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A full-page photograph of the rock musician Slash. He is wearing a black top hat with silver studs, dark sunglasses, and a dark t-shirt. He has long, curly dark hair and a goatee. He is holding a red Epiphone Les Paul Standard electric guitar. The background is a dark stage with warm, orange and red stage lights.

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WOODSHED

VOL. 42 | NO. 10 | OCTOBER 2021

E.C. WAS HERE — BUT WHEN?

IN THIS ISSUE'S cover feature, John Mayer talks about how much he worshipped Eric Clapton when he was in high school (Obviously, I mean when John was in high school — not Eric!). And he doesn't mean Bluesbreakers-, Cream- or Derek and the Dominos-era Clapton; he loved contemporary, late-Eighties Clapton, the Clapton who recorded 1989's *Journeyman*. "It all has to do with how old you were when it hit you," Mayer says. "And when I was in high school, it was 'Pretending.' It was 'Bad Love.' It was 'Running on Faith.' If you liked guitar and you liked Eric Clapton, that's what he was playing if you went to go see him at the New Haven Coliseum."

I love the Connecticut reference, because I saw Clapton on the same tour (April 13, 1990) about 45 minutes up I-91 in Hartford. I remember being kinda put off by the band's super-slick, synth-heavy sound and endlessly irritating background singers. It was way too "shimmering" for me. But this brings me right back to what Mayer said: "It all has to do with how old you were when it hit you." Clapton hit me during my high school years too, but that was back in '83, the year of *Money and Cigarettes*, the album that ended Clapton's long, laidback, pseudo-country, J.J. Cale-esque, "Strat straight into the amp" phase. It's a phase that's best represented by his 1980 live album, *Just One Night*, which is pretty much devoid of synths, shimmer and irritating background singers. Anyway, why am I reviewing 31-year-old concerts and 41-year-old albums? No reason, really, except to point out that "The Eighties" means so many different things to so many different people. Weezer's latest album, *Van Weezer* (covered in our July issue) is a nod to Rivers Cuomo's late-Eighties influences, but those sounds and references have very little to do with the very specific Eighties that Mayer references on his new album, *Sob Rock*. Frankly, it's a version of the Eighties that's often forgotten or ignored!



DAMIAN FANELLI
Editor-in-Chief

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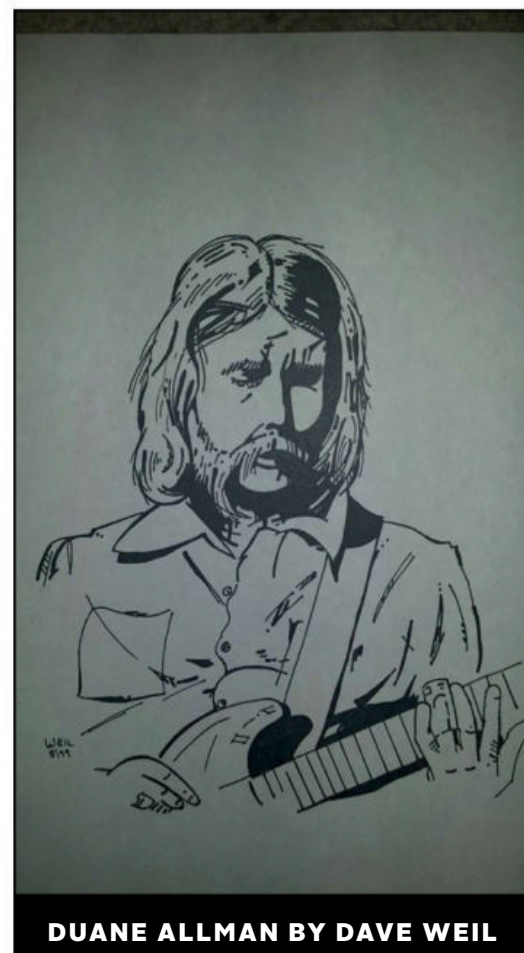
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OF THE MONTH

If you've created a drawing, painting or sketch of your favorite guitarist and would like to see it in an upcoming issue of *Guitar World*, email GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com with a scan of the image!



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DUANE ALLMAN BY DAVE WEIL

DEFENDERS of the Faith



Dan Morrison

AGE: 48

HOMETOWN: Palm Beach, QLD, AU

GUITARS: My uncle's hybrid Strat, which I still gig with; Gibson Les Paul Studio; cigar box guitar

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Chevelle "The Red," Fleetwood Mac "Oh Well," Johnny Winter "Dallas"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Nothing; I have what I need.



Sean Carroll

AGE: 43

HOMETOWN: Orange, CA

GUITARS: Gibson Les Paul Standard, Gibson Explorers, G&L Invader XL, G&L Asat classic S, Charvel San Dimas Style 2, Taylor 310

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Jimi Hendrix "Castles Made of Sand," Wes Montgomery "The Thumb," Montrose "One Thing on My Mind," Led Zeppelin "The Rover"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Gibson Explorer Custom Shop, Electro-Harmonix Mono Synth, TC Electronic Dreamscape Chorus



Guy Lee

HOMETOWN: Vero Beach, FL

AGE: 63

GUITARS: 2017 Gibson SG Standard, 2016 Gibson Les Paul Standard

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: "I'm Tore Down," "Sleep Walk," "Josie," "Mercury Blues"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Gibson dot-neck ES-335



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Black Pumas' Eric Burton [left] and Adrian Quesada shoot a pre-taped segment for the 63rd Grammy Awards in March



Black Pumas

FRESH OFF THEIR GUITAR-FORWARD GRAMMY JAM, ERIC BURTON AND ADRIAN QUESADA DISCUSS THEIR UNINTENTIONALLY RETRO SOUND, THEIR NEXT ALBUM AND THE “INTERESTING DANCE” OF A TWO-GUITAR ACT

By Richard Bienstock

THE 2021 GRAMMY Awards ceremony, which took place in L.A. back in March, was, like everything over the past year, an atypical production that only vaguely resembled its non-pandemic past. That said, the show still managed to kick off with a one-two punch of performances from very Grammy-like artists — pop phenoms Harry Styles and Billie Eilish. Also on the shared stage that night? The Black Pumas, who were up for three awards, including Album of the Year for the deluxe edition of their self-titled 2019 debut, and who brought a bit of retro-soul flavor — and a much-needed guitar-forward jam — to the stage with a searing performance of

“Colors” (that song, by the way, garnered the group’s two additional nominations, for Record of the Year and Best American Roots Performance).

Black Pumas, which is built around the duo of singer and guitarist Eric Burton and guitarist and producer Adrian Quesada, stood out from most of the other fare (the rock trio Haim excepting) on the show that evening — as did their companions, a 1967 Fender Coronado for Burton and a newer Fender Jaguar for Quesada that “sounded so cool with the fuzz pedal I was using,” he says. “And I tried it on with my wardrobe and it looked cool, too. So, done deal.” That said, they did feel a kinship with their fellow

musicians. “Everyone was definitely showing love,” Quesada continues. “Harry [Styles] actually came up to tell us that he really liked our record. So, kind of a cool moment having artists supporting other artists.”

Adds Burton, “It was nice to perform on the same stage as some of our peers who are doing very well and representing their genres with great gusto.”

Black Pumas, it’s worth noting, have likewise been representing their own genre with great gusto. “We’re making music from our hearts, and thankfully that’s resonated in other people’s hearts as well,” Burton says. But how they arrived here is unlike the road traveled by most bands. In a story that ➔

has now been told and retold (it's a good story), Burton, who grew up in Southern California singing in church and involved in musical theater, and with minimal exposure to secular music, cut his teeth busking at the Santa Monica Pier, developing his singing and guitar playing — and his performance chops — for crumpled-up dollar bills from passers-by. Eventually, he road-tripped up and down the West Coast with some musician friends before landing, and staying, in Austin, Texas.

Which is where he met Quesada, who, 13 years his senior, had grown up on hip-hop and hair metal, spent time in a local punk-jazz band and logged more than a dozen years with Grammy Award-winning Latin funk “orchestra” Grupo Fantasma.

During those years, Quesada had the opportunity to play alongside Prince (“His lead guitar chops were, like, through the roof,” he recalls. “It was pretty intimidating”) and also took part in a Grupo side project, Brownout, which recorded a series of Black Sabbath covers under the

name Brown Sabbath and played them, at one point, for Ozzy Osbourne himself. “We ended up getting booked for festivals, and we did a private show for Ozzy and [his son] Jack. The whole thing took on a life of its own.”

By 2017, Quesada had departed Grupo Fantasma and was looking for a singer to add vocals to some new instrumentals he was brewing up in the studio. At the suggestion of a mutual friend, he rang Burton, a virtual unknown in Austin — or anywhere else, for that matter. The pairing proved prophetic. “Eric fit like a glove on those instrumental tracks,” Quesada recalls. “And then he started showing me his songs that predated us even knowing each other, it was like, ‘Oh, shit, this fits perfectly with this sound I’m producing...’”

One of the songs Burton had in his pocket was “Colors,” which, Quesada says, “Eric wrote over 10 years ago. But it’s still touching that place in people’s hearts all these years later, on different levels.”

Indeed, “Colors,” with its swelling, almost hymn-like melody and socially minded lyrics (“All my favorite colors / My sisters and my brothers / See ’em like no other,” Burton intones in a honeyed, emotive voice) has, like much of the material on *Black Pumas*, led to the band being tagged with a retro-

soul label. But there’s more to it than that.

“We’ve never really set out to make retro music,” Quesada says. And while he admits he and Burton “probably listen to more older music than we do newer music,” he also says their sound “kind of lands somewhere in between. One day we’ll be really geeking out on an old soul song, and the next day we’ll be geeking out on a Mobb Deep track. And then the next day we’re on to some rock ’n’ roll. It’s all over the place.”

Guitar-wise, Burton characterizes himself and Quesada as “rhythm players at heart.” Though it is Quesada who handles the brunt of the lead work and single-note melody lines. “I love lead guitar and I love solos,” Quesada says, “and I’ve been playing so long

that there’s a certain amount of muscle memory that goes on.” But, he adds, “and I would shout this from the rooftops, Eric’s a dope-ass guitar player, man. There’s some stuff on the record that I think people have assumed is me on guitar, but I’m like, ‘No way — that’s the hands of Eric Burton.’ I like people that play interestingly and uniquely,

and Eric’s one of those guys.”

Regarding his approach, Burton says, “When I first started out on guitar, it was like straight-up troubadour style by myself, where I’m beating on the guitar to show some percussion, playing the bass notes, doing the minor leading tones within the rhythms. So with my guitar playing as unorthodox as it is, coupled with Adrian’s sensibilities, we have an interesting dance that we do together.”

Burton and Quesada are embarking on that interesting dance in pursuit of crafting the follow-up to *Black Pumas*. But word is still out on when the new material will be released, or what it will sound like.

“We have over 20 ideas that are in various stages of completion,” Burton says. “Some that started on acoustic, some that started on electric, some that started on keys. We respect each other musically, so we have the ability to follow each other into places we’re not familiar with, so to speak, with soul being a bit of a lighthouse.”

Quesada concurs. “I don’t ever remember any moments where Eric had shown me a song and I’ve been like, ‘Oh, man, I don’t hear it...’ My wheels always start turning immediately — ‘I could do this.’ I could do that.” There’s synergy between us. And it’s been that way from the beginning.”

“I love lead guitar and I love solos, and I’ve been playing so long that there’s a certain amount of muscle memory that goes on”

— ERIC QUESADA



WHAT'S ON MY PLAYLIST



JASON BIELER

1

“Heart in Hand”

Opeth

They do a ton of stuff right. Songs and technical prowess that never seems forced or like they’re trying to solve a math problem. So good!

2

“Lifeboat Serenade”

Jimmy Herring

Jimmy is about as good as it gets: emotional, melodic, with a rich vocabulary that’s always used to serve the tune. The man is a musical giant, and all must bow down before him.

3

“Greenwich Mean”

Wayne Krantz

If there’s a guitar player with a better time feel — or someone who is boldly marching to the beat of their own drummer more than Wayne Krantz — I need to be made aware.

4

“One Armed Bandit”

Jaga Jazzist

This feels like where music could be going: one part electronic, one part orchestral. Add a dash of snarl and whimsy and you get a wicked new sound.

5

“In the Blood”

John Mayer

Even though he’s been cursed by not being as good looking as me, this dude is a deeply underrated player. If he gains 50 lbs., goes bald and is in a kitchen accident involving oil splatter that melts his facial features in a Dali-esque fashion, he’ll go down as one of the all-time greats. At the end of the day the guy can write great songs, and that makes me dig his playing all the more.

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Roman Ibramkhalilov


Jinjer

GUITARIST ROMAN IBRAMKHALILOV EXPLAINS HOW THE PANDEMIC INSPIRED THE UKRAINIAN PROG-METALCORE STALWARTS TO DIAL IN THE “MOST POWERFUL SOUND POSSIBLE”

By Richard Bienstock

▶ UKRAINIAN PROG-METALCORE foursome Jinjer named their new album *Wallflowers*, but be warned — the music gathered on it is hardly of the shrinking-violet sort. Rather, explains guitarist Roman Ibramkhalilov of the title, “A wallflower hangs on the wall and is most times overlooked, but it sees everything — the good and the bad in people, and in real life.”

True to that all-encompassing view, the music on *Wallflowers*, the band’s fifth full-length overall, is some of their most varied — and devastatingly heavy — to date, from the detuned, nu-metal-esque mudslide riffing of opener “Call Me a Symbol,” to the mellow and moody clean tones of “Vortex,” the raging, blastbeat-powered rhythms and jazzy excursions of “Mediator” to the atmospheric tones and textures of the title track.

“We all love both death metal parts with blastbeats, but also the lighter parts,” Ibram-

khalilov says about Jinjer’s approach. That said, he adds, “I do think having more time to focus on songwriting led to some of the heaviness on this album.”

Indeed, like many bands, Jinjer, which also includes singer Tatiana Shmailyuk, bassist Eugene Abdukhanov and drummer Vladislav Ulasevich, found themselves grounded this past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which left them with plenty of time to work on new music. Whereas the band’s previous full-length, 2019’s *Macro*, was “written and recorded in three months,” Ibramkhalilov says, “the pandemic helped us, since we had a lot of time for writing and recording. And we did use all our free time to work on *Wallflowers* — we wanted to make it the best work we’ve ever done. As for the recording sessions, we wanted to get the most ‘live’ sound, but at the same time most powerful sound possible. And I think we got it.”

“I almost feel sorry for anyone who comes out to [our] shows, because we are going to smash them”

— ROMAN IBRAMKHALILOV

When it came to those recording sessions, Ibramkhalilov, who employed an OD Venus guitar through a Fender Super-Sonic 100 amp for the sessions, says he had to evolve his approach in the studio given that “most of the songs were written by our drummer, Vlad. So I had to work on them because the playing style and technique in his parts are very different from mine.”

Even so, he adds, “I already have ideas for future songs. That’s the thing with too much time... I am exploding with new ideas already.”

Until then, Jinjer are preparing to hit stages once again, with a U.S. jaunt alongside Suicide Silence scheduled for October. “I can’t wait for this tour,” Ibramkhalilov says. “After such a long time sitting on our asses, we have so much energy now and just want to move again. I almost feel sorry for anyone who comes out to the shows, because we are going to smash them.”

Cedric Burnside
in the studio

Cedric Burnside

THE GRANDSON OF MISSISSIPPI HILL COUNTRY BLUES GREAT R.L. BURNSIDE GOES ALL IN — AND ALL OUT — ON HIS NEW ALBUM, *I BE TRYING*

By Jim Beaugez

► **THERE'S A TENDENCY** in some circles to view blues music as a museum piece, while the musical styles it informed — rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, soul, hip-hop and their various subgenres — are allowed to evolve. But the country blues music that rolled out of hillside juke joints and hollers in the north Mississippi Hill Country in the hands of Mississippi Fred McDowell, Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside is alive and well, thanks to younger artists like Cedric Burnside.

"I've listened to old-school blues my whole life," says the 43-year-old Burnside, calling from his home in the rural Mississippi hills where he learned the ropes from his "Big Daddy," aka his grandfather R.L. "Even when [R.L.] wasn't playing guitar, he would throw on some Fred McDowell or Jessie Mae Hemphill, even Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, Lightnin' Hopkins. Some of my cousins, and some of my uncles and aunts, they'd get so tired of it they would

leave the house when he started playing."

Originally a drummer, Cedric began backing R.L. on tours when he was just 13, absorbing the hill country rhythms and his grandfather's sense of timing and improvisation. By the time he got serious about playing guitar himself, R.L. was in declining health and unable to play much. Instead, Cedric pored over videos on YouTube to study R.L.'s fingerpicking technique. The fruits of those lessons are on display throughout his latest album, *I Be Trying* [Single Lock], which follows his previous two Grammy-nominated solo outings.

Recorded at Royal Studios in Memphis with producer Lawrence "Boo" Williams, who also has roots in the Hill Country, Cedric took advantage of the studio's gear collection, plugging his Fender Stratocaster and a Les Paul-style guitar built for him by Mike Erickson into vintage Fender and Gibson amplifiers. On a cover of R.L.'s "Bird Without a Feather," he plays an auditorium-

"It was just amazing to me, that sound, and sitting and looking at my Big Daddy [R.L. Burnside] play his music firsthand. I knew it was something I was gonna do for the rest of my life"

style Gibson acoustic given to him by a fan and collector after a gig in Philadelphia. While Burnside takes most of the leads himself — as well as half of the album's drum tracks — longtime friend Luther Dickinson wields a slide on "Step In" and "Keep On Pushing."

No matter where his playing wanders, though, Cedric never wanders too far from the roots his grandfather planted. "It was just amazing to me, that sound, and sitting and looking at my Big Daddy play his music firsthand," he says. "I knew it was something I was gonna do for the rest of my life."

Bernth

HOW AN AUSTRIAN SHRED WHIZ TOOK INSPIRATION FROM HIS OWN POPULAR WEEKLY YOUTUBE VIDEOS — AND RABID FANBASE — TO COMPLETE HIS FIRST ALBUM, A DAZZLING PROJECT FOUR YEARS IN THE MAKING

By Gregory Adams

FEW GUITARISTS ARE willing to scorch their fretboard like Bernth. As a longtime session shredder and YouTube guitar personality, the Austrian virtuoso naturally has a handle on warp-speed sweeps and tapping techniques, but when it came to promoting *Elevation*, his first instrumental solo album, one video upload found Bernth literally lighting up a prized Ibanez with a series of blowtorches to prove his point on the unwavering resilience of guitar music.

“Maybe it was a bit dramatic, but it was a statement about all these articles that were going around, every single one of them saying ‘guitar music is dead! Nobody cares about guitar, especially shred guitar,’” Bernth says. Though the instrument’s finish bubbled and cracked against the flames, what’s more notable is how Bernth proceeded to pick up the singed six-string to melt faces with the adrenalized runs of *Elevation*’s suitably titled lead-off track, “The Kindling.” He says enthusiastically: “I think it’s proof that you can’t kill the guitar.”

Guitar culture may well be experiencing its phoenix moment, with guitar makers

having seen record sales since the start of the pandemic. Bernth’s YouTube channel, meanwhile, has surged to more than 313K subscribers since 2020, with fans eagerly logging on to learn scale hacks and hybrid picking workouts. While he’s happy to help his fellow shredders, producing weekly videos has also helped Bernth level-up his own technique (“The channel is also about pushing myself and getting better”). It also inspired him to finally complete *Elevation*, an album four years in the making.

As you might expect from the uploader of vids like “Extreme guitar speed in five easy steps,” Bernth brings a dramatic storm of high-velocity arpeggios to pieces like “When it Rains, It Pours,” but *Elevation* also has him slapping out rhythmic, djent-style dissonance with a seven-string on “Monolith” and bringing a fluid finger

style to ethereal pieces like “Dopamine.” *Elevation*’s most varied moment? A tribute to master violinist Paganini’s “Caprice 24,” which comingles neo-classical shred and armor-piercing trem-picking sections with a rollercoaster of EDM beats, mosh grooves and a gleeful symphonic metal finale.

“It’s, like, 24 songs in one. The biggest challenge was making it sound coherent,” Bernth says, adding that he hopes listeners will enjoy this manic take on “Caprice” as a unique twist on a classic, and “not just a technique demonstration.” This shouldn’t be a worry, though. Going by his YouTube numbers, at least a couple hundred thousand subscribers are eagerly anticipating a step-by-step video tutorial.

Bernth in action: “[My YouTube] channel is also about pushing myself and getting better”



“I think it’s proof that you can’t kill the guitar”

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DUANE DENISON TALKS
AURAL CLARITY, THE NEED FOR
BALANCE — AND TOMAHAWK'S
LATEST, THE EXHILARATING
TONIC IMMOBILITY

By Jon Wiederhorn

▶ OVER THE PAST 20 years, indie supergroup Tomahawk have released five albums — not bad considering the chaotic schedules of the band's four members: Faith No More vocalist Mike Patton, Jesus Lizard guitarist Duane Denison, John Zorn drummer bassist Trevor Dunn and ex-Helmet and Battles drummer John Stanier.

While Tomahawk are widely considered another offbeat vehicle for the eternally active Patton, the primary songwriter for the band is Denison, a schooled guitarist whose specialty is heterogeneous, sometimes schizophrenic-sounding songs.

"I like to find a balance between things that are noisy and aggressive and things that have more space and more sparseness," Denison says. "When I hear a lot of hard, heavy stuff that's relentlessly dense and busy, I can only listen to it for about

15 minutes before my mind shuts off and I need a breather. I think diversity is the key to keeping someone's attention."

Denison started writing Tomahawk's new album, *Tonic Immobility*, four years ago, and by the beginning of 2019, he had a batch of new demos. Soon after, Dunn and Stanier joined him in Nashville to start tracking. Patton composed his parts to the instrumental demos and sent files of his completed vocals just as the rest of the band members were finishing their parts.

Like Tomahawk's other albums, *Tonic Immobility* incorporates elements of punk, noise, metal and even spaghetti western music. Denison achieves the disjointed, exhilarating sound by combining discordant chord voicings on Travis Bean aluminum-neck guitars and tailored distortion dialed-down gain.

"You want that grinding sort of over-

drive, but at the same time I want a certain amount of clarity so you can hear the notes themselves," Denison says. "You hit a chord. It's not just mush. You can pick out individual notes and even the sound of the string itself. I really like to hear, not just the strings, but the space between the strings."

If *Tonic Immobility* seems more urgent and disjointed than 2013's *Oddfellows*, it has less to do with being isolated and unable to tour than with willful perversity.

"We were pretty much done with everything by early 2020 before COVID," Denison says. "So, fortunately, the album wasn't affected by that. I just always like to make music that's surprising without being overly technical. If there's one thing I hate, it's virtuosity for its own sake."



**"If there's one thing
I hate, it's virtuosity
for its own sake"**

— DUANE DENISON



AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** Electric Guitar Company Chessie Custom, Travis Bean Custom, Gibson ES-135, Schecter Solo II Special
- **AMPS** Hiwatt DR103, Gibson JCM800, Fender Super-Sonic 22, Korean Blackstar HT Stage 60
- **EFFECTS** TC Electronic G-Force, Line 6 Helix Rack
- **PICKS** Dunlop

Heart's Nancy Wilson with a Tele in '21 — and with a Martin in '17 [right]



Nancy Wilson

THE HEART ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC GUITAR ICON DISCUSSES HER FIRST SOLO ALBUM, COVERING PEARL JAM AND PAUL SIMON, AND — OF COURSE — THAT EVH ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTAL

By Richard Bienstock

▶ **AS THE STALWART** acoustic and electric guitar player and co-songwriter in Heart, Nancy Wilson has been a part of our collective six-string consciousness for more than four decades. And while Wilson has also played with the Heart offshoot the Lovemongers, the r&b-drenched Roadcase Royale and scored a handful of feature films, it took until 2021 for the iconic musician and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer to finally get around to releasing a solo album.

But that effort, the just-released *You and Me*, has been well worth the wait. Featuring a mix of Wilson originals, a handful of somewhat left-field covers (Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer," Bruce Springsteen's "The Rising," Pearl Jam's "Daughter," the Cranberries' "Dreams") and a set-closing tribute to Eddie Van Halen (the acoustic instrumental "4 Edward"), the new effort sees the 67-year-old guitarist still working at a creative high. What's more, she also recently collaborated with Gibson on her second signature model, the Epiphone Fanatic, is gearing up [as of this writing] for a July performance with the Seattle Symphony at Washington's Benaroya Hall and is

also, pandemic willing, looking forward to a major Heart tour in 2022. "That's the plan," she says. "If you bring your vax card and you show your ID, you'll hopefully be able to get into a rock show again sometime soon."

Wilson recently sat down with *Guitar World* to talk *You and Me*, her new Epiphone Fanatic signature model, her love of Paul Simon and Pearl Jam and just what sparked that acoustic Eddie Van Halen tribute. "I painted myself intentionally into the corner by saying I was going to do it," she admits. "Because then I *had* to do it. And it's a daunting task. It's like, 'Oh, hey, you're just talking about one of the greatest guitarists in history!'" She laughs. "No pressure, you know?"

There's always been a fair amount of acoustic guitar in your playing, but *You and Me* leans hard on that instrument, maybe more so than it does electric. Was that something you had in mind from the get-go?

Well, the acoustic has kind of been my main man since I was 9. And I've played a lot of electric, too — especially with Heart,

where I can, you know, turn the volume to 11. [Laughs] I particularly love playing my blue '63 Tele that I've had for ages. But the acoustic is kind of where I live. When I joined Heart, I sort of brought the more acoustic element into the band, and then from there I expanded on to electric. And electric rhythm playing, mainly — not so much lead, necessarily. If you could make an analogy, I'd be more of a Neil Young as an acoustic guitar player and a Pete Townshend as an electric player.

So it was natural for you to grab an acoustic when it came to writing these songs.

It was. The first song I wrote for the album was the one called "We Meet Again"; I wanted to sort of channel my inner-Paul Simon on that one, as far as the guitar. And also lyrically, actually, in that I was trying to go to that place where you're taking a long look at the arc of your life, and also kind of professing love to someone in such a deep way where you're ready to go through sweet and sour and thick and thin with them, all the way through to the river's end.



“I painted myself intentionally into the corner by saying I was going to do an Eddie Van Halen tribute, because then I had to do it”

In addition to trying to write in the style of Paul Simon, you also cover Simon & Garfunkel’s “The Boxer.” It’s not an easy song to play. I don’t know if Paul Simon gets the credit he deserves as a monster fingerpicker.

Oh my god, his playing is so genius! And yeah, I really learned my fingerstyle technique from him, the Travis [picking] kind of stuff. And stuff like “Anji,” one of the earliest Simon & Garfunkel instrumentals [originally written and recorded by Davey Graham, S&G’s version appears on 1966’s *Sounds of Silence*], that’s what I sort of modeled my “Silver Wheels” on, which is the instrumental intro thing that opens “Crazy On You.” I’ve actually modeled a lot of my fingerstyle on Paul Simon.

Another great interpretation on the record is your version of Pearl Jam’s “Daughter.” You really take it in a different direction; where the original is, at least musically, somewhat breezy and light, your take is dark and somewhat ominous.

That one was recorded before my album

was even a twinkle in my eye, actually. I did it for a film, a true story about human trafficking called *I Am All Girls*. I thought some of the words in that song were so appropriate to the subject matter, because there’s that line that says, “She holds the hand that holds her down,” and there’s such anger and rage in that. And so I recorded that with [producer] David Rice at his place in Austin, the Clubhouse, with some incredible players, including Tony Levin on bass. We made a new arrangement that was more sinister and almost psychedelic, with a strange anger attached. Just coming from a female perspective, the anger is a little more charged, maybe.

I have to ask about the Eddie Van Halen tribute, “4 Edward.” Can you talk about your interaction with him and what you found so inspiring?

We were actually on the road with those guys a couple of times; they were just wild men. They were the wildest partiers I’d ever seen. But Eddie actually complimented me on my acoustic playing, and I said, “Oh, coming from you, you know, that’s everything.” And I asked him, “Why don’t you play more acoustic?” And he goes, “Well, you know, I don’t really have one.” I told him, “I’m giving you this one right now!” I think we were backstage and I said, “Give that man a guitar!”

So then at the crack of dawn the next morning, the phone in my hotel room rings, and it’s Eddie. It was obvious he had been up all night and he said, “Listen.” And I listened to him play this gorgeous acoustic instrumental piece that started sort of classical, and had a lot of fiery kind of stuff in the middle, and then kind of finished up with a beautiful major chord thing. So when he left us recently, I thought, Okay... I’m recording... I should do an instrumental... I should dedicate it to Eddie.

And I like how it turned out. I basically wrote it in my mind while I was falling asleep, and then when I woke up I lay there and pictured it and listened to it in my head. Then I went back to my phone and I found a little bit that I came up with a long time ago where, once in a while I would add it to the “Silver Wheels” intro for “Crazy On You” when we played it live, just as an extra bit I could toss in there. Then I figured that I could do that with a double drop-D tuning and I could use harmonics at the beginning and harmonics at the end to sort of echo the shape of the piece that he’d written on the guitar that I gave him. And having done some score music in the past, I figured maybe a minute, a minute-and-a-half tops,

for reasons of attention span. Just long enough to not get boring. [Laughs]

What are your main acoustic and electric guitars on the new record?

For the acoustics I had my signature model that I cooked up with Martin, and I also used a 1920s “The Gibson” mandolin. And for electric I used my blue ’63 Tele and also the new Fanatic I designed with Gibson and Epiphone. That’s a real screamer — it’s affordable, but kind of a classic-sounding rock guitar. It’s got a good rock personality.

The Fanatic has such a unique body shape, which you also used on your earlier signature model, the Gibson Night-hawk. What about it appeals to you?

It echoes a lot of the cutaway shapes of classic Gibsons, I think, and allows more fretboard to be reachable. And it’s also more like a female shape; to me it’s like a woman’s sideways silhouette. When I drew it, that’s what I was kind of channeling. It’s also a little more diminutive, and it’s not too heavy. It’s a piece of cake, that guitar.

Given that we’ve talked a bit about some of the acoustic songs on the record, let’s end with one of the more up-tempo electric tracks — “Party at the Angel Ballroom,” which features Duff McKagan and the Foo Fighters’ Taylor Hawkins. How did that come about?

I had done some vocals for Taylor when he was making his really cool album called *Get the Money*. And so later on when I was working on this album, I said, “Hey, you know, do you have any jams laying around?” And he said, “Yeah — I’ll send you something Duff and I did.” So he sent me this really cool jam, and I thought it would be great to go along with the title, because I already had that in mind, just from all of us having lost so many great rock people recently. It came to me because I was thinking, man, right now there’s gotta be some good party going on up in that angel ballroom... And then I thought, hmm, not a bad song title! So when Taylor sent me the jam I rearranged it a bit and then figured out some lyrics and melodies. There was a lot of editing and a lot of structural shapeshifting, but it worked out pretty great and it’s a lot of fun.

It’s a nice companion to “4 Edward.” You’re paying tribute to great artists we’ve lost, only in an upbeat manner.

Yes. It’s a celebration of those angels, you know? And we’ve lost a lot of them, unfortunately. But they’re still also with us.



[from left] Dinosaur Jr.'s
Lou Barlow, J Mascis
and Murph

Dinosaur Jr.

FRONTMAN/GUITARIST J MASCIS TALKS CAPOS, THE BENEFITS OF SMALLER AMPS AND THE SURPRISINGLY UPBEAT *SWEEP IT INTO SPACE*

By Mark McStea

► **WHILE *SWEEP IT Into Space***, Dinosaur Jr.'s first album in five years, ticks all the boxes fans could hope for, it might just surprise a few longtime listeners, due to its upbeat feel. Frontman J Mascis agrees:

"I suppose it was a fairly positive feeling doing the record, although the pandemic hasn't agreed with me — and I haven't been too happy myself. We started before lockdown but had to finish it once it kicked in, which was pretty weird as I had to learn how to do a lot of things, engineering-wise, at home. I'm very happy with the record — although it will take me some time before I can really decide how it stands in relation to the rest of my work."

Although Mascis' guitar parts sound enormous, his guitar is actually not that loud in the studio. "We always use smaller amps when we're recording, like a [Vox] AC15 or a Tweed Deluxe. I like a lot of effects that really change the sound of the

"I just like the feeling of the guitar kind of hitting you in the back"

— J MASCIS

guitar; they often tend to be vintage units or newer models designed to sound like old pedals. Live, I still use the Marshall and Hiwatt stacks. I've not had my hearing tested lately, but I definitely have tinnitus; I've always worn earplugs, though. I just like the feeling of the guitar kind of hitting you in the back." [Laughs]

Guitar-wise, there've been a few recent additions to J's arsenal. "I used a Les Paul

Junior TV model, and Ernie Ball gave me a St. Vincent guitar, which I hadn't played before. I use a capo a lot, and a lot of my old guitars don't play very well with a capo on them. Live, I'm going to be using one of my signature Jazzmasters, which I've modified by installing a humbucker in the neck position. I'll be tuning that down to C# and using a capo for four songs on the album. It's really just to find the best key to sing with."

Going forward, Mascis plans to continue releasing solo records as well as work with Dinosaur Jr.

"I've started working on a solo album already, and I'm in the middle of mixing a Heavy Blanket album, an ongoing side project that's all instrumental with a lot of solos. We'll also be celebrating the 40th anniversary of [Dinosaur Jr.] getting together in a couple of years, which is a bit surreal. I think we'll do something special to celebrate that."



Katatonia's Roger Öjersson [left] and Anders Nyström

Katatonia

THIRTY YEARS INTO THEIR CAREER, THE SWEDISH DOOM OUTFIT ARE STILL LOOKING TO SUBVERT EXPECTATIONS

By Gregory Adams

KATATONIA WERE CREATIVELY spent as they entered 2018, and for the first time since forming in Stockholm in 1991, they knew they had to put the band on pause. While on hiatus, vocalist Jonas Renske and guitarist Anders Nyström channeled their energies into a brutal death metal LP with side-project Bloodbath; Renske had also started writing songs on his own, some with a more electronic edge. But just as he was set to enter the studio with a new team of collaborators, he pumped the brakes on what was meant to be his solo debut and brought the tracks back to musical life-partner Nyström. The result is *City Burials*, Katatonia's latest formula-defying studio album.

Nyström says that adapting Renske's solo material for Katatonia also meant that the guitarist didn't contribute any tunes of his own for the group's 11th album. "Did it feel weird for me for the first time ever to see none of my songs on the album? Yes. Did it matter? Not really."

In light of 2017's prog-geared *The Fall of Hearts*, *City Burials'* guitar motifs play especially spacious. Most noticeably, first single "Lacquer" scales back on the band's usual riff-reliant guitar structures to instead prop up digital drum production and sorrowful symphony strings. While electronic pulses are plentiful, Nyström and fellow guitarist Roger Öjersson do manage get down and dirty throughout these *Burials* — whether delivering chunky fretboard crawls on death waltz "Heart Set to Divide," Southern gothic pull-offs on "City Glaciers" or, in Öjersson's case, rip-snorting into a vintage pair of sweep-heavy solos on "Behind the Blood."

"The idea was to cover the time spans [of] when different guitar players influenced me, starting out in the Seventies in the first solo, and ending up in the Eighties in the second one," Öjersson says of adding hairspray-era dive-bombs into his present-day arsenal, "I can't even remember when I last touched a whammy bar before that second solo on 'Behind the Blood.'"



AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** (Nyström) Mayones Regius, Setius, Vidijs custom models; (Öjersson) Gibson Flying V; Schecter Ultra II and Ultra III
- **AMPS** (Nyström) Boss GT-1000; (Öjersson) Boss GT-1000, AMT SS-11A, Taurus SH4.HG, Taurus SH3
- **EFFECTS** (Nyström) Boss GT-1000; (Öjersson) Boss GT-1000, AMT M-Lead, Taurus Tux, Taurus Vechoor, Taurus Zebu, Pigtronix Philosopher's Tone, Black Sheep Flanger, Black Sheep Tremolo

On "Lacquer," Renske sings that "the road to the grave is straight as an arrow," a de facto battle cry for Katatonia, who, 30 years into their career, are still looking to subvert expectations. Though Nyström is quick to note that Katatonia haven't gone EDM — *Dead Air*, a more recent livestream LP recorded during lockdown, seamlessly blended *City Burials* standouts with the band's brooding back catalog — the group are happily walking off the beaten path by adding those kinds of textures.

"The whole electronic genre is kind of controversial and almost seems like a forbidden area with the metal purists, but so what?" Nyström says. "If you deny beauty just because there's no guitar present, you're checking out the wrong band."



[from left] Hoodoo Gurus' Rick Grossman, Nik Rieth, Dave Faulkner and Brad Shepherd

Hoodoo Gurus

MAINSTAY GUITARISTS DAVE FAULKNER AND BRAD SHEPHERD ADDRESS THE VENERABLE AUSSIE BAND'S HISTORY, GEAR CHOICES AND HOW THEY KEEP THE FIRE BURNING AFTER 40 YEARS

By Bruce Fagerstrom

▶ FEW BANDS HAVE put out as many consistently interesting and entertaining albums as Australia's Hoodoo Gurus. From their 1984 debut, *Stoneage Romeos*, up through 2010's *Purity of Essence* and a slew of more recent recordings, including 2021's "World of Pain," the band have cranked out perfect power-pop songs matched only by the "strum and drang" [sic] of their rave-up live shows. Along the way, they've been inducted into the Australian Recording Industry Association Hall of Fame. The group's lineup has been mostly stable — with a few changes to the rhythm section over the years — but singer/guitarist Dave Faulkner and guitarist Brad Shepherd have been mainstays.

As a songwriter, Faulkner delights in intricate and clever wordplay with subject matter that veers from the comic to the cosmic to heartfelt meditations on relationships gone sour. On 2020's "Get Out of Dodge," Faulkner explores calcified thinking and the limits of tolerance with guest vocals supplied by old touring partner Vicki Peterson of the Bangles along with her husband

John Cowsill of the Cowsills. On every recording, Shepherd's tastefully melodic riffs, fills and solos are a master class on how to avoid overplaying while still providing plenty of color to every tune.

GW spoke with Faulkner and Shepherd about the band's history, guitar and amp preferences — and what keeps them going after 40 years in the biz.

Hoodoo Gurus' music encompasses many influences, from Sixties garage punk to psychedelia to hard rock. Is that a reflection of a diverse listening appetite while you were growing up?

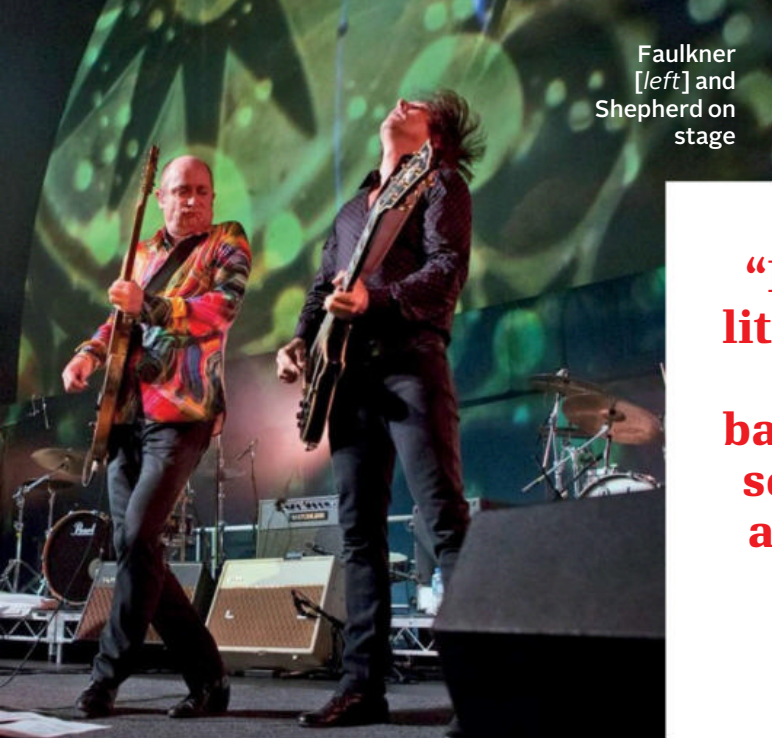
DAVE FAULKNER: Totally. You know, all of us had a foot in the Sixties as kids, and that music really saturated us. And, of course, we learned more about that music subsequently. As you get older, you trace back the influences of the things that are more mainstream and you find the more obscure things. For us, that was glam rock and all that stuff and even heavy rock like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, but also T. Rex, Slade, Suzi

Quatro, Alice Cooper. All that stuff was our teenage music, and then punk rock came along in our late teens. I was 17 or something when punk hit, and that was kind of like the crucible that shaped a lot of my attitude about music.

Brad, how did you end up getting together with Dave?

BRAD SHEPHERD: I joined the band very early, although the template for the band had been set before I joined, but it spoke to me. I saw the very early incarnation of the band. I was playing in another group. I really appreciated the fact that there were no rules. In Sydney in 1981, there was a fairly strict regime of what was cool and what was not, and I loved the fact that when I would go and see the Hoodoo Gurus before I joined that they embraced things that were inherently uncool to everyone else at the time, like glam rock or Fifties rock.

Brad, you've played a number of different guitars in your time with the group, such as a Gretsch Country Gentleman in the



Faulkner
[left] and
Shepherd on
stage

“If we feel like [we need] a little bit of a palate cleanser after 12 months of just bashing this stuff out, we do some beautiful pop music, and then we say, ‘Let’s get hardcore again’”

— DAVE FAULKNER

early Eighties, Les Pauls and SGs. What attracts you to a particular guitar?

SHEPHERD: It may’ve taken me 40 years to actually realize what I’m looking for out of a particular instrument. I like the warmth of Gibsons, generally. I have found within the context of the Gurus, because Dave often plays Telecaster that I try to steer away from that. I’ve found that if I’m playing a Gretsch or a Gibson, there’s a tonal diversity there that allows everyone to speak clearly within the context of the band’s unified voice. In a live context, it’s almost always something with a loud articulation and some unique warm tone somewhere in the lower-mids, and that allows those upper-mids for Dave’s Tele.

FAULKNER: Yeah, I play Telecaster for that principal reason — just to stay out of Dave’s way, because it’s a little bit more sonically compact. We always have to finesse our sounds to make sure there is room for each other, and that’s part of why I play the Tele, but also because I love that sound. I’ve been playing a Les Paul Junior more often lately, on recordings like on 2020’s “Answered Prayers.” So again, that’s a sort of smaller guitar; it’s not quite as fat a sound, so it leaves room for Brad to do more of the heavy lifting.

Brad, one of the most appealing things about your playing is that it’s versatile yet economical. How do you develop your riffs and fills?

SHEPHERD: That’s what the band’s about, making some kind of value contribution. Sometimes the valid contribution is just plowing through a handful of Ramones chords if that’s exactly what’s required. But I try to hear what’s going on in the rest of the song. What Dave’s singing. What his melody is and if there’s room somewhere else where I might be able to make a contribution where it becomes a kind of tapestry. I do tend to compose solos before we go in to record. Often, I can hear what my contribution should be, and then I work out the notes. I don’t honestly know what I’m

playing. Really, I’m just learning the shapes. There are certain positions that I’m familiar with up and down the neck, but more often than not, I don’t really know what I’m doing. I’ve got an idea in my head of what should happen at that point in the song, and I try to find the notes.

I’ve mostly seen you playing with Fender amps behind you.

SHEPHERD: I love Fender amps. I’ve been playing the Bruce Zinky Tone Masters since they were available. I actually have the first one that landed in Australia that I still use to this day. They have never disappointed me, they’ve never let me down onstage, and I’ve played them almost every show. On the odd occasion if we have to fly to a gig and we have some kind of rented backline, I might just grab a couple of AC30s because I found them to be fairly reliable. But nine times out of 10, I’ve used the Tone Masters onstage. I think I got mine in ’94. I’ve got a couple of them, but they’ve never given me any trouble. That’s my thing. I like a Gibson or a Gretsch into a Fender. It’s very Neil Young.

Dave, I think you use Matchless?

FAULKNER: Yeah, Matchless pretty much exclusively. I don’t know how long I’ve had them for but probably a similar timeframe to Brad. I’ve tried other things. I started off with a Fender. I had one when I was in my punk band, but unfortunately, it got destroyed, and that was a Vibrasonic. I’ve been through Mesa/Boogie and others, but the Matchless was a marriage made in heaven for me. I love the creaminess of it and the warmth, and it just seems very adaptable. Brad has a huge pedal board, and a lot of his sounds can be replicated through the board being what it is. I don’t; I only have a wah-wah and a tremolo, that’s it. I’m very simple. It’s all in the amp.

Brad, what are some of the go-to pedals you have on your board?

SHEPHERD: Well, a lot of my overdrive sounds are the Crowther Hot Cake. I’ve

got three of them on my board that are set at various gain stages. There are some modulation things going on and some different colors and the fuzz pedal, but by and large, it’s just the sound of my guitar into the amp. I’ve got giant tubs full of stomp boxes in our storage facility. But the one fuzz pedal that I’ve used for 25 years is actually something that was handmade by a tech in Sydney, where he cloned the circuit out of a Roland BeeBaa.

You worked with producer Ed Stasium on Nineties albums *Kinky* and *Crank* and 2010’s *Purity of Essence*, where he was involved in the mixing. Did you work with him on the songs you recorded in 2021?

FAULKNER: We’re really excited about the songs. We worked with Wayne Connolly, an engineer/producer. We always kind of produce ourselves, too. I do a lot of the heavy lifting on that side. But it’s good to have someone there as a referee and an objective voice to say, “Try it this way.” Ed Stasium mixed the tracks, and he mixed our 2020 singles like “Get Out of Dodge.” We found it a bit strange with COVID. When we did *Purity of Essence*, I was able to fly over to where Ed was in Colorado. It was a bit harder this time, because we had to do it all by email and phone.

How do you keep your sound so fresh after 40 years?

FAULKNER: It really comes down to quite a simple thing, which is it doesn’t matter what influence we’re drawing from. It sounds like us when we get it together, and the determining factor is, if it sounds real and exciting, we’re good to go. The closest we’ve ever come to really having some kind of ethos from album to album is this sort of sine wave between two polarities with one side the more hard kind of brutal punk rock and the other the more pop side, and certainly I could see on every album it oscillates. If we feel like a little bit of a palate cleanser after 12 months of just bashing this stuff out, we do some beautiful pop music, and then we say, “Let’s get hardcore again.” It’s just us having a mood, but it takes about 12 months to happen.

We’ve always thought the Hoodoo Gurus were their own universe. There were people who thought we were from California, because we toured there so much and we were on U.S. college radio. But our world is self-contained; we absorb the zeitgeist, and it’s all grist for our mill, but there’s only one mill. There aren’t 20 Hoodoo Gurus around the planet; there’s only one.

Todd Mosby's Imrat Guitar

WHERE EAST MEETS WEST

By Alan di Perna

► **WITH ROOTS IN** jazz, folk and Indian classical music, guitarist Todd Mosby is eclectic, to say the least. In the mid Nineties, he found himself in need of an axe that could accommodate the techniques and compositional ideas he'd drawn from both his Eastern and Western influences. As a result, he co-designed a unique hybrid instrument he calls the Imrat guitar, which combines elements of the guitar and Indian instruments such as the sitar and rudra veena. It can be heard on Mosby's most recent album, *Aerial Views*, a set of soft-hued impressionistic jazz compositions featuring A-List players like bassist Tony Levin (King Crimson, Peter Gabriel) and drummer Jerry Marotta (Peter Gabriel, Paul McCartney).

The Imrat guitar is named for Mosby's longtime Indian music teacher, the celebrated master Ustad Imrat Khan, who taught sitar to George Harrison and Brian Jones during the Sixties and later resided in Mosby's hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. "I'd been studying with Imrat for about four years, starting out on just regular acoustic guitar," Mosby says. "But I got to a point where I needed to access deeper levels of Indian music. Luckily I knew a luthier, Kim

Schwartz, who already had a design that was somewhat in the ballpark of what I had in mind. So the three of us started designing plans for a personal instrument that I could use as a jazz musician."

Mosby's electric Imrat guitar resembles a harp guitar in many ways. The fingerboard has five principal playing strings plus three chikari (rhythmic drone) strings. The harp above the fingerboard consists of 12 sympathetic strings. All strings are suspended across one of two sitar-style jivari bridges which help create a sitar-like buzzing, resonant tonality.

The fingerboard is scalloped and has jumbo frets, enabling dramatic microtonal string bends, which are essential in performing Indian classical music.

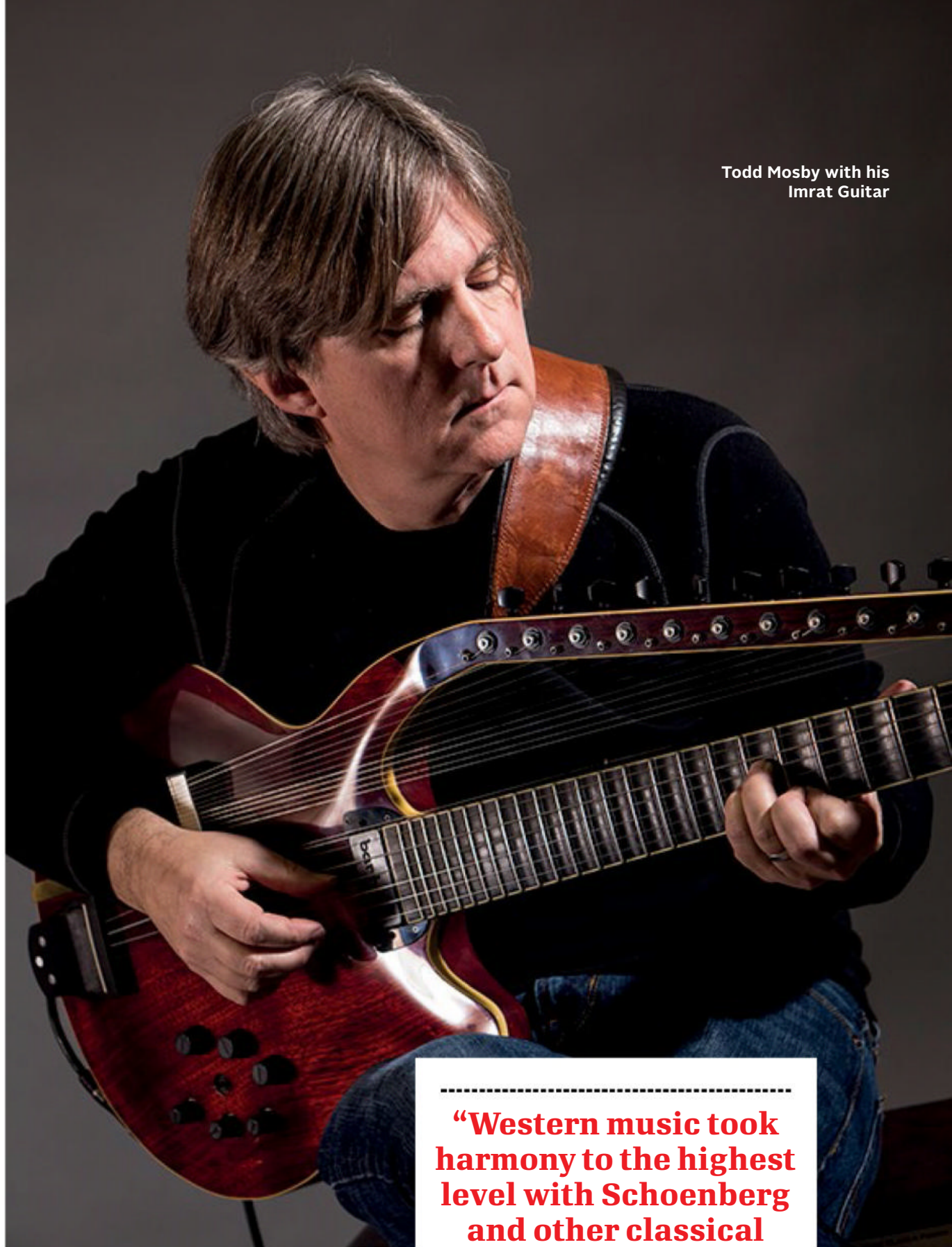
But you can also play chords, which are required for most Western music forms, such as jazz.

"Western music took harmony to the highest level with Schoenberg and other classical composers. In India, they wound up taking melody to the absolute highest level. With the Imrat guitar, I can incorporate both of these traditions in my playing"

— TODD MOSBY

"Western music took harmony to the highest level with Schoenberg and other classical composers," Mosby says. "And in India, they wound up taking melody to the absolute highest level. With the Imrat guitar, I can incorporate both of these beautiful traditions in my playing."

Todd Mosby with his Imrat Guitar



Luca Stricagnoli's triple-necked guitar includes necks for standard, soprano and bass



Luca Stricagnoli

WHY THREE NECKS — AND MILLIONS OF YOUTUBE VIEWS — MIGHT JUST BE BETTER THAN ONE

By Puneet Singh

▶ IN THE CROWDED field of internet guitar players, standing out has become increasingly difficult. But for 29-year-old Luca Stricagnoli, getting noticed has meant being true to himself.

The Italian-born acoustic fingerstyle virtuoso picked up the guitar at age 10 and studied classical until age 16, before putting it away entirely to focus on judo. When friends at the gym found out he used to play guitar, they introduced him to modern fingerstyle players on YouTube, with Andy McKee, an artist on CandyRat Records, forever shifting the paradigm.

“[Andy] was hitting the guitar, slapping it, doing tapping and weird things, and I was blown away,” Stricagnoli says. “I finally took a guitar in my hands and started into the field of fingerstyle.”

The next few years found Stricagnoli absorbing everything acoustic on the internet, propelling him to find novel ways to express himself. He sent CandyRat a video of himself playing the theme from *The Last*

of the Mohicans on three guitars with a violin bow — and they published it on their YouTube page.

“It started to go to almost a million views,” Stricagnoli says. “I had only published two videos before and was used to, like, 6,000 views. That was the beginning of everything.” To date the video has been viewed more than 13 million times.

His innovative, one-man-band style covers of everything from AC/DC’s “Thunderstruck” to Gorillaz’s “Clint Eastwood” played on a triple-neck acoustic, showcase another facet of his brilliance as a guitar inventor. Working with Italian luthier Davide Serracini, creator of a triple-neck acoustic that incorporates a standard, soprano and bass neck, Stricagnoli designed an original tool to further his sonic landscapes on the acoustic.

Called the “Reverse Slide Neck,” it is an inverted, fretless neck with an attached slide that moves along two string binaries. It has three high-pitched strings to play melodies

“I want to leave a mark for the new wave of guitar players. Maybe one day — 20 or 30 years later — a guitarist says, ‘I play this weird way because of Luca Stricagnoli.’ That would be a life goal”

with the slide or fingers and four lower-pitched strings to play bass lines. The neck can be attached to the guitar magnetically, giving Stricagnoli the ability to simultaneously play four different voices — melody, bass, slide and percussion — as seen in his YouTube cover of the Beatles’ “While My Guitar Gently Weeps.” Stricagnoli and Serracini are developing a consumer version they hope will be available this year.

“My dream when I started getting into fingerstyle guitar was to bring my own contribution to the way guitar is played,” Stricagnoli says. “I want to leave a mark for the new wave of guitar players, and maybe one day — 20 or 30 years later — a guitarist says, ‘I play this weird way because of Luca Stricagnoli.’ That would be a life goal.”

BOX

OFFICE

Addictive hollow- and semi-hollowbody guitars for every budget — including four standout models for less than \$500

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GW

BY AMIT SHARMA

PRS

SE HOLLOWBODY II PIEZO

\$1,549, prsguitars.com

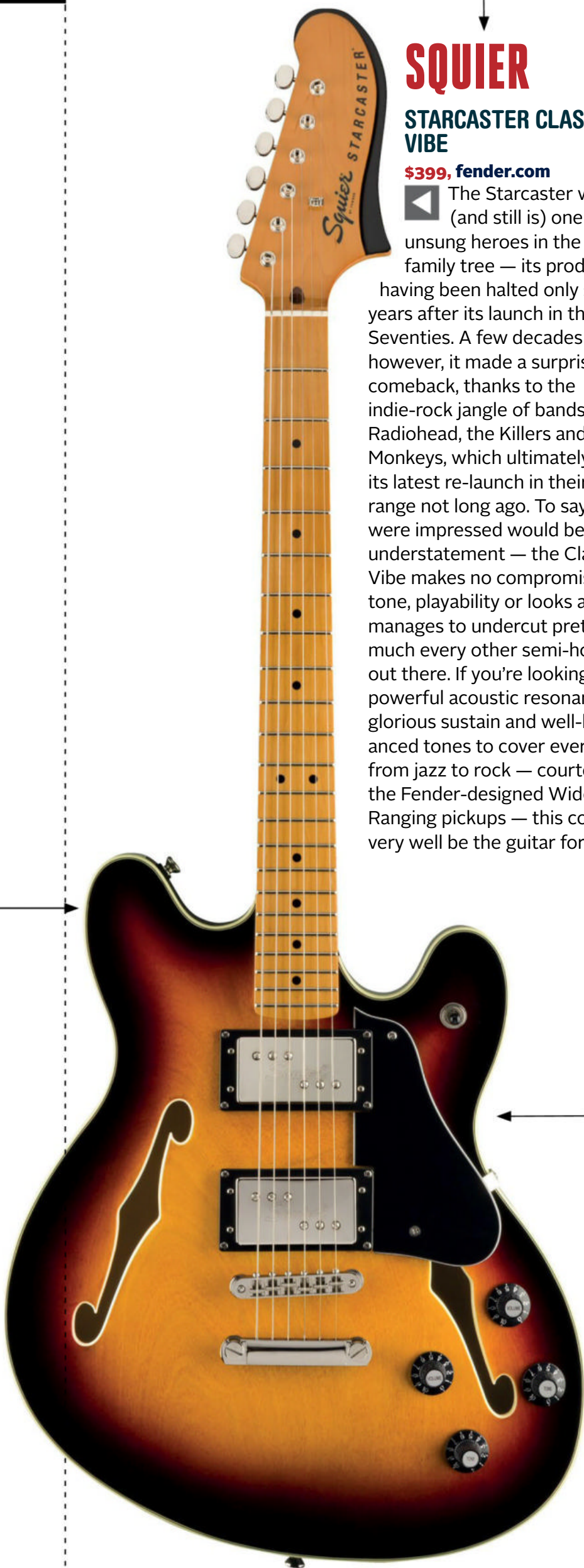
▶ Last year's announcement of PRS adding a Hollowbody II Piezo to their affordable SE line was met with wild-eyed wonder — with good reason. It's the kind of instrument many had been calling for but few expected, given its status as one of the more lusted-over instruments found in the company's Core and Private Stock catalogs. More importantly, though — could they really deliver that same boutique craft and tone for players on a budget? As it turns out, yes — very much so. The PAF-style 58/15S humbuckers can get very close to the pickups found on the Core original, while the LR Baggs/PRS Piezo system packs some truly breathtaking acoustic tones. The SE Hollowbody II Piezo might not be made in the company's Maryland factory — instead being produced in the same Chinese location responsible for their SE acoustic range — but there can be no doubt it's an instrument worthy of the heritage behind it.



EVERY GUITAR PLAYER, AT SOME point in his or her life, has put serious thought into owning a hollow or semi-hollow electric. It's a perfectly understandable inclination; visually, there's a lot going on, thanks to their oversized bodies, ample curves and eye-catching f-holes. Then, of course, there are the tonal differences to solidbody electrics, which are often considered thicker and more direct, though less open, airy and dynamic. And while semi-acoustics — a term that, confusingly, includes semi-hollow and hollowbody guitars — have often been regarded as jazz or blues instruments, these guitars have been wielded by players in just about every genre. Mastodon's Brent Hinds has been spotted playing a Gibson B.B. King Lucille, while Nirvana/Foo Fighters legend Dave Grohl and much-missed Soundgarden frontman Chris Cornell went so far as releasing their own Gibson ES-335 signatures.

As we know, guitars built this way are more prone to feedback — which, depending on the player, can be a blessing or a curse — though newer models aimed at metal players, such as the Squier Contemporary Active Starcaster, feature ceramic pickups on a sealed body to avoid unwanted noises. So there really is no reason such an instrument can't be harnessed and applied to almost any musical situation. As a result, these kinds of guitars are now ubiquitous, with numerous options to suit every kind of player. Here's our roundup of our favorites, including five models (with four priced at \$500 or less) for players on a budget.

**As we all know,
guitars built this
way are more
prone to feedback
— which,
depending on
the player,
can be a
blessing or
a curse**



SQUIER

STARCASTER CLASSIC VIBE

\$399, [fender.com](https://www.fender.com)

◀ The Starcaster was (and still is) one of the unsung heroes in the Fender family tree — its production having been halted only six years after its launch in the mid Seventies. A few decades later, however, it made a surprising comeback, thanks to the indie-rock jangle of bands like Radiohead, the Killers and Arctic Monkeys, which ultimately led to its latest re-launch in their Squier range not long ago. To say we were impressed would be an understatement — the Classic Vibe makes no compromises on tone, playability or looks and still manages to undercut pretty much every other semi-hollow out there. If you're looking for powerful acoustic resonance, glorious sustain and well-balanced tones to cover everything from jazz to rock — courtesy of the Fender-designed Wide Ranging pickups — this could very well be the guitar for you.

GRETSCH

G6136T WHITE FALCON PLAYERS EDITION BIGSBY

\$3,599, [gretschguitars.com](https://www.gretschguitars.com)

▶ Though it has obvious ties to rockabilly and country, plenty of hard-rock guitar players have also wielded a White Falcon, including the Cult's Billy Duffy and Guns N' Roses' Richard Fortus. And while this hollowbody might feel a bit bulky for some, and not best suited to those on a budget, it's the kind of guitar that's *always* guaranteed to make a statement — visually and sonically. With a laminate maple body, maple neck and ebony fingerboard complimented by two High Sensitive Filter'Tron dual-coils, it's an enduring classic that remains popular. "To play a White Falcon, you really have to *mean* it, be aggressive and control it," Billy Duffy told this writer in 2019. "These guitars get wild and crazy at full-pelt in bigger rooms... there's really nothing like them."



EPIPHONE

INSPIRED BY GIBSON ES-339

\$499, epiphone.com

▶ The Gibson ES-335 is undoubtedly the most quintessential semi-hollow of them all, though its slightly smaller and lighter cousin (the ES-339) is certainly worthy of consideration. This new addition to Epiphone's Inspired By Gibson range offers a lot of those famous tones and looks for a fraction of the cost, equipped with Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers, a Graph Tech NuBone nut, Grover Rotomatic tuners and a Locktone bridge and tailpiece for added sustain. Available in some classic gloss finishes like Cherry, Pelham Blue, Vintage Sunburst and Natural, these guitars are a great option for players looking for warm and open 335 sounds without compromising on comfort and playability. To be honest, at this price, it's difficult to see where you can go wrong.

IBANEZ

GB10EM

\$699, ibanez.com

▼ Until last year, George Benson's signature hollowbody instruments were typically found in the mid and upper tiers of the Japanese company's catalog. The introduction of the GB10EM, however, changed that — following the jazz legend's request for them to produce an instrument that was accessible to all his fans, offering a whole lot of guitar for very little money indeed. Available in Antique Amber or Jet Blue Burst, fitted with passive Alnico Magic Touch-Mini pickups and built out of a Spruce top with Linden back and sides, it's the perfect guitar for your best "Breezin'" licks — if you're able to keep up with maestro himself, that is!

These kinds
of guitars
are now
ubiquitous,
with
numerous
options to
suit every
kind of
player



GIBSON

MODERN COLLECTION ES-335 SATIN

\$2,599, gibson.com

▼ If budget isn't an issue, the Nashville-made satin 335 models in Gibson's 2021 Modern Collection series are certainly an enticing proposition, bringing the vintage aesthetics of the past into the present, thanks to the all-new Gibson Calibrate T-Type humbuckers, controlled by two volume and two tone controls, and a three-way selector as per the 335s of yesteryear. As well as being found in the hands of blues and jazz greats like Chuck Berry, Larry Carlton and Grant Green, this kind of semi-hollow also has been at the heart and center of many a great rock recording. "Every album we have ever made, from the first to the latest, was recorded with my red 1967 Trini Lopez ES-335 signature," once revealed Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl. "It is the sound of our band — and my most prized possession from the day I bought it in 1992."



GRETSCH

G6128T-89VS VINTAGE SELECT '89 DUO JET WITH BIGSBY

\$2,599, gretschguitars.com

◀ Eagle-eyed Soundgarden fans were quick to spot an '89 Duo Jet in this year's Vintage Select series update — which was one of the main guitars used by Chris Cornell on the band's 1994 landmark *Superunknown* and, according to producer Michael Beinhorn, the only guitar used by the sadly departed singer/guitarist on their biggest hit, "Black Hole Sun." The reissue models come in Gold Sparkle, Silver Sparkle or Black, with period-correct specs that include a chambered mahogany construction, a maple set neck, Gotoh tuners, G-arrow knobs, a Bigsby vibrato as well as an Adjusto-Matic bridge. Fitted with TV Jones pickups — namely the Classic Plus in the bridge and Classic in the neck — the tones are able to replicate the Filter's Tron sound of that era with minimal fuss.

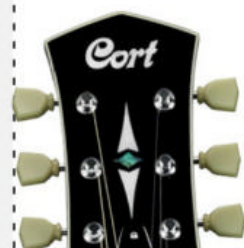


CORT

YORKTOWN

\$489, cortguitars.com

▼ If there's anything Cort is synonymous with, it's value for money — which is why the company's Yorktown hollowbodies successfully capture the spirit and vintage class of old Gibsons for those on a budget. Built using what they call "old-world construction methods," the guitars feature a spruce top that's complemented by the maple back and sides, as well as a Canadian hard rock maple neck and ovangkol fingerboard. There's also a floating tune-o-matic bridge for optimum intonation and VTH-59 pickups that are overwound for a slightly hotter output than your typical PAF. Finished in a rather fetching Tobacco Burst that fades from black into amber — we're sure you'll be inclined to agree — it's an instrument that oozes class.



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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fresh magazines, hot games,
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Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

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18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

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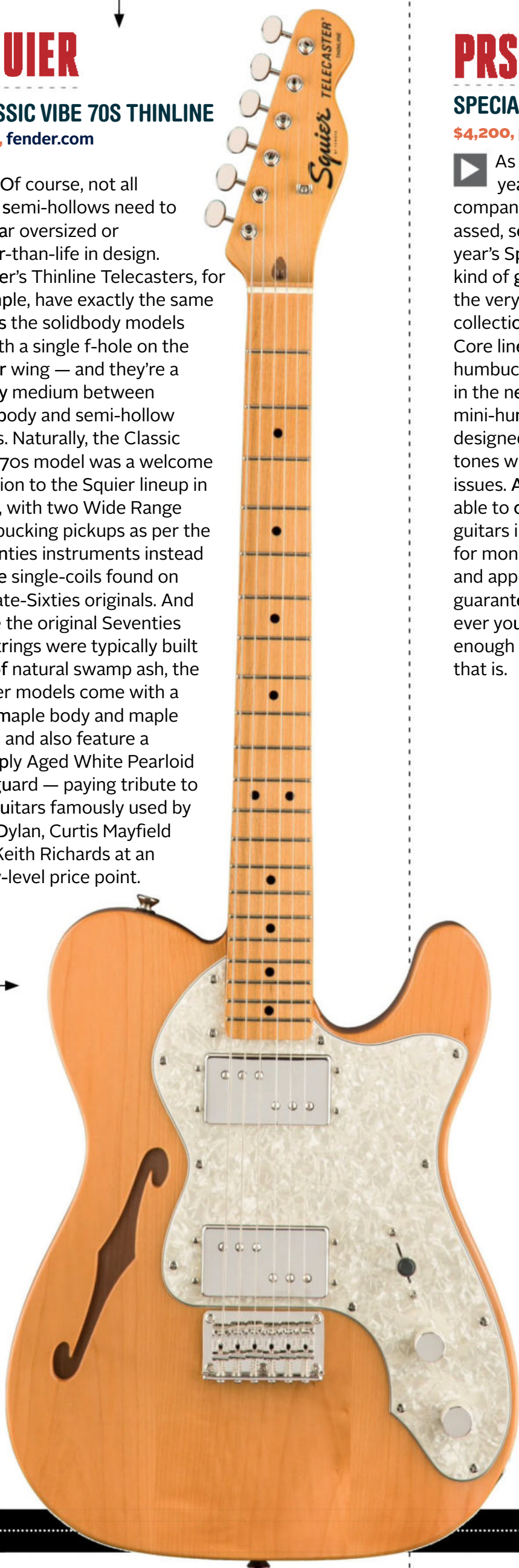
We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>

SQUIER

CLASSIC VIBE 70S THINLINE

\$479, [fender.com](https://www.fender.com)

▶ Of course, not all semi-hollows need to appear oversized or larger-than-life in design. Fender's Thinline Telecasters, for example, have exactly the same cut as the solidbody models — with a single f-hole on the upper wing — and they're a happy medium between solidbody and semi-hollow tones. Naturally, the Classic Vibe 70s model was a welcome addition to the Squier lineup in 2019, with two Wide Range humbucking pickups as per the Seventies instruments instead of the single-coils found on the late-Sixties originals. And while the original Seventies six-strings were typically built out of natural swamp ash, the Squier models come with a soft maple body and maple neck, and also feature a four-ply Aged White Pearloid pickguard — paying tribute to the guitars famously used by Bob Dylan, Curtis Mayfield and Keith Richards at an entry-level price point.

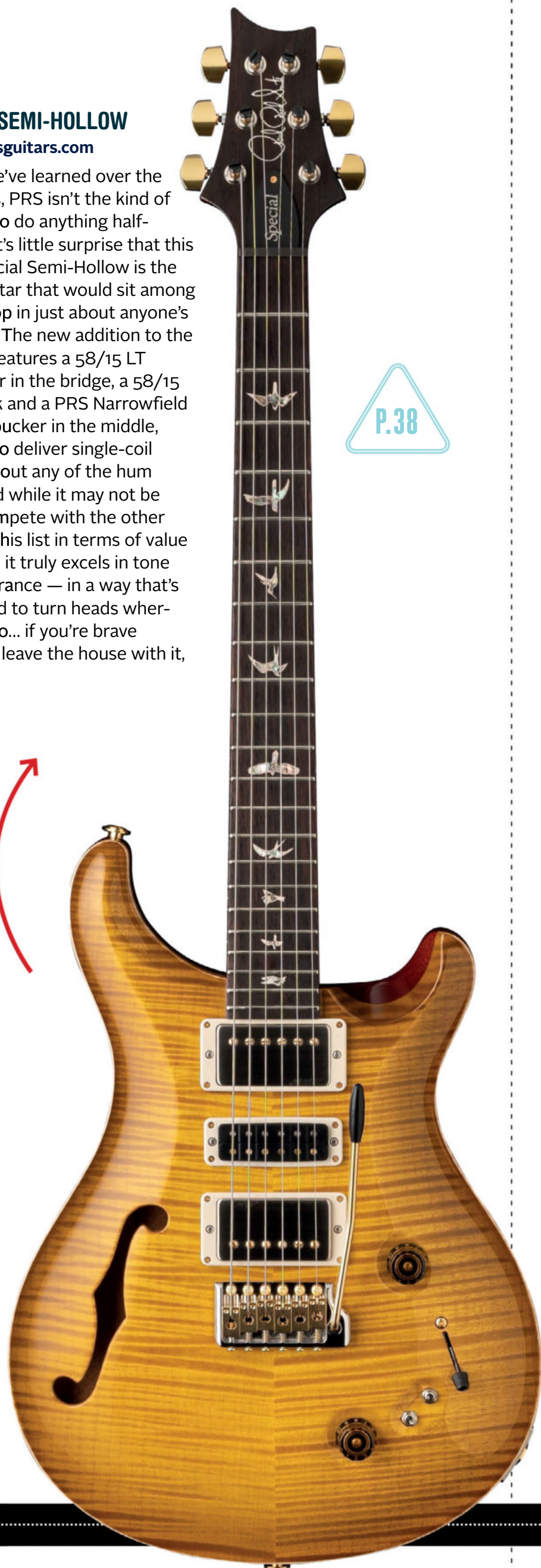


PRS

SPECIAL SEMI-HOLLOW

\$4,200, [prsguitars.com](https://www.prsguitars.com)

▶ As we've learned over the years, PRS isn't the kind of company to do anything half-assed, so it's little surprise that this year's Special Semi-Hollow is the kind of guitar that would sit among the very top in just about anyone's collection. The new addition to the Core line features a 58/15 LT humbucker in the bridge, a 58/15 in the neck and a PRS Narrowfield mini-humbucker in the middle, designed to deliver single-coil tones without any of the hum issues. And while it may not be able to compete with the other guitars in this list in terms of value for money, it truly excels in tone and appearance — in a way that's guaranteed to turn heads wherever you go... if you're brave enough to leave the house with it, that is.



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MADE TO ROCK HARD



"HOT ROD"

BARETTA CUSTOM GRAPHICS COLLECTION



KRAMERGUITARS.COM



W The rock-star attitude is, 'I'm the best, here's my music. Nobody is better than me.' A modern attitude would be, 'This is what I'm able to do now, [so] here are all the tracks.' I'm sure somebody's going to come up with an incredible idea..."

Kiko Loureiro with one of his signature Ibanez KIKO models



Open-Source Guitar

Besides collaborating with Marty Friedman and Marcus Asato, **MEGADETH** shredder **KIKO LOUREIRO** is taking a breakthrough community approach on his new album: He's uploaded all the stems online — from beats to guitar solos — so that anyone with internet access can concoct their own epic remixes

By GREGORY ADAMS Photo By VILLE JUURIKALA

“IMPROVISING WHILE READING THE COMMENTS IS MY new late-night practice routine.”

This is a somewhat comical but certainly zeitgeist-tapping caption to a recent Instagram post from shred king-cum-social media influencer Kiko Loureiro. The accompanying video is the kicker. If you're a longtime fan of Loureiro — who first rose up in the Nineties with Brazilian metal icons Angra — you know his painfully scrunched brow has nothing to do with his chromatic waggling, or the outsized bends he's stretching across the sunburst Ibanez AZ on his lap. That's just him trying to keep up with the mile-a-minute scroll of messages from eager fans, likely chiming in with anything from a “Sick lick, Kiko!” to “Check out my band at the link.”

This is all to say that the internet is a hell of a place, but at least Loureiro's having fun with it. Though he may be best known these days as the current lead guitarist for Megadeth, the past couple of years have clearly also found the Brazilian-born Loureiro making a home for himself on social media. Especially during this past year of lockdown — with Loureiro grounded in his current base of Helsinki, Finland — the guitarist has turned to his Instagram profile and YouTube channel as sounding boards for song ideas, places to teach the occasional string-skipping technique, and just as a way to connect with other players, since meet-and-greets are off the table until Megadeth's COVID-delayed tour with Lamb of God kicks off this August.

Getting back to those Instagram comments, it's that free exchange of ideas that taps into the central theme of Loureiro's latest instrumental solo album, *Open Source*. Likening the album to how anyone with internet access can technically contribute to Wikipedia, Loureiro was excited to explore a similar concept with his fifth instrumen-

tal solo album. He conceived the 11-song *Open Source* as a project where he could “collaborate with different people from different places.” There's an argument to be made that this can be said about any album, but Loureiro pushes the concept, like his runs, to the extreme.

First off, *Open Source* reunites Loureiro with the thunderous drumming of his former Angra bandmate Bruno Valverde. It also includes jams with contemporary Instagram guitar hero Mateus Asato and Megadeth alum Marty Friedman. It's a record that has Loureiro gleefully diving into progressive shred with melodic finesse (“Overflow”); floating a wah-soaked vibrato over thrash-tastic territory (“Imminent Threat”); locking into a raw and chunked-up, eight-string djent percussiveness (“Liquid Times,” “Black Ice”); and even working a uniquely cheerful, crossover pop-rock moment with “Dreamlike.” While the record is as varied as it is vibrant, the guitarist may be even more excited for what could happen with the music next. You see, his album arrangements are just a starting point. Taking the open-source concept to heart, Loureiro has since uploaded all the stems online pro bono — from beats to solos — so that adventurous music makers can do with them what they will; he's already received script-flipping EDM-style remixes of *Open Source* tracks like “E-Dependent Mind.” While extremely proud of his latest solo release, his first since 2012's *Sounds of Innocence*, its ideas are meant to outgrow the confines of its original 52-minute framework.

“It's more, like, ‘power to the people,’ you know? Do whatever you want,” Loureiro says of the flux nature of the LP. “The rock-star attitude is, ‘I'm the best, here's my music. Nobody is better than me.’ A modern attitude would be, ‘This is what I'm able to do now, [so] here are all the tracks.’ I'm sure somebody's going to come up with an incredible idea.”

That's not to say the guitarist hasn't laid out some brilliant choices of his own across *Open Source*. Loureiro's playing is palpably wide open and free, the instrumental pieces exploring all the jaw-dropping, technical whimsy the guitarist has accrued across 30-plus years of professional shreddery. That bag of tricks is secondary to *Open Source*'s overall songcraft, though.

"Well, the technique — slides, bends, hybrid picking, tapping, alternate picking — it's all there, you know? But I was really putting my effort into the compositions, the melodies," he says. "There are some difficult sections in there, but my goal was, 'How can I balance the melodic sensibility with some flashy, fancy technical things?' I'm always afraid to be this boring guitar player, just playing fast all the time. I like the shred world, but I want to be melodic [too]."

To that end, *Open Source*'s plethora of hummable moments include the neo-classical guitar harmonies of "Overflow" and the lyrical, rafters-reaching pop-metal motifs within "Sertão." "Dreamlike," a yearning, mid-tempo outlier full of organ-saturated tones and soulfully spacious bends, works more of a John Mayer vibe than what you may normally expect from a master shredder.

On the technical side of things, however, *Open Source*'s most complex moment may be the knuckle-snapping fretboard crawl on the aforementioned "E-Dependent Mind" — Loureiro's YouTube channel explained as much via his "The hardest phrase on my new single" video upload. As he notes in the step-by-step breakdown, the mercurial phrase had been written and recorded on piano before being doubled with his six-string.

"I'm using kind of a pentatonic on the piano, but I was playing it slower [when it was first written]," he further explains to *Guitar World*. "My [original] idea was to have only the piano, but then I thought maybe not — then it'd sound more like Dream Theater. I don't know... it's a guitar album. It has to have guitar!"

Having recorded the album just a few blocks away from the Bogner factory in Los Angeles, Loureiro rotated between the company's Shiva, Ecstasy and Helios heads. That said, he chose an EVH 5150 III for *Open Source*'s chunkiest rhythm sections. In terms of the guitars, he put an arsenal of Ibanez axes to work. Some of the album's most soaring moments are courtesy of his trusted Ibanez signature — a deep green KIKO-200 and an o.g., black-and-red KIKO-100 — though elsewhere he turned to an RG Prestige 7. He played an eight-string Ibanez RG852MPB for the chewier, djent-like grooves of "Liquid Times" but switched back to six strings for its sustained high

notes, harmonic ring-outs and soft-touch trem bar work.

"Liquid Times" is also home to a 30-second guest spot from Asato, with the social media wunderkind going supernova in his section with a series of dives, compound sweeps and bluesier slides. Having himself crossed over into the world of social media, Loureiro was glad to connect with one of Instagram's most prolific influencers.

"He represents the modern guitar player, the guy that has a mosaic of one-minute musical ideas on his Instagram. It took me a few years to understand that this is an art form," Loureiro says of Asato's online etiquette, at least before the younger guitarist put himself on a so-far temporary Instagram hiatus at the beginning of 2021. The title of "Liquid Times" is a comment on the "here today, gone tomorrow" aesthetic of Instagram, where moments of inspiration can be pulled offline with the push of a button.

"Recording an album is such a stressful time, because you have to decide who you are in that one hour [of music], and you cannot [take it] back," he says. "The Instagram posts you can just delete, right? How many times have you seen people say stupid stuff, and then they just delete the post? That's liquid time. I cannot delete *Open Source*. It's here forever; that's my stamp as an artist."

Though Loureiro has become a prolific poster in his own right, it's fair to say he still has some reservations about the online world. He points to people, like his friend Asato, getting burned out on being connected 24/7. Let's not forget that there are trolls tucked under countless crevasses of the online landscape, faceless figures looking to pit Loureiro and his contemporaries against each other.

"One of the worst things about the internet is how people are comparing you with other guitarists," he says. "I'm exaggerating, but for the past five years, most phrases on the internet that have 'Kiko' and 'Megadeth' in them have 'Marty Friedman' in the same paragraph, right? 'I prefer Kiko!' or 'I prefer Marty!' I thought the greatest message [to send out] would be to have Marty Friedman [on the record], not only because he was the Megadeth guy, but to show that music is not a competition. The best way to show that I'm into this open-source, collaborative vibe is to bring the guy over as a guest."

Loureiro notes that he's been a fan of Friedman for decades, but they hadn't met IRL until Loureiro invited Friedman out for lunch while Megadeth were touring Japan in 2015. The guitarists talked about music for hours — without ever actually talking about their respective tenures in Megadeth. It hadn't dawned on Loureiro at the time

to compare notes, though he did eventually fire off a video tribute to Friedman's legendary run with Megadeth. "I remember sending him a video of [myself playing] 'Tornado of Souls,' because people use it as a benchmark," he recalls with a laugh. "I sent it to him and he was like, 'Oh... cool!'"

The pair's collaborative "Imminent Threat" may be *Open Source*'s most frantic, go-for-the-throat moment. Loureiro explains that the song was crafted late into the album's production, after the guitarist realized the collection "was missing that fast shred song." For his part, Loureiro rifles off a series of wired-and-inspired runs, judding metal rhythms and wah-obliterated phrases. Mid-song, Friedman taps in with a fiery display of shred theatrics ("It's not easy to compose a solo when the chords are changing so much — it's a modal harmony there").

While currently promoting *Open Source*, Loureiro is also in Megadeth mode, with the Big Four favorites getting closer to unveiling the follow-up to 2016's Grammy-winning *Dystopia*. Pre-production began in 2019, but those plans were put on pause when Dave Mustaine was diagnosed with throat cancer. Following his treatment and recovery, the band went back on the road in early 2020, but then, of course, COVID hit. More recently, the band faced another roadblock after dismissing founding bassist Dave Ellefson following the online leak of sexually explicit videos the musician sent to a teenage fan. Megadeth are still expected to tour this fall with Lamb of God, but as of press time, they've yet to announce Ellefson's replacement. That said, the basic tracking for the 16th Megadeth album is complete, though Loureiro has punched in the occasional flourish as late as this spring. While relatively mum on the specifics of his second album with the band, Loureiro notes that, as with *Dystopia*, he does have a few co-writing spots on the record. He'll also concede that some songs have a "rock 'n' roll" vibe to them, arguably along the lines of *Countdown to Extinction* opener "Skin o' My Teeth." Suiting that old-school heaviness, Loureiro kept his eight-string in the case.

"There aren't any eight-string guitars, because that's not the concept of the band. I can explore that [on my own] — but I believe a band is more of a conceptual thing. When I'm there with Megadeth, it's, 'How can I be as aggressive and heavy as possible without cheating?'" he says with a laugh. "I remember recording 'Dystopia' [and saying], 'Hey, Dave, let's put a drop D [in there].' He didn't want it. I remember recording it to show him the idea, but it's not on the album. He was right; it would've sounded like somebody else." **GW**



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Billy F. Gibbons with his custom Mojo Maker, a replica of the first guitar he ever owned, a 1962 Gibson Melody Maker





HOW **ZZ TOP** LEGEND **BILLY F. GIBBONS** AND HIS BAND
(GUITARIST **AUSTIN HANKS** AND FORMER **GUNS N' ROSES**
DRUMMER **MATT SORUM**) HEADED TO THE CALIFORNIA
HIGH DESERT TO SEEK ROCK 'N' ROLL INSPIRATION —
WITH A SIDE OF “MYSTERY”

BY ALAN PAUL ★ PHOTO BY JEN ROSENSTEIN



LAST YEAR, BILLY F. Gibbons found himself with a lot of time on his hands. Like most musicians, the sudden cancellation of touring hit the ZZ Top guitarist hard, so he was wide open to drummer Matt Sorum's suggestion that they get together in a studio in the California High Desert near Joshua Tree National Park to kick around some ideas with guitarist Austin Hanks. The three of them had also worked on Gibbons' 2018 album, *Big Bad Blues*.



"The sessions started with what we suspected would be a 30-minute have-a-look-around-the-studio, and we walked in and didn't leave for three months," Gibbons says.

The result is *Hardware*, Gibbons' third solo album in six years. Unlike the previous two, which leaned heavily on blues and Latin music, this one is almost all original material that leans heavily toward greasy, grungy rock. "Holing up in the desert in the heat of the summer — that in itself was pretty intense," Gibbons says. "We let off steam by letting it rock, which is what *Hardware* is really all about. It's a raging rocker but always mindful of the desert's implicit mystery." We caught up with the good Rev. Gibbons by Zoom.

Most of the album features you, Matt Sorum and Austin Hanks. How does your collaboration work? Is everything a group effort?

Everyone is quite familiar with the backbeat from our fearless drummer, Matt Sorum. His history having played with the Cult, Guns N' Roses, Velvet Revolver and on down the line speaks for itself. Matt combines with Austin Hanks, who a lot of people know as the unusual left-handed guitar player. I've always enjoyed Austin's guitar playing as well as his Alabama-based style of singing. When the three of us get together, it's kind of a natural chemistry and occurrence. Which brings up another salient point: Where's the bottom end when it's just two guitars and drums? Let's shed some light on the rather interesting invention that makes this possible: A Little Thunder, the strange guitar pickup that identifies the low note of a guitar and throws it an octave lower and turns it into an accompanying bass guitar sound. When Austin and I are playing this device, it's actually not a trio but a five-piece band. We had not one but two bass guitars to the mix, so it's a powerhouse.

Are you both playing that pickup on every track?

Indeed we are. We also added some more traditional basslines when we found an old Fender Jazz — '64 or '65 — in the studio and everyone had a go. The unusual one was watching Matt step out from behind the drums and slamming down on a bass guitar. It was quite a surprise.

So what guitar are you playing? I don't imagine you put that pickup into Pearly Gates.

No, that came later. When we first arrived at the studio we only had the gear that was existing in that studio. All the backups, the known suspects, were yet to arrive, but in the corner I picked up an old Fender Jazzmaster that was leaning up against a '61 Fender Piggyback amp and a Fender Reverb tank, something I hadn't had the pleasure of plugging into for seemingly forever. It was in fine working shape, and after the first few notes, the engineer said, "Billy, it's no secret that you became pals with Jimi Hendrix. Wasn't it Jimi who said that you will never hear surf music again?" [A line from Hendrix's *"Third Stone from the Sun."*] I said, "Well, yeah, but things have turned the corner." There you have it. When you hear the first released track, "West Coast Junkie," it's definitely back to the Sixties.

You've said the High Desert setting of the studio (Escape, outside Pioneertown and Yucca Valley) had a profound impact on the sound of this album. Can you elaborate?

We spent three months there, and that time really allowed us to immerse ourselves in the surroundings, which are fairly sparse. You really have nothing but desert rock, a lot of sand and cacti, maybe a few rattlesnakes thrown in. Then you add the mystery quotient, that strange energy that defies description in writing — and even photographs don't do it real justice. When you're there, something descends and it really has an effect. We found it to be quite handy to let it lead the pencil across the blank piece of paper, and every day we were finding the creative lid was being lifted and we took that as part of that desert surrounding. You'll hear us take a stab at the description on the closing track. We wrapped up the sessions with a song called "Desert High," which is our take on a spoken-word delivery, and we tried to tiptoe through it.

Sounds like you wrote a lot of the material together during those three months.

We certainly did. We found ourselves having just tiptoed in with actually no preparation or forethought before going in to see what we could see in the studio. That did lead to some interesting excursions into the writing process, and on certain days it was no surprise to have two or three songs emerge.

Was *Hardware* a pandemic production, something that happened because you all had time

on your hands?

Yes. It started with an unexpected call from Matt, saying, "Man, I'm out here in the Palm Springs desert and I've discovered this new studio out in Joshua Tree." I had mistakenly tagged it as being a reference to a place I've worked with Queens of the Stone Age called Rancho De La Luna, which is David Catching's joint. He said, "No, it's actually across the road. Would you like to go check it out?" and I said, "Yeah, OK." He didn't mention that it was 20 miles across the road. [Laughs] It's out in the middle of the desert, but it turned out to be a stunning establishment. Surrounded by nothing, you walk into the confines of a very sophisticated setup.

A lot of the album is aggressive, but a couple of the slow tunes really swagger. I'm thinking of "Spanish Fly" and "Vagabond Man."

Oh, yeah! "Vagabond Man" was kind of a step





**“WE LET OFF STEAM BY
LETTING IT ROCK...
IT’S A RAGING ROCKER
BUT ALWAYS MINDFUL
OF THE DESERT’S
IMPLICIT MYSTERY”**

[from left] Austin Hanks,
Matt Sorum and Billy F. Gibbons
in action at the Troubadour
in Los Angeles in 2018

[below, from left] Gibbons,
Chris Layton, Sue Foley and
Jimmie Vaughan perform
at Antone’s in Austin in 2019



away from that hard-rocking thing that was leading the charge. It was recounting what it was like to be a traveling musician; everyone in the room, including the two engineers, had firsthand experience in not being able to stay in one spot more than one day at a time — and you really know what it’s like to be a true vagabond. We decided to try and put it into words, more on the lamenting of what you miss out on by not being a regular guy, by being a vagabond man. Even with a dollar or two in your pocket, it’s close to being homeless in some sense.

When you speak of slowing things down, we can tiptoe over to “Spanish Fly,” which may be slower in tempo but has a ferociousness that’s a direct result of having spent a lot of time back in Texas, down there in Houston, when we were working in the midst of a lot of the hip-hop guys, like the Geto Boys, Bushwick Bill and Juvenile and Money Fresh

from over in Baton Rouge. That was the Cash Money guys. On *Hardware*, you've got a handful of very disparate influences.

You're still sort of working in a trio format, but how is it different working with another guitar, and your unique approach to bass, versus the more traditional bass-drums-guitar lineup in ZZ Top?

A good question. As you know, working a trio is a very spare outing, with everyone working 100 percent. When you remove the bass guitar, it became incumbent on Austin and me to figure out what the arrangements were going to do. As I drifted into a solo, Austin picked up the beat by really bearing down on his rhythm stylings and then, of course, I would give him the nod and do the same. It was a 50/50 exchange.

Is that something you enjoy? You haven't played a lot of rhythm behind another guitar player in your career.

Oh, yeah! When Austin cuts loose it's a delight to listen to him play. What's antagonizing is trying to watch him play because he's the upside-down and backwards guy — a lefty playing a flipped-over, right-handed guitar in the Jimi Hendrix and Albert King style with a weird tuning. But somehow he makes it work.

It's always intriguing when someone of his generation, like Austin or Eric Gales or Doyle Bramhall II, plays in that style, because they could've gotten a left-handed guitar, unlike Albert or Otis Rush.

Indeed. I've often wondered about this and asked Austin, "How in the world did you invent this thing?" and he said, "It's all I've known." Like a lot of guys, there's a guitar in the corner and no one there to tune it properly, so you just pick it up and start to play, which is exactly what Austin's story is.

Tell me how Larkin Poe came to be on this album.

Oh, yes! ZZ Top had the pleasure of working on tour with a great blues guitar player named Tyler Bryant, and there were these two mysterious girls we kept seeing. [*Bryant and his band, the Shakedown, have toured often with ZZ Top. Bryant is married to Larkin Poe's Rebecca Lovell.*] Months and months of traveling and I finally braved the question, "Who are these attractive girls who are following us around? I see them in the dressing room and the catering room." And he said, "Oh, they've got a band! And in fact, they volunteered to hit the stage and do a little warmup." It was then and there on the touring road that I got to see Larkin Poe play, and brother, did they ever lift the lid on that end of things. They are fierce! And very unique. After seeing them play, I knew that someday it would be of value to turn them loose and see what occurred. With something so unexpected and new, which is a really big piece of this *Hardware* project,

every day was a new song and we actually got to engage with a couple of other players along the way. Larkin Poe do it right and do it well.

Do you foresee playing shows with Austin and Matt?

Yes. We join the many who are ready to see the curtain rise and get back to live entertainment. We're ready to hit the road. We had quite a successful run billed as the BFGs, and we had a blast out on the road, especially using that crazy pickup that transformed our guitars into bass and guitar all at once.

Do you run a split signal out of the guitar?

Yes, one going to a guitar amp and another going to your bass amp. But when we were recording the album, we stacked a backline with Magnatone amplifiers, so we took both the guitars and the basslines into that, and it worked beautifully.

I met the [*A Little Thunder pickups*] inventor, Andy Alt, when he was operating under the same roof as James Trussart, who told me I had to check out this pickup. Of course, having worked with Seymour Duncan for so many years and lately Thomas Nilsen at Cream T pickups, I thought, "Oh nice, another pickup." And James said, "No, this one is really different." And he was right! It's intuitive in that it's able to identify the bottom three strings of the guitar and also you can assign the task of "low note priority," which means the pickup has the ability to identify the lowest note and throw it down an octave — or two octaves! It's a very sophisticated piece of gear. It works as a regular guitar pickup, and then when you engage the octave-lower segment, it throws that in.

Does the fact that you're essentially playing bass make you play differently? For instance, did you find yourself leaning more heavily on the low notes when playing rhythm behind Austin?

No. What I liked about the effect of this pickup is it doesn't require re-learning or any kind of new technique. It's just picking up what you're already playing, although you can develop some interesting techniques. You can add this effect in a differential manner, but when we were out on the road, Austin and I were just going about things as we normally would. It was quite mystifying to those attending the event. They were hearing a bass guitar and going, "Where is the bass player? Is he behind a curtain somewhere?"

You still haven't told me what guitar you use this with pickup!

Ah! John Bolin to the rescue. As a lot of people know, I've had the pleasure of working directly with Bolin Guitars out of Boise, Idaho, for the last four decades; he called me and said he got word I was using A Little Thunder and that he had a couple of guitars he thought would be perfect. He had a right-handed version and a left-handed version

for Austin, so we slapped the Little Thunder pickups into these guitars — and off we went. It proved to be an excellent combination.

Tell me about the Jungle Show, your occasional band with Jimmie Vaughan.

Shortly after B.B. King passed away there was a tribute organized in Austin, and I was invited to contribute a few sentences of a verbal tribute about what B.B. has come to mean to so many. Then the organizer invited me to join in and play a B.B. King song, joining a grand lineup that included the B.B. King band with Bonnie Raitt, Rodney Crowell, Kris Kristoffersen and others. When I started looking at songs I was really familiar with, they had all been laid claim to! I went and talked to the great Hammond organist Mike Flanigin over lunch and told him we should find something from left field, and he had the perfect suggestion: "The Jungle," a song he knew well because the CD had been stuck in his car player for a year! That was the number we laid on them during that tribute. Flanigin said, "All of us are off the road, so why don't we throw a little get-together and do a few nights?" And I said, "Not a bad idea." He said, "Jimmie Vaughan wants to join in. Chris Layton, the great drummer, wants to beat the skins, and Sue Foley's got some blues licks up her sleeves. So yeah! Let's do this."

Then we have to pivot to what are we going to call this and he said, "Let's call it the Jungle Show since it's the first song on the setlist." That was six years ago. We've played an annual New Year's show at Antone's ever since. This past year, the restrictions were well in place so we decided to film the event, and it was released as a streaming broadcast.

Stevie Ray Vaughan was well known as a guitar player in Austin, and guitarist Bill Campbell told him he had to start singing or else he'd be someone else's guitar player forever. Did you have a moment of realization like that, or did you always see yourself singing and playing?

I started when I got a guitar for Christmas and along with it came a tiny little Fender Champ. Shortly after that I was invited to join the neighbors, who had already put a little outfit together. We decided to call ourselves the Saints, though we were very unsaintly, I must say. When I joined I was guitar player number 3 and the other two guys had big amps. All I could do with my tiny Fender Champ is turn it up, and by the time I had it turned it up to 10 I was screaming to be heard, and that's how I learned how to step up to the mic and start singing. Jimmie Vaughan tells a very similar story. Jimmie and Stevie started off as guitar players not intending to become frontmen or singers, but as you point out, Stevie got strict instructions from Mr. Campbell to open up and let it rip. Jimmie eventually did the same thing. Mr. Campbell was a guy who played with serious intent and should be remembered as one of the Texas greats as well. **GW**



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On his new album, **JOHN MAYER** lives out a very specific rock 'n' roll fantasy: "What if it's 1988 and I had had a band in the late '60s through the '70s, and now I'm my age in the '80s and people are handing me these things called chorus pedals?" The result is *Sob Rock*, a highly polished, extra-"generous" studio offering that slyly channels the guitarist's high-school-days guitar gods — including *Journeyman*-era **ERIC CLAPTON**

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARLOS SERRAO



Mayer with his signature guitar, a PRS Silver Sky, which was introduced in 2018





LET'S

FACE IT: 2020 was a helluva year. We all dealt with the global pandemic, the resulting lockdown and the general disruption and destruction of normal, everyday life in our own way. In John Mayer's case, he made a record.

And the record he made, *Sob Rock*, his eighth solo effort overall, is unlike any he has recorded previously. Its 10 tracks look to the past — specifically, the Eighties music of Mayer's childhood — in an effort to conjure a sound that, he admits, brought him comfort in uncomfortable times. "I started making music that I would find really soothing," he says.

But the record also does something else. In revisiting the sounds of his youth, *Sob Rock* reconstitutes a sort of pop craftsmanship — tightly arranged, highly melodic, excessively hooky songs executed with session-player proficiency and finished with a big-budget studio sheen — that has been largely jettisoned in an era of bedroom computer recording, flown-in tracks, autotuned vocals, digital cut-and-paste arrangements and earbud-attuned production styles.

Of course, as anyone who has followed Mayer's career over the past 20 years can attest, this is not the first time he has created music that sounds vaguely "Eighties." But whereas other artists aiming to invoke the vibe of that decade might merely slather on some sparkly synths, break out a drum machine or rip a hot-rodded solo over a power ballad, Mayer's musical mind works in more nuanced ways. *Sob Rock* succeeds not because it references a sound from the past, but because it does so with such remarkable specificity. It's an exercise in what the 43-year-old Mayer calls "wish fulfillment."

"I think everyone who makes music comes at it from a fantasy," he says, "but for me the fantasy this time was, what if it's 1988 and I had had a band in the late Sixties through the Seventies, and now I'm my age in the Eighties and people are handing me these things called chorus pedals, or people are going, 'Hey, you don't need a tube amp anymore.' And I go, 'You don't? Okay. This sounds great...'"

The result is a record that recalls Eric Clapton and Fleetwood Mac, Toto and Peter Gabriel, Bruce Springsteen and Steve Miller and various members of the Eagles — but recalls, precisely, the type of matured, occasionally mellowed-out music these seasoned artists were making in the Eighties.

Sounds unusually specific? It is.

“I don’t want to say it’s a costume, but it is an intention,” Mayer says. “I’m using sonic color-coding, like the sonic paint codes from the Eighties, but I’m making new images with them. I told myself, ‘Don’t steer away from it. If it brings you joy and it brings other people joy, what happens if you just do it?’ ”

And Mayer did, in fact, do it. From the blooming, chorus-drenched guitar triads that define the ultra-hooky first single, “Last Train Home” to the laidback rhythms and clean, shimmering licks of “Wild Blue,” the Springsteen-ian (and we’re talking of *Tunnel of Love* Bruce here) swell of “Carry Me Away” to the richly layered instrumentation and adult-contempo vibes of “Shot in the Dark,” *Sob Rock* is Mayer at, as he puts it, his most “generous,” offering up an expertly written, beautifully recorded [courtesy of ace producer Don Was] and unabashedly warm and tuneful listen.

“There is nothing in this record that has any sandpaper on it,” Mayer says. “I went, ‘Well, I’m just going to go for it. I’m just going to be as absolutely melodic and generous as I can be.’ And I was just putting more and more and more melody on each and every one of these songs. That’s the fun I had on this record.”

Which is not to say it came easy. “It took forever to work on these songs,” he continues. “It was like, here’s the three-and-a-half minutes — how do you inject it with as many moments and layers as possible? How can you just keep jam-packing it with payoffs? What we’re really talking about is, what’s so wrong about a guilty pleasure? Or, what’s so guilty about someone making a record that goes, ‘I’m setting out to please you as much as I possibly can with the art of melody.’ Someone may not like that, but I’m proud to go down with that ship.”

On the eve of its release, Mayer sat down with *Guitar World* to discuss how he built, and ultimately steered, the *Sob Rock* ship, from the music he referenced to the gear he employed to his approach to crafting solos. But before diving into the nuts and bolts of the record, there was one burning question we had to get out of the way...

So let’s just get right to it: In the video for the first single from *Sob Rock*, “Last Train Home,” you’re playing your signature PRS Silver Sky model, but in a never-before-seen pink finish. Is that a real thing?

Well, it’s a real thing in the sense that I have one. As to whether or not it’s a real thing in terms of other people having one? It’s definitely being talked about. The fun of having Silver Sky as a project that I can always be working on is that I can test colors out on myself. And in the last couple of years I’ve fallen in love with the L.A. session-guitar concept. Like, the old Valley Arts guitars, they’re all sort of these great shades of pink. And I just think there’s something really cool about a pink guitar. So I thought, Well, why don’t I do a pink one for this record?



“I ALWAYS WISHED I COULD HAVE A SONG THAT WAS ON ERIC CLAPTON’S JOURNEYMAN ALBUM. I LOVED HIM SO MUCH THAT I’M NOT AFRAID TO GO, ‘I JUST WANT TO FEEL WHAT THAT’S LIKE...’ LIKE, THE EXPERIENCE OF PLUGGING A STRAT WITH NOISELESS PICKUPS INTO A SOLDANO WITH A CHORUS PEDAL”

Sort of to help tell a little more of a visual story of the music. It’s really fun to just shoot a color on a guitar and go, ‘How does this make me feel?’ I had no idea people would gravitate to it like they have.

People dig it.

Actually, the pink guitar in the video is hot pink, and it’s actually *too* hot. So we went with a cooler pink that I can use going forward. That seems to be the magic



slipper, color-wise. I wouldn't have wanted to begin Silver Sky with a pink guitar, but we're enough years down the road that we can go a little "out there" on a couple colors while still keeping the identity of what this guitar is intact. And, of course, I'm nowhere near the first person to do a pink guitar. But I think it just aligns with this idea of making your own fun, and of having more fun than we've ever had before and taking advantage of the life that's been handed back to us, hopefully not provisionally.

The Valley Arts session-musician pink guitar is a pretty specific association, but it's in line with what you're doing overall on *Sob Rock*. The record obviously has a strong Eighties sound, but more than that it's a very particular Eighties sound, the kind of sound that artists like Eric Clapton and Fleetwood Mac and Peter Gabriel and Toto — and Steve Lukather, for one, was also a session guy who played Valley Arts guitars — were playing in that decade. The question is, how were

"Everything on this record, you can hear each guitar"



you able to home in on that so precisely?

That's a good question. And it's a very flattering observation. I'm very detail-oriented, and I believe the difference between people taking the magic carpet ride with you and not taking the magic carpet ride with you can sometimes come down to what most people would consider an infinitesimally small detail. But if we're talking about tricking your brain or tricking your heart, there are very, very subtle moves to get there. And especially when it comes to the idea of doing something that is certainly borrowing the intentionality of Eighties records. It's really easy to apply too much paint to the brush and hit the canvas too hard with the brush stroke and have people go, "I know what he's doing, never mind." I mean, I could have slathered the record in chorus, could have slathered the record in a Jupiter-8 [synthesizer], and that would have certainly let everybody know what my intentions were. "Oh, he's made *this*."

You went more granular.

What I think is really interesting is I'm at the

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RECORD"**

age now where I have the benefit of experience and having lived through that time. Like, I could never fully grasp the Sixties because I wasn't there. And I would probably reduce it in my estimation of what it was. I would go to flower power. Woodstock. VW Beetles. But for someone who was alive and a teenager during the Sixties, they can tell me so many things that didn't quite make it through the hoop historically and into a kind of common understanding of that era. So where a lot of people would think that the Eighties was all really goofy and neon-colored, well, to me, there was a lot of earnestness. The Eighties gave us Peter Gabriel. That's some of the coolest stuff in the world, you know? And what's interesting is that people now relate to that earnestness again in a real, non-ironic way. So what I set out to do on the record was be really sincere with it.

How did that translate to the music you ultimately created?

The songs, compositionally, had to be strong

Mayer, with a PRS Silver Sky, in a *Sob Rock* album cover outtake — "I have been guilty in the past of assigning four guitar parts to do the job of what could have been one better guitar part from scratch," he says

WANT TO PLAY PERFECT GUITAR SOLOS?

START BY BUILDING A RAMP, SAYS MAYER

AT ONE POINT or another, every guitarist has debated what makes a “perfect” guitar solo. And earlier this year, *Guitar World*’s sister publication, *Total Guitar*, set out to answer this question once and for all. Using information gleaned from GW’s poll of the 50 greatest guitar solos of all time to examine common attributes, *Total Guitar* crunched the data (tempo, key, pitch range, melodic content, “shrediness,” etc.) and, *voilà* — unveiled to the world the first scientifically verified perfect guitar solo.

But is there truly a formula for crafting a guitar lead that will achieve maximum impact with a listener? We asked John Mayer, as much a master of the superb, show-stopping solo as anyone playing the instrument today, for his opinion. And while he not surprisingly let out a laugh at the mere mention of a scientifically created perfect solo, he also acknowledged that there’s something to be said for approaching your leads with certain strategies in mind.

“I think pitch, repetition, motif, all these things have a lot to do with which parts of your emotional map a solo is hitting at any given time,” Mayer says. “I mean, if you start high, there’s nowhere left to go, right? So I see it as



on their own, no matter how you played them. The songs don’t rely on the sounds, and that’s really important. “Last Train Home” works on an acoustic guitar and a vocal as well as it does behind the lens of this idea that, just for one record, I want to go back to what I might’ve sounded like in that era. But it’s still a song of mine. I didn’t change anything in the way that I write. So it’s actually a pretty light touch in terms of it feeling like an old record. And it feels like an old record mostly because it’s fully recorded by people together in a room. So all these songs, they’re not fantastically complex. But where I had all the fun in the world was in the arrangements. I went deep into the brilliant arrangements of the Eighties. And when you start getting into Eighties records, the arrangement is as important as the songs and as important as the singer.

Where does the guitar fit into that?

Everything on this record, you can hear each guitar. And I have been guilty in the past of assigning four guitar parts to do the job of what could have been one better guitar part from scratch. I think we all, as guitar players, have had this experience where we start to kind of duct tape guitar takes together, not linear-wise, but in building a track. If one guitar track isn’t right and you keep it, you add another guitar track to beef it up. Then you get diminishing returns and it gets smaller-sounding, so you tack on another one. But what’s really great about the arrangements in the songs from this era is that each instrument is stating its case. It would get in, it was highly audible and it would get out. And it was laced with really,

really beautiful melodic motifs. Intervallic, dramatic, melodic, strong, loud motifs. So the idea for me with the guitar and the songs was, make it melodic, make it hooky. I want to sing it before it’s over. I want to have it stuck in my head before it’s over.

When it came to actually laying down the sounds in the studio, did you change up your gear at all to be era-appropriate?

It’s mostly the same gear. Although we certainly tried. Don Was has said he wishes he could’ve sold tickets to the recording of this album, just for the guitar parts. Because the guitar parts, some of them that never made it to the record, it was just so funny to hear that sound revived. There were times where I would take a Jackson and run it through a Rockman, which is as Def Leppard as you can get. It’d be a Jackson through a Rockman with, like, a [Marshall] JMP, and I’d start playing these kinds of *Hysteria* lines. But then you hear it back and you go, “I get it, but that’s not me. That was so much fun, but that’s not convincing and that’s not sincere.” So in the end it became this blend of my gear with the intentionality of the music of the past.

I’m assuming that means, at the base level, the Silver Sky through a variety of tube amps.

We used different amps all the time, and amps are tricky for me — I think the same amp sounds different on two different days. So we sort of used three amps as one. It’s like, what serves as the woofer, what serves as the crossover and what serves as the tweeter? It’s really fun to build an amp sound that way. And interestingly enough, the



Dumble really intersects with early Eighties session work, right? Like, Stevie Ray Vaughan was kind of an anomaly in that Dumble world because almost everyone else using a Dumble was kind of doing really clean stuff. I mean, I know guys like Larry Carlton and Robben Ford were making it sing with distortion, but it was mostly clean tones you were hearing with that amp.

And so it worked really, really well to take a Silver Sky, which is already kind of hi-fi, and run it through a Dumble and a direct, and then maybe an old Fender combo for the softness. Because those old Fenders apologize really well for the notes. But for that kind of session-player, speed-of-note thing, that picking response really comes from direct input or a Dumble amp, which, really, is a direct-input amplifier. Even though it's coming through a speaker, everything in those amps moves so fast, and in the best, cleanest way, that when you pick that single-note stuff, you're just in heaven because the notes are so crisp.

And then we actually used a Fractal in some places, too. Because as much as I was thinking,

"THERE IS NOTHING IN THIS RECORD THAT HAS ANY SAND-PAPER ON IT. I WENT, 'WELL, I'M JUST GOING TO GO FOR IT. I'M JUST GOING TO BE AS ABSOLUTELY MELODIC AND GENEROUS AS I CAN BE'"

"What would I have done then?" I was also asking, "What would *they* have done *now*?" And if somebody had walked a Fractal into the *Thriller* sessions? You would have heard a Fractal all over that record.

Absolutely.

There's just no doubt about it. And so that was the fun of it — bending and blending time and eras and influences. The exception was "Last Train Home," which, I'm not going to play stupid, "Last Train Home" definitely trades on some very specific musical references. But the rest of the record, the influences are chopped up so fine that it's almost a powder. You can sort of get one thing or another thing. I mean, I've heard people say one band name and another person say another band name off the same song. It's almost like they're hearing what it reminds them of more than what it is. I'd love to hear what you think about it...

I'll try one. To me, the song "Wild Blue" sounds like it came straight off Fleetwood

Mayer with his pink PRS Silver Sky: "I just think there's something really cool about a pink guitar. So I thought, Well, why don't I do a pink one for this record?"

building a ramp.” One guitarist he views as a master of building that ramp is Jerry Garcia. “When I was really diving deep into the Jerry stuff, getting ready for Dead & Company, I realized he was just brilliant at it,” Mayer says. “And another guy who’s brilliant at it is Doyle Bramhall [Doyle Bramhall II]. Doyle is the single best soloist, in my opinion, when it comes to getting you to lean in. It’s a masterclass every single time. First he whispers at you with his guitar: ‘Hey, I wanna tell you something...’ And you go, ‘What? What do you wanna tell me?’ And he goes, ‘I wanna tell you about *this*...’ And you’re in. He’ll be on the third go-round before he’s ever really pressed on the gas. He might do six go-rounds before he’s even thought about his heart rate going up. If you or I did that, we’d be circling the runway the last three.

“FIRST [DOYLE BRAMHALL II] WHISPERS AT YOU WITH HIS GUITAR: ‘HEY, I WANNA TELL YOU SOMETHING...’ AND YOU GO, ‘WHAT? WHAT DO YOU WANNA TELL ME?’ AND HE GOES, ‘I WANNA TELL YOU ABOUT THIS...’ AND YOU’RE IN.”

“So Doyle’s just a monster that way, and I think about Doyle’s playing a lot in that respect: When you’re playing a solo, state your case. If you want to state it again, you will be embellishing that motif again. You have another thing you want to say? Well, maybe now, as you start

Mac’s *Tango in the Night* — the driving-but-relaxed rhythm, the taut, clean-toned guitar lines, the soft background vocals. If I were to get even more specific, your first solo in that one sounds to my ears like Lindsey Buckingham playing through Mark Knopfler’s gear.

[Laughs] The solo is certainly a Knopfler thing. Although the song makes me think more of Boz Skaggs in, like ’79, ’80, like a really tightly engineered, two-inch tape thing. Maybe Alan Parsons. Or [Steve Miller Band’s] “Abracadabra.” But the solo, that’s actually the take from the first time we really played the song. And it’s the only song that I brought in while we were making *Sob Rock*. I had nine songs and this was the 10th, and it came out in the middle of a session for something else. And that’s the take. I didn’t have a guitar pick so I decided to just fingerpick it. And I think it’s through the Fractal, actually. It’s like the “Studio Clean” setting or something like that. Don’t hold me to that. But it was one of those kinds of settings. Because I was doing a scratch and it was, “Hey, let’s just play the thing...”

You mentioned that “Last Train Home” is the one song where the influences are more overt. What are we hearing on that one?

That’s a good question. And I have a deep dislike of dishonesty when it comes to creating, so I’ll tell you: I always wished that I could have a song that was on Eric Clapton’s *Journeyman* album. I loved him so much that I’m not afraid to go, “I just want to feel what that’s like...” Like, the experience of plugging a Strat with noiseless pickups into a Soldano with a chorus pedal. And to hear that back on your own song is funny, poignant, touching, exciting, titillating. I mean, it feels a little bit wrong. But the reason I’m okay telling you this is because Eric has always been someone who turned his test around and showed you his notes. Every single time: “I got this from that person, I got this from him. I got this from her.” So I’m at an age where I’m looking back and I’m really joyously reminiscing about times in my life as a listener, and as a music lover. And I’m going, “Well, why can’t I just ignite that spark on this one song? And if somebody gets a kick out of it, whether they know why or not, wouldn’t that be great?”

At *Guitar World*, we talk to a lot of players that cop to wanting to sound like Eric Clapton. But this may be the first time someone has said they wanted to sound like Eric Clapton playing “Pretending.”

Oh, well, this is a great conversation. This speaks to what matters to you based on your age, right? This is the whole genesis of Van Halen discussions. It all has to do with how old you were when it hit you. And when I was in high school, it was “Pretending.” It was “Bad Love.” It was “Run-

ning on Faith.” If you liked guitar and you liked Eric Clapton, that’s what he was playing if you went to go see him at the New Haven Coliseum. I remember seeing kids in school on a Monday showing off their Eric Clapton T-shirts — that was a cool thing. You can’t expect someone who’s 16 years old in 1990 to understand Cream. Not yet. So what finds you if you first pick up a guitar at that time? It’s that record. That record has such a deep place in my heart.

You play a fair amount of lead guitar on *Sob Rock*, but similar to Clapton in the Eighties, you keep your solos brief — four bars, eight bars, maybe 12 or 16 if you’re feeling generous. Which is also in line with how we would hear session guitarists on a record back then. You knew these people could wait for days, but they stayed within very strict parameters in order to serve the song. For most of your career that’s been your approach as well.

You know, my ears and my hands are two very, very separate entities, and I let my ears rule. So while it’s fun — just primally fun — to get more time to play a solo, I become *deeply* upset with myself when I start to hear myself thin out. It’s almost like a fountain pen, and I can always tell when the writing gets thin as a guitar player. And I don’t tolerate it in myself, even though the other side of myself just wants to let loose. So I’ll let loose... and then I’ll listen back. And the ear is the boss. And my ear goes, “I will simply not tolerate a solo that’s twice as long as it needs to be. I heard you lose your motifs. I heard you lose your lyricality. I heard you lose your phrasing.”

That’s why I don’t really consider myself a blues guitar player — because my phrasing gives out after a certain period of time. And I love playing blues guitar. I mean, it’s like constant downhill skiing. It’s an endless water slide. But the ear rules. The ear is the producer of the record, and the ear is the one that has to call bullshit on every other part of you as a composer and a musician and a guitar player.

Recently you posted a video clip of you playing along to “Last Train Home,” but with the lead guitar removed from the mix. And you invited people to solo over the track with you, and add their own melodies and lines. I thought that was a really neat thing to do.

If I can offer a little support to people who love playing guitar and don’t quite have the opportunity to play as much as they want or in all the situations they want, then I’ll do that. Because when we were coming up, we didn’t have *anything* without a lead guitar, right? I had to play over B.B. King. I had to play on top of Stevie Ray Vaughan. The nerviest move you could ever make! And so if I can say to the mix engineer, “Hey, will you give me one without the lead gui-

to explain yourself, you have a little more emotion because you're amping yourself up in your argument."

Mayer laughs. "And then maybe by the end you get to swear, if you want to swear."

Regardless of how you build your solo, and the techniques and devices you employ in doing it, Mayer is quick to point out that it's essential to remember that your lead is not a standalone piece of music. In order to truly be successful, the solo needs to function within, and, ideally, serve to elevate the larger song.

"The song has to pick back up after the solo, so you have to land the jump into the last chorus," he says. "Now, outros are different. You can build a ramp to the moon on the outro if you want, because you have a little something called the fade-out to save you. But otherwise, you have these two set ends. And that to me has always been a really interesting, and sometimes challenging, process of a solo. You have to build a roller-coaster that still ends flat so that you can get back into the song. And you have to get back into the song in a way that, when you hear the chorus again, you've done something with your addition of a solo that makes the chorus feel like it's saying something new. Well, that's a puzzle, man.

That's a puzzle." Ultimately, Mayer says, "Just have fun... but don't go crazy. It's like, 'Here, go tool around in this Ferrari, but don't bring it back crashed.'

Get it back into the garage so the song can keep going. Because the song is the boss, and that's it. You have to always remember that."

— Richard Bienstock

Mayer and Clapton share the stage at NYC's Madison Square Garden, May 1, 2015



tar?," I'll do it. And I'm going to do it for as many songs as I can. "Hey, jump on in, play along with this." It's not anything that's precious to me.

Look, do you know how flipped out I would have been if I walked through a CD store in 1991 and there was an Eric Clapton import CD from Australia or something that said, "*Journeyman — Lead Guitar Out Version*"? I would've never gone back to school! I would've never left the house. I think about that sometimes. And so that's why I'm always going to keep doing it if I can. And I can. So I will.

It's a way of sort of bringing guitar playing down from the mountain-top, so to speak. And it's not the only time you've done it. Over the past few months on TikTok you've posted videos demonstrating how to play songs like "Neon" and "Slow Dancing in a Burning Room," or that allow fans to trade off solos with you. It's like you're saying, "You can do this, too."

You know, I've never seen more people get more out of playing electric guitar than I have this past year. It is such a community. And it brings me back to my roots as a guitar player, as a guitar player alone in my house. So it's a way of saying that we're all in the same boat. We're all sitting down with an electric guitar

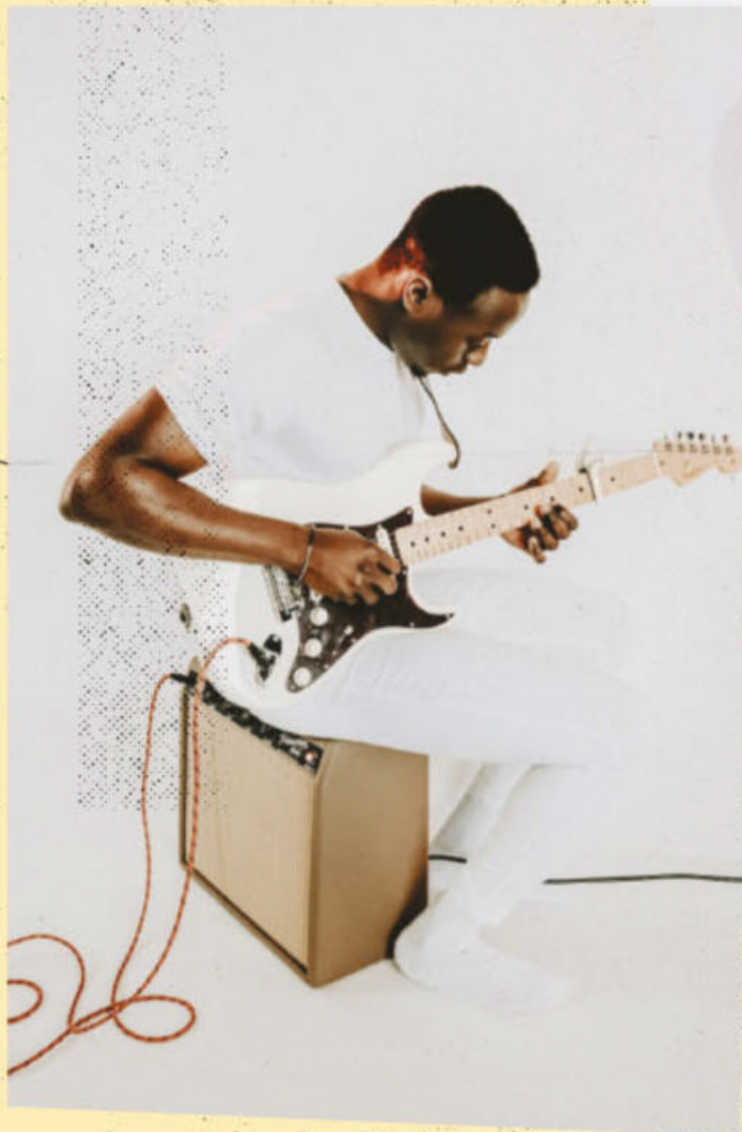
"I STILL WANT TO MAKE A SONG THAT SOUNDS LIKE ERIC CLAPTON, YOU KNOW? I STILL WANT TO WEAR A BIG BLACK TRENCH COAT. I'M NOT GONNA, BUT I STILL WANNA. I WON'T LET MYSELF. BUT MAN, WOULDN'T THAT BE FUN?"

alone in a room, hoping that maybe this time we're going to find something or trip over something that we'll never forget.

Like Clapton, you're turning your test around and showing people your notes.

I don't need that aspect of untouchability. I've never needed that. So I'm okay with going, "Hey, my floor is a mess too. It's cables and pedals, and picks are everywhere, and guitars are leaning up against the couch, just like you. And here's what I personally have been doing on the couch as I'm getting ready to play this thing." You know, I have a guitar just like you have a guitar. And I have dreams just like you have dreams. And if you're interested in what made my dreams my dreams, well, here's how I did it. I don't see it as giving anything away that is proprietary.

And so the idea of me playing electric guitar and showing people a little bit of what it breaks down to is my way of kind of saying, "I'm not that different." I still want to make a song that sounds like Eric Clapton, you know? I still want to wear a big black trench coat. I'm not gonna, but I still wanna. I won't let myself. But man, wouldn't that be fun? **GW**



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Rise Against [*from left*]:
Joe Principe, Brandon
Barnes, Zach Blair
and Tim McIlrath



NOWHERE VIEW

RISE AGAINST's TIM McILRATH and ZACH BLAIR dig through the roots of their unique six-string interplay — and their brawny new album, *Nowhere Generation*, a message of solidarity to the band's young fans

IN MARCH 2020, TIM McILRATH WAS heading straight for what he calls a “post-album emotional collapse” — and then the pandemic hit. The Rise Against singer and guitarist had just wrapped work on his long-running Chicago political punk crew's ninth record, *Nowhere Generation*, and he was ready to retreat into a “dark room with blackout curtains and not see anyone for a while.” So when Illinois issued its stay-at-home orders, McIlrath's plans weren't quite as upended as many other folks across the country.

“I turned the TV on and they're like, ‘You can't go outside and do anything,’” he recalls. “I was like, ‘That's cool — that's what I was planning on doing anyway.’ [Laughs] So the world falling apart dovetailed nicely with my calendar!”

It's April 2021 when *Guitar World* connects with McIlrath, and his spirits are high. *Nowhere Generation's* release is right around the corner (this past June via new label Loma Vista), and the COVID-19 vaccine rollout has the country entering what seems to be a much different, hopeful phase of the pandemic. Despite McIlrath's gallows humor, the guitarist is keenly aware of the toll the coronavirus crisis has taken on people's health, emotional well-being, income and more. After all, social consciousness has been intertwined with his creative output ever since Rise Against dropped their first album, *The Unraveling*, in 2001.

For the past two decades McIlrath and his band have been perfecting their formula — packaging call-to-action messages in rousing melodic punk — and it's paid off. Not only are they one of the scene's biggest acts and most dependable tour draws, but their records have also achieved Gold- and Platinum-selling status and consistently rank on *Billboard's* Top 10 chart.

Nowhere Generation continues McIlrath's mission to use his platform to address social issues close to his heart, which include economic inequality, racial justice, LGBTQ rights, veganism, environmental preservation, animal activism and more. But this time he's adopted a slightly different perspective when approaching his lyrics. Now in his 40s, the "nowhere generation" McIlrath is referring to are the millennial and Gen Z kids coming up in the world today: from the young fans at Rise Against's shows to his own two teenage daughters.

"I was getting feedback from young people that listen to our band about their anxieties and fears about what tomorrow's going to look like," he says. "This generation has to deal with unique things: the rise of the 1 percent, increasingly concentrated wealth, decay of the middle class, leaders shrugging off climate change ... The whole album is like listening to these anxieties with a sympathetic ear."

Over *Nowhere Generation*'s 11 songs, Rise Against — which also includes lead guitarist Zach Blair, bassist Joe Principe and drummer Brandon Barnes — create a powerful musical statement that runs the gamut from scathing protest anthems ("Nowhere Generation," "The Numbers") and furious burners ("Broken Dreams, Inc.") to catchy-as-hell fist-pumpers ("Talking to Ourselves") and poignant acoustic ballads ("Forfeit").

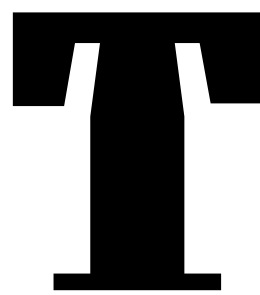
McIlrath and Blair — who have been a six-string team since the latter joined Rise Against for their fifth album, 2008's *Appeal to Reason* — lead the charge with a deft mix of whiplash punk-rock rhythm work, tastefully placed arpeggios, soaring octave riffs, "sparkly" atmospheric solos and more.

When asked to describe Rise Against's dual-guitar attack, McIlrath cites the chemistry of Nineties alt icons Fugazi as his aspirational reference point — while Blair hits us with what might be the most unexpected touchstone for a punk band ever: the Grateful Dead.



"Our [approach] to playing guitar is like something I read about the Grateful Dead," he says. "Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir interweave around each other — Tim and I do that too. Because if you have two guitar players, why play the same thing at all times?"

McIlrath and Blair's innate creative connection and fluid musical interplay is apparent throughout *Nowhere Generation*. But it's taken years of collaboration to get to this point. To better understand how a liberal activist punk songwriter from the Midwest and a heavy-metal-loving Texan arrived at such an organic, exciting sonic partnership, you need to step back and examine where each player's guitar journey began.



ODAY TIM MCILRATH IS

a highly visible and influential musician, and Rise Against have become a well-established pillar in the modern punk movement. But when he first

picked up a guitar, around the seventh grade, his dreams were much less grand. In fact, he suspected he was already too late in the game to "make it."

Despite his doubts, McIlrath carried on and quickly discovered that the instrument was the key to unlocking an unknown creative wellspring within him. "Music was my very primal way of communicating something deep down that I didn't know how to communicate," he says. "I didn't have the language ... That's what picking up a guitar was. Writing songs was something I didn't even know I had in me ... But when I started playing guitar, those things just came pouring out."

He soon found a crew of like-minded buddies and they started jamming in his parents' basement. The camaraderie he experienced in the punk and hardcore subculture "fed the flames" of his musical ambitions and he became "purpose driven" to get his message out. By then McIlrath had graduated from the nylon-string starter guitar his parents gifted him to a 1984 Gibson SG ("I still have it to this day, it's still my favorite guitar!") and a Marshall JCM 900 half-stack. The young guitarist took a DIY approach to learning the instrument, which included a period between 1991 and 1993 when he subscribed to this magazine.

"*Guitar World* was starting to let go of hair metal and having to respond to the juggernaut of grunge and alternative music," McIlrath recalls with a laugh. "I was so hungry for knowledge ... It didn't matter to me what genre it was. I just wanted to read the tablature and figure it out ... So [that's why] I know how to play '18 and Life' by Skid Row, 'This Love' by Pantera, Tool's 'Sober' and most of Nirvana's songs."

McIlrath played in punk bands around

Chicago throughout his teenage and early adult years (including Arma Angelus with future Fall Out Boy bassist Pete Wentz) before linking up with former 88 Fingers Louie bassist Joe Principe and guitarist Dan "Mr. Precision" Wleklinski in Transistor Revolt. The crew put out one self-titled EP in 2000 before signing to NOFX founder Fat Mike's Fat Wreck Chords. Fat Mike had one stipulation: the band needed to change their name. After a few suggestions... Rise Against was born.

During Rise Against's early years, Zach Blair was down in Texas cutting his teeth in punk and alternative bands. He was raised north of Dallas in a town called Sherman. His dad was a local radio DJ and music obsessive who introduced his young son to the state's homegrown blues legends. "Freddie King, Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown, Johnny Winter, Billy Gibbons and, of course, the Vaughan brothers," Blair recites. His father also routinely schooled him on the classic-rock greats. It was during one such lesson when he was "5 or 6" that Blair had his musical aha moment and was inspired to pick up an ax. His dad had tuned in to a PBS rerun of the classic 1970 concert film *Woodstock* — just in time for the Who's blistering set.

"Pete Townshend was wearing the white jumpsuit. He had the SG Special... I was just gobsmacked," recalls Blair. "He looked like a superhero! He's jumping, then he breaks the guitar. I knew that's what I wanted to do."

By the age of nine he was banging around on an old acoustic with "action so high you could put a finger between the strings and the frets." But it wasn't until he scored a Silvertone-style electric, and later his very own Gibson SG, that things started to fall into place. At the time Blair had taken a detour from classic rock and blues (styles he would revisit in later years) and was barreling full throttle into heavy metal and hardcore territory — from Minor Threat, Dag Nasty and Bad Religion to Metallica, Possessed, Death and more.

Blair's brother, Doni, was also a budding musician (he would go on to play bass in Toadies), and in the early Nineties the pair formed the alt-punk outfit Hagfish. When the band inked a deal, Blair promptly dropped out of high school and hit the road. "We were young, and all the major labels wanted a Green Day or an Offspring," he says. "And we were trying to rip off the Descendants." [Laughs]

In 1999, after a whirlwind run and several albums, Hagfish called it quits. Blair returned to Texas and started looking for his next project. Through a series of unexpected events, he found himself auditioning for Virginia shock-metal punks GWAR. To his surprise, he landed the gig — and for the next few years Blair assumed the role of lead guitarist Flattus Maximus.

"The guy I replaced, Pete Lee, was a fuck-

A full-page photograph of Tim McIlrath performing on stage. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and jeans, holding a black electric guitar. He is looking up and to the side, with his head tilted back. The stage is lit with bright spotlights from above, creating a dramatic effect. In the background, there are some blue smoke or fog effects.

“I’m always trying to get back to that — when guitar playing and songwriting is so pure and innocent... That’s when good things happen”

Tim McIlrath performs with Rise Against in Inglewood, California, January 19, 2019

ing wiz,” Blair says. “He can double-pick so fast, it’s like a hummingbird wings... The music was difficult and out of my wheelhouse. And then I’m doing it with a 60-pound costume... and a prosthetic mask. [Laughs] I can honestly say that was the best bootcamp training... I was ready for anything after that.”

Blair’s next big “anything” moment arrived in 2007, when he joined Rise Against. That kicked off the fruitful guitar partnership between McIlrath and Blair that has resulted in a string of hit albums: *Appeal to Reason* (2008), *Endgame* (2011), *The Black Market* (2014) and *Wolves* (2017). If *Nowhere Generation*’s title track is any indication — the lead single cracked the Top 10 on *Billboard*’s Hot Hard Rock Songs chart — the album is primed to be their next triumph. The record may be arriving in a very different-looking world than previous Rise Against

efforts, and McIlrath may be writing from a new lyrical perspective. But one thing hasn’t changed: the dynamic, and respect, between the two guitarists.

“I love the way Tim plays guitar,” Blair says. “He has such a signature sound and style that our producer Bill Stevenson calls ‘Tim’s blues.’ If you show Tim a thing, he’s going to nail the way you’re showing him. But because he’s such a great songwriter, he’s immediately going to start thinking of something really cool that accentuates and complements your original idea. He can’t stop writing. He can’t stop creating. Music falls out of the guy.”

“Zach is a born lead guitar player,” McIlrath adds of his partner. “Not that he can’t do rhythm because certainly he’s great at rhythm. He’s like a *really* proficient guitar player.”

When it comes to Rise Against lead

breaks, Blair is all about serving up something “tasteful.” He’s a fan of the shredding styles of Michael Schenker (“He’s the greatest!”) and Eddie Van Halen (“I use the Phase 90 because of Eddie”). But Rise Against requires a more restrained approach, and for that he finds inspiration in the solos of Brian Baker of Bad Religion/Dag Nasty/Minor Threat fame. “Brian is an astounding guitar player,” he says. “He can shred, but he was always so tasteful in his lead choices and he always played for the song.”

He also credits Baker and his double-picked, galloping rhythm work with “bringing a lot of metal styling to punk-rock guitar” — a technique Blair puts to good use in Rise Against. As examples, he points to two of his favorite *Nowhere Generation* tracks: “Monarch” and “Sudden Urge.”

“‘Monarch’ is almost metal in its approach,” he says. “You’re palm muting a

Rise Against's Zach Blair in action in Inglewood, California, January 19, 2019



“Pete Townshend was wearing the white jumpsuit. He had the SG Special... I was just gobsmacked. He looked like a superhero!”

lot and [playing] very fast. ‘Sudden Urge’ is one of my favorite tracks because it’s just a heavy drop-D riff that I’m happy that our band can pull off under the umbrella of still being called a punk-rock band.”

McIlrath also picks the clobbering detuned section in “Sudden Urge” as a standout guitar moment on the new album. “I love the drop-D riffs,” he exclaims. “That goes back to growing up on Quicksand and Helmet and guitarists with that drop string [who are] having some fun with it.” McIlrath loves a good breakdown, but he also admits he’s not one to dwell on technique. In fact, he says one of his greatest “strengths as a guitar player is knowing when *not* to play anything at all, knowing when it’s too much.” McIlrath is all about serving the song, which brings our discussion back to two of his core influences: Fugazi’s Ian MacKaye and Guy Picciotto.

“They were the biggest guitar players in my world,” he says. “I love their style. When I try and play guitar, if I’m emulating anybody it’s that vibe. I love the way Fugazi makes me feel. When I’m writing a Rise Against song, I always want to create that kind of feel.”

Rise Against are a study in balance. McIlrath and Blair share some fundamental punk and hardcore inspirations, but each brings a distinct musical perspective to the collaboration. Their similarities and differences are also reflected in their pandemic activities — McIl-

rath took college classes in political science and philosophy; Blair completed Berklee College of Music’s advanced blues program — and their approach to gear.

Blair’s arsenal contains upwards of 50 vintage and modern guitars: Gibson Les Pauls (often outfitted with EverTune bridges, Seymour Duncan JB pickups and Ernie Ball Strings), Fenders (Jim Root Tele, Tim Armstrong 12-string), Nash (Strat and Jazzmaster styles), Dan Armstrong (1969 Lucite) and Martin acoustics, to name just a few. But his prized electric is his 1976 SG, which he says, “was one of two guitars I had to my name when I joined Rise Against and I used it at my very first show with them.” Blair also owns a host of Marshalls (JCM 900, 800, Jubilee, JMP 50), Peaveys (5150, 6505), Fenders (Hot Rod Deville) and a whole lot more.

McIlrath says he’s never been a collector, and his criteria when it comes to guitars is exceedingly practical: “Is it playable and can I write a song on it?” He’s also a Gibson/Marshall/Martin guy like Blair and says he typically gets a couple of new guitars for each album: one to record and one for the road. But the *Nowhere Generation* album cycle has looked a little different. This is partly because the pandemic has delayed touring [*They’re on the road right now, by the way*]. But mostly, it’s due to his rekindled love affair with his “first real guitar”: the 1984

Gibson SG he played all those years ago in his parents’ basement. “I just pulled it out of storage since the pandemic,” he says. After a tune-up at his local store, Chicago Music Exchange — and a surprise gift from Blair — the SG is now sounding, and playing, better than ever.

“For my birthday Zach got me these custom Seymour Duncan pickups,” says McIlrath. “He made them listen to a bunch of our songs and my guitar playing and had them custom make these pickups based on our tones. I was like, holy shit, this is a really cool gift.”

The updated SG paired with his Marshall JCM 900 — the same style of amp he started out with — has McIlrath super pumped to take *Nowhere Generation*’s songs on the road once the pandemic restrictions lift. “I am playing the rig that I did when I was 13!” He laughs. “I’m always trying to get back to that — when guitar playing and songwriting is so pure and innocent... That’s when good things happen.

“Otherwise, you’re overthinking things,” McIlrath continues, “Like, should I write a song that’s going to be big on the radio? Should I write a song that’s going to be a throwback to our roots? Should I write a song that’s pretending I’m someone that I’m not? Should I write a dance hit? [*Laughs*] Those are *none* of the things you thought about when you first picked up a guitar and started to play. And that’s what you have to get back to.” **GW**

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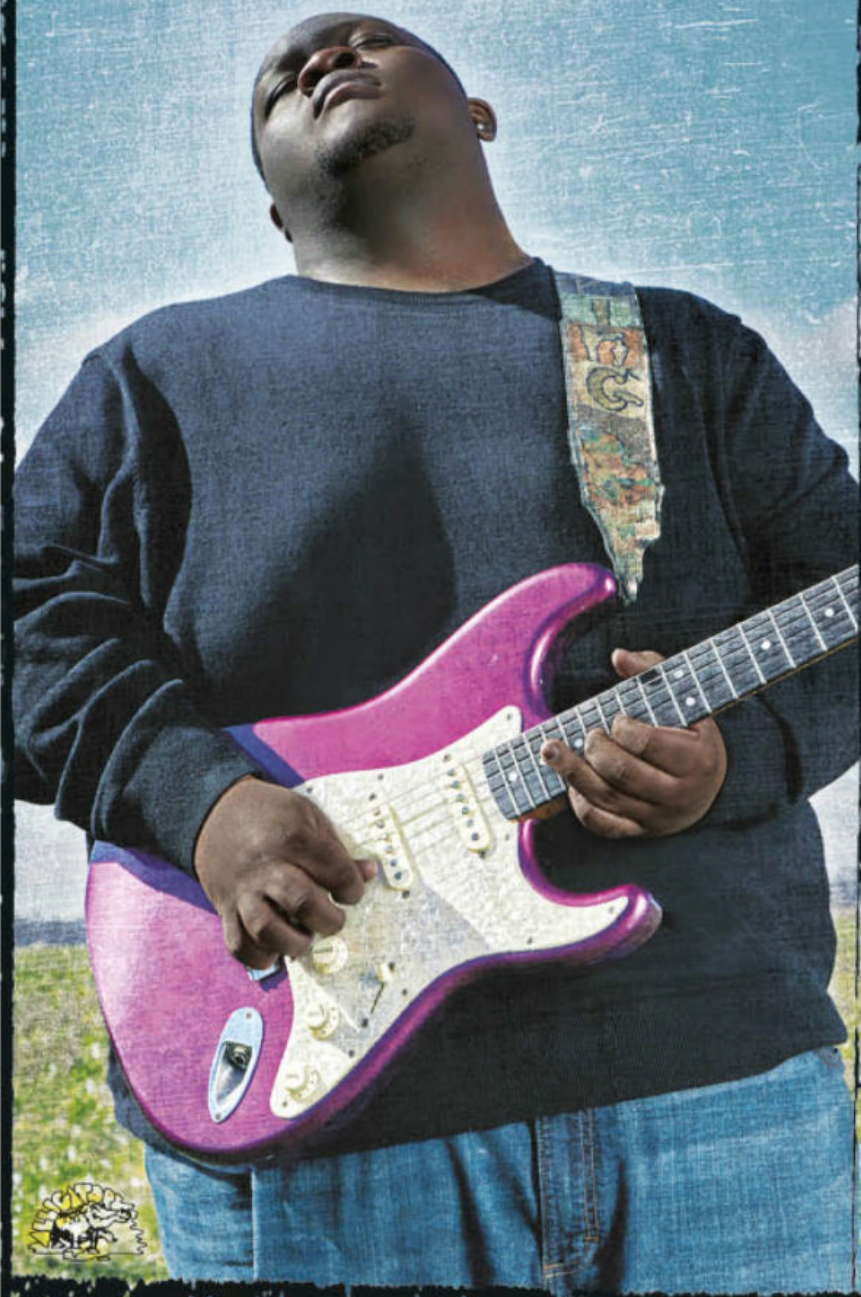
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**"THERE ARE
BIG PLANS
FOR KRAMER,
AND WE'RE
JUST GETTING
STARTED"**



With their recently introduced collections, the top dogs at the new (and improved?) Kramer Guitars are looking back to their hairspray heyday while simultaneously concocting ultra-modern axes for today's shred royalty



The Kramer
Baretta
Special in
Purple

**ORIGINAL
COLLECTION**

*“The Originals are the guitars
that ignited hair-sprayed hard
rock and metal heads all over
the world in the Eighties. It’s a
bit of a passion project for me
because I love all of that”*

— Gibson CMO
Cesar Gueikian

KRAMER

EVER SINCE GIBSON WENT UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT IN 2018, THE COMPANY HAS BEEN ON A MAJOR HOT STREAK.

But while the Gibson and Epiphone lines have garnered much of the attention from players (as well as most of the splashy headlines from the press), it's worth noting that these aren't the only guitar brands in the company's stable. In 2020, Gibson officially announced the relaunch of Kramer Guitars, and true to that brand's bold, flashy and, in every sense of the word, loud history, Gibson is bringing it back in a big way.

[from left]
Kramer
Baretta
Vintage
(Ruby Red),
Pacer Vintage
(Orange
Tiger), Focus
VT-211S
(Teal),
Baretta
Special
(Purple),
Jersey Star
(Candy
Apple Red),
NightSwan
Black with
Blue Polka
Dot, The 84
(Radiant
Red) and
SM-1 (Orange
Crush)

for me because I love all of that. So it's about going back and recreating those models, but with upgraded appointments. We're not necessarily saying, 'Okay, what was the exact volume pot that was used in 1984?' but more like, 'How was that guitar built? What was it meant to do and how can we recreate that vibe?'

The Modern Collection, meanwhile, "is us saying, 'Okay, we have the classics down. How can we put more gas to that fire and bring ultra-modern and innovative appointments and designs to the hands of players today?'"

Adds Epiphone and Kramer Brand Director Krista Gilley, "We're making Kramer flexible to a player in 2021, but without straying too far from its own rich history."

And what a rich — and unique — history it is. The Kramer story begins in the late Seventies, when Gary Kramer, an associate of Travis Bean, teamed up with Dennis Berardi and began building, much as he had with Bean, aluminum-necked guitars with a "pitchfork" headstock. Unlike Bean, Kramer added wooden inserts, set in epoxy, to his necks to give them a warmer, more traditional feel. That said, these instruments were still far from conventional, boasting Ebanol fretboards and tone-

Late last year, the company unveiled the new Original and Modern Collections, which, respectively, reintroduce classic-but-updated models from Kramer's Eighties heyday, and also add in new creations designed with the 21st-century player in mind. Which means that, once again, you can pick up streamlined, shred-ready guitars like the Baretta Special (equipped with a single humbucker and "banana" headstock) and a Pacer finished in iconic throwback Orange Tiger, but also the thoroughly modern Assault Plus (a progressive take on the Les Paul) and the radically contoured Nite-V.

What's more, the company has extended that mix of classic and current to its line of new signature models [see sidebar], collaborating with Skid Row guitarist Dave "Snake" Sabo to bring his famous custom Snake Sabo Baretta to market for the first time ever; L.A. Guns/Sunbomb maestro Tracii Guns on the Gunstar Voyager, an updated take on the company's early Eighties star-shaped Voyager; and Peruvian shredder Charlie Parra on a razor-sharp offset-V Vanguard design.

The result is a range sure to thrill devoted Kramer diehards who grew up loving not only the unique look and sound of these instruments, but also the players — among them Eddie Van Halen, Bon Jovi's Richie Sambora, the Cars' Elliot Easton and Mötley Crüe's Mick Mars — who used them.

And for those who have never experienced a Kramer before? Get ready.

"There are big plans for Kramer, and we're just getting started," Gibson CMO Cesar Gueikian says. Expanding on the focus of the Original and Modern Collections, he explains, "the Originals are the guitars that ignited hair-sprayed hard rock and metal heads all over the world in the Eighties. And it's a bit of a passion project

ORIGINAL COLLECTION

"It's about going back and recreating those models, but with upgraded appointments. We're not necessarily saying, 'Okay, what was the exact volume pot that was used in 1984?' but more like, 'How was that guitar built? What was it meant to do and how can we recreate that vibe?'"

— Cesar Gueikian



ARTIST | Dave
“Snake” Sabo
AXE | Kramer Snake
Sabo Baretta

Material | Alder
Neck | 3 piece
maple, natural satin
finish
Fingerboard |
Indian laurel
Frets | 22
Controls | Master
Volume, Master
Tone, CTS
Potentiometers
Bridge | Floyd
Rose 1000 series
Tremolo with EVH
D-Tuna Drop-D
Tuning System
Pickup | 85-T
Double Black Open
Coil Humbucker
Finish | Snake
Green

DAVE “SNAKE” SABO: SNAKIN’ ALL OVER

DAVE “SNAKE” SABO’S history with Kramer stretches back decades, to when the company was based in Neptune, New Jersey, in the 1980s, and Sabo’s band, Skid Row, was still a few years away from achieving multi-platinum success with their self-titled debut and hard-rock anthems like “Youth Gone Wild” and “18 and Life.”

At the time, Sabo was holding down a day job at Garden State Music, a guitar shop roughly a half hour south of Neptune in Toms River, New Jersey, and playing with an early version of the Skids. “We started working with Kramer and they were so receptive of us,” Sabo recalls. “Skid Row didn’t have a record deal or anything. We were just a band from the neighborhood.”

Sabo’s first Kramer was actually a parts guitar that the company fitted with a Kramer neck. It featured, per Sabo’s preferences, a Floyd Rose trem and a single humbucker, as well as original artwork by Kramer artist Dennis Kline. “I said to Dennis, ‘How about something like a snake coming out of a grave, with my birth date on there?’” Sabo recalls. “And what he came up with was so amazing. Kramer really fine-tuned that guitar and did their handiwork, and I played all the early Skid Row gigs with it.”

As Skid Row shot to stardom, that Kramer was used to record the band’s smash 1989 debut and the follow-up, 1991’s chart-topping *Slave to the Grind*, as well as to rock arena and stadium stages alongside the likes of Aerosmith and Bon Jovi.

Fast forward to a few years ago, and Sabo and Skid Row co-guitarist Scotti Hill, who are also big Gibson players — “it’s part of our DNA,” Sabo says — paid a visit to the Gibson factory to meet CMO Cesar Gueikian. They immediately

“YOU HIT
THE GAS ON
THAT THING
AND IT’S
FULL-ON”



Dave “Snake”
Sabo with his
Snake Sabo
Baretta

hit it off. Recalls Sabo, “After a couple of conversations, Cesar said to me, ‘We’re relaunching Kramer and we want to do the Snake guitar.’ I was like, ‘Are you serious?’ It was so humbling.”

The guitar they came up with, the Snake Sabo Baretta, pays tribute to Sabo’s original model with a single humbucker, a Floyd Rose (in this case a 1000 Series tremolo fitted with an EVH D-Tuna), a reverse headstock and the original Dennis Kline Snake artwork. “The green finish, it just stands out so well — it’s almost fluorescent,” Sabo says. Other features include an alder body, a fast-playing three-piece maple neck and a 22-fret Indian laurel fingerboard.

As far as the new guitar’s tone, Sabo points to the addition of a Kramer 85-T Double Black Open Coil Humbucker as a particular sonic upgrade; his original model was loaded, at various times, with a Seymour Duncan and an EMG. But after hearing the Kramer 85-T, designed by Gibson Master Luthier Jim DeCola, Sabo fell in love. “You hit the gas on that thing and it’s full-on,” he says, noting that his signature model is also the first production Kramer to feature DeCola’s creation.

The result is “a guitar that, you plug it in, and it’s ridiculously fierce,” Sabo says. “The original guitar played great, and this plays just as great. But I’ve gotta be honest — I think this Kramer sounds even better.”



woods like curly maple, walnut and koa.

Early on, Kramer and Berardi joined up with Peter LaPlaca — a vice president at Norlin, then Gibson's parent company — and investor Henry Vaccaro to open a plant in Neptune, New Jersey; soon after, Kramer moved to Los Angeles, essentially ending his day-to-day connection with the company that bore his name, years before the brand caught fire with the guitar-playing public.

The first step toward that fiery future came in 1981, when Kramer transitioned to making wooden-necked instruments — a move that served to lower production costs (some offshore production in East Asia and parts from Japan helped as well) while making the brand more appealing to traditionally minded players. The company also hooked up with a German inventor named Helmut Rockinger and began installing his Rockinger tremolo systems, a precursor to the Floyd Rose, on its instruments. This tremolo system eventually caught the eye of Eddie Van Halen, who signed on as a Kramer endorsee and famously vowed that he would help make Kramer the “number one guitar company in the world.”

Within a few years, Kramer was. By 1983, the Rockinger system (or as it came to be known, the “EVH trem”) was out, and Kramer was offering its guitars stock with Floyd Rose tremolos. They also introduced what would become their flagship model, the single-hum Baretta, based on Van Halen's Frankenstrat (despite Eddie's close association with the company, Kramer never actually produced an EVH signature model). That sleek, streamlined guitar, built for speed and massive amounts of gain, helped to kick off the superstrat era. By 1985, Kramer swapped out Schaller pickups for hotter and more modern Seymour Duncans, and soon after added in eye-catching appointments like custom graphics options and pointy headstocks (following forays with “strathead,” “beak” and “banana” headstock designs).

At this point, Kramer's status as the shredder's instrument of choice was indisputable. And indeed, for several years in the mid Eighties Kramer was the overall best-selling guitar brand, with a list of players and endorsers that included Vivian Campbell, Sambora, Joe Satriani and others. Those glory days, Gueikian recalls, “were when I started playing guitar, and Kramer was what everybody was playing. It's the authentic brand of that Eighties shred revolution.”

Kramer's reign, however, eventually came to an end, and through mismanagement and financial problems the company effectively ceased to exist in 1991. Six years later, however, it was sold out of bank-



The Kramer Nite-V Plus in Alpine White

MODERN COLLECTION

“Okay, we have the classics down. How can we put more gas to that fire and bring ultra-modern and innovative appointments and designs to the hands of players today?”

— Cesar Gueikian

Tracii Guns
with his Tracii
Guns Gunstar
Voyager

“THE BULK
OF MY FANS ARE
FANS OF EIGHTIES
METAL GUITAR.
THEY WANT TEETH
AND THEY WANT
SHREDDING”
»

TRACII GUNS: ELECTRIC GYPSY

“WHEN IT CAME to doing a signature guitar, there was no point in doing something ordinary, you know what I mean?” Tracii Guns says. To be sure, even a cursory glimpse at the L.A. Guns guitarist’s new Kramer Gunstar Voyager confirms that, yes, we know exactly what he means.

From the star-shaped Voyager body, to the custom flame finish, to the classic-era pointy headstock with Kramer “pyramid” logo (“I wanted that really gnarly headstock where you can poke a vulture’s eye out with it”), there’s certainly nothing ordinary about the Gunstar Voyager. It’s a supremely modern metal machine that also exudes a cool throwback vibe. “It

has this Eddie Van Halen, Randy Rhoads, Dimebag-y appeal about it,” Guns says.

And that’s just what he was intending in designing the instrument. Because while Guns is an incredibly versatile player, he also acknowledges that “the bulk of my fans are fans of Eighties metal guitar. They want teeth and they want shredding. They want big, ringing open G chords and they want whammy bar dives. And this guitar can deliver all of that.”

Indeed it can. Boasting a mahogany body, three-piece, slim C-shaped maple neck, 22-fret maple fingerboard and deep cutaway for easy high-register access, the Gunstar Voyager provides speed, comfort and clear, full-bodied resonance before you even plug it in. Paired with a high-gain head or combo, the guitar comes alive via a pair

of Epiphone ProBuckers, which deliver plenty of aggressive cut via the bridge ‘bucker and a healthy dose of rounded, bluesy tones at the neck position. What’s more, the guitar is fitted with a Floyd Rose 1000 Series Tremolo to fulfill any player’s deepest dive-bombing desires. “We went with the two-way, so you can pull back on it, which I hadn’t done in years,” Guns says. “When I started using it live, I immediately went, ‘Ah, this is great!’ ”

But like Guns himself, there’s much more to the Gunstar Voyager than just being a primo shred machine. “The idea was to have kind of a cross between, like, a Les Paul Custom or an Explorer with a hot rod guitar,” he says. Which means that in addition to the shred-ready features and graphics, the Gunstar Voyager also boasts a set neck, a rhythm pickup (“I didn’t want to just do a single-hum guitar — it wouldn’t be practical for me”) and a wealth of tonal options.

For starters, there are those ProBuckers, which Guns says are low-output enough to allow the amplifier to do the talking. “The guitar sounds pretty much uncolored,” he says. “And when I hit the distortion, you can hear all the high strings when you play a big chord, and you get a lot of bite and clarity.” What’s more, each pickup has its own volume control fitted with a coil-splitting push-pull option for even more tonal flexibility. “So it’s a serious instrument. Plus, it’s so fun to play... and it looks cool in pictures!”

Guns has already been putting the Gunstar Voyager to good use onstage — “it’s really designed for [L.A. Guns] songs like ‘Electric Gypsy’ and ‘Speed,’ where the brightness of the guitar just makes it more ‘metal,’” he says.

At the same time, Guns continues, “it’s the nicest hot rod instrument I’ve ever had. It’s just everything I want and need in that type of guitar, and it sits proudly next to my really well-made Les Pauls. So we achieved the goal, you know? We definitely achieved the goal.”

ARTIST |
Tracii Guns
AXE | Kramer Tracii
Guns Gunstar Voyager

Body | Mahogany
Neck | 3 piece maple
Fingerboard | Maple
Frets | 22
Controls | Neck
Volume with coil split,
Bridge Volume with
coil split
Bridge | Floyd Rose
1000 series Tremolo
Pickups | Epiphone
ProBucker 2 (neck),
Epiphone ProBucker
3 (bridge)
Finish | Black Metallic

ruptcy to Gibson. And while Kramer's new owner didn't do much with the brand over the subsequent two decades, with the resuscitation of Gibson in 2018 and the arrival of Gueikian and new CEO and President James "JC" Curleigh, Kramer, like all Gibson brands, has been experiencing a renaissance.

"Our objective is to reestablish Kramer as the leading guitar for this type of playing," Gueikian says. "Our brand statement is 'Made to Rock Hard,' and that's not something we just came up with. I was looking at old marketing materials from back in the day and it was right there. So that's what Kramer was, and that's what Kramer still is. We don't need to reinvent what the brand is all about."

As Gueikian and Gilley are quick to point out, another thing that Kramer "is all about" is an adventurous approach to guitar design. These are guitars that were originally built to appeal to players on the more extreme end of the six-string spectrum, and with that history comes a certain freedom.

"Whereas Gibson has more of a cherished classic legacy, Kramer has its own unique personality that's a little more wild," Gilley says. "And we can take that into the finishes, into the body shapes, into the components. I know that's something that's such a joy for our product-development team — they can ask things like, 'What are some of the custom graphic wraps that are iconic from the Eighties that we can make into cherished models today?' We can bring that into the modern era and have fun with it."

Adds Gueikian, "Suddenly you're saying, 'what we can do with this brand is unbelievable.' And that is the mission — to make it unbelievable. So the plan is to have a nice balance between Original and Modern collection guitars, and eventually between both USA-made collections and overseas-made collections, so that we can touch every price point for every type of player, from the ones who loved Kramer back in the Eighties to the kids today that want to learn more about the history and the legacy of these instruments.

"And if those kids decide to try out a Kramer, and they take it home and plug it in and their parents end up telling them to turn it down? Then we know we've had success." **GW**

ARTIST |
Charlie Parra
AXE | Kramer
Charlie Parra
Vanguard

Body | Mahogany
Neck | 3 piece
maple
Nut width | 1.693"
Frets | 22
Controls | Master
Volume
Bridge | LockTone
Tune-O-Matic with
LockTone Stop Bar
Pickups | EMG 66
(neck), EMG 57
(bridge)
Finish | Candy Apple
Red

**"THE
GREAT THING
ABOUT DOING
INSTRUMENTAL
MUSIC IS THAT
IT'S UNDERSTOOD
EVERYWHERE"**
»

CHARLIE PARRA: CANDY APPLE SHRED

PERUVIAN METAL SENSATION Charlie Parra may be a rising guitar hero on these shores, but in his homeland he's already a *bona fide* star — so much so that in 2016 he became the first South American guitarist to earn a Kramer signature model, with the release of the Candy Apple Red-finished Charlie Parra Nite-V Plus.

Now, the 35-year-old shred master and YouTube star — he leads the punk/metal act Difonia as well as his own solo band, has supported artists like Slash and the Cult on tour and runs a YouTube channel with more than 160 million views — has collaborated with the brand on a second signature design, the new Charlie Parra Vanguard.

Like Parra's previous guitar, the Vanguard is a V-shaped model, and it also comes in the same striking Candy Apple Red finish. "We wanted to bring back the Vanguard shape, which is like a 'spaceship' Flying V," Parra says of the model that Kramer first introduced with offset wings in the Eighties. As for why he favors the Candy Apple Red color? "I'm a big fan of [late Ratt guitarist] Robbin Crosby," he explains, "and I remember he was always using V-shaped guitars in bright red and other super-flamboyant colors."

Beyond that, the Charlie Parra Vanguard, which boasts a mahogany body, three-piece Slim C maple neck, 24-fret ebony fingerboard, a LockTone Tune-O-Matic bridge and Stop Bar tailpiece and a powerful and versatile EMG 66/57 humbucker set, is very much its own beast. "We wanted to make it a shred guitar," Parra says simply, "so it was important to me to have the 24 frets and a body design where it's easy to get all the way up the fretboard. Also, it's a great tapping guitar. I love tapping so much, and the main reason I use a V is because there's basically no wood between my

tapping hand and the fretboard."

At the same time, he continues, "I wanted to make sure this was a guitar that was comfy to play whether you're standing up onstage, sitting down in a recording studio or just practicing in a bedroom. And it is — it feels great."

The Vanguard looks great, too. In addition to the sleek offset wings and Candy Apple Red finish, the guitar sports eye-catching visuals like a 12th fret Day of the Dead Owl fingerboard inlay, a satin aluminum pickguard and chrome pickup covers, as well as a classic "pointy" Kramer headstock.

As for the sound? Well, you can hear the Charlie Parra Vanguard in action on the new Difonia album, as well as in recent YouTube videos like Parra's blazing Dimebag Darrell/Pantera tribute, in which he performs an instrumental medley comprised of a range of Pantera songs. "The great thing about doing instrumental music is that it's understood everywhere," Parra says. "It's not in Spanish, it's not in English... it's just straight guitar playing that everyone can enjoy the same."

Similarly, he sees the Charlie Parra Vanguard as a guitar that shredders of every stripe can dig into. "I think that the legacy that Kramer represents is something that shred lovers go for," he says. "And I believe the Vanguard — with the body style, the cutaway, the 24 frets, the pickups — has what these players will like."

Parra continues, "You know, when people talk about shredding, they say 'more is better,' right? So the Vanguard to me feels like the total package. And I feel humbled and honored to be part of the Kramer shredding family."

Charlie Parra
with his
Charlie Parra
Vanguard



SOUND CHECK

the gear
in review



77

ORIGIN EFFECTS

RD Compact Hot Rod

78

EVENTIDE

MicroPitch Delay

79

EVH

5150 Series
Standard



Silver Lining

**STERLING BY MUSIC MAN MARIPOSA
AND CUTLASS CT50HSS**

By Chris Gill

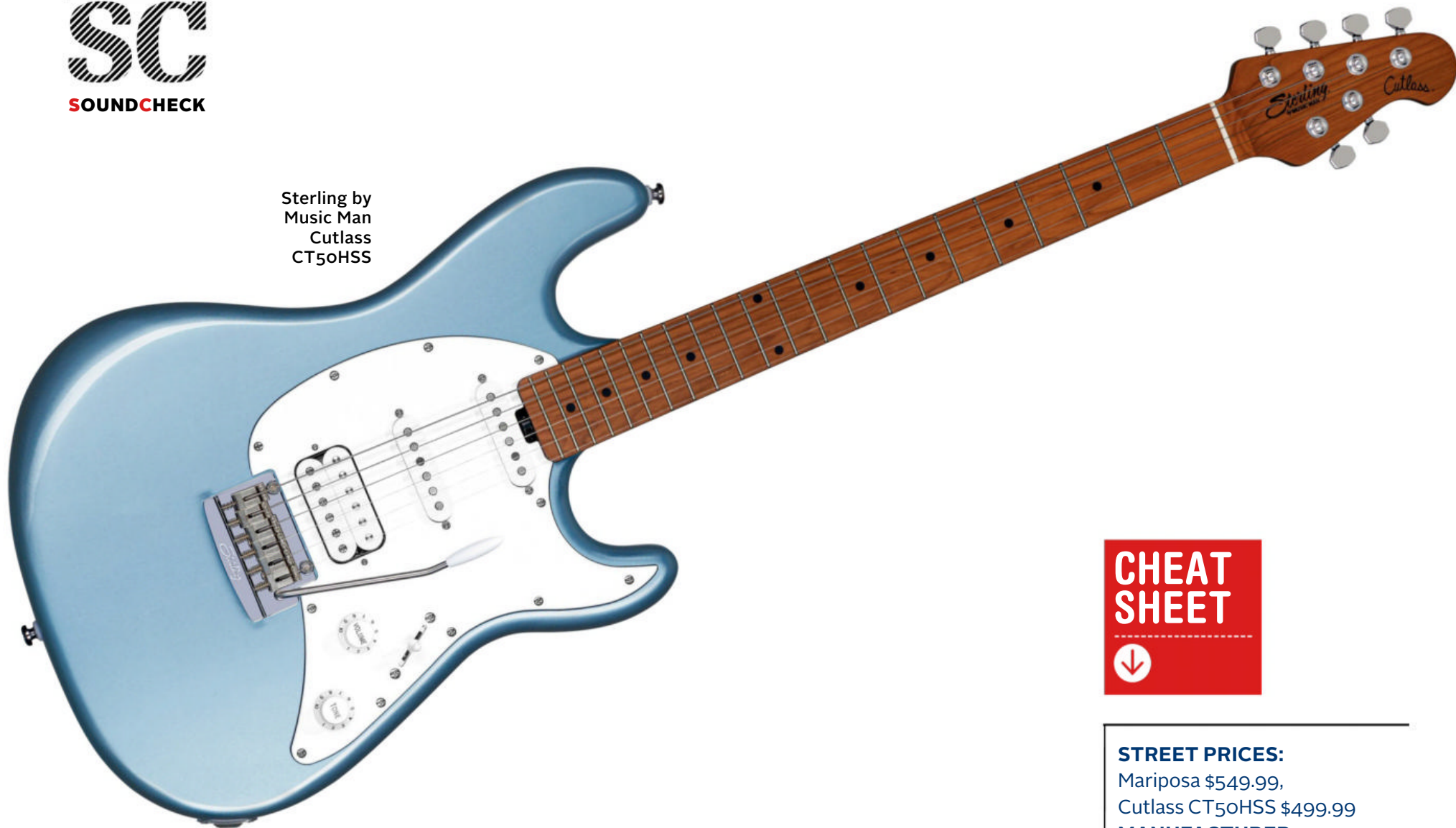
THE GOOD NEWS is that the quality of entry level guitars has improved dramatically in recent years. Many marquee USA brands now offer alternative lines produced overseas that benefit greatly from the know-how that went into producing a company's flagship models. Even though these import brand guitars often cost significantly less than their upmarket counterparts, many offer similar playability and performance that will please all but the most critically discerning players.

Two new models with street prices less than \$600 recently introduced by Sterling by Music Man — the Mariposa and Cutlass CT50HSS — show just how much the gap between entry level and flagship guitars have narrowed in recent years. Both instruments provide features like roasted maple necks, locking tuners and custom designed pickups usually found on much more expensive guitars. These Sterling guitars are close enough to their Music Man equivalents to fool most audiences and players, although your budget and bank account will certainly notice the huge difference in price.

Sterling by
Music Man
Mariposa



Sterling by
Music Man
Cutlass
CT50HSS



CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICES:

Mariposa \$549.99,
Cutlass CT50HSS \$499.99

MANUFACTURER:

Sterling by Music Man,
sterlingbymusicman.com

FEATURES The Sterling by Music Man Mariposa features the same compact, angular body style of the Music Man Mariposa model designed by Omar Rodriguez-Lopez (Mars Volta, At the Drive-In), and the Sterling Cutlass CT50HSS is the equivalent of the Music Man Cutlass RS HSS, featuring a humbucker/single/single pickup configuration and Strat-like asymmetrical double-cutaway shape.

Both models have essentially identical necks, but with a few differences. The necks are crafted from roasted maple and provide a 25.5-inch scale, 12-inch radius, 22 medium frets and 1.65-inch nut width. The necks are solidly attached to the body with five bolts at a smoothly sculpted heel, and the oversized 4x2 headstocks are equipped with locking tuners. The main differences are that the Mariposa's neck has a rosewood fingerboard with white pearloid block inlays and the headstock is painted to match the body, while the Cutlass CT50HSS has either a rosewood or roasted maple fingerboard both with dot markers and the headstock is not painted. Both models also include a vintage-style tremolo.

The Cutlass has a poplar body finished in a selection of four vibrant colors: Dropped Copper, Firemist Silver, Rose Gold or Vintage Cream. The neck and middle single-coil pickups and bridge humbucker are Sterling by Music Man's own designs, wired to master volume and master tone controls and a five-position blade pickup selector switch that provides bridge, bridge/middle, middle, neck/middle and neck settings.

The Mariposa's body is crafted from nyatoh and finished either in metallic Dorado Green or Imperial White. The pair of custom artist humbuckers have chrome-plated covers, and the electronic circuit features individual volume controls for

each pickup and a three-way toggle pickup switch. While the Music Man Mariposa has a fancy laser-etched pickguard, the Sterling Mariposa has a more traditional three-layer white/black/white pickguard.

PERFORMANCE Although the Sterling versions of the Mariposa and Cutlass may not look quite as fancy as their Music Man counterparts to the trained eye, most players would not be able to tell the difference in feel and playability in a blindfolded comparison. Both have a smooth, fast playability and solid feel, and the attention to detail throughout the entire construction is impressive. The finishes are dazzling, and the dark brown hue of the roasted maple necks gives the guitars a distinct upscale look. Both Sterling models have traditional nuts instead of the compensated nuts found on their Music Man counterparts, so the intonation, while excellent, isn't quite as meticulously dialed in.

While the Mariposa and Cutlass are made from different tonewoods than their Music Man equivalents, which are built from okoume and alder, respectively, they sound surprisingly similar as well. The Sterling Mariposa is slightly more aggressive and raw, which many players will find very desirable. The midrange is remarkably clear, providing outstanding clarity and definition whether played clean or with highly saturated distortion. The Cutlass CT50HSS provides an attractive balance between harmonically rich humbucker and spanky, percussive single-coil tones with a sparkly-but-full-bodied treble. Both instruments have a ton of distinctive character, standing far above the generic character of most competing solidbodies in their price range.

- Both models feature necks crafted from roasted maple that provides the lively tone and strength of a vintage, aged neck.
- The Mariposa has two custom artist humbucking pickups wired to individual volume controls to provide natural variations in treble response when set at different levels.
- The Cutlass CT50HSS has a bridge humbucker and neck and middle single-coil pickups that provide a wide range of tones from hard rock roar to funk and country spank.
- Locking tuners keep the vintage-style tremolo in perfect tune even after performing deep dives.
- THE BOTTOM LINE:** In addition to being impressively close to their much more expensive Music Man counterparts, the Sterling Mariposa and Cutlass CT50HSS are outstanding, versatile instruments that far outperform their surprising affordability.



Revival of the Fittest

ORIGIN EFFECTS RD COMPACT HOT ROD

By Paul Riario

THE UNSHAKABLE FEALTY many a guitarist has for their favorite dirt device is a hard thing to shatter. No doubt, when a new type of gain pedal emerges, it's an uphill battle to persuade these stompbox stalwarts to be open-minded and eschew any skepticism. And understandably, I get that most of the latest drives are — more or less — variations of the iconic “Screamer” ilk. However, every so often, a contemporary overdrive comes along that is unlike anything else and is so convincingly good in nailing the sound of a tube amp roaring at full-tilt that it becomes apparent we may have a new best-in-class. That accolade, as far as I'm concerned, goes to the Origin Effects RD Compact Hot Rod, a condensed and hot-rodded version of their award-winning large-format RevivalDrive and RevivalDrive Compact stompboxes. The RD Compact Hot Rod is not your garden-variety overdrive, nor is it a “Klone” or an ersatz amp-modeling pedal. This is a serious all-analog tone-shaping tool with more gain and sustain, and one that allows complete control over dialing in the same harmonic content, responsiveness and filthy richness a classic, heavily modded tube amp offers when pushed to its limit.

FEATURES UK-based Origin Effects hand-builds and tests each of their pedals to endure a lifetime of use, which is why the RD Compact Hot Rod feels substantial and is ruggedly overbuilt. Compared to the intricately crammed and daunting control set of Origin's two-channel RevivalDrive, the RD Compact Hot Rod is much less intimidating and smartly streamlined for plug-in and play. But don't mistake fewer controls for less versatility or sonic complexity; the pedal is every bit as nuanced as the RevivalDrive — just more intuitive. The six knobs react very much like the topology of a tube amp, with Output, Gain and Blend (mix between the dry input signal and overdriven signal) operating as intended. Highs increases both the high



and mid-frequency content while keeping everything tight, Lows regulates the bass, and the More/Pres combines two parameters that affect the negative feedback in the output stage (turning clockwise boosts highs like a Presence knob, and counterclockwise reduces the negative feedback resulting in an earlier breakup). Certain settings on these EQ knobs will replicate the behavioral characteristics and preamp voicings of some legendary, modified tube amps. The Post-Drive EQ controls offer additional tone shaping via a three-position switch with P/AMP (for plugging into a flat-response power amp, FX return, mixer or

recording interface), EQ1 (for brighter-sounding amps) EQ2 (for darker-sounding, mid-heavy amps), and the ADJ knob (for further fine-tuning the high-frequency response for EQ1 and EQ2). The pedal features all-analog circuitry, high-current/low-noise electronics, ultra-high input impedance, silent switching, a high-quality buffered bypass and is powered by a 9V DC adapter.

PERFORMANCE While I generally forgo the included sample settings manual, I must admit for this pedal, it's a great place to start. Setting the Post-Drive EQ mini-toggle to EQ1 (I don't have many dark-sounding amps) and turning the interactive EQ controls to try out both “Brown Sound” and “Liverpool Hot Rod” suggestions, you're instantaneously met with a ferociously-saturated and cutting tone that compliments your existing rig. The pedal makes an obvious nod to vintage amps like Fender, Marshall and Vox, but it's striking how realistic it sounds and feels like a hot-wired version of these classics. The EQ controls are great for adding overall body and percussive tightness to your tone, and I surprisingly found myself setting the More/Pres knob counterclockwise for more of that responsive “sag” that apes a variac. As mentioned before, moving the EQ knobs in certain settings and using the Gain and Blend knobs to affect the amount of drive will get you shades of a classic Fender snarl or gritty Vox chime, but if anything, the RD Hot Rod is very much a searingly hot Marshall Plexi on steroids. It may sound clichéd, but the RD Hot Rod reacts in a totally tube-like manner — it just has the most natural feel, wide-open dynamics and presence of any drive pedal I've come across in recent memory. Where other overdrives and distortions become overly compressed, mid-heavy and crumbly in their crunch, the RD Hot Rod stays smooth and precise in its gain structure, with a tight bottom end and just the right amount of stinging compression where notes sing and harmonic overtones blossom. It's not a cheap pedal, but it's a worthwhile investment if you care about having one of the best musical overdrives available.

CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICE:
\$390
MANUFACTURER:
Origin Effects,
origineffects.com

● The Post-Drive EQ switch and ADJ knob voices the pedal to match your amp, along with a P/AMP setting when using a power amp, recording interface, DI or mixer.

● The More/Pres control affects negative feedback in the output stage and can modify the breakup characteristics or respond similarly to a Presence knob.

● **THE BOTTOM LINE**
The Origin Effects RD Compact Hot Rod is an unparalleled hot-rodded overdrive stompbox with nuanced complexity and response for dialing in super-detailed tube-like amp tones that are downright mesmeric.



The Thick of It

EVENTIDE MICROPITCH DELAY

By Chris Gill

DURING THE LATE Seventies and early Eighties, a few recording engineers discovered that they could create thick, rich, realistic-sounding chorus effects with excellent clarity using the micro pitch shifting capabilities of Eventide Harmonizers. This method became a secret weapon of L.A.'s "Bradshaw Bunch" studio guitarists (Bob Bradshaw rack enthusiasts like Dan Huff, Mike Landau and Steve Lukather) as well as Eddie Van Halen, but due to the expense of multiple Eventide Harmonizer units it remained off limits to most players until Eventide introduced the PitchFactor and H9 pedals.

Like Eventide's recent Blackhole and UltraTap pedals, the MicroPitch Delay takes a focused (and affordable) approach to provide highly beloved Eventide effects for players who want that elusive Eventide sound but don't need a full assortment of algorithms. The MicroPitch Delay also provides user-friendly operation in a pedal board-friendly format, but without sacrificing the versatility and pro-level sound quality of

Eventide's renowned rackmount processors. In addition to the classic MicroPitch chorus effect, the pedal can generate a wide variety of sounds, including spacious delays, hypnotically lush slap backs and wild special effects.

FEATURES The Eventide MicroPitch Delay features the same layout as the Blackhole and UltraTap pedals, with six knobs, an LED/button for switching the knobs to a secondary set of controls, two footswitches (Active and Tap, with functions toggled by corresponding LED/buttons) and a column of five LEDs that indicate the selected preset. In Primary mode, the knobs control dry/wet mix, pitch A (from 0 to +50 cents), pitch B (from 0 to -50 cents), LFO or envelope depth, modulation rate/envelope follower sensitivity, and pitch mix (stereo or mono output). In Secondary mode, the knobs control tone, delay A and B (up to three seconds max in Time mode or up to six seconds max in Tempo mode), modulation type select, feedback and output level. The rear panel provides a single input (mono or TRS stereo),

outputs 1 and 2, a 1/4-inch expression pedal jack, mono/stereo switch (for input), guitar/line level switch and mini USB jack for software updates, MIDI control and connecting the pedal to the free Eventide Device Manager software via a computer. The Eventide Device Manager software allows users to save, import and export additional presets (55 MicroPitch Delay presets are included with the software), edit system settings and presets and much more.

PERFORMANCE Unlike the usual "plug and play" pedals, the MicroPitch Delay is not initially intuitive to use and requires a brief study of the quick start guide to understand how to access presets, toggle between preset select or tap tempo modes, select latch/momentary switching and so on. Fortunately, the pedal is simple to operate after an initial period of familiarization. The five presets available on board are more than enough to satisfy most players, but should you need to access more, up to 127 presets are accessible via MIDI.



CHEAT SHEET



The sound quality of the effects is consistent with the elevated standards that Eventide processors are known for. While the MicroPitch wet/dry/wet chorus effect sounds incredible, with a thick texture, outstanding clarity and precise intonation that works well with clean and heavily distorted guitar tones alike, the pedal can do much more, including trippy “auto whammy” pitch bends controlled by playing dynamics and reverb-like delays that retain crisp attack clarity. The 55 presets included with the Eventide Device Manager software provide a good overview of the pedal’s capabilities, making ideal launch pads for further tweaking, customization and exploration.

The Eventide MicroPitch Delay is an ideal “gateway” pedal for players who want to experience the Eventide sound. From its “ultimate chorus” effects to sophisticated delays that go well beyond the average digital delay pedal, it’s also a great value for guitarists seeking a versatile tone-shaping tool.

- **STREET PRICE:** \$279
MANUFACTURER: Eventide, eventideaudio.com
- Pitch A shifts the left channel from 0 to +50 cents while Pitch B shifts the right channel from 0 to -50 cents to create lush stereo soundscapes.
- The six knobs are toggled between primary and secondary functions for adjusting pitch shift and delay settings, respectively.
- **THE BOTTOM LINE:** From the “secret sauce” chorus effects of L.A. studio pros and industry standard delays to wild new sounds waiting for discovery, the Eventide MicroPitch Delay provides a wealth of exciting and useful effects.

Buzz Bin



EVH 5150 Series Standard

THE STRIPPED-DOWN appeal of the EVH Striped Series of guitars will most likely never lose its enduring popularity for Van Halen fans and players alike. Even the many iterations of the Wolfgang series adopted by numerous artists continues to grow by leaps and bounds. But if you ask me, I’ve been digging the EVH 5150 Series Standard guitar, which combines the very best attributes of Eddie Van Halen’s famed “5150” guitar along with the refined tones of Eddie’s innovatively designed Wolfgang guitars. As much as I loved my first VH-approved guitar when I was a youngster (a 1984 Kramer Baretta), having just one pickup and a volume control severely limited my tonal possibilities — because, hey, I’m no Eddie Van Halen. Thankfully, the new EVH 5150 Series Standard guitar expands upon the EVH Superstrat theme with some extras and updated tweaks that turn this guitar into more than just a one-trick pony.

The 5150 Standard is about as feature-packed as you can get in a stripped-down design. Pressed against your belly you’ll notice its slightly modified Strat-style basswood body possesses a deeper upper-body curve for close comfort. The bolt-on quartersawn maple neck is graphite-reinforced and features a modified “C” profile that’s comfortably slim and flat, with a hand-rubbed satin urethane back finish, and a 12”-16” compound radius ebony fingerboard with 22 jumbo frets and cream dot inlays. What’s nice to see is the addition of a heel-mount truss rod wheel for ease in making quick neck adjustments, and of course, the iconic “hockey stick” headstock that’s color-matched to the body. What’s new is the HH pickup configuration of two custom-designed EVH Wolfgang Alnico 2 humbucking pickups controlled by low-friction volume and tone knobs, along with a three-way toggle switch, now found on the upper bout rather than the bottom cutaway. Where the old toggle switch used to be is now a lower bout kill switch button, great for replicating Van Halen’s on/off stutter effect on “You Really Got Me.” Of course, the guitar isn’t complete without an EVH-branded top-mount Floyd Rose locking tremolo with EVH D-Tuna and EVH-branded Gotoh tuning machines.

I don’t need to mince words to describe the feel and playability of the 5150 Standard — it’s exactly as it looks, a total high-performance, hot-rodged guitar engineered for you to play at top speed. The pickups are boldfaced but remain intensely focused under the most punishing distortion pumped through them, and are seriously some of the best pickups for articulating amps with high-gain preamps. In short, with all its fully loaded features and affordability, the 5150 Standard is an irresistibly exciting guitar made to scream for you. — *Paul Riario*

STREET PRICE: \$899.99

MANUFACTURER: EVH, evhgear.com

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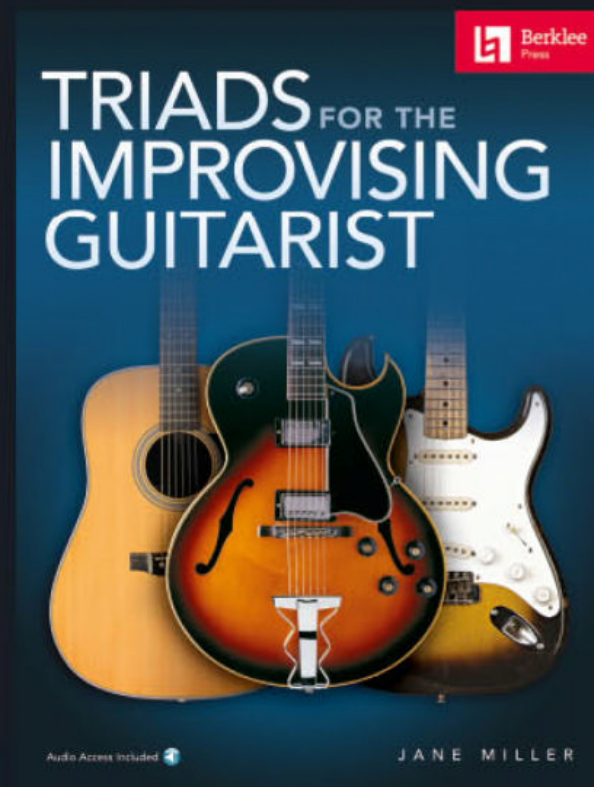
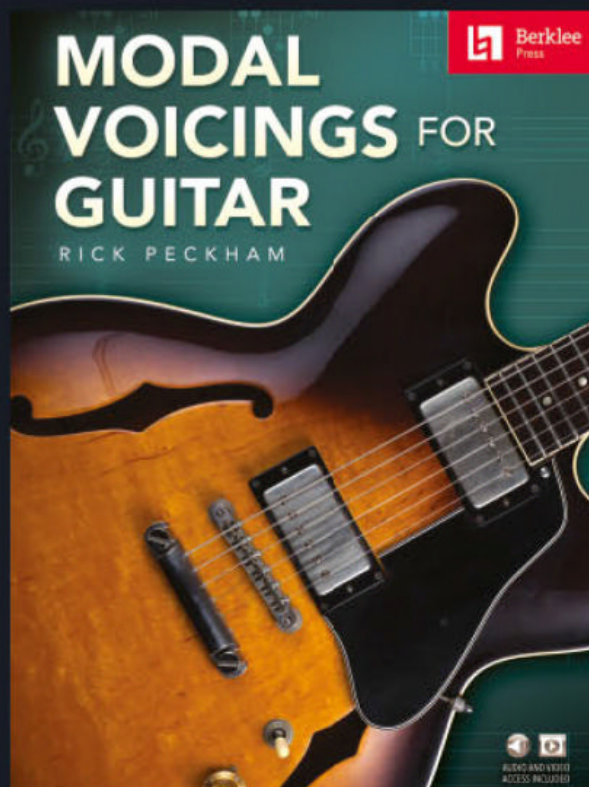
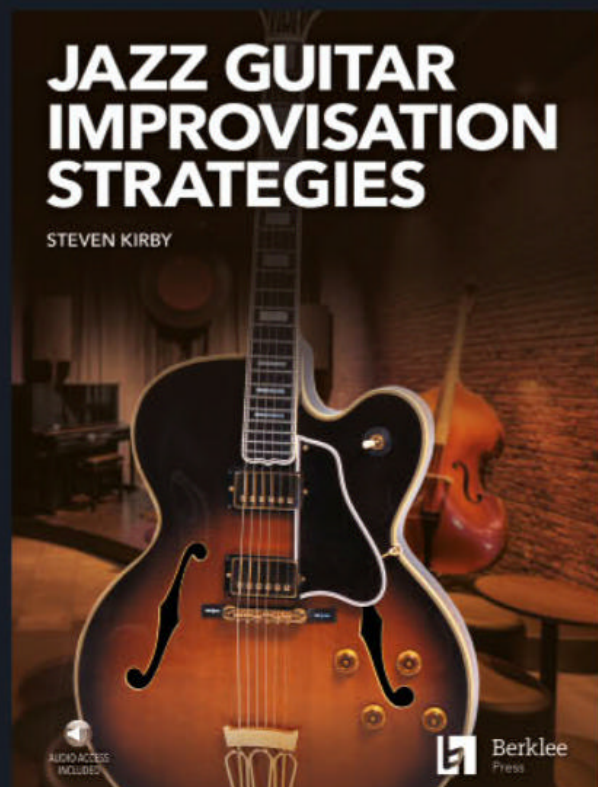
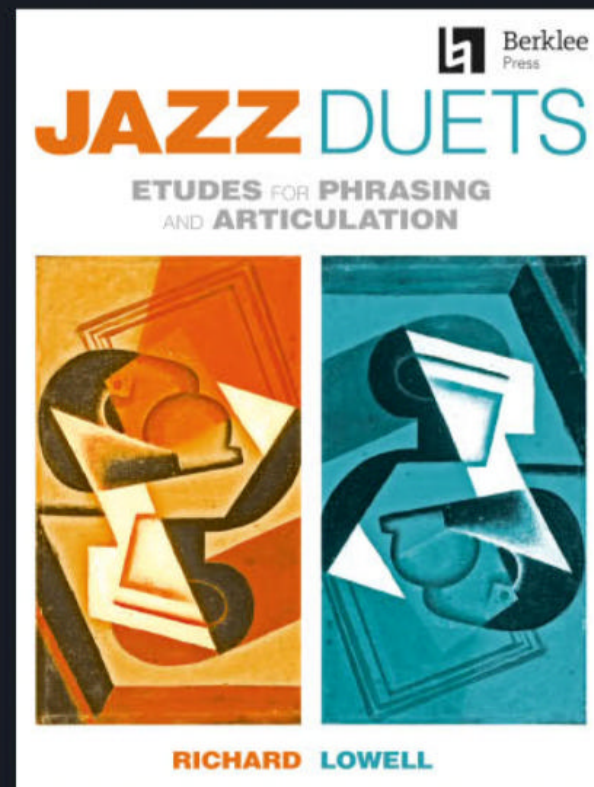
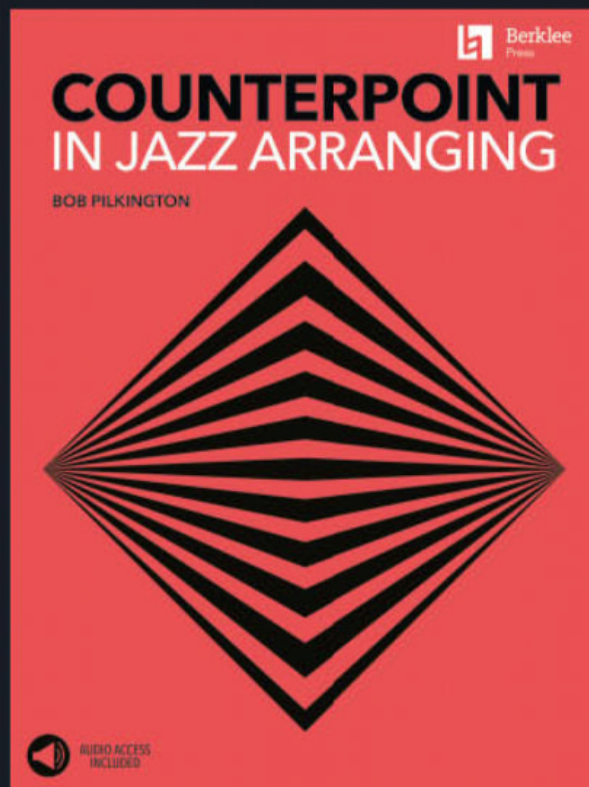
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STRING
THEORY

by Jimmy Brown

For video of this lesson, go to
GuitarWorld.com/October2021I GOT RHYTHM,
PART 21

Groovin' in 12/8 meter

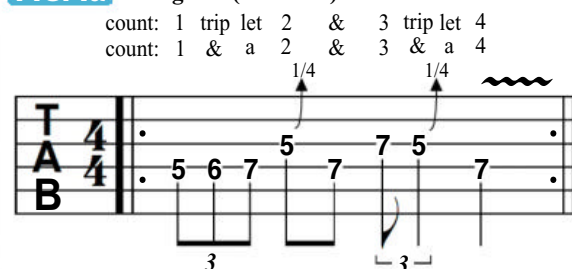
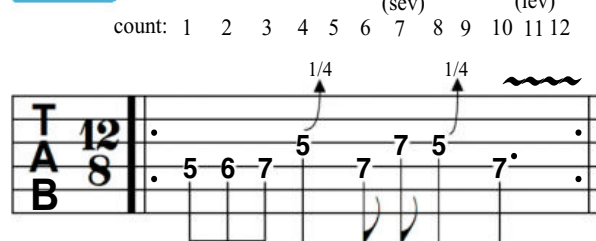
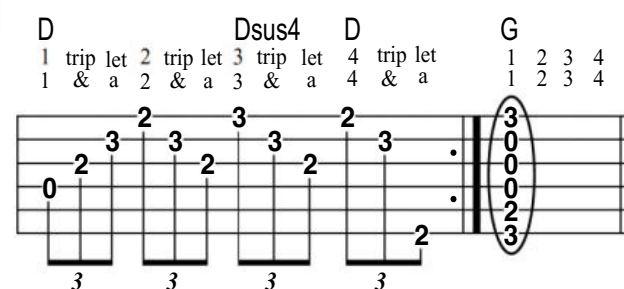
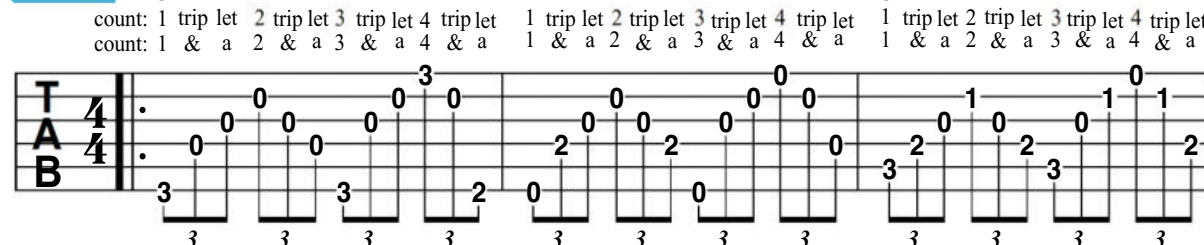
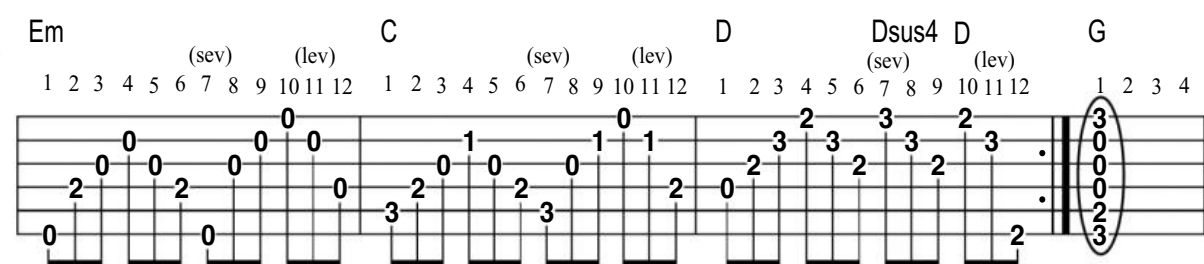
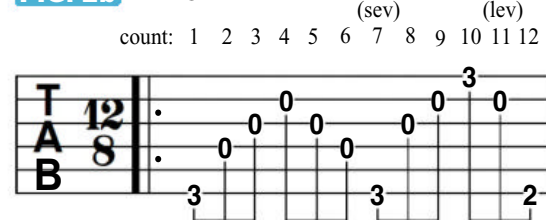
NOW THAT WE understand how triplets work — three equally spaced notes played across one beat, or two beats, or half a beat — I'd like to talk about a widely used triplet-based meter, $\frac{12}{8}$, and cite some well-known examples of songs that embody what musicians refer to as “the $\frac{12}{8}$ groove” approach to counting and notating rhythms.

In the same way that $\frac{4}{4}$ signifies four quarter notes per bar, $\frac{12}{8}$ indicates 12 eighth notes, which are beamed in four three-note groups, just like eighth-note triplets in $\frac{4}{4}$. There are, however, a couple of differences in the way the beats are counted and written in $\frac{12}{8}$, which in certain situations makes it preferable to using $\frac{4}{4}$. In $\frac{4}{4}$, you would either count “1 trip let, 2 trip let, 3 trip let, 4 trip let,” or “1 & uh, 2 & uh, 3 & uh, 4 & uh.” In $\frac{12}{8}$, you count “1 2 3, 4 5 6, 7 (sev) 8 9, 10 11 (lev) 12.” Notice that I shortened “seven” to “sev” and “eleven” to “lev.” This eliminates the extra syllables that would interfere with the counting.

Writing eighth-note triplets in $\frac{12}{8}$ meter eliminates the need to include those Italic “3s,” as you would have in $\frac{4}{4}$. It also eliminates those pairs of brackets, or “bookends,” that would be required whenever you have a “broken” eighth-note triplet figure, for which there's no beam, due to the use of either a rest or of a quarter note that takes the place of two tied eighth notes within the beat.

To illustrate, here's a short lick notated two different ways. In **FIGURE 1a**, it's transcribed in $\frac{4}{4}$ meter, with a “swing eighths” indication, which allows me to simplify the “long-short” rhythm on beat 2 to a pair of eighth notes. **FIGURE 1b** presents the same phrase in $\frac{12}{8}$, which, with fewer markings, is simpler overall. Notice, however, that the last note is now a dotted quarter note, which is the $\frac{12}{8}$ equivalent of a quarter note in $\frac{4}{4}$.

So, when you have a song with a triplet feel, there can be pros and cons to using $\frac{12}{8}$ meter instead of $\frac{4}{4}$. Much of it depends on the tempo and what the drummer is playing, particularly on the ride cymbal or hi-hats, which often determines how “triplet-y” the groove is. Typically, at a slow or medium tempo, such as what you have in a slow blues song like “Since I've Been Loving You” by Led Zeppelin, or in a medium-slow blues like “Texas Flood” by Stevie Ray Vaughan, you

FIG. 1a Swing feel ($\text{♩} = \text{♩} = \text{♩}$)**FIG. 1b****FIG. 2a****FIG. 2b**

have lots of triplets, and double-time sextuplets too, for which $\frac{12}{8}$ meter makes for the most flowing count and streamlined notation too. The same applies to some medium-tempo songs that have a very pronounced triplet feel, like “Fooled Around and Fell in Love” by Elvin Bishop. However, with faster tempos and “rock boogie” shuffle grooves, as in, for example, “I’m the One” and “Hot for Teacher” by Van Halen, you’ll have more swing eighth notes than triplets (well, except for the tapping intro in “Hot for Teacher,” which is all triplets), and so $\frac{4}{4}$ presents a simpler option for both transcribing and counting the rhythms overall.

For comparison, I’ve taken a standard I - vi - IV - V chord progression in the key of G — G - Em - C - D — and transcribed it two different ways. It’s played at a relaxed

tempo, with one chord change per bar and using open chords and ringing arpeggiation.

FIGURE 2a shows the pattern in $\frac{4}{4}$, while **FIGURE 2b** conveys the same thing in $\frac{12}{8}$. As you can see, the $\frac{12}{8}$ version looks neater and less cluttered, without all those Italic 3s below the beams. In either case, you feel the music the same way, with an underlying emphasis on every third eighth-note triplet, which is where you would tap your foot.

This progression, by the way, has been used in countless pop songs, such as “Unchained Melody,” famously recorded by the Righteous Bros., in the key of C, and “Perfect” by Ed Sheeran, the original studio recording of which is in A $\flat$. (Sheeran performs the song in G but used a capo at the 1st fret on the recording to transpose everything up a half step.)

Senior Music Editor “Downtown” Jimmy Brown is an experienced, working musician, performer and private teacher in the greater NYC area whose mission is to entertain, enlighten and inspire people with his guitar playing.

IN DEEP

by Andy Aledort



For video of this lesson, go to GuitarWorld.com/October2021

SLIDE ON!

Anatomy of a slide solo in open E tuning, part 1

SLIDE GUITAR IS a technique that just about every guitar player I've ever known has been fascinated by. Unlike the sounds that are created by fretting notes conventionally, with the fingers, a hard, smooth object, called a slide, is instead pressed against the strings. As with conventional fretting, shortening or lengthening the distance between the slide and the guitar's bridge will make the notes sound either higher or lower in pitch. The big difference is that using a slide takes the frets out of the equation; one can place the slide on a string, pick the string and then glide the slide up and down its length to change the pitch in a seamless glissando, akin to the manner by which the human voice can sweep from one note to another. And a beautiful, vocal-like vibrato can be produced by wiggling the slide back and forth against the string over the fret.

The roots of the sound and techniques of slide guitar can be traced back to the "diddle bow," which is a taut wire strung between two fixed points — such as two nails hammered into opposite ends of a board — and as the wire is plucked, a smooth object is moved up and down its length to alter the pitch of the note.

Slide guitar would become an integral element in the sound and development of American blues, as exemplified by Blind Willie Johnson, Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and Son House, and carried into the rock era brilliantly by Ry Cooder, Duane Allman, Lowell George, and many others.

Slide guitarists often tune their strings to what's known as an open tuning, which allows one to strum across all of the open strings to produce the sound of a given chord. The most commonly used open tunings are open E (low to high: E, B, E, G#, B, E), open D (the same tuning down a whole step: D, A, D, F#, A, D), open A (low to high, E, A, E, A, C#, E) and open G (the same tuning down a whole step: D, G, D, G, B, D).

Bar 1 of **FIGURE 1** illustrates the open strings sounded individually with the guitar tuned to open E. In bars 2 and 3, an E major chord is strummed across all of the strings, first open, then an octave higher, with the slide placed across the strings directly above the 12th fret. **FIGURE 2** illustrates the scale pattern used most commonly for soloing in

FIG. 1 Open E tuning

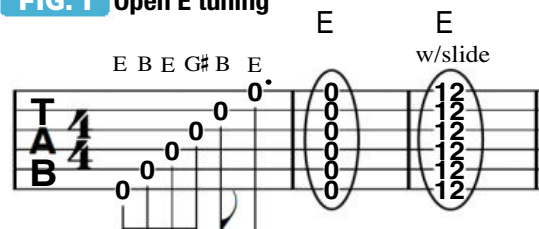


FIG. 2

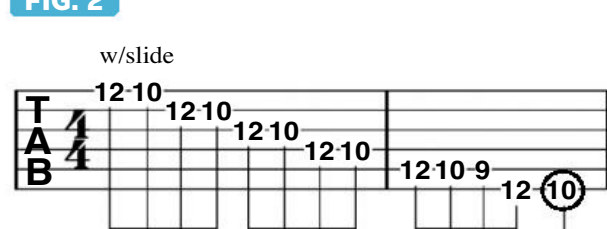


FIG. 3

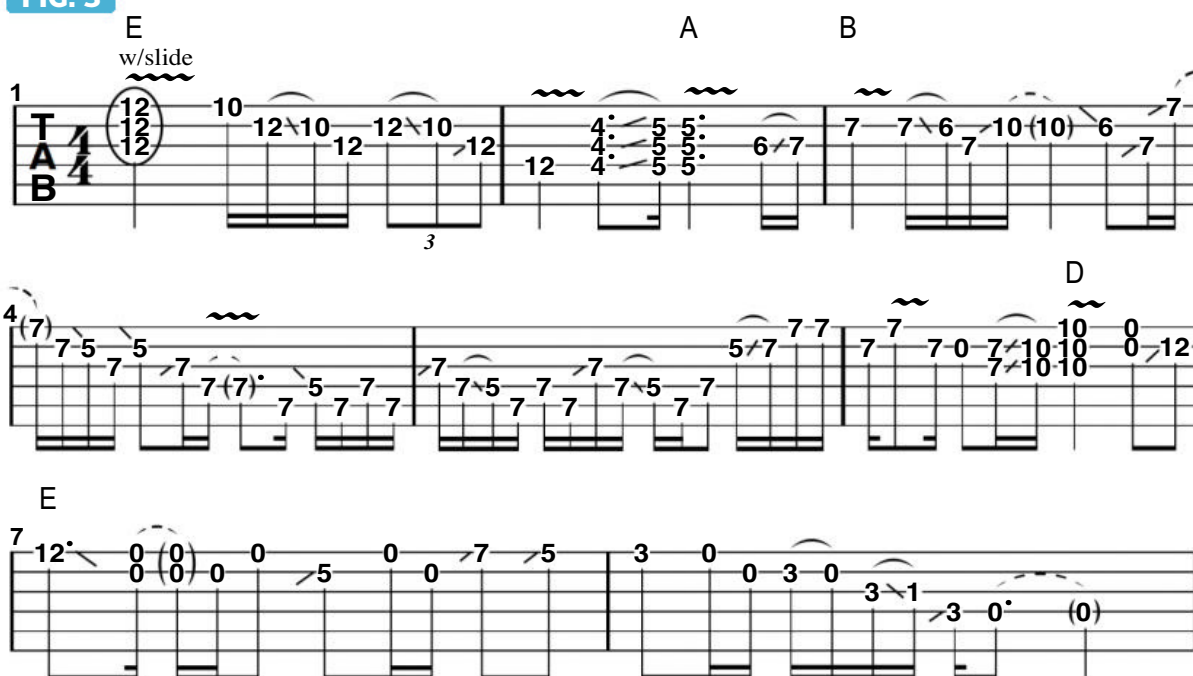
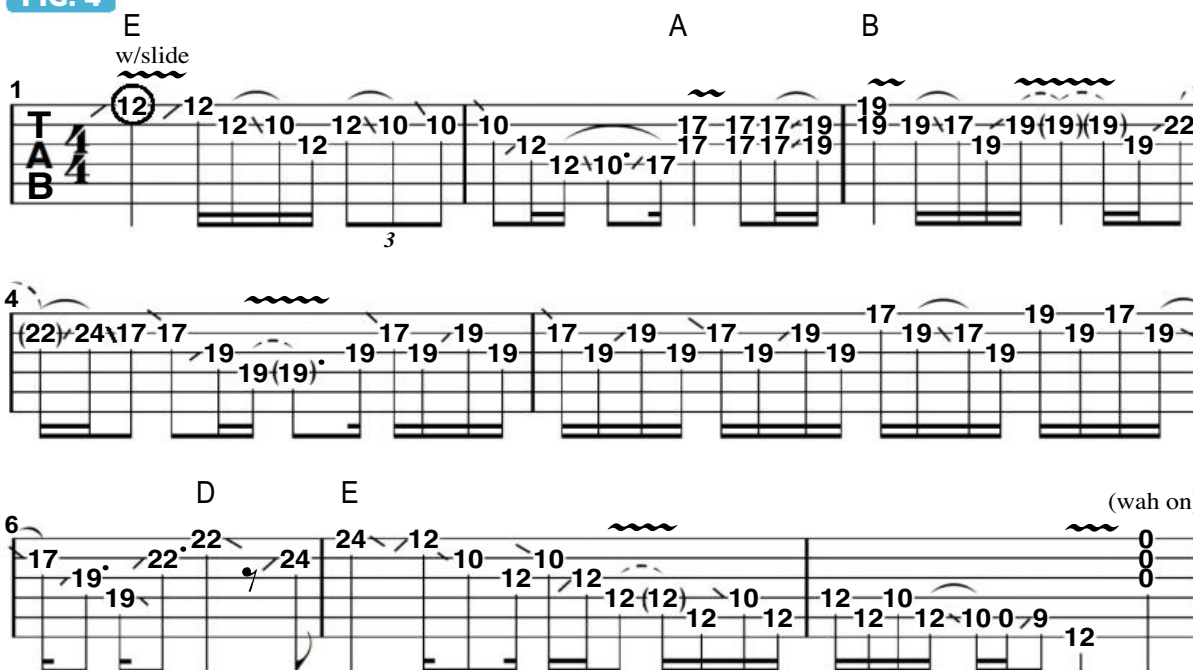


FIG. 4



open E tuning. This set of notes (E, F#, G#, A, B, D) may be analyzed as the E Mixolydian hexatonic scale.

FIGURES 3 and **4** present two eight-bar slide solos played over a I - IV - V (one - four - five) chord progression in the key of

E. (The chords are E, A and B, respectively.) While playing through these solos, be aware of the alternating nature of the slide movement, as the subtle shifts in slide direction serve to create a more "vocal" sound, by "scooping" into a note from above or below.

Guitar World Associate Editor Andy Aledort is recognized worldwide for his vast contributions to guitar instruction, via his many best-selling instructional DVDs, transcription books and online lessons.

THE GRISTLE
REPORT

by Greg Koch

For video of this lesson, go to
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IN C MAJORHybrid picking, and
how to play “Luna Girl”

“LUNA GIRL” IS the opening track on my latest album, *From the Up’Nah*, which I recorded with my group, the Koch Marshall Trio, featuring Toby Marshall on keyboards and my son Dylan on drums and percussion. The main riff in this song is crafted from a melodic line played in tandem with pedal tones while additionally adding bass notes underneath the melodic information. Like most guitar players, I can deliver this type of musical mayhem on the guitar by incorporating hybrid picking, wherein, generally speaking, the notes on the lower strings — the “bass notes” — are downpicked with the plectrum while the notes on the higher strings are fingerpicked.

The majority of the tune’s initial primary riff is built around a C chord. The best way to get started is to set up a pick-hand framework to follow for the entire song. **FIGURE 1a** illustrates a 1st-position C major chord, sounded by fingerpicking the notes on the B and G strings while using the pick to sound the reiterated low C note on the A string’s 3rd fret. In **FIGURE 1b**, I expand the sound of the C chord by fingerpicking the open high E string along with the B and G.

With the high E included as part of the equation, I can simply barre my index finger across the top two strings at the 1st fret to sound an F major chord, and then alternately add or remove the barre to switch from an F chord to a C chord, as shown in **FIGURE 2**. In **FIGURE 3**, you can see that the C chord can be embellished by adding an ascending line on the G string.

The “Luna Girl” lick is constructed by interweaving a melody based on the C blues scale into the repeatedly hybrid-picked C chord: **FIGURE 4** shows this scale played on the top two strings, and **FIGURE 5** illustrates how I employ it in the first melodic phrase of “Luna Girl.”

FIGURE 6 elaborates on the initial one-bar phrase by illustrating how I carry the idea across three bars, which is accomplished by moving the melodic phrases gradually downward from the high E string to the B, G and D strings. The musical idea is capped off with the bold and aggressive striking of the F5 chord at the end.

FIG. 1a



FIG. 1b

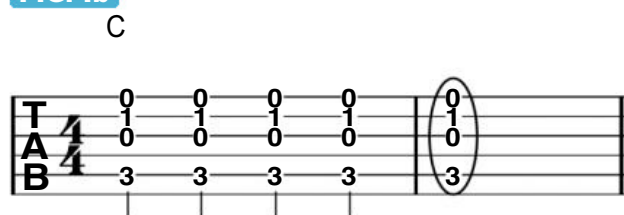


FIG. 2

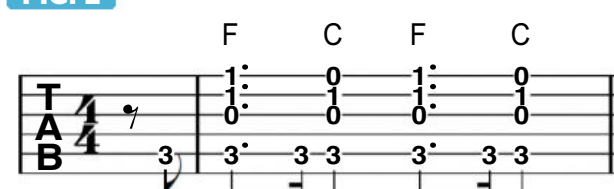


FIG. 3

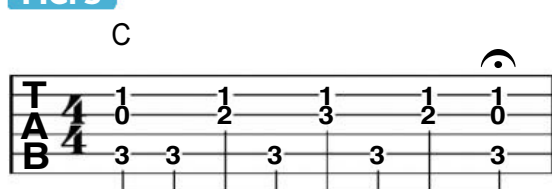


FIG. 4 blues scale

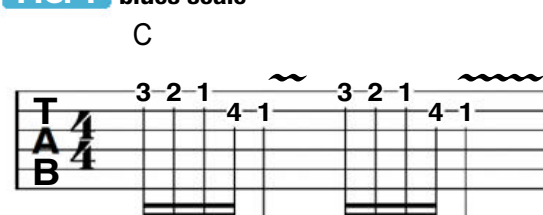


FIG. 5



FIG. 6

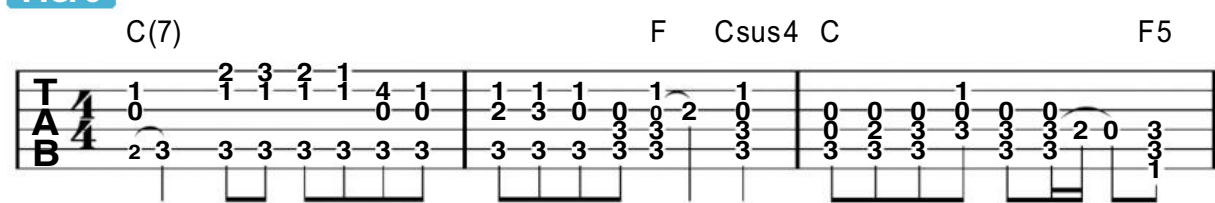


FIG. 7

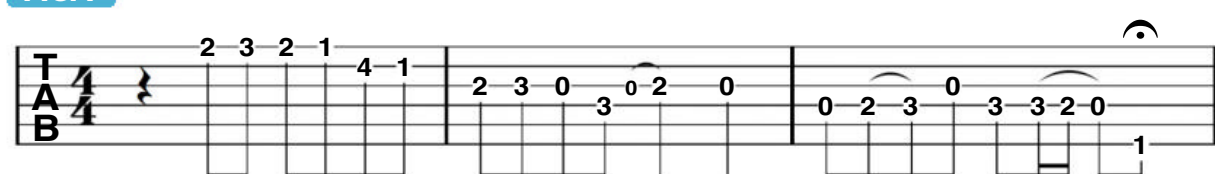
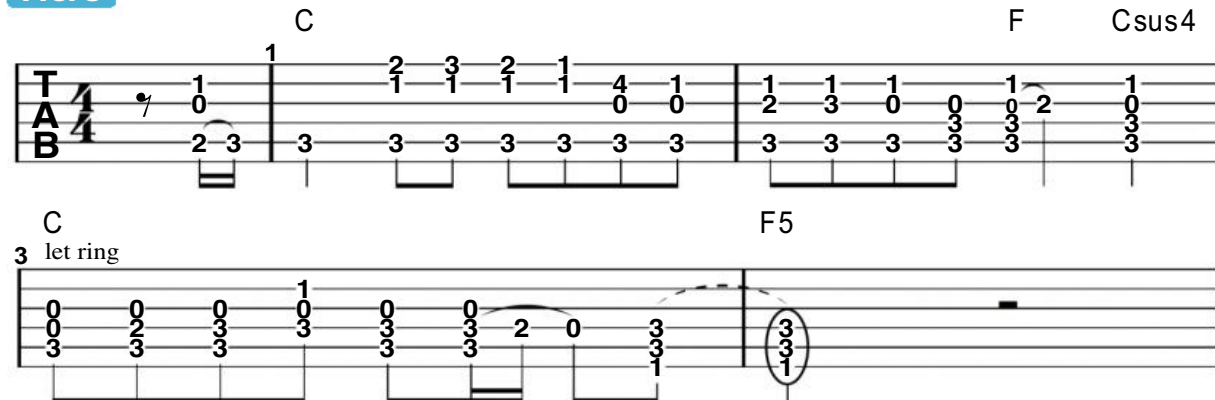


FIG. 8



A useful thing to think about and practice is the single-note melody by itself, as illustrated in **FIGURE 7**. Here, the entire melody is stated in single-string fashion; once you have a handle on this melodic line, it will be that much easier to add the hybrid-picked bass notes and additional chord tones. **FIG-**

URE 8 demonstrates how I bring all the elements together in the final actualization of the “Luna Girl” lick.

I’m a huge fan of hybrid-picked ideas like these, so please feel free to use these musical examples as jumping off points into your own musical inventions.

Greg Koch is a large human who coaxes guitars into submission in a way that has left an indelible print on the psyches of many Earth dwellers. Visit GregKoch.com to check out his recordings, instructional materials, signature musical devices and colorful hats.

MELODIC
MUSE

by Andy Timmons

For video of this lesson, go to
GuitarWorld.com/October2021

GYPSY SOUL

Articulation, dynamics
and detail, and how to play
“Electric Gypsy,” part 2

LAST MONTH, I began our examination of the main guitar part in my song “Electric Gypsy,” which is my tribute to Jimi Hendrix that I originally recorded for my 1994 album, *Ear Ecstasy*. In breaking down this part, three things come to mind as being of the utmost importance: *articulation*, *dynamics* and *detail*. Let’s take a closer look at how these three elements of musical expression reveal themselves in “Electric Gypsy.”

Once you’ve gone over the basic lick and are familiar with the sequence of the phrases, as well as the melodic and chordal relationships between them, you can then zero-in on what I consider essential elements that give the song a sense of musicality. “The devil is in the details,” as they say, and the things that will make this lick sound the way it should come down to the dynamics and the articulation utilized when moving from one phrase to the next.

FIGURE 1a illustrates the first phrase of “Electric Gypsy,” wherein the open D string is played as a pedal tone against an E-to-F# slide on the G string. Essential to the articulation of this lick is to use a light palm mute on the open D string and then pick the E-to-F# slide much louder, in order to add musical emphasis to that initial melodic part. In **FIGURE 1b**, I demonstrate how that first phrase, played over D major, shifts to the melodic line played over A major. As you play, focus on the dynamics of the articulation and the volume of every note as it is played.

At the foundation of the entire riff is the constant motion of the strumming hand, which is alternating between downstrokes and upstrokes in a flowing 16th-note rhythm. Inherent in this strumming motion is a lighter touch on the downbeat (beat 1), followed by heavier, more accented picking on beats 2 and 3, after which I lighten up a little on beat 4. To my ears, this serves to impart a natural, “breathing”-type quality to the riff that is both musical and vocal in nature.

The significance of this 16th-note rhythm is illustrated in **FIGURE 2**, as I move back and forth between the D/F# chord shape and the muted-string accents. In **FIGURE 3**, the initial riff is filled out a bit more, as I add the quick slides on the

FIG. 1

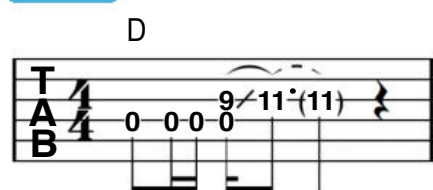


FIG. 1b

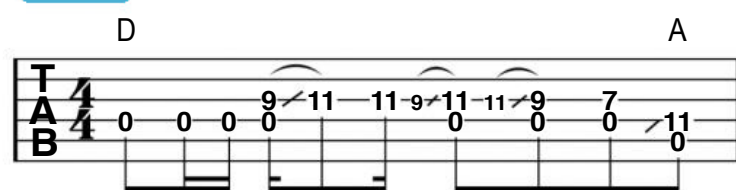


FIG. 2

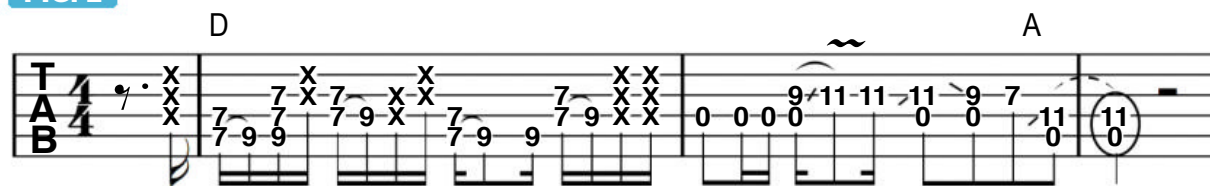


FIG. 3

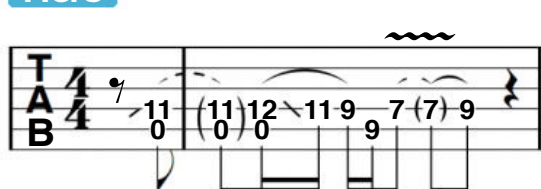


FIG. 4

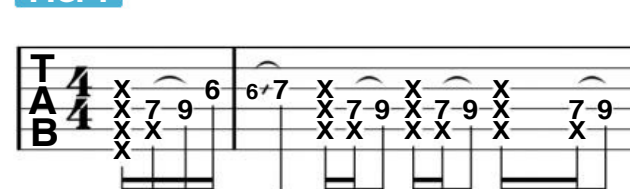


FIG. 5

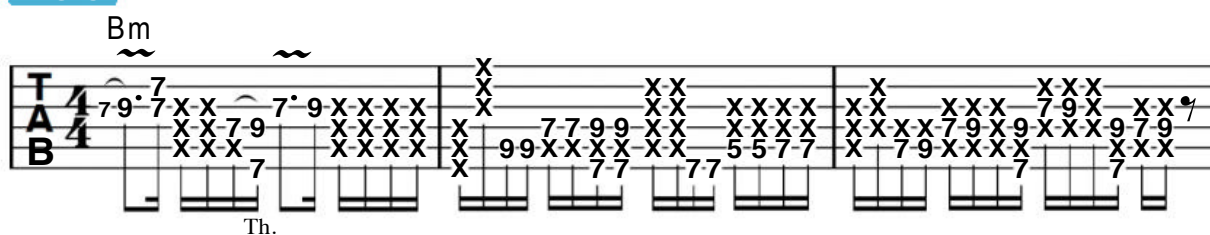


FIG. 6

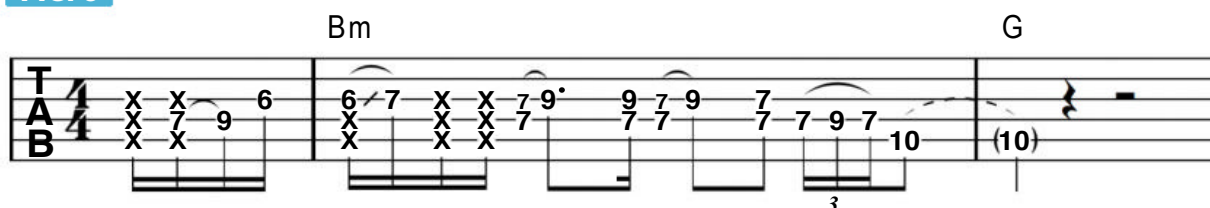
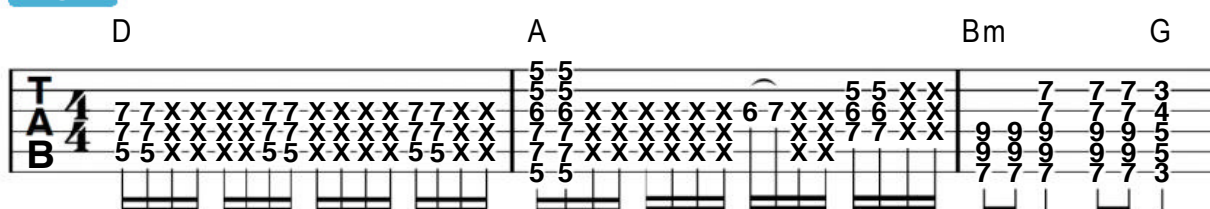


FIG. 7



D string followed by a single-note phrase based on the A major pentatonic scale (A, B, C#, E, F#).

FIGURES 4 and **5** represent where the third chord, Bm, comes into play, and I use my fret-hand to intermittently mute all the strings, so that I can strum across them for percussive effects, incorporating fretting at specific points to outline the next segment of the melody. Keeping the pick-hand loose while strumming in a 16th-note rhythm is essential to achieving the desired sound for

this riff. **FIGURE 6** then carries the phrase to its conclusion as I move into the phrases that outline the G chord that concludes the four-bar phrase.

A great, helpful thing to do is to simplify the approach down to the chord progression itself — D - A - Bm - G — as shown in **FIGURE 7**. Whether you’re performing the basic chord pattern or the riff in all its detail, the strumming hand needs to strike the strings in the appropriately musical manner.

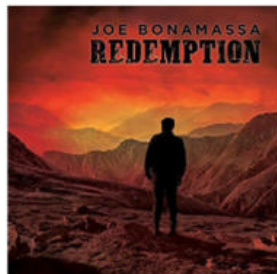
Andy Timmons is a world-renowned guitarist known for his work with the Andy Timmons Band, as well as Danger Danger and Simon Phillips. Visit andytimmons.com and guitarxperience.net to check out his recordings and many instructional releases

PERFORMANCE NOTES

...HOW TO PLAY THIS MONTH'S SONGS...



"REDEMPTION" Joe Bonamassa



THE TITLE TRACK from Joe Bonamassa's 2018 studio album, this earthy, downtempo song features the guitarist in a serious, soul-searching mood,

with swampy, drop-D-tuned acoustic and electric riffs, impassioned vocals and a fiery guitar solo. (The three-part female background vocals are great too!)

Joe makes great use of a slide in the song's repeating two-bar intro riff, crafting a haunting low-register melody that's based on the D minor pentatonic scale (D, F, G, A, C), with the added B note at the end of bar 2 implying a warm-sounding G/B chord and adding a D Dorian-mode flavor (D, E, F, G, A, B, C) to the phrase. Notice how the guitarist swoops into certain notes from below, which is a highly expressive decorative embellishment and a slide guitar signature. As you play this figure (*Rhy. Fig. 1*) and alternate between placing the slide against the strings and lifting it off them to sound the open-string notes, use a light touch with the slide and take care not to inadvertently cause the strings to "fret out" and "clank" against the frets, which is all too easy to do down in the lower positions, especially if your guitar has low action at the nut. (Guitars that are set up specifically for slide playing typically have higher action at the nut, for this very reason.)

Joe's non-slide single-note solo (see section I) features the guitarist doing some bluesy shredding on a standard-tuned ax, playing over a repeating "Kashmir"-like riff in the key of D and $\frac{5}{4}$ meter. Using mostly notes from the D minor pentatonic scale, Joe rips out some fast, deftly articulated licks, mixing bursts of alternate picking with some well-placed pull-offs, hammer-ons and finger slides. As you play through the solo, you'll notice how the guitarist quickly shifts positions from one D minor pentatonic "box" pattern to another, to expand his note range. Particularly challenging are the blazing runs he plays in bar 36, where he shifts and reaches up to grab the high C note at the 20th fret then shifts back down to lower positions, so as to stay mostly on the top three strings.

— JIMMY BROWN



"SAY IT AIN'T SO" Weezer



THIS ENDEARING, MID-'90S alternative rock classic features some of guitarist-frontman Rivers Cuomo's finest songwriting, with simple but

effective rhythm and lead parts that serve the song perfectly. As the arrangement unfolds, Cuomo and co-guitarist Brian Bell create some powerful dynamic contrasts, with the intro and verses being relatively quiet and subdued, using jangly, clean guitar tones, and the chorus and bridge sections featuring full-tilt, loud, heavily overdriven power chords, which are supported by bassist Matt Sharp and drummer Patrick Wilson following suit with contrasts between light-and-laid-back accompaniment on the verses and heavy-and-bombastic bashing on the choruses and bridge.

The song's signature chord, that "busted"-sounding G#add#2 is performed by playing the bottom four notes of a regular G# major barre chord, but without barring the top two strings and intentionally allowing the open B string to ring. Although the chord has a sour sound, its use is very effective here, creating a brief moment of tension that gets resolved by the pleasing-sounding A and E chords that follow.

Cuomo varies the repeating two-bar riff pattern nicely between the 1st and 2nd verses, with a soulful, Hendrix-y melodic chord riff in bars 12-14. Notice how he uses a combination of single notes and double-stops with decorative oblique hammer-ons to outline and "dress up" the underlying chords — C#m7, G#, A and E.

The song's second and third choruses feature cool-sounding unison-bend fills between the power chord jabs (see section F). These licks, while not difficult to perform on their own, can be tricky to execute quickly and cleanly transition to here from the C#5 and G#5 power chord strums that immediately precede them. Practice these bars slowly at first, to acquire the necessary muscle memory and muting moves that are required in order to play them cleanly, without unintentionally sounding any open strings. Use both hands to mute the lower strings immediately after strumming the second chord in each of these bars (the one with the staccato dot above the tab numbers).

— JIMMY BROWN



"MIDDLE OF THE ROAD" The Pretenders



RECORDED BACK IN 1983, this classic rock and roll song sounds as fresh today as it did when it became an FM radio hit in 1984. The arrange-

ment features a snappy, uptempo groove, bright, twangy, semi-overdriven guitars and complementary riffs. Guitarist-vocalist Chrissie Hynde (Gtr. 2) plays the song in standard tuning and provides punchy barre chord stabs, mostly in the middle-upper register, and guitarist Robbie McIntosh (Gtr. 1) plays low-register drop-D power chords on the intro and choruses and a clever, well-crafted single-note riff during the verses (see *Rhy. Fig. 1*, bars 9-14), which drives the song nicely. Notice his use of notes tied over the bar lines in this figure, which create an appealing rhythmic syncopation and sense of "push" as the chords change.

When playing McIntosh's single-note verse riff, you'll want to momentarily mute the ringing open low D string as you finger and pick the notes on the A string, to prevent the low D note from droning below the A and G chords played by Hynde during this section.

McIntosh crafted a killer guitar solo for this song, armed with his powerfully biting, overdriven Telecaster tone, a great sense of melodic development and some slick, tasteful chops. Leading into section E, in *Fill 1*, the guitarist starts out playing the solo fingerstyle, with his pick tucked into his palm. This allows him to pluck notes on different strings simultaneously and achieve a razor-sharp, non-staggered articulation.

In bar 49, McIntosh quickly retrieves and deploys his pick to play a driving, rhythmically displaced "Free Bird"-style repetition lick that he continues through bar 52. The guitarist then segues into a series of two-note chords that are based on the A Dorian mode (A, B, C, D, E, F#, G), which nicely cap off the solo in bars 53-57. Particularly cool is the series of three-note triads beginning in bar 58, which don't match up to those in the underlying progression played by Hynde and bassist Malcolm Foster. The result is a subtle, interesting dissonance, which adds to the song's allure.

— JIMMY BROWN

“REDEMPTION”

Joe Bonamassa

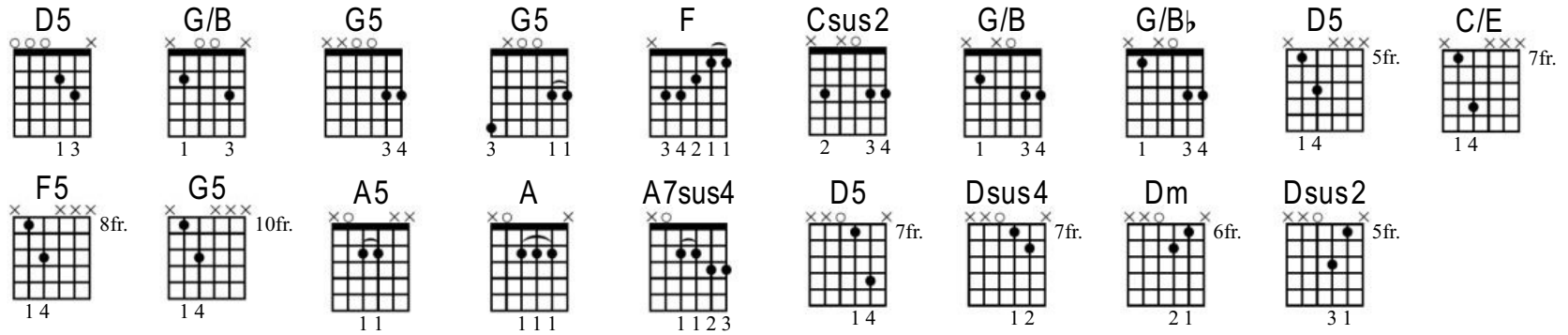
As heard on **REDEMPTION**

Words and Music by JOE BONAMASSA, KEVIN SHIRLEY, JAMES HOUSE, DION DIMUCCI and RICHARD PAGE • Transcribed by JEFF PERRIN

Guitars 1, 2, and 3 are in Drop-D tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, E).

Guitar 4 is in standard tuning.

Bass tuning (low to high): E, A, D, G.



A Intro (0:00)

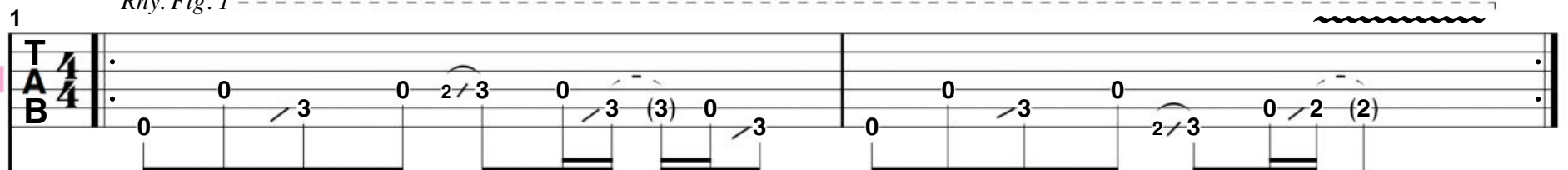
Moderately Slow ♩ = 74

*D5

Gtr. 1 (acous. w/slide)

Rhy. Fig. 1

G/B



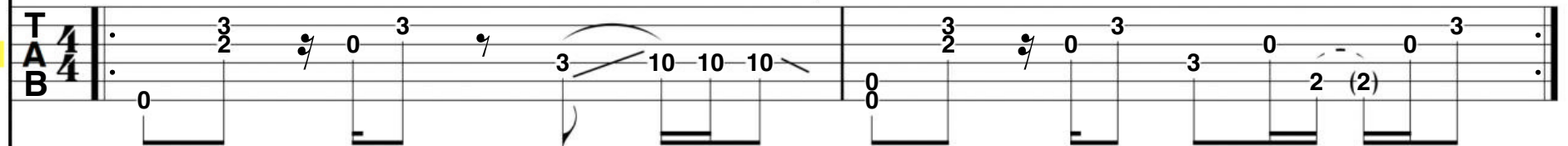
*Chord symbols reflect overall harmony.

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/overdrive and tremolo effect)

Rhy. Fig. 1a

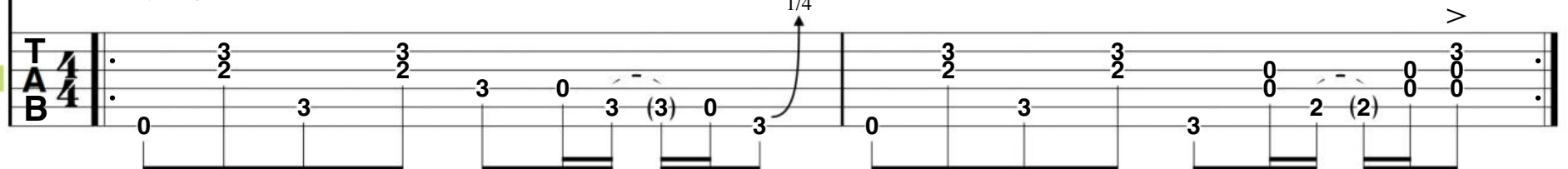
(fingerstyle)

w/slide



Gtr. 3 (12-string acous.)

Rhy. Fig. 1b



D5

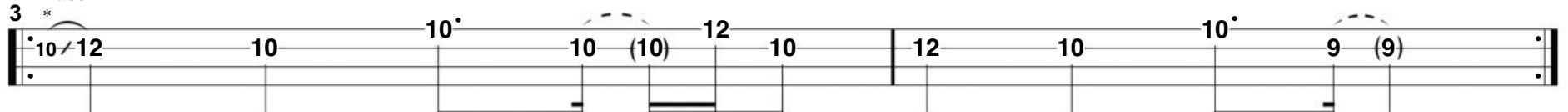
G/B

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a (see bar 1)

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 1b (see bar 1)

Bass



*grace note played first time only

“REDEMPTION”

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOE BONAMASSA, KEVIN SHIRLEY, JAMES HOUSE, DION DIMUCCI AND RICHARD PAGE.

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B 1st Verse (0:26)

She took the fire as she was leaving No forgiveness and no confession Now I'm sifting through the cold grey ashes Lookin' for peace in my redemption

D5

Gtr. 1

Rhy. Fig. 2

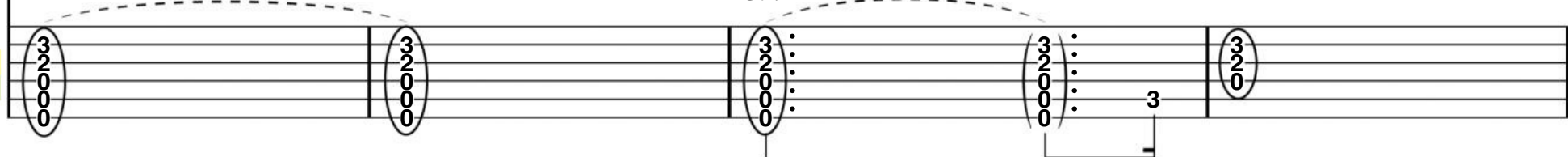


Gtrs. 2 and 3

Rhy. Fig. 2a

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 2a (see bar 5)

Gtr. 2

**C** (0:39)

D5

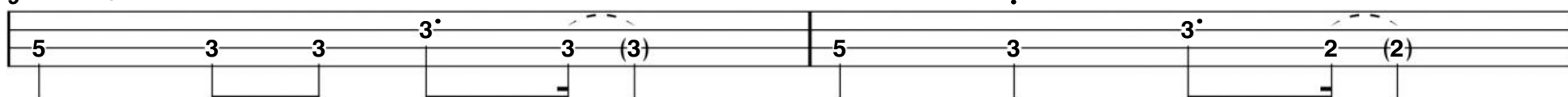
Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a twice (see bar 1)

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 1b twice (see bar 1)

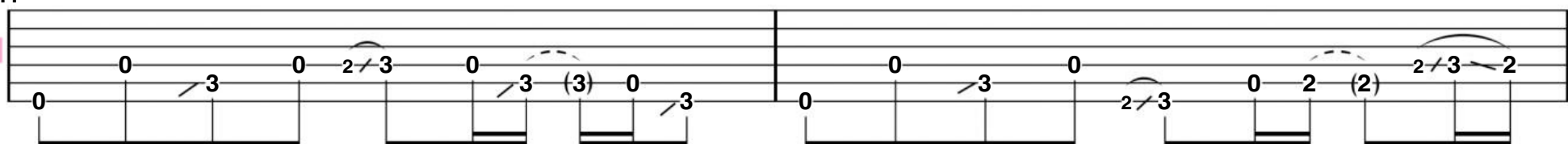
Bass

Bass Fig. 1



D5

11 Gtr. 1



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 9)

D 2nd and 3rd Verses (0:52, 1:44)

2. She was my secret and I was a sinner Had to whisper our confessions

3. Bullets flyin' out of nowhere

Reaching out with no exception

Went to the well and looked in the mirror Raised a glass

Now the preacher cries on the TV wants my money

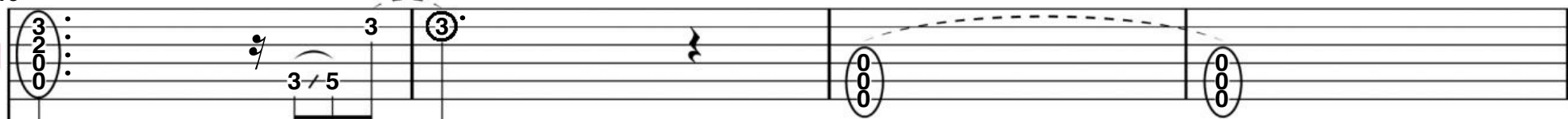
to my re- and my re-

D5

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 2a, twice simile

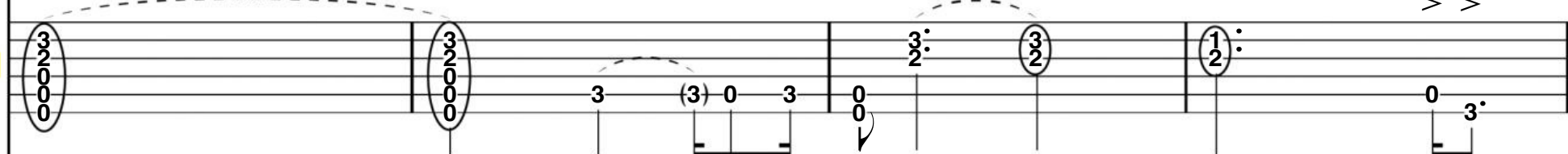
Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill 1 second time (see below bar 21)

13 Gtr. 1



*notes played first time only

Gtr. 2



(tremolo effect off)

> >

Bass



E Chorus (1:05, 1:57, 4:19)

(1., 2.) demption
(3.) demption

How long 'til I drink from the fountain My Redemption
How long 'til I drink from the fountain My Redemption
Oh can you hear me calling (My redemption

How high 'til the top of the mountain (How long)
How high 'til the top of the mountain (How long)
woman came for my redemption (How long)

G5
17 Gtr. 2

D5

G5

D5

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. The score is written for three instruments: Gtr. 1 and 3, Bass, and Drums. The Gtr. 1 and 3 part features a complex, melodic line with many triplets and a final double bar line with a repeat sign. The Bass part provides a steady, rhythmic accompaniment with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The Drums part is a simple, steady beat. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format with a yellow highlight on the left margin.

Take repeat on 3rd Chorus only
2nd time, skip ahead to G (bar 29)
On repeat of 3rd Chorus, skip ahead
to Q Outro (bar 62)

How long	(How long)	How long	(Ah	am I gone	ooh)	For your redemption
How long	(How long)	How long	(I	am I gone	Oh you hear me calling	
				hear you calling now	I hear you calling for my redemption)	
How long	(How long)	How long	(Ah	am I gone	ooh)	For your redemption

F

Csus2

(Ah
G/B

G/B $\flat$
Gtrs. 1, 2 and 3 substitute Rhy. Fill 2 first time on 3rd Chorus (see below)

[illegible]

Rhy. Fill 1 (1:44)

D5

Gtr. 2

Rhy. Fill 2 (4:42)

G/B $\flat$

1/4

3'

Bass Fill 1 (4:42)

1 3'

F (1:31)Go back to **D** 3rd Verse (bar 13)

D5

G/B

D5

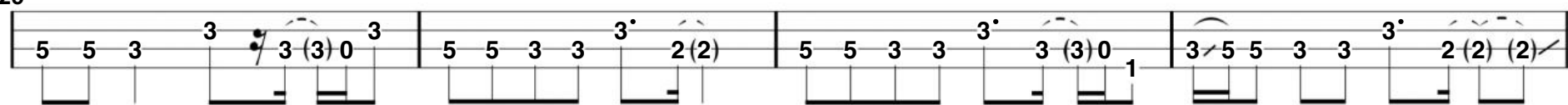
G/B

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 1)

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a twice (see bar 1)

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 1b twice (see bar 1)

25 Bass

**G** (2:23)**H** (2:26)

D5

C/E

F5

G5

D5

C/E

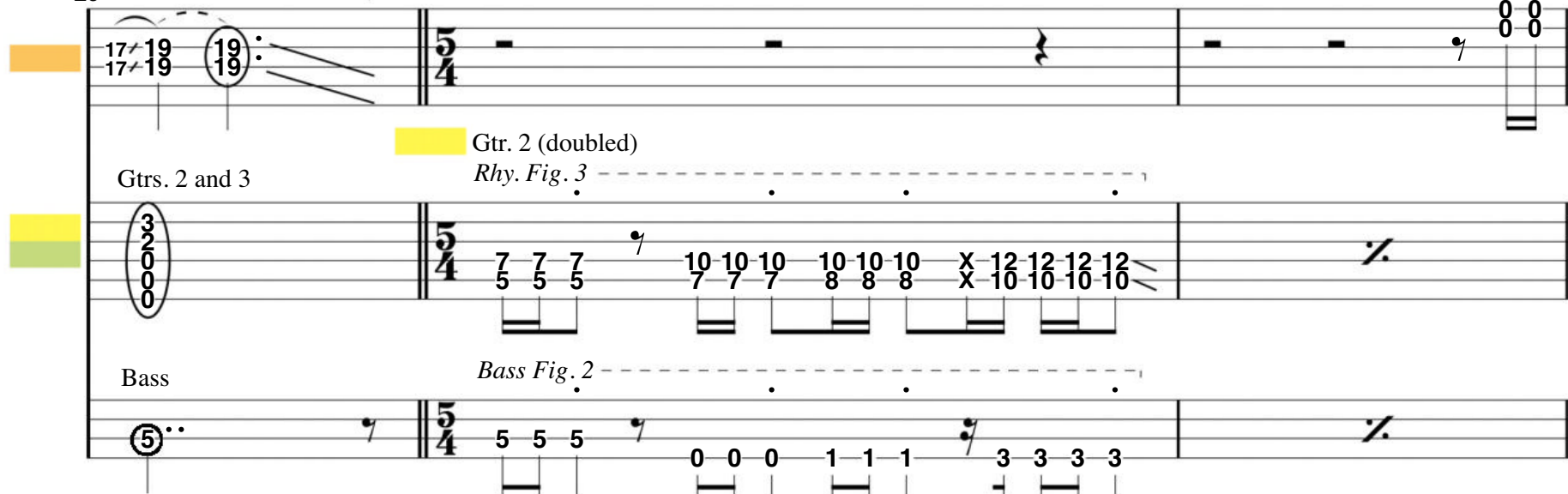
F5

G5

Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.)

(w/wah pedal)

29 w/slide

**I** Guitar Solo (2:34)

D5

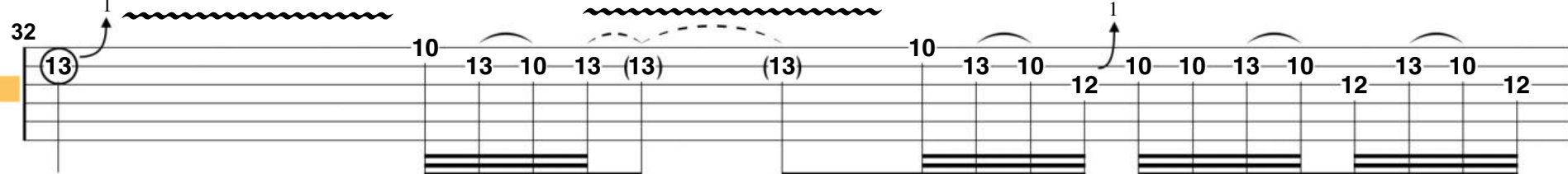
C/E

F5

G5

Gtrs. 2 and 3 play Rhy. Fig. 3 six times (see bar 30)

Gtr. 4



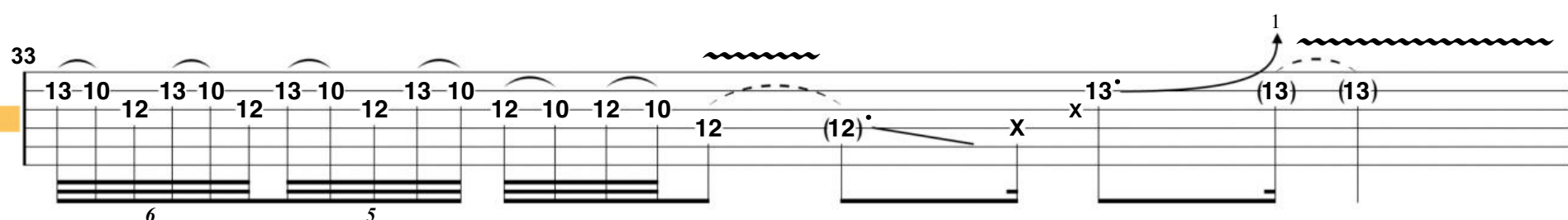
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 six times (see bar 30)

D5

C/E

F5

G5

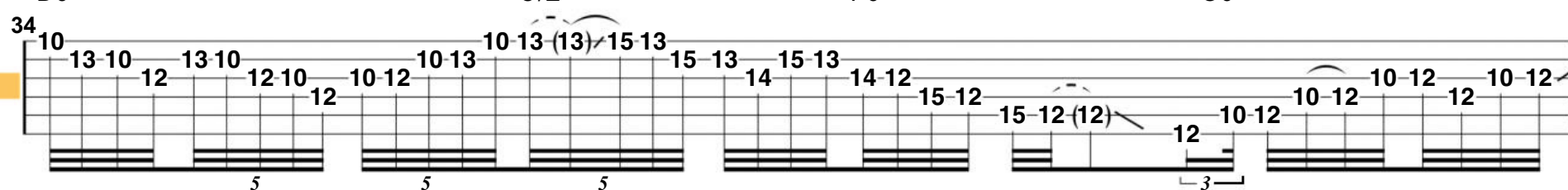


D5

C/E

F5

G5

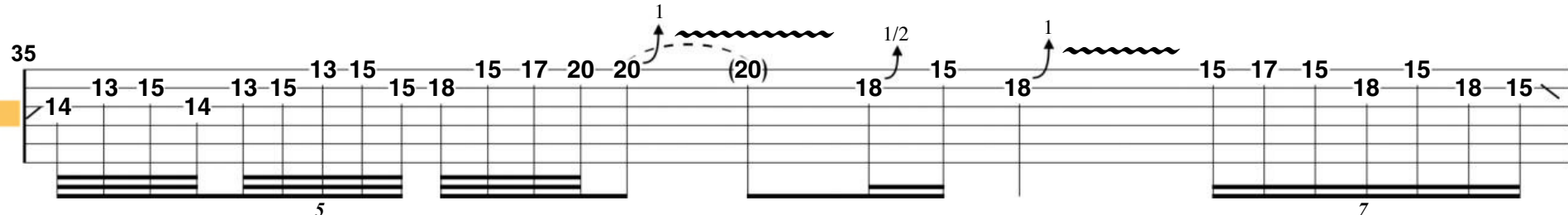


D5

C/E

F5

G5



100

J (2:58)



100%



K Interlude (3:11)

Gtr. 1
(fingerstyle)

42 *let ring throughout*

The image displays the guitar solo for the song "Hotel California" by The Eagles. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a standard six-string guitar notation, showing a sequence of chords and notes. The bottom staff is a bass line, indicated by the label "Bass" on the left. The bass line features a repeating pattern of notes, with a dashed line connecting the first and second measures, and another dashed line connecting the third and fourth measures. The notes in the bass line are circled, and the first measure of the first dashed line is labeled "10-12".

L Breakdown (3:24)

D5 Dsus4 Dm Dsus2 D5 Dsus4 Dm Dsus2

46 Gtr. 1

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' consists of two staves. The upper staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains four measures of music, each with a note value of 10/7. The notes are G4, A4, Bb4, and C5. The lower staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains four measures of music, each with a note value of 0/0. The notes are G3, A3, Bb3, and C4. The first measure of the lower staff has a double bar line.

Gtr. 3
let ring throughout

D5 Dsus4 Dm Dsus2 D5 Dsus4 Dm Dsus2

50 Gtr. 1

The second system of the musical score for 'The Wind' consists of two measures. The first measure contains a sequence of notes: a whole note G4, a half note F#4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, a half note C4, and a whole note B3. The second measure contains a sequence of notes: a whole note A3, a half note G3, a quarter note F#3, a quarter note E3, a half note D3, and a whole note C3. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

Gtr. 3

The 'Scale' section consists of a single staff with the following notes and fingerings: 0, 7, 10°, 0, 7, 8°, 0, 7, 6°, 0, 7, 5°, 0, 7, 10°, 0, 7, 8°, 0, 7, 6°, 0, 7, 5°. The notes are grouped into pairs, with a double bar line after each pair. The final note is a double bar line.

Bass

[illegible]

M (3:53)

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 1)
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a twice (see bar 1)
Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 1b twice (see bar 1)

54 Bass

N 4th Verse (4:06)

Go back to **E** 3rd Chorus (bar 17)

No salvation in an empty promise Hollow wall with no protection I have to kneel at the alter It's the last chance for my redemption

D5

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 twice (see bar 5)

58 Gtr. 2 (w/tremolo effect)

O Outro (5:11)

Can you hear me calling

D5

G/B

D5

G/B

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 three times (see bar 1)

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a three times (see bar 1)

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 1b three times (see bar 1)

Bass

Oh

D5

G/B

Freely

D5

G/B

D5

68 Gtr. 1

Gtr. 2

Gtr. 3

Bass

21

Say it ain't so

My love is a life-taker

C#5 G#5 A5 E5 C#5 G#5 A5 E5

E 3rd Verse (1:55)

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F 2nd and 3rd Choruses (2:20, 3:37)

Say it ain't so Your drug is a

C#5 N.C. G#5 N.C. A5 E5 C#5 G#5

Gtrs. 4 and 5 play Fill 5 2nd time (see below bar 50)

Gtr. 3 (w/dist.)

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 three times (see bar 17)

heartbreaker Say it ain't so

A5 E5 C#5 G#5 A5 E5

2nd time, skip ahead to **I** (bar 50)

G Bridge (2:46)

My love is a life-taker Dear daddy You've cleaned up This bottle Like father I'll write you found Jesus of Stevens step father

C#5 G# A E5 B5 B5/A#

Gtr. 3 Gtr. 4 plays Fill 4 (see below bar 40)

Rhy. Fig. 3 Substitute Fill 3 2nd and 3rd times (see below bar 41)

Bass

1., 2., 3. 4. (3:11)

in spite of years of silence Things are good or so I hear awakens ancient feelings the son is drowning in the blood Yeah yeah yeah yeah

E5 G5 E5 G5 C#5 G# A E

Rhy. Fig. 4

Fill 4 (2:44) Rhy. Fill 3 Fill 6

(A) (E5) B5 B5/A# (A) (E)

Gtr. 4 (w/dist.) Gtr. 3 (w/dist.) Gtr. 2

fade in

H Guitar Solo (3:17)

C#5 G#

Gtr. 3 repeats Rhy. Fig. 4 two times (see bar 42)

Gtr. 4 (w/dist.)

44

Bass

Go back to **E** 3rd Chorus (bar 31)

47

Bass

I (3:59)

life-taker

A5 E5

J Outro (4:02)

C#m7 G#add#2 A E

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

fdbk.

C#m7 G#add#2

A E
Gtr. 2 plays Fill 6
(see below bar 42)

50

Fill 5 (3:37)

(C#5) (G#5) (A5) (E5)

Gtr. 4 (w/dist.) fdbk.

TAB 4/4

pitch: E

Gtr. 5 (w/dist.) fdbk.

TAB 4/4

pitch: E

“MIDDLE OF THE ROAD”

The Pretenders

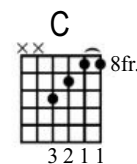
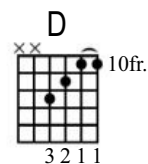
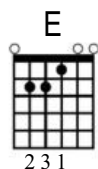
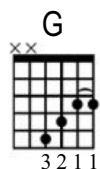
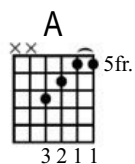
As heard on **LEARNING TO CRAWL**

Words and Music by **CHRISSIE HYNDE** • Transcribed by **DANNY BEGELMAN**

Gtr. 1 is in drop-D tuning (low to high, D A D G B E).

All other gtrs are in standard tuning.

Chords for Gtr. 2
(standard tuning)



A Intro (0:00)

Moderately Fast Rock ♩ = 162

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/light dist.) (drums)

A G E A G E

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/light dist.)

Bass (w/pick)

let ring

let ring

(0:12)

Whew

(2nd time) 1. Middle of the road

A G D C A G D C

Rhy. Fig. 1a

end Rhy. Fig. 1a

Rhy. Fig. 1

*omit note first time

“MIDDLE OF THE ROAD”

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CHRISSIE HYNDE

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B Verses (0:23, 1:05)

(2.) you see the is tryin' to find me I'm That
darndest things

A G D C A G D C

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a eight times (see bar 9)

13 *Gtr. 1*

end Rhy. Fig. 1

C (2:52)

standin' in the middle of life with my pains behind me I got a smile
fat guy's got an eye on keys to the city wearin' big diamond rings and silk suits There's
(3.) is my private cul de sac

A G D C A G D C

17 *Gtr. 1 tacet during bars 17 - 20 on 3rd verse*

corrugated tin shacks for everyone I meet (As)
I can't get from no filled up with kids I mean I don't mean a Hempstead nursery When you
cab to the curb without some little jerk on my back

A G D C A G D C

21

Bass Fill 1 (1:15)

D C

Bass Fill 2 (2:55)

A G D C

long as you don't try draggin' my babe or droppin' a bomb on my street Now come on baby
own a big chunk of the bloody Third World the babies just come with the scenery Now come on baby
Don't harass me can't you tell I'm going home I'm tired as hell I'm not the cat I used to be I got a kid I'm thirty three baby

A G D C A G D C

25 *Rhy. Fig. 2*

D Chorus (0:46, 1:28, 3:10)

Get in the road

Come on

29 *Gtr. 2 Rhy. Fig. 3a*

Gtr. 1 Rhy. Fig. 3

let ring

Bass

3rd time, skip ahead to **G**
Harmonica Solo / Outro (bar 80)

now in the middle of the road yeah

A G E A G E

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 2nd time (see below bar 50)

end Rhy. Fig. 3a

33

let ring

end Rhy. Fig. 3

2.

A G D C A G D C

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Figs. 1 and 1a eleven times (see bar 9)

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

fingerstyle

A G D C A G D C

Gtr. 3

*Bass substitutes Bass Fill 2
3rd time (see below)*

Fill 1 (1:37)

(A) (G) (E)

Gtr. 3 (w/dist.)

fingerstyle

TAB $\frac{4}{4}$ - z y 9 | y 8 z y 8 8 y | - y 8 7 y 8 7 |

53 Gtr. 3

D C A G D C A G

1/4

Bass

57

D C A G D C A G

61

D C A G D C A G

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 27)
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a (see bar 9)

65

D C A G E A G E

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Figs. 3 and 3a (see bar 29)

1/4 1/4 1/4

F Breakdown (2:29)

One
Two
Three
Four

A G

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a (see bar 9)

Gtr. 4 (w/clean tone)

72

A G E

2 0 2 0 3 0 3 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

* -1/2 -1/2 -1/2 -1/2

*Lower pitch by detuning string.

A G

5 6 7 5 6 7 5 6 7

5 5 3 3

1., 2., 3.

4.

Go back to **C** (bar 15)

76

Whew

3. In the middle of the road

(play 4 times)

Gr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a (see bar 9)

D C A G D C D C

8 9 10 8 7 9 8 7 9 5 6 7 5 6 7 7 8 9 10 8 7 9 8 7 9 5 6 7 5 6 7 3 5 3 3 5 3 3 5 3 3

G Harmonica Solo / Outro (3:23)

A G

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a (see bar 9)

Gtr. 1

(play 5 times)

80 Gtr. 1 *(play 5 times)*

**omit note first time*

Bass

A G D C A G D C E5 F5 F#5

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a
(see bar 9)

84

G5 A G

Gtr. 2 plays first four bars of
Rhy. Fig. 3a (see bar 29)

let ring

A G E

let ring

88

[illegible]

A G E

A G E

92 Gtr. 2

Gtr. 1

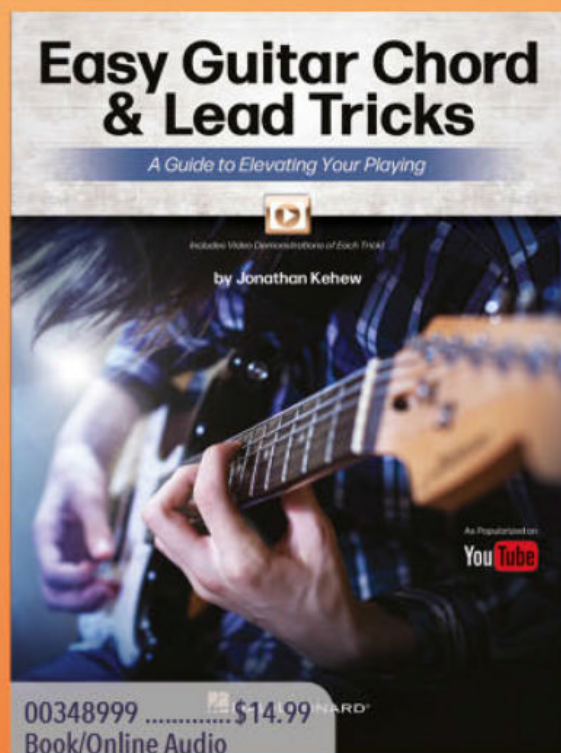
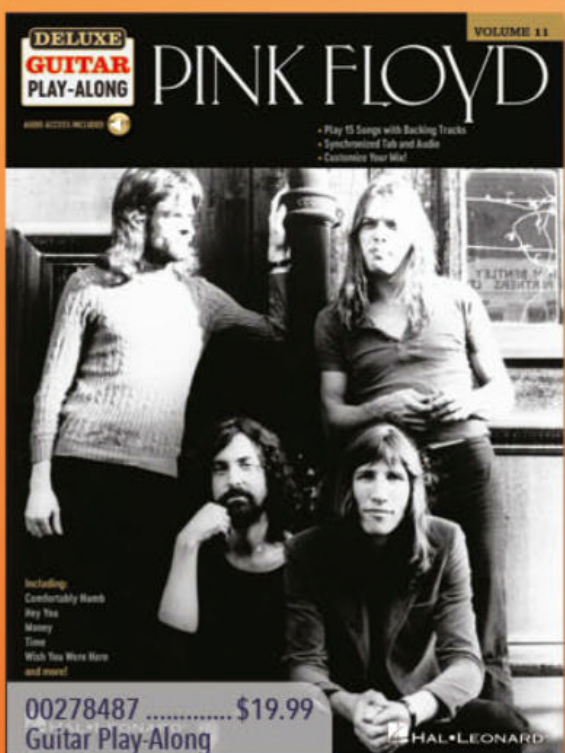
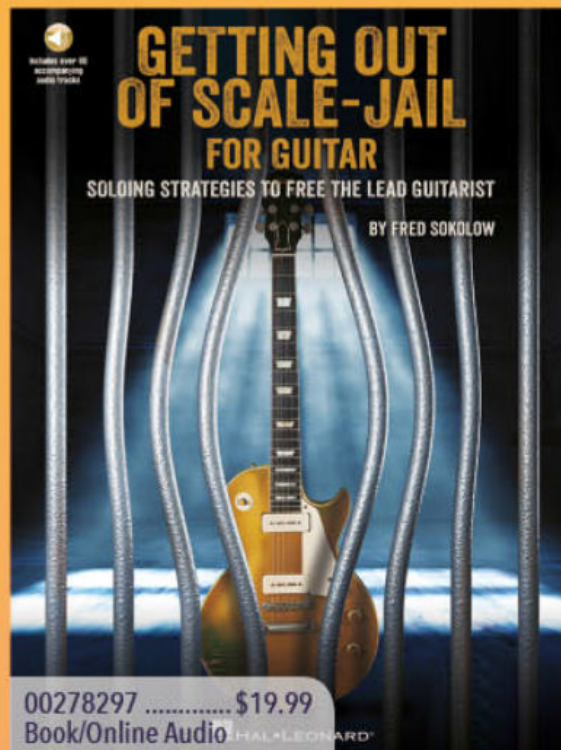
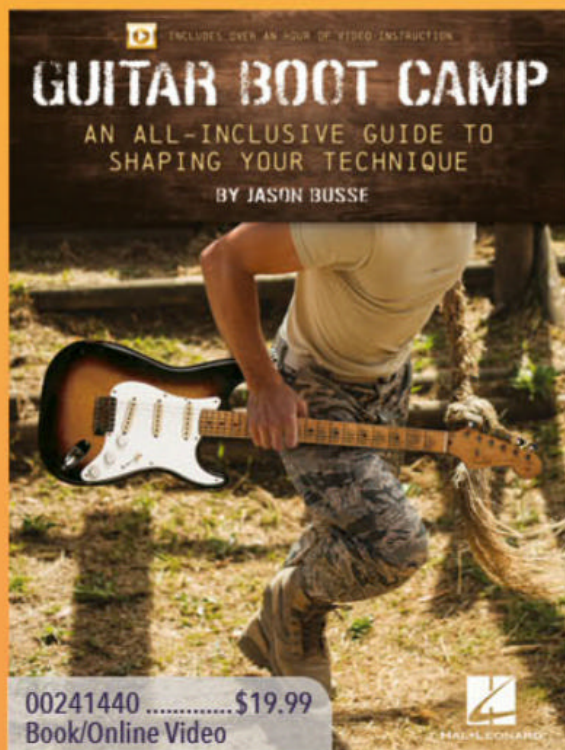
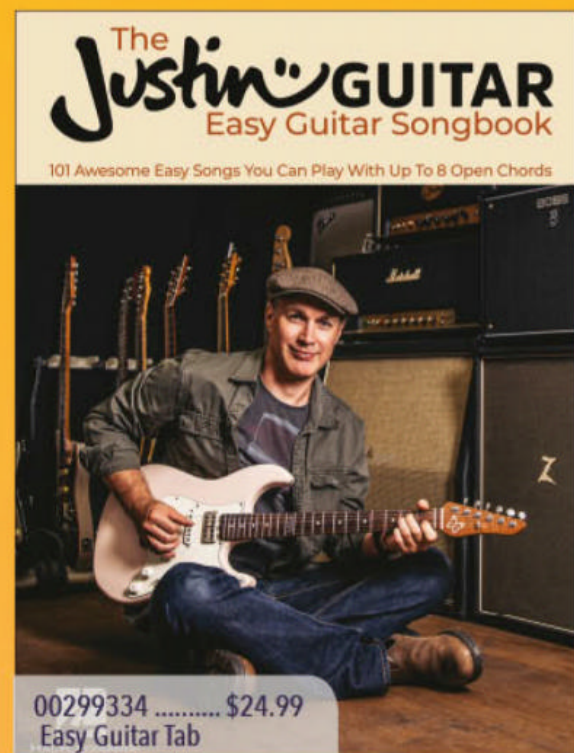
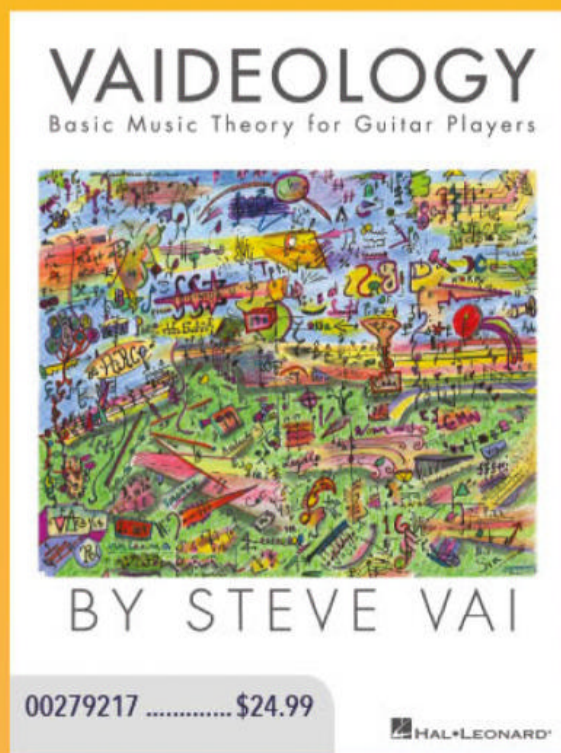
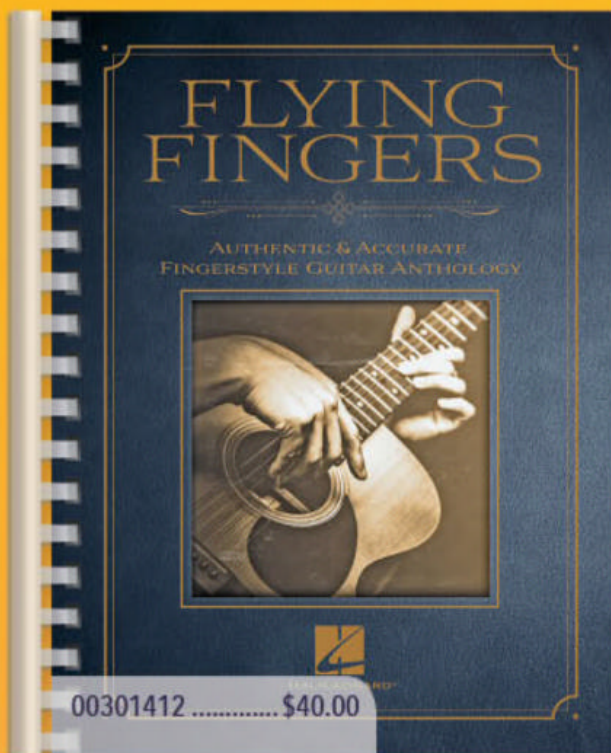
let ring

let ring

[illegible]

Bass

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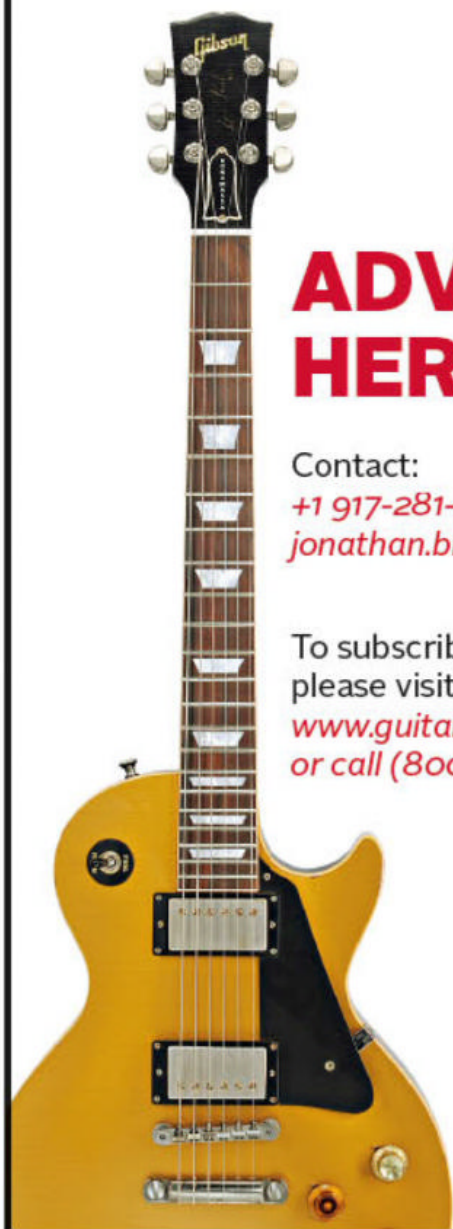
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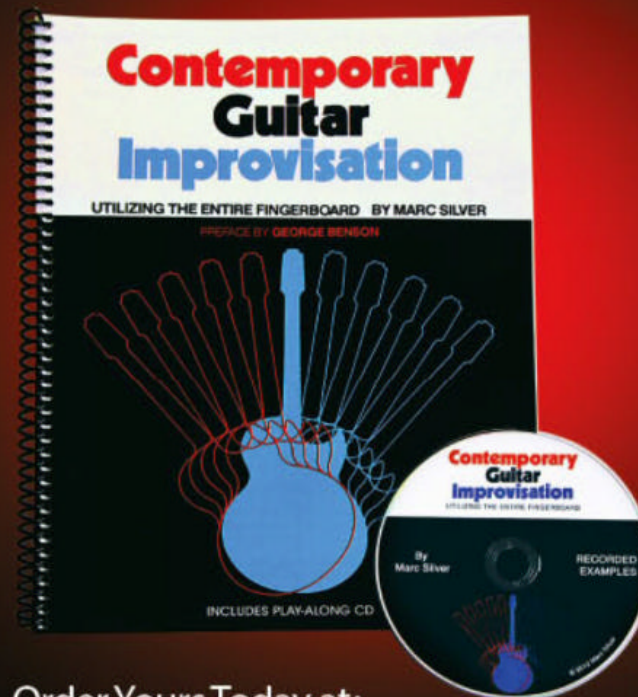
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"LIGHT MY FIRE"

THE DOORS | *THE DOORS*, 1967 | GUITARIST: ROBBY KRIEGER | STORY BY CHRIS GILL



ALTHOUGH THE DOORS were formed less than a year before recording their debut album at Sunset Sound in August and September 1966, the band quickly developed its unique sound and advanced chops from playing four to five sets a day during a residency at London Fog and as the house band at the Whisky A Go Go on Hollywood's Sunset Strip. Guitarist Robby Krieger immediately earned praise for his sophisticated, jazz-inspired playing, a style that he remarkably developed quickly after making the transition from acoustic flamenco and folk to electric, also about a year before recording *The Doors*.

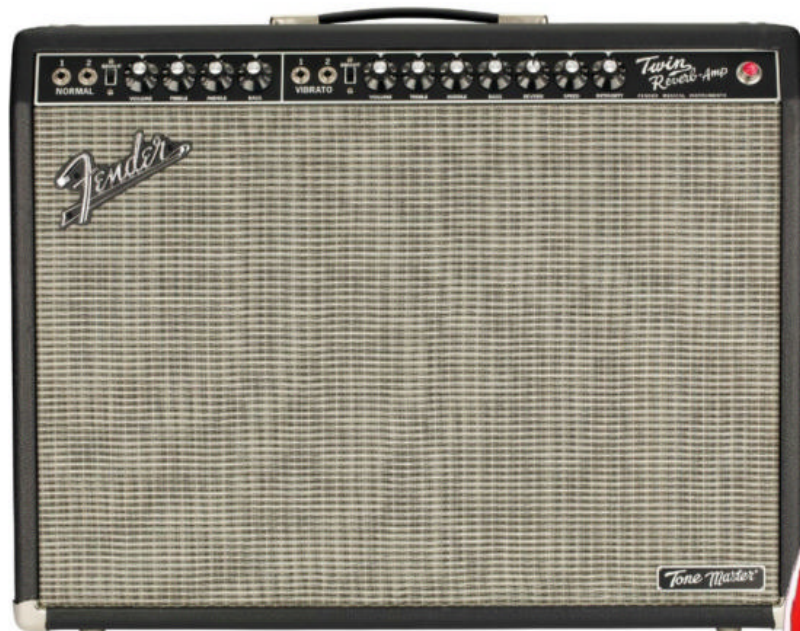
After the band's debut single, "Break On Through," failed to do just that, the Doors released "Light My Fire" as a follow-up, which quickly shot up the charts before hitting Number One on the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart. The album version of "Light My Fire" remains an iconoclastic classic, with its unusual blend of a baroque-inspired organ figure, Jim Morrison's charismatic vocals that range from lounge lizard croon-

ing to aggressive screams and, especially, Krieger's deftly melodic and jazzy solo.

Thanks to Krieger's flamenco background, he avoided the usual pentatonic blues scale clichés that defined mid-Sixties rock guitar. Krieger played fingerstyle without a pick, which, coupled with his lightly overdriven tone, gave his guitar a rich, warm tone that had more in common with players like Wes Montgomery and Kenny Burrell than Eric Clapton or Mike Bloomfield. His guitar was a 1964 Gibson SG Special solidbody with a pair of P90 single-coil pickups, which he plugged into a rented Fender Twin Reverb amp.

Beyond his fingerstyle technique, another key to Krieger's warm tone is the fact that he preferred the sound of old, dirty strings. "I never change my strings," he told *Guitar Player* magazine. "The older they get, the better they are for me. Sure, they go dead, but I like a dead sound. The dirtier, the better."

Robby Krieger with his Gibson SG in 1968



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- Epiphone SG Special P-90
- Fender Tone Master Twin Reverb



ORIGINAL GEAR

GUITAR: 1964 Gibson SG Special (neck pickup), Volume: 10, Tone: 10

AMPS: c. 1965-66 Fender Twin Reverb (Input: Vibrato Channel 1, Bright: On, Volume: 7, Treble: 8, Middle: 5, Bass: 2, Reverb: 2, Speed: 0, Intensity: 0) with unknown pair of 12-inch speakers, probably Jensen C12N or Oxford 12T6

EFFECTS: None

STRINGS/TUNING: Ernie Ball Slinky .010-.046/Standard

PICK: None

TONE TIP: The narrow placement of the SG Special's P90 pickups, with the neck pickup closer to the middle than usual, provides a slightly sharper attack critical to this song's guitar tone. Get your chops up, too, as the bulk of the sound lies in the fingers.



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