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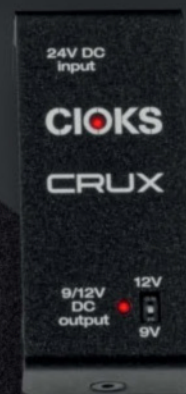
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WOODSHED

VOL. 45 | NO. 9 | SEPTEMBER 2024

NEWS FROM THE ANDYS

▶ **IN THE MONTHS** ahead, you'll probably notice a bit more turnover in terms of our columnists in the back of the mag. This is purely (and obviously) to keep things fresh and interesting. We added David Grissom a couple of issues ago, and this issue sees the arrival of Andy Wood (Rascal Flatts, Sebastian Bach), a guy who's the very embodiment of the concept of "professional guitarist." Of course, as is often the case in life, the arrival of one Andy means the farewell of another, and Andy Aledort's In Deep column (which has been a *GW* mainstay since before I got here in 2011) is taking a breather. Don't worry — our Andy isn't going anywhere! He's still an associate editor at *GW*, and his presence can be felt in every issue. Anyway, please stay tuned for even more changes back there.



A FUZZY WEEKEND: Although I wouldn't quite call this a review (we have people who do that sorta thing for a living), I had a chance to check out the Aclam The Mocker fuzz pedal during a long, gig-packed weekend in Indiana in May. Although the pedal has a strong Beatles connection — it's a replica of the fuzz circuit on the band's now-super-rare Vox UL730 amps... the name is a reference to a classic Ringo Starr line from *A Hard Day's Night*... "The Mocker" is written in something akin to the *Sgt. Pepper's* font — it's actually an incredible, all-around fuzz, even for guitarists who don't give a rat's ass about the Beatles. The fuzz is creamy, smooth and sustain-y, just the sort of thing that might make your bandmates turn around and mouth the word "Whoa!" during one of your guitar solos. And yeah, that happened to me.

CORRECTION: In our feature about the greatest New Jersey guitarists of all time [July 2024], we spelled the late Criss Oliva's last name correctly in the header but then decided to call him "Olivia" several times in the body of the story. He's actually mentioned twice on page 12 in this issue, but we think we've got it right this time!
— *Damian Fanelli*

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John Rzeznik recalls the making of the Goo Goo Dolls' breakthrough 1998 album, *Dizzy Up the Girl*. We also check in with Towa Bird, Nick Johnston, Jamie Dickson, Parlor Greens' Jimmy James, Blushing's Michelle Soto and Witherfall's Jake Dreyer. Meanwhile, Eric Gales shows us his pedalboard, while Orianthi tells us about that blinged-out PRS guitar on her April 2013 *Guitar World* cover.

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Although the Gibson Flying V, which was introduced at the same time as the Gibson Explorer, found a small but devoted cult of players during the late Fifties and Sixties, the Explorer didn't really catch on until the mid Seventies.



COVER PHOTO: JEN ROSENSTEIN / JENROSENSTEIN.COM

SOUNDING BOARD

Got something you want to say? **EMAIL US AT:** GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com

Why no Kerry King transcription?

Imagine how excited I was to receive my most recent *Guitar World* magazine [July 2024] and discover Kerry King on the cover! In times past, GW made it a practice to include at least one transcribed song from the cover artist/band. This practice appears to have gone by the wayside, as the King issue includes such gems as the Who's "Pure and Easy" and the backyard barbeque staple "Running on Empty" by Jackson Browne. It would be awesome if GW could return to the old days when a reader could not only read about the artist/band, but also learn one of their most influential pieces. Just a thought.

— Ransom Boynton

[Ed.'s note: Gang — all's I can say is (as I've said here before), song approvals take much, much, much longer now than they did in the past (I'd say, maybe, as of about five or six years ago); please be aware that a Kerry King transcription is coming up — as is, for that matter, a Slash tune! — D.F.]

An ongoing sidebar conversation

I'm going to have to second DJ John's motion [July 2024 *Sounding Board*] that sidebars be terminated. Maybe not so vehemently — but they are silly. I multi-task all day long at work and just want to read a story without marking pages or going back and reading in the margins.

I understand... it's a business, you are trying to get as much info into the mag in the fewest pages for us guitar obsessed, but maybe brainstorm a new format.

I also agree with DJ John that, overall, the mag is great and has been well put together for years. A good mix of old and new. This is a minor quibble.

— Thomas M. Swem

You missed a great New Jersey guitarist

A list of the greatest New Jersey guitarists [July 2024] is incomplete without Tom Monda. Check out Thank You Scientist's "My Famed Disappearing Act" for a sample of his ferocious playing.

— Guru Surya

Star of GW's 2nd-most-viewed video!

I just recently subscribed to *Guitar World*, so not sure if you've featured this artist before my sub started, but you should interview Michael Angelo Batio. He's touring with Manowar now.

— ang.rose1

Bursting with Personalities

I've become a fan of your Personalities features, the ones where you interview guitarists who have had interesting careers but often fly below the radar today. Here are a few suggestions! Frank Marino [pictured, right], Glenn Tilbrook, perhaps something on the late Shawn Lane and Criss Oliva (although it was cool to see Oliva mentioned in your New Jersey story), plus Lita Ford, Vernon Reid and session guitarist Tim Pierce, who I noticed was mentioned in the Sounding Board a few issues ago. Thank you for your consideration.

— ambrose567



COMPETELY RANDOM PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Savatage's Johnny Lee Middleton [left] and Criss Oliva — doing his best Jason Becker impression — hang out on a New York City rooftop, August 8, 1991. "[Criss] had the fluidity of guys like George Lynch and Warren DeMartini, but with an aggressive, melodic conviction that fit Savatage perfectly," Alex Skolnick told *Guitar World* in 2009. "His solos had a flash that would have worked with any popular Eighties hard rock band, but his rhythms had an intensity and crunch that were reminiscent of Black Sabbath and Deep Purple, and this gave his playing a dark, melodic flavor."

SEND LETTERS TO: Sounding Board, *Guitar World/Future*, 347 W. 36th St., Suite 1700, New York, NY 10018 or GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com.

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READER ART

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 .jpg or screenshot of the image.

And (obviously...), please remember to include your name!



SLASH BY ADAM SCOTT



WARREN HAYNES BY BRYAN CASPARY

DEFENDERS ⚡ of the Faith



Cohen Hauck

AGE: 16

HOMETOWN: Oroville, CA

GUITARS: All Parts '52-styled Telecaster w/Bigsby, PRS SE Custom 22, Hohner HS-35, Gibson MV-X

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: The Cars "Just What I Needed," King's X "Summerland," Jerry Garcia "Sugaree"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Phred Guitars "Dead Bolt"



Jerry Vayne

AGE: 54

HOMETOWN: Westminster, CO

GUITARS: ESP Michael Wilton Strat, Dean Eric Peterson "Old Skull" V, Oktober Guitars XP, ESP EC-1000 Deluxe, Dean 1980 Cadillac, Epiphone 1996 LP Standard, Fender Telecaster Modern

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Songs by Iron Maiden for a Maiden tribute band, Nineties-to-current alt-metal for my band Shattered Vinyl, my new single "One More Minute" and songs for my new CD, *The Pandendum Effect*

GEAR I MOST WANT: Fender Dave Murray Signature Strat, Neural DSP Quad Cortex

Joshua Sinclair

AGE: 45

HOMETOWN:

Des Moines, IA
GUITARS (AND THE NAMES I'VE GIVEN THEM):

Guild M-240E
Troubadour (Tot),
Gretsch 5021E
Rancher Penguin
Parlor (Madge),
Taylor GS Mini (Tater), Lyle W460
Hummingbird 1969 (Tex), Gibson Les Paul Jr. 1956, Seagull SG Burst Ukulele (Little Fella)

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Everette "Dang the Whiskey," Sunny Sweeney "Drink Myself Single," the Cadillac Three "Why Ya Gotta Go Out Like That," Billy Strings "Dust in a Baggie," Joshua Sinclair "Silicone & Wine," "Check One Two" and "Roll My Joints"

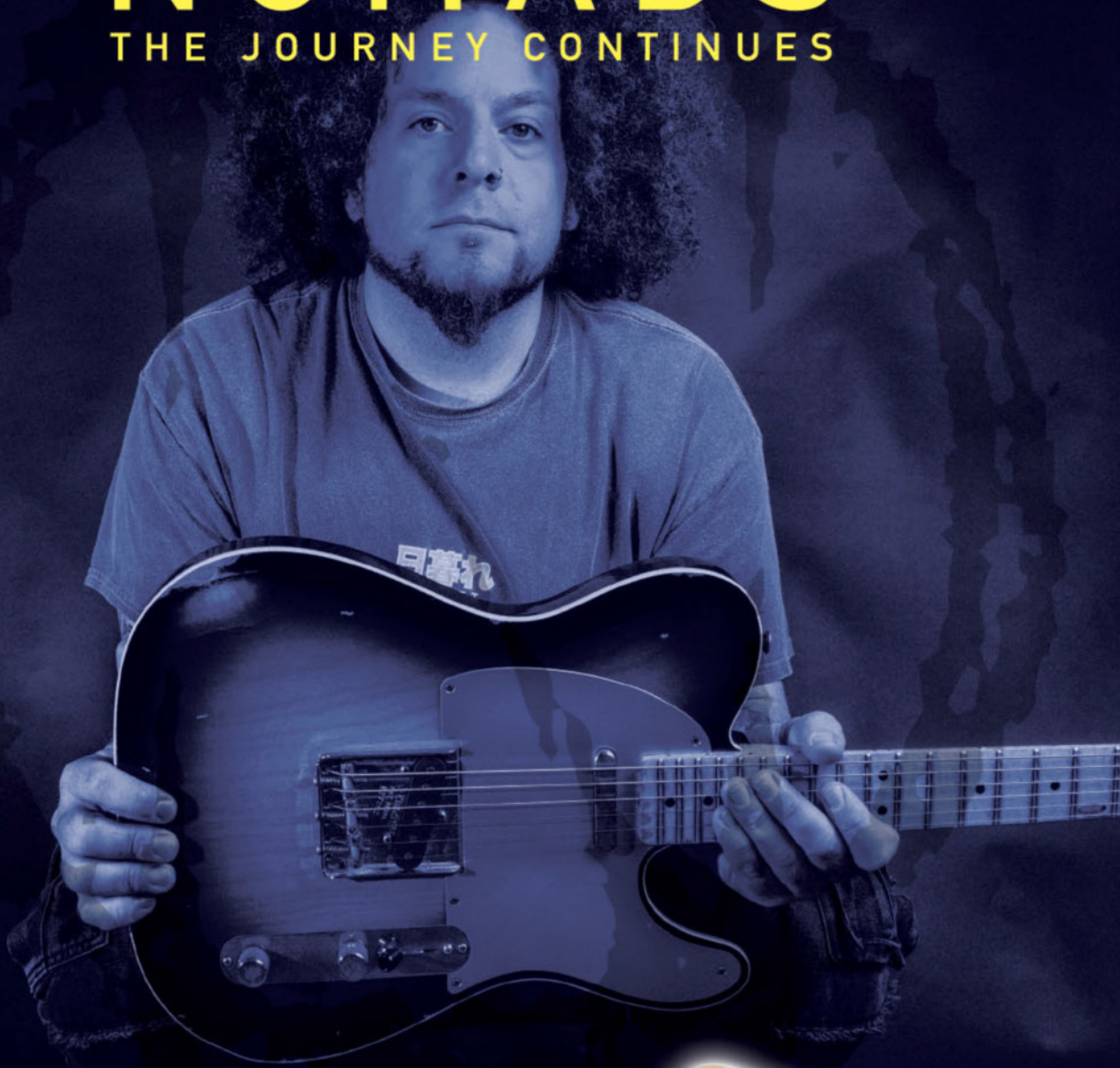
GEAR I WANT MOST: TC-Helicon Harmony V100 acoustic amp, T-Rex Soulmate, Carl Martin Acoustic GiG



Are you a Defender of the Faith? Send a photo, along with your answers to the questions above, to **GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com**. And pray!

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Free as a Bird

THE TRADITION OF GUITAR-DRIVEN POP IS ALIVE AND WELL ON VIRAL STAR TOWA BIRD'S DEBUT ALBUM, *AMERICAN HERO*

By Jim Beugez

▶ **TRADITIONAL PATHS TO** rock 'n' roll stardom — such as blockbuster album sales and sold-out tours — may have become less and less common in our post-everything world, but Towa Bird isn't worried. She's busy punching her own ticket to the top.

Over the past few years, the breakout TikTok guitarist has ridden a wave of online celebrity to a major-label record deal, an appearance on *Late Night with Seth Meyers* and a scorching performance on Olivia Rodrigo's Disney+ documentary, *Olivia Rodrigo: driving home 2 u*. Now, with her debut album, *American Hero*, the 25-year-old guitarist is finding new ways to use her instrument in popular music by pulling from her classic-rock roots.

"I can't really think of any current guitar heroes that I have," she says from her home in Los Angeles. "All of my guitar heroes are either into their seventies or no longer with us." Bird grew up in Hong Kong, Thailand and London on "a pretty strict diet" of Sixties and Seventies rock 'n' roll. "That's how I fell in love with music — listening to Hendrix and Zeppelin and Pink Floyd and the Who," she says.

Digging through her father's record collection, she found a bottomless well of inspiration, and then followed the tendrils to rebellious rockers like Joan Jett and enigmatic virtuosos like Prince. As she →



Towa Bird on stage in Nashville last year with her Kramer The 84 ("The Illusionist") model

“All of my guitar heroes are either into their seventies or no longer with us”



expanded her rock music listening, though, groups like the Arctic Monkeys and the 1975 stood out as contemporary favorites. “They still incorporate the guitar, but it’s less of a unique voice and more of a rhythm instrument,” she says.

Bird’s love of first-wave hard rock — and her knack for pop-music earworms — are immediately apparent on *American Hero*, released in June on Interscope Records.

“There were a couple of years where pop music, or popular rock music, whatever we’re calling it, was quite cerebral and took itself very seriously,” she says. “And I think with this record, I really wanted people to feel joyous, maybe like they did in the Sixties when they went to a Beatles concert where it was just euphoria and joy, and they could have fun and dance and listen to live instruments and connect with their friends.”

While *American Hero* is undeniably pop, Bird’s approach to songcraft and production neither marginalize her main instrument nor treat it as mere window dressing. Instead, her guitar is the foundation of *American Hero*. Beyond the big-beat drums and sparkling synths, her processed guitar tones on songs like “Drain Me” and “FML” are polished, arena ready and 100 percent fun — just how rock should be.

“It was really important as I was writing this project [*to consider*] how the studio versions would translate onto a live stage, and could I make that feel kind of seamless,” she says. “But also, when they come to a live show, they hear something that’s slightly different from the studio version.”

American Hero follows a series of four singles Bird released in 2023, culminating with the *Live from Terminal 5* EP, which served up live renditions of three tunes, a playful cover of Blur’s “Song 2” and a new song, “B.I.L.L.S.,” which gave listeners a glimpse into the direction she would take on her first full-length. “The ‘B.I.L.L.S.’ riff is one of my favorite guitar riffs I’ve ever written,” she says. “I like the modes I use; I like that there’s a flat note in there, and it’s so fun to play. It just creates a perfect circle in my brain.”

Armed with her Gibson Firebird and

Fender Telecaster, which she ran through a myriad of amps, stomp boxes and even Cory Wong plug-ins, Bird indulged her proclivity for warmly fuzzed-out and hyper-driven guitar tones. She often writes songs and tracks her parts directly, and then experiments with tones when re-amping.

“There was no one thing that I really stuck to, but I would usually go with a humbucker guitar into the Supro because it heats up really nicely, and you can get a crunch tone if you dig in, which is always really nice,” she says. “The most important thing for me is to get the idea out, and then I will mess around with tones. I use a lot of fuzz pedals.”

For her solo on “Boomerang,” Bird created the illusion of dueling soloists by tracking two unique guitar parts so it sounds like two different guitar players. “I used two different guitars for that, and two different setups and amp sounds, essentially kind of giving the illusion of a band — but it’s just me.”

For as much guitar ear candy as Bird packed into *American Hero*, she always keeps a few tricks set aside for the live rock show experience. “Trust me, I’m definitely adding extra guitar solos in there [*live*],” she says. “I’m taking all of my opportunities to make it feel live and fresh.”



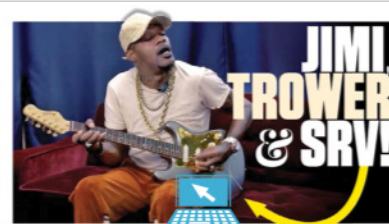
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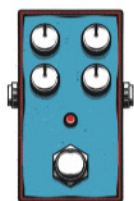
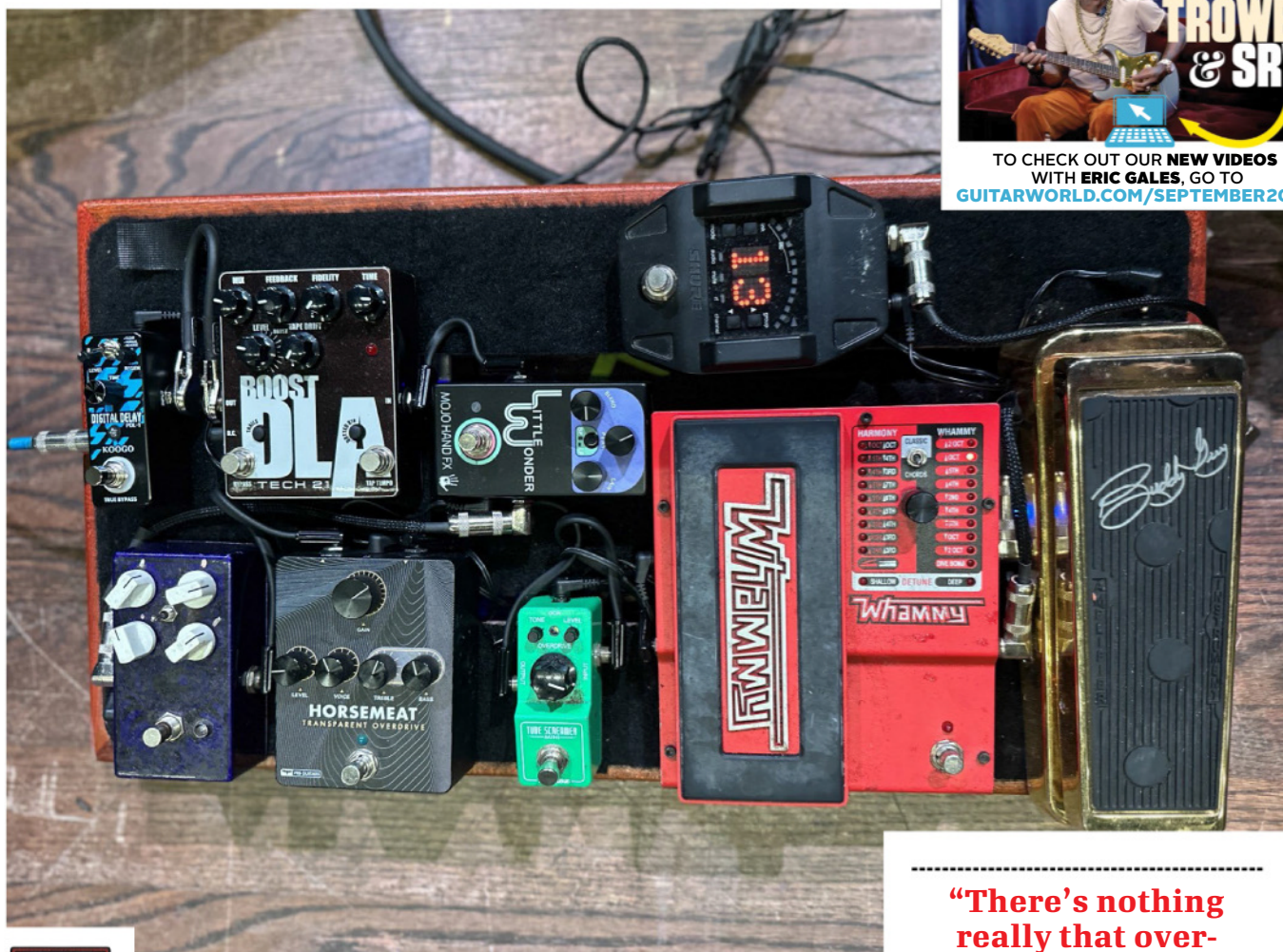
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MY PEDALBOARD ERIC GALES

WHAT THE MODERN-DAY BLUES HERO SEES
WHEN HE LOOKS DOWN

“USING THE PEDALBOARD is an extension or a way of aiding me in some sounds I can’t naturally get with the guitar and amp. It’s nothing extreme — just a few things that give me a little more comfortability. There’s nothing really that over-washes the natural sound of the guitar and amp; it’s more or less to embellish it.

“I’m going through the Shure [Digital] Wireless, the floor-mounted kind. My tuner is built into that; I’m not sure of the model number [Shure GLXD16+], but it’s there. That goes into the Buddy Guy [Cry

Baby BG95] wah — and Jimmy Dunlop personally dolled it up. I have a couple of other ones I have blinged out, like the 14-karat gold one, and I swap them out from time to time.

“That goes into the DigiTech Whammy, and that goes into the Mini Tube Screamer [TSMINI Overdrive]. But I swap that sometimes with the MXR Raw Dawg [EG74 Overdrive]; it all depends on what I’m using on a particular run. But generally, almost nine times out of 10, it’s the Raw Dawg or the Mini Tube Screamer. That goes into a PRS pedal I started using

within the last couple of months [Horsemeat Transparent Overdrive].

“From there, it goes into the Colossus by Mojo Hand; that’s the purple pedal. It’s more of a fuzz, which strictly flows out and goes into an envelope filter [Mojo Hand Little Wonder FX]. That’s specific to maybe some funk stuff or used when necessary. Out of that goes my Tech 21 [Boost] DLA, and out of that is another delay [Koogo Digital Delay Echo], which I have set for reverse delay.

“The Tech 21 DLA is on all the time — that’s my normal delay. The [Koogo] was only added to the pedalboard about a week ago [April 2024]. I like to dip and dive into some ambient reverse stuff, so that’s what it’s used for.” — Andrew Daly

IF I HAD TO CHOOSE ONLY ONE PEDAL FOR A FULL SHOW:

“It would be the Tech 21 DLA; it’s always on. I like the trickling off in a quarter-note fashion of that, which might be due to my heavy influence from Eric Johnson throughout the years.”

Have someone in mind for a My Pedalboard feature? GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com

"It felt like nobody in the instrumental world was playing technical guitar on an S-style instrument," Nick Johnston says



Nick Johnston

THE CANADIAN INSTRUMENTAL MASTERMIND CONTINUES THE QUEST FOR TENSION ON HIS LATEST ALBUM, *CHILD OF BLISS*

By Amit Sharma

▶ FOR THE PAST eight years, Nick Johnston's name has appeared on more Schecter guitars than anyone else's — an impressive feat, given how their list of signature endorsees includes Robert Smith, Synyster Gates and Robin Zander. But it goes even further than that; for a number of years the Canadian guitarist's Diamond Series Traditional was the best-selling artist model for the industry as a whole. Ask Johnston why and he'll tell you it was a mixture of good fortune and impeccable timing, likening the experience to catching a falling star.

"We filled a void in the market by pure chance," he tells *GW*. "At the time, it felt like nobody in the instrumental world was playing technical guitar on an S-style instrument. People quickly realized my guitar was cheaper than a Mexican Strat and better made, coming in ice cream colors with locking tuners, brass inlays and more. Somehow the most magical thing happened, and it became this industry-

standard tool. I still don't know how they make it at that price point. I've never seen an import and custom shop guitar so close in quality."

On his latest solo album, *Child of Bliss*, his red custom shop signature was fed into a mixture of Orange, Friedman, Mesa/Boogie and Marshall amps. Given his penchant for direct sounds, no pedals were involved, but since completing the recordings he's finally found "the one." "Recently I've been using a Brass Tacks boost/overdrive by Riveter Electric," he says. "They're made by a guy out in Nashville. I don't normally use pedals, but this one feels right."

Of course, no Nick Johnston album would be complete without a generous serving of chromatics, twisting listeners' ears in the way Guthrie Govan, Greg Howe and Richie Kotzen have done so many times in the past. Moments of ethereal beauty devolve and decay, sinking into the abyss before they miraculously find a way back out into the light.

"It's like setting the table with all this nice cutlery and fine china and then bringing a hammer out"

"I can be a petulant child when it comes to that stuff," Johnston says. "Songs like the title track go from pretty to weird then dark — classical kind of arrangements turning into a twisted guitar fantasy. It's like setting the table with all this nice cutlery and fine china and then bringing a hammer out! It's okay for things to sound broken."

That very notion of disorder, he says, plays a big part in the identity of rock guitar playing. Some rules are made to be broken. "It's that uncontrollable flame, you know?" he says. "I stole that mindset from Yngwie Malmsteen, Eddie Van Halen and — more recently — from what Nuno Bettencourt has been doing. Some ideas might not seem right to play on paper, but they might still be perfect for that part. It's good to smash things up a bit!"

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LOST CLASSICS: Goo Goo Dolls

JOHN RZEZNIK RECALLS THE MAKING OF THE BAND'S BREAKTHROUGH ALBUM, 1998'S *DIZZY UP THE GIRL*

By Mark McStea

▶ WITH THE RELEASE of *Dizzy Up the Girl* in 1998, Goo Goo Dolls completed the transition from indie favorites to mainstream rock monsters. They'd already experienced chart success with their previous album, 1995's *A Boy Named Goo*, boosted by the unexpected success of "Name," which saw them enter the singles chart for the first time, peaking at Number 5. But the success of *Boy* paled in comparison to *Dizzy*, which spawned four hits, including radio favorite "Iris."

Singer/guitarist John Rzeznik remembers the change in the band's status and is understandably unapologetic for the alienation of some of the band's early fans.

"We'd got used to our underground cult status," he says. "Once the record broke big, our hipster fan base basically said, 'fuck you' to us. [Laughs] We had to just think, *whatever*, you know? We were always grateful that we were able to get out to a much bigger audience. When you come up from the underground DIY punk scene, those people shit all over you if you dare to break out of that niche. We took a lot of shit for succeeding. We lost a few friends, but we made a lot more new ones."

When the album came out, it marked a subtle shift in direction from the previous record, *A Boy Named Goo*. But, of course, compared to your first album, 1987's *Goo Goo Dolls*, it was profoundly different.

There was no conscious decision on our part where we thought, "now we need a hit" or something. I think we basically made the same kind of record we always made; we always had some ballads on the albums, for instance. That's really a product of the albums I grew up listening to, which would mix fast rock songs with slower songs or whatever. To someone on the outside of the process, things look like a leap, but it takes six months to write and record an album. I made the first album when I was 21 and *Dizzy* was done nearly 10 years later; obviously you change and grow as you get older. My tastes changed, and it would have been foolish for me to still be doing what I did from 10 years earlier.

The overall feel of the album is very optimistic. Is that a reflection of how you

were feeling as a band?

I think so. It felt like we were in the last days of acting like children, as the last album had done very well and there was some pressure to match its success. But then I said to myself that I have no control over what would happen once it was released, so I freed myself up to write whatever I wanted.

Was it a smooth recording process, given that you already had five albums under your belts?

We spent a lot of time in pre-production. You shouldn't be burning through a ton of money experimenting in the studio. This was the first album where we had a good budget and a real producer, Rob Cavallo, and those things definitely impacted on what we thought we could achieve. That meant we knew the basics of exactly what we would be doing, with the proviso that we'd be able to then develop and expand our ideas. He'd make suggestions as we went along, and they were always great, so we were happy to go along with what he came up with. If we thought the ideas were a little "out there" for us as a band, we could think to ourselves that it was the producer's idea. [Laughs] We spent a couple of months in total, including all the production work, etc. Jack Puig, who was mixing, spent up to three days on some of the tracks.

Was there much recorded that didn't make the cut?

I'm a brutal editor, and before anything ever gets into the studio as contenders, I edit most of it out. I never think I'll record everything and save stuff for B-sides or whatever. If it doesn't excite me, why bother recording or releasing it? I know guys who'll sneeze into their iPhone and release it because they're so sure that everything they do is brilliant. [Laughs]

"Iris" became a huge hit and is one of those songs everybody knows — even though they don't necessarily know who recorded it. Was it obvious it was going to be a major song for you when you were recording it?

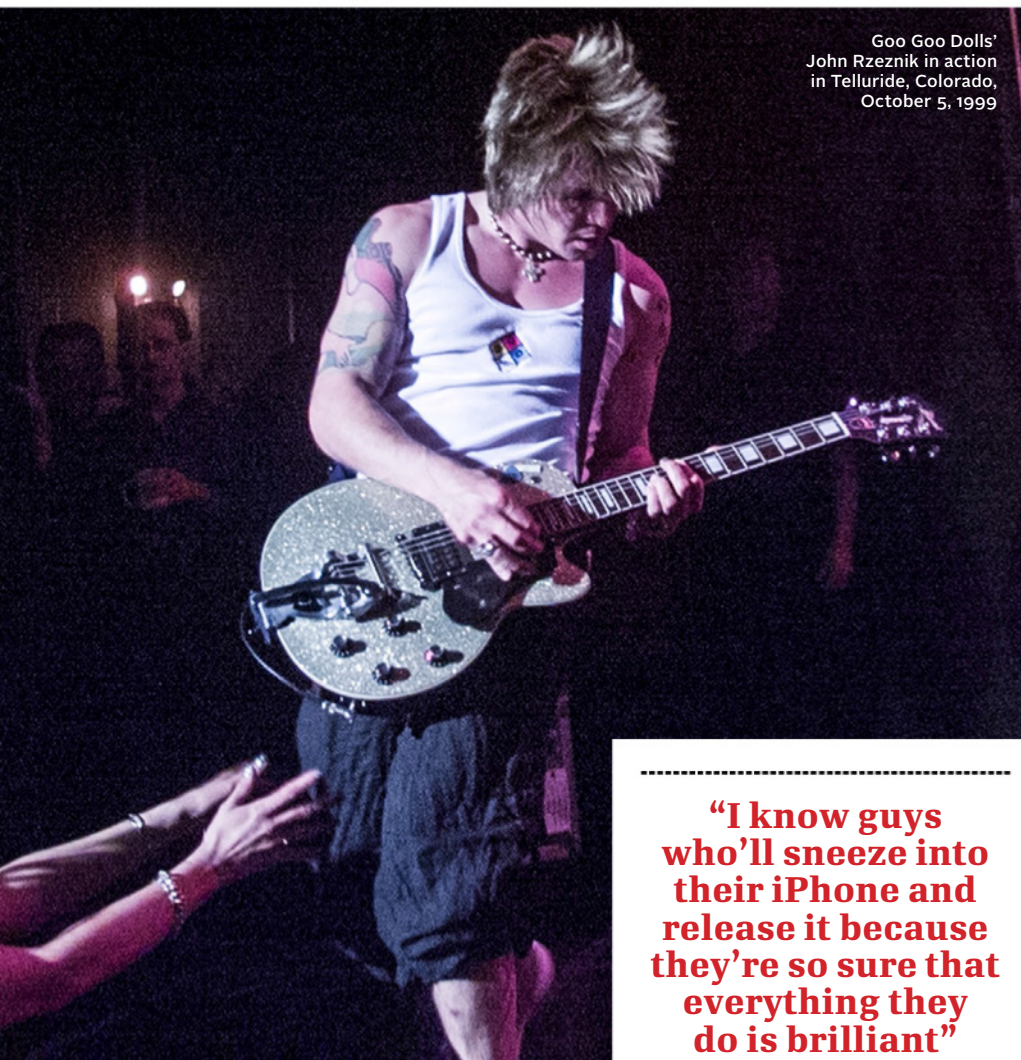
When I was making the demos, I was putting the string parts on with a synth, but



the way that Rob Cavallo took the song and brought in a really powerful string section — that was a major shift. It's a really long song, but it was written specifically for a film [1998's *City of Angels*], so I had my subject matter in front of me. Robby [Takac, bass player] and me — we were nervous as we watched the string section come in and start tracking. We were saying we were turning a corner, and did we want to go back? We just decided to say fuck it; we knew the song was undeniable. I'm glad we made that decision. Tim Pierce [ace session guitarist] worked on that with us. I could never play his parts; he's a tone architect, a great ambient player. He knows how to weave around a song and insert little spots of sonic candy. He plays those long, sustaining slide parts.

"All Eyes on Me" has a fairly epic solo. Would you have worked that out or just played it off-the-cuff?

It's a bit of both. I'd make everyone, except the engineer, leave before I did my solos.



Goo Goo Dolls' John Rzeznik in action in Telluride, Colorado, October 5, 1999

"I know guys who'll sneeze into their iPhone and release it because they're so sure that everything they do is brilliant"

I'm not a real skilled technician, so I'd just sit there and try ideas, keeping the ones that worked. The idea was that there would be a beginning, middle and end, so the final result would be the product of trying a number of different approaches. In effect, it's using the studio as another instrument, really, with the creative options that it offers.

What guitars and amps did you use on the album?

We did the album in Los Angeles, and I didn't have very much gear that was real top-drawer stuff at that point, so we rented a lot of equipment from Lon Cohen Rentals [*LCSR Backline*], who are based in L.A. They have the most amazing gear. I rented a couple of Marshalls; the 50-watt JMP is the pinnacle of the Marshall rock 'n' roll tone. I had a plexi, but it was so loud you couldn't record with it. I also rented a Bogner and a Fender Bassman. Nowadays I record with tiny combos, but I do have a pristine old 50-watt Hiwatt head and

an old, original 4x12 cabinet with Fane speakers that sounds like god. [*Laughs*] I also rented a magical Gibson J-200 and a Gretsch Country Gentleman, an incredible guitar. I owned a Les Paul with mini humbuckers at that time, which I loved. I think that's the best Les Paul tone; it's not as dense and there's a little more cut.

What did you start out on?

My mom bought me a guitar for \$40 when I was in the eighth grade, a Kay SG copy. It had these foil pickups; I guess it was a piece-of-crap guitar, really, but it was *something*, and it meant a lot to me. The first decent guitar I got was an ESP Strat-style guitar with a humbucker at the bridge. That was actually my only guitar when we first started to go on tour. We hired a guitar tech and asked him to bring a guitar as well as a backup. [*Laughs*] When we started to make some good money, I got an ES-335. I now have a decent collection of vintage gear that I never take on the road.

You're known for playing in a lot of unusual tunings that you invented yourself. What was the thinking behind that?

It came from necessity, as I wanted to create a big sound and to have strings that would drone, to help fill out the sound of us as a three-piece. I first started experimenting with a guitar that I fitted a Hipshot on, which dropped the low E to D, then I had banjo tuners on the B that raised it to C and another that raised the top E to F#. That opened up the world to open tunings and expanded everything. It's a bit weird, as with each different tuning you have to almost re-learn how to play a little bit. I'm currently taking 28 guitars on the road, which gives me the scope to cover every tuning.

Who were the people that influenced you and made you want to play?

Mick Jones and Joe Strummer from the Clash. The first music I could play by ear, just from listening to the records, was the Ramones. That was a "wow" moment for me to make me think that maybe I could have a band and write some songs. I loved Robert Smith from the Cure and Will Sergeant from Echo & the Bunnymen, plus Andy Summers and Mark Knopfler. Bob Mould was a particular influence; the things he did with Hüsker Dü, the beauty he created from such a dense sonic noise.

When you look back at the album, how do you view it?

I always look back and think if I'd done this or that it'd have been so much better. I remember thinking to myself back then that if you're not careful with what you use, it's going to sound really dated in 10 years. For my first album, the guy talked me into using a Rockman, which just makes me cringe when I hear it now. I always say stick with the classic tones that never go out of style, which is one of the reasons I think the record still holds up.

What's coming up for the band?

We're all still hungry. Any kid that picks up a guitar and plays in front of a mirror wants to be a rock star — we all think big when we start out. We never had a plan B, we just worked real hard, and we were incredibly lucky. I never take anything for granted. I was in the studio just the other day working on new material, which will probably come out in 2025. I still get incredibly excited by making new music and then getting the chance to take it out live and seeing how our fans respond. What could be better?

Witherfall

GUITARIST JAKE DREYER DETAILS SOUNDS OF THE FORGOTTEN'S PURPLE REIGN OF DETUNED THRASH, FAUX-FLAMENCO AND QUEEN-SIZED BOMBAST

By Gregory Adams

JAKE DREYER CAN see the mauve aura enveloping *Sounds of the Forgotten*, the newest album from his melodic metal project, Witherfall. What's more, each record occupies a different emotional and tonal spectrum of the rainbow.

"We think in colors when it comes down to the music, which is kind of strange. But to us, this sounds like a purple record," Dreyer says of his group's collective, feels-based synesthesia. "When I was in music school, people were able to associate intervals with colors, which is fucking wild. I'm not there yet. I just get the vibes of the song."

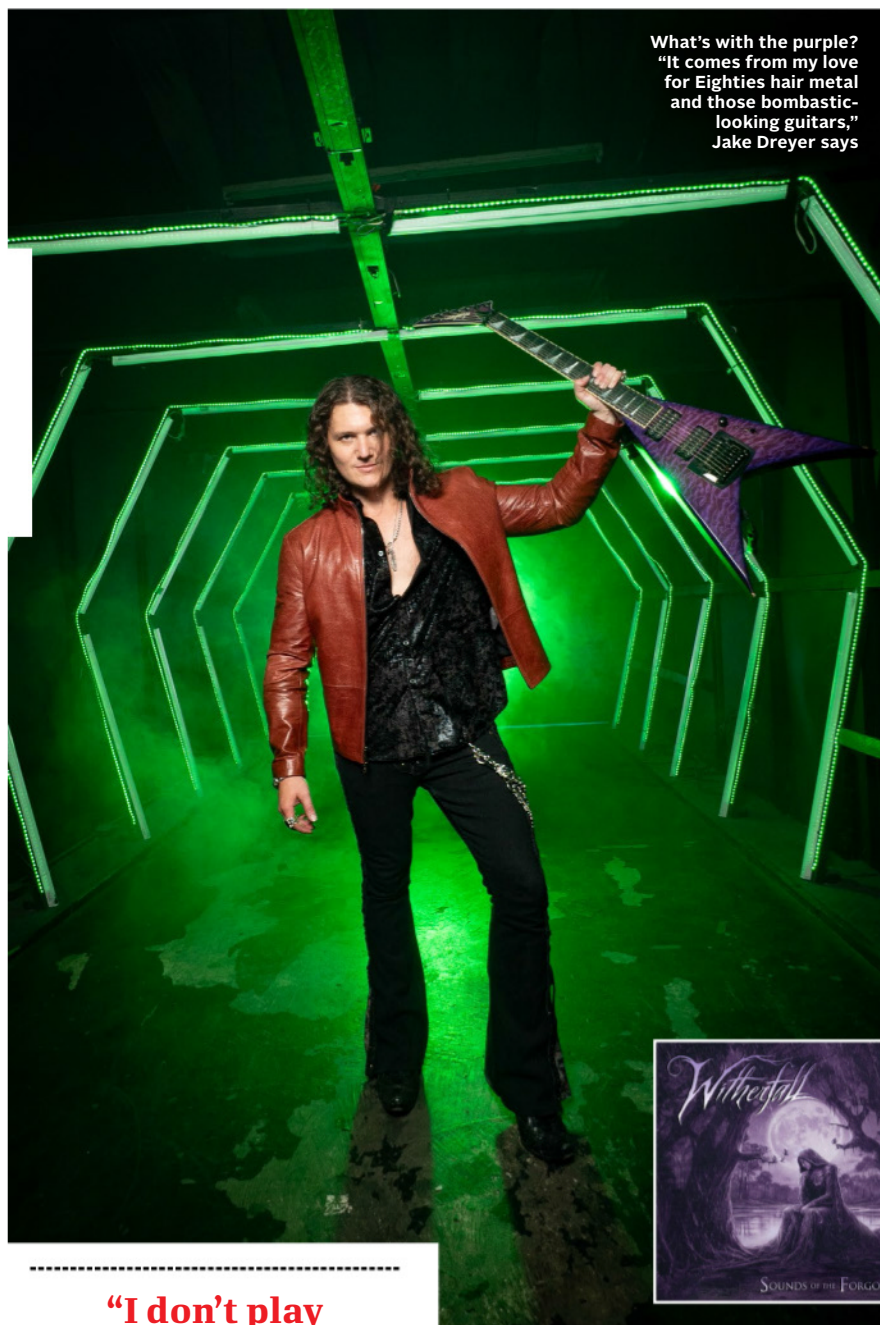
Dreyer's work within this latest palette can be quite regal. His royal violet solo sections on "They Will Let You Down" and "Insidious" are fit with micro-sized, megayered and joyfully jarring harmonies befitting the best kinds of Queen songs ("I always think about what Brian May would do.")

There's more than one shade to his playing, though, with Witherfall's fourth full-length also exploring galloped thrash, grandiose power balladry and Beethoven-quoting neo-classicism. Bassist Anthony Crawford — a veteran player who'd previously backed Justin Timberlake and Allan Holdsworth — pumps through a mix of R&B-and-metal informed rhythms, while Dreyer also infused several pieces with a newfound, faux-Spanish acoustic flutteriness.



AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** Jackson Custom Shop KV7 purple quilt with DiMarzio Deactivators, Jackson Custom Shop RR7 black ghost flame with EMG 707s, Ibanez UV777GR, Jackson Custom Shop KV7 desert burst, Taylor 314 CE-N, Taylor 314 CE
- **AMPS** Bogner Ecstasy, Soldano SLO 100, Revv Generator 120, Marshall



"I don't play flamenco at all; I just fake it on an acoustic with a guitar pick. But I've always loved that tonality"

"I don't play flamenco at all; I just fake it on an acoustic with a guitar pick. But I've always loved that tonality," he says of the "hollowed-out" opulence he yielded with a Taylor nylon and a trad-modded plectrum style. "I'm not doing it at all like Paco de Lucía, with fingers. I wish I could..."

While Dreyer notes that, lyrically, *Forgotten* often taps into personal "despair" and "the hardships of having a band in this

day and age," he admits being in a metal group is still super fun. He recalls the band taking over sleepy Utica, New York, each night after sessions wrapped at the Big Blue North studio. There's also Witherfall's cute-as-heck cross-promotion with iconic toymakers Funko, who made bubble-eyed figures of vocalist Joseph Michael and Dreyer, the latter's plastic avatar accessorized with a miniaturized version of his number one Jackson KV7. "It's the one I've been playing for years; I had the custom shop make it in 2010," he says.

As you might have guessed, both versions of the instrument are coated in vibrant purple paint. "It comes from my love for Eighties hair metal and those bombastic looking guitars," he says with a laugh. "Hideously beautiful. Disgusting, even."

Parlor Greens

WITH HIS INSPIRED NEW TRIO, SEATTLE GUITARIST JIMMY JAMES DIGS DEEP INTO METERS-STYLE FUNK

By Jim Beaugez

NEW BANDS RARELY strike gold from the jump; assembling the right players can be tricky, and the timing and mood are a big part of the magic. But the chemistry between guitarist Jimmy James and his bandmates in Parlor Greens exploded the first time they got in a room together.

"I think it was the same night we flew in," James says. "A groove started happening, and the next thing you know, [*it became*] 'West Memphis.' You catch a certain vibe, and there it is."

James and his bandmates — organist Adam Scone and drummer Tim Carman — connected through their record label and consummated the whole soulful affair in a Loveland, Ohio, studio. That opening improvisation turned into "West Memphis," a highlight on the resulting debut album, *In Green We Dream*, released in July.

James, who also plays in the Seattle soul and funk combo True Loves, cut his teeth listening to his mom's record collection, which included plenty of Motown and Stax R&B, groups like the Temptations and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, and classic country singers Loretta Lynn and Patsy Cline.



AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** 1964 Silvertone semi-hollowbody
- **AMPS** Ampeg Gemini, Peavey Delta Blues, Fender Hot Rod Deluxe



Former Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio guitarist Jimmy James with his 1964 Silvertone

"The thing that really got me into guitar is when I first heard 'My Girl' by the Temptations, later to find out that it was Robert White, the session player for the Funk Brothers," James says of Motown's house band. "Then, hearing 'I Second That Emotion' by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, which was Eddie Willis who played the lead line. That's really where it started."

From the first notes of *In Green We Dream*'s "Driptorch," the organ-led trio recall the aesthetic of legendary New Orleans funk pioneers the Meters and Memphis' Booker T. and the MGs. On the leadoff tune, James grabs the spotlight with Leo Nocentelli-inspired guitar figures, laying a foundation for Scone alongside Carman, who also hits the skins for Boston garage

"James Jamerson said it best: 'If you don't feel it, don't play it'"

blues rockers GA-20.

Armed with his lived-in 1964 Silvertone, James is a master of funk playing, alternating between clean single-note lines deep in the pocket and the jazzy chording. But he's conscious not to overplay, and he and Scone leave each other plenty of room for exploration. For the self-taught guitarist, feeling is always the top concern.

"Be yourself and play what moves you," he says. "James Jamerson said it best: 'If you don't feel it, don't play it.'"



FIVE QUESTIONS MICHELLE SOTO

THE BLUSHING GUITARIST MUSES ON THE LATEST SHOEGAZE REVIVAL AND HER INTENSE, EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH HER “SOULMATE” GUITAR

By Andrew Daly

▶ ON THE STRENGTH of the old-guard revival (Ride, Slowdive, Drop Nineteens and My Bloody Valentine), a new wave of shoegazers is upon us. One such band is Austin-based outfit Blushing, led by vocalist and guitarist Michelle Soto. Soto recently beamed in with *GW* to dig into working with Ride’s Mark Gardener and former Smashing Pumpkins guitarist Jeff Schroeder on Blushing’s new record, *Sugarcoat*, and her love for a particularly tasty (and durable) Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar.

Q: Ride’s Mark Gardener mastered *Sugarcoat*. How did that impact the guitars?

We started talking to Mark in 2021 when we worked together on our last album, *Posessions*, and we instantly clicked. Mark dialed our sound in at his Oxford studio and gave the album a polished cohesiveness that lets the sparkle and grit come through without getting muddy.

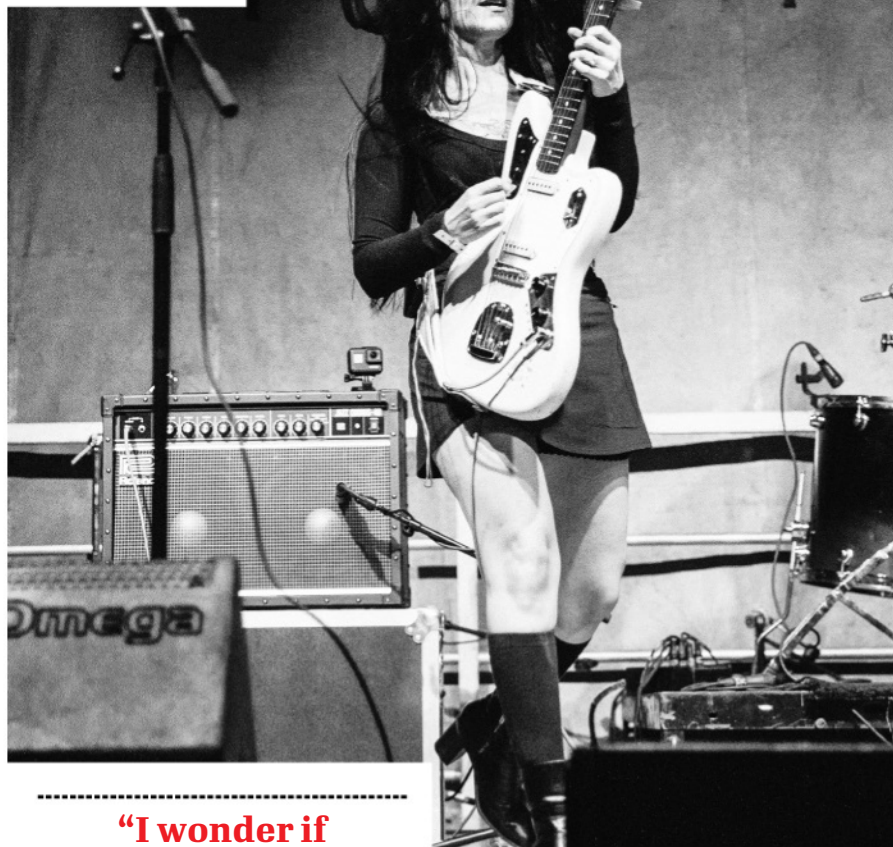
Q: Tell me how Jeff Schroeder ended up on “Seafoam.”

In July 2018, we went to see the [*Smashing*] Pumpkins perform in Austin, and were lucky to meet Jeff backstage. We became friends and kept in touch, and he invited us to see the Pumpkins again in October 2022 in Austin. We mentioned we were recording a new record and would like to collaborate with him.

He agreed, and months later, we sent him the track “Seafoam,” and he recorded it on the tour bus in between shows. It was very hands-off since we were remote, but after we heard what he sent, we loved it and had zero revisions for his part. It’s a unique guitar sound that we don’t typically use, which I believe he got from a Helix processor. It just fit so great with the track.

Q: Here’s a two-in-one gear question. Do you have any “always on” pedals, and which guitar do you lean on most?

I have three always-on pedals — an Ibanez SS10 Session-Man [*reverb*], an Ibanez DSC10 Digital Chorus and an EarthQuaker Devices Afterneath reverb. Guitar-wise, I call it my “soulmate guitar” because I’m in a very seri-



“I wonder if modern shoegaze getting pushed into mainstream might send it down a similar path as grunge in the Nineties”

ous, exclusive relationship with my [*Fender*] Johnny Marr signature Jaguar. I couldn’t imagine playing any other guitar. I’m pretty small, so having the shorter-scale Jaguar neck is nice, and it feels solid as a rock. Even when I pull down and move around ferociously, it can take the hostile handling. From the moment I started playing it, I knew I had to have it. It came home with me; I haven’t played another guitar since.

Q: Do you find solid-state or tube amps to be more effective for shoegaze?

That’s a hot-button issue! I like both, but I am a loyal Roland Jazz Chorus fan. For touring, I use a JC-40 to save space, but anytime I can use my JC-120, I will. Their durability and lighter weight make them great for touring, but they can still get so loud. I love how clean and bright my setup can sound even when pushing it.

Q: What do you make of the current shoegaze revival?

You can’t deny TikTok’s impact on the current shoegaze revival, but the resurgence of bands from the Nineties coming back has a lot to do with it too. I do wonder if modern shoegaze getting pushed into mainstream might send it down a similar path as grunge in the Nineties, where if you owned a flannel and played distorted guitar, you were given a major-label deal, leading to an oversaturation of the sound. I hope not. I hear some innovative takes and would like to hear more.

“For touring, I use a [*Roland*] JC-40 to save space, but anytime I can use my JC-120, I will,” Soto says



Jamie Dickson

THE ENGLISH GUITARIST ON THE SEVENTIES FOLK HEROES WHO INSPIRED THE TONES AND FEEL OF HIS STUNNING SOLO DEBUT

By Amit Sharma

IF YOU'RE A fan of vintage folk heroes like John Martyn, Nick Drake and Bert Jansch, *Withershins* by Jamie Dickson may very well end up being one of your favorite releases of 2024. The debut solo full-length from the editor-in-chief of *Guitarist* magazine is a love letter to earthy sounds of the past, transporting the listener to a private serenade in a dark, fire-lit room. Evocative and intimate in feel, with real-life noises and guest musicians adding color, its natural warmth is rooted in a time when more emphasis was placed on musical honesty than anything too forced or contrived.

"The last thing I wanted to make was a beautiful but soulless DADGAD album," Dickson says. "I wanted it to feel like a piece of art in the sense of there being tragedy and joy stitched into these tracks. Most final versions were the second take, with a natural live energy. We definitely weren't trying to make an acoustic version of Def Leppard's *Hysteria*, where they famously

"I tried to keep strings ringing to maintain a lovely harp-like shimmer and glow"

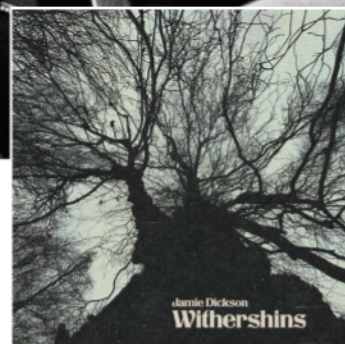
separated out chords into single notes!"

Three albums were sent to producer Chris Turpin (Ida Mae) for reference: *Près de Paris* by Pierre Bensusan, *Solid Air* by John Martyn and *The Black Balloon* by John Renbourn. The bar for quality and candor was set rather high in that regard.

"I actually wanted bits of spit and sawdust, scuff notes here and there, because I love all that Seventies stuff," Dickson says. "We wanted to stay away from anything too pristine, like perfect-sounding digital reverb."

The main guitar for the sessions was a 2002 Martin 000-14 that had been listed on Reverb for less than the going market rate. It felt too good to be true, and the questionable photos were also a cause for concern; but after a year of searching, buying and trading, Dickson gave in and visited the seller to find out more. Luck was on his side that day.

"It was waiting for me the whole time," he says. "It belonged to an old Irish session musician. He flipped the case open and it was perfect for my style, already tuned to DADGAD. I like to conserve energy, so I tried to keep strings ringing to maintain a lovely harp-like shimmer and glow. DADGAD works so well for that. I used a Beard Deco Phonic for the standard-tuning stuff, a National on one song and a 1957 Martin 0-18 for the title track. I was looking for sounds that felt old and very physical, with the kind of kinetic motion that can't be replicated."



GUITAR WORLD

COVER MODELS

guitarist: Orianthi	guitar: 2008 PRS Custom 24
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Guitar World catches up with its classic cover stars — and the guitarists who play them.

this interview:
April 2024

cover photographer:
Jeremy Danger

GW COVER DATE
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Q: Where and when did you get this guitar?

I got it when it was new; PRS actually gave it to me during the Michael Jackson *This Is It* rehearsals. When I got it, it was a plain stock guitar, and then we covered it with rhinestones, which was pretty insane looking.

Q: What led you to cover it in rhinestones?

For the tour, Michael's designers were like, "We need a really sparkly guitar. Can we make one of yours sparkly?" I had a few Custom 24s; I brought this one in, which was one of my backups, and they said, "Okay, let's cover it," and I said, "That sounds pretty good." The designers just covered it, which made it pretty heavy. But yeah, it was a cool guitar, but I didn't want to play it too much after that because I didn't want the rhinestones falling off. [Laughs]

Q: While on tour with Michael Jackson, which songs did you use this guitar on?

I believe I used it on "Beat It" and "Black or White." But with "Beat It," I always had a red guitar, so I interchanged with that one. I had about four guitars for that tour, but that was the main one I used for "Beat It" — and especially "Black or White."

Q: Have you used this guitar on any notable recordings?

I actually did! I used it on "Monster," which I recorded with Michael Jackson and 50 Cent.

Q: Have you used it since?

I used it — well, it was very strange — during a video shoot [for Dave Stewart's *Every Single Night*]. I nearly got crushed by an elephant while holding it, but I didn't, thank God! So, yeah, that guitar has definitely seen some shit. [Laughs]

Q: All of that inherited mojo aside, what makes this PRS special?

With any PRS, they're incredibly well made. They all have different personalities because, you know, with the woodgrain

and just the way the necks are. They're all pieces of art and all pretty similar — but different. But that one definitely had a personality, and I used it for certain things; it's a very diverse guitar; you could use it for anything.

Q: Is that why you chose it for your *Guitar World* cover shoot?

Instead of using a regular PRS, we used that, which was definitely cover-worthy. They said, "Do you have a showy guitar?" I said, "Yes, I do," and that's why we chose it.

Q: Do you still have this guitar? If so, when was the last time you played it?

That guitar is actually at a museum in Asia now. The last time I played it would have been quite a few years back. I wanted to display it there because Michael was massive in Asia and toured there a lot, and I still do. So instead of putting it away in a safe and never playing it, they asked, "Can we have it to display it?" and I said, "Absolutely!" — Andrew Daly

JOE RILEY

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BLACKSTAR AMPLIFICATION

No amp company launched over the past two decades has infiltrated the market quite like **BLACKSTAR**. As we learn from two head designers, their secret lies in understanding what modern guitar players need — and then thinking outside the box

By Amit Sharma

floor units, which are engineered to replace conventional heads and combos. These latest developments coincide with the introduction of the high-definition IRs in their CabRig software and the plug-in versions of the St. James amps in its 6L6 and EL34 variants. It's exactly this kind of thinking that's placed them at the cutting edge of modern amp design, rewarding modern guitarists with innovation that's as affordable as it is reliable.

To get an idea of where the company is in 2024 (and what's coming next), we checked in with Chief Engineer Paul Stevens — who has worked for Peavey, Buddha and Trace Elliot — and Head of Products Alex Gee, the man in charge of all things digital.

Let's start with the St. James. It has the jaw-dropping tones and wide-ranging connectivity people have grown to expect from Blackstar, but it ditches the traditional transformer for a switched-mode power supply, also featuring a brand new lightweight speaker from Celestion.

PAUL STEVENS: Our managing director called me into his office for a discussion about what we could do to shake things up. I said, "Tube amps are great but heavy; why don't we look at lightweight versions?" His first question was, "How?" I suggested developing a new kind of supply based on switched-mode princi-

ples. We weren't the first to do that, but we've probably been the first to do it successfully. Tube amp users tend to be resistant to change, but everywhere else in the world we're seeing these supplies being used for all sorts of things, from phones to televisions. Those products are made in higher quantities; they can afford to develop. It wasn't easy. We had to go through many revisions to get it right — thousands of hours of testing in different temperatures. We then developed lighter-weight speakers with Celestion and also looked at lighter woods, taking weight out where we could.

It's interesting how a company that started with the vintage-leaning Artisan models now seems to be focusing on modern needs.

STEVENS: The Artisans will always be there, but we don't sell big numbers. Modern players are used to connectivity, so that's the direction we're going in. People are used to having USB outputs and Bluetooth connectivity. It's not sacrilege. I remember being at Peavey 15 years ago, and we were talking about putting a USB output on something. Some people were like, "No way!" — but now it's normal. Blackstar is going into all sorts of areas. Earlier on, half of us would be on digital, and everyone else would be amps, but now we're all working together, combining the technology into everything. The DSP gear

SINCE BEING FOUNDED

17 years ago in the English town of Northampton, Blackstar has gone on to become one of the most fiercely innovative amplification companies in the music trade. They manufacture a whole range of products that cater for just about every need, from the kind of practice units touring musicians use in backstage dressing rooms to high-performance metal machines. You'll find their logo in living rooms, bedrooms and stages of every kind, and with good reason.

In recent years they've launched the highly successful St. James series, which made headlines for being the lightest tube amps ever made, and the 100-watt Amped



[from left] Blackstar's Dept. 10 Amped 3 100-watt guitar amplifier pedal; the St. James 50-watt EL34 head in Fawn; the two-channel Dept. 10 Dual Drive tube overdrive pedal; a screenshot from Blackstar's St. James EL34 amplifier plug-in



uses the amps as a reference. The tube amps are incorporating more digital technology, not within the main signal path, but for things like reverb and CabRig. That's where we're going — taking amps to where they should be in the 21st century.

The St. James plug-in range is a first for Blackstar. A sign of things to come, perhaps?

ALEX GEE: You could say that. Because we understand why circuitry makes such a difference, we came at the plug-ins with a unique perspective. It doesn't matter how we get the sound, as long as we get the sound. The tone is the important thing. Some products have been built in the digital domain first, so we can rapidly prototype the physical. We've actually been working with plug-ins for many years. Our digital products like the ID Series and Silverlines were developed in plug-in format first and then translated into amps. Although the St. James plug-ins are our first commercial ones, we've been using them internally for a long time.

There's some great footage of Jared James Nichols, a dyed-in-the-wool blues purist, being blown away by the quality of the plug-in. That was a clever way of promoting it.

GEE: Jared can make anything

sound good. He also knows when to move on. It was stressful going into that first reaction, but he genuinely loved it. Feel is so important to the player. Our St. James plug-in reacts like a cranked amp. That's the barrier we're trying to remove; you can have the convenience of a plug-in and keep the great sounds you're used to.

CabRig and Amped have also been very well-received by guitar players around the world. Why do you think that is?

GEE: We wanted our CabRig technology to be in all of our products. You have it in our smallest ID Core, which isn't much over \$100, offering ridiculous value for money. It's all about creativity, feeling like you're in a professional studio even if you're playing over a backing track or writing. The Amped series took a while to develop. There are other floor amps, but they're more niche. Ours is a direct replacement. It can hit 100 watts, which is more than anyone needs, but the headroom was important to us.

STEVENS: We put the same level of attention into everything. It can be infuriating, because we'll go round in circles. We'll listen in different rooms, with different guitars and different players, to get there. It doesn't matter if it's an expensive tube amp or a beginner's solid-state, we put the same amount of attention into everything.

Who do you see as your biggest competition for the digital end of the market?

GEE: That's an interesting question. Neural DSP, Fender and Line 6 are doing brilliant stuff. They're all good in different ways. We just try to make great products and innovate in different ways to our competitors. I wouldn't say there's one that makes us go, "Oh, we have to beat those guys!" It's not in our nature to think like that.

What's coming up next for Blackstar?

STEVENS: When we finished the St. James, it became immediately obvious that the other ranges needed updating. So that's what I've been doing over the past year. We don't want to become tired or obsolete. I'm also working on things to take the St. James even further. Expect expansion!

GEE: We're not going to stop with the Amped series. It was a surprise from Blackstar, and there will be plenty more. The same goes for plug-ins. That will be an area worth watching because there's a lot of exciting stuff going on there. You can't beat a valve amp live, but the convenience of digital plug-ins can't be ignored. As a valve amp company, we don't want to ignore that. We'd rather be a product-driven company. We will carry on leading the way on all fronts. We're not stopping! **GW**

"THAT'S
WHERE
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BE IN
THE 21ST
CENTURY"



↑

HIS FIRST (WITH KISS)
Animalize (1984)

.....
...AND HIS LAST
Psycho Circus (1998)



BRUCE KULICK

Kulick — the steady-as-a-rock guitarist during Kiss's non-makeup era — discusses the making of *Crazy Nights*, *Hot in the Shade* and *Revenge* (and, um, not being asked to take part in the band's final shows)

By Andrew Daly

KISS'S NON-MAKEUP era is often relegated to “persona non grata” status — at least for original-lineup diehards. But things were different for Kiss fans growing up without Ace Frehley — as they only knew Bruce Kulick.

Of course, before Kulick, there was Vinnie Vincent, who some fans say “saved Kiss.” And then there was star-crossed shredder Mark St. John, who Kulick replaced.

But the truth is that despite Frehley's iconic foundational licks, Vin-

cent's cult following and St. John's... well, never mind about him... without Kulick holding down the fort as the lead guitarist of rock's most bombastic band between 1984 and 1996, Kiss wouldn't have had a house to bring down thereafter, let alone a non-makeup era to forsake.

“When I came into Kiss, I wasn't asked to imitate Ace,” Kulick says. “I'm very thankful for that because it allowed me the freedom to be myself. If I was asked to do what Ace did, I'm not sure things would have worked.”

And that's a good thing, as after Kulick joined in 1984, Kiss experienced success with records like *Asylum* (1985), *Crazy Nights* (1987) and *Hot in the Shade* (1989). But for purists, none of that “mattered.”

“There are misconceptions about Eighties Kiss,” Kulick says, “the biggest of which is that we sucked! Old fans maybe didn't get it. But the fans who grew up seeing Kiss without makeup knew how good we were. Certain years of my era were magical; I stand by the Eighties; we were a cut above. You're always in the winning circle when you have two leaders like Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons.”

The Eighties might have been alright for Kiss, but a problematic era was ahead in the early Nineties, as drummer Eric Carr died of heart cancer in 1991. Additionally, music was changing; hair metal was out, grunge was in, leaving Kiss — a band of men in their forties — to stare their musical mortality in its face.

That led to producer Bob Ezrin being called in for Kiss's Nineties opener, *Revenge* (1992), which Kulick has long championed. “We put so much into *Revenge*,” he says. “But it wasn't received well as, by that time, Nirvana had hit.”

Kiss hit the road in support of *Revenge* in April 1992, but kickass songs and a killer vibe couldn't save a tour that was doomed from the start. “We toured, but the arenas were half empty,” Kulick says. “Paul and Gene were frustrated. We didn't know the future; I could tell there was hesitation from the top down.”

Some old-guard bands folded, while others rode grunge out — but not Kiss. They embraced their grun-

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

“GENE AND PAUL KNEW I HAD MY ROOTS IN THE RIGHT PLACES, SUCH AS JIMI HENDRIX,

gier side, which Gene Simmons loved, and Paul Stanley hated, leading to the 1995 sessions for *Carnival of Souls* (1997). But all wasn't well, and while on a break, Stanley and Simmons pulled the ripcord by inviting Kiss founders Ace Frehley and Peter Criss onstage for an infamous taping of MTV's *Unplugged*.

That might have seemed like an innocent gathering of old friends, but Kulick knew better. "Their lack of attention to *Carnival of Souls* made sense," he says. "Paul and Gene were preparing to put together the reunion, which took a lot of leg work." That leg work manifested as a Stanley/Simmons/Frehley/Criss reunion and the 1996-1997 Alive/Worldwide Tour, leading to Kulick and Singer, well, being gone. At first, the reunion worked, bringing riches to the Kiss kingdom... until the wheels came off, leading to Frehley quitting in 2002 and Criss being fired in 2004, while Black N' Blue guitarist turned Kiss tour manager Tommy Thayer and once-jilted, now re-welcomed, drummer Eric Singer became the Spaceman and the Catman.

Kiss cashed in for another 20 years with Thayer and Singer. It is what it is, and really — who can blame them? You've gotta, as Paul Stanley said on *Animalize*, "get all you can take." But there's some sadness associated with Kulick, who, despite his importance to Kiss, wasn't mentioned during Kiss's final December 2023 shows in New York City, at Madison Square Garden — let alone invited.

Then again, all of Kiss's former members were egregiously ignored, so once again — it is what it is. But Kulick, one of the under-appreciated guitarists of any era, doesn't care. "I've made peace with not being included in Kiss's End of the Road," he says. "That said, no, they never called me.

"I've always missed being in Kiss, but if being in Kiss meant being the Spaceman like Tommy, I wouldn't want to do it. And if being a part of the final shows meant I had to ask to be there, I'd rather stay home. I guess that's why Ace respects me and has always been kind to me."

As for how he views himself within the canon of Kis-

story, Kulick smiles, saying, "I was never asked to clone Ace Frehley; I'm very proud of that. I made those songs my own. I am proud of my era; it was real and not just about money. It came to a screeching halt; the power of the reunion era killed it. It died. It was over. I had to move on."

As for where Kulick goes from here, or if he laments not being asked onstage for Kiss's final shows, he says, "I was not expecting it to happen; I know to read between the lines when I heard the press and interviews with Doc McGhee. Did they miss an opportunity to share the importance of the past? In my opinion, yes, Kisstory was ignored. The present and future was what the final show at MSG was about. I kept hearing that it was a disappointment from the fans, my only hurt was knowing NYC was ground zero with the most passionate Kiss fans, and I love experiencing their excitement in person. So, me not being invited to celebrate with them was unfortunate for me personally.

"Nothing has been planned with Gene or Eric. What could happen? I am as curious as the fans! I know I will be doing many creative projects, such as new music, perhaps an autobiography, special events and performances that will focus on my legacy. It's a very exciting time for me."

Your brother, Bob Kulick, had a long-time association with Kiss. Is that how you met Paul and Gene?

I met Paul Stanley by tagging along with my brother. I had a car, and Bob didn't, so we would hook up with Paul in New York City to see a movie or go to one of the cool clubs. Paul was very mellow compared to his onstage persona.

Were you a Kiss fan before joining?

I wasn't a crazed Kiss fan, so I wasn't nervous, even though I was excited to hang out with Paul and my brother.

Bruce Kulick performs with Kiss in Milwaukee, December 30, 1984. "When I came into Kiss, I wasn't asked to imitate Ace," Kulick says. "I'm very thankful for that"

I met Gene at a studio [*The Record Plant*] in New York City with Bob during the *Creatures of the Night* sessions in '82 while he was busy working on "I Love It Loud." I also met Eric Carr that night. So when the *Animalize* sessions happened in '84, and the issues

with Mark St. John being unable to do solos cropped up, and they called me, it was fun to be a ghost guitarist like my brother had for Kiss before.

After Mark St. John developed reactive arthritis, Kiss called you for the *Animalize* tour. Did you join right away?

No, not right away. But when it was time to make the decision, Paul called me in my hotel room, saying, "Bruce, the Kiss lead guitarist gig is yours." He then explained a few things about what he wanted me to focus on, like, "Being competitive with the new styles of guitarists."

Coming in behind Vinnie Vincent and Mark St. John, who weren't right for Kiss, what was the directive?

Gene and Paul knew I had my roots in the right places, such as Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton and Leslie West. But Van Halen was huge, and Eddie was such a virtuoso, so that was a style I needed to make my own. I added that into my lead playing, and in retrospect, I mixed all those influences, which made me an excellent fit for Kiss.

Was it challenging to execute the parts of Ace Frehley, considering his feel and vibrato seem impossible to replicate?

I wasn't asked to play that like Ace. We know Tommy Thayer's role as the "Spaceman" was exactly that, and he did it well. But my approach was to make Ace's guitar riffs my own without losing the signature parts he created. It was a relatively easy thing to evolve into. I knew Ace's style was unique and essential to performing the band's early catalog.

The sessions for 1985's *Asylum* represented your first proper Kiss album. What was that like?

I went in with Marshall amps paired with Charvel and Jackson guitars. I was excited to be at Electric Lady Studios in Greenwich Village [NYC] because Jimi Hendrix had that place built. I worked with Gene and Paul for over a month straight every day. I loved it all, as now I was the official lead guitarist of the band. I'll always love "Tears Are Falling," as I got flashy with a cool riff that's

JIMMY PAGE, ERIC CLAPTON AND LESLIE WEST. BUT VAN HALEN WAS HUGE..."

hard to play and ended with an exciting, fast phrase. I love that it's a signature solo of my era.

I listened to *Crazy Nights* the other day; despite the keyboards, it's very guitar-forward.

I used my ESP M-1 "Banana" guitar quite a bit for *Crazy Nights*. By '87, I often used that guitar and a few other Super Strats. I know [producer] Ron Nevison heard and loved the clarity and power of that guitar. And you're right about the guitar sound on that record; we worked hard on the solos, and they are featured upfront in the mixes.

The *Crazy Nights* tour flopped, though. How did that impact Kiss going into *Hot in the Shade*?

It was time to break away from a name-brand producer. So, in 1989, Gene and Paul came up with songs with some help from Eric Carr, me and several outside writers, and off we went to a small studio in Hollywood almost under the 101 freeway, and Gene and Paul produced the record.

Forgoing a producer didn't change the result, though.

Well, *Hot in the Shade* received mixed results and reviews, but it's a great LP — and "Forever" is another signature solo for me. I used fewer Floyd Rose whammy bar guitars and more Gibson Les Paul-style guitars. We returned to a bluesy approach for the songs and the playing, which shows.

How would you describe the state of Kiss as the band entered the Nineties?

That's a good question. The *Hot in the Shade* tour was fun; we had a great stage show, did many classic songs and featured many amazing supporting bands. This was pre-grunge; if grunge had come earlier, *Hot in the Shade* wouldn't have survived. We had had a few hits on *Hot in the Shade*, namely "Hide Your Heart" and "Forever," but we knew to keep moving forward and get more traction, we needed to harden things up.

What was the game plan?

Bringing in Bob Ezrin was a big part

of it. I don't know how the discussion about bringing Bob in started, but it was a great move. But you've gotta remember what happened with Bob during the disaster that was *Music from "The Elder"*; even though Bob had done *Destroyer*, Gene and Paul were over-cautious. But even during *Destroyer*, Bob was supposedly erratic and doing a lot of cocaine, so Gene and Paul were unsure.

Did Eric Carr's death in 1991 impact the Kiss machine much?

Even before he got sick, Eric let things bother him. He was unhappy about his role in Kiss. It was complicated. I felt for Eric but disagreed with his reasoning. Losing him was tough because he was a great drummer, but Eric Singer stepped up. What happened to Eric Carr wasn't expected, and we didn't know he was so sick at the end of the previous tour. So we got Eric Singer [who had played in Paul Stanley's solo club tour band in '89]; we were sad about Eric Carr's cancer diagnosis but had to move forward. We were committed to making *Revenge*. I'm glad we had Eric Carr's vocals for "God Gave Rock 'N' Roll to You II" and [had] him in the video.

Some say "God Gave Rock 'N' Roll to You II" is an anthem akin to "Rock and Roll All Night."

I agree. We had Bob Ezrin produce it after we covered Argent's old song as a test to see if we could work with him. But we completely reworked it; Argent's version was inappropriate for Kiss. Our version was a part of the *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey* soundtrack, and then we committed to working with Bob for *Revenge*.

What was it like working with Bob Ezrin, who, according to Ace Frehley, can be rough on guitarists?

I remember there were no compromises; we had a vision. But there were some crazy times, like when I was working on the solo for "Domino." I initially had a direction, put some EBow on it, doubled and tripled what I had done, then left it alone and went to lunch.

Kiss's Bruce Kulick [left] and Paul Stanley in action at London's Wembley Arena in May 1992. "We toured, but the arenas were half empty," Kulick says. "Paul and Gene were frustrated"

When I came back, Bob said, "I hate it. Do it again."

How did you hash it out?

I didn't love that, but Bob was right; the approach was wrong. He had me use an off-the-cuff approach, and it worked. Bob always said, "Play from your balls, Bruce," which meant, "Play melodically, but make it tough, and make it count." It wasn't always about pedals; he meant to play tough physically.

Would you also credit Bob for bringing Gene back to the forefront?

Let's be real here: Kiss is Paul and Gene's band. They make concessions only to each other. That's how they work. The relationship between Paul and Gene is like a marriage. But bringing in Bob Ezrin made both Paul and Gene happy, which helped.

How so?

They both respected Ezrin, whereas, when we recorded *Crazy Nights*, Gene hated Ron Nevison, while Paul loved him. Gene was crying during *Crazy Nights*, and Paul was happy, which showed in Gene's songs. But with *Revenge*, you had a case where we had Bob Ezrin, aka the mad professor, who had both Paul's and Gene's respect.

As he had with Ace Frehley on *Destroyer*'s "Sweet Pain," Ezrin replaced you with Dick Wagner on "Every Time I Look at You." Why?

They were hurrying to finish "Every Time I Look at You," but it was a holiday weekend, and I wasn't around. It just so happened that Dick Wagner was recording in the studio next door, so they grabbed him and he played the solo. I didn't tell that story a lot in the past because I was a little hurt about not being on the track. They let me take a stab at the solo, but I had to

admit, what Dick did was perfect, so we left it. If you listen back to *Unplugged*, though, you can hear that I match what Dick did, but that solo sounds like me. Dick used my ESP Explorer and harnessed what I was doing, making it seamless. That's the only lead I didn't play on a record while in Kiss. It worked, so I got over it.

"[PRODUCER] BOB [EZRIN] ALWAYS SAID, 'PLAY FROM YOUR BALLS, BRUCE,' WHICH



Well, you killed it on every other track.

Revenge was a great showcase for me. The tones and the solos were on point, and the guitar choices were interesting and not remotely simple. Kiss often gets labeled as “simple,” but if you listen, Kiss’s songs are anything but.

Can you pick out an example of that?

Take “Unholy,” for example; there are a lot of complex parts, both rhythmically, and — of course — the whole lead section has a timing where it’s not all 4/4. That song was one I was always proud of because of its complexity, but it was weird enough that I called it my “Frankenstein timing” because there’s so much going on underneath.

Was the prevalence of grunge the reason Kiss overhauled their image for *Revenge*’s promotion?

It would be easy to boil it down to that, but *Revenge* was a heavy record, so it made sense to toughen up our image. But I don’t know why we felt *Revenge* should be a leather-clad-looking thing with a battleship, tank-like, riveted metal object behind us on the cover. It felt right, I guess.

What led to Kiss going full-on grunge with *Carnival of Souls*?

You had these young guys who looked like they could be druggies that didn’t seem to care about how they looked. Guys playing very dark, intense music, you know, the type of stuff that doesn’t make you smile or want to make out with your girlfriend in the backseat of your car. We decided there had to be a reaction to that.

Gene loved it, but Paul hated it, right?

Gene was into a lot of that stuff. I remember him liking Smashing Pumpkins and even “Creep” by Radiohead. But Paul was not attracted to it, and I don’t think he wanted any part of it.

Gene embraced the darkness of grunge. I think the “Demon” persona came out. Did you enjoy grunge?

I have respect for guys like Kurt Cobain; he started Nirvana, who, by the way, was a kickass band. Kurt was not much of a lead guitarist, but he could write these songs and sing with this emotion that connected an entire generation. I’ve always felt that music goes in 10- or 12-year cycles, and then

it shifts again.

Kiss took a break from recording *Carnival of Souls* for *Unplugged*, and Peter and Ace showed up to shock the world. You had to know something was up, right?

Eric and I knew something was going on. We didn’t know what would happen, but we knew Paul and Gene’s attention was elsewhere, maybe even on Peter and Ace, but not for sure. So Eric Singer and I would get together, head into the studio, experiment and demo things for *Carnival of Souls*.

Grunge experimentation, yes?

The sound of Stone Temple Pilots and Alice In Chains was present. Jerry Cantrell and Dave Navarro were cool, so we embraced those sounds. It’s not that we were trying to jump into the trend, per se; it was more those things bled into the music. We were writing, playing meaner and more brutally and taking risks.

“I Walk Alone” is your lone Kiss lead vocal and the final track from *Carnival of Souls*. That’s ironic.

By the time we got into the studio again, Gene and Paul were not committed because they were conversing with Ace and Peter about the reunion, unbeknownst to Eric and me. So we get in the studio, and I’ve got this primitive version of “I Walk Alone,” and Gene was supposed to sing it. But because he wasn’t around, I sang it.

Gene and Paul were talking to Ace and Peter, but you still didn’t see it coming?

I knew something was up. A reunion was always in the back of my mind; I hoped it would never happen; I always knew it would — especially after *Unplugged*. So, like you said, “I Walk Alone” was prophetic because it was the beginning of me walking alone. I poured my soul into Kiss, and it was upsetting to know that while Eric and I were recording *Carnival of Souls*, Paul and Gene were being fitted for their reunion costumes.

How did Paul and Gene break the news?

Paul and Gene were comfortable with

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

MEANT, ‘PLAY MELODICALLY, BUT MAKE IT TOUGH, AND MAKE IT COUNT’”



a version of Kiss with Eric and me in it. They couldn't kill it unless they felt the reunion would last. When they told us, they said, "We're not letting you go. We aren't sure if this is going to work. We aren't going to put *Carnival of Souls* out right away. We'll finish it for the label, but we'll tour with Ace and Peter."

And how did you take it?

I knew that the day would come, but Eric Singer was devastated. Paul and Gene did the right thing by keeping us on salary for a year, but they had to do that because they could go back if the reunion blew up. But once success came, and Ace and Peter did their jobs, the writing was on the wall.

And that's fine, but the lineup with you and Eric Singer seemed like a case of what could have been.

I've always looked at it as I was never fired from Kiss; I was left behind for a wildly successful commercial ven-

ture. You don't have to be an accountant to understand Paul and Gene. What Kiss would make with Eric and me was like five million, but with Ace and Peter, we're talking about netting 50 million; that's truly obscene.

At the expense of chemistry and musical integrity...

True. All the cracks reopened. If you look at *Psycho Circus*, that was not a band album. It's got Tommy Thayer on guitar, Kevin Valentine on drums, I'm playing some bass — and Ace and Peter are barely there. Sure, the four of them toured in support of it and did that "final tour," but the truth is that putting the makeup back on at the time was a purely commercial decision.

Do you feel the reunion killed Kiss as a creative entity?

That's tough to say because you've got people who like the music they did after the reunion. But did they turn their back on what was a very creative and solid band? Yes, they did. But

it was for the popularity and massive success of a reunion tour, which I can understand. But did they turn their back on that? Absolutely. Our version of Kiss had a lot of promise. We clicked, got along, and shone brightly. It's a shame it was killed. I understand why it happened, but it took me time.

Are you disappointed Paul and Gene didn't call you when the reunion fell apart?

I'm not disappointed they didn't ask me to be in Kiss again. To be in Kiss again, I would have had to be the Spaceman, right? If I had done that, I would have negated my entire non-makeup era. Tommy Thayer did a fine job playing Ace's riffs with some swagger. He did the Spaceman well, but I never wanted to.

When you look back on your era of Kiss, what stands out?

We persevered. The Eighties had Paul steering the ship while Gene was distracted. But it wasn't as one-sided as it's made out to be, as they have always completed each other. I learned so much from them about the "Kiss way." And then, in the Nineties, musically speaking, we were as good as any Kiss era.

As good as the vaunted Seventies era?

Absolutely. I've heard Gene pick on *Alive III*, for example, but it's a load of shit. It's like, "Dude, give me a break. We were killing it then." Here's the truth about the Eighties and Nineties: We could play the old shit right, and we played the new shit right. I'm not saying we had the magic of the original band, but don't put that era down because you're trying to sell the makeup. I've always said that was bullshit.

I also don't buy Paul putting down some of that stuff. He was there. He sang his heart out. He worked hard on it. Is Paul entitled to his opinion? Of course. But to reduce an era to nothing? I don't buy it. We persevered and would have made it out to the other side given a chance.

It wasn't grunge that killed that era; it was a reunion tour. **GW**

Kiss in Tokyo, April 1988; [from left] Gene Simmons, Bruce Kulick, Paul Stanley and Eric Singer. "I don't buy Paul putting down some of that stuff," Kulick says. "He was there. He sang his heart out. He worked hard on it"

"PUTTING THE MAKEUP BACK ON AT THE TIME WAS A PURELY COMMERCIAL DECISION"

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THE

ON *DRAMA*, HIS VINTAGE-GEAR-FUELED NEW ALBUM, FORMER MEGADETH MAN

PLOT

MARTY FRIEDMAN PROMISES “THE ABSOLUTE PUREST, HIGHEST-PERCENTAGE,

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HIGHEST-CALORIE VERSION” OF WHO HE IS AS A GUITARIST AND ARTIST

“VE PUSHED A lot of boundaries on this [album] and surpassed any of the guitar playing I’ve done before,” Marty Friedman tells *Guitar World* about *Drama*, his new record. “If you want to talk on a guitar level, it’s — without question — the deepest dive into my playing that I’ve ever done.”

That’s some next-level thinking from the former Megadeth and Cacophony guitarist who’s been putting out solo albums since the late Eighties. And although those words shouldn’t exactly surprise you if you’ve followed along with Friedman’s career, it still takes balls to say it. But listening to *Drama*, one can’t help but think Friedman might be onto something.

“The amount of energy, effort, love and ‘putting myself out there’ that goes into a record like *Drama* — it’s like night and day compared to other projects that people might have found me from,” he says. “It’s the absolute

purest, highest-percentage, highest-calorie version of what I am as an artist.”

***Drama* seems like a particularly important record for you. What brought you here?**

I’m very interested in finding out why you thought this was an important record for me — because it is, in fact, a very important record for me. What was it about the record that made you say that? I’m curious.

Despite being an instrumental guitar player, you’re keying in on certain emotions and trying to tell a story via textures. The placement of your solos — it just seems different.

Well, I’d like to think I’m getting better at what I do. If I listen back to my previous work, which I rarely do, I know there’s a lot of things I still would smile about, but

BY ANDREW DALY PHOTOS BY TAKAAKI HENMI

there's [also] a lot of things I wouldn't do that way anymore because I've evolved from that. I think *Drama* is the sum of so many varied life experiences — [and] the sum of all those things put into music.

I'm totally aware that a lot of people, especially in America, know me from my previous bands and my early solo records, and they think, "Well, he went to Japan, and that was that." You know, "He's doing something in Japan." I don't fault them for knowing just that much, but I think on this record, it's undeniable that I'm reaching out to people around the world, not just the Japanese audience.

It's a snapshot of where you are, right here, right now.

Artistically, this is exactly where I'm at. You might know me from something in the past, [or] you might not. This is brand new for a lot of people to listen to. So it's very important to introduce myself to people with this. As I was making this record, I paid extreme attention to not repeating anything I had ever done conceptually while touching on and embellishing what I found to have been the best parts of my music in the past.

Some people have liked my music in the past, and I try to guess what they liked about it. If that matches what I like about my music, I tried to embellish that. To sum this up, this is a love letter to those people who have followed me, even though I haven't always been in America, and to those people who've kept me in their musical rotation.

But it's also an introductory letter to the people who may have forgotten about why they liked my music in the first place — and for the people who have no idea who on Earth I even am! With those criteria in mind, I chose the music very carefully. It was with that purpose.

Another perception that most people have is, "Marty Friedman is a shredder," and they go into your albums with that in mind. But there are a lot of surprises here in terms of how you placed your solos while still making them grandiose — and still quintessentially you.

I like your words better than mine. I think what's important to me is that grandioseness comes from something, and what that comes from is the placement of phrases, so to speak. A lot of people learn these very intricate, difficult things, and they just play them.

On the surface, it's no big deal, but if you put them in the most delicious spot and build up a piece of music, that's the Holy



Grail of things I've been trying to develop over my career. You have to create this groundwork of a piece of music that allows you these delicious spots in the song, and in those places, you put the phrases that are going to give people goosebumps, make a tear come out of their eye and give people chills. This is the thing I've been developing over the years, and when I listened back to my older stuff, it's very primitive. I had fancy phrases and stuff, and I put them out there; but over the years, I found ways to build up the foundation of the piece of music so that the listener gets excited when they hear these things.

One track that immediately did that for me was "Illumination." There was a feeling there, though, that it was difficult to track. It was as if a story were unfolding.

Well, thank you very much for your words. I hope that you leave all your comments in! It's important, especially on this album, because it was constructed to bring out emotions. I think a lot of bringing out emotions comes from subliminally and consciously taking familiar melodies from people's childhoods, like little bits of familiar melodies.

All of us have been listening to music for many years, but there are familiar turns of *cliché* melodies that we've grown up with and maybe haven't heard for decades. And there might be a little three seconds of a melody. The last time you heard this melody was when you were five years old, walking somewhere with your mom. As someone who is constantly surrounded by,

listening to, analyzing and enjoying music, my will is deep enough to drag things out.

If you listen to my record, it sounds modern; it sounds like it was recorded in 2024. Some of the heart of the content, the chord work and the way notes fall over the chords, is kind of timeless. They're the melodies that could be in the Top 10 now, or they could have been in songs Doris Day sang in the Fifties. These melodies are only mine because I interpret them my own way. But they must have come from somewhere in my life and in everyone's life. This album is the best example of doing that [that] I've ever had.

Instrumental music is fascinating, especially when the main voice is a guitar. But as far as themes, are they implied, or did you have something in mind?

I hope the melodies stick with people for their own reasons. When I'm creating an album like this, I'm creating many demos before I even consider going in to make the real record. And for whatever reason, certain melodies stick with me. I want those melodies to represent me. When people hear my name, that melody might pop into their minds, and I have to make that choice. It's kind of a big responsibility, so there's something in these melodies that resonates with me.

By the same token, when people are listening to music that they like, there's some indescribable thing they hear that makes them enjoy it and want to hear it again. They want to buy it; they want to be surrounded by this sound; it's their music, you

know? All of the music that's in your collection — that's your music. It's very personal, so there's not some kind of formula; there are probably pop artists following some algorithm and doing something in that world, but in my world, there's just absolutely no formula.

I'd be remiss if I didn't touch on the solos. What is the function of solos within the context of your music?

Of all the things that I'm able to do, solos are probably the sharpest weapon in the toolbox. That's kind of the easiest thing for me to do. My main goal is to create musical

records where I hit a couple of good emotional points.

But as you grow as a player, musician and artist, you try to appeal to a more honorable part of the listener's personality. Trying to appeal to someone's impression of you as a technically gifted player, that's kind of low-hanging fruit. It really is. Because all you really need to do is practice, and you're going to impress a lot of people with your playing.

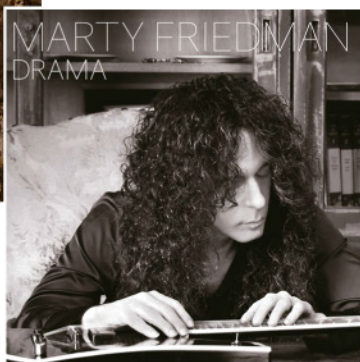
Of course, it's a wonderful thing; believe me, I've done a lot of that in my early years. And I really hope that people are impressed with my playing now as well. When you

the record.

What do you hope people take away from this record?

I'm very excited about new people hearing my music because it's been very encouraging over the last years touring outside of Japan. I've been noticing that the demographic of fans coming to my shows and the demographic of people hearing my recent music has been so much younger. I think younger people are going to hear this music with a very fresh and clear palate.

I'm excited to hear people who maybe don't know me and say, "Well, I heard this



"I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO WALK AWAY AND SAY, 'HE'S A GREAT SOLO PLAYER' OR 'THOSE ARE SOME FANCY LICKS.' I JUST WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL THESE EMOTIONS FROM HEARING THE MUSIC"

landscapes so I can come in as a soloist and send this piece of music home. That's the biggest challenge; creating a delicious point to play a solo is an endless pursuit. But when you get it, the solos feel so incredibly good and so natural, and you feel like, "This is exactly what I'm here to do."

There are a lot of guitar solos on this record. Go figure — it's a Marty Friedman record, and there are going to be a lot of solos! The solos are going to be deeper, richer and more advanced, for lack of a better word, than any of the solos I've ever done before. But my whole purpose in creating my own music is to create music as a whole. I don't want people to walk away and say, "Wow, he's a great solo player" or "Those are some fancy guitar licks." I just want people to feel these emotions from hearing the music.

Looking at a song like "Icicles," that checks out. I walked away from it thinking less about the impressive technical aspect and more about the vibe.

I'm very happy to hear that. Because I'm as guilty as anyone else; there was a lot of showboating on some of my earlier records that a lot of people know me from. I had a lot of that to say, and I really believed in that at the time. But looking back on that, it's kind of funny, and despite that, I think there are some moments on those early

make it to your 17th record, you realize that people knew that you could play a long time ago. And anyone can play; there's millions of fantastic, great players. So, what separates me, or any other person, from the others is the artistic world that they create and the feelings that the listener gets when they listen to it.

One of the things I notice about *Drama* is how textural it is. What sort of gear did you deploy to make that happen?

A lot of this stuff came from old gear. The Fender Twin I used was from the Sixties or something like that. And I don't have any vintage gear — I don't own any of it. I've always been a "new gear" type of guy. I've never understood vintage gear; I've never had the capacity of knowledge for it, the patience for it or the love of it, for that matter. But on this album, I'm seeing the light a little bit.

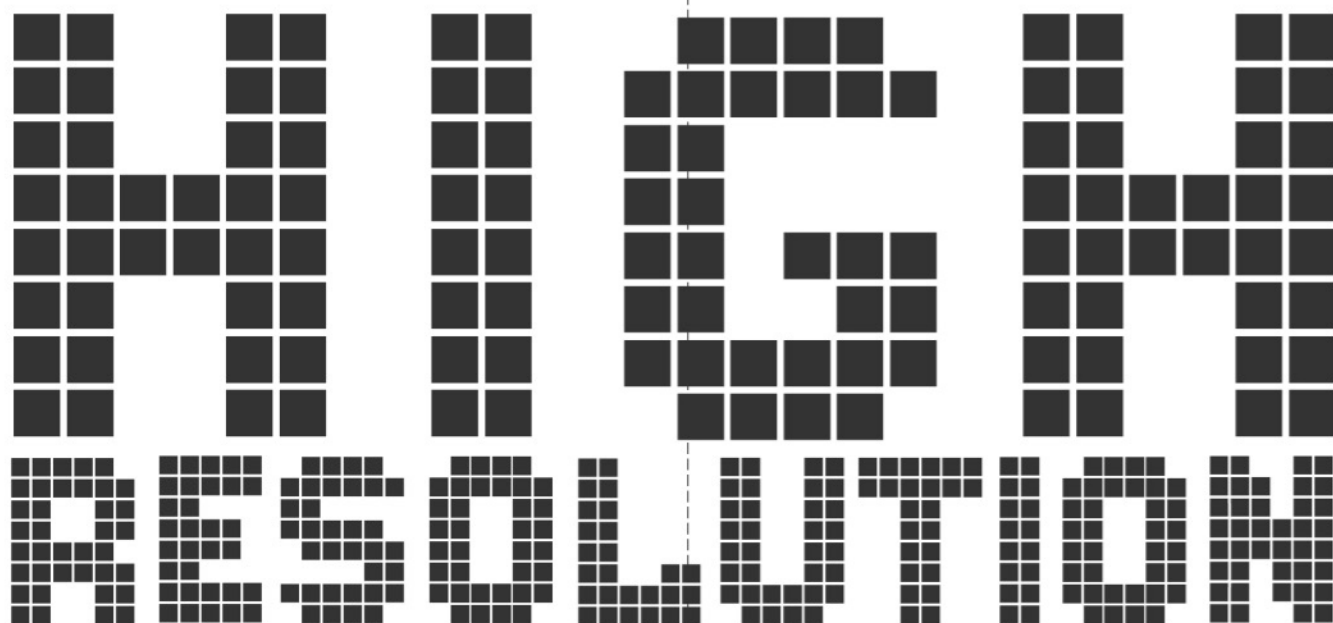
In the hands of someone who knows how to maintain vintage instruments, I can't imagine an amp that still exists from the Sixties... I mean, how much beer and bong water must be in that thing? I can't even fathom it. I use new gear on every single tour, and I love it. But in the hands of a master technician who can maintain vintage gear, it really gives a complete, new and beautiful light to shine against the modern gear that I'm also playing all over

guy Marty plays a mean guitar, but I had no idea that this was in him." A lot of people might have left off on my career where they might have been thinking, "Well, he's this super guitar player..." But I think a lot of people are gonna say, "I didn't know he had it in him. I didn't know he had *this* in him."

What misconceptions about you would you like to put to bed once and for all?

People discover you when they discover you, and then they discover you for whatever reason they discover you for. There are no real misconceptions, you know what I mean? There really isn't. I've been fortunate to have such a long career where I've done so many things and so many varied things; I mean, it might be easier to categorize me if I was like, you know, the Ramones, where you know exactly what you're getting.

For better or for worse, I've done a lot of things, and I've signed off on everything I've done; I'm not ashamed of anything. Wherever you found me in my career, that's great. So there's not any kind of misconception that I'd like to put to rest. If you've found anything that speaks to you in my creative output, that's wonderful. You can't appeal to everybody all the time. But I will say this: this album, *Drama*, is a very good representation of the deepest core of what I am as an artist. **GW**



> **THERE ARE SEVERAL POPULAR IMAGES OF GARY CLARK JR.:** the hipster bluesman; the guitar prodigy who made Eric Clapton want to play again; the political firebrand who channeled his experience of the South into 2019's triple Grammy-winning album *This Land*; the devastated Black man who gave an incendiary response to George Floyd's death at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis in 2020. "We just want to wake up in the morning, go and make the most out of what we can, get what we can for ourselves and for our family, and go the f**k back home," he posted on Instagram at the time. "That's all." And, of course, there's the most familiar, well-meaning if somewhat reductive label: "savior of the blues."

"People get that really wrong about me," the 40-year-old Clark tells us. "Although I appreciate that; it's my roots. But if you go back and listen to my old records, I've always been incorporating different styles and genres and ideas on all my records. I've always been that way. I think people have this vision of, like, 'Well, I thought that guy was gonna be the next Hendrix.' That wasn't really what I was setting out to do."

Having broken through with 2019's *This Land*,
GARY CLARK JR.

– the one-time
"savior of the blues"
– has thrown off his
many labels and
delivered *JPEG Raw*,
his most
musically diverse
offering yet

Story by Polly Glass Photos by Max Crace



“If you go back
and listen to my
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THAT WAY”**

He pauses, chuckling. “Or that I take myself real seriously. I think people think I’m serious all the time.”

In light of *This Land*, such impressions weren’t entirely surprising. The messages in that record were unflinching, uncomfortable, honest. There was fire there, and Clark became associated with that fire. It was serious.

Speaking at his ranch outside Austin, Gary Clark Jr. is a mellowed soul, more keen to talk music than politics. He’s a guitar nerd, and a bit of a nerd all round (not the most obvious descriptor, perhaps, for a handsome six-foot-four guy so often described as “cool”). He enthuses about his new Ibanez (“with a Floyd Rose, something I’d never done before”); Steve Vai’s epic “For the Love of God”; his Neve mixing console; time spent barbecuing outdoors with his family during lockdown... All things that mixed the colors of his career-topping new album, *JPEG Raw*, a heady yet hooky fusion of blues, smoky jazz, dirty rock, hip-hop and African flavors, peppered with stellar collaborators.

“For this album I leaned toward really crafting songs and using all kinds of different influences,” he says. “We were sitting at home, it was 2020 through to 2023, and we were working on this thing, so there was a lot of time to sit and discover new music.”

The fire of *This Land* can still be heard. It’s there in the heated guitars juxtaposed with sharp beats and worldly textures. It’s there in the political ire of “What About the Children,” his collaboration with Stevie Wonder, conceived as the Black Lives Matter movement rose up in 2020.

Clark hasn’t lost his sense of urgency, his refusal to rehash old standards or settle into a comfort zone. But a shift seems to have taken place. The Clark Jr. of *JPEG Raw* is more nuanced, more real, less confined to angry, soapbox-y impressions. An ordinary guy with extraordinary experiences, delving into musical styles that he loves. And, ultimately, he sounds more powerful for it.

“It’s kind of yours to digest, and you can feel about it how you want,” he says with a shrug, when asked what he hopes people will take from the record. “It’s kind of open to interpretation after I’m done with it. I hope people enjoy it and come out to the show and rock out with us.”

In 2020, as the world remained at home, Clark started holding weekly barbecues. Using an offset smoker and the best brisket he could get his hands on, the father-of-three slow-cooked meat and thought about life — what the future might hold without music. His wife, Australian model Nicole Trunfio, prepared sides. Their youngest child had just been born. Gary and Nicole joked about opening a restaurant if their careers didn’t survive the pandemic.

“Oh yeah, we would be, like, ‘Maybe we’ll start off with a little food truck and just travel across the country,’ you know, stuff like that. Fortunately, we got out of that thing and were able to get back out on the road. So we put the restaurant project on the back burner — for now.”

Gathered over brisket smoke, records and a few drinks, Clark and his bandmates brainstormed ideas. They listened to Steve Vai, Albert King, Stro Elliot, Eric Johnson and much more. The soul of *JPEG Raw* began to take shape.

“I had taken all these projects on my own, musically,”

Clark with his
Wide Sky P125 and
[previous page]
Gibson ES-355



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he says. "So it was nice to have that teamwork and that camaraderie. I think that really helped with the direction, the sonic palette of this album."

Meanwhile, Clark used the enforced at-home time to master music production software Pro Tools and his Neve console, marking the start of a wider-reaching composer/producer role. An early result of that had been "This Is Who We Are," featuring London-based R&B vocalist Naala, which started life in early 2020. At the time, Clark tossed the song idea aside, but the finished version feels like a capsule taste of the whole record.

"It develops," he says. "It encompasses all the things I like about music. It's got kind of this orchestral, symphonic movements, kind of dark minor, bluesy vibes, chugging funky rhythm and weird synth, bass and loud guitar riffs."

At the time, Clark's band lineup had changed. "Riff-rock guy" Elijah Ford (ex-Black Crowes guitarist Marc Ford's son) joined on bass. Drummer JJ Johnson had returned from the Tedeschi Trucks Band ("who I love," Clark says). Their lives and influences can all be heard on *JPEG Raw*.

"He [JJ] comes from San Antonio, so he kind of grew up in that punk scene," Clark tells us, "but also he is an amazing jazz drummer. So he can do just about anything, which is cool. And Jon Deas [keyboards] comes from a church background, so he's got the soul, the gospel stuff along with the funky jazz, all the colors, all the crazy new sounds — he's that guy. I love all of it."

Jacob Sciba, co-producer/writer/arranger, brought various jazz and West African influences to the table. Riffy opener *Maktub* (meaning "it is written" in Arabic) emerged from this, and through conversations with co-writer Sama'an Ashrawi's father, who is of Palestinian descent. All of it hinges on a compelling blues melody.

"He's telling stories about how music helped bring people together, in times of war and despair, the terrible things that happen in life," Clark says. "And saying, 'Music is the message.' It's very powerful. It was a long conversation."

Such messages are embedded in *JPEG Raw*. "Don't Start," enriched by guest vocalist Valerie June ("I wanted that funky, swampy Southern bluesy but dancey thing happening"), is a highly danceable affair with a subtle polemic that sneaks up on you. "Better run and hide, better learn to pray / Oh, Lord I'm 'bout to kill that man," Clark sings.

"It was a conversation about a certain... situation that maybe a few of us have been in," he says with a laugh, a little evasively, "where you felt like doing somebody a little harm. But, you know, luckily that didn't happen, and you got good friends around you to hold you back. But for a minute, you think about doing a little damage."

With the world in such a tumultuous place while he wrote these songs, you'd be right to expect some social commentary. But Clark says a bigger inspiration was the pitfalls of absorbing global events, and the lives of others, online. With three young children, he became especially conscious of the canyon between life shown on social media and in reality. "It's not as cool or glamorous or easy to get to these seemingly unattainable goals as it looks on the internet," he says. "You know, it's tough to not get caught up in it, but I'm really trying hard not to."

Does this album feel more like a product of your own

experience, or observation? "It was observing the world around me, it was a big realization that..." He thinks about this.

"I was getting a lot of my information on the world through my feed. It was crazy out there, you know, and it still is. But I saw how much I feed my brain through my phone, how much it affects my mood and my disposition, versus when I turn it off and I'm hanging with my kids and they're playing in the yard and my wife's happy and, you know, singing and dancing around the living room, like, 'Okay, this is all right, this is cool, I should appreciate this and not stress so much about things that I can't necessarily control.'"

Following Clark's Instagram post about George Floyd's death, Stevie Wonder got in touch. For Clark, who grew up listening to Wonder's records, it was a turning point.

"I was expressing some frustration, you know?" Clark says now of the Instagram post. "And Stevie saw and he's like, 'Hey, man, I feel you do it. You know, I understand where your heart is.' And he's like, 'Let's write a song together.'"

Conversations turned into demos and eventually studio time, and they wound up with "What About the Children," a super-sweet, funky yet biting tune in the vein of Stevie's own "Living for the City." It's a bridge between *JPEG Raw*'s heavier, grittier textures and its softer ones.

Indeed, across the record there's a lot of sweetness between the sharp edges. The low-lit jazz/soul/hip-hop fusion "Alone Together" features sultry trumpet lines from Keyon Harrold (who played the Miles Davis parts in Don Cheadle's biopic *Miles Ahead*). Dreamy textures drive the atmospheric "Hyperwave," a song that came about while watching sunsets in Austin, pink, orange and purple skies, deer and antelope in the distance.

"It was quiet, you can hear the crickets, birds," Clark says, sounding happy. "That's not really something I've had in other studios. I've usually been, like, in Los Angeles or New York, you know, places like that."

Although finishing touches were made in L.A., the bulk of *JPEG Raw* came together amid the comfort of Clark's Austin home, as well as producer Mike Elizondo's studios in Nashville. You can hear it in the



Clark with
his Ibanez
Blazer BL1025



record's balance of color and space.

"That's kind of out in a rural spot as well," he says of the studio. "So it was a lot of going outside on breaks and seeing wildlife and horses and beautiful sunsets, green pastures and beautiful oak trees. I guess that had something to do with the atmosphere, the tones, the space, the colors in the record."

This affinity with nature isn't new for Clark. As a child he was in the Boy Scouts and spent a lot of time outdoors, camping and birdwatching. He learned to shoot a gun at a young age. His grandfather took them fishing. "Oh yeah, I was a big nerd," Clark says. "Absolutely. I mean, being in Central Texas, we were encouraged to appreciate the hill country. So we would take field trips and go out on boats and search for eagles, take our cook kits and boil up some water, do archery... So I've always been appreciative of quiet rural areas."

You can feel that quiet on "To the End of the Earth." Perhaps *JPEG Raw's* most surprising moment, it's a minute-long dose of crooning by Clark, inspired by John Coltrane collaborator/baritone Johnny Hartman. It's stripped back, with just his voice and an acoustic guitar. A new sort of spotlight for a guitar hero whose singing gets relatively fewer plaudits.

"I sing all the time," he says. "I grew up in a musical family where we sang all the time. We were also in choir, so I was learning how to sing classical, jazz, modern stuff, barbershop quartets, you know. So I appreciate singing harmonies. I do it all the time."

In high school he and his friend Robbie started a vocal harmony group called Young Soul — a far cry from the heavier sounds he'd come to embrace with his other good friend/guitarist, Eve Monsees. "We thought we were

gonna go on the road and open up for Boyz II Men back in the day," he says with a laugh. "But that didn't really work out. I picked up a guitar instead."

All the while, Clark and his four sisters (two older, two younger) were ingesting their father's copies of Stevie Wonder's albums *Innervisions* and *Songs in the Key of Life*, along with his memories of seeing Parliament and Carlos Santana in Oakland when he lived there in the Seventies.

Some of these formative influences come full circle on *JPEG Raw*: the slinky "Funk Witch U" features Parliament mastermind George Clinton; on the aforementioned "What About the Children," it's Clark's sisters on backing vocals. "It was really cool, me and my sisters on a song with Stevie Wonder," he says. "I played it for my dad and he teared up a little bit."

Looking forward, his hopes revolve around learning: composing, getting to grips with music theory, honing his craft. "That's not for [my] career or anything," he says. "That's just me wanting to better myself as a musician."

"IT WAS NICE TO HAVE THAT TEAMWORK and that camaraderie. I think that really helped with the direction, THE SONIC PALETTE OF THIS ALBUM"

Beyond that, who knows? After a lifetime of labels, there's a sense of Clark coming back to his truest ones. Gary Clark Jr. the music lover. The guitar nerd. The husband and father. The human being.

Still, he does have some other ideas.

"I want to be a photographer for *National Geographic*," he says affirmatively. "Or be a camera guy for that show *Earth*; I want to catch the mysterious snow leopard. I want to be one of those guys. I'm already on my way." He chuckles again. "My wife is a little bit concerned with the camera gear I've been purchasing..." **GW**

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FIRE and WATER



Ahead of their joint **ASHES OF LEVIATHAN** tour, Lamb of God's **MARK MORTON** and Mastodon's **BILL KELLIHER** look back on having rocked the **BOAT** and **TORCHED** the metal scene with their respective 2004 releases *By Gregory Adams*



SOME THINGS ARE

just meant to go together — like peanut butter and chocolate, or Bennifer. You could add Lamb of God and Mastodon to that list of perfect pairings.

Though they're two very different bands — the former a precision thrash force with a penchant for groove, the latter a Southern-fried psych trip of percussive prog — both shot to prominence in the early '00s while redefining the American metal landscape. Sure enough, they've been prolific vanguards for heavy music ever since.

This summer, they're looking back to their gloriously pummeling past through the joint Ashes of Leviathan arena tour — a 20th-anniversary celebration of Lamb of God's powerfully political *Ashes of the Wake* and Mastodon's massive-sounding *Moby Dick* tribute, *Leviathan*. In true happenstance, both now-iconic albums managed to come out the same damn day: August 31, 2004. Lamb's lead guitarist Mark Morton and Mastodon rhythm riffer Bill Kelliher explain, however, that their careers had been inextricably linked well before then.

It was in 1998, specifically, when Richmond, Virginia's Burn the Priest — Morton's proto-Lamb project — happened to crash into producer Steve Austin's recording studio in Clinton, Massachusetts, to track their venomously grinding self-titled debut. Kelliher, a native of Rochester, New York, had also recently arrived in town to play bass in Austin's noise-core group, Today Is the Day — which then also featured drummer (and fellow future Mastodonian) Brann Dailor.

Kelliher recalls Austin Enterprises being smooshed into an old building with “an antique store on one side and a fucking donut shop on the other.” Morton recalls Burn the Priest being supremely excited to be there, though the producer's tiny working space got cozy, to say the least.

“We were all sleeping there because we didn't have a budget to stay anywhere else,” Morton says of the heavy metal slumber party, both he and Kelliher noting that everyone got chummy over drinks once sessions wrapped for the day. “I have a great picture of me, Brann and Mikey Brosnan — who had a label called Legion Records, and was putting out the Burn the Priest CD at the time — on the couch the week we were there.”

Kelliher continues: “That was our home. Brann slept on the couch; I slept on a little flip-and-fuck mattress. There was a tiny

fridge. No shower. A dingy little bathroom. It was fun at the time... We had no idea what was coming down the pike.”

It'd be a few years before the musicians met again, though they were on each other's respective radars. Burn the Priest became Lamb of God in 2000, which is when they picked up Morton's partner in crime, guitarist Willie Adler. Kelliher caught wind of the name change, recalling seeing that his friends were “catapulting” into greater recognition following the release of 2000's *New American Gospel* and 2003's *As the Palaces Burn* — impressive, extreme-metal statements that led to Lamb of God signing with major label Epic ahead of making *Ashes of the Wake*.

Kelliher was likewise on an incline. He and Dailor wound up in Savannah, Georgia, after leaving Today Is the Day in 2000, and it's in the Peach State where they linked up with bassist Troy Sanders and wildcard chicken-picker Brent Hinds to form Mastodon. While the sludge-chunkiness of 2002 debut album *Remission* set the stage for greatness, Dailor shuttled the band to new heights after proposing they base their progressively twisted sophomore collection around 19th-century American novelist Herman Melville's most famous epic.

“We were all sitting at the bar in a hotel in Belgium,” Kelliher says of the conversation. “Brann was out of his mind — we'd had a few drinks or whatever — and he was like, ‘Guys... I just read this book, *Moby-Dick*, and I have all these crazy ideas for our next record.’ People started taking us seriously [*once Leviathan came out*].”

“I have always looked to Mastodon — and their really unbridled, unrestrained creative ambition — as a source of inspiration,” Morton says in a general tangent. “I think I can say this... [*but*] from a distance, it sometimes looks uncomfortable for them, because there's an identity push-and-pull. ‘Are we a metal band, or are we a doomy band, or are we this artsy Rush band?’ The answer is yes to all of those things. As a fan and as a friend, that sometimes looks a little restless [*for them*], which I think is good. Because if you're not restless... then you're stagnant.”

While set to dip into some summertime nostalgia, Mastodon and Lamb of God



Blast from the past: Lamb of God's Mark Morton [left] and Willie Adler in Bristol, England, February 12, 2009



"I have always looked to MASTODON — and their really unbridled, unrestrained CREATIVE AMBITION — as a source of inspiration"

MARK MORTON

won't be resting on their creative laurels for long. Both acts are in the primordial stages of making their next records (Mastodon last released *Hushed and Grim* in 2021; Lamb of God's latest is 2022's *Omens*). Nevertheless, Kelliher and Morton got together with *Guitar World* to dish on legendary riffs, the sambuca and baloney sandwich days, and how both groups of heavy metal pirates are still journeying toward a great unknown.

Looking back on the era, Bill, do you feel like Mastodon's songwriting leveled up from *Remission* to meet Brann's *Moby-Dick* concept?

BILL KELLIHER: The first two Mastodon records — *Remission* is the first full-length, but there was the *Lifeflood* EP before that — were kind of a mish-mash. Brent and Troy had their songs, me and Brann had our songs, and we kind of put them together. But by *Leviathan*, I felt like we started locking in together with the songwriting. And the songs were getting more complex, more thought-out. We were getting more intricate with the note choices.

And then we really felt connected to that *Moby-Dick* concept. I felt like we were Captain Ahab in search of the white whale. I could totally relate to the story. It's not about capturing the whale; it's about the thrill of the hunt. And we were a bunch of dirty pirates! Our ship was this giant, stinky white van, and we went port to port to play our music. We were in search of whatever the white whale could be, metaphorically... It could be a success.

Mark, how do you remember the transition for Lamb of God between *As the Palaces Burn* and *Ashes of the Wake*? Since there was only a year between those albums, were the *Ashes* songs already in the tank?

MARK MORTON: It was really terrifying, because we had just done *Palaces*, a record that happened naturally. We had time to write *those* songs in our practice space as ideas popped up. We got signed to Epic pretty shortly after *Palaces* dropped, which was life-changing. Epic doing what they do, they wanted a record. They had just invested in this extreme-metal band, the scene was bubbling up and becoming a thing... So we had to turn around and go right back into writing. I remember being aware of how intense that situation was. It had this cloud of pressure about it. I'd just expended all of these creative ideas on this other album.

What it taught me, though — and it's something I hang onto today — is to trust

your artistry and wherever that creative flow is coming from. Maybe don't accept everything as good just because it's coming to the surface, but when your intuition tells you something is valid, run with that. Don't be scared to believe in the ideas you have. But I didn't have the choice of overthinking anything... We had to run with the ideas that were coming. And that wound up becoming *Ashes of the Wake*.

These records kick off with all-time bangers from both of you. Mark, "*Laid to Rest*" is one of the defining stomps of the Lamb of God catalog. What do you remember about putting it together?

MORTON: I don't remember so much about putting it together, except that I had this riff rattling around in my head. And it turns out, part of what I was hearing was a song from Testament called "Into the Pit," because the riff is remarkably similar. The song structure is very different and goes to different places, so it's not a direct lift. But it makes sense, because Testament was a really huge influence for me. It's rooted in my love for Eighties Bay Area thrash. I've definitely told Eric Peterson a time or two that I probably owe him dinner.

Bill, "*Blood and Thunder*" is the beast that tees off *Leviathan*; it's still a big part of your sets. That first percussive riff just pumps you the fuck up.

KELLIHER: That's our "Ace of Spades" kind of song that we have to play every night, whether we want to or not. It's interesting you ask about that riff, though. Brann came up with that. He doesn't play guitar, and he's about as good at guitar as I am on drums — which is to say, terrible — but he comes up with a lot of riffs, and puts them into my hands. The thing is, he thinks of rhythms differently than I would. He was playing the beat to it [after explaining the riff], but we kept getting off time. He was like, "No, dude, it doesn't go 'ban-na, ban-na, ban-na' it goes 'BANT, ban-na, ban-na.'" That simple little change... It was like learning new math. This was jagged, angular and weird, but all of a sudden it clicked. That song just exploded. It got onto *Guitar Hero* back in the day. It's the very first song on *Leviathan*, [but] when we do our live shows it's usually the last song, because it's a head-banger and kind of our most popular song.

What were either of you using on these records, gear-wise?

KELLIHER: I'd had two guitars stolen in 2003 over in Europe, so I had just bought an '82 Les Paul custom silverburst, which I still have. I used that for everything,

because that's the only guitar I had. I think Brent only had one guitar, his goldtop Les Paul. We were in Seattle at Studio Litho with [producer] Matt Bayless. For "Blood and Thunder," I used my JCM800 2210, dual-channel, which I'd used since I was a kid. I also used Brent's JMP to double the guitars. I had either an old-school BK Butler or Chandler tube driver, like the big wedge box. It's not like today where I've got over 100 guitars, 50 amps, every pedal you can imagine and modelers. When I go into the studio now, it's like I'm a kid in a candy store. It was much different back then.

MORTON: I would have used a '75 Les Paul goldtop that had been routed out for PAFs. I think I had a Seymour Duncan '59 humbucker in the bridge, which is what I would've been using mostly. I also had a

MORTON: The thing to consider is that any competent producer can come in and capture my tone just like I like it, but a producer [has] other agendas to consider. They have to carve out space for the other guitar player or the bass player. There is a science toward making space with frequencies in the mix... sometimes that can stomp on what I might think is the perfect guitar sound.

Machine wasn't super familiar with the band, so I think there's an aspect of trying to get the best overall result in the most efficient timeframe. What inevitably happens is a lot of producers already know how they're going to wrap the signal paths, because they have a tried-and-true system. That winds up changing the personality and the sound [of the band]. I'm not attacking Machine — we went on to work with

"My mom would STILL BE BUGGING ME in 2004, like, 'You need to go to college, get a degree [and] get a real job.' I was like, 'NO, MOM, IT'S COOL'"

BILL KELLIHER

Jackson Swee-tone, which is a weird spin on a neck-through. Kind of a Dinky-shaped, two-humbucker thing. I played that for a lot of that era, too. Those would have been the two main guitars.

Amp-wise, it would have been a Boogie Mark IV, which I still use quite a bit, but [Ashes producer] Machine did a lot of re-amping on that record. Honestly, I've never loved the guitar sound on that record. I liked the guitar sound going into *Ashes of the Wake*, but the guitar sound coming back when it was mixed and mastered... I'm still not really a fan of it. It's just not my sound. It's kind of sandy and gritty. When I'm dialing in a tone, it's more reflective of my personality on the guitar. A tighter gain structure. Not as grainy and sharp.

Bill, did you and Brent catch the white whale on *Leviathan*, in terms of tone?

KELLIHER: I wasn't unhappy with the guitar tone on the record. I think it's fine... I have to agree with Mark, though. A lot of times when I go into the studio where someone else is in control, I'm never happy with how the guitars sound when they come out of the speakers. Like, "That's not my tone. Go put your ear up to the fucking amp." I record bands all the time, and I don't run it through anything except a microphone; that's when it sounds the best.

him again [on 2006's *Sacrament* — ed.] and rectified a lot of those issues — but I think a lot of times you're on a strict schedule, and you've got to get this record done. Sometimes that winds up with guitar players like Bill and myself not being thrilled with the tone that wound up printing on the record.

This might be a good point, Mark, to analyze the tone and feel of several different players on your record. How did you go about putting together *Ashes of the Wake*'s thrash-instrumental title track, which ended up rolling out four distinct solos from you, Willie, Testament's Alex Skolnick and Megadeth's Chris Poland?

MORTON: We had kind of gotten away from the *New American Gospel* style of writing, which was just landscapes of riffs stitched together. By the time we're at *Ashes of the Wake*, we're considering the way a song moves — what's the chorus; what's the bridge; how are these things working together — from a succinct, listenability kind of approach. That particular song didn't have a lot of that going on, though. [Laughs]

Willie, my partner in the band, definitely has a less conventional approach to songwriting. He's more like, "I don't care what part it is that happens next." There's a beauty to that, but sometimes it can be difficult to write lyrics to that. So that song had

that feel to it — "Why don't we just leave it instrumental?" Then the idea was to put these solos on it. It was a nod to some of our influences. And having Chris Poland and Alex Skolnick on the same tune is cool!

Was the idea of going toe-to-toe with your heroes intimidating?

MORTON: Probably! I remember feeling relieved that I got to go last, because then you kind of know what you're up against. I'm not the most adept lead player. I'm a blues guitarist, really. I got a few licks... I'm pretty sure I worked them all into that solo.

This is a tour where you're playing the album front to back, which potentially opens up "*Ashes of the Wake*" to getting guest solos from Brent, Bill or even Kerry King, who's opening a few dates. What's everyone here thinking about that?

MORTON: It's an open invitation to those guys, but my guess is they'll be eating frozen yogurt or watching a movie [during our set].

KELLIHER: Touring in your 50s, you're getting on the bus and watching some Netflix.

MORTON: Yeah!

KELLIHER: I'm not much of a soloist either. I've been in bands where I was the only guitar player. I had to play solos, but I never took any guitar lessons. I grew up on punk rock — Greg Ginn from Black Flag; Dead

Mastodon's Bill Kelliher in Atlanta in 2005. "I just remember hanging out with the Slayer dudes and drinking a lot of 'buca with Kerry King," he says





Kennedys — and they were sloppy. That fit my style. When I solo, it's simple, bluesy stuff. Less Kerry King. I can get up there and do a Chuck Berry solo in the middle of it, though... sure. [Laughs]

"Hearts Alive" is one of *Leviathan's* most complex pieces. It's the weightiest song that the band had put together at that point — at nearly 14 minutes, it's still the longest song in your catalog. What was it like writing that kind of an epic?

KELLIHER: Brent had found a book called something like *500 Guitar Chords* and was learning all these different chords to put together in the opening riff. It was such a departure from a song like "Blood and Thunder." They're on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of songwriting. With what Mark was saying earlier about Mastodon, we don't really fit into one category. I love that about our band! Today we're a metal band, tomorrow we're a Southern rock band or a doom band. There are bluesy licks; there's country licks, metal-ized; there's punk rock riffs. It's what keeps our heart beating.

Brent's solo on "Hearts Alive" is also one of Mastodon's biggest....

KELLIHER: I don't think there was much soloing on *Remission*. It's a lot of rhyth-

mic stuff; that's kind of who we were, you know? I think [*"Hearts Alive"*] was a chance for him to open up, let loose, go crazy and show off his skills. And it was epic! He's always great when he's laying down his solos. They're soulful. You can feel them. There are a lot of weird notes that he bends into, and it's like, "Where are you going? Oh, there it is!" He's a unique player.

Looking back at your first big summer tour together, are there any memories that stick out from the Unholy Alliance trip with Slayer in 2006?

MORTON: I've always felt a kinship with the Mastodon guys. The camps have always gotten along really well. Maybe Bill has more specific memories... I lost a lot of years starting around that era.

KELLIHER: I don't remember a lot of those days either. I used to drink quite heavily, which I stopped doing years ago. I just remember hanging out with the Slayer dudes and drinking a lot of 'buca with Kerry King. Just riding the wave, man, and having a good time with everybody. But honestly, my brain has been fried for so many years that I can't remember specific things because it was mostly a blackout night every night. It's much different these days!

So, we have this *Ashes of Leviathan*

tour celebrating these two monumental albums. What are the defining aspects of these records for you?

MORTON: It was a pivotal record for the band. For me, creatively, it gave me a little bit of confidence. As a songwriter, I was thrown into the fire because of the timing of it all. To see it connect the way it did, I was able to take a breath [afterwards] and say, "Alright, cool... now we get to do this again and we can take more time with it." We hit a stride around that point that we remained in for some time. In that sense, [*Ashes of the Wake*] was us reaching altitude.

How did *Leviathan* change things for Mastodon, Bill?

KELLIHER: At the time I was in the middle of it, it was just a regular day, going out and playing those songs. But we were very proud of the record. My mom would still be bugging me in 2004, like, "You need to go to college, get a degree [and] get a real job." I was like, "No, mom, it's cool. I'm in the van and getting baloney sandwiches on 100 bucks a night. I love it. And I'm 30!" But when we were in *Rolling Stone* for *Leviathan* and they were giving us accolades like, "There's much more to these neanderthals than just sludge metal — they read books," it gave us some credibility. That really helped us stick out as not just another metal band.

A song like "Hearts Alive" was also the gateway into the next record, *Blood Mountain*. It's just an upward-and-onward thing. Looking back at *Leviathan*, that's really where our career moved up a notch. It's a defining moment in our history. The best-selling record it seems like, too.

Beyond this trip, what are the next steps for either band?

KELLIHER: I've been writing a shit-ton. If I spend a day and write 10 riffs, maybe one of them is good, and that's OK! It's what puts me at peace and keeps me on track. So right now, we're at the tip of the iceberg [for the next record] — laying all the riffs out, putting them to click tracks and arranging.

We're interviewing producers. We're talking about collaborations with other people.

MORTON: There's nothing to announce at this point. Willie and I write a lot of riffs, and sometimes we'll bounce stuff off each other to know what the vibe is.

Maybe this is a sign of things to come from Lamb of God and Mastodon, in terms of these paired-up album tours. *Blood Sacrament* has a nice ring to it, for instance. Maybe this is what you do together every couple of summers...

KELLIHER: Hey, if it works... why not? **GW**

SLASH'S *Blues* BALL

WITH HIS S.E.R.P.E.N.T. FESTIVAL, *SLASH* — A FAVORITE SON OF THE EIGHTIES L.A. HARD ROCK SCENE — HAS PUT TOGETHER A SUMMER BLUES TOUR FOR THE AGES. THE GN'R GUITARIST TALKS B.B. KING, SOME UNEXPECTED GEAR CHOICES AND WHY AND HOW HIS BLUES PASSION WAS REIGNITED (AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE)

WORDS BY
RICHARD BIENSTOCK

PHOTOS BY
JEN ROSENSTEIN



[from left]
Samantha Fish,
Slash and Christone
"Kingfish" Ingram
photographed
in Los Angeles,
May 7, 2024

**“ONE OF THE
GREAT THINGS
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BACK IN NOVEMBER 2023, SLASH

had just completed six months of touring with Guns N' Roses, a jaunt that took the band everywhere from Budapest and Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi and Oslo, and then wrapped with yet another run of stadium dates across the U.S. Heading into the holidays, the 58-year-old guitarist was staring down an eight-week break before returning to Europe for a long headlining run with his other band, Slash Featuring Myles Kennedy & the Conspirators. And so, he did what most of us would do at that moment: take a breather and enjoy some well-earned rest and relaxation.

We're kidding, of course.

What Slash *actually* did was head right back into the studio, this time to cut a solo album that paid tribute to the blues artists that inspired his own musical development and guitar style. And he did it with the help of some of his famous and extremely talented musician friends, among them Iggy Pop, Gary Clark Jr., ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons and the Black Crowes' Chris Robinson. The result is the recently released *Orgy of the Damned*, a star-studded affair that sees the guitarist reinterpret a host of blues and r&b classics, from Howlin' Wolf's "Killing Floor" (with AC/DC's Brian Johnson and Aerosmith's Steven Tyler), Willie Dixon's "Hoochie Coochie Man" (with Gibbons) and Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City" (with Tash Neal), to Robert Johnson's "Crossroads" (with Gary Clark Jr.), Fleetwood Mac's "Oh Well" (with Chris Stapleton) and many other iconic tunes.

Slash has long flirted with the idea of doing a blues covers album (he also led a short-lived covers band, Slash's Blues Ball, that he gigged with in the Nineties following his initial departure from Guns N' Roses), but it took until this decidedly not-very-un-busy moment in his life for it to finally happen. Why now?

"I think it was building up in the

back of my mind for so long that it finally pushed its way to the fore," he tells *Guitar World* nonchalantly. As for carving out time in his schedule to get it done, he merely shrugs. "I had the short break, and I knew it wouldn't take long to do and that it would be fun to do. So it was, 'Let's make the record...'"

No time like the present — even if it's a busy one [See our "Pretty Tied Up" sidebar]. "Well, I like playing and I like working, for want of a better word," Slash says. "I'm really not good at just sort of sitting around and spinning my wheels. I can do it for a few hours, or a day, but I can't go weeks like that." He laughs. "My mind would go crazy."

Fortunately for Slash and his mind, he won't be spinning his wheels any time soon. Rather, he's spending the summer not just on tour, but leading his very own branded music extravaganza — the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival. An anagram for Solidarity, Engagement, Restore, Peace, Equality N' Tolerance, the new outing sees Slash and his band — former Blues Ball members bassist Johnny Griparic and keyboardist Teddy "Zig Zag" Andreadis, along with drummer Michael Jerome and singer and guitarist Tash Neal — headlining a nightly celebration of the blues that features, depending on the date, a lineup of performers that includes the Warren Haynes Band, Keb' Mo', Larkin Poe, Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Samantha Fish, ZZ Ward, Robert Randolph, Eric Gales and Jackie

"The Gibson ES-335 is something I've always dug, but it just never fit with my thing," Slash says. "I used one with Velvet Revolver for a minute, but it just never seemed right"

Venson. The result is, well, an actual blues ball, with each show presenting a range of acts that reflect the breadth and scope of the form, and who expertly telegraph the myriad ways the music is interpreted by contemporary artists and absorbed by contemporary audiences.

"It's going to be a whole day of really cool music," Slash says. "And maybe reminiscent of a period gone by that used

to happen a lot more often, where people would go out in the summertime and have these outdoor amphitheater gigs with a bunch of different bands and players would just jam. And you know, I've sat in with guys doing blues songs here and there, but I haven't done full sets like this, and in a festival-like setting, since the Nineties. So I'm really excited."

He believes audiences will be similarly enthused. "I just want people to have a really great time," he says, "and go home feeling satisfied after having food and drinks and hanging out with people and listening to great music. That's my hope. So we put it together to have a bunch of great players just playing from the heart all day and giving it their best."

Prior to the tour's kickoff, Slash sat down with *Guitar World* to discuss the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival, making *Orgy of the Damned* and some of the unusual (well, for him) gear he has been using as of late. He also dove into his love for and history with the blues, how he approaches playing the music, and why he believes this traditional style still has resonance in the modern world.

"One of the great things about blues is the stories that it tells, especially for people who are struggling," Slash says. "And it also offers a reprieve for the people who are performing it, where they can play something and just feel better after all the fucking grind or whatever it is that they've been going through."

"So to me, blues concerts and blues festivals are really about people all getting together to enjoy the moment, where you don't have to worry about the pressures of life for a little while. And I think that's really what this festival is — a celebration of a moment to sort of let it all go and just have a good time."

"MY GRAND-MOTHER WAS LIKE, 'WELL, YOU KNOW, ALL THOSE ROCK GUYS GET IT FROM THIS.' AND SHE PLAYED ME B.B. KING"

Slash with a Gibson L-00 Standard

[right] Slash performs with B.B. King at London's Royal Albert Hall, June 28, 2011

How did the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival come together?

After I finished up the [Orgy of the Damned] record, the next thing is always figuring out a tour. And my manager told me that a promoter that he was talking to was interested in doing a blues festival and putting something together like that with me. And I just thought it was a great idea. So I jumped at it and started putting together some suggestions for blues artists I thought would be great to have on the bill.

The artists involved represent so many different expressions of the blues.

All the players are really, really cool. And they're all people that, with the exception of maybe Eric Gales and Warren Haynes, are relatively new to me. I mean, some people have been around — like, Kingfish has been around a lot longer than I realized, but because of social media, all of a sudden I became very aware of him, more than I had through regular word of mouth. And some of them are fairly young, new artists,

which I think is very cool to have. But overall it's a really nice mix.

A particularly cool aspect of the tour is that you've partnered with various charities — the Equal Justice Initiative, Know Your Rights Camp, the Greenlining Institute, War Child — and will be supporting these organizations with proceeds from ticket sales.

I thought it'd be great if we could help make this into something a bit more communal, and make the gigs more inclusive and more about bringing people together as opposed to driving everybody apart, which has been sort of really what this country has been doing for the last five years, you know? Like, we've been seriously focusing on division. So we started looking



into some different charities that would be in line with important causes, like racial injustice and mental health — organizations that help people on the fringes, who are kept on the fringes because of certain discriminations and things like that. All around, it just seemed like another really good way to bring people together, in addition to the music.

It's a way to address personal and societal struggle, which are themes inherent to blues music.

Absolutely. The blues has always functioned as a release for people that are having hard times — both the people playing it and the people listening to it. And unfortunately, I think a lot of people are having a hard time these days.

What was your earliest exposure to the blues?

I think it was a little different from some other people. When I was really young, I lived in England [*Slash's father, Anthony Hudson, is British; his mother, Ola, was American*], and it was all about the bands that my dad was listening to heavily, which was the Kinks and the Who and the Yardbirds and the Moody Blues and the Stones. That was, like, the big thing. For the first seven years of my life, I listened to that shit day in and day out, every minute of the day. And it was great. But when I moved to the States, all of a sudden it was all these different artists. It was Led Zeppelin and Joe Cocker and the Beatles... obviously the Beatles were the Beatles, but they were bigger in America at that time. It wasn't such a big deal in England. And my grandmother being American was like, "Well, you know, all those rock guys get it from *this*." And she played me B.B. King.

That took you back to the source, so to speak.

Well, on my mom's side of the family, my grandmother and my cousins all listened to a lot of blues and r&b and soul music. A lot of funk, too. And I had two cousins, Wayne and Edward, who were a fucking monster rhythm section, bass and drums. They never took lessons, but they could pick up an instrument, hear a song and play it. So I began to be exposed to all that once I moved to the States — a lot of Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker and Little Walter and all this cool stuff. But I was just a little kid — I didn't really know what it all was, I just

liked it. And so later on, when I finally did pick up the guitar, I started learning stuff by the rock guys that I had rediscovered for myself out of my parents' collection. It was Cream and Zeppelin and Rory Gallagher and Eric Clapton, and it was that stuff, maybe Clapton, that took me back to B.B. King again. And I remembered B.B. King from my grandmother. So it was a sort of full-circle moment of realization. Because my grandmother had told me, and I didn't really get it at the time — I mean, I got it, but it wasn't really important to me [*Laughs*] — that I was listening to all these British artists, and they were all heavily influenced by these Black artists from America. And she wanted to make sure credit was given where credit was due.

She had a good point.

She was right. And all things considered, my favorite British guitar players are amazing, but they all pale in comparison to the original guys, because that was their own personal technique, from its origin, and everybody after that was just picking up on it and taking it somewhere else. But those early blues guitar players from the Fifties and Sixties — and, of course, it goes further back

PRETTY TIED UP

How busy is Slash these days? Here are nine of his guest appearances, all released just within the past year-plus

By Andrew Daly

IF YOU HAVEN'T noticed, Slash is literally busier than ever before. And we're not just talking about his ongoing Gun N' Roses duties, his Capital One commercial, his new *Orgy of the Damned* album or his S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival. We're talking about guest appearances, people. Since 2023, Slash has appeared on a whole lotta tracks — and it's not by accident. As he says elsewhere in this issue, "I'm really not good at just sort of sitting around and spinning my wheels. I can do it for a few hours or a day, but I can't go weeks like that. My mind would go crazy."

Yeah, no kidding. Based on the volume of side hustling Slash has done lately, his inability to sit still checks out. Here's a quick guide to his 2023 and 2024 guest appearances... so far.

2023

Ian Hunter, *Defiance Pt. 1 "Defiance"*

Of all his recent guest spots, Slash's sinfully bluesy cameo across Ian Hunter's "Defiance" — which also features Metallica bassist Robert Trujillo — is his most, shall we say, familiar. For those accustomed to Slash's Les Paul-laden licks heard on GN'R, Slash's Snakepit and Velvet Revolver classics, with its slinky riff and tone-soaked solo, "Defiance" is quintessential Slash.



Chris Janson, *The Outlaw Side of Me "21 Forever"*

Slash tapped into his country side for this guest spot, and he did so alongside fellow guest star Dolly

Parton — there was a thing there that was just raw and amazing and unique, you know?

When it came to recording *Orgy of the Damned*, in addition to stepping outside your usual musical zone, you also tried out some different gear. We can see you playing a Gibson ES-335 in the video for "Killing Floor," and you've talked about using a Fender Strat on "Oh Well" and a Telecaster on "Living for the City." Will you be bringing any of those guitars on the road for the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival?

All things considered, the 335 is something I've always dug, but it just never fit with my thing. I used one with Velvet Revolver for a minute, but it just never seemed right. But interestingly, I had gotten this really pretty 1963 ES-335 [*this guitar was recently recreated by the Gibson Custom Shop as the Slash 1963 ES-335 Collector's Edition*] a few months before I had the idea to do this record. And then when I had decided I was going to do the record, I was like, "Oh, cool — I can use this guitar!" So it became a part of the record, and I'm definitely going to be using it on the tour. I also have a really cool old [*Gibson*] Firebird that sounds really nice that I might bring out, and my '58 replica [*Gibson*] Explorer, which is a great-sounding guitar that I'm definitely going to bring out. And there will be Les Pauls. I don't think I'm going to bring any '58s or '59s, but I'll use the Custom Shop equivalents. As far as Teles and Strats go, it was great to use them in the studio, but I doubt I'll bring them on the road. I can make those sounds pretty much with any of my Gibsons, at least close enough to pull it off.

You also used some smaller combo amps on the record. Will any of those make it to the stage?

Funny enough, I only used one combo on the record — a Magnatone M-80, which started a whole big thing with me. I got that Magnatone a few years ago — I think it was [*Guns N' Roses guitarist*] Richard Fortus that turned me onto it. But I'd been hearing about it from other people, too, like Billy Gibbons. I've always been such a Marshall guy that I'll listen to tons of different amps, but nothing really measures up for me. So I'm always sort of like, "Yeah, yeah, whatever..." But I got this Magnatone, and when I went into pre-production for this record, I said, "Well, I'm gonna use some old combos instead of just my regular Marshall setup." Which is not to say that I couldn't have done the record with a Jubilee, but there's a certain Marshall sound that I was trying to get away from.

But what I did was I took a 50-watt Marshall in, and I had a Dumble Deluxe combo that Dumble built for me — I think it was the last amp that [*Alexander "Howard"*] Dumble made before he passed away. And then I had an old Vox, some old Fifties Fender Deluxes... I took all this stuff in to the studio, and I would get set up and go through these different amps, and I would end up with that Magnatone every fucking time. [*Laughs*] I did all the pre-production with the Magnatone, and then I used it for the whole recording session. I went on to design a 100-watt Magnatone [*the Slash Signature SL-100*], which I've been using on the road. But the Magnatone I'm using right now is a little 50-watt M-80. There's two versions — the combo, and then a head with a 2x12 cabinet. I'm probably going to take the head with the 2x12 cabinet out on the tour.

As far as your setlist for the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival goes, I imagine much of it will consist of the covers we hear on *Orgy of the Damned*. A lot of those are also songs you played with Slash's Blues Ball in the Nineties. Clearly, you have a lot of history with these songs.

Yeah. And they're songs that had a big influence on me prior to Blues Ball. We picked the songs because they meant something to me then, and there's some others that are just great blues songs. But what happened was, the Blues Ball was something that was just a fun, fuck-around kind of thing. We did a lot of gigs and it was a blast, but it wasn't something I took really seriously. It wasn't going to be my next sort of career move. I ended up doing [*Slash's*] Snakepit again after that, then Velvet Revolver and so on. But I had always wanted to record the blues stuff. And so when it finally came back around 30 years later that we were going to record this material, Ted [*Andreadis*] managed to pull out some of these old Blues Ball set lists. And I was like, "Yeah, this song, this song, this song." And then I had a couple that we didn't do in Blues Ball, like "Killing Floor," but it's always been one of my favorite guitar riffs of all time. So we got some songs from the old set lists and then a couple different songs that were newer for us and put it all together.

***Orgy of the Damned* provides a great cross-section of blues classics. Can you point to additional blues songs that you would consider essential listening?**

I was talking just recently with someone about "Spoonful" [*written by Willie Dixon*], which is something that was a big influence on me and that I was actually considering doing for the record, but "Killing Floor" won out. And then yesterday I was listening to a song, "I Was Blind," by B.B. King, which is maybe less known compared to some of his other ones but that I love. [*Jimmy Reed's*] "Bright Lights, Big City" is another influential one that we might put into the set for the tour. A more obvious one for guitar players would be [*Willie Dixon's*] "I Ain't Superstitious" — there's so many different versions of that



**“THAT WAS
THE COOLEST
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ALL THE GREAT
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UNDERNEATH
ALL THAT WAS
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TASTY BLUES
GUITAR PLAYER”**

Parton. How's that for a crossover? But then again, Slash is no stranger to slow-burners, so his understated solo is low-key on-brand.



**Ryan Gosling,
Barbie Soundtrack
“I’m Just Ken”**

Can this track's philosophical lament over Ken's lot in life as “number two” behind Barbie be compared to Slash's career beside Axl Rose? Who knows! But if we dig out of the emotional depths of plastic dolls turned real-life, the guitarist simply does what he does best: rip some sleazy riffage.

**Demi Lovato, *Revamped*
“Sorry Not Sorry
(Rock Version)”**

Slash was known for peeling off the occasional solo for Michael Jackson, and in 2023, he did so for Demi Lovato by livening up “Sorry Not Sorry” with a chugging riff and a solo that exposes a new generation of listeners to Slash's magic.



**Duff McKagan, *Lighthouse*
“Hope”**

While McKagan played most of the guitars himself on *Lighthouse* (with a well-loved Burny Lawsuit Les Paul), he called upon his GN'R bandmate for “Hope,” a track filled with slinky riffs, gnarly tones and a vibe-filled solo that hovers over the track, setting the tone for one of this overlooked album's most memorable songs.

**Fear, *Nice Boys*
(*Don't Play Rock 'N' Roll*)
“Nice Boys
(Don't Play Rock 'N' Roll)”**

Slash's music is an amalgam of blues and punk. So as far as vibe checks go, Slash's guesting on this Fear track makes sense. There's not much here by way of solos, but in keeping with the punk theme, Slash lays down one hell of a rhythm part.

2024

The Dandy Warhols,
Rockmaker
**"I'd Like to Help You
with Your Problem"**

THE DANDY WARHOLS



The Dandy Warhols, who, by the way, already have two killer guitarists in Courtney Taylor-Taylor and Peter Holmström, cozier up nicely with Slash on "I'd Like to Help You With Your Problem," which is graffitied with the GN'R legend's wah-coated ostinato patterns, volume swells and descending Locrian flourishes. The Shins' James Mercer jumps into the fray as well, adorning key moments in the song with a "high Viking-rock wail," as Taylor told *Guitar World*.

Mark Knopfler's Guitar Heroes, *Going Home* **"Going Home (Theme from *Local Hero*)"**

For Mark Knopfler's remake-for-a-good-cause track "Going Home (Theme from *Local Hero*)," Slash goes back-to-back with Peter Frampton and Duane Eddy, each taking a few bars. Slash doesn't dominate this track, but given that we've just lost Eddy, recently lost Jeff Beck, and Frampton is winding down, this moment will forever be poignant.



Bear McCreary, *The Singularity* **"The End of Tomorrow"**

Sure, it's a bit more alternative than we're used to hearing from Slash, but he does slip in enough gain-drenched licks to make himself known before letting loose a monster of a solo. So again, this isn't your typical Slash fare, but his solo shows that he still knows how to mark his territory.

song, even prior to Jeff Beck doing it, which are really, really cool. I've always dug that song. "Mojo Hand" is something that's really cool from Lightnin' Hopkins and is another one I think we'll probably do on the tour. We were talking about Rory Gallagher earlier — "Cradle Rock" is a good one there. And along those lines, Gary Moore's "Still Got the Blues." And a song that's not necessarily a blues song but that we might do on the tour is "Use Me," by Bill Withers. I'll probably put it in the set because I just love that riff. So there's just a lot of cool stuff. I could go on and on, you know?

There's still so much guitar information and inspiration to be gleaned from the classic artists. But do you listen to any of the newer, for lack of a better term, "Instagram famous," technical players?

You know, there's a lot of really great players out there that I'm aware of in that sort of world, but I don't necessarily know their names. They're really amazing and doing all kinds of crazy shit, and a lot of it is interesting or entertaining to watch for a minute. It doesn't necessarily stick with you, but it's bitchin'. [Laughs] You're like, "Whoa, that's pretty tricky!" For me, I think it's when somebody is playing in such a way where there is a mix between some new-school technical stuff and some old-school styling, that's what catches my attention. Techniques are cool, but they're only great if they fit into the music in an emotional context, or if it's a fluid part of a melodic run, like it just came naturally.

Can you give an example?

A great example, and I can't remember the name of the song, but there's a B.B. King song where he plays a lick and then he throws in a diminished scale. I mean, I know what that is, right? [Laughs] I recognize it, but it's part of the solo so you don't really think about it in technical terms; you just hear melodically that there's something really cool going on. And really, he's just playing a regular pentatonic thing, with three notes or four notes of a diminished scale added in. But it's right between keys, and it's so perfect. I don't hear guys doing *that* so much. It always seems so planned out and articu-



Slash at The Baked Potato in Studio City, California, with his signature Magnatone SL-100 head and SL-412 cabinet

lated. Whereas sometimes the natural sort of passing tones that you do as you're playing produce these really interesting things, when you're not thinking about what scale it is or what technique you're using. I think I tend to like that more.

When you're playing blues, do you think about the history behind it? Or, conversely, do you consider how to present it in a modern context?

Actually, when it comes down to it, it's neither of those for me. It's just a fun thing to do. I did pick these songs because I innately felt a connection to them on a deeper level than just, "Oh, that's a cool song," but it was also really just something that I wanted to do for fun. So I tried to have a good time with it and not take it too seriously. That was one of the reasons I brought all the different singers in for the record, as opposed to having Ted and Tash just sing, which is what we'll do onstage. Because I didn't want people to think it was a serious new band record that I was doing. It was just about doing something that would be fun to listen to, and that would maybe

ONE IN A MILLION

According to Slash, it doesn't matter what genre you play or your level of skill; just be sure to put your own stamp on every note you play

FROM HIS EARLIEST days with Guns N' Roses, it was clear that's Slash's lead guitar style — be it the direct, deep-in-the-pocket pentatonic licks and gritty double-stop bends of "Welcome to the Jungle" or the emotive, vocal-like phrasings that characterized "Sweet Child O' Mine" — was heavily steeped in the blues. And yet, he came up in a time and place — 1980s Los Angeles, to be exact — when hard rock had largely eschewed those stylistic hallmarks in favor of an acrobatic and highly technical approach that emphasized speed and flash over feel and, sometimes, taste.

Or, as Slash puts it, "There were a ton of, you know, tremolo-bar fucking fiends going around." He laughs. "But that never really spoke to me. I was just doing my own thing because that's what I wanted to do. I wasn't really interested in all that other stuff."

That said, Slash also emphasizes that there were plenty of guitarists in the scene that he appreciated and admired. "Lately I think about it and I go, 'Oh, yeah, there were some really great guitar players,'" he says. "Like, Paul Gilbert is an amazing fucking guitar player. Jason Becker was insanely good. Joe Satriani and Steve Vai, who've been around forever, they have their own unique personality, just the same as Stevie Ray Vaughan or Johnny Ramone."

In Slash's estimation, good guitar playing is about having your own style, whether you're a blues man or the most high-octane shred demon. "No matter what type of playing it is, the really good ones that stand out are the ones that have their own unique personality," he says. "That's what I've always been attracted to. It doesn't matter whatever technique it is that they're using, as long as it's theirs." He laughs. "I mean, Yngwie? Yngwie means it. He fucking owns that shit, whether you like it or not."

As far as using the blues as a launching pad to create something wholly unique, Slash turns to the man largely credited with kickstarting the Eighties shred craze — Eddie Van Halen — and makes the point that, even as he was rearranging the rock guitar landscape, he was also a blues aficionado at heart, acknowledging the influence of players like Billy Gibbons, Jeff Beck and, most prominently, Eric Clapton, at every turn.

"That was the coolest thing about Eddie for me," Slash says. "All the great ideas he had that were uniquely his own, all these left-field kind of things, underneath all that was a really tasty blues guitar player. He just added all these other ways to branch out his expression on top of that. And that's why nobody could ever touch him."

— Richard Bienstock



"I GOT THAT MAGNATONE A FEW YEARS AGO — I THINK IT WAS RICHARD FORTUS THAT TURNED ME ONTO IT"

turn some young people on to some old songs that they might not have heard before.

I imagine you have similar aims with the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival.

With the festival, I have no idea what it's gonna be like, but I have a feeling I'm going to really get off on it. There's going to be a lot of jamming and a lot of discovery and a lot of learning for me as a player. I probably want to do it annually, or semi-annually, or something like that. And going forward, I would probably want to put out some bluesy records outside of Conspirators and Guns N' Roses, things that are more oriented and focused in that way, where I can play that stuff and write that stuff for my own personal satisfaction.

That sounds like a fun prospect.

Yeah. And so going back to what you were asking before, I don't know that I would necessarily think about, "Okay, well, here's how to introduce blues to the modern era..." I would definitely be very cognizant of the old sounds and a lot of old tones and all that kind of stuff, because I want to preserve it for me, feel-wise. But I think that when you put your own personality on it, and you live in the modern era, if you're not trying to emulate being something from way back when it just takes on its own sort of fresh tone anyway. Kingfish plays really great, old-school blues. But he does it in his own way, and that alone makes it fresh. And that goes for anybody doing it; play what you love, and make it your own. **GW**

**"PEOPLE
WERE SAYING,
'THIS ISN'T
BLUES.' AND
NOW IT'S
OUR GOLD
STANDARD"**

Samantha Fish
with her trusty
Gibson SG





SWIMMING WITH SNAKES

**S.E.R.P.E.N.T. FESTIVAL CO-STAR SAMANTHA FISH
TALKS MEETING SLASH (DURING THIS ISSUE'S COVER SHOOT!),
HER FIVE ESSENTIAL BLUES TRACKS AND WHY YOU NEED
A SWIG OF R.L. BURNSIDE'S A ASS POCKET OF WHISKEY**

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK PHOTOS BY JEN ROSENSTEIN

SAMANTHA FISH FIRST came to mainstream attention as part of a trio of artists on the 2011 *Girls with Guitars* record, but over the past decade or so she has proven to be a more singular — and much less easy to pigeonhole — talent. Over the course of seven studio albums, first for German indie label Ruf and more recently for blues and roots powerhouse Rounder, Fish has carved out a style that marries high-octane blues with raucous rock 'n' roll, pop, country, punk, hip-hop and other sounds. Binding it all together are her commanding vocals and tasty, melodic guitar work, attributes that have over the years garnered a sizable audience that counts Slash amongst its members.

"Samantha reminds me a little bit of Bonnie Raitt in some ways," Slash says of his S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival mate. "She's got this cool swagger and incredible blues tone and style. She's a real natural, and somebody that sort of surprised me when I first heard her play. I was like, 'Wow, this is great!'"

Regarding her penchant for mixing the blues with other styles, Fish sees it as a part of a long tradition. "A lot of my heroes are rock 'n' roll people who learned from the blues and then reinterpreted it," she says. "And I think that's the challenge — 'What can I say with the blues?' It's also part of the fun of being an artist — you get to play around and mix up these different things that inspire you, and not restrict yourself too much. I always

want to make sure I stay true to who I am, but every record has its own shape, its own style, its own concept and feel."

The point, she continues, is to find your own voice, not ape ones from the past. "I'm never going to sound better than Muddy Waters sounded doing his style," she says. "Because it's perfect the way he did it. So the only thing I can really do as an artist is find my own sound and try to perfect that. I think that's our job as artists. And nowadays the world has opened up so much in terms of genre — there's a lot of saturation and mixing together of different styles, which I think is great." She laughs. "I mean, they're having a hell of a time down at the record store trying to figure out where things go, you know?"

How did you get involved in the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival?

I'd been hearing whispers about Slash doing a blues-oriented record, and then I think I first heard about

the tour from my management. And I was like, "Yeah, I'll get to go do stuff with Slash, sure..." You know, very skeptical. [Laughs] But then it actually came through and I thought, it's a cool concept, and such a cool lineup. All the acts are really incredible performers and it's a really great thing to get to be a part of. I was stoked.

Did you have any previous relationship with Slash?

No. I had never met him prior to the photo shoot we did for this story. But I'm a huge fan. I actually told him this story at the shoot: When I was a teenager, I almost lost my driver's license because I got so many speeding tickets driving around listening to *Appetite for Destruction*. I just love that record.

Were you a big rock fan as a kid?

I listened to a lot of classic rock, because I was into guitar. And in the late Nineties, early 2000s, the stations that played guitar solos were

the rock stations. Maybe country, too. But I became a fan because all those songs were just so great and exciting and fun to listen to. And Slash, he's an amazing guitar player. I definitely tried to figure out how to play like Slash at one point in time or another.

What led you to the blues?

I've always been the person who likes to "find out," you know? I like to study people and find out what they were into. So I was into Keith Richards.... Well, what did Keith Richards listen to? And that's kind of how I discovered blues music for myself — by going backwards and finding out the blues is really the common thread for everybody and everything. It's the root of all modern music. Also, growing up in Kansas City really helped shape and define me, because Kansas City has such a deep tradition of jazz and blues. So it was just something where I kept getting pulled in that direction.

Was there any particular strain of the blues that you were drawn to?

I got really into the North Mississippi, Fat Possum kind of thing. Because I felt that sort of married this raw rock 'n' roll edge to a blues groove. And it was very drums-oriented. But there's so many things that pulled me into it. And then I just worked on finding my voice within the music.

What did you love about the blues as a guitar player?

The first thing that hit me was having the ability to emote within an open format. I would go to these blues jams around Kansas City, and just being able to improvise in a form and express yourself openly with the instrument was something I thought was really cool. It wasn't just about learning this riff and that solo as it's set; it was about finding your own voice and really expressing yourself. When I got to perform it and I started finding my voice in it, it just felt natural.

Over the years you've developed your sound from a more traditional blues approach to something that incorporates elements of so many other styles. This was particularly evident on your most recent solo effort, *Faster*, which even featured



"I had never met Slash prior to the photo shoot we did for this story," Fish says. "I actually told him this story at the shoot:

"When I was a teenager, I almost lost my driver's license because I got so many speeding tickets driving around listening to *Appetite for Destruction*. I just love that record"



a collaboration with Tech N9ne.

Well, the *Faster* record, I was working with a producer named Martin Kierszenbaum. He produced one of my all-time favorite pop records, *The Fame* by Lady Gaga, along with a bunch of other really incredible pop productions. So it was an opportunity for me to stretch in that direction. I'd always written melodic hooks, and I've tried to bring some pop sensibilities to my songs, so it was a case of expressing myself even further into that world. But I still wanted to keep where I come from in the music and try to marry the styles together.

More recently you took another stylistic left turn with *Death Wish Blues*, a collaborative record with outlaw country great Jesse Dayton that was produced by Jon Spencer.

With Jesse, our North Star was, "We want to go to New York and make a really dingy rock 'n' roll record and figure out how to bring some punk elements to the blues." I think Jon Spencer was the perfect person to bring in, because one of my favorite records is R.L. Burnside's *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*, and Jon Spencer's Blues Explosion was the backing band on that. I feel like that album potentially opened the door for bands like the Black Keys and the White Stripes — that North Mississippi-inspired indie rock thing. And I think we came up with something really cool. It was different from what any of us expected it to be, but it's a really special album.

Do you ever feel there's a tightrope you have to walk between being reverent for blues tradition while also trying to carve out your own distinct sound?

Even when Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf went electric, which is what we consider to be traditional blues now, they were outsiders, right? People were saying, "This isn't blues." And now it's our gold standard. So I just feel like it's the artist's job to push boundaries and find their voice. And, of course, you worry about losing people. You worry about gaining people. That's the business side of what we do. But at the end of the day, I feel like you have to make art that you can stand by and that you feel strongly about. The rest of it, it kind of sorts itself out.

What are five blues songs that you would say every guitar fan should hear?

Well, B.B. King is obviously one of the best blues guitar players. And his song "Hummingbird" is great — it takes a surprising turn, it's very dramatic, and his playing is just so perfect. So that's one. Then I'd say, "Going Down" by Freddie King. I love Freddie King, and "Going Down" is a great song for people who are really into rock, because a lot of rock bands have reinterpreted it. And his guitar playing is just so searing on it. R.L. Burnside, I just talked about him for a few minutes, but anything off of *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*. It's so rough and raw. Maybe check out his version of "Shake 'Em on Down." I'd also suggest Junior Kimbrough's "Nobody But You." It's a sexy song, which I think is a through-line with rock 'n' roll and blues. It's sexy music, you know? It makes you wanna dance. Finally, I'll go contemporary and pick something from Derek Trucks, who is just a phenomenal player, especially his slide stuff. I'll say "Learn How to Love," from Tedeschi Trucks Band, which has some

great, great guitar on it.

How would you characterize your approach to lead guitar playing?

Everything I do, I try to do in service of the song. I might be basing it around a core melody that repeats, and that's a beautiful place to start when you're soloing — playing something that fits within the parameters of what you're doing, that's going to compliment the song. Maybe it's not the exact melody. Maybe it's a counterpart. You can build off that. Then you deal with tones and textures and how to make it sound weird or different. But I usually start in that place of, "All right, what's going to make this song pop even more?" I know that sounds vague, but I just feel like that's how I've been approaching it lately.

What is your primary guitar-and-amp setup for the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival?

Depends on how long we're playing; I like to switch around. [Laughs] But my main guitar is a Gibson SG. I just find it's really versatile, and it's something that I feel very comfortable playing. I've got these custom amps from Category Five, a boutique amp company from Texas. They're really simple point-to-point wired tube amps, and they sound like behemoths. That's going to be my main setup. Then I might mix in a [Gibson] Firebird or a [Fender] Jaguar here and there, and I have a cigar box guitar, which people usually find to be kind of cool.

What do you think a tour like this says about the state of blues in 2024?

It's a good opportunity to showcase how diverse the blues can be. All these artists are so different from one another and are being true to themselves artistically and pushing the genre forward in their own right. Also, you're gonna get a dose of really passionate performances, and I feel that's something that connects people. It's the reason all of us probably got drawn into this music in the first place. I just feel that's what the blues does — it connects us to our hearts, and it connects us to each other. So it's exciting to me to see the music being put out on a broad stage like this, where it can bring people together in a beautiful way. 



Christone "Kingfish"
Ingram with his
signature Fender
Kingfish Telecaster
Deluxe

**"YOU CAN'T
FAKE THE SONG
WITH THE
BLUES. THAT'S
WHAT I LOVE
ABOUT IT; IT'S
REAL SIMPLE
AND STRAIGHT-
FORWARD"**

RIDING WITH THE *Kingfish*

CHRISTONE “KINGFISH” INGRAM TALKS HITTING THE ROAD WITH SLASH AND EXPERIENCE HENDRIX, HIS LP-STYLE GUITAR (MADE BY FENDER), HIS FIVE ESSENTIAL BLUES TRACKS AND GROWING UP AS A BLUES-DIGGING OUTSIDER

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK PHOTOS BY JEN ROSENSTEIN

CHRISTONE “KINGFISH” INGRAM is only 25, but he’s been a hot name in the blues world for going on a decade. And it’s hardly surprising: He was practically born into the blues. Hailing from Clarksdale, Mississippi — the supposed site of the crossroads where Robert Johnson traded his soul to the Devil — Ingram, who grew up in a musical family, was surrounded by church gospel music, as well as the playing of local Delta legends, from an early age. He received an education in the blues at the nearby Delta Blues Museum (where he also earned the “Kingfish” moniker) and, as a pre-teen, started gigging at local clubs and venues.

Initially hailed as a child prodigy (at 15 he performed for Michelle Obama as part of a Delta Blues Museum student delegation to the White House), Ingram truly came into his own with his 2019 debut, *Kingfish*, which demonstrated a style, highlighted by fiery lead licks, a sweet-but-stinging tone, rich vocals and a mature songwriting approach, that was stunning for an artist of any age. Since then, he has released a critically lauded follow-up, *662*, supported a wide range of artists onstage, from Buddy Guy to the Rolling Stones to indie rockers Vampire Weekend, won a Best Contemporary Blues Album Grammy and even designed his own signature guitar, the Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe, with Fender. He’s also picked up a few

famous fans along the way.

“The first time I heard him play, I was just floored,” Slash says about Ingram. “He’s such a naturally soulful musician, and everything he does seems to really come from the heart, and also come pretty effortlessly, in a melodic sense. I really dig his style of playing and his style of singing and his whole trip. I’ve been following him ever since the first time I heard him, all the way up to this point where, doing the festival, he was one of the people that I definitely wanted to have on.”

Ingram is similarly excited to be along for the ride. “What I’m looking forward to is all the great music that’s about to be played with all the wonderful talent,” he says. As for what he loves about the blues in general? “It’s just one of the coolest and simplest ways to really express yourself. You can’t fake the song with the blues. That’s what I love about it; it’s real simple and straightforward.”

What are you most looking forward to with the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival?

I’m looking forward to seeing all the blues-rock talent, like Larkin Poe and Eric Gales and all of them. When Slash and his team reached out for me to do some dates and he told me who was going to be a part of it, I just thought it was a no-brainer to do it.

You’ve recorded with several of the artists on the tour, like Eric Gales and Keb’ Mo’.

Right. I worked with Eric on his 2017 release, *Middle of the Road*. I also did some work on one of Keb’s last records, and he played on one of mine [*“Listen,”* from *Kingfish*].

One of the great things about the bill is there’s so many different expressions of the blues that are represented.

Definitely. Not everybody can rock

it hard, so you've got Keb' for the smooth people, right? But for the people that do like to rock it hard, you've got Eric Gales and Samantha Fish and players like that. It's just a big melting pot of artists.

When did you become familiar with Slash?

It was when I was in seventh grade. I had seen him on TV and everything, but I didn't know his name. But then I got the *Guitar Hero III* game, and that's how I was able to fully know who he was. Then when I really started to actually hear him play, I remember listening to his version of "The Thrill Is Gone" that he did with Slash's Blues Ball, which is one of my favorite versions of that song. I definitely became a fan.

What was the thing you remember that first attracted you to the blues?

Well, I was fully immersed in gospel music before I got into the blues. So when I first heard the blues, I thought it was interesting to hear the secular parallel of what I was doing, or what I was listening to, because in a lot of ways they're the same. So just to get the parallel of that, the secular side, was kind of what drew me in. And blues is life, so the life stories and the storytelling got me as well. I remember one of my first introductions was when my dad showed me a PBS documentary on Muddy Waters, and also me seeing B.B. King on *Sanford and Son* when I was a kid.

You started performing from a very young age.

How did your playing develop so quickly?

I was just really determined. I really wanted to learn how to play. I'm still determined now, but at that time I had this, like, hunger for it. I was eager. So I would learn from my teachers in class, and then go home and practice, get on YouTube and study great blues guys and stuff like that. I was always doing it. It was pretty much all I did.

How old were you when you started gigging?

I would say somewhere in the window of 10 to 12. Somewhere in there. But I'm originally a bass player, so at the time I was gigging as a bass player sideman. I started to perform on the guitar maybe three years later.

I imagine most kids your age were probably listening to more contemporary music and artists. Did you feel like an outsider for being into the blues?

Oh, definitely. Because where I come from the blues is, like, grown-folk music. So the fact that I was listening to that, while everybody else was listening to pop and hip-hop and what's described as Top 40, it felt different. But that was okay.

When you're playing blues, do you think about how to bring modern elements into it?

Definitely. One of the ways that we can get young kids in is if we add some of the elements from their world. And when we get 'em in, we can teach about the foundation and where it all came from. But it's a very slippery slope, because you don't want to go too far to where you're creating something else. So it's best to always keep the foundation in there somehow.

In your opinion, what are five blues songs everyone should hear?

Well, I can start by giving you a whole album — B.B. King, *Live at the Regal*. Then I'd also say Albert King, "Answer to the Laundromat Blues," and Freddie King, "Hide Away." Now, two more... you really put me on the spot with this one. [Laughs] I'll say "Love in

Vain" by Robert Johnson and... let's go with Son House, "Death Letter Blues."

How would you describe your lead guitar style?

I would say rough, but smooth at the same time. [Laughs] Yeah. It's like a freight train that takes breaks, if that makes sense.



**"I JUST HOPE
PEOPLE TAKE
AWAY FROM IT THE
KNOWLEDGE THAT
WE CAN ALL UNITE
IN THE BLUES. WE
CAN FORGET OUR
WOES AND FORGET
OUR ILLS..."**



Do you think being from Clarksdale influenced your style at all?

Definitely. I really think if I was born somewhere else, I probably wouldn't even have known what the blues was. But it was from hearing legends like Big Jack Johnson, and a host of other local bluesmen, that shaped my sound to what it is now.

What will be your main guitar-and-amp setup on the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival?

At the moment, I've been using three different guitars — my Fender signature Tele, and then I've got a couple customs from my guy Michael Chertoff [*Chertoff Custom Guitars*]. I've also been using a Gibson Black Beauty, so I may pull that out on the tour, too. As for amps, I'm basically just using two [Fender] Twins.

You mentioned your signature Tele. What are some of the special features on the Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe that you wanted Fender to include in the design?

Well, I pretty much asked them to make me an LP-sounding guitar. So one of the special features is the pickups [*Custom Kingfish Humbuckers*], which are custom-wound and give you really good, classic '57 overdriven hard rock tones. But then you can also scale them back and get smooth r&b tones. So they're very versatile. And the guitar has some style to it as well, which I like.

Last year you put out a live record, *Live in London*, that captured you and your band onstage at The Garage. What led you to want to release a concert document?

You know, I'm often told that the Kingfish live experience is quite different from hearing me on the album and whatnot. So I wanted to give the fans what they wanted, because they've been asking for it. And this way I feel that, for somebody who hasn't come to a Kingfish show, they can get the full-on experience by listening to the album.

As far as playing live goes, this fall you're going to be part of the Experience Hendrix Tour — its first run in five years — alongside Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Zakk Wylde, Eric Johnson, your current tour mate Samantha Fish and others. Was Jimi a big influence on you?

Definitely — so having the opportunity to jam on a bunch of Hendrix songs, that's going to be so cool. I don't really play Strats too often, but I'll be able to bring out a few for that tour. And I don't know what songs I'm playing yet, but I'm definitely excited. We always have fun jamming on Hendrix stuff.

Until then, you'll be out with Slash on the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival. What do you hope people take away from these shows?

What I'm looking forward to most is all the camaraderie. I just hope people take away from it the knowledge that we can all unite in the blues. We can forget our woes and forget our ills and just be there, together, with the music. **GW**

**"PEARLY GATES,
OUR LONG-STANDING
FAVE-RAVE SIX-STRING,
ENTERED THE STUDIO
TO DO THAT RIGHTEOUS
THING"**



Billy Gibbons
on stage with ZZ Top in
Waterbury, Connecticut,
September 25, 1975.
He's playing his Pearly Gates
Les Paul, the same guitar heard on
"Hoochie Coochie Man" from
Slash's new *Orgy of the Damned*

THE BILLY CLUB

ZZ TOP'S BILLY GIBBONS — A LONGTIME SLASH AMIGO — DISCUSSES HIS “HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN” GEAR, KINGFISH AND THE B.B. KING ALBUM HE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

BY DAMIAN FANELLI

WHEN IT CAME time for Slash to send out invites to the sonic party that would become *Orgy of the Damned*, his new blues-covers album, there was at least one obvious choice: Billy Gibbons. The well-traveled Texan has been shaking, baking and barbecuing the blues — with or without ZZ Top — since the late Sixties.

On top of all that, the Slash/Gibbons friendship dates back to the days when ZZ Top's *Afterburner* and GN'R's *Appetite for Destruction* duked it out on the shelves at Tower Records on the corner of Sunset and Horn in North Hollywood. As is always the case, the famous Texan showed up at Slash's behest — expertly geared-up and raring to go — to help his host lay down a fine new version of Willie Dixon's “Hoochie Coochie Man.”

Below, Gibbons chats about the *Orgy* sessions and gear, his relationship with Slash, the finer points of B.B. King and Kingfish and the health of the blues in 2024. Spoiler alert: blues fans have nothing to worry about.

How, when and where did you meet Slash?

Backstage following a ZZ Top show in Los Angeles. I maintained residence up the Sunset Strip nearby a notorious liquor store and happened by there one day to “resupply.” Our guy was there choosing the appropriate libation, and a friendship ensued. He's kind of unmistakable, and I guess he figured we were connected and latched onto all things “six-string” in very short order. We've knocked around pretty much ever since; I'd place that encounter somewhere in the late Eighties when *Appetite* was making some noise. Truly a sympatico cat if ever there was one.

How do you approach bringing something new to “Hoochie Coochie Man,” a song that's been around the block a few times?

It's fair to say Slash and our collective adventures cover wide ranges of bluesy influence. Most everyone appears to enjoy maintaining an actual ongoing relationship with all things sonically “blue.” Muddy Waters' “Hoochie Coochie Man” is something [*that's*], quite simply, fundamental. Slash and I approached the number with a sincere, personalized vision, forwarding the arrangement to expand the track with some extra breathing room and sound luster. It's a Willie Dixon standby “oldie” — and

[*it's*] still kickin' in a big way.

What guitar and amps did you use on “Hoochie Coochie Man”? Any other notable gear?

Oh yeah, man! “Pearly Gates” [Gibbons' 1959 Gibson Les Paul, which he acquired in 1968 and has used on every ZZ Top album since 1971's ZZ Top's *First Album*], our long-standing fave-rave six-string, entered the studio to do that righteous thing. And it ain't no secret that the new Magnatone line of amplifiers were on hand, which are now taking the front and center spot on stage and in the studio. We brought the two together, making for a ferocious combo.

Slash tells us you've occasionally bent his ear about Magnatone amps. Why are you such a fan?

Magnatone is the way to go for many reasons — its heritage, the look and, most importantly, the pre-amps can feed the power stages with as much grist and grizzle as one might lean into. Magnatone's inimitable true vibrato is unbeatable and very real, just as when Buddy Holly and Lonnie Mack played it to brilliant advantage.

It turns out you and Slash are also bigtime B.B. King fans. Can you detect any B.B. in Slash's playing?

Sure 'nuff! Anyone qualifying to enter bluesman territory certainly includes inspiration from the King; B.B. set a far-reaching standard for tone and taste and still abides to the present day.

Speaking of which, what would you nominate as the one B.B. King

album you can't live without?

Live at the Regal. It's really all there.

B.B. played a modified Gibson ES-335 on *Live at the Regal*, and now Slash has his new signature ES-335. Do you have your own 335 story?

Well, something we feel [*that's*] close enough. We carried on, early on, with a rare, mid-Fifties Gibson “Switchmaster” ES-5. Big box, big sounds.

When can we expect the follow-up to 2021's *Hardware*?

Glad you asked, as we've just recently squeezed into the studio between roadshow dates, getting back to extending some added recorded loudness.

Who's on your list of favorites among the new breed of blues guitarists?

Christone “Kingfish” Ingram is on it, in that there's a resonance with a strident Mississippi presence, bringing on that wisdom of the Delta. Also, Quinn Sullivan has entered the scene, a Buddy Guy discovery going on to play at the Mahindra Blues Festival in India. Both join the wave of up-and-comers with a genuine kind of approach and intensity.

Is the blues in good hands in 2024?

Ain't nothing much to worry over on this. It steadfastly endures underlying most everything and keeps bouncing back. This is the artful creation that underpins and expresses the human condition — the low stuff and the high stuff. Gotta say it — “You can't lose with the blues!” **GW**

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EVH SA-126 Special

By Chris Gill

EDWARD VAN HALEN named his Wolfgang model signature guitars after his son. Now that Wolf has conceived his own EVH signature guitar, the SA-126 Special, he has returned the tribute by naming the model number after Edward's January 26 birthdate.

Representing a new chapter in the evolution and future of the EVH brand, the SA-126 Special is Wolfgang Van Halen's brain child and the company's first guitar developed without input from Ed, although the elder Van Halen's spirit is present in the meticulous attention to detail in every aspect of the guitar's design. Like Ed did with the original EVH Wolfgang, Wolf subjected the SA-126 to a prolonged period of rigorous road testing, playing a variety of prototypes with his band Mammoth WVH. It took more than two years for the SA-126 Special to reach the market, and the dedication behind the project truly shows in the final product.

The SA-126 semi-acoustic electric is a truly original model featuring numerous innovative details. Its construction is particularly individualistic. The body starts with a slab of mahogany with large acoustic chambers carved on either side of a partially raised section in the center running from the neck joint to the bottom strap pin. A "belly" contour is also carved out of the back to enhance playing comfort.

The flat maple top has a similar partially raised interior block carved down the center, with the "wings" on either side shaved down to about an 1/8-inch thickness. The top also has a single distinctive "E" hole cut out of the bass bout. A slab of basswood is sandwiched in between the mahogany body and maple top center blocks, providing a lightweight, highly resonant conduit for top vibrations to transfer





to the back. Each of the mahogany, basswood and maple center block sections appear to be equally thick (slightly more than 1/2-inch each — the body measures 1.75 inches deep).

With its asymmetrical design, the body looks quite large. Actually, it has about the same overall body volume (in terms of dimensions, not acoustic properties) as a 335-style guitar, but its upper bass bout cutaway horn extends further up the neck while the body's width is about one inch narrower, making it better balanced and more comfortable to play than an old school semi-hollow.

Whereas traditional semi-hollow electrics with humbuckers usually have pickups floating in mounting rings, the SA-126's bridge and neck humbuckers are mounted directly to the body's center block with four screws, and the mounting rings seen here are purely cosmetic. Designed by industry veteran Tim Shaw, the EVH SA-126 bridge and neck pickups are entirely new designs. These pickups sound quite bold and assertive, yet they deliver stellar definition and clarity whether played through a blazing high-gain amp with everything turned up to 11 or through a clean amp with the guitar's volume controls backed off. The bridge pickup is slightly hotter and brighter than the separately voiced neck humbucker.

The SA-126 features a two-piece mahogany bolt-on neck with an ebony fingerboard, 22 jumbo frets, 24.75-inch scale and 12-16-inch compound radius. The neck has a slim EVH modified "C" shape profile

that feels similar to the neck on the EVH Wolfgang USA. The 3x3 headstock is slightly larger than a traditional Gibson "open book" headstock, with added mass that delivers enhanced resonance, dynamic response and tonal body.

Other notable features include a large EVH Harmonica bridge with stop tailpiece, EVH Keystone tuners, Graph Tech TUSQ nut, triple block fretboard inlays, single-ply bound headstock, 5-ply body binding, a 3-way pickup switch and individual volume and tone controls for each pickup with Fender amp-style skirted, numbered black plastic knobs.

Sonically, the SA-126 Special is an aggressive beast. Compared to several classic electrics, its tone is the sonic equivalent of a 4K Ultra HD movie while the others are like a Standard Definition DVD. There's a distinctive Strat-like crystalline upper midrange that's seamlessly layered with the throaty lower mid growl of a Les Paul/335 hybrid and the tight low-end punch of an Explorer. The attack is instantaneous and punchy when played hard, transforming to a sweet swell with a lighter touch. The SA-126 can even deliver genuine country twang with the volume controls backed down. Surprisingly for hollow chambered guitar, it remains feedback free even when using an amp dialed to extreme high gain and high volume settings.

CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICES:

\$1,799.99 (Stealth Black or Matte Army Drab finishes); \$1,899.99 (Transparent Purple or Tobacco Burst quilt maple top versions)

● **PROS:** The SA-126 humbucking pickups deliver an impressively wide range of tones; unique mahogany/basswood/maple center block provides stellar dynamic responsiveness and touch-sensitivity.

● **CONS:** Pickup height is moderately adjustable (however, height is ideally adjusted from factory).

● **MANUFACTURER:** EVH, evhgear.com

THE BOTTOM LINE:

The EVH SA-126 Special is an impressively versatile electric that combines the dynamic responsiveness and "air" of a semi-acoustic with aggressive character and punch that outshines many solidbody designs, making it ideal for a comprehensive range of musical styles.

Orangewood Guitars Juniper Sunburst Live (Rubber Bridge)

By Paul Riario

▶ SOME MIGHT FIND it curious, but one of the more interesting — and hottest — guitar trends is rubber-bridge guitars. The idea behind it boils down to fashioning a bridge or a strip made of rubber to dampen the tone of a guitar in order to project a softly muted sound that's instantly alluring. The idea isn't exactly new; a few aftermarket hardware companies have offered rubber bridges and dampeners for that muted texture for basses and electric guitars. However, prior to the pandemic, an Angeleno luthier named Reuben Cox had been outfitting numerous acoustics with rubber-bridge builds that landed in the hands of some of the most recognized alt-rock darlings, including Phoebe Bridgers and Jeff Tweedy. These artists, among others, recorded many notable chart-topping hits and brooding album cuts with that percussive-yet-mellowed tone from rubber-bridge guitars.

With that, it seems this trend isn't going away anytime soon, which is why Orangewood Guitars offers two rubber-bridge acoustics — the Juniper Sunburst Live (reviewed here) and the Juniper Black Live. If you haven't already, I'd urge you to pick up one of these intriguing acoustics, because not only are they affordable, but you just might end up writing the next big indie hit song.

Coming out of its included gig bag, the Juniper Sunburst Live feels solidly built with Orangewood's custom parlor-sized construction and a 24.75-inch scale length. It's an inviting body style with compact dimensions that lends itself to intimate performances, and the 3 5/8-inch body depth is deep enough to provide a bit of plucky punch to its muted tones. At the heart of the Juniper's sound is Orangewood's methodical design for its rubber bridge. The company tested many versions to get the proper thickness of the rubber, surface area and fine-tuneable adjustability to support its distinctly muted tone

and intonation. The guitar also implements a vintage trapeze tailpiece as additional reinforcement for its non-scalloped X-bracing, and as a by-product, it adds to its "old-time" mojo appearance. The Juniper features a soft satin finish from top to bottom, a solid spruce top in a vintage three-color sunburst, a 3-ply white/black/white "teardrop" pickguard, layered sapele mahogany back and sides with creme binding, mahogany neck, a sonokeling (Indian rosewood) fretboard and bridge, and bone nut with a 1.73-inch nut width. The guitar also comes equipped with premium Grover open-gear tuners with an 18:1 gear ratio for superior tuning stability and an Alnico 5 rail humbucker pickup with a vintage "cupcake" volume knob.

It is undeniable how much fun it is to play a rubber-bridge guitar, and the Juniper Sunburst Live is a solid and reliable vehicle to bring inspired life to this "deadened" and muted sound — which is further enhanced by the flatwound strings it's strung with. Still, it's an entirely different universe compared to traditional acoustics, since all the ringing dynamics are dampened, but what you get in return is a plush, melancholy tone that softly chimes like a plucked harp. Everything is dialed in — from its near-perfect, low-action setup to the comfortable profile of its slim C-shaped neck. Plugged in, the Juniper comes alive with renewed vitality where the high-output rail pickup cleanly articulates its softly muted voice — and sounds even more captivating with ambient effects like delay and reverb. That same sound also tracks on recordings with a lovely character that adds layers of muted depth. It's not a boisterous instrument, but for singer-songwriters and solo acts that rely on pensive and thoughtful performances, the Juniper Sunburst Live is the real deal — and for the attractive price, it's one to add to your collection.



CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICE:

\$395

MANUFACTURER:

Orangewood
Guitars, orangewoodguitars.com

● **PROS:** Rubber bridge adds a musical palm-muted sound; flatwound strings emphasize its dampened tone; parlor-sized body style offers an inviting playing position and comfortable playability; rail humbucker cleanly articulates its muted tones; Classy vintage looks.

● **CONS:** Not all will enjoy the "deadened" and muted rubber-bridge tone.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Prepare to be easily charmed by Orangewood Guitars Juniper Sunburst Live (Rubber Bridge) acoustic with softly muted tones that are nothing short of inspiring.



CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICES:

\$199 (Warm Bender);

\$219 (Ringerbringer)

MANUFACTURER:

Warm Audio, warmaudio.com

● **PROS:** (Warm Bender) Authentic classic Tone Bender fuzz tones; three distinct fuzz circuits; Sag switch emulates distinctive “dying battery” effects; (Ringerbringer) Accurate reproduction of beloved Moogerfooger Ring Modulator; versatile output/input jack section for use with external synths and controllers; stellar ring modulator tones and effects.

● **CONS:** (Both) No easy-access battery compartment for users who prefer battery operation; (Warm Bender) Muddled note-to-note definition of chords with higher gain settings (but typical of classic fuzz effects); (Ringerbringer) Ring modulation effects can be of limited use to traditional-minded players.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

These new additions to Warm Audio’s growing line offer a tasty variety of coveted fuzz effects for traditionalists (Warm Bender) to trippy ring modulation for defiant experimentalists (RingerBringer) at affordable prices miles below their vintage/used counterparts.

Warm Audio Warm Bender and Ringerbringer pedals

By Chris Gill



SINCE THE COMPANY’S launch in 2011,

Warm Audio has provided recording studios with reasonably priced alternatives to classic highly desirable, rare and expensive mics and processors. A few years ago Warm Audio added guitar effects to its product line that follow a similar philosophy, providing musicians with affordable, high-quality reproductions of discontinued classic pedals that have become prohibitively expensive on resale and vintage markets.

With Warm Audio’s recent introduction of the Warm Bender fuzz and Ringerbringer ring modulator, the company now offers eight impressive pedals that range in price from \$119 to \$219. These two new pedals reveal that any timeline or technology is fair game to Warm Audio, with the Warm Bender being based upon the relatively simple Tone Bender fuzz circuits dating from the dawn of stomp box history in the mid and late Sixties while the Ringerbringer is a reproduction of the much more sophisticated Moogerfooger Ring Modulator, which was produced up until 2018.

The Warm Bender is both a faithful reproduction of a Tone Bender with Attack and Level controls and a modern enhancement thanks to the addition of a three-way switch that selects three different fuzz circuits plus a Sag switch that drops the voltage from 9 to 6 volts. It’s housed in a familiar-looking wedge enclosure with a gray hammered metal powder coat finish, but it’s scaled down to about half the size of the original. The fuzz circuits consist of NOS 76 featuring new-old-stock OC76 and SFT337 transistors like the early Vox Tone Bender (used by Ron Asheton of the Stooges, John Lennon, Lou Reed, Kevin Shields, Ratatat and others, and allegedly based on the Mark 1.5 circuit), NOS 75 with three new-old-stock OC75 transistors replicating the coveted Mark II Professional circuit, most famously used by Jimmy Page with the Yardbirds and Led Zepelin and Silicon – a modern circuit that uses three silicon transistors instead of the aforementioned germanium transistors.

The three settings are all bona fide classic square wave fuzz tones. Typical of a Tone Bender, the mids are more prominent, which makes the effects quite useful for violin-like,



The Warm Audio RingerBringer is pretty much a dead ringer for the discontinued Moogerfooger pedal it's based on

singing single-note lead tones. The NOS 76 setting has lower gain and more presence, while the NOS 75 setting is more aggressive and delivers darker, warmer character that's similar to using a neck humbucker with the guitar's tone knob rolled back. The Silicon setting has added treble buzz and cut, and it gets quite spitty and static with the Sag control engaged. Like most classic fuzz circuits, chords can lack note-to-note definition, although root/fifth intervals can sound quite heavy.

The Ringerbringer is pretty much a dead ringer for the discontinued Moogerfooger pedal it's based on, housed in a nearly identical enclosure with wood sides and featuring identical top-panel control knob and rear-panel

jack configurations. Even the rocker switches are the same shade of blue. Controls consist of modulator Mix and carrier Frequency knobs with a Lo/Hi switch, LFO Amount and Rate with a square/sine wave switch and a Drive knob, while jacks include Audio In and Out, Rate, Amount, Mix and Freq jacks for use with control voltage devices or expression pedals, LFO Out and Carrier In and Out jacks for carrier signal functions with external devices.

If you're not familiar with what a ring modulator does, the simple explanation is that it takes a modulation signal (such as an electric guitar, synth or vocal mic) that is combined with a carrier signal (usually a sine wave at a set frequency) and outputs the sum and difference to create unusual, atonal, metallic-sounding textures (the middle section of Devo's "Too Much Paranoias" is a classic example of ring modulation). The Ringerbringer produces one of the best ring modulation effects for guitar, with ample body and rich harmonic character, but be forewarned that the effect is mainly for adventurous, experimental musicians, and playing one at a blues jam will likely get you permanently banned.

THE SPECS



WARM BENDER

- **CONTROLS:** Attack, Level
- **SWITCHES:** NOS 76/NOS 75/Silicon fuzz circuit, Sag on/off, true-bypass effect on/off footswitch
- **JACKS:** ¼-inch Input and Output, 9-volt center negative DC adapter (adapter not included)

RINGERBRINGER

- **CONTROLS:** LFO Amount, LFO Rate, Drive, Modulator Mix, Modulator Frequency
- **SWITCHES:** LFO Square/Sine wave, Lo/Hi Frequency, true-bypass effect on/off footswitch
- **JACKS:** Audio In, Audio Out, Rate, Amount, Mix, Freq, LFO Out, Carrier In, Carrier Out, 9-volt center negative DC adapter (adapter not included)



When soloing, simply engaging the “Even More Fuzz” footswitch brings on the heat

sandwiched at the base of its diecast chassis with a circuit-board-mounted LED inside the enclosure that gleams a red halo around the bottom of the pedal when powered up. The pedal feels rock-solid with bulletproof construction and features dual footswitches for Fuzz Me-On and Even More Fuzz, with controls for Master (level), Fuzz, Tone on its left side; while More Level, More Fuzz and Blend (+/- clean signal) are found on its adjoining side. The Medici is true bypass, features side-mounted 1/4-inch I/O jacks and can be powered by battery or via a center negative DC 9-volt power supply.

While I can’t say the Medici falls under the category of a dual fuzz pedal, it’s best to think of it as an astoundingly great fuzz with the option of stacking “even more fuzz” on top of it — which is literally what the right side of the pedal does. The left side of the Medici governs your base fuzz tone with velvety-thick fuzziness and a hard-clipping sizzle that many fuzz connoisseurs will find appealing. It’s not raucous, bottom-heavy or gloomy sounding, but more of a bluesy-edged fuzz that’s pliable and warmly defined as you throttle your volume knob to add heft to single notes and chords. When soloing, simply engaging the “Even More Fuzz” footswitch brings on the heat; this is where the Medici sears with loads of fuzzy sustain and sharpened overtones that cut with a midrange slice. I find if you dial back the fuzz knobs on both sides, you get a solid combination of rhythm and lead tones to bounce between, where you won’t even consider adding any clean signal from the Blend knob altogether.

Call me partisan, but the Medici is one of those musically rich fuzzes that make me want to say *Ciao!* to my other fuzz pedals.

Buzz Bin Dophix Medici More Fuzz

By Paul Riario

IF YOU LOOK closely at the tiny screen-printed text on the face of the Dophix Medici More Fuzz stompbox, you’ll see an inscription in Italian. It’s a quote by Lorenzo de’ Medici that roughly translates to, “*How beautiful is youth, that is always slipping away! Whoever wants to be happy, let him be so: of tomorrow there’s no knowing.*” As a Paisan, that quote takes on a whole new profound meaning when I consider how ironic that — centuries later — here I am reviewing a pedal named after the most prominent ruler of the Medici family who my ancestors (look at my surname) tried to assassinate (look up the Pazzi Conspiracy) during the Renaissance. The good news is that all is well (sorry about that, Lorenzo), and we can move forward and talk about this royally good Medici More Fuzz from Dophix, an Italian boutique pedal company

based in Florence, Italy.

Every pedal in Dophix’s collection is handmade in the company’s Florence factory and named after inspirational figures from Florentine culture and Roman mythology, with the Medici More Fuzz having Donatello’s “Marzocco” lion screen-printed on the pedal’s face. What’s cool is the Medici has a clear acrylic panel



CHEAT SHEET



STREET PRICE:

€410.00

(approx. \$446)

MANUFACTURER:

Dophix,
dophix.it/prodotto/
medici

● **PROS:** Medium-to-high gain fuzz with an additional cascaded and boosted fuzz circuit; Solid range of fattened and raw fuzz tones; Blend control adds or subtracts clean signal into the circuit; true bypass; handmade.

● **CONS:** Expensive

THE BOTTOM LINE:

The Dophix Medici More Fuzz is a primal and thickened fuzz with an additional fuzz circuit to increasingly layer more scorching fuzziness.

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ELEMENTAL VISION

Strengthening interval recognition

HELLO EVERYONE, AND welcome to my first *Guitar World* column! I'd like to start off with an essential element of musical understanding, which is the knowledge of intervals. To illustrate, I'll cite a passage from my song "Believe," from my new album, *Charisma*.

An interval is the distance between two notes, measured in half steps and whole steps. "Believe" offers a great way to examine intervallic relationships, as there's a repeating, droning root note throughout the opening melody, and it's helpful to be aware of the intervallic relationship between the root and each individual melody note.

FIGURE 1 shows how I kick off the tune, with a three-bar vamp on Dsus2 setting up the introduction of the melody. Bars 4-8 show the initial melody that's played over Dsus2, and bars 9 and 10 progress to the IV (four) chord, G, followed by a return to the tonic, D, in bars 11 and 12. Notice that over the G chord, I include a C# note; in relation to a G root, C# is the #11 (sharp 11), which may also be thought of as the b5 (flat 5).

The best way to begin looking at the guitar intervallically is to be aware of the note names of the open strings; low to high, they are E A D G B E. As notes are fretted on any given string, there's one rule you should remember: as you move through the "musical alphabet," with the notes A B C D E F G, there are two instances, between B and C and between E and F, where consecutive letter names are only a half step, or one fret, apart. All the other consecutive letter-name notes are a whole step, and two frets, apart. So there's a note that "lives" in between. For example, between A and B there's A# (A sharp), also known as Bb (B flat). Likewise, between C and D there's C#, or Db.

FIGURES 2 and **3** illustrate the D major scale, which consists of the notes D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#. Intervallically, the major scale notes are identified as *degrees*, numbered 1 2 3 4 5 6 7, with "8" being the root note (1) one octave higher. This is true for every major scale. **FIGURE 4** shifts all the notes up one fret to sound the Eb major scale.

Let's now play the same D major scale up a single string, as shown in **FIGURE 5**.

FIG. 1 Dsus2

let ring throughout

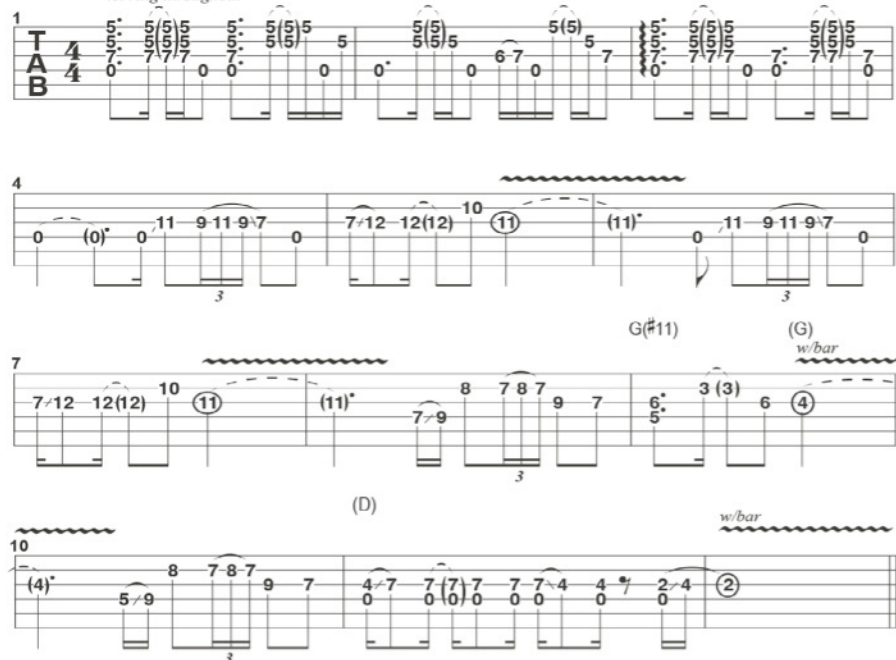


FIG. 2 D major scale



FIG. 3 D major scale



FIG. 4 Eb major scale



FIG. 5 D major scale

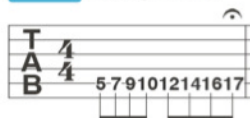


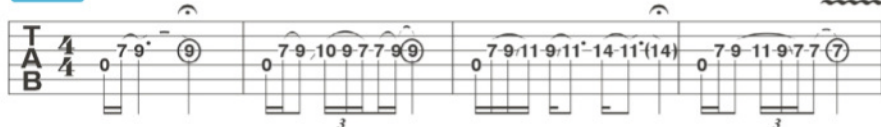
FIG. 6



FIG. 7 D triad



FIG. 8



Playing the notes this way, it's easy to see the distance between each consecutive scale degree. **FIGURE 6** is a descending melody that's based on the D major scale and moves from 14th position down to 9th position.

The building blocks of chords are *triads*, which are made up of three notes. **FIGURE**

7 shows the notes of a D major triad: D, F#, A, or 1 maj3, 5, which form a D major chord. One can strengthen intervallic awareness by playing each note of the D major scale against the open D root note, as I demonstrate in **FIGURE 8**, with an awareness to how each note "sits" over the root.

Andy Wood is an extraordinary virtuoso and master of everything from bluegrass to metal. His latest release, *Charisma*, hit shops in July and is available from andywoodmusic.com

TALES FROM NERDVILLE

by Joe Bonamassa



For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/september2024

TOOLS OF THE TRADE, PART 15

The 1957 Gibson Les Paul Junior

THIS MONTH'S "TOOL of the Trade" is a guitar I really love, the 1957 Les Paul Junior. The most well known user of this instrument was Mountain guitarist Leslie West, who was universally beloved for having one of the heaviest guitar tones of all time. But there are many different sounds, both ultra clean and distorted, that this instrument can provide, making it a perfect choice for just about any type of guitar-based music.

I treat the Les Paul Junior like a Fender Esquire, in that you can get a ton of different sounds out of a simple guitar fitted with one pickup, one volume control and one tone control. In the case of the Junior, it is fitted with a P90, which is a large, high-output single coil pickup.

Like an Esquire, the Junior works well for country-style guitar, as demonstrated by the licks shown in **FIGURE 1**. This 14-bar solo begins on beats 1 and 2 with a "country approved" phrase based on the A major pentatonic scale (A, B, C#, E, F#), after which I bring in C natural as a passing tone between C# and B, as well as G, via the open G string. The G note sounds great, as it implies an A7 chord (A, C#, E, G) and lends a bluesy feeling to the lines.

In bar 4, I switch to the A blues scale (A, C, D, E♭, E, G), initiated by partial barres across the high E and B strings, as well as the B and G strings. In bars 7-9, I expand the melodic lines to include F# and F natural. Bringing in the F# evokes the sound of A Mixolydian (A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G), and, in the phrases played here, I use C natural and F natural as passing tones moving up to C# and F#, respectively.

Bar 13 into 14 is built from a "rolling" descending line that makes use of the open G, D, A and low E strings, as I move quickly between my fret-hand index and ring fingers.

If you turn the guitar up, the sound is perfect for root-5th power chords, as I demonstrate in **FIGURE 2**. Leslie created many of Mountain's most iconic riffs from these simple two-note chords played on a Junior, such as those in "Mississippi Queen," "Nantucket Sleighride" and many others.

If you turn the guitar's tone knob all the

FIG. 1 (A)

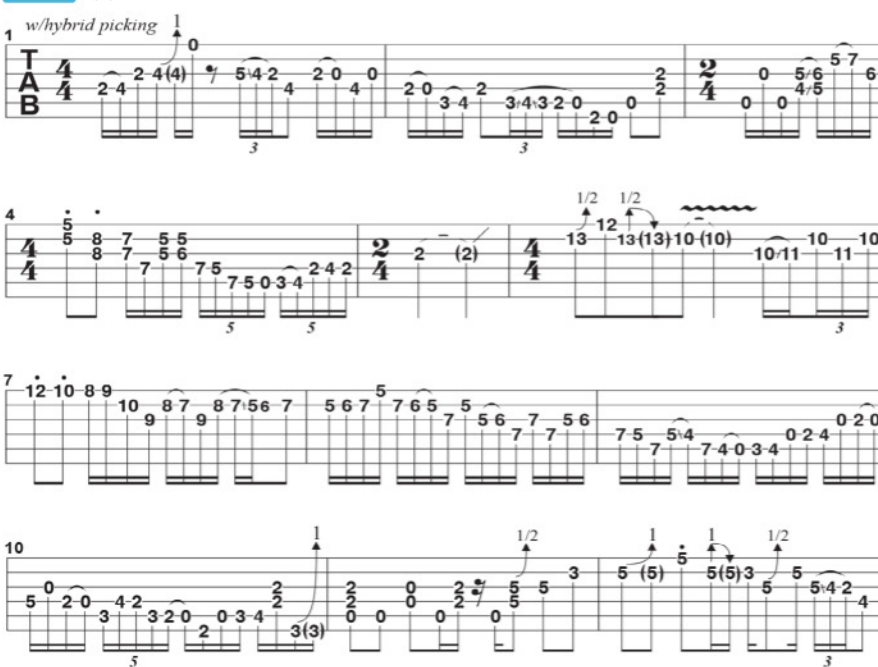


FIG. 2 D5 E5 G5 F#5 E5

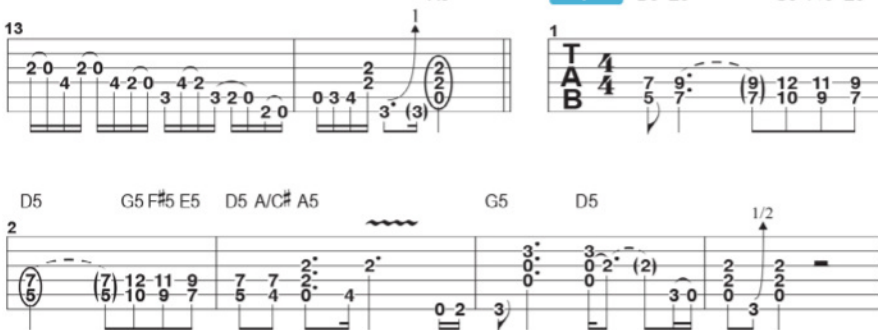
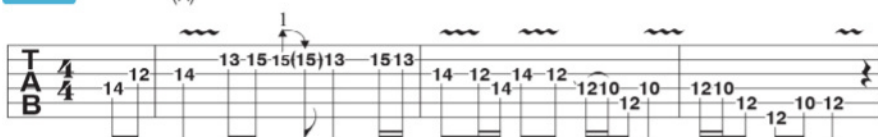


FIG. 3 (A)



way down, as I demonstrate in **FIGURE 3**, you can emulate the "woman tone" Eric Clapton makes use of on Cream songs like "I Feel Free" and "Sunshine of Your Love." These licks are based on A minor pentatonic played up in 12th position, transitioning down to 10th position.

Back in 1957, the instrument was only

available in sunburst or "TV yellow," so named so that you could see it on this new contraption called black and white television. Gibson and Epiphone both make great reissues of this classic instrument, so no need to break the bank when picking up a Les Paul Junior. Armed with one, you can rule the world.

Joe Bonamassa is one of the world's most popular blues-rock guitarists — not to mention a top producer and *de facto* ambassador of the blues.

MELODIC
MUSE

by Andy Timmons



For video of this lesson, go to
guitarworld.com/september2024

CONNECTING
FLIGHTS

Using string bending
and chromaticism to
connect melodic phrases

THIS MONTH, I'D like to continue exploring musically effective approaches to soloing over the 16-bar progression we've utilized for the last two columns, which is in the key of E minor: Em - A7 - Em - A7 - Cmaj7 - B7b9 - Cmaj - B7b9. For this month's improvised solo, I'll incorporate some string bending, along with a little bit of chromaticism.

FIGURE 1 presents the solo, which ends with an additional bar that resolves the final phrase back on the tonic chord, Em. The majority of the phrases are based on the E minor pentatonic scale (E, G, A, B, D), starting with a pickup into bar 1.

As always, my goal is to create strong, "hooky"-sounding melodies delivered with expressive, vocal-like articulations. The legato sound of hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides, bends and vibratos serve to emulate that vocal quality. I think of the guitar as the singer, and the emotive qualities inherent in the human voice should be exhibited in the single-note lines.

For example, in bar 2, I slide up from E, on the G string's 9th fret, to F# at the 11th fret and then bend that note up a half step to G, followed by a slide up to G at the 12th fret, which I then bend up a whole step to A and apply some vibrato. To my ears, this type of quick, slithering movement emulates the delivery of a vocal part. At the end of bar 3 into bar 4, I bring F# into the mix, alluding to the sound of the E minor hexatonic scale (E, F#, G, A, B, D), as well as the E Dorian mode (E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D) and E Aeolian (E, F#, G, A, B, C, D). This F# note comes into play again at the end of bar 4.

At the end of bar 6 into bar 7, I add the C# note from E Dorian, as this note functions here as the major 3rd of A7. In the second half of this bar, I initiate an ascending quarter-note triplets phrase built from alternating bends on the G string and fretted unison notes on the B string that serve to set up Cmaj7 in bar 9, over which I bend D, 2nd string, 15th fret, up to E, the major 3rd of C.

The chromaticism arrives on beat 2 of bar 12, as I descend through A, G#, G and F#, followed by a long descending line that carries us through to the end of the solo. Again, these lines are based on E minor hexatonic.

FIG. 1

FIG. 1 shows the solo notation for the 16-bar progression. The notation includes fret numbers, string numbers (T, A, B), and chord symbols (Em, A7, Cmaj7, B7b9). It features various techniques like slides, bends, and vibrato.

FIG. 2

FIG. 2 illustrates how I use slides and bends to ascend through a solo phrase.

FIG. 3

FIG. 3 offers a closer look at the chromaticism that finds its way into the end of the solo.

FIGURE 2 illustrates how I use slides and bends to ascend through a solo phrase. **FIGURE 3** offers a closer look at the chromaticism that finds its way into the end of the solo.

The bottom line is that I want the solo

to sound musical. Any time I start thinking too much, it's never a good thing! Too much analytical brain activity can take you away from being "in the middle" of the music in real time, which is where you should really want to be when improvising.

Andy Timmons is a world-renowned guitarist known for his work with the Andy Timmons Band, Danger Danger and Simon Phillips. Check out his new instructional course, "The Art of Story Telling."

LONE STAR EVOLUTION

by David Grissom



For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/september2024

ROLLIN' IN THE DEEP

Using rolling pull-offs and hammer-ons, and how to play "Way Down Deep"

THIS MONTH, I'D like to discuss the tune "Way Down Deep," the title track from my third album, released in 2011. A live version of the song also appears on 2014's *How It Feels to Fly*. "Way Down Deep" is built from similar hybrid picking and drone string techniques that I demonstrated for "Lucy G." in my first two columns. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, hybrid picking is an indispensable technique for me; without it, I couldn't play half of my songs or improvise the way I prefer to.

I listened to a lot of bluegrass when I was younger and still practice a lot on acoustic. Two of my primary bluegrass influences are Norman Blake and Doc Watson, and both use hybrid picking and drone string techniques in much of their music. It's probably sacrilege to bluegrass purists that I'm using a distorted electric guitar tone and equating it with bluegrass music, but I've never been shy about mixing up elements of different styles.

"Way Down Deep" came together while exploring these playing techniques on acoustic guitar. **FIGURE 1** presents the tune's intro riff, played in the key of G. I begin with the open D and G strings, which I fingerpick with my middle and ring fingers, followed by a downward slide and pull-off on the D string from F to E to D, performed in conjunction with the open G note. This creates a nice rolling effect. On beat 2, I drop in a low C note on the A string's 3rd fret, sounded with the pick. From here, all notes on the bottom two strings are struck with the pick while the notes on the higher strings are fingerpicked.

The same type of riff is played on beats 2 and 4. On beat 2, the low C note is followed by a hammer-on from the open D to E, with both strings ringing. On beat 4, this movement is shifted down to the bottom two strings, with a low G note followed by a hammer-on from the open A note to B. In bar 2, I alternate F, G and the open low E note against either the open D or G strings, all the while allowing all notes to sustain as much as possible.

FIGURE 1 shows the second part of the

All examples performed w/hybrid picking.

FIG. 1 G5 let ring throughout

1. w/bar 2. dips w/bar

FIG. 2 (G5) C5/G w/bar

FIG. 3 G5 F#sus2 (G5)

FIG. 4 G5 (F#sus2) (G5) (E5) F#sus2

FIG. 5 (G5) Gm C5/G Gm (G5) F#sus2

Triplet Feel ♩ = ♩

FIG. 6 (G5) C5 (G5) C5/G

intro, which is later recalled during the tune's chorus. Here, I play notes on the bottom two strings in unison with the open G string, culminating with a C5 chord that places its 5th, G, as the lowest note, or "in the bass" (C5/G).

FIGURES 3 and 4 offer a more detailed look at the primary riff, with **FIGURE 3** zeroing in on the one-bar opening phrase;

FIGURE 4 presents this lick in half time, notated as quarter and eighth notes. The phrase ends with my favorite F chord, a thumb-fretted F#sus2, which I also include in "What Passes for Love," shown in **FIGURE 5**. Finally, **FIGURE 6** offers a more detailed look at the "Way Down Deep" chorus. Be sure to play through the phrase slowly while allowing all notes to ring.

David Grissom has toured or recorded with Buddy Guy, John Mellencamp, Storyville, the Allman Brothers Band, Robben Ford and John Mayall. In 2022, *Guitar World* named him one of the 30 greatest Texas guitarists of all time.

K.T. YARBROUGH

Written by **DICKEY BETTS** • *Transcribed by* **DAVE WHITEHILL and JIMMY BROWN**

**Fast Country Rock** ♩ = 186

D/A

Chord change labeling simplified from this point on.

Gtr. 1 (acous.)

1

TAB 4/4

Bass (w/pick) (enter 2nd time)

TAB 4/4

D/A

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

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/hgt dist.)

7

Organ and Elec. Piano (arr. for gtr.)

Bass

Bass Fig. I - - - - -

3rd time, skip ahead to **E** (bar 48)

[illegible]

D Bridge (0:55)

G **A** **G**

Gr. 2
32

Rhy. Fig. 2
Gr. 1

Bass Fig. 2
Bass

A **G** **A**

38

G **E**

43

Go back to **B** Theme (bar 9)
N.C.

end Rhy. Fig. 2

Organ and Elec. Piano

end Bass Fig. 2

E (1:26)

A D/A
Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 1)
Gtr. 2

48

Organ and Elec. Piano

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice (see bar 9)

F 1st Walk-up (1:30)

N.C. (Am)
Gtr. 2

52

Bass

G Re-intro/ Pre-solo Breakdown (1:38)

A D/A A D/A A D/A A D/A
Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 22 times (see bar 1) (congas enter 3rd time) (piano enters 3rd time)
(play 4 times)

Gtr. 2

59

A D/A A D/A A D/A A D/A
Gtr. 2 plays Riff A six times simile (see bar 63)
Bass (play 3 times)

67

A D/A A D/A A D/A A D/A
75

H Piano Solo (2:28)

A D/A A D/A A D/A
Gtr. 2 Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 1) 32 times simile (play 16 times simile)

81

Bass (play 16 times simile)

J Guitar Solo (3:45)

D

G

Rhy. Fig. 3

Bass Fig. 3

Gtr. 2

end Bass Fig. 3

Gtr. 2

Bass repeats Bass Fig. 3 simile (see bar 89)

Gtr. 2

Bass

9 ~~~~~

55

115

D G D G D G

Bass Fig. 4

[illegible]

D G D G D G

Gtr. 2

127 10-10-10(10)10 10-12 10-10-12(12)12 10-12 10-10-(10)10° 10°-10(10)10 10-12 10-10-(10)10-10 12(12)-12 12°-10

Bass

5 5 2(2)5 2 3 2 3(3)4 4 5 5 4(4)7 4 5 5 4(4)7 4 5 5 5 4(4)7 4 5 5 4(4)7 4

133

D G D G D G

Bass Fig. 5

D G D G D

139
10 12 12 10-12-10 12 12 10-12-10 12 10-12 (12)(12)12 (12)12 (12)12 12 (12)12(12)(12)12 (12)12 (12)12 (12)12

end Bass Fig. 5 Bass plays Bass Fig. 5 twice (see bar 137)

5 5 2 (2) 5 2) 3) 2 3 (3) 4 4 5 5 2 (2) 5 2) 3) 3 2 (2) 0 0 5 5 2 (2) 5 2)

5 5 4 (4) 7 4 5 5 3 5 7 5 5 4 (4) 7 4 5 5 3 5 7 5 5 2 (2) 5 2 3 3 2 (2) 3 4

5 5 2 (2) 5 2 3 3 2 (2) 0 0 5 5 2 (2) 5 2 3 2 3 (3) 4 5 5 5 4 (4) 7 4 5 5 3 5 7 7

The second staff of the exercise contains the following sequence of notes and rests: 5, 5, 4 (4), 7, 4, 5, 5, 3, 5, 7, 7, 5, 5, 4 (4), 7, 4, 5, 5, 3, 5, 7, 7, 5, 5, 4 (4), 7, 4, 5, 4, 7, 5, 7, 4. The notes are written on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The notes 4 and 5 are on the first line, 3 is on the first space, and 7 is on the second line. The notes 4 (4) are on the first space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the second line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the second space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the third line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the third space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fourth line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fourth space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fifth line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fifth space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the first line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the first space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the second line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the second space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the third line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the third space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fourth line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fourth space. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fifth line. The notes 5 and 7 are on the fifth space.

guitarworld.com **91**

N.C. (D)

D

G

N.C. (D)

Gtr. 1 repeats Rhy. Fig. 4 (see bar 93)

Gtr. 2

197

Bass

L "Falling Leaves" Riff (5:57)

Gtr. 2

203

Organ

Bass

M Bridge Recap (6:03)

G

A

G

A

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 32)

Gtr. 2

209

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 32)

G

A

G

E

217

N Final Theme Recap (6:22)

A

D/A

A

D/A

A

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

Gtr. 2

224

Gtr. 1 Elec. Piano and Organ

230

D/A A D/A A D/A A

236

D/A A D/A A D/A

1.

2.

O Ending (6:59)

A Gtr. 2

241

A Gtr. 2

249

253

259

265

271

277

283

289

295

301

307

313

319

325

331

337

343

349

355

361

367

373

379

385

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421

427

433

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709

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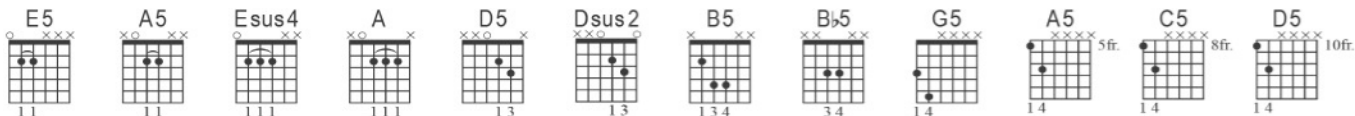
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“MIDNIGHT TRAIN TO MEMPHIS”

Chris Stapleton

As heard on **FROM A ROOM: VOLUME 2**

Words and Music by CHRIS STAPLETON *and* MIKE HENDERSON • *Transcribed by* JEFF PERRIN



A Intro (0:00)

Freely

E5	A5	N.C. (G5)	Esus4
Gtr. 1 (elec. w/overdrive)			

Moderately ♩ = 90, w/swing 16ths feel ()

Esus4	A	N.C. (G5)	E5
-------	---	-----------	----

Oh!

[illegible][illegible]

1. Well

E5 A N.C. (G5) E5

9

7^{*} 7 5 7 (7) 5 7 5

1/2 1/2 1/4 1/4

B Verses (0:31, 1:30, 2:30)

- (1.) Judge looked down gave me forty days
(2.) Whistle blows when the sun comes up
(3.) Ten for the jury ten for the judge

Instead of the fine that I could not pay
Hit the floor keep your big mouth shut
Twenty more to forget my grudge

Esus4 N.C. Esus4 A N.C. (G5) E5

11

Bass substitutes Bass Fill 1, second time (see below bar 36)
Bass substitutes Bass Fill 3, third time (see below bar 43)

0 7^{*} 7 5 7 (7) 5 7 5

1/2 1/2 1/4 1/4

Said walk right you'll soon be home
Eat your breakfast on the ground
When I get to thirty-nine

That's the

Esus4 A N.C. (G5) Esus4 A N.C. (G5)

14

Bass substitutes Bass Fill 2, second and third times (see below bar 44)

7^{*} 7 5 7 (7) 5 7 5 5

1/4 1/4 1/4 1/4

Cross the line you'll be on your own
Work like hell 'till the sun goes down
longest day in a prisoner's mind

Forty days

E5 A

17

7^{*} 7 5 7 (7) 7 5 7 7 3 4

1/2 1/2 1/4 1/4

C Chorus (0:53, 1:52, 2:52)

of shotguns and barbed wire fences

19

D5 Dsus2 E5 A5 N.C. (G5)

Bass substitutes Bass Fill 4 third time (see below bar 44)

2nd time, skip ahead to **E** 2nd Interlude (bar 33)
3rd time, skip ahead to **F** Outro (bar 41)

Forty nights

to sit and listen

to the midnight train to Memphis

22

E5 A5 N.C. (G5) B5 A5

D 1st Interlude (1:09)

25

E5 A5 N.C. (G5) E5 N.C. E5 A5 N.C. (G5)

28

E5 N.C. E5 A5 N.C. (G5) E5

Esus4	A5	N.C. (G5)	E5
-------	----	-----------	----

E 2nd Interlude (2:08)

E5 A5 N.C. (G5) E5 G5 A5 C5 D5

The musical score continues from measure 36. Measure 36 has a pink highlight on the first staff. Measures 37-40 show a sequence of chords: A5, N.C. (G5), E5, G5, A5, C5, and D5. The notation includes various fret numbers and accidentals, such as flats and naturals. Measure 41 features a key signature change to one flat (B-flat). The final measure, 45, shows a whole note chord.

Esus4

Gtr. 1

E

guitarworld.com 97

Go back to **B** 3rd Verse (bar 11)

3. Well now

E5 A5 N.C. (G5) Esus4

39

F Outro (3:08)

Midnight train to Memphis
Midnight train to Memphis
the Midnight train to Memphis

Oh

E5 A5 N.C. (G5) Esus4

41

(play 3 times)

(decrease tempo) **Freely**

E5 A5 N.C. (G5) E5

43 Gtr. 1

Bass Fill 1 (1:30)

E5

Bass Fill 2 (1:41)

E5 N.H.

pitch: D

Bass Fill 3 (2:30)

E5

Bass Fill 4 (2:54)

D5

Performance Notes

HOW TO PLAY THIS MONTH'S SONGS By Jimmy Brown

"JESSICA"

The Allman Brothers Band



WRITTEN AND RECORDED in the wake of the tragic, untimely deaths of guitarist Duane Allman and bassist Berry Oakley, this upbeat, triumphant-

sounding country-rock instrumental represents one of the late Dickey Betts' finest moments as a guitarist, composer and de facto bandleader.

Betts conceived the tune's main theme, which begins in bar 8, as a tribute to the great gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt, who, due to a childhood injury, only had the use of his first two fret-hand fingers. The melody during this section is indeed playable using only these two digits, with a couple of position shifts required. When bending the D note at the 10th fret on the high E string up a whole step to E, in bars 9, 17 and elsewhere, use both fingers to push the string upward, with the 1st finger assisting at the 9th fret. And hook your thumb around the top side of the fretboard for anchorage. When working on this part, you'll find it helpful to periodically reference the unbent E note at the 12th fret as the target pitch of the bend.

Our transcription also includes the theme's two beautifully arranged harmony lead lines that were performed on electric piano and organ by Chuck Leavell and Gregg Allman, respectively. Both parts lay nicely on the guitar, with Allman's low harmony line indicated by smaller tab numbers.

Dickey's solo, beginning at section J, features his signature sure-footed phrasing and polished touch, with sturdy finger vibratos and perfectly intonated, pedal steel-like whole-step bends. When bending the E note at the 12th fret up to F $\sharp$ in bars 90-92 and elsewhere, use your 3rd finger and reinforce it one fret below with the 2nd finger. And, as advised earlier, hook your thumb around the top side of the fretboard when bending. You'll find it especially helpful here to reference the unbent F $\sharp$ note at the 14th fret as the target pitch for the bend, especially when working on the chains of pre-bends (indicated by straight vertical arrows) and releases in bars 142-148. Let your ears train your fingers to apply precisely the right amount of push pressure to the string.

"MIDNIGHT TRAIN TO MEMPHIS"

Chris Stapleton



COUNTRY SINGER/SONGWRITER Chris Stapleton flexes his electric blues-rock guitar chops on this rousing, jail-themed song. Armed with

what's probably a Gibson ES-335, plugged into a cranked, overdriven Fender Princeton amplifier, Stapleton dials in a fat, midrange-emphasized bridge-pickup crunch tone to play this song's roaring open power chords and well-crafted single-note fills.

Following a mood-setting, free-time introductory phrase in bars 1 and 2, the guitarist proceeds to lay down a repeating two-bar riff, which he plays with a swing-16ths feel, using a Bo Diddley-style syncopated rhythm in bar 3, followed in bar 4 by a series of fret-hand-muted "chucka" strums. Note the guitarist's use of an open Esus4 chord here, which is no doubt a physical byproduct of fretting an open E5 shape with a 1st-finger barre on the A and D strings, with the G string getting barred in the process. This is comparable to what happens when forming an open A5 chord the same way, where the B string ends up getting fretted as well, resulting in a full A chord.

When performing the muted "chucka" strums, lightly lay all four fret-hand fingers across all six strings. Doing so will ensure that no unintentional natural harmonics are sounded, only pitchless, percussive sounds.

The all-important half-step bends, or *blues curls*, on the low G note in this riff are what give it *attitude* and swagger. After picking the note, fretted with the 2nd finger, pull the string slightly downward, to raise the note's pitch to G $\sharp$. Then quickly "get off it" to play the following chord, taking care not to sound an unintentional pull-off to E. Use both hands to preventively mute the 6th string here as you hit the A5 chord.

During the song's two post-chorus interludes (see sections D and E), Stapleton plays bluesy one-bar single-note phrases between the repeating chord riff. Most of these are played within the first five frets, but there are two, in bars 34 and 38, that require quick, accurate position shifts. When sliding up to the 12th-fret E notes in bar 34, be careful not to over- or undershoot it.

"POLICE TRUCK"

Dead Kennedys



THIS CLASSIC PUNK rock song from 1980 features guitarist East Bay Ray's trademark surf guitar-influenced melodic riff writing at its best.

With his bridge humbucker-equipped Telecaster-style ax plugged into a Maestro EP-3 Echoplex tape unit (set for quick, multiple repeats) and a Fender Super Reverb amp (with the reverb turned off), the guitarist dials in a twangy, punchy, overdriven tone that effectively fills in the sonic space in the band's guitar-bass-drums instrumentation, with the tape echo providing ambience.

Most of Ray's parts consist of picked eighth notes, played up and down a single string and performed at a brisk tempo of nearly 200 beats per minute, which for most guitarists necessitates the use of alternate picking. In the intro, he makes great use of high perfect 4th double-stops on the top two strings and descending chromatic lines on the B string, which he resolves satisfyingly to chord tones of E5 or D5.

For the verse riff, which brings to mind the classic surf instrumental "Pipeline" by the Chantays, Ray mostly pedals on his open low E string and adds 3rd-fret G notes on beats 2 and 4, accenting the backbeats along with drummer Ted's snare hits, with bassist Klaus Fluoride doubling the line an octave lower. Notice how, during the verses, Ray palm mutes (P.M.) all his 6th-string notes, so as to subdue his tone and volume and allow vocalist Jello Biafra's busy lyrics to be easily heard over the rhythm section.

During the choruses (section C), Ray discontinues palm muting and lets all his notes ring loud and clear, which provides an exciting dynamic contrast to the previous section. He does the same during the instrumental interlude at section E, where the guitar and bass share the spotlight with their octave-doubled single notes.

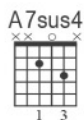
Ray's guitar solo (section F) is simple but effective, as he stays on his high E string and targets chord tones of Em (E, G, B), approach them from below with *chromatic lower neighbors* added for rhythmic and melodic effect. Use your first two fingers to fret each pair of adjacent notes, shifting the hand up or down the neck to the next pair.

"POLICE TRUCK"

Dead Kennedys

As heard on **GIVE ME CONVENIENCE OR GIVE ME DEATH**

Words and Music by ERIC BOUCHER, RAYMOND PEPPERELL, GEOFFREY LYALL and DARREN HENLEY • Transcribed by JEFF PERRIN



A Intro (0:00)

Fast ♩ = 192

A7sus4

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist. and Echoplex delay effect)

A7

C

First three measures of the intro. The guitar staff (Gtr. 1) shows chords A7sus4, A7, and C. The bass staff shows a simple bass line.

Em

Gtr. 1
(w/reduced delay effect)

E5

Measures 4-7 of the intro. The guitar staff shows a sequence of notes and chords: Em, E5, and a descending scale.

Bass

Bass Fig. 1 (repeat previous bar)

Bass staff for measures 4-7 of the intro, showing a repeating bass figure.

Gtr. 1

D5/E

E5

Measures 8-11 of the intro. The guitar staff shows a sequence of notes and chords: D5/E, E5, and a descending scale.

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 eight times (see bar 4)

N.C. (Em)

1. To-

Final measures of the intro. The guitar staff shows a sequence of notes and chords: N.C. (Em), P.M., and a descending scale. The bass staff shows a repeating bass figure.

B 1st and 3rd Verses (0:20, 1:30)

(1st time: increase tempo to ♩ = 196)

(1.) -night's the night that we got the truck We're going downtown gonna beat up drunks
3. down your dress Here's a kick in the ass Let's beat you blue 'til you shit in your pants

N.C. (Em)

Gtr. 1

16 P.M.

Your turn to drive I'll bring the beer It's the late late shift no - one to fear And
Don't move child got a big black stick There's six of us babe so suck on my dick And

Gtr. 1

20 P.M.

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 16)

C 1st and 3rd Choruses (0:30, 1:39)

ride ride how we ride
(B5) (B♭5) (A5) (Em)

And
(2nd time) Let's

24 Gtr. 1

2nd time, skip ahead to [G] (bar 68)

ride Low ride
(B5) (B♭5) (B5) (Em)

2. It's - a

28 P.M.

D 2nd Verse (0:42)

(grad. increase tempo to ♩ = 199)

round - up time where the good whores meet we're gonna drag one screaming off the street And

(Em)

Gtr. 1

32 P.M.

Guitar staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 5 5 5 3 0 (0) | 2 (2) (2) | 2 (2) 0 0 2 (2)

Bass staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 6 5 5 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 16)

ride ride how to ride Got a
(B5) (Bb5) (A5) (Em)

36 Gtr. 1

Guitar staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 5 5 5 3 0 (0) | 2 (2) (2) | 2 (2) 0 0 2 (2)

Bass staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 6 5 5 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0

Bass

black uniform and a silver badge Playin' cops for real We're playin' cops for pay Let's

Gtr. 1

40 P.M.

Guitar staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 5 5 5 3 0 (0) | 2 (2) (2) | 2 (2) 0 0 2 (2)

Bass staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 6 5 5 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 16)

ride Low ride
(B5) (Bb5) (A5) (Em)

44 Gtr. 1

Guitar staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 | 0 3 0 (0) 3 0 | 0 3 0 0 0 3 0

Bass staff: 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0

Bass

E Interlude (1:01)

(B5) (Bb5) (A5) (G5) (B5) (Bb5) (A5) (G5)

Guitar staff: 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3

Bass staff: 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3

Guitar staff: 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3

Bass staff: 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3

(E5) (E♭5) (D5) (E♭5) (E5) (E♭5) (D5) (E♭5) (E5) (E♭5) (D5) (E♭5) (E5) (E♭5) (D5) (E♭5)

52

2 2 1 1 0 0 1 1 | 2 2 1 1 0 0 1 1 | 2 2 1 1 0 0 1 1 | 2 2 1 1 0 0 1

2 2 1 0 0 1 1 | 2 2 1 0 0 1 | 2 2 1 0 0 1 | 2 2 1 0

7

F Guitar Solo (1:13)

(Em)

Gtr. 1

56

7 6 7 6 7 6 7 7 | 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 11 | 12 11 12 11 12 11 12 | 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 5

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 10 times (see bar 4)

60

7 6 7 6 7 6 7 7 | 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 11 | 12 11 12 11 12 11 12 11 | 12 11 12 11 12 11 12

(play 3 times)

12

Go back to **B** 3rd Verse (bar 16)

3. Pull

64

P.M. -----

3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3 X | 7 7 6 6 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 twice (see bar 30)

G (1:46)

ride

N.C. (Em)

Gtr. 1

0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 3

Bass

0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 0 0 3 0 0 0 3 0 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 0 (0) 0 3 0

H Bridge (1:49)

The	left	newspapers	might	whine	a bit	But the
	guys	at the station	they	don't give a shit		
	(B5)			(B♭5)	(A5)	(G5)

Dispatch calls Are you doing something wicked No siree Jack we're just givin' tickets As we

(B5) (D5) (B5) (B♭5) (Em) (B5) (D5) (B5) (B♭5) (A5) (G5)

72

I

Outro Chorus (1:59)

ride ride How we ride And

(B5) (B♭5) (A5) (Em)

76

Bass Fig. 4 *end Bass Fig. 4*

ride ride How we ride And

(B5) (B♭5) (A5) (Em)

80

Gtr. 1

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 twice (see bar 76)

ride ride How we ride Let's

(B5) (B♭5) (A5) (Em)

84

Freely

Gradually slower -----

ride Low ride

(B5) (B♭5) (B5) Em

88

Gtr. 1

**trem. strum*
***trem. pick*

**Trem. strum in time w/snare drum.*
***Trem. pick in time w/snare drum.*

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By learning 5 simple patterns and the chords that match up to them, you form the foundation for shattering the barriers that are holding you back. You'll start hearing notes and chords that you recognize from listening to your musical heroes. Your fingers and ears will work together like never before.

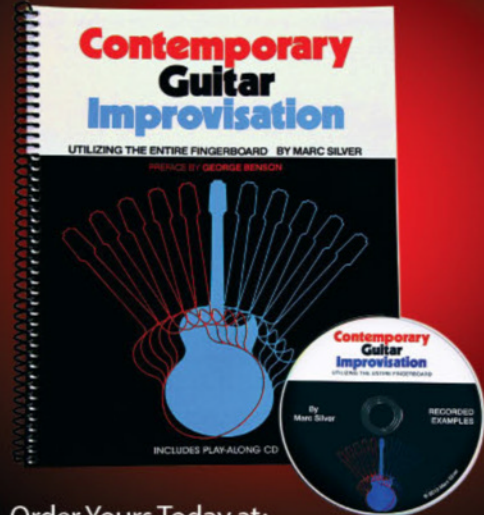
Lesson 2

By connecting the five patterns, the fingerboard suddenly becomes a familiar superhighway that takes you anywhere you want to go. You'll understand how and why these related patterns and chords work together so well across the entire fingerboard. *Lessons 3 through 8 will take you even further.*

Contemporary Guitar Improvisation will teach you:

- How to improvise across the entire fingerboard on any single chord
- How to improvise in one position over multiple chord changes and keys
- Chords with fingerings and voicings that you understand and can modify
- How to accurately (and creatively) interpret chord symbols
- How to substitute chords
- How to use pentatonic and blues scales over ANY types of chords
- How to apply the 5 patterns to sightreading
- How to analyze songs so you play the right patterns
- Chromatic connections
- Much more

You don't need any music-reading ability to get the full benefit of the book, and the included CD has over 50 helpful play-along examples to keep you on track as you progress.



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1958-63, 1976-PRESENT GIBSON EXPLORER

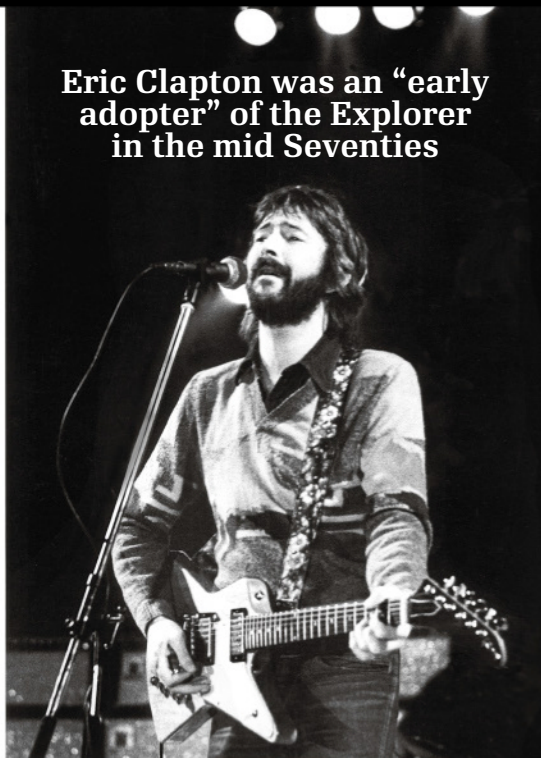
CATEGORY: SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR

BACK IN 1958, when the first Gibson Explorer guitars appeared on the market, there was no heavy metal, hard rock, Marshall stacks or over-drive pedals. Distortion was something that amp manufacturers and players generally frowned upon, embraced only by a handful of hooligans and raucous rebels. Gibson president Ted McCarty conceived the Explorer's design as a modern, space age-inspired competitor to the Stratocaster, but its radical sharp-angled "arrow-head" (on the earliest version) and "hockey stick" headstock shapes and pointy geometric body that resembled Thor's lightning bolt were just a little too futuristic for musicians who still considered crew cuts and suit jackets the height of rock 'n' roll fashion.

Although the Gibson Flying V, which was introduced at the same time, found a small but devoted cult of players during the late Fifties and Sixties, the Explorer didn't really catch on until the Seventies. This was partially due to the extreme rarity of the original Gibson Explorers; only 22 were built in 1958-59, and fewer than 50 were assembled from leftover parts during the early Sixties. Eric Clapton, who acquired a second-hand Explorer with a chunk of its lower bass bout sawed off; Rick Derringer, who owned a very early example with a V-shaped headstock; J. Geils and Allen Collins of Lynyrd Skynyrd were "early adopters" during the mid Seventies. Soon afterwards, Explorer copies built in Japan, upscale custom models made by companies like Hamer and Dean and reissues offered by Gibson helped fulfill demand as changing musical tastes and fashion caught up with this rediscovered gem.

Truthfully (IMHO), the Explorer does not sound significantly different from most other Gibson-style solidbody models with a 24 3/4-inch scale, set neck, dual humbuckers and stop tailpiece. It can sing like a Les Paul, bark like an SG and spank like a Flying V, with the pickups installed in it arguably playing a bigger overall role than its tone woods or body shape. The three controls (individual volume for each pickup and master volume) are perhaps slightly more limited than a four-knob configuration, but that's hardly a handicap. Some players feel that the extended lower bass bout and extra body mass below the bridge enhance its bass response, but that could

Eric Clapton was an "early adopter" of the Explorer in the mid Seventies

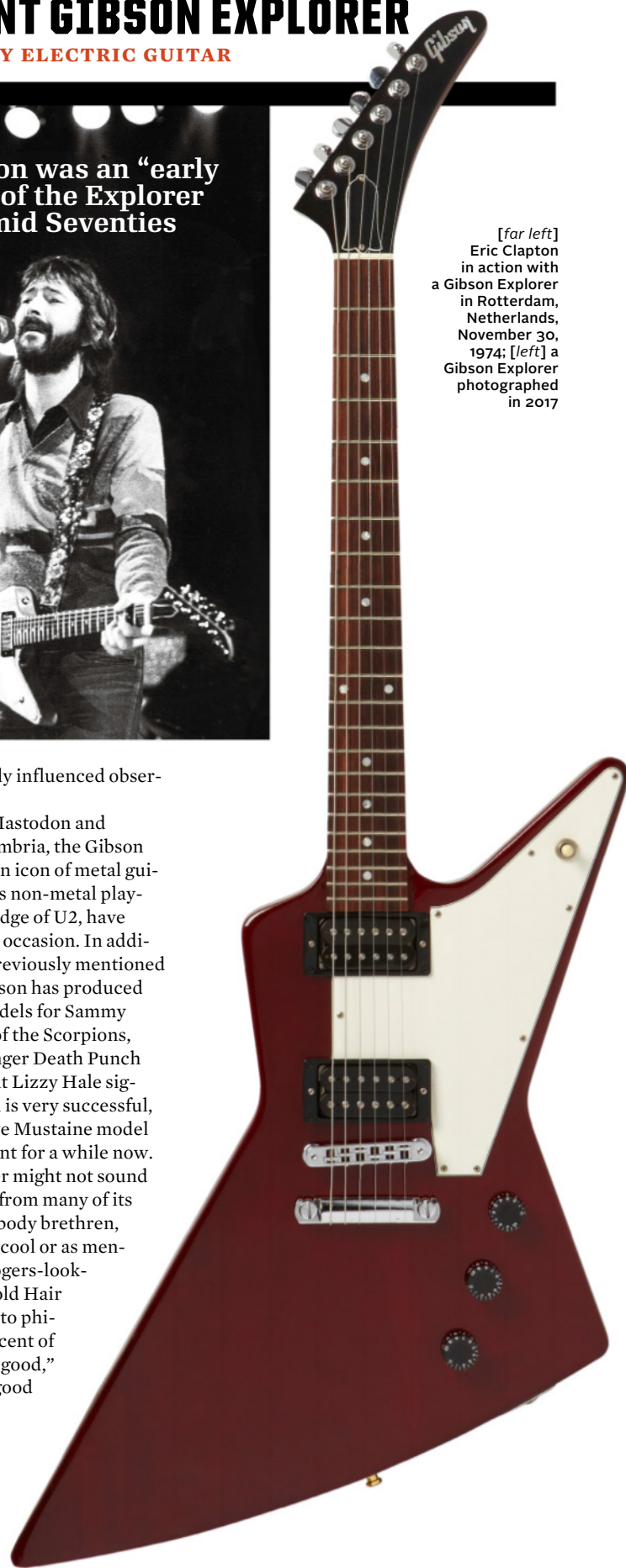


[far left] Eric Clapton in action with a Gibson Explorer in Rotterdam, Netherlands, November 30, 1974; [left] a Gibson Explorer photographed in 2017

just be a psychologically influenced observation.

From Metallica to Mastodon and Kiss to Coheed and Cambria, the Gibson Explorer has become an icon of metal guitar, although numerous non-metal players, most notably the Edge of U2, have also used Explorers on occasion. In addition to several of the previously mentioned players and bands, Gibson has produced Explorer signature models for Sammy Hagar, Matthias Jabs of the Scorpions, Jason Hook of Five Finger Death Punch and others. The current Lizzy Hale signature Explorer model is very successful, and a forthcoming Dave Mustaine model has been in development for a while now.

The Gibson Explorer might not sound dramatically different from many of its dual-humbucker solidbody brethren, but few guitars look as cool or as menacing. As the Kenny Rogers-look-alike boomer in those old Hair Club for Men ads used to philosophize, "Ninety percent of feeling good is looking good," and few things feel as good as strapping a Gibson Explorer around your neck and wailing on some power chords.



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