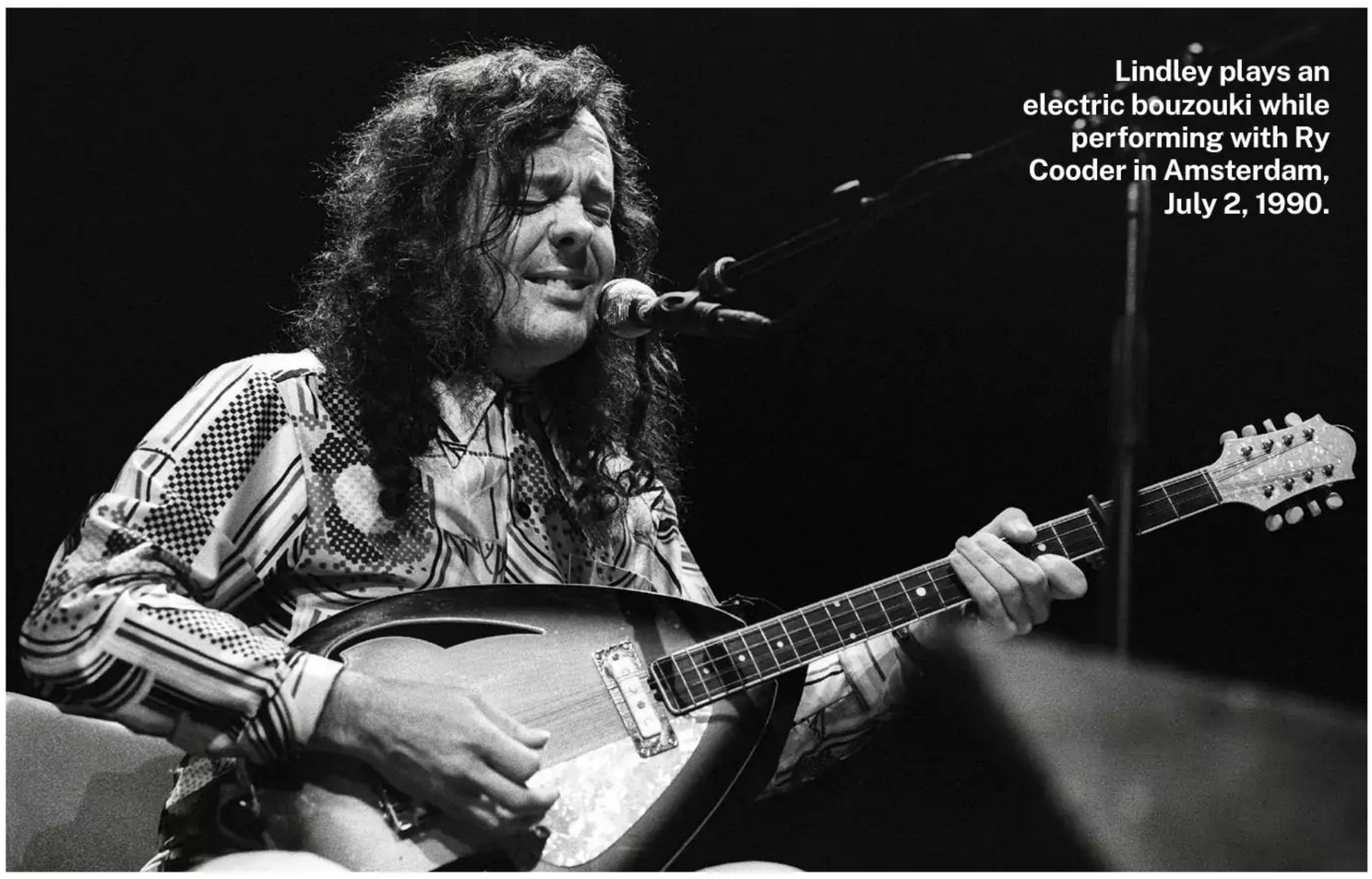
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REGGAE

"Then there was the fantastic rhythm when he played using his first finger as a pick. You get a certain snap on the strings that way. We'd play this folky reggae thing that he used to like to do. It had this fabulous quality. I would only do it with him. Nobody else could cop that groove like he could. It was his groove: Southern California reggae. And he liked to play double-stringed instruments, like the oud, and he had a 12-string guitar with lipstick pickups and those LaBella black, tape flatwound strings. It was teardrop shaped and was sort of colored like bacon fat. Man, he would make that killer axe walk and talk. When he'd hit that reggae rhythm on that guitar, it felt so good. It was like lift-off. You could play anything and have a ball. It would make you jump — make you want to rock.

"It was always encouraging to play with him, and you never worried, because you knew it was going to be all right. So often you run into taste issues and hit the wall, but not with him. We just seemed to hit it off and have a good time. It was always okay, especially onstage."

WAR STORY

"We used to play these mud festivals in Europe — oh my god. I remember one where a guy picked us up at the airport in a Volkswagen, naturally, that didn't have enough room for our stuff, so we had to stick it up through the roof and out the window. [*laughs*] When we got to within five miles of the site, the car started to shake. I said, 'What's going on?' 'Oh, that's Lenny Kravitz.' 'What?' The bass is shaking the car from five



Lindley plays an electric bouzouki while performing with Ry Cooder in Amsterdam, July 2, 1990.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS (LINDLEY); JACK VARTOOGIAN/GETTY IMAGES (COODER)

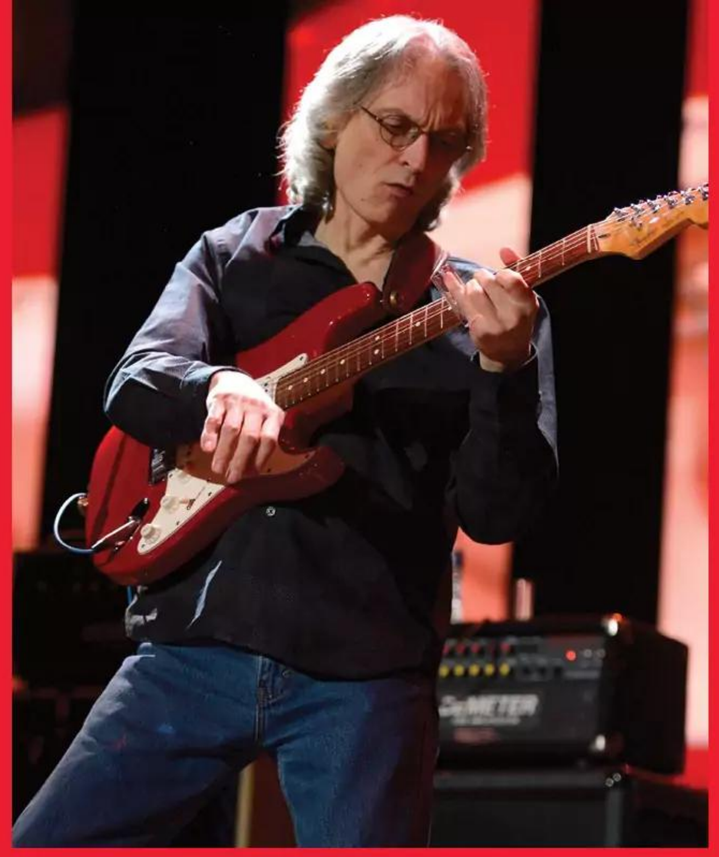
miles away, and we have to follow that? 'Well,' David said. 'Let's just walk through the farmer's muddy pig field and do it.' The stage was so big that the people couldn't see us. If they could, they figured we were roadies testing and tuning up for the main act. We would do our 45 minutes, get our good money, and get back in the Volkswagen.

"David never batted an eye. He had real stamina. That all used to drive me crazy, but not him. He was a good road hog. I would complain my head off, but he would soldier on with no complaints. Touring is a nightmare, but he made it enjoyable, being very funny and light-hearted. It was never life-threatening with him."

EL RAYO-X

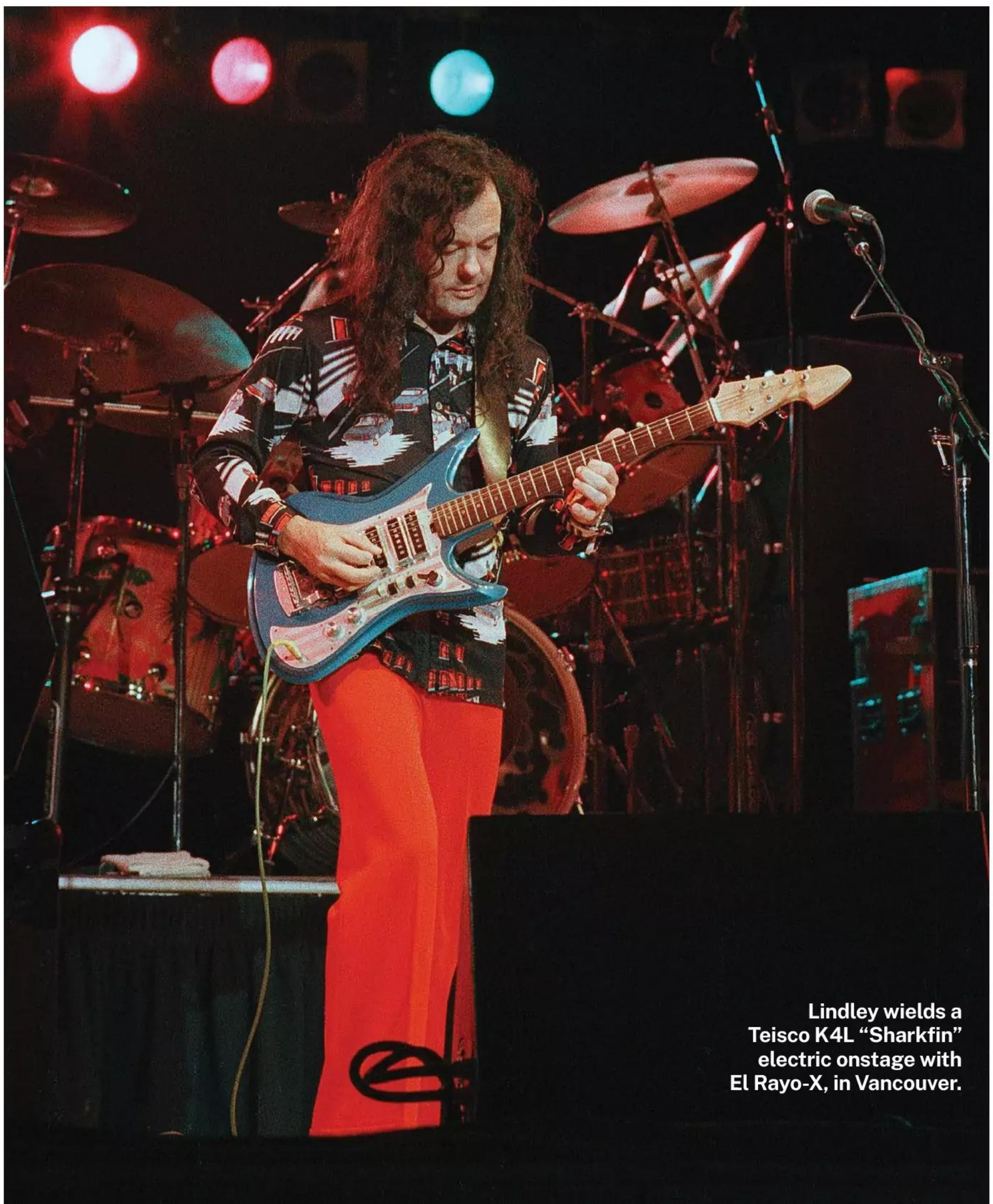
"I gave him that name: El Rayo-X. We would come up with shit like that casually in conversation. He asked what he should call his group, I suggested calling it that, and he did. I just thought it was a cool name, but it turned out to be the name of a Panamanian prize fighter. Lindley found out later. I suppose I'd seen it in print. 'David Lindley and the El Rayo-X' is a little exotic, but it's funny. It fit him. He was a cheerful character. And that was another thing, the character he devised for himself: the guy with the polyester shirts. [*laughs*]

"David had such a terrible time later. He damaged his ears. You know, cymbals in your face, and amps that are capable of rearranging your molecular structure. It's too bad he suffered because of that, and I'm very sorry. But we had so much fun."



"HE HAD SUCH A POWERFUL SOUND, YET HIS PHRASING WAS SO NUANCED AND LYRICAL"

— SONNY LANDRETH



Lindley wields a Teisco K4L "Sharkfin" electric onstage with El Rayo-X, in Vancouver.

SONNY LANDRETH ON MENTORSHIP

"LOOKING BACK ON the past 40-plus years, I can't imagine the ride without David Lindley at the wheel, showing me the way when I needed it. By 1974, I was mostly playing acoustic and had techniques and concepts of my own, but I didn't have a clue about tone and developing my own sound on the electric. Then, snowed in during a winter in Estes Park, Colorado, I discovered David on Jackson Browne's great albums *For Everyman* and most especially *Late for the Sky*. That just knocked me out. He had such a powerful sound, yet his phrasing was so nuanced and lyrical that it echoed the poetic sensibilities of Jackson's profound songs. That combination of songwriting art and tasteful, whup-ass guitar had a big impact on me. I felt like I'd been pointed in the direction I was meant to take.

"Five years later I got to hear them together on the *Running on Empty* tour at the Jackson, Mississippi, Coliseum, and then I heard David with El Rayo-X at a small club in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1988. Of course, he sounded amazing, and that fired me up. Of all my slide guitar heroes, Ry Cooder and David Lindley have touched me the most. David became a mentor with conversations that were equal parts information, advice and comedic relief."

IAN ALEXANDER MARTIN (LINDLEY); KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE (LANDRETH)

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (RAITT)

THE BREAKFAST CLUB

"We met over breakfast at the Winnipeg Folk Festival hotel in 1988 and would connect off and on over the years via phone or find each other at workshops and gigs we played together. He had a 50-watt Dumble, so I was all about getting one. But he discouraged me. He said, 'No, man, they're too complicated and too expensive.' His other guitar player at the time, Ray Woodbury, had a Demeter, and David said, 'You want this amp.' So I called Jim Demeter and we became fast friends. I got one of his amps and I've used one or more of the three I own on at least 80 percent of everything I've done in the studio since."

"The beautiful thing about David was how he shared his gift and sense of humor both onstage and off. I recall a press conference at the Singer-Songwriter Festival in Frutigen, Switzerland, becoming a bit dull and quite awkward, but Lindley, the bringer of fun, lit the whole affair up as soon as he walked in. He and Wally Ingram, running late due to hard traveling, arrived just in time for Mr. Dave to save the day. Wally joined Steve Earle and me at a table facing the group of reporters and journalists who were now all abuzz. David patiently answered their questions about the music biz, working with big-name artists, songs and gear, until it was time to wrap it up. I jokingly said, 'I have a question. Brother, where do you shop for clothes?' Though laughter broke out in the tent, David was unfazed and without hesitation began to seriously name his favorite stores in California. Some of the journalists were actually writing the information down. I've always wondered if his list sparked a few overseas shopping missions for polyester suits."

"HE WAS LITERALLY ONE OF THE FUNKIEST HUMAN BEINGS I'VE EVER HEARD IN MY LIFE"

— BONNIE RAITT

With (from left) Bonnie Raitt, Browne, Shawn Colvin and Bruce Hornsby on the Sensitive Ones tour, circa 1998.

BONNIE RAITT
MEETING DAVID

"I BECAME FRIENDS with Jackson Browne in 1970 or '71 when I first opened for him, and then at some point I met David when he started playing with Jackson. I was very excited to open Jackson's national tour in 1974, which was my first national tour, and our two bands were on one bus. So it was one woman and 13 guys, of which David was my favorite. It was such a blast. We developed a close friendship that would last a lifetime."

TASTE AND TONE

"David's reputation preceded him in musician circles, so I was familiar with his virtuosity on the fiddle and his sensitivity in terms of playing perfectly on Jackson's tunes. I can't even imagine most of Jackson's songs that David's on without his contributions. Playing lap steel was just one of the great things he did. His taste, tone and approach to augmenting whatever the singer and the song needed was perfect. He set the standard for me of what great accompaniment could be, long before he went off on his own and had one of my favorite bands of all time, El Rayo-X. Thinking back to when I first met him, his virtuosity was astonishing, but he didn't lead with it. He did it quietly. He was delightful and a perfect foil for Jackson. His personality came across in

his playing and his stage presence, no matter what his role.

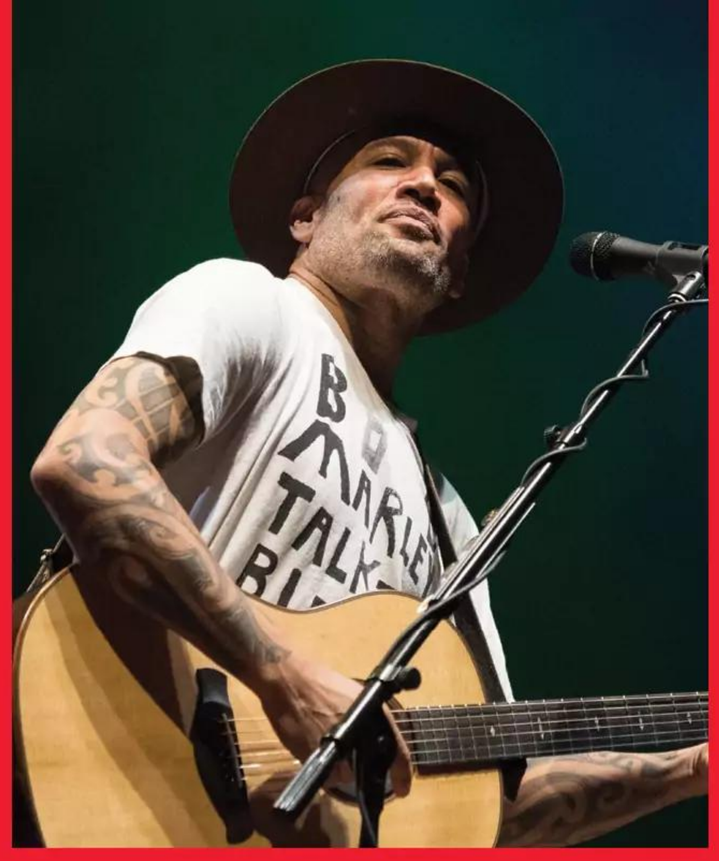
"I was knocked out at his lap-steel playing. It's a completely different instrument, but it can do so much similarly to slide guitar, especially when you're looking at Ry Cooder and Lowell George and David. They set the tone for me on how slide guitar can fit within a song that's not just in a blues idiom.

"David's tone is the perfect blend of grit and richness, but I didn't really go to him for that. It was more about his taste and his lyricism. His choices about what licks he put where, how he played them and which octave — all of that was a great influence on me."

IN IT FOR THE MUSIC

"Because we were both touring non-stop in different bands, we didn't interface very often. When we would interact over subsequent decades, he knew how much I loved his sense of humor, and he was extremely witty and sardonic. I also loved the fact that he just couldn't care less about the record business. He was like Ry Cooder in that they would deliberately avoid trying to be commercial in any sense. I was simpatico with that. We were there for the music, not for the hit record. So you win your stripes and your friendship by the respect you have for each other, and we shared great love and affection as friends."

Lindley plays a lute at the 17th Annual East Coast International Blues and Roots Music Festival, Australia, April 17, 2006.



"WHEN I HEARD LINDLEY PLAY THE WEISSENBORN, I WENT, 'THERE'S NO WAY I'M NOT GOING TO TRY MY HAND AT IT'"

— BEN HARPER

THE SENSITIVE ONES

"We eventually toured together again, along with Jackson, Bruce Hornsby and Sean Colvin. I believe it was in '98. We joined forces for almost two months across the country outdoors in a kind of a supergroup, which we lovingly referred to as the Sensitive Ones, because people would always make comments about Jackson's music being so sensitive. David and Wally opened the shows, and then we would all do four or five solo songs, each of us backing the other ones up.

"That tour is one of the high points of my 54 years on the road, partly because I got to hear David and Wally slay the audience every night, just the two of them.

"We had one memorable time when we all went through his legendary polyester wardrobe, showed up and surprised him. I don't think we did the gig in that — my memory of it is hazy — but I loved his satirical splendor and his quirkiness. He was a fantastic artist as well. His drawings were incredible."

ONE OF A KIND

"Nobody delighted all of us as much as David. To be that much of a genius as a multi-instrumentalist singer/songwriter and a performer, and then have that incredibly engaging personality — I've never met anybody like him. And I have to say that El Rayo-X is one of the greatest configurations of musicians and material and groove. I mean, the guy had a groove that was just unbeatable. He was literally one of the funkiest human beings I've ever heard in my life. Nobody tells funnier stories onstage. And his voice — [*laughs*] — I'm so happy to be able to talk about it because it makes him feel alive for me again. Thank you very much for honoring his memory. David is beloved by so many fans and musicians and will always be. I'm so glad that *Guitar Player* is doing this tribute. I'm happy to celebrate my pal."

BEN HARPER
THE LINDLEY INSPIRATION

"THE FOLK MUSIC Center is full of exotic world instruments, and David could transform the room on all of it. He mastered them all. He put in 10,000 hours on all of them. David would come in and play the Weissenborns, and my grandfather sold Lindley his first one. That was my inspiration. I had heard everybody come in and play everything, but when I heard Lindley play that, I went, 'That's the most fucking incredible thing I've ever heard in my entire life! There's no way I'm not going to try my hand at it.'"

HENRY KAISER
REQUIEM

"DAVID LINDLEY WAS the best musician that I've ever known. He had the most musical wisdom and the best in both good *and* bad taste, which is rare. He was one of the best improvisers, and he had the most amazing sense of time, on par with the best drummers. He put the most heart and love into his playing, and he had the best sense of humor.

"Our trips to Madagascar and Norway collaborating with local musicians were some of the greatest adventures of our lives, and the richest musical experiences, yielding many albums. We also worked on the soundtrack for the Werner Herzog film *Encounters at the End of the World*. The final thing we did together was work on an album I produced for Freddie Roulette

JAMES GREEN/GETTY IMAGES (LINDLEY); LOIC VENANCE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (HARPER)

called *Man of Steel*. Lindley sang and played slide guitar along with him. They were in Terry Reid's band in England, long ago. That's what brought Lindley to the lap steel and the Hawaiian guitar."

WALLY INGRAM
MR. DAVE'S GLOBAL RHYTHM

"EVERYONE KNOWS DAVID was a melodic virtuoso and could play anything with strings, but his global knowledge and sense of world rhythms spanned from reggae/ska/mento to Caribbean and Latin to Appalachian, North African, Eastern European, Hawaiian and beyond. He always laid down deep-pocket grooves with the right variance of swing, from swampy Cajun/N'awlins to blazing bluegrass. Mr. Dave had a wicked thumb-and-fingerpicking combination enabling him to lay down the bass while comping, soloing *and* singing! Our Twango Bango duo was a life-changing dream gig for me. We laughed and played our way around the globe for nearly a decade."

"I ASKED HIM IF HE KNEW WHAT KIND OF PICKUPS AIRLINE USED BACK THEN. HE SAID, 'THE GOOD KIND.'"

— PAPA MALI

Onstage at the Roskilde Festival, 2013.

RUNE HELLESTAD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES (LINDLEY); ANTHONY PIDGEON/REDFERNS (MALI)

PAPA MALI
KEEPING THE FLAME BURNING

"WALLY AND I go back to the early '80s when we both were playing in reggae bands. He is the reason I knew Lindley as anything other than a fan. Like many, I became a Lindley disciple in the early '70s via Jackson Browne's records. In 1975, I saw them perform on the *Late for the Sky* tour, and it was the first time I realized he was getting that supercharged slide sound not from playing bottleneck but with a lap steel. From that moment on I started listening to everything I could get my hands on, from Kaleidoscope until his most recent stuff.

"My first personal encounter with Mr. Dave was the day after I witnessed a now-legendary performance by he and Ry Cooder at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage festival in May '94. I was at the airport and spotted him sitting at a nearby gate, waiting to board, quietly strumming a mandolin. As I cautiously approached him, he smiled, as if to say. 'It's all right, I see by your guitar case, that we speak the same language.' We exchanged pleasantries and he couldn't have been any nicer. Soon, Ry walked up. These guys were like gods to me, so I made myself scarce, although neither of them made me feel like I was a bother.

"Wally started playing with Dave some years later and introduced me at a show. Surprisingly, he remembered the airport encounter, and after that he would always say hello and want to talk guitar stuff. I once asked if he'd sign a '60s Airline guitar. His reply was, 'Now, why would you want to mess up this perfectly nice guitar?' But he obliged. I asked him if he knew what kind of pickups Airline used back then. He said, 'The good kind.'

"Wally Ingram and I plan to keep doing this annual tribute show to David Lindley during Jazz Fest in New Orleans as long as artists and fans keep supporting it. If the first two are any indication, they're just going to keep getting bigger and better."

CERTIFIED GREATNESS

Fingerstyle master **Tommy Emmanuel** combines unique musical instincts and breathtaking technique to become an acoustic tour de force.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

IN HIS BOOK, *Outliers: The Story of Success,* author Malcolm Gladwell asserts that at least 10,000 hours of practice are required to excel at any given skill. If that's indeed the case, Australian guitar maestro Tommy Emmanuel certainly has a lot more than that under his belt. One of only five guitarists to be bestowed the title "Certified Guitar Player" by the legendary Chet Atkins — a "C.G.P." inlay marks the 12th fret of his signature TE series Maton guitars — Emmanuel is a master of precision, control, touch and tone, with a signature style honed by decades of writing and interpreting a vast array of songs, while relentlessly refining his technique.

It would be a daunting task to try to cover the totality of Emmanuel's style in one lesson, as he is both a master fingerpicker and flatpicker. So, here, we'll be exploring just some of the guitarist's favorite fingerstyle approaches and techniques. Lucky for us, one of New York City's finest fingerstylists, Gilber Gilmore (Instagram: @gilber_gilmore, YouTube: @1972f1972,), has graciously joined us once again to create videos to accompany all of this lesson's examples, which you'll find at guitarplayer.com. (Gilmore's videos are also featured in my two-part lesson "Adventures in Fingerstyle Rock Guitar" in the April and May 2024 issues.)

As you'll see in these musical examples, fingerstyle guitar music is often notated with *opposite stemming*, also known as *divisi* notation, which allows two independent melodic or harmonic "voices" to be clearly shown and visualized for the reader. Up-stemmed notes are generally picked with the fingers, and down-stemmed notes are most often picked with the thumb. In addition, much the same way that fret-hand fingers are indicated with numbers, pick-hand fingers are traditionally assigned a letter, based on the Spanish words for the various digits: *p* (thumb), *i* (index), *m* (middle) and *a* (ring).

FUTURE

MORE ONLINE!

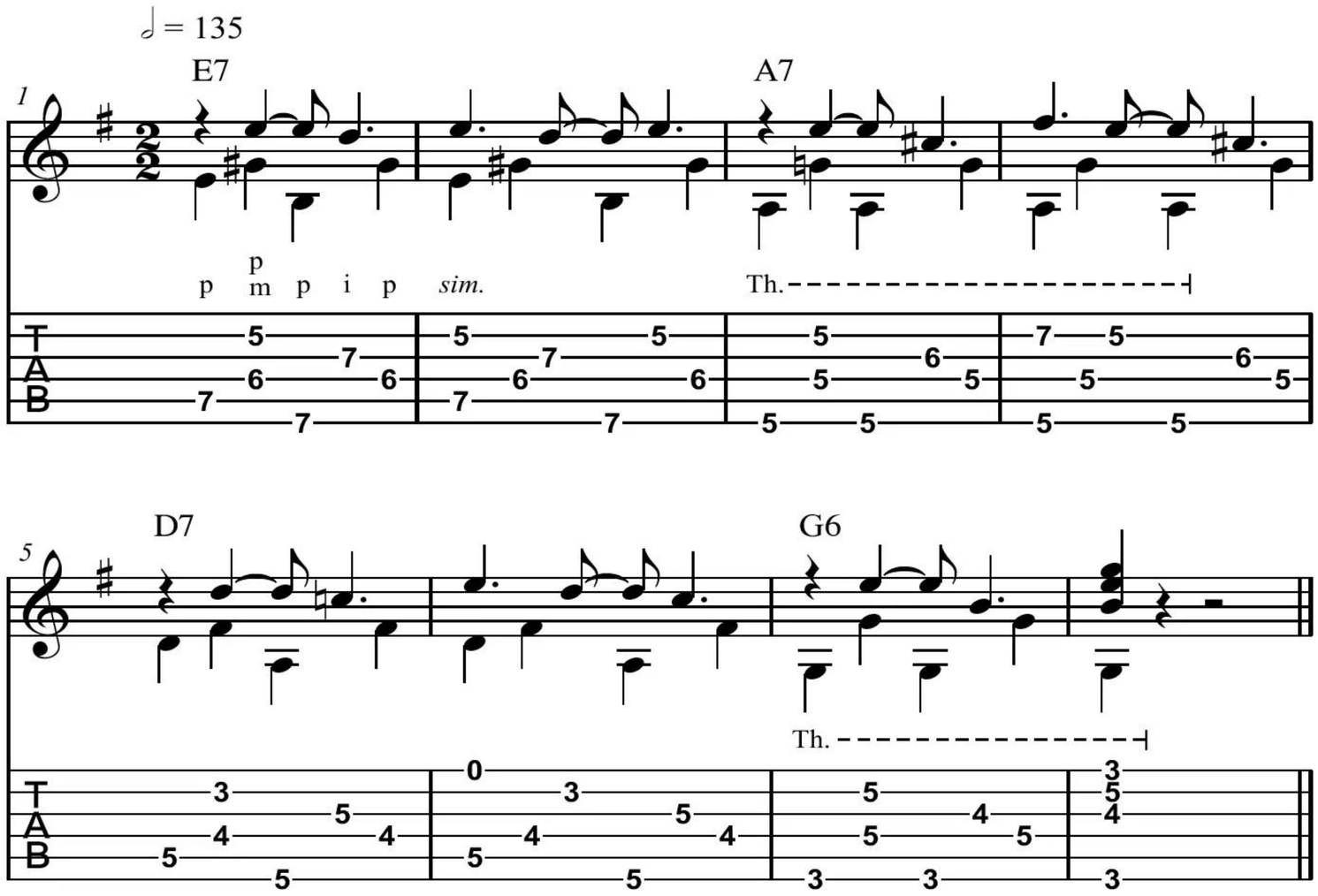
For video of this lesson, go to
guitarplayer.com/nov24-lesson

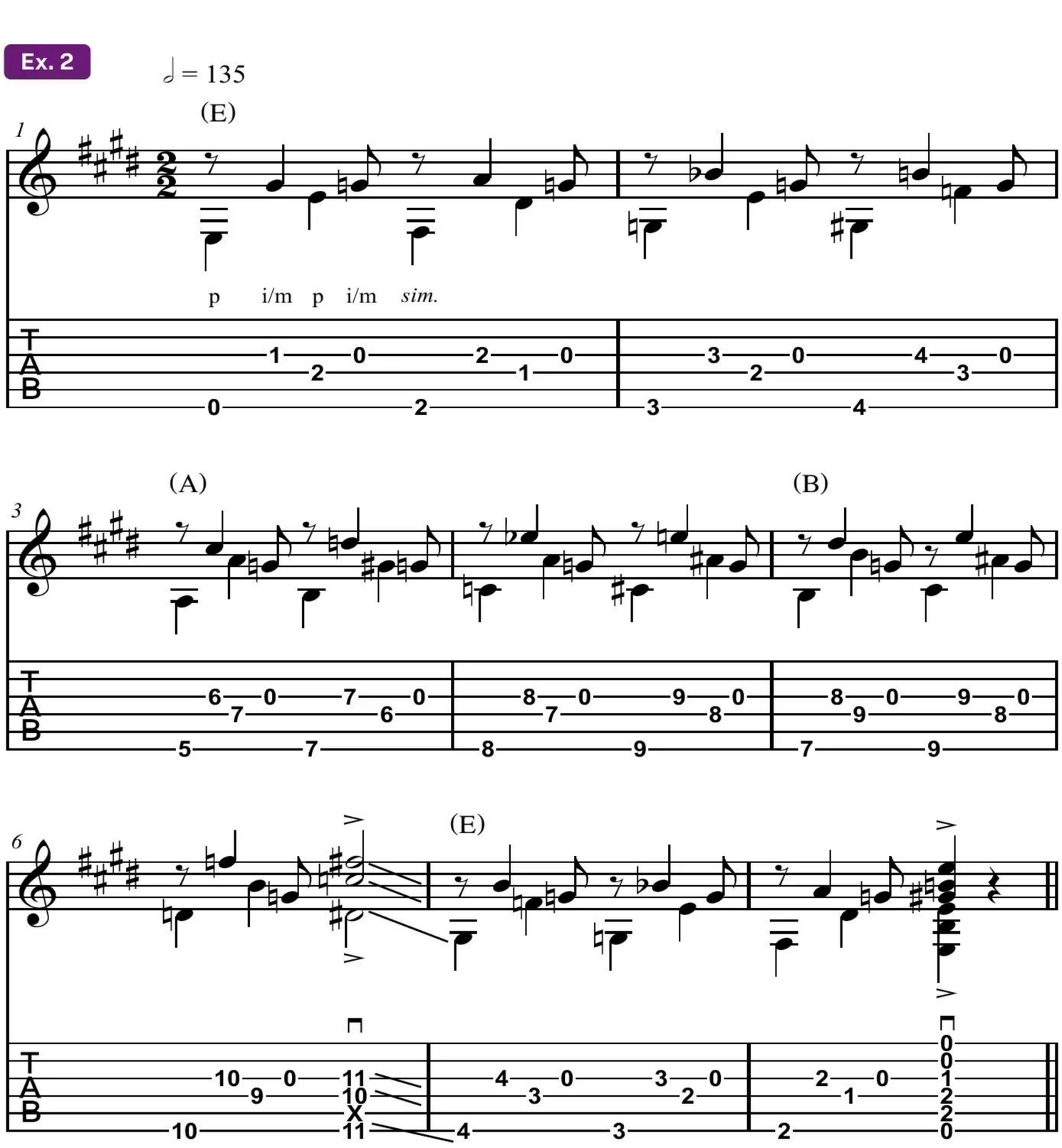
Note that Emmanuel most often uses a thumbpick, but it's optional here, as is his use of the fret-hand thumb to play certain notes on the 6th string, indicated in the examples by the abbreviation "Th." Okay, now we're ready to discover just what makes this guitar genius tick. One of the foundational techniques of Emmanuel's style is *Travis picking*, named for Merle Travis, the iconic country and western singer, songwriter and guitarist. Its hallmark feature is the use of alternating bass notes on different strings, picked with the thumb, with a fairly consistent palm mute applied to the low E, A and D strings to prevent the bass notes from ringing, or "bleeding," into each other and keep the bass notes sounding tight and punchy while notes on the higher strings are allowed to ring. When Travis picking, you'll find that lightly palm muting the bass strings will additionally help you feel them more easily and better control your fingerpicking accuracy.

Ex. 1 is inspired by Travis' classic "Cannonball Rag," which appears as part of a medley on Emmanuel's 2006 release *The Mystery*. To get a feel for Travis picking, start by playing only the thumbpicked notes while holding each of the full chord forms. Once you feel comfortable doing this, add the up-stemmed notes (picked with the fingers). Keep in mind that one of the "secrets" to TE's success has been repetition, taking the time to work out complex movements slowly, and with a metronome, before bringing them up to tempo. How slow? A good rule of thumb is to start playing something as slow as it takes to work your way through, while playing with good time and no mistakes, at least twice. This gives your brain time to absorb all the nuanced movements involving both hands.

Ex. 2 demonstrates a nifty use of Travis picking to scamper up and down the neck. Notice there's an open G note between each chord form, allowing for more seamless position shifts, while adding a bit of a country "chicken pickin'" sound. The focus here is mainly on your pick-hand thumb, as your middle finger handles most of the

Ex. 1 **All examples performed fingerstyle on acoustic guitar**



Ex. 2

remaining notes, which are generally found on the 3rd string. There are two spots, however, beat 3 of bar 6 and the very last chord, where TE would likely strum with his thumbpick, so as to accentuate these beats. (Notice the accent marks, indicating to play these beats a bit louder for emphasis.) No problem if you don't have a thumbpick; strumming with the backs of your fingernails will produce a similar bite.

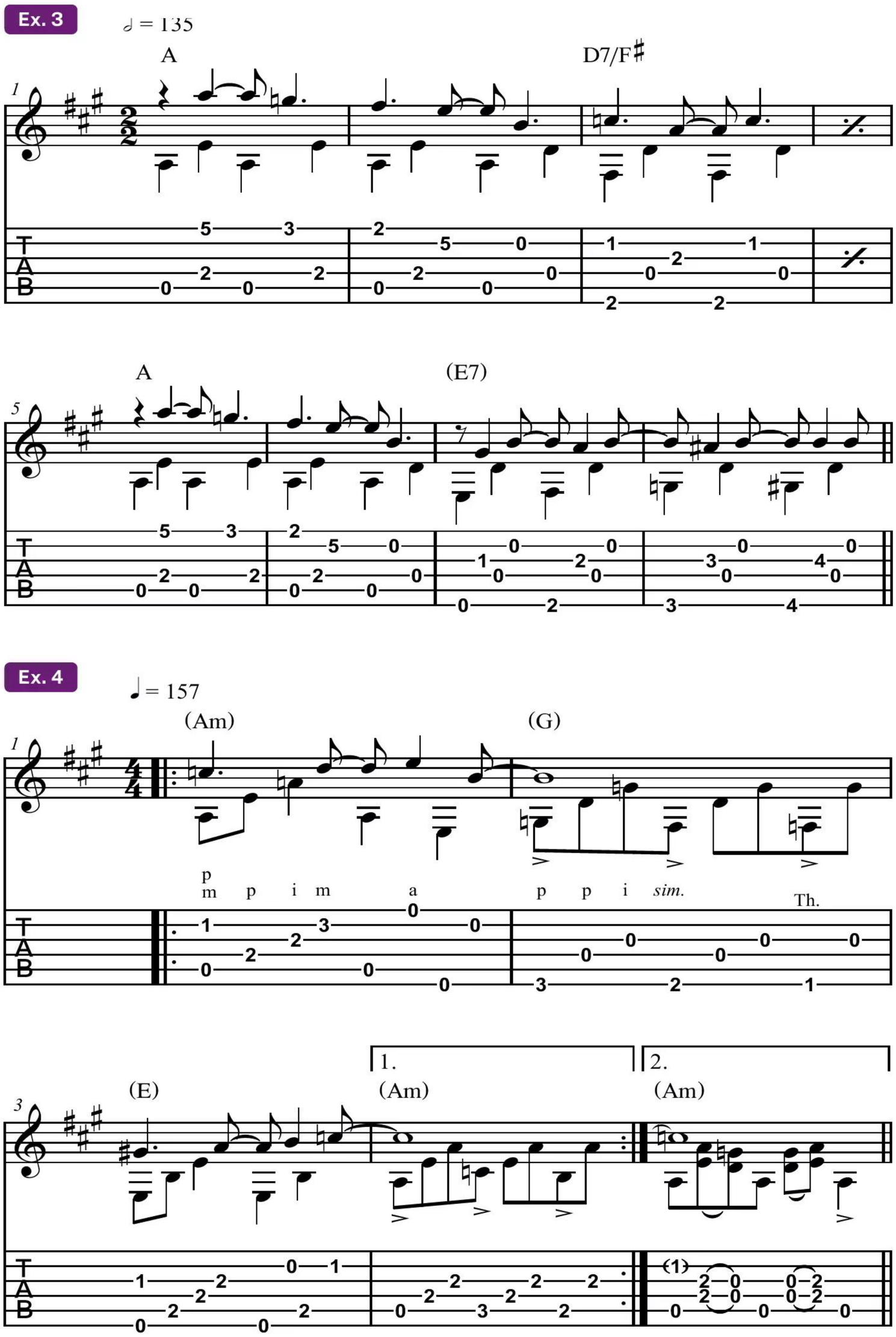
Ex. 3 is reminiscent of "Son of a Gun," from 2004's *Endless Road*. Written for Travis' son, Thomas Bresch, it has Emmanuel in full freight train mode. You won't find much new material technique-wise, but it does require working the different phrases up to a breakneck speed. To do this, repeat each two-bar phrase multiple times until you get the hang of it; then work on connecting them. Breaking music down into more digestible chunks is another effective way to learn parts more quickly.

Next up, **Ex. 4** is along the lines of classical guitarist and composer Mason Williams' "Classical Gas," which Emmanuel often performs. While it has some elements of Travis picking, there's a different interplay between the melody and accompaniment. Welcome to the art of arranging — creating a unique rendition of a song by melding the melody and accompaniment in a compelling way. This is at the heart of what Tommy has dedicated himself to, as he has forged his signature style by combining his adventurous musical instincts with a vast arsenal of blistering techniques. Notice how, in bars 2 and 4, the whole-note melody leaves space for the accompaniment to take over, allowing for descending bass lines to mingle with higher, droning notes. In similar fashion, Bar 5 introduces hammer/pull double-stops, giving our ears something new and unexpected.

Emmanuel introduces all kinds of ingenious techniques into his arrangements to pique the listener's interest. One example is his use of *banjo rolls*, via fingerpicking patterns more commonly associated with banjo players. **Ex. 5** is a great example; after getting it under your fingers, try playing it as an intro to Ex. 3 to get a sense of how TE uses different techniques to create musical drama in his arrangements and propel a song forward.

Another way the guitarist keeps things interesting is by employing lightning-quick single-note licks. **Ex. 6** uses clever open-string pull-offs to again tap into chicken pickin's bouncy quality. It's one of those licks that sounds intimidating, but in actuality is easier to play than it sounds. As indicated, you'll need only your pick-hand thumb and middle finger to create the repeating pattern, and note how the cagey pull-offs create darting, angular lines that really keep things moving.

Ex. 7 presents us with a different



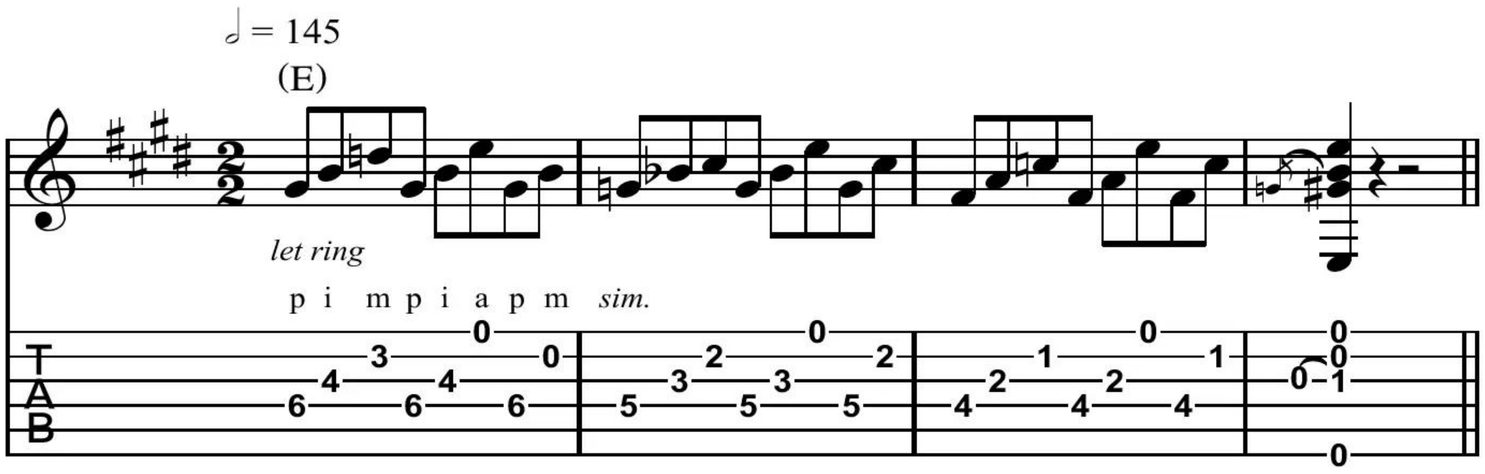
sort of challenge. Inspired by Tommy Emmanuel's arrangement of the Beatles' "Day Tripper," part of his sensational "Beatles Medley," from 2005's *Live One*, it requires us to keep a steady quarter-note rhythm on top of a melodic bass riff. But before exploring this aspect of the figure, let's take a moment to notice how the first two bars have virtually no down-stemmed (thumb-picked) notes. This is a clever arranging technique to keep in your bag of tricks, as it creates a tangible anticipation, setting the stage for a dramatic entrance by the bass line. Listening to some of Emmanuel's arrangements, it quickly becomes apparent that they're chock-full of these musical signposts, keeping us on our toes. Note the staccato dots appearing above each beat, indicating to play these notes short. This is accomplished here by lightly resting your pick-hand fingers on the strings quickly after sounding the notes. Things really get interesting during the last two beats of bars 3 and 4, when your pick-hand finger independence and overall rhythmic equilibrium are both put to the test, as eighth-note bass lines are played over the static quarter-note pulse.

It's crucial to note that creating a compelling arrangement does not necessarily mean it has to be a complex one. Emmanuel has said that one of his main focal points when arranging is a song's melody and how best to interpret and convey it on guitar, both from a rhythmic standpoint and in terms of employing the guitar's articulation nuances, such as bends, finger slides and vibrato. A great way to do this is to actually sing the melody, then try to capture what you've sung. Let's look at the basic melody to the traditional song "Amazing Grace" and see if we can find a creative way to play it so that it sounds more natural and soulful on guitar. **Ex. 8a** is a bare-bones rendition of a snippet of the tune's melody, as you might find it in a beginner's fingerstyle method book.

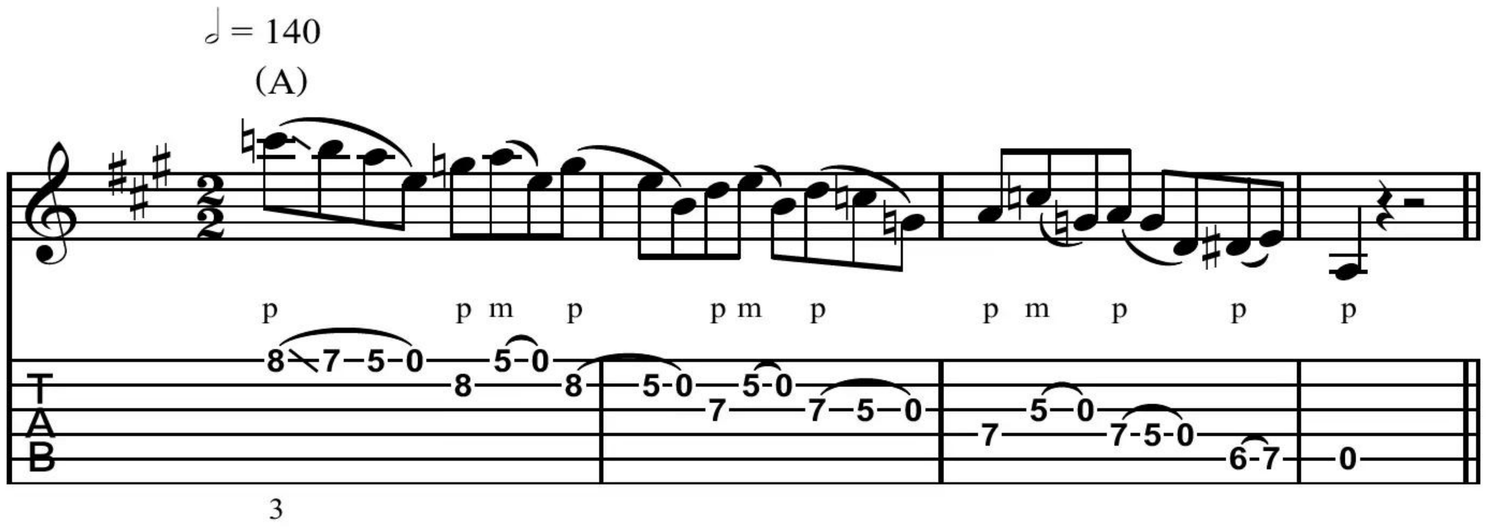
Ex. 8b brings the same melody new life by using some basic arranging techniques. Looking at the melody, now incorporated are a pull-off, finger slide and hammer-on, which ornament the articulations and phrasing over the first three bars, with grace-note finger slides added to beat 4 of bar 3. Note also how we've changed the rhythm on that beat, so that the G note now anticipates the final bar. In the accompaniment, notice how the chords are quickly arpeggiated on beat 1 of bars 1 and 3, and how some rhythmic motion has been added in bar 2. Finally, a gentle hammer-on rounds out the phrase in bar 4. Now you're playing music, instead of just notes.

Let's finish things off with one of TE's most favorite techniques, the *harp harmonic* ("H.H."). Invented by Chet Atkins and developed even further by Lenny Breau, a harp harmonic is sounded by fingerpicking a fretted note

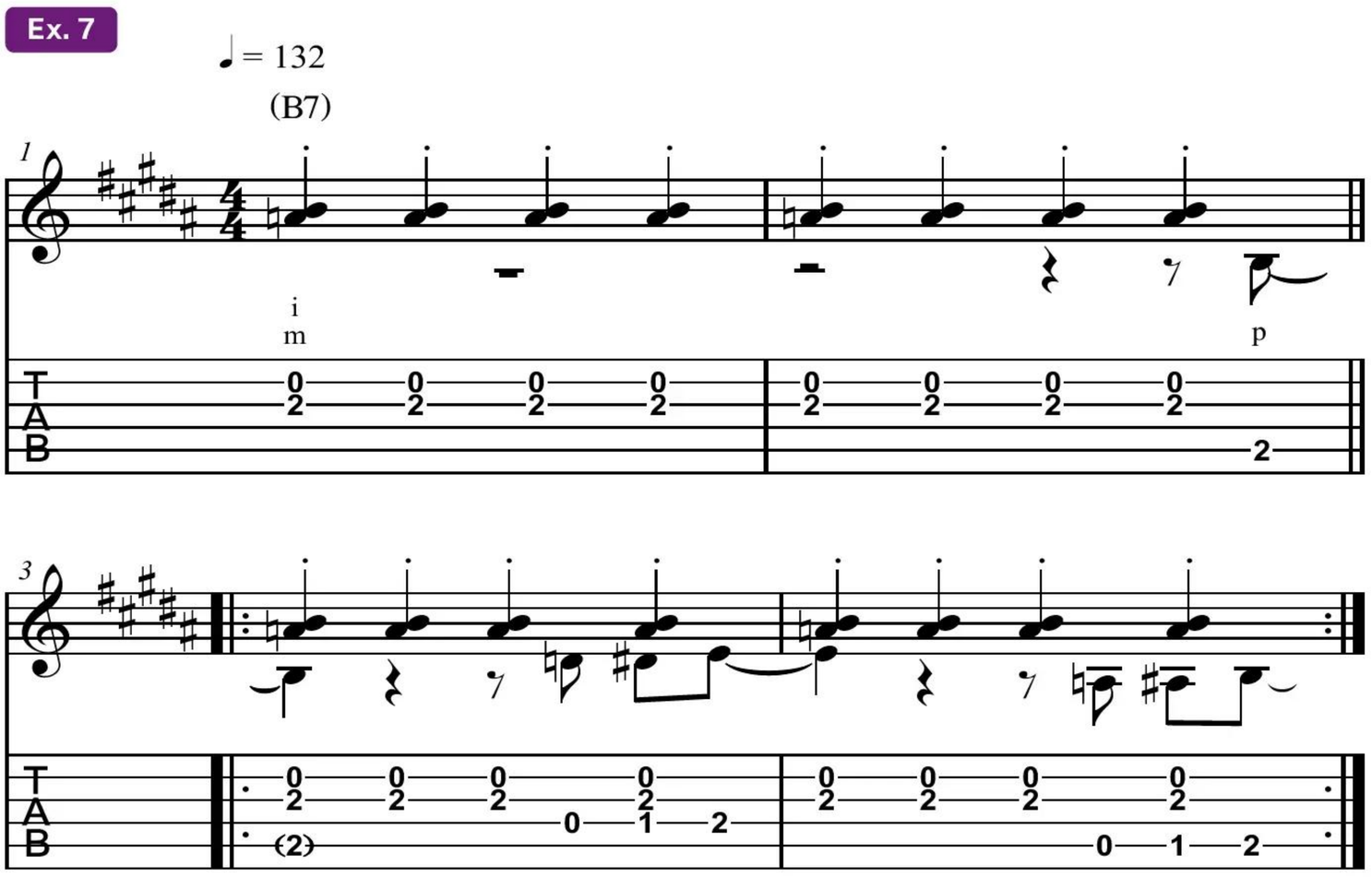
Ex. 5



Ex. 6



Ex. 7



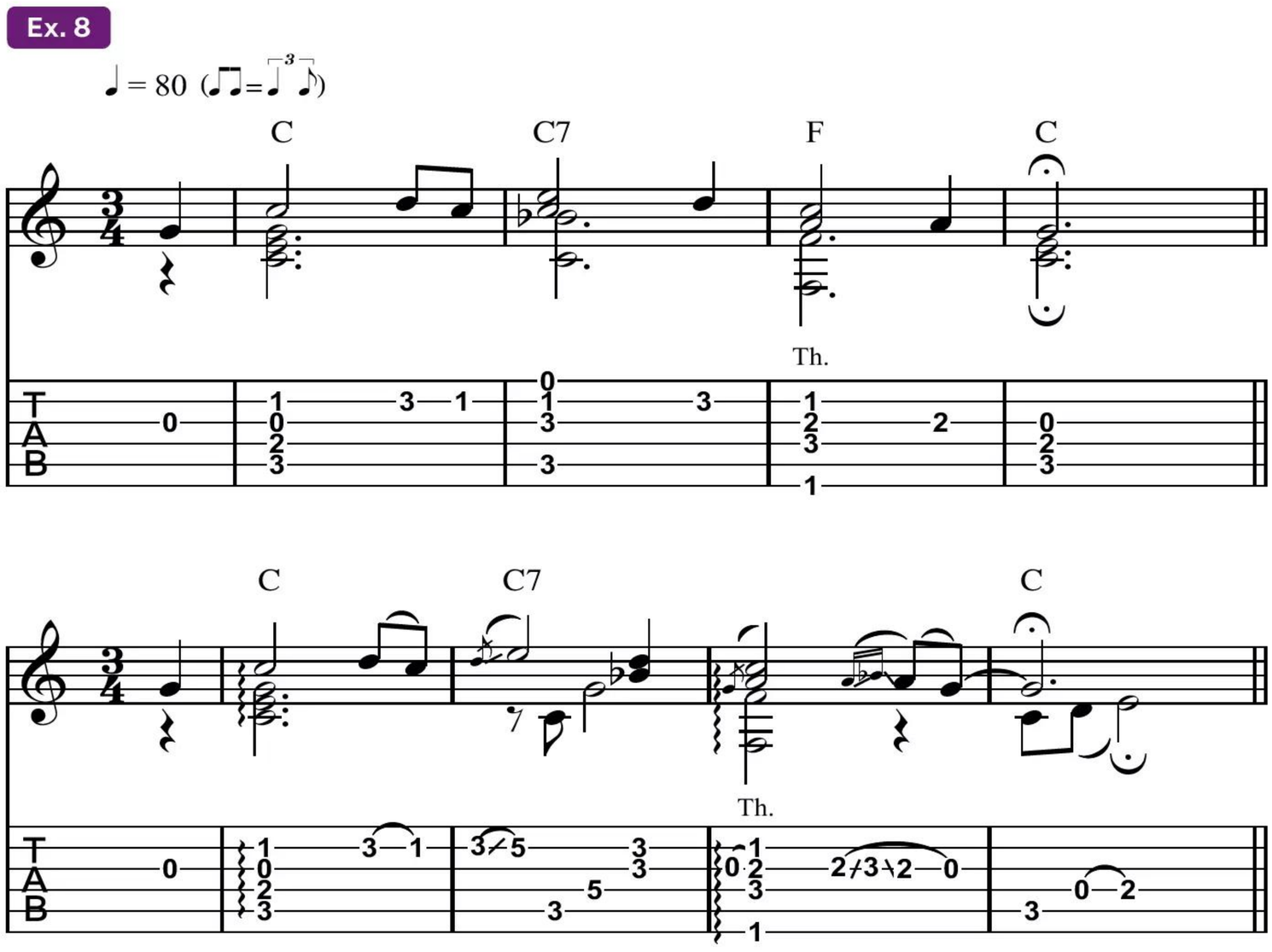
while touching the string very lightly with the tip of your pick hand's index finger at a *node*, typically 12 frets higher, to generate an octave-higher harmonic. While doing this, pluck the string with your thumbnail (or thumb-pick). The result should be a harmonic one octave above the fretted pitch, comparable to a 12th-fret natural harmonic on an open string. Note that, just as other, higher natural harmonics can be sounded on an open string — for example, seven or five frets above the nut or "zero fret" — the same is true with harp harmonics.

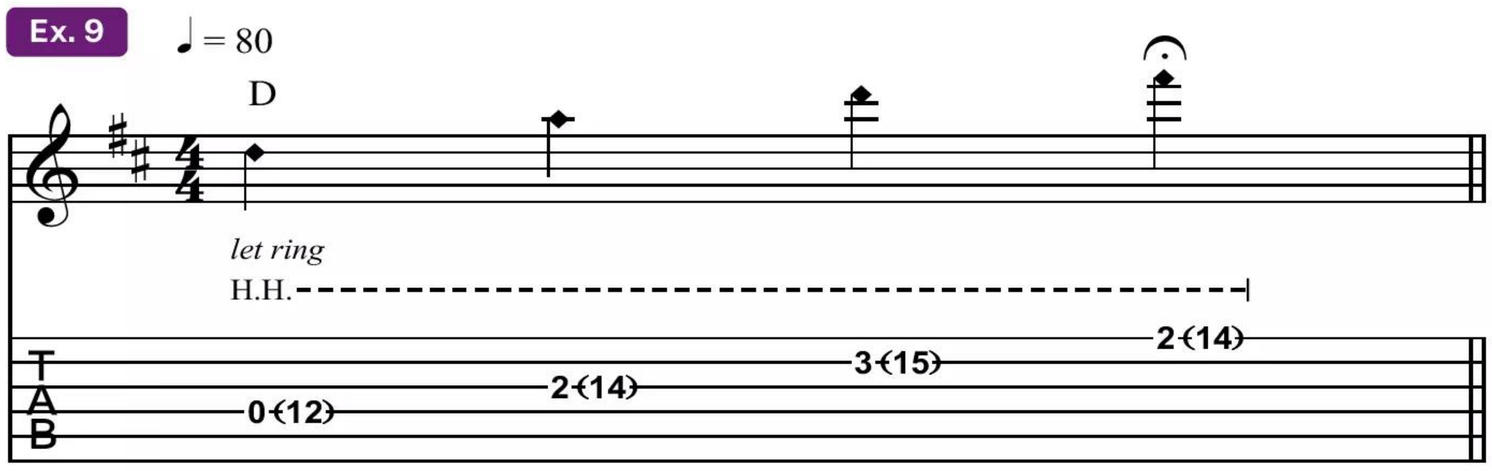
Ex. 9 employs these harmonics to an open D chord, adding some extra sparkle. Next to the initial tab number indicating the fretted note or open string, you'll find another number in parentheses, which indicates the fret above which you are to lightly touch the string as you pick it. Just as you would with a natural harmonic produced with open strings, be sure to touch the string *directly over* the fret indicated, in order to correctly target the harmonic node.

Like Breau, Emmanuel often mixes harp harmonics with regular fretted pitches, creating a lush, cascading effect. **Ex. 10** is inspired by his version of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" from *Endless Road*, which begins with a beautiful harp harmonics-fueled intro. The key is to let the notes ring over each other by having each chord form fretted *before* sounding the first note of each bar. Notice how incorporating harmonics into basic chord shapes produces a smooth, scalar line.

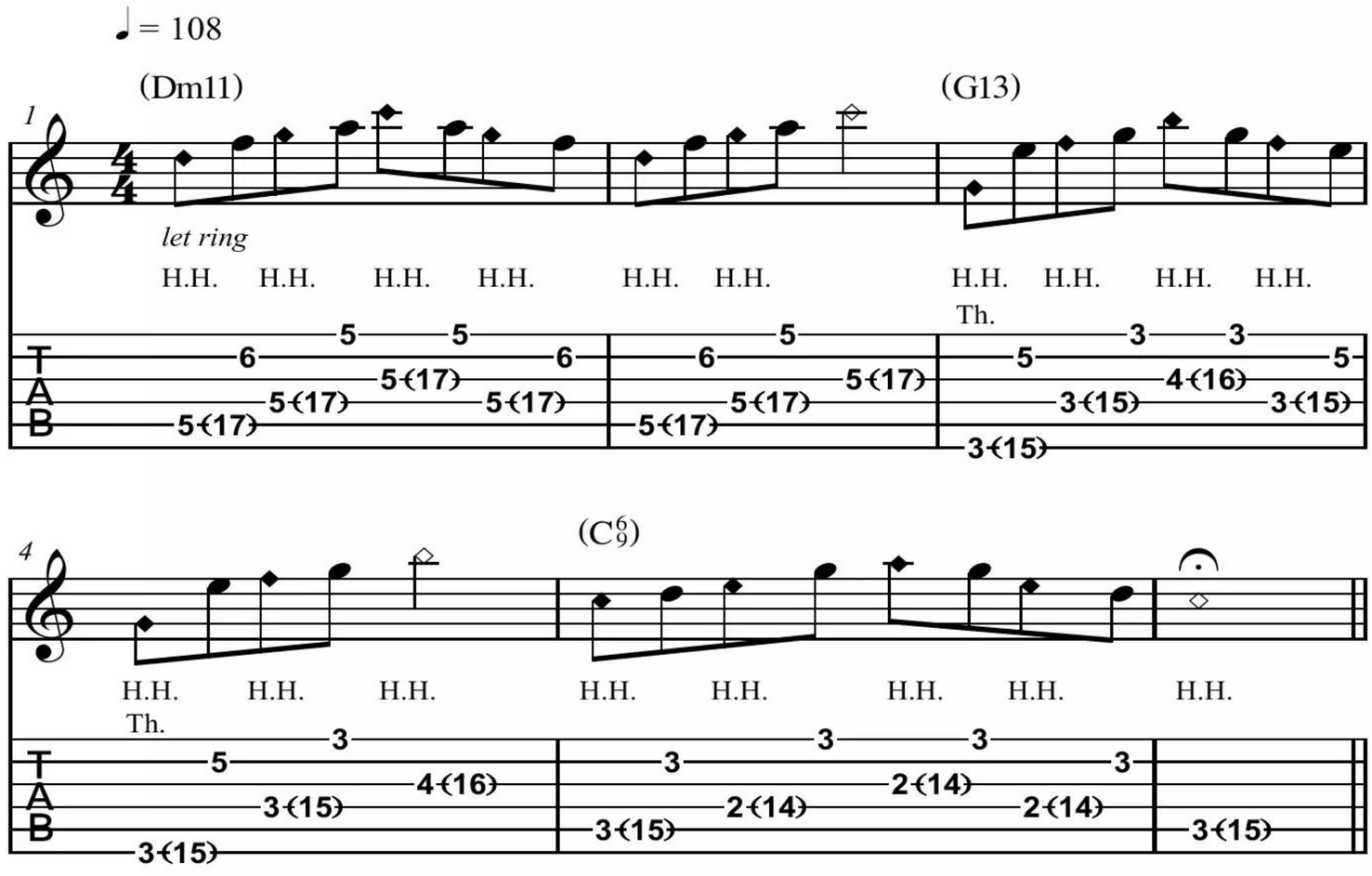
If you are to take just one thing away from having spent this time with Emmanuel's music, remember that it's how he plays the notes, by way of his daring arranging choices and masterful use of charismatic techniques, that contributes so much to his being a most exceptional player — a Certified Guitar Player, that is.

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

Ex. 8

Ex. 9



Ex. 10



Dobro 101

A look at the iconic bluegrass slide box.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

Jerry Douglas performs on Dobro at the Newport Folk Festival, Rhode Island, July 30, 2023.

DOUGLAS MASON/GETTY IMAGES

DOBRO IS ON my mind because of doing some gigs with a talented Bay Area player named Adam Bowers (he plays in the groups Poor Man's Whiskey and Go by Ocean) and working with him to prepare for my upcoming interview with perhaps the greatest Dobro player of all time, Jerry Douglas. So what exactly is a Dobro? That's a simple question with a complex answer.

THE MODERN DOBRO

The Dobro is a six-string acoustic square-neck resonator with a raised nut and a single spider-style metal resonator cone. It's primarily a bluegrass instrument, and practically all bluegrass cats call their instrument a Dobro, whether it is truly and historically a Dobro or not. Conversely, Hawaiian players still call it a steel guitar, not a Dobro, even if it is one.

Most modern Dobros have wooden bodies and are played with a solid steel bar in an open tuning. The instrument can be set on one's lap or on a stand, but it's generally played standing up using a strap that facilitates playing it in a face-up position, as if it were on one's lap like a lap-steel.

Which brings us to a primary point of confusion. A Dobro is a steel guitar because it's played with a solid steel bar. Any such instrument with a raised nut and a square neck — regardless of body material, number of strings or posture positioning — is a steel guitar. But by no stretch are all steel guitars Dobros. Even more confusing is that all resonators are not Dobros, but the Dobro is the original resonator.

DOBRO ORIGINS

Around 1889, Hawaiian guitarist Joseph Kekuku fashioned a solid slide from a piece of railroad steel. He then raised the nut on his acoustic guitar and flipped it face up. The steel guitar, with its signature portamento sound, was born.

The Dobro came about four decades later. The name is spelled with a capital *D* because it's a specific American brand of resonator guitar. In the 1920s, Slovak immigrant John Dopyera and steel-guitar player George Beauchamp, both living in Los Angeles, were looking for ways to increase the volume of Beauchamp's guitars. Dopyera built a resonator, which was patented in 1929. The guitar featured a metal cone inside the body that acted as a soundboard, amplifying the guitar's rich and metallic acoustic sound. Dopyera concluded that while one resonator cone made the instrument a bit louder, three produced a nicer musical tone.

Dopyera and Beauchamp founded the National String Instrument Corporation to manufacture the first resonators, known as resophonic guitars. John and his brothers left to start their own company, Dobro Manufacturing Company, in 1929. The name Dobro is a combination of *Do*, from Dopyera, and *bro*, from brothers. It also means *good* in Slovak. Dobro's slogan was "Dobro means good in any language." The company eventually started using wood for the body, initially because it was cheaper, and later because of metal scarcity at the outset of World War II. The Dobro name has undergone several ownership changes and has been owned by Gibson since 1993.

DOBRO PLAYERS

Hawaiian steel guitar player Sol Hoopii [*see Vinyl Treasures, page 30*] was the first musician known to record using a National Tri-cone, and the Dobro was quickly adopted by blues, country and bluegrass players. Tampa Red was among the first African-American blues players to record with a National in a bottleneck style. A roundneck resonator is favored by bottleneck players in the standard guitar position, while a square neck is the go-to for steel players using a face-up position. Dobro players tend to use thumb and finger picks. It's a tradition that goes back to "Uncle" Josh Graves, who adopted Earl Scruggs's pioneering three-finger banjo technique circa 1955 with Flatt & Scruggs, playing Dobro in a bluegrass context. Modern Dobro masters such as Rob Ickes and Jerry Douglas stand on those broad shoulders.

Dobro is now more a matter of stylistic context and less about whether the instrument is a Dobro in the historic sense. In 2008, Jerry Douglas told *GP*, "My signature model Beard resonator guitar is a complete redesign of the basic Dobro concept." Find out all about what the newly inducted Bluegrass Hall of Famer is playing these days in next month's Frets feature.

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

EPIPHONE

Inspired by Gibson Custom 1963 Firebird V and 1959 ES-355

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

EPIPHONE HAS EXPANDED its Inspired by Gibson Custom range, and in doing so has arguably narrowed the gap in quality between these guitars and those of the parent company. At the same time, Epiphone has expanded its offering of period-correct models, which so far has included renditions of the J-45, J-180 and SJ-200 acoustics. The new lineup features the 1959 Les Paul Standard, Les Paul Custom, 1963 Les Paul SG Custom, and the two more exotic offerings, reviewed here, the 1963 Firebird V and 1959 ES-355.

While the majority of Epiphone's guitars have been "inspired by Gibson" models since it was absorbed by its parent company in 1957, the series represents a much closer collaboration between the Chinese-made guitars and the luthiers of Gibson's Nashville-based Custom department. The twofold goal includes greater attention to vintage-correct details and the use of many of the same parts featured on American-made Gibson guitars.

For example, each of these guitars has the same USA-made pickups found on Gibson's Custom counterparts, as well as CTS potentiometers, Switchcraft jacks and switches, Mallory tone caps and other components you'll find on many of the finest guitars available today. At these prices there will inevitably be some departures from both vintage-correctness and Gibson Custom quality. The most obvious include polyurethane finishes, some slightly sharp fret ends and the use of bridge mounting anchors rather than posts directly into wood. With that said, the look and feel are both impressive at first glance, so let's dig more deeply into them.

From its phoenix graphics to its Kluson banjo tuners, the 1963 Firebird V accurately follows the classic formula.

1963 FIREBIRD V

The Inspired by Gibson Custom 1963 Firebird V accurately follows the reverse-body Firebird shape of 1963–'64. In addition to the distinctive body lines — which rather closely resemble the outline of a flipped-over Jazzmaster or Jaguar — the Firebird's most noteworthy feature is its neck-through-body construction, in which a multi-ply core forms both the neck and the center of the body. Glued-on mahogany "wings" give the guitar its shape, and it's topped with a reverse six-a-side phoenix headstock to maintain the theme, with six Kluson banjo-style tuners to avoid spoiling the lines.

Other hardware items include an Epiphone ABR-1 (a.k.a. Tune-o-matic) bridge and a vibrato tailpiece that Epiphone calls the Maestro Vibrola, with engraved cover. The model is available finished in Frost Blue, Ember Red, Cherry Red and a gloss Vintage Sunburst that I find classy and arguably most representative of the originals. It's beautifully complemented by a white pickguard with phoenix graphic and parallelogram inlays on the bound Indian laurel fingerboard.

The pickups are another component that sets the Firebird apart, a narrow humbucker that delivers a brighter, tighter sound than the full-size Gibson humbuckers, and in this case, they're a pretty big deal. After using a hotter Firebird mini-humbucker with ceramic magnets for several years — with arguably strident results — Gibson reworked the formula in 2019 to use Alnico V magnets and vintage-spec windings. They're the same pickups used on the Custom 1964 Johnny Winter Firebird and Murphy Lab 1963 Firebird V I've played in recent years, and most 'Bird fans find them a big improvement.

THIS MIGHT JUST BE THE BEST REVERSE-BODY FIREBIRD I'VE PLAYED AT THIS PRICE

The '63 Firebird neck profile is a medium-depth "C" that's a touch flatter than, say, a typical '59 Les Paul carve, but not as flat as the enduring SlimTaper profile. Played unplugged, this through-neck design reveals a lot of resonance and sustain, and you really feel the body vibrating into your sternum. Tested through a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a Fractal FM9 modeler, this Epiphone 1963 Firebird V delivers an authentic and enjoyable take on the classic reverse-body 'Bird and proves an inspiring and versatile performer by any measure.

The bridge pickup is bright, snarky and aggressive without ever being harsh, the neck is rich and vocal, yet very clear, and the in-between setting offers myriad blends of thoroughly usable voices. Having owned both vintage and newer Gibson Custom Firebirds in the past, I was pleasantly surprised by how well this Epiphone sat alongside them, and what a characterful and fully giggable guitar it presents for the price, offering that legendary Firebird cut-through-the-mix bite and sting without tipping into shrill tones.

SPECIFICATIONS

Inspired by Gibson Custom 1963 Firebird V
CONTACT epiphone.com
PRICE $1,699 street

NUT Graph Tech, 1.692" wide
NECK 9-ply mahogany/walnut, '63 Firebird medium "C" profile
FRETBOARD Indian laurel, 24.75" scale, 12" radius
FRETS 22 medium-jumbo
TUNERS Kluson Planetary (banjo style)
BODY Solid mahogany with 9-ply mahogany/walnut core
BRIDGE ABR-1 Tune-o-matic with Maestro Vibrola
PICKUPS Two Gibson Firebird mini-humbuckers with Alnico V magnets
CONTROLS Two volume controls, two tone controls, three-way selector switch
FACTORY STRINGS Epiphone .010–.046
WEIGHT 8.8 lbs (as tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS An impressive rendering of the original reverse-body Firebird V at this price, with great playability and authentic tones
CONCERNS Some fret ends above the 12th fret are a tad sharp

Luxury appointments on the 1959 ES-355 include multi-ply binding and a bound tortoise pickguard.

SPECIFICATIONS

Inspired by Gibson Custom 1959 ES-355
CONTACT epiphone.com
PRICE $1,299 street

NUT Graph Tech, 1.692" wide
NECK One-piece mahogany, '50s rounded medium "C" profile
FRETBOARD Ebony, 24.75" scale, 12" radius
FRETS 22 medium-jumbo
TUNERS Grover Rotomatic, gold plated
BODY Semi-acoustic laminated maple with solid maple center block
BRIDGE ABR-1 Tune-o-matic and stopbar tailpiece, gold plated
PICKUPS Two Gibson Custombuckers with gold-plated covers
CONTROLS Two volume controls, two tone controls, three-way selector switch
FACTORY STRINGS Epiphone .010–.046
WEIGHT 9.4 lbs (as tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS Great looks, easy playability and versatile ES-derived tones from a well-built ES-355 for the money
CONCERNS This guitar's arguably just a little heavier than some might prefer a semi to be

1959 ES-355

Often considered an ES-335 with fancier looks, the ES-355 stands further apart thanks to its ebony fingerboard and Grover Rotomatic tuners, both present here. Most originals had a stereo output, rejected by many players as cumbersome, so the mono version with stop-tail — upon which this Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom 1959 ES-355 is modeled — has always been considered the design's zenith.

The looks are all there, for sure. The top is trimmed with seven-ply top binding, with three on the back, five ply around the headstock and one along the fingerboard. Gold-plated hardware, a bound tortoise pickguard, and mother-of-pearl block inlays and split-diamond headstock inlay complete the luxury appointments.

The Epiphone rendition is built to the classic formula of a semihollow body made from maple ply, a solid-maple center block and a glued-in one-piece mahogany neck. The body is 3/32 inch thicker at the rims than the original '62 ES-355 sitting beside my desk, but the actual depth measurements of vintage ES models from '58–'65 varied quite a bit too. The neck on this guitar is carved to a full, well-rounded '59 "C" shape, with rolled fingerboard edges for extra comfort. It leans a little bulky in the shoulders perhaps, so players less at-home with bigger necks might want to feel it out in person before jumping into a purchase. The guitar is offered in Classic White, Cherry Red and Ebony, all in what Epiphone calls "VOS," for Vintage Original Sheen, kind of a satin polyurethane that yields a textured feel to the fingers.

The pair of Custombucker pickups are the same PAF-style humbuckers used on the majority of Gibson Custom models. Tested through the same rigs as the Firebird V, the 1959 ES-355 admirably pulled itself in line with classic Gibson ES tonalities, which I generally hear as a blend of rich and bright, crisp and articulate, yet with a textured, almost granular body to the notes, along with that extra ounce of clarity from the ebony fingerboard. While a good dual-humbucker ES can do most anything a Les Paul can, there's a little extra bite and edge to the former that can help it cut through, and this Epi has it in abundance into an overdriven amp. Add the harmonic depth and a certain chewy swirl from the Custombuckers, and it's a tone that stands out beautifully through myriad rhythm and lead applications.

THE 1959 ES-355 DELIVERS CLASSIC ES PERFORMANCE AND TOP-TIER LOOKS

CONCLUSION

All in all, Epiphone and Gibson Custom have knocked it out of the park, and both of these guitars offer big-league tone, looks and feel at minor-league prices. The 1959 ES-355 delivers abundant classic ES performance and top-tier looks, while the 1963 Firebird V captures that classic's character so well, it might just be the best reverse-body Firebird I've played at this price. Together, these two new entries handily earn Editors' Pick Awards for their achievements.

POWERHOUSE PRO STUDIO

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PRS

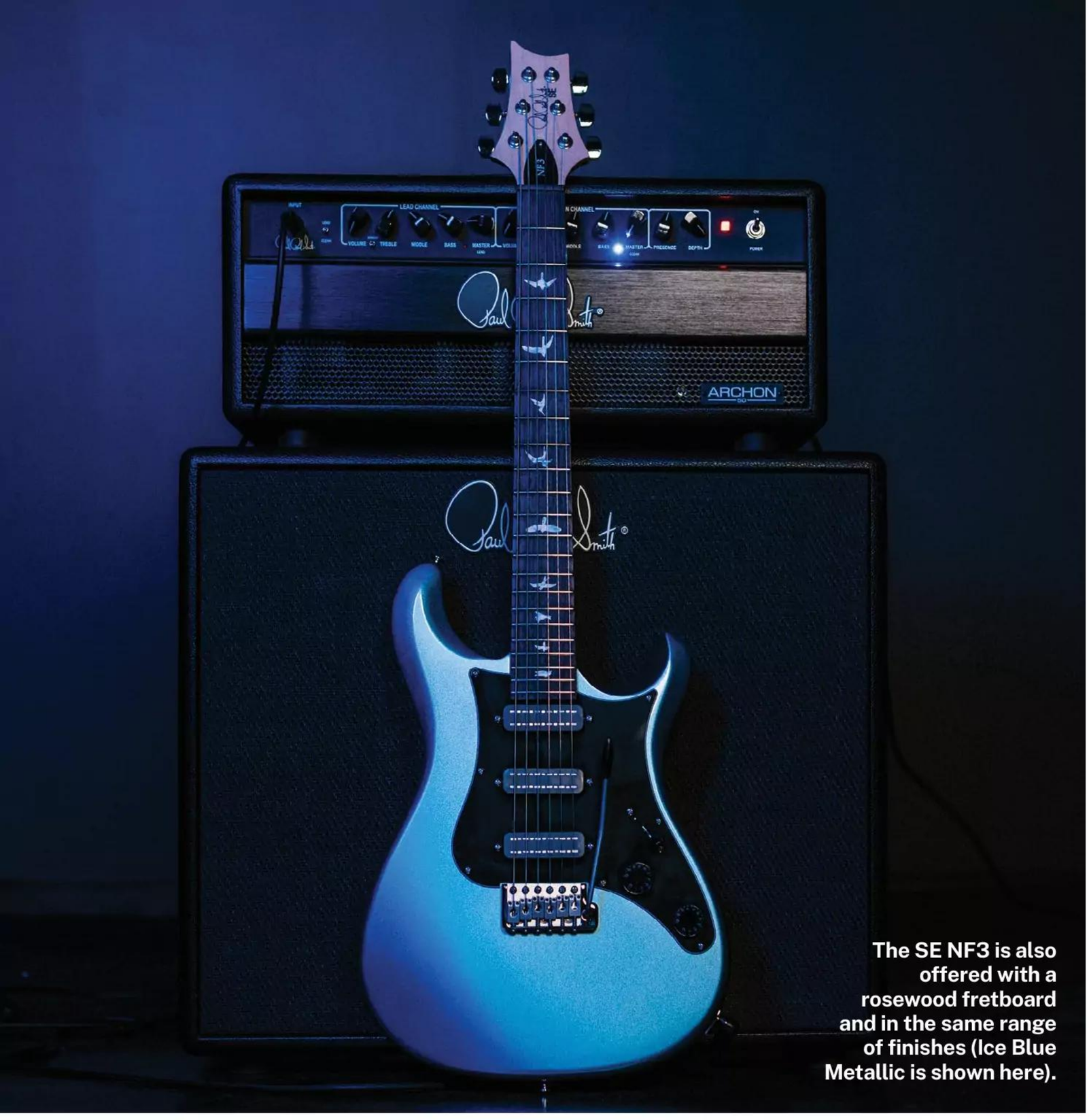
SE NF3

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

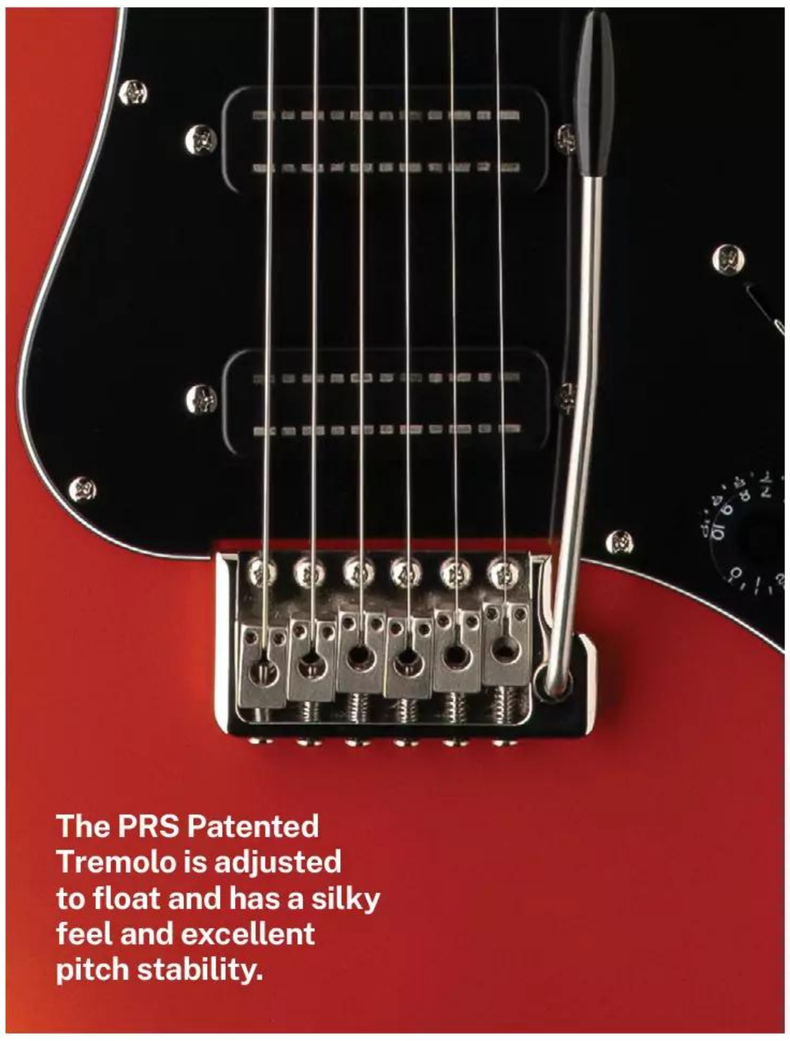
PREVIOUSLY PART OF PRS's Maryland-built guitar line, the SE NF3 was recently reissued in the company's offshore-produced SE series. The SE NF3 is so named for its Narrowfield Deep Dish (a.k.a. DD) "S" pickups. These unique PRS-design units have deeper bobbins to accommodate more windings and extra metal pieces between the magnets to yield a more powerful "single-coil" tone, while remaining noise-free because they are in fact humbuckers. A control set consisting of master volume, tone and a five-way blade switch allows the usual selections of bridge, middle and neck pickups by themselves and the neck-plus-middle and bridge-plus-middle combinations that allow the SE NF3 to veer into Strat-like territory in switch positions two and four.

All of this makes the SE NF3 quite different from standard humbucker-equipped PRS guitars, although it follows the specifications of many other SE models. The flattop body on my lightweight review sample was finished in pearlescent Polar White (see specs for other colors) and is contoured on the edges and the back to sit comfortably when playing seated or standing. Hardware consists of a PRS Patented Tremolo that's adjusted to float and has a silky feel and excellent pitch stability when working the bar, which pushes into a nylon bushing on the molded bridge. The precisely fitting trem bar stays where you put it and swings out of the way with a light touch.

The natural-finished bolt-on maple neck has a super-comfy Wide Thin profile that sits awesomely in the hand with its 13/16-inch thickness at the first fret and 57/64-inch thickness at the 12th fret, where the fretboard flares to 2 ¼ inches. Topped with a 25-inch-scale maple fingerboard adorned with Birds inlays, the playing surface sports 22 nicely crowned and polished frets whose beveled tips have



The SE NF3 is also offered with a rosewood fretboard and in the same range of finishes (Ice Blue Metallic is shown here).



The PRS Patented Tremolo is adjusted to float and has a silky feel and excellent pitch stability.

The SE NF3 walks the line between humbucker and single-coil, making it essentially a crossover guitar that delivers some of the best aspects of both while bringing a personality all its own. Bottom line, this maverick PRS model is outstanding on its merits, and it's fantastic that the SE version will allow more players to groove on what this guitar has to offer.

DELIVERS SOME OF THE BEST ASPECTS OF BOTH HUMBUCKER AND SINGLE-COIL

a silky feel when you slide your hand along the neck. The intonation is sweet in all positions, and the guitar's acoustic sound is lively and sustaining. Tuning chores are handled by PRS 18:1 ratio non-locking machines.

Played through a PRS DGT 15 head and 1x12 cabinet and a RC Davis Scirocco 30-watt combo [*see reviews in, respectively, the September and October 2024 issues*], the SE NF3 delivered inspiring tones that blended humbucker girth and power with single-coil detail and shimmer. On the back pickup it's akin to playing a beefier-sounding Strat, as it sounds crisp and clear but also delivers a muscular overdrive tone with gain added from pedals that included a Fulltone OCD and a UAFX Lion '68 Super Lead — or through the DGT 15 with the gain cranked. The Narrowfield pickups' silky highs are super pleasing, and the tone control smoothly rolls off the top end if you're going for a buttery distortion tone. The volume knob also maintains clarity as you turn it down so your rhythm tone doesn't suffer from loss of edge or presence.

The neck and middle selections offer a ton of cool spots for rhythm playing, and they also sound great when gained-up for gritty textures that are killer for blues, roots rock, slide playing and the like. As alluded to earlier, one of the handiest aspects of this guitar is its dual-pickup combinations in switch positions two and four, which yield different flavors of chiminess that are very inspiring for Strat-style tones. The fact that the Narrowfields sound a little beefier in those positions is icing on the cake.

SPECIFICATIONS

SE NF3
CONTACT prsguitars.com
PRICE $799 street, gig bag included

NUT Synthetic, 1 11/16" wide
NECK Maple bolt-on, Wide Thin profile
FRETBOARD Maple, 25" scale, 10" radius, Birds inlays
FRETS 22 nickel
TUNERS PRS designed 18:1
BODY Poplar with flat top
BRIDGE PRS Patented Tremolo
PICKUPS Three PRS Narrowfield DD "S" humbuckers
CONTROLS Volume, tone, 5-way blade pickup switch
EXTRAS Available in Gun Metal Gray, Ice Blue Metallic, Metallic Orange and Pearl White
FACTORY STRINGS PRS Classic .010–.046
WEIGHT 7.04 lbs (as tested)
BUILT Indonesia

KUDOS A great playing guitar with tones that combine single-coil detail and humbucker girth. Noise-free operation courtesy of the Narrowfield pickup design
CONCERNS None

CORT

Sol Encanto classical cutaway acoustic-electric

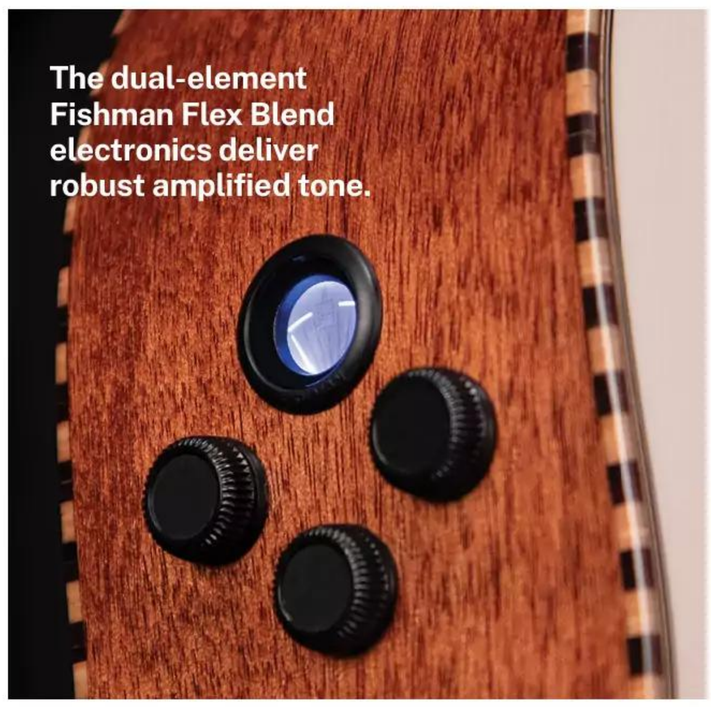
TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

THE SOL ENCANTO is the newest member of Cort's top-of-the-line Masterpiece range, featuring all solid woods and elegant aesthetics, and it's the only nylon-string model of the four Masterpiece models currently available. When the press release came out, I quickly asked about a review unit because the Sol Encanto checks a lot of boxes. Here's a nylon-string guitar with solid mahogany back and sides, a solid Engelmann spruce top, a soft Venetian cutaway, a side sound port and Fishman electronics, all at a street price below $1,500. Once I saw the gorgeous promo photo, I simply had to meet this lovely in person and feel it in hand.

The Sol Encanto is a true stunner with a distinct appeal. The White Blond gloss finish makes its Engelmann spruce top truly pop. Take it outside in the sun and it practically radiates. The multifaceted rosette consists of several wooden elements and a custom abalone soundhole inlay that come together in abstract style. Wooden check-pattern binding puts a fine frame on the top, and the dark Macassar ebony headstock cap, fretboard and bridge provide striking contrast. The golden open tuners with black buttons appear simultaneously classic and modern, and the script mother-of-pearl logo inlay at the 12th fret is a nice finishing touch.

The Sol Encanto's playability is likewise very nice. The neck profile feels like that of a real classical, without being so wide and flat as to be foreign to those who primarily play steel-string and electric. The neck is 1.89 inches wide at the nut, which is greater than a standard steel-string's 1.75 inches, but not nearly as wide as a traditional classical's more than two-inch width. The scale length is a full 25.6 inches, but as nylon strings bend readily, the Sol Encanto excels as an expressive lead instrument. It's also a great fingerpicker, with string spacing of 2.36 inches.

The tone can sound quite different depending on where and how you play. The Engelmann spruce top is touch sensitive and quite responsive to the nuanced dynamics of a fingerstyle attack. The overall tone is clearly colored by the solid mahogany back and sides, delivering a rather balmy and smooth sound for its relatively small body size, which is significantly smaller and thinner than a triple 0. That makes it easy to wrap your body around.



The dual-element Fishman Flex Blend electronics deliver robust amplified tone.

The wooden check-pattern binding runs along the body's front and back.

The golden open tuners with black buttons are both classic and modern.

It brightens up nicely if you play way back by the bridge and/or use a plectrum. You have to be a bit careful where you rest the corner of your plucking hand because the bridge comes to a rather sharp corner, rather than being rounded off, which would be preferred. The sound port's unique placement on the back end of the top side encouraged me to position the guitar a bit further back to keep my bicep from covering it up. Folks can argue all day about whether a sound port makes much difference, but I say it does. Just cover it up and compare the difference. To my ears it adds a welcome sense of dimensionality on the Sol Encanto.

Although I took to this guitar like a fish to water, my only complaint was that it had trouble staying in tune. I always find this a problem with nylon-string guitars, so I was patient and did a lot of string stretching. Perhaps the tuners are a bit wonky, but I felt confident enough to take the guitar out on a gig, where I performed for a couple celebrating their wedding anniversary. They wanted a Spanish-style soundtrack for their celebration, and since *Sol Encanto* is Spanish for *sun* and *charm*, I was very happy to have the guitar on hand for the job.

THE SOL ENCANTO DELIVERS SOLID TONES, AND FEATURES FINE PLAYABILITY WITH GIG-WORTHY ELECTRONICS

With the signal running through a Universal Audio Max Preamp & Dual Compressor and into an L.R. Baggs Synapse Personal PA, the guitar's dual-element Fishman Flex Blend electronics delivered a robust amplified tone that seemed surprisingly more powerful than the larger steel-string guitars I brought along. The Flex has a built-in tuner that was handy for on-the-fly adjustments, and once I got going playing songs at full force, the tuning seeded in well enough that I could forget about it and focus on playing.

As with a 12-string, there are certain songs that sound authentic only when played on a nylon-string, such as Blind Faith's "Can't Find My Way Home" and the beautiful étude "Is There Anybody Out There?" from Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. I also wound up performing instrumental versions of tunes, such as "Across the Universe," that went over especially well because the Sol Encanto's classical tone fit the vibe of the classy clientele at the event.

I think every guitar player should own a nylon-string acoustic. The techniques and skills you develop will raise your steel-string game and help you improve your posture, while its warm and mellow tone will give you a new take on playing the most familiar tunes. To that end, the Cort Sol Encanto is a worthy choice for gigging players who use the entire neck and desire a handsome presentation. It delivers solid tones from a light body made of solid woods and features fine playability along with gig-worthy electronics — all at a price that won't break the bank.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sol Encanto
CONTACT cortguitars.com
PRICE $1,299 street, gig bag included

NUT WIDTH 1.89", bone
NECK Mahogany, dovetail joint
FRETBOARD Macassar ebony, 25.6" scale
FRETS 19
TUNERS Classical open-gear style with black knobs
BODY Solid mahogany back and sides, solid Engelmann spruce top
BRIDGE Macassar ebony
ELECTRONICS Fishman Flex Blend dual element with Fishman S-Core piezo undersaddle plus mic
CONTROLS Volume, tone, blend (mic/pickup). Push volume activates tuner visible via LED display port
FACTORY STRINGS Savarez Cristal Corum
WEIGHT 3.9.lbs (as tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS Elegant look, easy playability, solid acoustic and amplified tones
CONCERNS Some issues staying well tuned. Sharp bridge corner

UAFX

Brigade Chorus and Vibrato, and Flow Vintage Tremolo

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

ADDING TO ITS roster of compact effects pedals, UAFX presents the Brigade Chorus and Vibrato, and the Flow Vintage Tremolo. Both deliver the same modeling technology found in the company's larger and more feature-heavy Astra Modulation Machine, in formats that boast simpler controls and smaller footprints. Both units are powered by a nine-volt supply rated at 250mA minimum (not included).

I previously reviewed the UAFX offering that these new pedals are based on, so for this story I tested them on their relative merits through a Fender Deluxe Reverb, a Vox AC10 reissue, and a PRS DGT-15 head and 1x12 speaker cabinet, along with guitars that included a PRS Dustie Waring signature and the recently introduced PRS NF3 SE [*reviewed on page 88*].

BRIGADE CHORUS AND VIBRATO

Lifted from the Astra Modulation Machine [*reviewed May 2022*], the Brigade exactingly replicates the warm analog chorus and vibrato effects of the iconic Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble from 1976. The pedal features rate, depth and level controls, plus a mini toggle switch for selecting chorus or vibrato. A recessed slider switch on the front of the green-finished aluminum housing selects buffered- or true-bypass modes and another slider turns the preamp on/off.

The latter is important because, when the preamp slider is set to "off," the preamp is active only on the wet signal. When the preamp slider is set to "on" in buffered mode, the preamp is active on the dry signal all the time, while in true-bypass mode, the preamp is active only when the pedal is on. Note that you'll want to keep it in true bypass to take advantage of the adjustable boost and fatness that the preamp brings. Should you prefer the boost to occur only when you click on the effect, set the preamp to "off" so the level boost comes on when chorus or vibrato are engaged.

The multi-color LED above the on/off foot switch indicates when the preamp is active on the bypass modes. In true bypass, the orange LED means the preamp is not on the dry signal, and the green LED indicates that it is when the pedal is on. In buffered bypass, the red LED means the preamp is not on the dry signal, while the purple LED tells you the preamp is on the dry signal whether the pedal is on or bypassed.

The sounds that the Brigade delivers are outstanding. The chorusing is sweet and syrupy and has the range of depth to cover everything from mild blurriness to deep, '80s-style slosh, according to taste. The

SPECIFICATIONS

Brigade Chorus and Vibrato
CONTACT uaudio.com
PRICE $199 street

CONTROLS Rate, depth, level. Vibrato/chorus switch. (Front panel) buffer/true bypass switch, preamp on/off switch
I/O 1/4" input and output jacks, center-negative 9V DC input, USB-C for registration and firmware updates via computer
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical
SIZE 5.75" x 2".58" x 2.29" (LxWxH)
BUILT Malaysia

KUDOS Excellent sounding emulation of '70s-style chorus and vibrato.
CONCERNS Rate control is only active in vibrato mode

SPECIFICATIONS

Flow Vintage Tremolo
PRICE $199 street

CONTROLS Speed and depth. Three position toggle for Dharma, 65 and Square . (Front panel) buffer/true bypass switch, Tap on/off switch
I/O 1/4" input and output jacks, center-negative 9V DC input, USB-C for registration and firmware updates via computer
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical
SIZE 5.75" x 2".58" x 2.29" (LxWxH)
BUILT Malaysia

KUDOS Great selection of classic amp-style effects including harmonic tremolo
CONCERNS None

Brigade and Flow feature compact footprints and easy-to-use three-control layouts with a mini toggle and foot switch.

rate control does not affect speed in chorus mode, but the fixed modulation is pretty pleasing nonetheless, and it's great that you can turn up the level knob to keep the effect loud and proud in a band mix.

This holds true for the vibrato too, which delivers the requisite pitch-bent wobble that adds color and potential motion sickness to your playing. Here the rate knob affects speed, allowing everything from cool rotary-speaker and Magnatone amp-style vibrato sounds, with the depth and speed controls around the halfway mark, to pulsing "ray gun" sounds when you crank the knobs to their limits.

FLOW VINTAGE TREMOLO

Also derived from the Astra Modulation Machine's vast assortment of emulations, the Flow pedal offers three distinct flavors of tube-driven tremolo. The controls here are speed, depth and volume, while a three-position switch activates Dharma (a '60s Fender brown-amp harmonic tremolo), 65 (a classic blackface-era optical Fender trem), and Square, a UA-modded 65 trem that delivers more aggressive chopped-trem effects. Along with a buffered-/true-bypass slider, there's a Tap on/off switch that lets you adjust modulation speed on the fly.

A few things worth noting here: The LED blinks to indicate the tempo in quarter notes, but the tremolo plays back as eighth notes, so the effect sounds twice as fast as what you tapped in. The pedal also retains the tempo when Tap mode is bypassed (by pressing and holding the foot switch for a few seconds) and does not necessarily reflect the position of the speed knob.

Similar to the Brigade pedal, a multi-color LED above the foot switch indicates the Tap mode in relation to the selected bypass state. For true bypass, the green LED means Tap is on, while the orange LED indicates it's off. For buffered bypass, the purple LED means Tap is on and red means it's off.

THESE ARE WELL WORTH CONSIDERING IF YOU DON'T NEED ALL THE FEATURES IN THE ASTRA MODULATION MACHINE

Flow's emulations provide many ways to shape trem sounds. The Dharma setting combines tremolo and phasing — the signal is split into bass and treble components, panned via an LFO between the filters and then summed back to mono, resulting in a watery-sounding effect that can add luster to fingerpicked parts and arpeggiated chords. The 65 (middle switch position) is like the tremolo (vibrato) on a Fender blackface or silverface amp — awesome for texturizing your playing with smoothly rounded pulse at the depth and speed that suits your preference. Lastly, setting the toggle to the right activates Square, which is UA's choppier version of 65. It rules because it cuts through and stands out when you need a "flashpot" effect to add drama to a song break or make a dynamic shift in volume. The volume control lets you lift the output level so the tremolo can be clearly heard when you kick it on.

All in all, these are two strong entries in UA's growing pedal line, and well worth considering if you don't need everything on offer in the Astra Modulation Machine.

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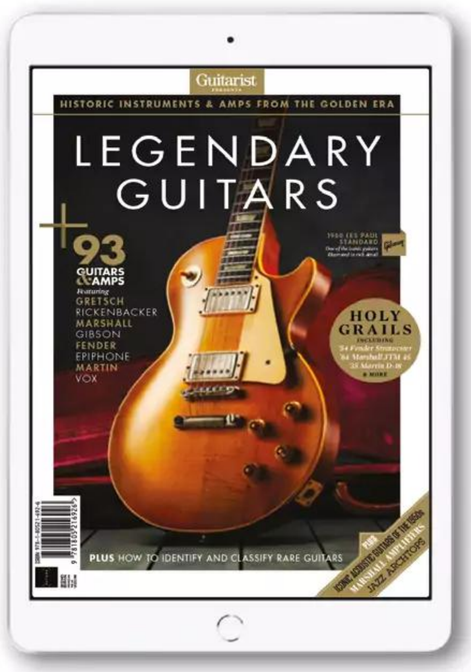

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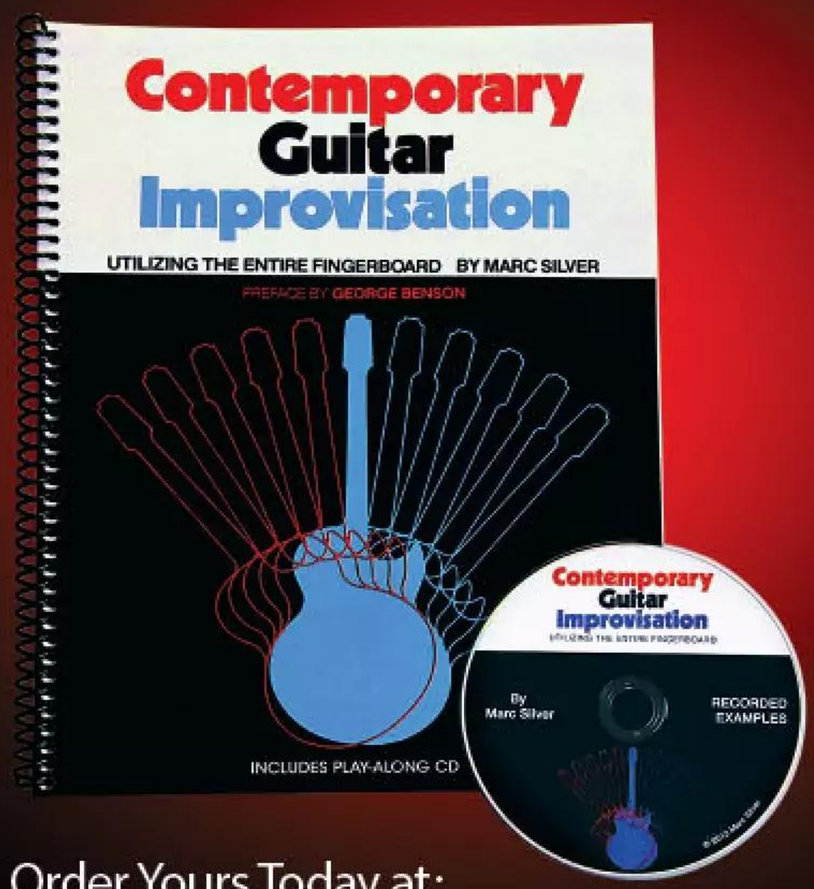

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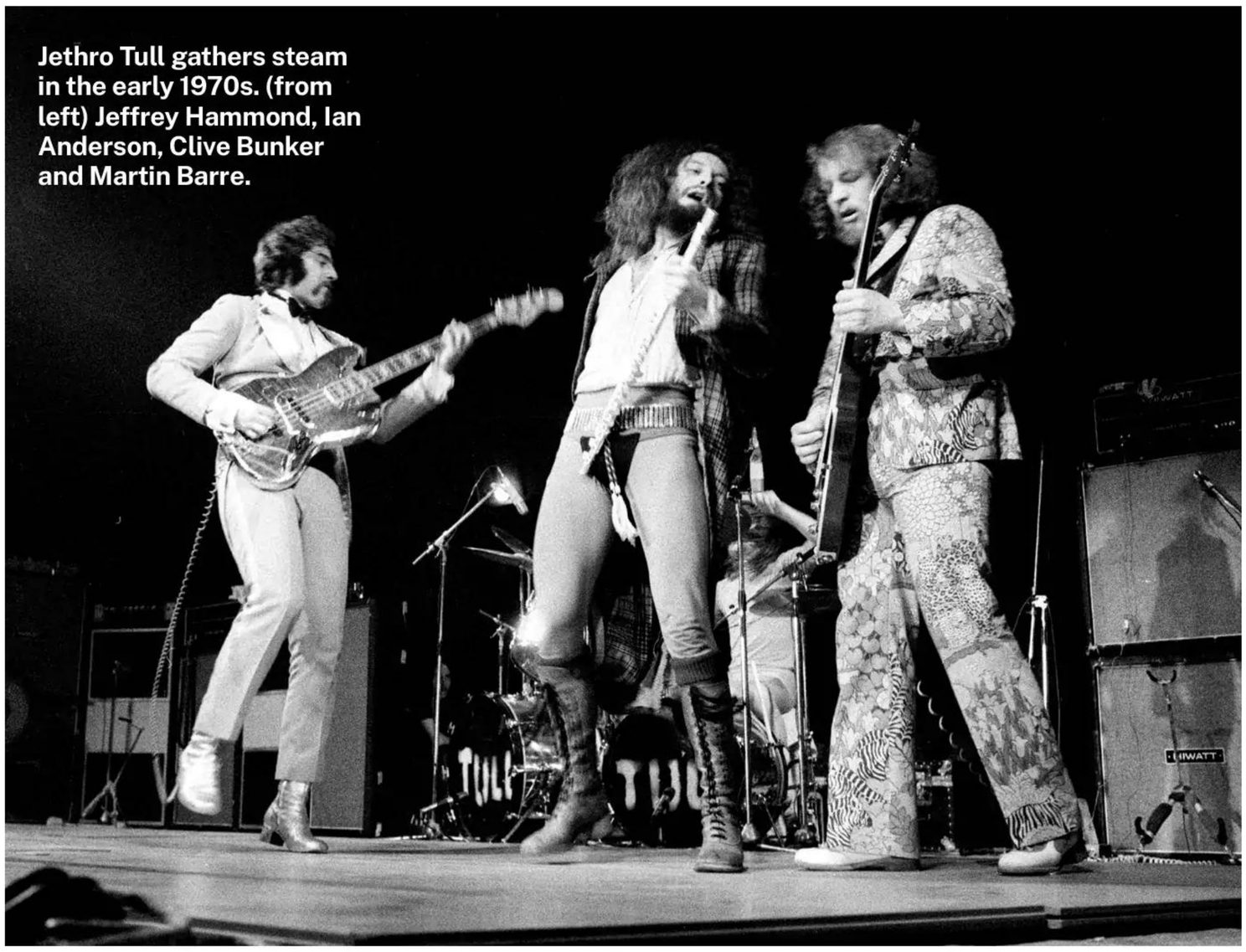
Jethro Tull gathers steam in the early 1970s. (from left) Jeffrey Hammond, Ian Anderson, Clive Bunker and Martin Barre.

How I Wrote...

"Locomotive Breath"

Ian Anderson reveals his train of thought behind Jethro Tull's 1971 classic.

BY JOE BOSSO

"I WOULD SAY it's one of the important ones," Ian Anderson remarks of Jethro Tull's 1971 hard-rock classic. "It's an enduring live performance piece, but it's also important in terms of its prescient subject matter based on a runaway train of population growth and globalism. I'm pleased about that."

IN THE SHUFFLING MADNESS

Throughout 1970, Jethro Tull fit recording sessions for their fourth studio album, *Aqualung*, around their hectic touring schedule, with the majority of their road-work taking place in America. "We were quite busy in those days, so I would grab what time I could, usually a few hours before soundcheck, to collect songs for the album," Anderson recalls. "The opening to 'Locomotive Breath' came to me while strumming an acoustic guitar as I sat in my room in a Holiday Inn."

He began hammering out a simple, hypnotic chord sequence, which he punctuated with a bar of aggressively strummed muted strings. "Even though I played it on an acoustic, it had an electric feel," he says. "It was train music, which appears in different music forms, particularly the blues. You have the imagery of the hobo, I suppose, and the idea of being on a train is mysterious and romantic."

Latching onto a runaway-train motif, Anderson sketched out lyrics about greed and capitalism run amok by overpopulation. While on tour, he would occasionally run through new ideas with guitarist Martin Barre, and if the numbers were fleshed out enough, the band would play them at soundchecks. "Locomotive Breath," however, remained in Anderson's head. It wasn't until Tull went back to England later in the year and reconvened at Island Studios in London that he first played it for his bandmates on an acoustic.

STATIONS ONE BY ONE

The group tried to record the song's basic tracks live off the floor, but the groove wasn't happening. "It didn't have the metronomic feel I wanted," Anderson says. "It was just too loose and untidy." Rather than bag the song, he decided to build the track piecemeal on his own. After recording a click track by banging two drumsticks together, he played a kick drum and hi-hat over it. Next, to emulate the band's characteristic heavy sound, Anderson borrowed Barre's Les Paul and played a rugged rhythm track, adding lines and phrases that darted in and around vocals. Recalls Anderson, "This was the only time I ever played a Les Paul."

"IT DIDN'T HAVE THE METRONOMIC FEEL I WANTED. IT WAS JUST TOO LOOSE AND UNTIDY"

Anderson admits his process might have bruised his bandmates' feelings. "But sometimes, in order to get the job done, you have to do it yourself," he says, adding that Barre would add on his own biting electric licks, "things I simply couldn't play."

Gradually, the song took shape. Clive Bunker cut the remaining drum parts, John Evan played piano and bassist Jeffrey Hammond recorded "varooming" basslines. Anderson laid down vocals and a spirited flute solo, as well as a layer of acoustic guitar rhythms "for some texture." The idea for a jazz-blues piano intro came later. "I wanted something that would set a mood of quiet grandeur before it was shattered," Anderson says. "John did some improvisation that became more definitive, and Martin added the intro guitar solo and various bits."

NO WAY TO SLOW DOWN

"Locomotive Breath" was released as the lead single from *Aqualung* in March 1971, but it failed to chart (the following single, "Hymn 43," would be the band's first song to crack *Billboard*'s Hot 100). Nevertheless, the track enjoyed heavy play on FM stations, and together with memorable cuts like "Cross-Eyed Mary" and the popular title track, it vaulted the album into the top 10. Over the years, *Aqualung* would sell more than seven million copies and become regarded by critics and fans as the band's finest hour.

"Locomotive Breath" quickly became a crowd favorite and remains Jethro Tull's most-performed song. It's been featured in films such as *Jumanji* and in various TV series like *Fargo* and *Supernatural*. "They have to ask my permission for use, so I always read a script or synopsis before I say yes or no," Anderson says. "Maybe it's got some actors in it that I like, or there's an important director. Either way, it's good to know that the song has another life in some new context."

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