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ERIC GALES
SAMANTHA FISH
AND THE BIGGEST
BLUES ALBUMS
OF THE YEAR



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THE RED-HOT
RETURN OF
WOLFGANG
VAN HALEN!

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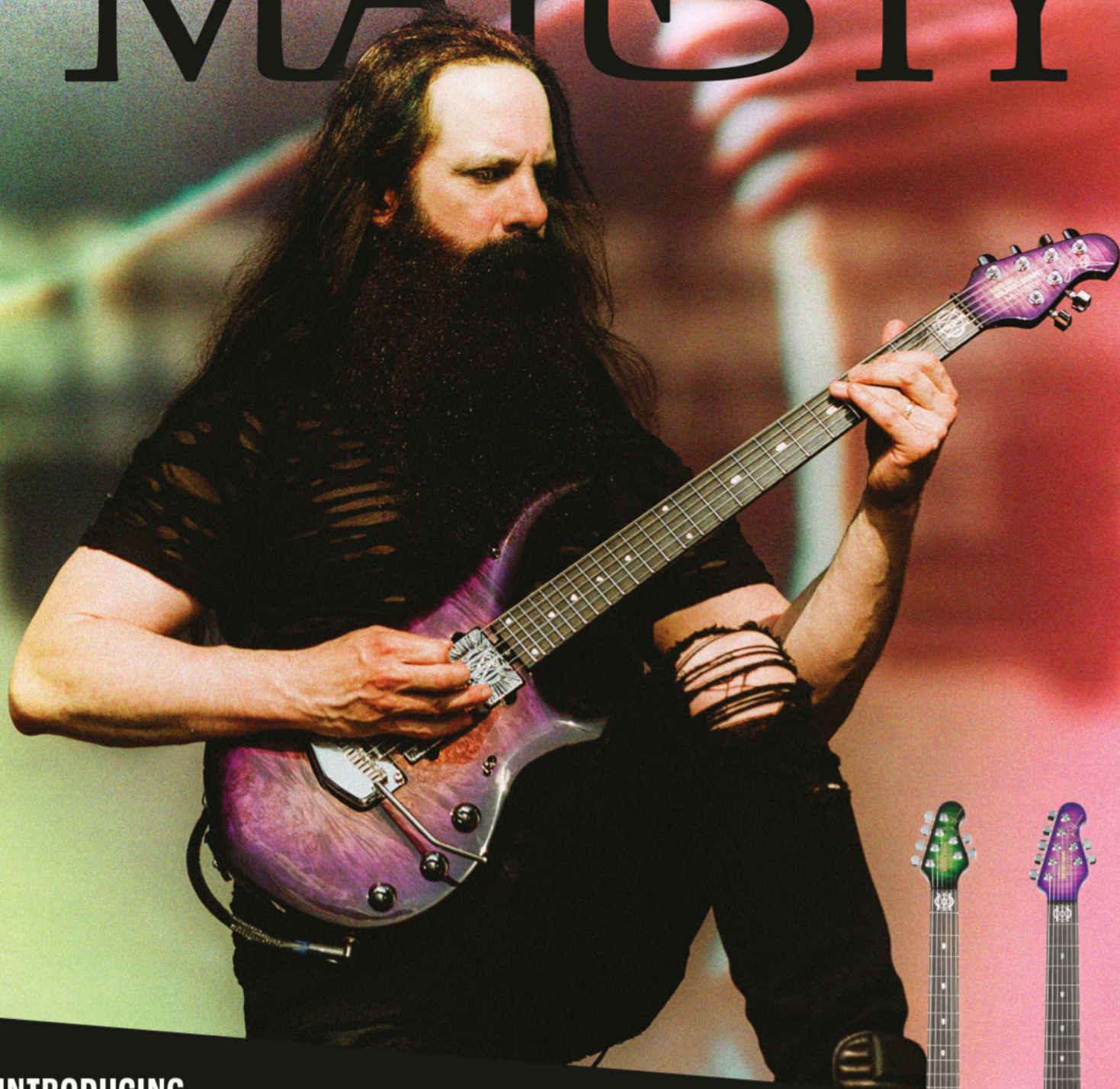
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A woman with long brown hair, wearing a silver sequined crop top and black leather pants, is playing a green electric guitar. She is standing on a beach with waves crashing around her. The background is a dramatic sky with dark clouds and bright lightning bolts. White musical notes and swirling lines are superimposed over the scene, creating a sense of energy and movement.

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Contents

VOL. 46 | NO. 12 | DECEMBER 2025



Slash on stage with Guns N' Roses in Taipei, Taiwan, on May 10

18 Brent Hinds (1974-2025)

A tribute to the Mastodon master

22 The 2025 blues boom

Whether you've noticed it or not, 2025 has been a dang feisty year for blues and blues-rock albums. So, lo 'n' behold, we bring you new interviews with...

>>>> Buddy Guy

>>>> Joe Bonamassa

>>>> Eric Gales

>>>> Christone "Kingfish" Ingram

>>>> Samantha Fish

>>>> Walter Trout

>>>> **PLUS** Ana Popovic, Larry McCray, Cardinal Black's Chris Buck and Canyon Lights' Pat Faherty

40 The best of SNL

Live from New York, it's *Saturday Night Live*'s 50 greatest guitar moments!

48 Wolfgang Van Halen

With their third album, *The End*, WVH and his band, Mammoth, are about to take the world of rock guitar by storm once again — critics, anxiety and Southern California wildfires be damned

54 Guns N' Roses

GN'R have been around for decades, but have fans ever witnessed a steadier, more accomplished six-string pairing than Slash and Richard Fortus? In two different interviews, we grill Slash (the band's resident guitar legend) and Fortus (the band's resident Cal Ripken Jr.) on why it all never stops clicking.

64 Suhr Guitars

The Gear Hunter pays a visit to the one and only John Suhr

TRANSCRIBED

By a Monster's Hand

VOLBEAT

PAGE
86

Dam That River

ALICE IN CHAINS

PAGE
93

Life in the Fast Lane

EAGLES

PAGE
96

DEPARTMENTS



68 Soundcheck

68 Fender Ultra Luxe Vintage '60s

Telecaster Custom

71 Boss VG-800

72 Martin GPE Inception Maple

74 EVH 5150 Iconic Series 15-watt 1x10 Combo

76 Blackstar ID:X 50

77 EarthQuaker Devices Easy Listening

80 Columns

80 Follow the Groove

by Cory Wong

81 Tales from Nerdville

by Joe Bonamassa

82 One Guitar Woman

by Sue Foley

83 Hardwired

by James Jared Nichols

110 Power Tools

A revamped Ibanez electric guitar lineup made its debut at the 1987 Winter NAMM Show and generated a huge buzz of excitement. The most successful model to come from this era was the RG550. In essence, it was a more affordable variation of Steve Vai's JEM with a super-slim Wizard neck, flat 16.9-inch radius, 24 jumbo frets and a lightweight basswood body.

COVER PHOTO: TOMÁŠ TRĚŠTÍK

PHIL BARKER/FUTURE, GUNS N' ROSES

Woodshed

VOL. 46 | NO. 12 | DECEMBER 2025

Tracksuits and bucket hats in NJ? Oasis must be nearby!

▶ **THE AREN'T MANY** bands who get bigger and more culturally significant 30-plus years after their golden era. But there is Oasis. The band's nearly impossible-to-fathom reunion was one of GuitarWorld.com's biggest stories last year. And, as someone who sort of fell under their spell *since* their 2009 implosion (mostly the result of my 2011 and 2015 interactions with the clever, ever-cool and damn funny Noel Gallagher), there was no way I was gonna miss their August 31 show at the massive MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. Here are my three big takeaways from that night:

+ Noel played some mouthwateringly beautiful Gibson guitars, and the drool really started gushing when said axes showed up on the stage's twin five-story-tall Jumbotrons. I counted three Les Pauls (one of them is pictured below), an ES-355 and two acoustics, all of which burned brightly in the window-rattlin' mix.

+ This might actually be the best time to see the band – as in, ever. Besides the Gallaghers, I witnessed classic-era guitarist Paul "Bonehead" Arthurs; Gem Archer, the guitarist who replaced Bonehead in 1999; and bassist Andy Bell, AKA the guitarist from Ride. Noel and Archer, in particular, were diabolically spot-on.

+ These guys were tight, confident and full of passion, and that passion was beyond repaid by the gobsmacked audience. Let's just say that belting out the chorus to "Don't Look Back in Anger" with 70,000-plus beer-soaked, bucket-hatted Oasis fans is one of those definite "keeper" moments in life.

HEY! Performance Notes will return next issue. Also, please think of this issue's "2025 Blues Boom" feature as a special-edition, blues-themed Tune-Ups section. Enjoy!

DAMIAN FANELLI



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GUITAR WORLD (ISSN 1045-6295) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue, by Future US, INC., 135 West 41st Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036. Phone: 212.378.0400. Fax: 917.281.4704. Web Site: www.futureplc.com. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by CMG. Subscriptions: One-year basic rate (12 issues) US: \$17.95. Canada: US\$42.95. Foreign: US\$42.95. Canadian and foreign orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688. PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to Guitar World, P.O. Box 2024, Langhorne, PA 19047-9957. Ride-along enclosure in the following edition(s): None. Standard enclosure: None. Returns: Pitney Bowes, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Entire contents copyright 2024, Future PLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future PLC is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in Guitar World. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of Guitar World. Products named in the pages of Guitar World are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. **SUBSCRIBER CUSTOMER SERVICE:** Guitar World Magazine Customer Care, P.O. Box 2024, Langhorne, PA 19047-9957. Email help@magazinesdirect.com.

BACK ISSUES: www.magazinesdirect.com **REPRINTS:** Future PLC, 135 West 41st Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036.

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SUBSCRIPTION DELAYS We rely on various delivery companies to get your magazine to you, many of whom continue to be impacted by Covid. We kindly ask that you allow up to seven days before contacting us – at help@magazinesdirect.com – about a late delivery.

SINGLE-ISSUE SALES www.magazinesdirect.com/guitarworld

PRINTER Kodi Collective

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HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw

GUITAR WORLD EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING OFFICES
347 W. 36th St., 17th Floor/Penthouse, New York, NY 10018

FUTURE US, INC.
135 W. 41st St., 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036, www.futureplc.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. Please remember to include your name! Some people don't.



Red Hot 'n' Smokin' SRV

BY SHARON PASCUAL, PETERBOROUGH, U.K.

This is my hand-painted "Red Hot 'n' Smokin' Stevie Ray Vaughan" resin model, which I completed in July. I loved every second of painting this much-loved Texan guitarist who I only discovered in 2023 while flicking through YouTube!

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



Doug Dickeson

AGE: 72

HOMETOWN: Lincoln, NE

GUITARS: 27 total, including Fender, PRS, Carvin, Martin, Godin, Takamine, Epiphone, Strandberg and others

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Zach Bryan "Something in the Orange," Pink Floyd "Wish You Were Here," Poison "Ride the Wind," Steely Dan "My Old School"

GEAR I WANT MOST: A Les Paul and an SG that I can truly bond with



Craig S. Snyder

AGE: 65

HOMETOWN: Canandaigua, NY

GUITARS: PRS Custom 22 Semi-Hollow, Epiphone Dot Deluxe Custom Shop, Ibanez AFM-93

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Mahavishnu Orchestra "Birds of Fire," Billy Cobham "Stratus," Pat Metheny "Bright Size Life"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Hardtail 1962 Gibson ES-335



Greg Goodell

AGE: 44

GUITARS: Gibson Signature T Les Paul, Gibson ES-335, Charvel San Dimas Pro Mod, Fender Deluxe Nashville Telecaster, customized Guild Surfline

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Sturgill Simpson "You Can Have the Crown," Gin Blossoms "Hey Jealousy" and original songs by my groups, Buckshot Crazy and Summer School Dropouts

GEAR I WANT MOST: Gibson Les Paul Custom with maple fingerboard

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PHOTO BY BRAD BEENDERS



Brent Hinds

(1974-2025)

On August 20, we lost one of modern heavy music's most accomplished guitarists. We salute the master of Mastodon

BY JOEL McIVER

I MET BRENT HINDS a few years ago at a Mastodon gig. For some reason, he was standing next to me at the public bar, waiting in line to buy a drink, rather than staying out of sight backstage, so I introduced myself as a writer for *Guitar World's* sister magazine, *Total Guitar*, and bought him a beer and a shot.

We talked briefly before he headed backstage, but I couldn't quite figure him out. My impression was that he was a bit of an introvert, perhaps not that good with new people — someone who saved his flamboyance for the stage.

In his personality, Hinds — who died August 20 in a traffic collision in Atlanta at age 51 — was rather like the music of Mastodon. Their eight studio albums are epic, progressive and thought-through, but none of the music is easy to digest or understand, making the elevated commercial position they hold damn near miraculous. Mastodon never recorded a substandard album, either. From day one, they were a force of nature.

A large chunk of Mastodon's brilliance and success can be attributed directly to Hinds. Sure, his partnership with guitarist Bill Kelliher — also a phenomenal musician, who focused more on heaviness and riffs while Hinds tended more toward solos and weird textures — was among the most accomplished in metal. But Hinds' own songwriting and performing was unique to itself; he blended genres deliberately but effortlessly, denying that he was anything as limited as "a metal guitarist" in *GW* and elsewhere.

Hinds was born in Helena, Alabama, in 1974 and listened to country musicians as a kid, later namechecking Johnny Paycheck and Jerry Reed, in particular the latter's guitar playing. He attended the Alabama School of Fine Arts and later moved to Atlanta, where he joined bassist Troy Sanders' band, Four Hour Fogger. The two musicians later formed Mastodon with Kelliher and drummer Brann Dailor, who they'd met at a High On Fire show, initially performing as a quintet with singer Eric Saner.

A demo led to a deal with Relapse, and when Saner quit, an unusual setup developed in which lead vocals were alternately delivered by Sanders, Hinds and Dailor; a debut album, *Remission* (2000), attracted immediate attention and Mastodon rapidly built a profile. "March of the Fire Ants" was an immediate fan favorite, demonstrating the group's unorthodox but compelling set of influences — think Metallica and Rush meet Isis and Neurosis, plus Hinds' love of country guitar — and a fanbase swiftly coalesced.

The ambitious concept album *Leviathan* (2004), based on Herman Melville's 1851

novel *Moby-Dick*, has become a 21st-century milestone for its progressive-metal mastery, appearing in several best-of-the-decade polls. High-profile tours with Slayer, Lamb of God and Slipknot took the Mastodon message to the public and, after a compilation called *Call of the Mastodon*, a step up to the Warner label took the band even further.

High points that remember from Mastodon's early-2000s trajectory include "Colony of Birchmen" from *Blood Mountain* (2006), featuring Josh Homme of Queens of the Stone Age; the psychedelic inspirations of *Crack the Skye* (2009), featuring Hinds' amazing hybrid picking on "Divinations"; tours with Metallica and Dethklok; and their soundtrack to the 2010 movie *Jonah Hex*. "Curl of the Burl" from *The Hunter* (2011) nabbed a Grammy nomination, Mastodon toured America with Opeth and Ghost in 2012, and your kids leaped off their cinema seats in excitement that year when a blast of "Island" was heard in *Monsters University*.

The upward trend continued with *Once More 'Round the Sun* (2014); appearances by Hinds, Dailor and Kelliher as undead adversaries in *Game of Thrones* in 2015; *Emperor of Sand* (2017), on which Hinds' pentatonic mastery is on display on "Roots Remain"; and an EP called *Cold Dark Place* — inspired, said Hinds, by the end of a relationship. "I wrote some pretty dark, beautiful, spooky, funky, ethereal, melancholy music, which also sounds like the Bee Gees a little bit," Hinds said with typical sly humor. A 2019 cover of Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" came

"The only way we can deal with hurt is to have these songs that go out to our fallen brothers and sisters"



Brent Hinds (with Bill Kelliher in the background) goes record shopping in Atlanta, August 12, 2011

from a similar place of sadness — the death of manager Nick John — and Mastodon's most recent LP, *Hushed and Grim*, appeared in 2021.

Hinds didn't talk much about his personal life, although we do know the title track of *The Hunter* was written for his brother Brad, who died on a hunting trip in 2010. Occasionally he alluded to past trauma ("There's hurt and anger that have afflicted us through our lives... the only way we can deal with it is to have these songs that go out to our fallen brothers and sisters") and he also discussed a Xanax addiction with *GW* in 2022.

"I used to have constant anxiety about getting in a bus accident or a plane crash," he said. "And then big crowds of people give me anxiety. So I've lived with anxiety for 20 years, and I was hooked on Xanax for 15 years, and I had to wean myself off of it a little bit at a time because it was compromising my breathing... One time I couldn't get it and I had two seizures. So I finally weaned myself

off. It took years, but recently I discovered that you need to be anxious and fucking deal with it and that keeps you on your toes and motivated to keep doing shit. Now I try to feed off the anxiety and play guitar."

Despite Hinds' issues, his guitar partnership with Kelliher was among the most creative of metal's last two decades, but that's not to say the two men operated as one; indeed, their creative processes differed radically. "We're opposite sometimes," Kelliher told *GW* in 2024. "When I write songs I'll spend months piecing them together, whereas Brent says, 'Let's jam in the studio.'"

"I wrote some pretty dark, melancholy music, which also sounds like the Bee Gees"

Those differences often paid huge dividends, he told us. "Once in a while, he'll hear something in what I'm showing him and he'll come up with his own interpretation. And sometimes he'll do something that will totally surprise me. Like, I'll put a bridge in there and I assume he'll play a solo over that. Then he'll come in the next day and play his part and when I come back in, I'm blown away when I listen back because he put the solo somewhere entirely different, like over a midsection, which I thought would be instrumental. I'll be like, 'Whoa, wow! I wouldn't have put it there, but that's cool. That sounds killer.' When it works, it's a very cool thing to hear because it shines a whole new ray of light on the song."

Still, those differences in personality and creativity didn't exactly make it easy for Kelliher, as he diplomatically told *GW*. "When Brent writes stuff — and I've told him this before — it's like he's writing as if he was the

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

only guitar player in the band, because it's just wild," he said. "So I'm trying to learn it and trying to play it over and over. I'm like, 'Dude, this is really hard.' He'll go, 'Oh no, it's not hard. Your stuff is hard.' I'm like, 'Well, your stuff is hard because it's almost like you're playing a guitar solo the whole time.'"

He continued: "It's very hard for him to teach me stuff and tell me what he's doing. He doesn't have any patience for sitting down and showing me what to do. When he plays, I have to video record his exact finger positions on my phone. And then I'll learn it. But it changes a lot, too. I'll work really hard and learn something one way and then by the next practice he's changed it, which he can do. It's his riff until we record it."

Hinds understood that his own playing was complex, telling *GW*, "I like to sprawl out in a song. I think living in the city and being cramped around people causes these unconscious decisions for my songwriting. The only case scenario I have to really spread out is in a song. Having the kind of sound I have, when I play and get into it, I get kinda lost, and before I know it 13 or 15 minutes have passed."

The complicated nature of Hinds' compositions was in itself a challenge, Kelliher said. "There's a song on *Blood Mountain*, 'Capillarian Crest,' and when it gets to the midsection he's playing completely crazy stuff. I was like, 'Yeah, I'm not even going to try to play that because I'm going to give myself an aneurysm if I try to learn it.' And then I got to the point where he was doing something really complicated and I went, 'Okay, I'm never going to play something exactly like you because we're different kinds of guitar players.'"

Gear-wise, Hinds was a Flying V guy to the core, often playing a silverburst model made by the Gibson Custom Shop, although he also played Les Pauls and SGs. Epiphone made him a signature V when Gibson failed to do so. "I'm pretty disgruntled with the Gibson people," Hinds told us in 2016. "But Epiphone, if I could give them all a hug or a Valentine's card, I would!"

The Hinds V is a tough instrument out of necessity; one of his most memorable *GW* quotes was, "I emphasized to them that I'm gonna wank, spank, slobber, bleed, bend, crunch and crush all over this fucking thing, and the guitar's gonna need to be able to handle the monster behind it." He also owned a pedal company, cunningly named Dirty B Hinds.

Mastodon was, despite their prolific output, just one outlet for Hinds. He released a split double album in 2011 from not one but two projects, Fiend Without a Face and West End Motel, and the following year formed a supergroup called Giraffe Tongue Orchestra

with members of the Dillinger Escape Plan, Jane's Addiction and the Mars Volta. Another all-star project titled Legend of the Seagullmen, featuring Tool drummer Danny Carey, came in 2018.

Hinds either quit Mastodon or was fired from the group five months before his death. The official statement announced that they had "mutually decided to part ways," a non-explanation that neither he nor the other band members subsequently clarified, as is so often the case in this legally-sensitive era. The group replaced him firstly with YouTuber Ben Eller and then with Nick Johnston, who did a sterling job at Ozzy Osbourne's farewell show, Back to the Beginning, in Birmingham, England, on July 5.

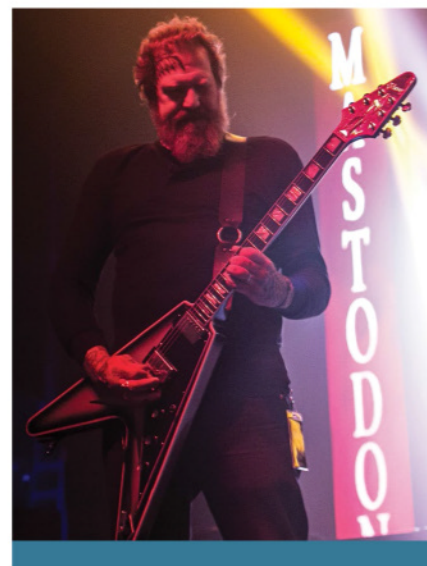
Sadly, Hinds' last words on the subject of Mastodon were bitter ones. In June he wrote (on Instagram), "I won't miss being in a shit band with horrible humans" and later added in response to a live video from 2012: "My guitar sounds great, but Troy and [Dailor] sound absolutely horrible. They are way out of key. Embarrassing and they kicked me out of the band for embarrassing them for being who I am. But what about who they are? They are two people that can't sing together live or anywhere else in the world. Everything they try to sing in the studio is manipulated by Autotune because they're incapable of singing in key."

"Only I know who they really are," he continued. "They are the biggest fans of themselves... I've never met three people that were so full of themselves. It's disgusting."

Like a true mensch, Kelliher rose above all this, writing in tribute, "We had our good and bad times, just like in any relationship... I didn't think you'd be taken from us like this, [with the] absolute loss of a true, one-of-a-kind guitar wizard extraordinaire. You were a brother, we were a family, you were a wild man not to be tamed."

A sad ending to a unique trajectory, then, and equally sadly, not the first or the last time that genius has proved a terminal obstacle to creative collaboration. Hinds' wild-card nature was summed up in the words of Shirley Manson of Garbage, who wrote: "I am utterly devastated to learn of your death... the world is so much less wild and free and beautiful without you in it. Rest easy my brother. Keep me a seat at the bar, will you?" *GW*

"I discovered that you need to be anxious and deal with it... that keeps you on your toes and motivated"



Hindsight

Select Brent Hinds quotes from the pages of *Guitar World*

The reason you smash [a guitar] is because you're having problems with it and it's your way of fixing it, really. You've already sent it to the luthier, you've already put the new nut on there. You've worked with this guitar for years, and it does that one fuckin' thing one time too many, and you go, 'You know what? You're going out tonight, buddy. It's a great show when that happens, too, but I hate losing an awesome guitar. Also you can hurt yourself. In St. Louis, we did this really awesome show, and I did a Babe Ruth up against a wall. It smashed into a million pieces, but I tore my rotator cuff. — *Holiday 2010*

I was 12 or 13 when I first heard [Metallica's] *Master of Puppets*. For months, it's all my friends were talking about, and finally a friend let me borrow it on cassette. I took my jam box down to the basement so my parents wouldn't know I was down there worshipping the devil. I sat there with the jam box turned up just enough to hear it, and I gotta say, I was kind of creeped out. I remember being quite impressed and totally feeling like I'd been touched by an evil force. But I also felt a desire to practice and become a better guitarist. — *January 2006*

I have no beef with Satanists, but only 'cause I don't believe in their shit. There's no flaming-hot devil dude who's going to poke you in the ass with a pitchfork, man. That's such bullshit. On the other hand, if we were Satanists, we'd be the best Satanists in the world, 'cause we don't do anything halfway. [Laughs] — *November 2006*

For sure I'll be recording with my new [Epiphone Ltd. Ed. Brent Hinds Flying-V Custom] — while standing on top of a chair with a werewolf mask on. And that's not a joke; I really do that. I never sit down to record. You can't sit down and play a Flying V, everyone knows that. — *August 2016*



2025 BLUES BOOM!

The GW guide to some of this year's greatest blues and blues-rock albums and personalities

Buddy Guy

Is Buddy Guy our greatest living blues guitarist? As his 10th decade approaches, we meet the master for a frank talk about passing the torch, the importance of a sip of cognac and the advice he gave Jimi Hendrix

BY ANDREW DALY

THE RUMOR WAS that Buddy Guy planned to retire – and considering that he's pushing 90, no one would blame him – but it seems that, despite Guy's age, rumors of his retreat were, well, premature. Still, that doesn't mean he isn't feeling his age.

"I'm gonna tell you like I tell everybody else; if I tell you I'm doing all right, I'd be lying," Guy says. "When you get to this age, everything gets to be aching. But other than that, I guess I'm doing okay. If you live to my age, your muscles and everything else aches. I was told in my twenties, 'Wait till you get to my age,' so I knew it was coming if I hung around long enough. Still, people say, 'You don't have any gray hair, and you still look good!' I say, 'You need glasses!'" [Laughs]

Aches and pains aside, when it comes to playing live, Guy is an ageless wonder. With a few pre-show sips of cognac and his famous polka-dot Fender Strat slung over his shoulder, Guy runs circles around players half his age. But live shows aren't all that Guy has planned, as he dropped a new record, *Ain't*

Done with the Blues, on his 89th birthday on July 30. Rather than be over-the-top excited about his 19th solo record, the first since 2022's *The Blues Don't Lie*, Guy shrugs with a been-here-before vibe.

"With the blues, I still think I'm doing good. I appreciate you all from my heart – and whatever you can do to help the blues."



You're nearly 90, but you're keeping up a furious pace. How do you do it?

A double shot of cognac before I go to the stage. [Laughs] Muddy Waters taught me that. When I first came up, I didn't drink or do anything; I was too shy to talk and almost too shy to play. And they would say, "Man, stop dragging this schoolboy stuff with us. Get out there and play." I had cognac at home, but I didn't touch it unless my friend came over. Now, the only time you'll see me drinking cognac is if I'm gonna go up and try and play a song. A little shot might give you the best that you got. [Laughs] You can't ask for anything more.

With cognac on your side, are you able to play as well as you always have?

I ain't gonna lie to you. I can't do what I did when I was 22. Once, I was playing at Central Park in New York City and jumped off the stage. They thought I was crazy! But man, that was way up there, and I kind of sprained both ankles. [Laughs] I had to have two police officers help me go to the hospital. Now I almost need help walking off the stage, because I'll be 89 in July.

"I just hope I'll be playing the right lick and get lucky. You just never know"

"If I knew what Leo Fender knew, I'd be one of the richest men in the world," Buddy Guy says



You seem to be going strong. Do you ever consider retirement?

I thought about it, but all of my friends who I learned everything from – B.B. King, T-Bone Walker and those guys – used to tell me, “Just try and keep the blues alive. The blues are being ignored by big radio stations.” Those guys wouldn’t catch airtime, so I haven’t stopped yet.

In recent years, you’ve had your son Greg playing guitar in your band. Was he a blues fan growing up?

I’m glad you asked that, because he’s been coming out there with me. When he was growing up, I’d never ever come home and

say, “Here’s a guitar.” But I remember when he was 12, 13 or 14, on the Fourth of July, we’d put the speakers in the yard and spin records. They’d play Michael Jackson and all kinds of stuff, but when somebody would put on one of my albums, Greg would run out and say, “Don’t play that.” I didn’t say nothing, but when he turned 21, he came into the blues club, looked at me and started crying. He said,

“My grandparents would say, ‘I don’t know how that boy got to be a musician’”

“I didn’t know you could do that. Now I want to get tough.”

Get tough?

It was kept from him. Let me give you an example. They would take a young man, or a young daughter, and put them in the army at 17 or 18, right? They can go there and survive or be killed, and they’d come home at 20. You ain’t old enough to drink a beer, but you’re old enough to kill or be killed. I don’t think that’s fair. So you can make a man or woman at 18 or 19 think they should be tough enough to come back and drink a beer and listen to some blues. That’s what happened to him. Ever since he saw me when he was 21 in that club, he’s had some good times and success. If you come to the show, I’m gonna bring him out. He can do a lot, but I didn’t teach him.

Do you think you’ll record with Greg?

He wanted me to play on his album, but I don’t know. But he’s playing very well. And like I said, I didn’t show him nothing. He looked at me once, bought a guitar with the Jeff Beck whammy bar on it, and he said, “I want to play a few licks.”

Tell us about your recent album, *Ain’t Done with the Blues*.

I had a birthday on the 30th of July, and the new record came out on that day. I’m still able to do a little to try and keep the blues alive, and I’m hopeful for another young person, like Kingfish, and a couple of other people.

When you make a new record, do new developments in the sound of the blues impact how you approach things?

You never know about a record. They had me play a little spot in a movie [*2025’s critically acclaimed Sinners*], and I still get more calls about the movie than I do my records. [Laughs] You know, with Michael Jackson and James Brown, everything they touched went to gold. If I knew how to do that, I’d probably be more than I am now. When I go into the studio, I just hope I’ll be playing the right lick and get lucky. You just never know.

Seeing as the blues is often observational and inspired by life, do you find yourself influenced by different things as an older man?

If people would just listen to the lyrics of the blues – you know, if you haven’t lived through some of the things that root blues lyrics, if they haven’t happened to you, keep living. The blues don’t just happen to somebody; it’s about good [and] bad times. And who doesn’t go through life and have bad and good times?

***Ain’t Done with the Blues* is a pretty symbolic title for where you’re at in life.**

COURTESY OF BUDDY GUY

What does it mean to you?

The way I came up, you had the blues, but it was a joyful blues. My parents were sharecroppers. We couldn't even afford a bicycle, so a horse was the only way to stop walking for miles. [Laughs] And we picked cotton and raised potatoes and everything like that. We didn't have no radio or nothing. My grandparents would say, "I don't know how that boy got to be a musician, because we didn't have no radio to listen to at night." But when I was 13 or 14, I got my first record, and I was still driving a tractor and plowing a mule. If that ain't the blues, what is?

While recording, are there any pieces of gear that you rely on the most?

You know, all the super British guitar players, like Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page, when I went there to England in 1965 with this Strat, they all looked at me — and they weren't famous yet — and said, "Man, I didn't know that kind of guitar could play the blues." Then they all went out and bought Strats. But I had and still have a Fender Bassman amp. I just turn on the amplifier, and it'll get on down. But the British guys all say I had something... people used to look at me and ask what I had. I'd say, "I didn't make it, Leo Fender made it. It's just a tone." That tone is so clear, and I never really paid attention to it. I just turn on the amplifier and play my guitar.

As they say, tone is in the hands.

Well, you know, after I met Jimi Hendrix... you'll laugh, but I thought he used to play too loud. When I first came up, Muddy Waters and those guys had two little speakers at each corner of the blues club, and it was a clean sound. But when the British guys started playing, they had stacks of Marshalls. And when I got to know Jimi, I'd go see him and say, "Before you go in there, you ain't gonna hear nothing." That type of sound just took over. That clean sound went away because, with the amplifiers, it was a dogfight. It was just a rat race. And then all the special effects came in, and Jimi, I think he was one of the greatest that ever took advantage of the special effects, because a lot of people used them after him.

You're something of an ageless wonder. With a new record coming and no plan to stop, what does it mean to you to have been such a mainstay within the past and present blues scenes?

All I do is just keep my fingers crossed. When you're in this kind of business, it's almost like good food, you know? You ain't gonna know what it tastes like until you taste it. Then you say, "I'm gonna keep buying that here." I look at all kinds of things like that. It's just like with Leo Fender; if I knew what Leo knew, I'd be one of the richest men in the world. **GW**

"Even the people who get praised and championed by the blues police think the blues police are a joke," Joe Bonamassa says



Joe Bonamassa

When you're on a winning streak, don't mess with the formula — and opinions be damned, says the perennial blues phenomenon

BY ANDREW DALY

IN THE LAST 25 years, Joe Bonamassa has dropped 16 studio records. That's a lot of music, meaning it's hard to keep things fresh — and his latest, *Breakthrough*, despite its title, doesn't even try to break new ground. The truth is, it doesn't have to; it just needs to reflect the type of music Bonamassa likes to create, which tends to rub about half the hardcore blues community the wrong way — not that Bonamassa cares.

"What I interpret the blues as is different from what other people interpret the blues as," he says. "I'm long past the point of caring. There's nothing I can do

to change people's opinions about me, nor do I wish to."

That's not to say Bonamassa is on the losing end of the stick. Quite the contrary; he's perpetually on tours that include continuously sold-out arenas. Even so, Bonamassa keeps a level head when it comes to the subject of his success.

"I'm not in the thought process of going, 'Well, this is the most important thing in the world,'" he says. "What I offer is an escape for two hours and 10 minutes. When we play a show, it's an escape from politics, the world's problems and your personal problems. **GW**

To check out
Joe Bonamassa's latest
Guitar World column, aim
your eyeballs at page 81



You enjoy the show, or put on the record, and you forget. That's what music is about. It's always been about that."

Perhaps that line of thought is the true meaning of *Breakthrough's* title.

"It's escapism and inspiration," he says. "It's eliciting feelings of joy and just zoning out and relaxing. When it becomes too serious and something that people fight over, it loses its intent of what it was supposed to be in the first place. That's my opinion."

What's the story behind *Breakthrough*?

We started it two and a half years ago. We took the tracks to Nashville, finished those tracks and wrote more. Then I ended up going to L.A. with [producer] Kevin Shirley, where we did 18 or 19 tracks, and we whittled those down to 10.

Do you find it challenging to keep things fresh after releasing so much music?

Honestly, we felt like we weren't repeating

ourselves, and that's hard to do after more than 15 solo albums. It's impossible to go, "How am I going to reinvent myself without going full dubstep, or having a crazy production, which my fans aren't going to like, and which there's no way I can pull off live?" You keep to the confines of what you do; it's hard not to repeat. So that's what we were going for, and it took longer than I thought.

When it comes to your solos, are they premeditated, or do you just peel one off in the moment?

I always start with an initial reaction. If there's some adult chords, yeah, I gotta work it out, but if it's just straight ahead, I'd rather just not

"When we play a show, it's an escape from politics, the world's problems and your personal problems"

JEFF FASANO/GUITAR WORLD

think about it. If I miscalculate the amount of bars, I'd rather peel it back and punch in.

Did any new gear discoveries shape this record?

What I discovered on the last two or three records is you don't have to bring 80 guitars and every pedal you own to figure it out. It's all about knowing what a simple chain of gear will do, and what you need. Knowing what you need is way more important than saying, "I've got every option in the world in front of me; let's try it." You're blowing good takes figuring out whether you like the Klon overdrive better than the Ibanez Tube Screamer. I'd rather just have a good take with good tone and taste.

So you don't have a secret weapon in terms of tone?

Roll the volume back two numbers. *[Laughs]* That's the trick. If you get the gain you want out of the rig, roll it back two numbers. Make it harder to play. You don't want your favorite tone. The tone secret is to set your gain, roll your volume back and challenge yourself to play cleaner. You will absolutely love it and be way more happy with the tone – and you'll be proud of it.

Would you say most players rely too much on pedals that mask their natural tone?

We've been down that road before, us and the media. Players can do whatever the fuck they want, I don't care. How about that? *[Laughs]* You do you, I do me, and we'll see how it works out. I don't give a shit what anybody else does. I'm not gonna comment on other players' business; they can do whatever they want. Have at it. I'm happy for you. If you want to lug a tabletop full of shit around to a club, God bless you. Mazel tov. And if you want to plug straight into the amp, it's all good. It's just guitar, man. It doesn't matter.

That's fair. Everybody has their own process.

And if the process is taking a small amp and a large pedalboard and creating textures and layers that weave in and out of the tune, absolutely, that's a great way to do it. If the process involves taking no pedals and creating a big, fat sound with a bare-bones approach, that's great too. It depends on what song you're playing. If you're playing AC/DC, you don't need a lot of pedals. If you're playing Coldplay, yeah, you may need a delay and a reverb.

You once said there's a lane for every type of player.

Everybody has room. There's no right or wrong. We live in a world of influencers going, "Well, here's the ultimate way to do X." The next thing you know, someone comes up



with some oddball approach that changes the game again. But everybody is dealing with the same wood and wire as everybody else.

So it's not the gear – it's what you do with it?

A Les Paul is a Les Paul. A Strat is a Strat. A Gretsch is a Gretsch. It doesn't matter if it's 60 years old or if it was finished six weeks ago; it's about who drives it. The analogy I use is that the British racing driver Lewis Hamilton could get in a Toyota Prius and beat me on a fast lap, even with me driving his Ferrari race car. He just knows how to drive. I don't know how to drive. I have more horsepower and a better-handling car, but he'll figure out a way.

One of the interesting things that happens when you put out new music is that people either love it or chastise you for not making traditional blues. Does that bother you?

It doesn't matter, because when I look at our last set of gigs and I see full arenas, I think, "We did something right, and the music struck a chord with a large number of people." So do I placate the minority of folks, or do I play an arena gig with blues songs that nobody else is doing? I'd rather do the latter. Why do I have to impress 10 people when 1,000 people are saying, "Hey, man – I dig this"?

To be fair, the blues has always been fluid anyway. It seems somewhat ridiculous to hold you to the standard set by Albert or B.B. King when you're helping move the genre forward.

But even the people who get praised and championed by the blues police think the

"There's nothing I can do to change people's opinions about me, nor do I wish to"

blues police are a joke. They all roll their eyes in private. I've had this conversation with many of them, going, "I don't get it. What makes you the arbitrator of anything? Why don't you grab an instrument, or a harmonica, and write song tunes, while the rest of us judge?" They wouldn't like that. It's like, "Who cares? It's just music." It's made to be enjoyed; it's not that important.

To that outside-the-box end, is there a record you love that might surprise people?

One of my favorite records of all time is *Here Come the Noisemakers* by Bruce Hornsby [2000]. Why? It's a masterclass in arrangements, light and shade, heavy and mellow, and it's just a kickass band captured on the road. I love everything Hornsby does. I've taken a lot of his arranging skills and incorporated them into my own music.

Is there a classic guitar solo that players need to learn in order to truly understand the blues?

No. If you truly want to understand the blues, you do it through experience and getting up there on open-mic nights. It all starts there. When I was a kid, a band called me up and said, "Okay, kid, we'll give you a shot. Here's one song." So you need to learn quickly how to communicate with the instrument and to get people's attention and draw them in. Once you learn how to do that, any blues solo will fly. There's not a series of notes you can point to, like, "If you complete this solo, you'll have the Rosetta Stone of the blues." That's not quite the case. It's how you communicate through the instrument.

What's apparent about you as a player and artist is that you're fearless, which is rare. How did you get that point, and how can other artists get there?

You have to, at some point, say to yourself, "This is who I am, but not everybody is going to like it." And if you're proud of it, and if somebody else likes it, then you're doing the right thing. If you do it with conviction and for the right reasons, you'll win. You're not doing it right until you're polarizing. You're not doing it right until someone you know makes a stupid meme about you. You're not doing it right until there's a pile-on about some interview you did about pedals 10 years ago. So, you're not doing it right unless you're somewhat polarizing. There's a quote from a bass player [Derek Smalls] from a great band [Spinal Tap], who said, "There's fire and ice," but what you don't want to be is lukewarm water. I'd rather quit than be lukewarm water. I'd rather be loved or hated – but not tolerated. I'll leave you with that. You can clickbait me with that anytime. *[Laughs]* **GW**

Samantha Fish

With her latest studio release, the Kansas City blues rocker bottles the energy of life on the road

BY DAMON ORION

▶ **FORTUNE HASN'T JUST** been smiling on blues rocker Samantha Fish lately — it's been sending her long-stemmed roses and leaving love notes on her windshield. The Missouri-born guitarist/vocalist grabbed the top spot on *Billboard's* blues chart in 2023 for *Death Wish Blues* (a collaboration with Jesse Dayton), and 2024 found her opening for the Rolling Stones and joining forces with Slash on the latter musician's multi-artist blues tour, the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival.

Fish bottled some of that magic on her most recent release, *Paper Doll*. She and her road bandmates — keyboardist Mickey Finn, bassist Ron Johnson and drummer Jamie Douglass — recorded the album between gigs on tour.

"For the record to come out when we wanted it to come out, recording on the road was really the only choice, because our touring schedule was just bananas last year," she says. "I don't use the word 'bananas' lightly, by the way. I felt like we had set ourselves up for this impossible task, but thanks to the dedication of my producer Bobby Harlow and the willingness of the band, we were able to make it happen. I feel like it worked out really well, because the band was fully primed from gigging."

Paper Doll finds Fish at her most stylistically wide-ranging. Influences like Jack White, AC/DC, ZZ Top and Led Zeppelin bob up on standout cuts such as "Rusty Razor," "Can You Handle the Heat?," "I'm Done Running" and the ghostly, quasi-mystical "Fortune Teller." Meanwhile, "Lose You" proves that Fish can wail with the best of gospel, soul and R&B singers.

One of the strongest showcases for Fish's guitar playing on the album is "Sweet Southern Sounds," a slow-burning pop-blues number with a riff that'd make AC/DC's "Have a Drink on Me" blush with fatherly pride. Fish imaginatively ornaments the chord changes of the final chorus with some string-skipping intervallic leaps. This gives way to a bit of menacing feedback that heralds the arrival of one of *Paper Doll's* most vibrant solos.

"That's the good thing about Gibson ES-335s," Fish says. "Those guitars just want



to scream the second you plug them in. If you stand within five feet of an amplifier and turn it up halfway, it wants to feed back."

Fish used open-G tuning on "I'm Done Running" and drop-D on "Fortune Teller." She says she and her band recorded "Lose You" in standard tuning, "but I also used a Stogie Box Blues four-string cigar box guitar and layered over it. We play that song in open A now because I've had to adjust for the live show."

She adds that the cigar box "wasn't a prominent feature on this record. Usually I have one song that showcases the guitar on its own, but this time I just used it for a subtle bed layer underneath things. It's got a really thick, aggressive tone."

Besides offering more insights on tech and technique, Fish gave us her thoughts on her process and the state of the blues in 2025.

Paper Doll is a great riff album. What's your process for coming up with riffs?

For this album in particular, I started every song with almost a Hill Country-inspired riff. I think that's most evident on "Sweet Southern Sounds" — it's got this kind of Junior Kimbrough-esque feel to it — but then there are songs like "Lose You" that are a little less obvious because of the production and the layering. I started with an acoustic guitar on that song and was using *[a technique where you]* lay a drone down with your thumb and do something melodic on the higher strings. That's kind of where I was starting with every song on this record. I think "Paper Doll" fits that world as well. "Fortune Teller" has that same sort of feeling to it. I think most of the songs started with that kind of riffing, and then I built a melody around it.

Tell me about the gear you used on this album.

Oh, God! *[Laughs]* I don't know why I don't take pictures! I think because I'm so focused on the music and getting everything done, I forget to take pictures of all the gear we use. But I used a Fender Deluxe on almost every song and rhythm track. I feel like they're just really versatile amps, and you can get this great crunch out of them. If it's a good amp, you don't have to try terribly hard. I know I used an old Supro at one point, which was cool. As far as guitars, I used my SG a lot, which is kind of my go-to. I could only bring in so many guitars to the studios because we were flying in for a lot of these sessions, so I got my cigar box in, but then I used a lot of the guitars that were in the studio. When we were in L.A. and recorded at Savannah Studio, they had some really cool, funky guitars, and we'd cycle through them and say, "What sounds and feels good?" By the time we landed on one and hit "record," I wasn't even registering. "Maybe I should take a picture of this so that

"I feel like I'm never really trying to write a blues song — I'm just trying to write a good song"

someday when I'm doing an interview I know what I'm talking about!" *[Laughs]* I know we used 335s, Les Pauls and Telecasters. We had a great arsenal to choose from.

Tell me about singing and playing lead at the same time. Is that something you put a lot of practice into?

It can be difficult. It's one thing to hear it on a recording, because — spoiler alert — usually you're not singing and playing lead at the same time in the studio, so to then figure out how to do that onstage can be a bit of a challenge. Rhythm guitar and singing is a little easier for me, because usually I write parts where the rhythm's not going against the vocal so much. But that's a challenge. It makes you a better musician when you set the bar really high on a record: "Okay, now I have to go nuts on the guitar and somehow still sing this vocal with conviction." It can be a bit like where you pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time. You're doing things that are kind of counterintuitive, but



Samantha Fish in action in Kent, Ohio, last year



practice, practice, practice, and eventually that muscle memory clicks into place.

You have a knack for writing blues-sounding songs that don't follow the traditional 12-bar blues structure. Is that deliberate?

My goal is just to write songs. I feel like I'm rooted in the blues. It's how I learned how to play guitar. It's what speaks to me and inspires me. To this day, I feel like North Hill Country Delta blues is such a deep well that I return to year after year for inspiration. It continues to push me forward. I feel like I'm never really trying to write a blues song — I'm just trying to write a good song. I'm always looking for hooks. That's really where I start when I'm writing: How can I make something that people want to listen to and is infectious? I usually start with the melody and then build around that. To me, the blues is something that just comes naturally.

Who do you think some of the best modern blues players are?

I just got off the road with Kingfish, and he's pretty amazing. I think Derek Trucks is one of the greatest there is, not just in blues playing but any playing. He's an alien. I like Gary Clark Jr. — he's very tasteful, and he's got a great tone. Eric Gales is incredible. He just blows everybody away. Luther Dickinson is one of my favorite contemporaries, too. He's awesome.

You're counted among the best contemporary blues players, and *Total Guitar* ranked you as the 38th greatest blues player ever. What's your take on that?

That's crazy and a big honor. I feel like being a guitar player is all about self-expression, so when you're ranking guitar players, it's tough for me, because I don't think there's one better way to do it. There are obviously people who are technically light years down the road from me, but I think when it comes to self-expression, it's hard to rank them. I'm just trying to do what I can and what I know and get better at what I do. **GW**

Chris Buck with his ubiquitous
Yamaha Revstar



Cardinal Black

How many bands take 16 years to craft their debut album? This one did...

BY JONATHAN GRAHAM

▶ **2025 IS SHAPING** up to be a banner year for Cardinal Black. After dropping their highly anticipated sophomore album, *Midnight at the Valencia*, the Welsh trio are gearing up for their first-ever U.S. tour — a spiritual homecoming, as guitarist Chris Buck tells *Guitar World*. “Most of our influences, in some way or another, either come from America or broke in America,” he says. And, as it happens, a “good word” from none other than Slash helped make these North American dates a reality.

A new band in name only, Cardinal Black’s story began 16 years ago. Long before the sold-out shows and social media acclaim, Buck, frontman Tom Hollister and drummer Adam Roberts were just three friends from Wales, gigging under the name TH3. They

“We wrote the entire album in the moment, and that’s why it feels so cohesive”

played weddings, pubs, funerals — anything that paid. After a few years of slogging it out with mixed success, they split to pursue other projects. As the world was emerging from lockdown, the trio reconnected, renamed themselves Cardinal Black — and after an overwhelmingly positive response to a self-titled debut EP in 2021, released a stellar album, *January Came Close*, the following year.

“Our manager joked it was a greatest-hits album of songs nobody had ever heard,” Buck says. “Some of the tracks were weeks old; others dated back to 2009. It’s a weird Frankenstein.” The new record, though, is a snapshot of the group today.

“This time, we couldn’t rely on any older material,” Buck says. “There was something liberating, though a bit terrifying, about having a totally blank canvas. We wrote the album in the moment, and that’s why it feels so cohesive — it captures who we are now.”

The same goes for Buck’s playing. Listen to his solos — on *Midnight at the Valencia*, on his YouTube channel or in a sweaty club — and there’s always a moment where the notes curve sideways, blurring into something

between a human voice and a steel slide. That identifiable fingerprint was by design, but it didn’t just appear overnight. “I spent years just trying and failing to sound like my heroes,” Buck says. “But that’s the secret — if you take enough influence from different places, it gets diluted into something that’s just you. All my favorite players — Derek Trucks, Jeff Beck, Peter Green — you could pick them out after one or two notes.”

Still, even if the worry’s unfounded, Buck is wary of predictability. A quick scroll through social media and you’ll spot a slew of guitarists mimicking his musical turns of phrase, often with the hashtag “Chris Buck style.” “There’s a danger in becoming too predictable,” he says, “so now I use some things more sparingly, in a more musically mature way. I don’t want to become a pastiche.” As for finding your voice, he shrugs off any talk of a formula. “It’s not a one-size-fits-all thing, finding your sound. It’s different for everyone, and it takes as long as it takes. You can’t force it.”

With their first U.S. headline tour set for this year, Cardinal Black faced a major hurdle — securing a visa. “Our lawyer said, ‘You need

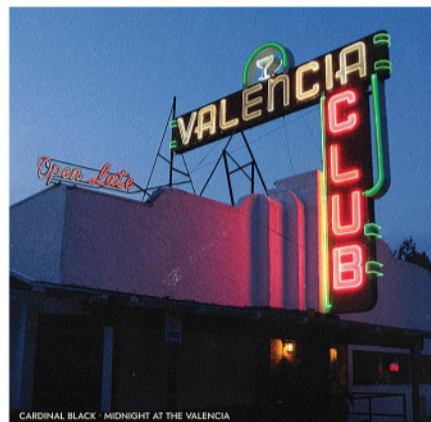
LEWIS MANN

a letter from an industry expert,' so I texted Slash," Buck says. Their friendship began years ago when Buck, then 21, got a call in the "cheese aisle at the supermarket" — inviting him to jam on stage the next night in front of 12,000 people. Within the hour, Slash sent in the good word. "Our lawyer goes, 'That's not the Slash, is it? Fucking hell — it could have just been your manager,'" Buck laughs. The visa was approved.

Could 2025 also mark the year Buck's signature Yamaha Revstar takes a step closer to reality? It's an honor typically reserved for musicians with twice his mileage. "When Yamaha do signature models, it's almost always a legacy appreciation thing — for folks further into their careers like Nathan East or Mike Stern," he says. "As much as I can't categorically say it's coming — because a Yamaha rep will probably appear out of nowhere and shoot me — there's a good chance it'll be sooner rather than later." He laughs. "It would be as close to mine as they can manage, considering mine's been played to death. That means my inlays, my pickup choices, the wraptail bridge, a three-way switch... You know. My guitar. Hypothetically speaking..."

Though you won't catch him on stage without his Revstar, Buck has a soft spot for vintage guitars. He's played a few '59 Bursts — including Bernie Marsden's "Beast" — and owns a '62 Strat. Still, for Buck, older doesn't always mean better. "I don't subscribe to the idea that all vintage instruments are great, because I've definitely played some dogs. Some of my favorite guitars were made after 2020, and some were made in the Sixties. There's a synergy between you and a great instrument. That could be a \$300 Squier or a \$5,000 Gibson. It doesn't matter. If it speaks to you, it's the one."

His latest find? A 1962 Gibson ES-335. "The moment I strummed it, I thought, 'This is alive,'" he says. "The guitar's a mess, but I fell in love with it. It's got original PAFs and original electronics. It's been resplayed. The headstock has had a catastrophic break — but it's just such an amazing instrument." **GW**



CURTIS KNAPP

CARDINAL BLACK: MIDNIGHT AT THE VALENCIA



Larry McCray

After his career flagged, intervention from Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith brought this Michigan master to the forefront of the blues

BY ALAN PAUL

LARRY MCCRAY WAS one of the great new-generation blues guitarists of the Nineties, emerging out of Saginaw, Michigan, with 1993's excellent *Delta Hurricane*. He was a regular at blues festivals and clubs around the world, touring with Gary Moore, Albert Collins and many other guitar legends. McCray also released several albums grounded by his stinging playing — which was reminiscent of Albert King — and soulful, gospel-infused singing.

By the time of the pandemic in 2020, however, McCray had not released new music in years and was barely touring outside of Michigan. That's when Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith drove up to his rural home and proposed working together.

The resulting album, 2022's *Blues Without You*, was a fantastic, assertive return to form. The album put him back on the national blues map, and his profile was raised further on annual tours with the Allman Betts Family Revival. Now he's back with *Heartbreak City*, his excellent second album, produced by Smith and Bonamassa, who also appear

on the record alongside the California blues master Kirk Fletcher.

"I totally trust those guys behind the board. When you have that, it's fun and easy to work together," McCray says. "I was intimidated on the first one because we were just meeting, and I had lost a lot of confidence after having down days in my career. I kind of lost my mojo for a minute, but they propped me back up."

McCray's mojo is definitely working again. In addition to his two outstanding solo albums, he also appears on Devon Allman's *The Blues Summit* album and the associated Blues Summit tour.

"I've had a personal rejuvenation," McCray says. "When you're starting out, you want to be the brightest star ever. But after you get your feet wet, you know success doesn't always mean being the biggest fish in the pond. I appreciate what I've accomplished, and now I feel like I have another shot — and I am all in on it!" **GW**

A X O L O G Y

Guitars

2003 Gibson Les Paul V with Burstbucker pickups; '57 Gibson Les Paul goldtop with '57 PAF Classics; 2001 Gibson Blueshawk with noise-canceling P90 pickups, three-way toggle and six-way Varitone selector ("It can sound like a beefed-up Telecaster or a big jazz box similar to a Gibson L5"); DeArmond M70, M75 and Jetstar

Amps

1971 and '73 Fender Deluxe Reverb, both modified with solid-state rectifiers, rebiased and tubed with 6L6 power tubes. Red Plate 50W Sonic Mist 1x12 cab with Warehouse speakers. Peavey Classic 50 with 1x12 speaker

Effects

Klon Centaur, Joe Bonamassa FET Driver, Dunlop Cry Baby Classic

Christone “Kingfish” Ingram

It's a new era for the blues guitar prodigy of our times

BY ALAN PAUL

THE NEW HARD *Road* is a landmark album for Christone “Kingfish” Ingram. It's not only his first studio recording since 2021's Grammy-winning *662*, but it's the first release on his own label, Red Zero Records. After two studio LPs and one live album for Alligator Records — which helped establish him as a rising star and likely future of the blues — Ingram has boldly charted his own path.

Ingram had just turned 20 when he debuted with his 2019 album, *Kingfish*. Even so, he'd already been gigging around his hometown of Clarksdale, Mississippi, for years, having learned to play at the Delta Blues Museum's music-education program. Ingram's mentor, the late guitarist Bill “Howlin' Mad” Perry — who gave Ingram the name “Kingfish” — would bring star pupils from the classes to perform with him at the Ground Zero Blues Club, partly owned by Morgan Freeman.

“That was like a reward, and it was a great experience,” Ingram says. “The first time he did it for me, I realized this was it for me. It wasn't going to be a hobby.”

Buddy Guy's endorsement — and working with Tom Hambridge, Guy's producer and songwriter — gave Ingram a boost, as did being signed to Alligator, the landmark Chicago label that was home to Albert Collins, Son Seals, Koko Taylor and other greats. The strength of his debut gave *Kingfish* immediate credibility, swiftly generating a buzz around him as the future of blues guitar playing.

Hard Road remains rooted in *Kingfish*'s singing and searing blues guitar playing, but the songwriting veers into more modern approaches, with touches of rock, pop and R&B. The songs' lyrics also explore emotionally raw and complex topics of love, loss, identity and personal growth. Ingram, now 26, has seen a lot more of the world — literally

and metaphorically — than he did as a debut artist.

In recent years he has lost his mother, Princess, his earliest and biggest supporter; he's toured the world; he's worked with legends like Guy and Steve Miller; and he's appeared in the hit 2025 film *Sinners*. And now he's started a label and begun establishing himself in a new world. All of these experiences are reflected in the songs of *Hard Road*.

“This record comes from real-life reflection,” Ingram says. “I've been balancing fame, heartbreak, love and relationships while trying to stay grounded, touring, creating and maturing. These songs are about owning my story. They're about learning to see myself clearly and seeing others with more compassion. That's changed the way I write, the way I play, the way I live.”

How and why did you start your own label?

Red Zero Records was an idea my manager, Ric Whitney, formulated a couple of years

ago. It morphed into me wanting to give opportunities to other artists who probably didn't have the same resources I had.

You've come a long way. Could you have imagined yourself five or six years ago talking about your resources?

In a relatively short time! Yeah, I've been grateful. When I was 15, I was hustling it out in the juke joint clubs, and then along came Mr. Buddy Guy, who was gracious enough to help me out with my first record and put me on the road with him. Then I got on Alligator Records and I'm in a position now where I can help the other guys and gals coming along, and that is exciting. Mr. Guy is, of course, an OG, and I was so honored that he helped me get out of my region, where I was playing since I was a teenager.

Tom Hambridge worked with you as well; it felt like he helped you craft your story into great songs that have your voice. “Been Here Before” from your debut always stuck out in that regard.

Yeah. That was the last song we did on the *Kingfish* sessions. We were upstairs in the studio, and I had an acoustic and we were going back and forth, and out that song came, and we went downstairs

“I'm ready to just have my music listened to and not have people think, ‘He's great for a kid,’” Christone “Kingfish” Ingram says

JEN ROSENSTEIN

and recorded it. And, yeah, it is my story. As a child, before I even knew anything about blues, I would always repeat some of the soul songs my mom would listen to and give people a show. Five years old, singing stuff like the Stylistics, and people would always say, "He's not normal; he's an old soul."

I did an interview with Derek Trucks when he was about your age now. I remember him saying, "I'm just really excited to get past the 'kid' thing." Do you relate to that?

Definitely. It can be a blessing and a curse. When people see a kid playing, they automatically think "gimmick," but there's been some serious guys coming up as kids. No one wants to get stuck being the cute kid that plays guitar. So that's when you got to focus on the lyrics and singing, which I did on this one. I'm ready to just have my music listened to and not have people think, "He's great for a kid."

On the new record, you show more blues and R&B influences. Do you feel free to do anything you want, or do you worry about how your audience might respond?

It's definitely something I think about a lot, and it's a double-edged sword. I'm always told I've got the potential to go here or there. It's something I struggle with, and I look at it like this: I have the potential to go a lot of places musically, and that's what I want to do. I have a lot of influence, but what I do is always gonna be rooted in the blues, because that's the aim and that's who I am. I want to reach my generation, and to do that, I need to mix it a little bit to pull them in. Once they get in, I can really show them the real raw thing, and that's pretty much what I'm doing.

Did recording this for your own label change the way you approach the material? Would it have been more straight blues for Alligator?

That's a good question. Probably not. I was ready to branch out a little in any case.

What songs on the album highlight where you are now?

Can I say all of them? I do feel that way, but I think the ones that really showcase what the album is about, the journey in the different

"What I do is always gonna be rooted in the blues, because that's the aim and that's who I am"

genres are "Voodoo Charm," which is the blues-rock space; "Bad Like Me" is more in the pop rock vein; "Nothin' But Your Love" is serving the adult contemporary, R&B space. Those three songs showcase what the album is trying to say, showcasing my voice and my range on the guitar.

You have a great voice. Have you worked on that a lot, or was it more like you started playing guitar, opened your mouth and started singing – and that's what came out?

That's exactly how it started out! I literally just focused on my guitar playing and started singing. I'm just now trying to work on my voice. I'm learning more about myself, that I have range. There were places where I thought I couldn't go vocally, and working on this record showed me that I could.

How much do you still work on your guitar playing? How much do you practice?

I play guitar every day. My weak point is that I don't have a regimen; I just pick up the guitar and play. Sometimes I do try to work on different scales or whatnot, but there's no plan, and I think I can and should be more orderly in that regard. But I'll never not play my guitar every day.

When you're not on the road, are you happy relaxing and chilling at home, or are you pacing the floor waiting to get back out on the road?



All of the above! The first couple of days are straight chilling. But I'm here in the studio, still working and making music every day. After a few days, I am – like you say – starting to pace the floor. [Laughs] When it's time to go back out, I'm ready to get it popping.

Who are your greatest guitar influences?

Acoustic guys like Son House and Robert Johnson and then Albert, B.B. and Freddie King, Prince, Ernie Isley, Gary Moore. There are also a lot of players of the day that I'm into, and I hate to even mention them because I know I'm leaving out so many, but I really like Isaiah Sharkey, Matteo Manusco, Yvette Young and so many others. I love where the world of guitar is going, even though I'm considered to play an old style.

You mentioned that on Red Zero you wanted to be able to give other people an opportunity. Is anyone else signed?

Yes, two artists to start. Dylan Triplett, a young man out of St. Louis. What's so dope about Dylan is that, even though we have a lot of young guitar slingers – male and female – coming up, we don't have a lot of young Bobby Blue Bland-style soul singers, and that's Dylan's main thing, though he also plays guitar. We also have Matthias Lattin from Houston, who won the International Blues Challenge in 2023. He's a young guitar slinger in the rock-blues-fusion space, a great writer and arranger. We have a lot of other artists we're developing as well, but those are the guys we're starting with.

How involved in the label are you? You have a trusted manager, so do you get involved in the label and in your own business?

I have no other choice but to know it, because Ric isn't going to let me just leave it to him. He tells me everything. We're both hands-on with my career and the label. As far as giving other guys resources, it's imperative for me to know what I'm doing so I can share some knowledge, too! **GW**



A X O L O G Y

Guitars

Fender Kingfish Telecaster, Banker Guitars V, Gibson Les Paul Custom

Amps

Two Fender Twin Reverbs

Effects

Marshall Shredmaster, Dunlop Cry Baby Mini, Boss DD-8

"With time, the guitar became literally my right hand," Ana Popovic says. "It serves as an inspiration for the stories"



Ana Popovic

The Serbian guitarist on the "jubilant" recording of her new album

BY ANDREW DALY

▶ WHILE MAKING 2023'S *Power*, Ana Popovic was dealing with breast cancer. She survived, leading to introspection on 2025's *Dance to the Rhythm*. "You start thinking, 'How much time do I have?'," she says. "You think, 'Do I want to keep going at this pace? If I do, what do I want to give people?'"

Popovic's take on the blues has always been edgy. She's never cared what people think and isn't focused on tradition. "I want to be new, uncensored, not fake," she says. "I want to be myself and to give the real me to the audience and listeners with every new record."

Popovic says *Dance to the Rhythm* features "a strong sense of roots." Her "musical home is the starting point, as I'm always aware of where I came from musically." But she's not planning on staying home. She isn't sure where she's going, and she's not worried.

"It's about new, unexplored horizons," she says. "Even after all this time, I look around and I am just thankful."

Your take on the blues is different, which galvanizes and polarizes fans. If you're bound to break some rules to bring something new to the table, how can you be bothered by what the majority has to say about it? Either you've got the balls to do it or you don't. Do you want to recycle or try something new? I never chased the popular opinion as much as I chased my inner feelings.

What inspired *Dance to the Rhythm*? "We were jubilant, we were full of dance. No boundaries for our creativity." That's

how we felt making the record — groove and dance. With *Power*, we were trying to survive. Through *Dance*, we celebrated life and a new chance. Dance is one of the styles of music I haven't explored, [but] it has always been present in my life. I always wanted to make a connection between the guitar and dance.

How has surviving cancer shifted your perspective?

It's a major shift in your universe. It puts a perspective on your whole life. I've always approached my art as sacred. I need to put my whole self into it. Don't borrow from people around you; try to be authentic. But being faced with so much insecurity brought the aspect of time.

Who are you as a guitar player today?

I am a guitar player who's in charge of everything. When I think about my playing, I see the big picture. With time, the guitar became literally my right hand; it serves as an inspiration for the stories.

What guitars are on the new album?

My "Foggy" Custom Shop Strat, my all-original '64 Strat and my '57 reissue Strat, plus Teles, Gibson Les Pauls, Martin acoustics, and so on. My pedalboards are always a mix of older and newer gear, but I'm a fan of older gear.

What's your outlook now?

While having a long career, you come across obstacles. You fight on, and the reward tastes twice as sweet. But what I'm most proud of is that I've done it without compromising my private life. **GW**

Eric Gales

With a stirring tribute to his older brother Manuel, who performed as Little Jimmy King, the master southpaw returns with one of the finest albums of his career

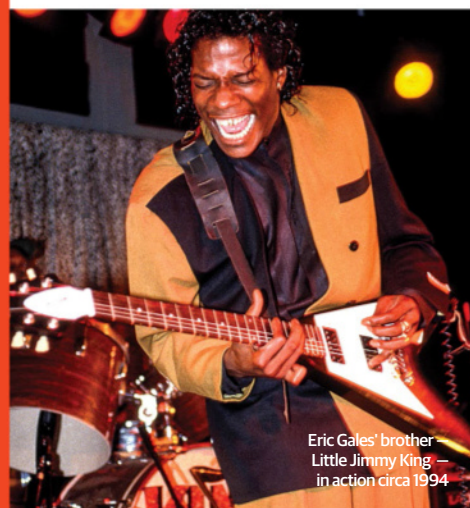
BY AMIT SHARMA

▶ THE ERIC GALES we know today is undoubtedly a product of his environment growing up. In this case, as fate would have it, we're talking about an incredibly musical family. Older brothers Manuel and Eugene guided his journey on guitar from the age of four, giving him the kind of blues education that can't be bought. By the time he was 10, he was already being labeled a prodigy, landing a major record deal in his mid-teens before eventually becoming one of the modern era's greatest blues guitarists.

Manuel also made a big impression on the circuit, from performing in Albert King's band and touring with Buddy Guy to cutting records with Double Trouble, Stevie Ray Vaughan's rhythm section. However, tragedy struck in 2002 when the singer/guitarist — better known to audiences as Little Jimmy King — died from a heart attack at age 37.

This year, the youngest of the Gales brothers is paying tribute to his sibling through *A Tribute to LJK*, an album packed with his own interpretations of Manuel's biggest and best tracks. The record was co-produced by Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith and features guest appearances from the producers, plus big-hitters like Buddy Guy, Chrstone "Kingfish" Ingram and Roosevelt Collier.

"My brother was a powerhouse blues player," says Gales, who — as we can see, because we're on Zoom with him — has a framed poster of his Grammy-nominated



Eric Gales' brother Little Jimmy King — in action circa 1994

RAPHA EL (LEFT), EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS

2022 album, *Crown*, on the wall behind him. "Manuel was a big part of the recipe that made me who I am. I want the world to discover his music and learn things they may not have known. I've been thinking about doing this for quite some time. This is a homage to a badass left-handed, upside-down player who did his own thing."

Manuel got you started on guitar.

What did you learn from him?

He was all about power. He took that from Albert King, who was a strong player. There was a rigor and intensity to what Albert chose to play. It was always very intentional. Every push and bend meant something and had some pain or emotion behind it. That's something I learned from both of them. It's prominent in certain riffs and licks I do, with touches that are very purposeful. When I go in, I go all in. There's no second-guessing with a six-note bend. Once you commit to something like that, you commit. You are going in raw with all that power. He wasn't one to delve into a lot of effects. He would turn his amp up, maybe there was a bit of [Dunlop] Cry Baby, and that was it.

You're similar in that sense.

I have a couple of devices here and there, but they aren't a necessity. I look at effects as a comfort zone. They're on the pedalboard, but whether I use them depends on how I'm feeling. My brother was a raw guitar-and-amp dude. In situations where your pedalboard doesn't make the plane and all you've got is your guitar and amp, the show needs to go on. You should be able to plug in and go for it.

He made a pretty big name for himself as Little Jimmy King.

He even had Double Trouble on a couple of his records. He had a relationship with Stevie Ray Vaughan, too. People knew about Little Jimmy King. He was a touring machine who did it the hard way through grind. If he wasn't on the road, he was at B.B. King's Blues Club on Beale Street every single weekend playing in the house band. But it didn't come easy to him. It kinda came easy to me, with the record deal at 15, tour bus and all that stuff. It came a little harder for him, and I saw that struggle. It gave me a glimpse of the real grind it takes to make a name for yourself to beat the pavement like that. He'd be in places that were far from pristine, but every night he'd play his heart out. That stuck with me.

Given the connection between Buddy Guy and your brother, it's great to hear Buddy guesting on "Somebody."

It was important for him to be part of this record because of that. Buddy may be a big blues legend, but he was all in when it came



"When the world catches on, I'm ready," Eric Gales says

to paying tribute. The same goes for Kingfish, who has often said my brother was a big inspiration to him. I was quite methodical in who I chose to involve with this record. We got MonoNeon to play bass. Of course, Joe Bonamassa knows about my brother. Josh Smith is a big fan too; we'd talk about Manuel all the time, referencing songs like "Soldier for the Blues," "Baby, Baby" and "Shouldn't Have Left Me." Those conversations actually influenced the songs I picked.

Hearing you, Joe and Josh go head-to-head on "It Takes a Whole Lot of Money" feels like one of the big guitar moments on this release.

"What I do is always gonna be rooted in the blues, because that's the aim and that's who I am"

We all sat back and played our asses off. We did it for the culture and the whole blues world. That was really fun. People have been wondering if there's another "I Want My Crown" [his 2021 single] on the way with more epic battles between me and Joe. As long as we are both playing, there's always a chance for it, but I think we gave it a nod on that track. There's another track with Joe called "Don't Wanna Go Home." It has a rock feel. Joe takes the middle solo and I do the outro solo. We did a tag-team one-two punch, nothing too competitive or outrageous. It came out great.

What did you use for the sessions?

I had my signature Magneto guitars. For a solo or two, I used the same Les Paul that Joe left in the room. I forget what year it was, but it was old as shit. It was an old-ass Goldtop, maybe a 1954 or something like that. We used my DV Mark amps and blended a little bit of Dumble in there. As for my pedalboard, nothing has been added or taken away for a while — it's the same Custom Audio Electronics

wah, Mojo Hand Colossus Fuzz, the MXR Raw Dawg overdrive, a Tech 21 Boost DLA and a DigiTech Whammy. I used a PRS parlor acoustic on "Somebody." I really like how they sound because they give me that old Robert Johnson small-Gibson acoustic vibe. I really like those PRS acoustics; even though they're small guitars, they sound nice, full and thick.

Does a Les Paul change how you play?

Sometimes. It puts me in more of a rock zone. There's a guitar that was gifted to me by Nik Killa from Killa Guitars that's a brown replica of a Gibson Explorer. He made it and brought it to a show. I've been playing that thing a lot and like the hell out of it. I would actually say I've been playing it more than my Magneto recently. I also have an SG that I occasionally pull out. It's not like I said I wouldn't play humbuckers, I'm just more prone to the spanky single-coil tones. At home, I'll play whatever. I've got PRS guitars and all kinds of things I'm not seen with that often.

You've also been playing guitars made by Eric Gale at Freestyle Custom Guitars.

He's an amazing luthier, and it's pretty crazy we've almost got the same name. He made me a couple of guitars; one is called Crown and



the other is Model Two. He's a badass builder using amazing materials. I take those guitars out with me along with the Magnetos.

You recently worked with Maricela "MJ" Juarez on launching your own set of Seymour Duncan pickups. What kind of sound were you going for?

The sound I've always liked, something fat and spanky. MJ did the rest. We put my name on them and there we go. I told her what I was looking for and she totally got it. I wasn't thinking of vintage tones or anything. I might

have mentioned Texas Specials or Jason Lollars — things in that vein.

Do you have any other signature gear coming out in the near future?

I'm not allowed to unveil anything yet. I think it's going to raise some eyebrows, though. I probably should keep this one to myself, but it's a good thing. It's a company everyone knows. I can tell you it's not Fender and it's not Gibson. People are going to be shocked.

How do you keep improving, and what would you like to get better at?

I'm proud of my involvement with the *Sinners* soundtrack. I'd like to get more involved in things like that, even orchestral stuff that's beyond just making records and touring. It's a different side of the industry, and the same goes for producing. I have colleagues on much bigger playing fields than me, selling out huge places. I'd be lying if I didn't say I want that as well. I don't know what separates them from me. I don't think it's skill. I'm not really doing anything too different. I just want to continue doing what I'm doing but on a much bigger scale. Fill more seats, bring more people out and let them know this is what I was born to do. When the world catches on, I'm ready. **GW**

Canyon Lights

Pat Faherty, formerly of Boston blues hounds GA-20, resurfaces in a new power trio

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

FOR PAT FAHERTY of Canyon Lights, starting at the source is the only way forward. When the former GA-20 frontman listens to the blues, more often than not it's going to be originators like Hound Dog Taylor or T-Bone Walker. And when he reaches for inspiration to create the riffs behind his new band's rolling early Seventies rumble, he's coming from the same place as guys like Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton.

"All of those guitar players who started the concept of the guitar riff, they were learning

comping before the style even existed," Faherty says. "They were learning to back up the melody, not take over the melody with

their guitar playing. I think what helps me for Canyon Lights is that the riffs come from the comping style of playing rhythm guitar."

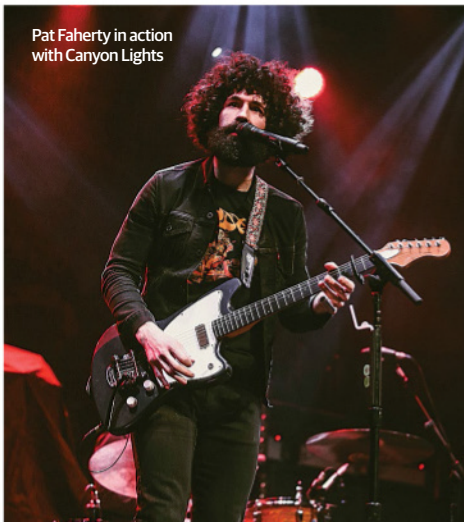
Faherty and drummer Tim Carman, his bandmate in GA-20 — a band that, incidentally, recorded an entire album of blues covers, 2021's *Try It... You Might Like It: GA-20 Does Hound Dog Taylor* — formed Canyon Lights after jamming on riffs and song ideas that didn't fit the more conventional blues of their previous band. Modeled in the mold of power trios like the James Gang — whose "Walk Away" they covered and released

earlier this year — and Cream, Canyon Lights paints with a much broader brush. "Breathe Easy," their debut album's title cut, is rooted in a bluesy shuffle and accented with slide licks, but Faherty's approach to vocals and harmonies carries the song deep into the disco decade. And the single-note picking in the intro to "Song Behind Those Tears" rings like a long-lost Byrds tune before he lays down the stomping main groove.

Faherty's ability to move seamlessly from chunky riffing to slinky funk to ripping slide reveals his virtuosity. After all, he's schooled in jazz and once took on the role of Eddie in a Van Halen cover band; he even posted YouTube tutorials on how to play some of the late guitar legend's solos during Covid days.

"I grew up with a lot of different sounds in Boston in the Nineties. I have a basic rock background, but I was also playing punk, hardcore and metal," Faherty says. "All of that coalesced into certain kinds of vibes that just weren't going to work with GA-20."

Breathe Easy has the organic tones and feel of garage rock's glory days, but those blues touchstones are still Faherty's north star. "That live video of Buddy Guy doing 'First Time I Met the Blues' in 1970 that was in the documentary *Chicago Blues* — if I could ever even get close to the feel or touch of that performance, I'd be able to die a happy man," Faherty says. **GW**



Pat Faherty in action with Canyon Lights

Yes, Walter Trout uses the death metal setting on his Mesa Boogie amp



Walter Trout

As the blues veteran releases a fiery new album, he reveals his preferred tone setting. Believe us, it's not what you're expecting

BY JOEL McIVER

▶ **"MY WIFE HAS** enrolled me in a gym, and I have to go lift weights for an hour after this," chuckles blues guitarist extraordinaire Walter Trout, the 74-year-old survivor of a drug habit and subsequent rehab that would've defeated any lesser man.

Now committed to a healthy lifestyle and pushing through his sixth decade as a sideman and solo artist, Trout is about to release an album, *Sign of the Times* (it's just a coincidence, Prince fans), that's packed with energy and attitude. This is partly down to Trout's irritation at some of the more foolish aspects of modern life — smartphones and AI among them — but also down to his determination not just to enjoy his remaining years, but to make them the best of his life.

His sojourns as a member of Canned Heat (1981-84) and with the late John Mayall (1984-89) were productive, but they were marred by drug and booze habits that led to a near-fatal ill-health episode in 2013. Fortunately, a liver transplant saved his life — and Trout is determined to go out fighting.

It looks like you have a full six months of international live dates coming up.

I'll be at the grocery store and someone will say, "Hey, Walter, are you going on tour?" "Yeah, I am." "Where are you going?" "I don't know. They told me to be at Los Angeles airport at 10 tomorrow morning, and from there I don't know shit!" But I'm one of the lucky ones, because I actually love being on the road. You couldn't do almost six years with John Mayall and not learn to love touring, because that guy was ruthless.

How ruthless?

We did one tour that was something like 78 cities in 65 days. We'd do doubles on the

"I'm still going to create and try to contribute to the world, not sit back on the couch"

weekends — play a festival at 2 in the afternoon, then drive 100 miles and play a club at 10 at night. John would have stayed on the road forever if he could, so you either had to learn to love it or you needed to get a different gig. But I was fine. I'd get in the van, have a couple of shots and a joint and just keep going. I don't even know how to start to talk about the love and the respect I have for John, and how he helped me and nurtured me and supported me and helped me get sober.

How's your health these days?

On July 9, I hit 38 years sober — and I feel great. I'm 74 and I'm on my second liver, but when I go to the liver clinic at UCLA every six months or so, they tell me I'm in great shape.

By the way, *Sign of the Times* is great.

Thanks! I wasn't sure how it was going to be received by people because, you know, I did 15 albums with the same producer. This time, my wife, Marie — who is my partner in crime, she's managed my career for 33 years — said, "Maybe it's time to do something different and have it sound different. You need to produce yourself. You don't need somebody saying to you, 'Play the solo again.' You know if you like the solo or not."

Which guitars did you play on the new album?



I did the record with my Delaney signature model. It plays beautifully and sounds wonderful. I also have a Delaney in Europe, and my son Jon will be touring with me, so he's going to be using that. And I have a sunburst Fender Strat that I'll take as a spare, as well as a couple of acoustics.

How old is the Strat?

It's from the early Seventies. I've retired my old Strat, the one that's on the cover of all my albums. I told my wife that if somebody offered me 10 million bucks for it, I wouldn't take it. She goes, "Well, we may need to talk about that." [Laughs]

Will you have a pedalboard with you?

No. I go straight into my Mesa Boogie. As you know, Mesa Boogies have what they call "suggested settings." Now, for all the bluesers out there, I'm going to tell you my suggested setting. I have it set for death metal.

You're kidding, right?

I'm serious. If I want to clean it up, I just turn the volume down on the guitar. Between about 5 and 10 on the volume knob, it adds overdrive. Listen to the lead solo on "Sign of the Times." That's the death metal setting with the guitar turned all the way up.

Do you have happy memories of being in Canned Heat?

I had a great time with Canned Heat. I love those guys. I love Fito de la Parra, the drummer. He's like a brother to me, and I had the best time touring with those guys. I will say it was a bit of a crazy time, because I was drinking and taking lots of drugs.

What was your drug of choice?

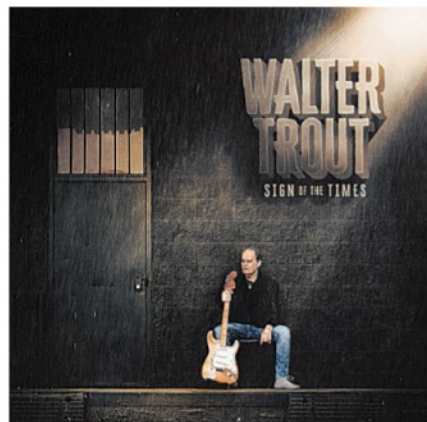
Whatever I could get, but it was normally cocaine or crank. At the time, we were

managed by — I can't say their name in print — a well-known biker organization, and the first gig I did with them, these people handed me a mayonnaise jar full of cocaine and said, "Welcome to the band." So there was a lot of that. It was pretty crazy, but it was really fun. I had a great time. I still love those guys. If they come to your town, they still sound great, so go see them.

When you listen back to your early recordings, how does the guitar playing stand up?

I think it sounds really good. I saw John Mayall two years ago, when he came to my gig in L.A., and I asked him, "How did you put up with my insane behavior when I was so drug addicted and so alcoholic?" He had two answers. His first answer was funny. He said, "Well, there was a certain kind of humor to it," meaning I was this doped-up fucking clown.

But then his serious answer was, "No matter how loaded you got, you always seemed to be able to play the music. If we had come out one night on stage and you couldn't play my music, I'd have sent you home the next day." So when I listen to those old records



I did when I was so fucked up, the playing is still there, but there's no edge. I'm dull. The edge came when I got sober. And I think on this new album, there's a whole lot of edge.

Name your top three most influential guitar players.

The main reason I grabbed a guitar in the first place — an acoustic — was because my brother brought home *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, the album with "Blowin' in the Wind" and "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall." At the time, I was going to be a jazz trumpet player; I wanted to be Miles Davis. But my brother brought that album home and I heard all this substance and incredible depth with those three chords. So I got a guitar and started learning, because I just wanted to play folk music.

Then the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan. There wasn't one particular guitar player, but those guys changed everything. So now I was like, "Well, I've got to get an electric guitar and maybe I could be in a band like that." I got an electric guitar — a Silvertone, the little cheap one with the speaker in the case — and I'm trying to learn Beatles songs.

Then my brother comes home with another album and says, "I'm going to play this for you, but you have to sit down because when you hear this guy, you're going to fall over." It was *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band*, with Michael Bloomfield on "Born in Chicago" and all those songs. Nobody played like that, and that's when the world opened up to me about what was possible on the guitar. I realized you could play that music with rock 'n' roll aggression and fire and swagger.

What are your goals at this point?

I still have a purpose. I'm going to create, and I'm going to try to contribute to the world, not sit back on the couch. I hope I'm able to keep going and doing this for a long time, so I push myself. People look at my schedule, and they say, "We couldn't do that if we were 20." But I've always done that, because I wanted to do this from the time I was a little boy.

I wanted to be a musician, and I wanted to travel the world and play music. It's a beautiful experience. It nourishes me, sustains me and gives me a sense of purpose. It keeps me young in my brain, because every night I go up there and I try really hard to play something I've never played before.

Any final advice?

I see a lot of people my age — people I've grown up with — who have given up. They've lost their joy of life and their wonder. They've lost their drive and sense of purpose. Don't lose those things. Your body can get old, but keep that joy and that wonder of life. Hold on to it to the very end, man. Don't give up. **GW**

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From EVH to SRV, Angus to Beefheart, Fear to Rage, Costello to Morello and Jack White to Jack Black, here are *Saturday Night Live's* 50 greatest guitar moments

BY GREGORY ADAMS

SINCE MAKING ITS debut on October 11, 1975, NBC's *Saturday Night Live* has been a pop-culture juggernaut like no other. But before becoming a weekend staple for generations of late-night viewers, creator Lorne Michaels' variety show began as a brash, uniquely irreverent counter-culture experiment boldly pairing off-the-cuff outsider comedy with of-the-moment musical guests — for the record, the first show featured Billy Preston, Janis Ian and, arguably most memorably, Andy Kaufman miming his way through the *Mighty Mouse* theme song.

Indeed, while it's a comedy-first operation, music has always been a major part of *SNL's* appeal — and, obviously, that means we've seen a lot of guitarists grace the show's stage.

It's been a spot for bands to crank it up just before their careers went supernova. Others faltered spectacularly on live TV, beneath the bright lights of Studio 8H and under the watch of millions of viewers at home. Some of the greatest guitar virtuosos showed up unannounced for once-in-a-lifetime jams. A pair of blues-loving bees morphed into the show's breakout musical act. While it's all made for hundreds upon hundreds of must-see moments, to paraphrase the show's iconic metal-head character, Wayne Campbell — a.k.a. Mike Myers, an obtuse on-air shredder in his own right — some were more worthy than others.

So, in honor of the show's staggering 50 years on the air, ladies and gentleman, behold the 50 greatest guitar moments in *SNL* history.

50 The Rolling Stones, "Shattered"

SEASON 4, EPISODE 1; OCTOBER 7, 1978

While nabbing the Stones was a major coup, the band's lone *SNL* appearance isn't remembered for being great. Mick Jagger's voice is shot and unpretty through "Beast of Burden," but "Shattered" taps into the sleazy urgency of the *Some Girls* era. It also embodies the chaotic, anything-goes-in-the-moment spirit of live TV right about the time Jagger starts snapping his ivory sportcoat at Ronnie Wood, wet-towel style.

49 "The Devil Can't Write No Love Song" sketch

SEASON 25, EPISODE 5; NOVEMBER 13, 1999

Garth Brooks plays a down-on-his-luck musician willing to sell his soul for a hit. Ready to make a trade, Lucifer — a horned-and-bearded Will

Ferrell — bursts onto the scene with a devil-red Fender built out of a "hell-spun mixture of the bones of fornicators." Trouble is, the dark lord is a damned terrible songsmith. His "Fred's Slacks" is a brittle-toned, out-of-tune geek-rock atrocity, and his originals only get cringier from there.

48 Joan Armatrading, "I'm Not in Love" / "Down to Zero"

SEASON 2, EPISODE 21; MAY 14, 1977

The highlight of Joan Armatrading's *SNL* performances is the sound of her rich and oaken vocal — but her stately 12-string chording chimes through the mix quite nicely, too. Whether through the dew-

eyed "I'm Not in Love" or the yearning folk-rock of "Down to Zero," guitarist Jerry Donahue also brought a waterfall-rippling wave of flanged-out fretboard elegance to the arrangements.

47 System of a Down, "B.Y.O.B."

SEASON 30, EPISODE 18; MAY 7, 2005

The *SNL* censors were prepared to bleep out the F-bombs SOAD's Serj Tankian and Daron Malakian regularly scheduled into their zany, kinda thrash/ kinda ska single "B.Y.O.B." The latter let loose an unscripted "fuck yeah" during a surf-zested string slide, though, which ended up putting he and the rest of System on *SNL's* blacklist. They never played the show again.



47

NBC/UNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES

QOTSA (with Will Ferrell) — and System of a Down [below left] — perform in 2005; Spinal Tap [below right] get low in 1984



43

guitar hero wham-smashing his way through a micro-sized but massive-sounding *SNL* moment. This performance took us to the commercial break seconds after the show staged its iconic "More Cowbell" sketch.

39 The Black Crowes, "Sometimes Salvation"

SEASON 18, EPISODE 9; DECEMBER 12, 1992

"Sometimes Salvation" is a funny pick because the Crowes' aching, extended blues ballad shares a similar feel to the *SNL* band's longtime closing credits jam, "Waltz in A." Where it differs is that the Georgia rockers also had Marc Ford sustaining a series of seismically reckless and romantic bends through his spacious solo. And it's spectacular.

38 Foo Fighters, "Times Like These"

SEASON 28, EPISODE 13; FEBRUARY 22, 2003

Foo Fighters are prolific *SNL* guests, having hit the program nine times since 1995. Their third pop-in at 30 Rock came during the promotion cycle for *One by One* and began with a crunching version of "All My Life." But "Times Like These" is what makes the highlight reel — not just because the Foo's crushed their yearning anthem with ease, but because Jim Carrey stormed the stage mid-song to air guitar his right leg like a maniac.

37 Red Hot Chili Peppers, "Stone Cold Bush" / "Under the Bridge"

SEASON 17, EPISODE 14; FEBRUARY 22, 1992

Dubious to include, but hard to ignore, the Chilis left a strange taste in millions of mouths with this off-kilter two-fer. "Stone Cold Bush" was funky, but merely fine — Flea gets appropriately



41

46 Metallica, "Fuel"

SEASON 23, EPISODE 8; DECEMBER 6, 1997

An argument could be made that *SNL* blew it by not booking Metallica during the height of Eighties thrash and that they slept on the biggest metal band in the world circa "Enter Sandman." But producers gave 'tallica fans that which they desired by finally bringing aboard the band during their *Reload* period. "Fuel" found Kirk Hammett all-gassing his wah-wah solo. James Hetfield kept on theme by strapping himself to a flame-emblazoned Flying V.

45 The Tragically Hip, "Grace, Too"

SEASON 20, EPISODE 16; MARCH 25, 1995

When original Not Ready for Prime-time Player Dan Aykroyd was asked to co-host this episode, he agreed — with a caveat: fellow Ontarians the Tragically Hip had to come along with him. Gord Downie grinned cherubically as he flubbed his first line, but Canada's Band otherwise nailed the artfully hard-rocking "Grace, Too," guitarist Rob Baker flexing a wide, flavorful vibrato into its finale.

44 Adam Sandler, "The Thanksgiving Song"

SEASON 18, EPISODE 7; NOVEMBER 21, 1992

Sandler used his *Weekend Update* segments to test out goofball characters like Cajun Man and

Opera Man. The news desk was also where he developed his voice as a singer-guitarist, and that all starts with "The Thanksgiving Song." Coming out the gates with cheerful seventh chords and a toothy grin, he uses the quaint acoustic jazz-folk song to toast turkey dinners and serve up a side of pop-culture non-sequiturs.

43 Queens of the Stone Age, "Little Sister"

SEASON 30, EPISODE 19; MAY 14, 2005

Though drummer Joey Castillo was already clonking his plastic jam block hard-and-heavy through this segment, Will Ferrell apparently felt that Queens could use more cowbell. The comedian reprised his famous Gene Frenkle character — ill-fitting shirt and all — and whapped to his heart's delight, but the impromptu percussive performance wasn't the scene-stealer. Credit that to Josh Homme putting on a clinic with his serpentine flair.

42 Big Ricky & the Minnows, "Bass Lake" sketch

SEASON 50, EPISODE 16; APRIL 5, 2025

A lakeside potluck jam on Tom Petty's "Free Falling" goes horribly awry once Big Ricky — played by an increasingly exasperated Jack Black — realizes everyone hitting the stage is hoisting a bass and the soupiest tone of all time ("The quality of sound feels like a sinus infection"). The low-end nightmare swells into a dozen rhythm-stringers and one particularly talented basset hound trying to find their footing within the frequency, with disastrous results.

41 Spinal Tap, "Big Bottom"

SEASON 9, EPISODE 18; MAY 5, 1984

Talk about bass chops, these guys got 'em. Unlike Black's bass sketch, Tap's low-end monstrous performance of "Big Bottom" was no shit sandwich. Performed on air just two months after *This Is Spinal Tap* hit screens, the band's performance of their multi-bass opus rumbled with hilarious, horn-dog fervor. Derek Smalls lays down the initial rhythm with a double-neck bass. Nigel Tufnel hits those perfect fourths like a pro. The synth-bass is on point, too. But it might be David St. Hubbins mud-flappin' lead bass prowess that pushes the ludicrous metal anthem into overdrive.

40 J Mascis & the SNL band, "Out There"

SEASON 25, EPISODE 16; APRIL 8, 2000

It's a travesty that J Mascis never got to chop through this *Where You Been?* stunner on the show with the rest of Dinosaur Jr. in the Nineties. Nevertheless, a 20-second sampling of "Out There" — which Mascis performed while sitting in with the house band — found the alt-rock

35



Prince & Co. "Partyup"
(like it's 1999) back in 1981

slappy on the bass, but things get weird when vocalist Anthony Kiedis soccer-slides toward John Frusciante and boots his bandmate in the butt. "Under the Bridge" is even more tense, with Frusciante cresting through a loose fluidity that paints a bit too outside the lines – and with a lot of brown. He ends the alt-ballad howling in falsetto like a hound from hell. The rest of the band seem stunned over their tragic *Magik* performance.

36 Boz Scaggs, "Lowdown"

SEASON 2, EPISODE 2; SEPTEMBER 25, 1976
Elliot Randall's wildcard solo is one of *SNL*'s most uproarious musical WTF moments. Halfway through the hit's soft disco shuffle, Randall rips out to center stage for a furious hellfire of hammer-ons. He tries to hit a behind-the-nut bend but kind of biffs it, then walks back with a huge smile to resume his soulfully rhythmic plinking. Slang-style praise or secret diss, Scaggs jumps back in to croon with perfect comedic timing: "You ain't got to be so bad."

35 Prince, "Partyup"

SEASON 6, EPISODE 11; FEBRUARY 21, 1981

Prince's most storied *SNL* performance arguably isn't this one, and it wasn't even in public – rather, a slow-jammed "Let's Go Crazy" during the show's 40th-anniversary afterparty in 2015 apparently had cast members losing their minds. But his televised "Partyup" in '81 was still plenty iconic, with the Purple One parading around in thigh-high boots and sex-grinding his guitar with slinking funk licks.

34 Tracy Chapman, "Give Me One Reason"

SEASON 15, EPISODE 9; DECEMBER 16, 1989

Here's a good reason to have owned a VHS machine in the Eighties: Chapman's rhythm-locked, Grammy-winning blues-rocker "Give Me One Reason" was performed on *SNL* a full six years before it made it onto an album. Chapman anchored its television debut with subtle, staccato acoustic fingering and her soulful vocal, though the house band gets into the action, too; Tom "T-Bone" Wolk injects jumping-bean bass accents while bandleader G.E. Smith delivers Delta-ready slidework.

33 Devo, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction"

SEASON 4, EPISODE 2; OCTOBER 14, 1978

Devo's subversive take on the Stones classic harnesses the palpably anxious and painfully horny undercurrent of the anthem arguably better than when it's ever sung by Jagger. Sweet release arrives through this performance, where Devo – deep in their matching hazmat suit-and-3D glasses era – twitch through the tune like a bunch of broken androids, Mark Mothersbaugh wilding out while using a Hagstrom 1 with boosts and overdrives duct-taped all over its cherry body.

32 Pearl Jam, "Not for You" / "Rearviewmirror" / "Daughter"

SEASON 19, EPISODE 18; APRIL 16, 1994

Pearl Jam were arguably the biggest band in the world in the spring of 1994, so *SNL* showcased the hell out of the Seattle quintet during their second appearance on the show – even offering them a rare third song. Their "Daughter" performance, in particular, presented an extended Jam; the group gave the alt-rock anthem a funky two-minute outro full of vibe-heavy fretless bass and ad-libbed Crazy Horse lyrics.

31 AC/DC, "Stiff Upper Lip" / "You Shook Me All Night Long"

SEASON 25, EPISODE 15; MARCH 18, 2000

AC/DC's *SNL* debut found the band cranking into their *Back in Black* classic a whopping 20 years after its initial release. In a solid performance, Angus Young wails hard and goes full-Curly while spinning around the ground during the finale. Earlier in the evening, though, the eternal schoolboy and brother Mal arguably locked in harder for the gritty, then-current and super underrated "Stiff Upper Lip."

30 Punk Band Reunion at the Wedding sketch (Crisis of Conformity, "Fist Fight in the Parking Lot")

SEASON 35, EPISODE 14; FEBRUARY 6, 2010

What begins as a father sheepishly getting his old band back together at his daughter's wedding reception quickly devolves into one of *SNL*'s most raging hardcore performances ever. Fred Armisen sneers his way through Eighties-style Reagan-punk lyrics, while the arrangement itself quotes Suicidal Tendencies' "Institutionalized." The table-crashing, glass-smashing melee gets all-too-real once drummer Dave Grohl's mic cuts out. A cream Strat-strapped Kutcher saves the day by lunging over with another mic – which also reveals he's definitely not the one punk-chording through their "Parking Lot."

29 The Replacements, "Bastards of Young" / "Kiss Me on the Bus"

SEASON 11, EPISODE 7; JANUARY 18, 1986

G.E. Smith was a Replacements fan and called the group when *SNL* needed a last-minute replacement for the Pointer Sisters. The Replacements proceeded to get drunk backstage with host Harry Dean Stanton and strolled out to deliver slapdash *Tim* songs while sloshed out of their skulls. Paul Westerberg fumbled lyrics, Bob Stinson played a loaner

Les Paul after he fell on his own guitar on the way to the stage. The night was best summed up by the first line of "Bastards of Young": "God... what a mess."

28 Bonnie Raitt, "Thing Called Love"

SEASON 15, EPISODE 11; JANUARY 20, 1990
Nearly 12 years to the day after her first *SNL* appearance, Bonnie Raitt returned to the show to slide through this blues-rock blazer. At one point she bats at the body of her Strat to gain some gnarly sustain. Later, she juxtaposes a fiery, near-30-second glass slide solo against the arrangement's laidback, roadhouse-reggae breakdown.

27 Lenny Kravitz, "Are You Gonna Go My Way" / "Always on the Run"

SEASON 18, EPISODE 18; APRIL 17, 1993
Everything went Kravitz and co-guitarist Craig Ross' way. Sporting the rawest and most

iconic rock riff of '93, the pair brought harmonized pull-offs and Hendrix-ian sharps to a pitch-perfect performance of "Are You Gonna Go My Way" — and then Ross delivered a wailing solo. They then dug into their retro-rock war chest for *Mama Said* single "Always on the Run," expertly swaggering themselves through fuzz-funk syncopation before Ross splintered off with another heater solo.

26 Nirvana, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" / "Territorial Pissings"

SEASON 17, EPISODE 10; JANUARY 11, 1992
Nirvana's *Nevermind* dethroned the King of Pop's *Dangerous* from the Number 1 spot on the *Billboard* chart the same week they dropped by *SNL*. Understandably, they played "Teen Spirit," the industry-revolutionizing game-changer that got them there. That said, "Territorial Pissings" was the liveliest of their two

performances; Cobain capped the manic track by smashing his guitar into a tower of logo-less cabs; Krist Novoselic hucks his bass into the air like loose change; Grohl rains drum hardware across the soundstage.

25 Rage Against the Machine, "Bulls on Parade"

SEASON 21, EPISODE 17; APRIL 13, 1996
Interestingly, the *SNL* time bookers paired billionaire media mogul and Republican nominee hopeful Steve Forbes with left-leaning political rap-rockers Rage Against the Machine. Rage tried to hang upside-down U.S. flags across their cabs as a form of protest, which led to an on-stage confrontation with patriotic stagehands, who yanked away the subversive Stripes milliseconds before the band kicked into "Bulls." Tom Morello crushed it with his wah work and mock-scratch technique. Then the band got booted out of the building.

24 Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, "You Don't Know How It Feels" / "Honey Bee"

SEASON 20, EPISODE 6; NOVEMBER 19, 1994
Petty's fifth of eight appearances on *SNL* came during his *Wildflowers* cycle and boasted a new, temporary Heartbreaker behind the drum kit: Dave Grohl. The performance interestingly falls between the latter's post-Nirvana, pre-Foo Fighters period, and he hits those cans heavy. "You Don't Know How It Feels" was a crowd pleaser, but the real treat is "Honey Bee." The swamp-soupy garage-blues tune had Mike Campbell dripping out liquid gold guitar leads, but Petty hits an uncaged-and-uncouth, bendy solo of his own.

23 Aerosmith on Wayne's World

SEASON 15, EPISODE 13; FEBRUARY 17, 1990
Satirically or not, *SNL*'s resident headbangers-cum-cable access hosts hoisted the flag for heavy



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Aerosmith in full-on Pump mode in 1990

music during a time where the show probably should've booked more metal acts. Nevertheless, Wayne and Garth still got their party on with Aerosmith one time, with Joe Perry and Brad Whitford beefing up Mike Myers' mock-squealing *Wayne's World* theme as a basic-but-brawny basement rocker. Aerosmith also hit a pair of *Pump* tunes for the show, but this was their biggest bash of the night.

22 Fear, "Beef Baloney"

SEASON 7, EPISODE 4; OCTOBER 31, 1981

Fear was brought onto *SNL* as a favor to fan and then-former castmate John Belushi, whom showrunners were hoping would pop back on the program for a cameo. Fear then invited hardcore kids from across the Eastern seaboard — including members of Minor Threat and Negative Approach — to mosh out during a chaotic four-song medley. Bassist Lee Ving is constantly chasing a micstand as it gets knocked about by stage divers.

21 Phoebe Bridgers, "I Know the End"

SEASON 46, EPISODE 11; FEBRUARY 6, 2021

Phoebe Bridgers wasn't the first person to smash a guitar on *SNL*, but she's the one who got

the most flak for it. "I Know the End" starts subtle, but the indie-rockers ended up primal screaming her way through the climax — which likewise found co-guitarist Harrison Whitford delivering quixotic scalework — before yanking off her jet black Danelectro and decimating it against a speaker wedge. The misogyny brigade tried to shame her on socials; Bridgers sold the ax for \$100,000 and donated it all to charity.

20 Captain Beefheart & the Magic Band, "Hot Head" / "Ashtray Heart"

SEASON 6, EPISODE 2; DECEMBER 22, 1980

Beefheart's underrated early Eighties period found the experimental icon making music with the meanest-sounding iteration of his Magic Band. They put on a feisty performance for a shocked *SNL* crowd — guitarist Moris Tepper, in particular, spewing hot fire with his junk-blues sliding. Beefheart cradled a cigarette, brilliantly rifling off a dadaist word salad through a haggard wheeze that sounded like his lungs had burnt right down to the filter.

19 Living Colour, "Cult of Personality" / "Open Letter (to a Landlord)"

SEASON 14, EPISODE 16; APRIL 1, 1989

Living Colour's April Fool's appearance found Vernon Reid going off-the-charts gonzo with his inspired fusion playing. He cut loose through



Fear enjoys some "Beef Baloney" in '81

22

a mind-bending, minute-long solo on "Cult of Personality" and then leaned into a vivid display of ambulance siren-styled inverted bending on "Open Letter (to a Landlord)." The only thing that might've outshone Reid's playing was Corey Glover's extremely late-Eighties, iridescent purple-and-yellow BodyGlove wetsuit.

18 Rihanna (with Nuno Bettencourt), "Diamonds"

SEASON 38, EPISODE 7; NOVEMBER 10, 2012

Nuno Bettencourt never got the funk out on *SNL* during Extreme's peak. Despite this, the Boston virtuoso was able to shine bright like a diamond when he popped up on the show as part of Rihanna's backing band. The focal point is the pop star, without question, and Bettencourt begins the song with minimalist, volume pot-craning ambience. But by song's end, he's soaring through the mix with a boldly prismatic vibrato.

17 David Bowie, "Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)"

SEASON 22, EPISODE 12; FEBRUARY 8, 1997

Armed with a Parker Fly, an unruly series of harmonic slides and an onslaught of out-of-control pinch-squeals, ace guitarist Reeves Gabrels (nowadays a member of the Cure) was a beast to behold on "Scary Monsters." Bowie & Co. were supposed to play something off 1997's *Earthling*, but they went rogue and performed the retro cut as a form of protest after the singer objected to a sketch idea — and as a dig on Lorne Michaels, who told Bowie about a terrifying cocaine binge he'd been on while listening to "Scary Monsters" in the Eighties. They were ushered out of the building ASAP. Bowie reportedly regretted not grabbing the fruit basket on the way out.

16 Top of the Pops sketch (aka Ian Rubbish & the Bizarros, "It's a Lovely Day")

SEASON 38, EPISODE 21; MAY 18, 2013

Fred Armisen's *SNL* tenure was

full of musical characters, one of his most memorable being comically hate-filled Spirit of '77 punk eccentric Ian Rubbish. While the U.K. snarler had many memorable lyrical barbs, Armisen's last show as a full-time cast member found him slapping on Rubbish's peroxide wig and a Fano Alt de Facto to deliver an earnest farewell anthem called "It's a Lovely Day." It turns into a jam featuring Sleater-Kinney's Carrie Brownstein, the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones, J Mascis, Aimee Mann and Michael Penn. Is this one of Armisen's top-10 greatest TV appearances of all time? Yeah, probably.

15 H.E.R., "Hold On"

SEASON 46, EPISODE 4; OCTOBER 24, 2020

H.E.R. wowed guitar-heads doubly in this Season 46 standout moment. She shot melodious, mile-wide vibrato through the ceiling during a revelatory performance of R&B slow jam "Hold On." She also used her time on *SNL* to showcase a then-brand-new signature Fender Chrome Glow Strat, which reflected a rainbowed array of colors beneath the stage lights that was almost as resplendent as her tone.

14 Robert Cray, "Smoking Gun" / "Right Next Door (Because of Me)"

SEASON 12, EPISODE 13; FEBRUARY 28, 1987

While "Smoking Gun" was tight, we're going to suggest that it's Cray's run-through of "Right Next Door" that left a stronger impression on the music-loving public. There's a sleek, clean-channel mystique coursing through the smooth-blues arrangement, Cray accenting his adulterous tale with perfect, passionately plinking accent rhythms. By song's end, he bait-and-switches us with a yearning backend climax of wry little wriggles and finger-snapped string work. Of course, if you're going back and watching all these, don't deprive yourself of "Smoking Gun."

19



Living Colour — in living Eighties colors — in 1989

13 The Smashing Pumpkins, "Cherub Rock"

SEASON 19, EPISODE 5; OCTOBER 30, 1993

The Pumpkins went in for the kill during their first appearance on *SNL*. The performance of loud-quiet-loud classic "Today" was spectacular, but the alt-rock champs went nuclear on "Cherub Rock." Billy Corgan shreds his sinewy vocal cords throughout and wails a furious solo on his

modded Bat-Strat. James Iha likewise gets in a few nasty and textural bends before they put this all-out bash to bed.

12 Beastie Boys, "Ricky's Theme" / "Heart Attack Man"

SEASON 20, EPISODE 8; DECEMBER 10, 1994

The Beasties' second musical spot of the night began with instrumental soul jam "Ricky's Theme," where auxiliary Beasties player Money Mark's morning

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glory electric piano glistened against Ad-Rock's sly-and-wily wah-wah guitar and MCA's lithe standup basslines. An extended cymbal segue leads to gear-swapping and a furious aesthetic pivot, as the Boys then go buckwild with a pacemaker-exploding old-school hardcore freakout. Ad-Rock smashes an S-shape into the ground — splinters fly into the air as the screen fades to black.

11 Adam Sandler, "Lunch Lady Land"

SEASON 19, EPISODE 11; JANUARY 15, 1994
From "Red Hooded Sweatshirt" to "The Chanukah Song," most of Adam Sandler's *SNL* music went unplugged. But unencumbered by the confines of the *Weekend Update* desk, the Sandman went full-electric with a black Gibson Les Paul to strum this Bruce Springsteen-ian opus about elementary foodstuffs revolting against their maker. Sandler sells his "Jungleland" rip with goofball heartland earnestness. Of course, the sight of Chris Farley's hair-netted Lunch Lady gracefully *plié*-ing across the stage near Kevin Nealon's sentient Manwich pushes the performance into all-timer territory.

10 Fishbone, "Sunless Saturday" / "Everyday Sunshine"

SEASON 16, EPISODE 16; MARCH 23, 1991
Despite its gloom-clouded song title, Fishbone were beyond brilliant on "Sunless Saturday." Frontman Angelo Moore somersaulted across the stage with manic energy and put on an acrobatic vocal performance. John Norwood Fisher flexed thick bass thwaps across the soul-metal fusion piece. A double-strapped Kendall Jones switched between acoustic strums and flanged-out-and-frantic tap solos on an S-shape. Keeping things on-theme, they then dipped into the funky Vitamin D-dosed "Everyday Sunshine" for their second song.

9 St. Vincent, "Birth in Reverse"

SEASON 39, EPISODE 21; MAY 17, 2014
While the Season 39 finale brought out rappers 2 Chainz and Lil Jon for a pair of sketches, Annie Clark commanded the stage with playfully panicked art-punk energy during her performance of "Birth in Reverse." Early on, she's twitching out jazz chords on a vintage 1955 M-75 Aristocrat. By the finale,



[from left] Eddie Van Halen, T-Bone Wolk and G.E. Smith in 1987

a choreography routine finds St. Vincent and guitarist Toko Yasuda harmonizing post-shred bristliness while parading the stage like a pair of nectar-crazy hummingbirds.

8 Elvis Costello, "Radio Radio"

SEASON 3, EPISODE 8; DECEMBER 17, 1977

"I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen; there's no reason to do this song here." In one of the show's most iconic moments, musical or otherwise, Elvis Costello came into 8H to play "Less Than Zero" but abruptly and awkwardly halted the single to re-route his band toward a spritely but unexpected "Radio Radio." The swerve had staff panicking behind the scenes. He'd later say it was because "Zero" was too slow; it might've been that its lyrics on the rise of British fascism were, well, incredibly British. Costello satirically recreated the chaos for *SNL*'s 25th-anniversary special in 1999, hijacking Beastie Boys' "Sabotage" to once again play "Radio Radio."

7 David Gilmour with G.E. Smith & the SNL Band, "Song for My Sara"

SEASON 13, EPISODE 7; DECEMBER 12, 1987

This episode brought out two musical guests, wildly juxtaposing Buster Poindexter's broad, brass-heavy calypso-sleaze smash "Hot Hot Hot" with Gilmour's tastefully funky instrumental, "Song for My Sara." Supported by the *SNL* band, the latter echo-quaked melodious vibrato from his headless Steinberger GM 3T. T-Bone Wolk thumb-and-finger popped his way through the piece. G.E. Smith is all smiles while supporting the Pink Floyd legend. The song was never officially released, making Gilmour's drop-in appearance even more unique.

6 Eddie Van Halen with G.E. Smith & the SNL Band, "Stompin' 8H"

SEASON 12, EPISODE 13; FEBRUARY 28, 1987

Van Halen's lone and unplanned *SNL* appearance arose out of boredom. As then-wife Valerie Bertinelli was rehearsing skits that week, EVH ended up in the music office trading licks with Smith, and together they whipped up a bluesy lil' choogle named after the show's 8H soundstage. Eddie goes full Orca-moan on his striped Kramer 5150 before flitting between tasteful quarter-note taps and cut-throat runs. Smith is ear-to-ear grinning while chopping at his Tele. The two guitarists literally — but playfully — butt heads mid-stage, though they stood united for this memorable drop-in moment.



Stevie Ray Vaughan in action (with Tommy Shannon on bass) in 1986

George Harrison [left] and Paul Simon in 1976

4



5 Stevie Ray Vaughan, "Say What!" / "Change It"

SEASON 11, EPISODE 10; FEBRUARY 15, 1986

As Double Trouble drummer Chris Layton recalled years later, host Jerry Hall's then-husband, Mick Jagger, was around during rehearsals. Mick almost sat in with the band for their *SNL* debut but ultimately didn't have the stones to go through with the team-up. Instead, a mass of Texas talent graced the stage, with SRV first hitting 12-bar instrumental "Say What!" as a screaming, whammy-and-wah-wild workout. For the cocksure "Change It," he strutted through flavorful blues runs alongside fellow Strat-smith, brother and Fabulous Thunderbirds co-founder Jimmie Vaughan.

4 George Harrison and Paul Simon, "Here Comes the Sun" / "Homeward Bound"

SEASON 2, EPISODE 8; NOVEMBER 20, 1976

Back in the first season, Michaels went on-air to offer the Beatles a hilariously paltry \$3,000 — to split however they'd like — if they appeared on his show ("You want to give Ringo less? That's up to you"). Paul McCartney and John Lennon were apparently watching the show together in

NYC and damn near took a cab to 30 Rock to collect. But it was Harrison who became the first Beatle to play on *SNL*, and he did it with another music icon. In one of most stunningly tender musical moments of the early years, Harrison and Paul Simon teamed up to strum and folk-finger through the former's "Here Comes the Sun" and the latter's "Homeward Bound," back to back. Outside of their acoustics and gentle vocal harmonies, it's pin-drop silent in the studio, the audience watching history in the making. To say the least, the performance was more than alright — it was god damned magical. McCartney would ultimately show up as a musical guest four times between 1980 and 2012, and he closed out this year's 50th-anniversary show with another *Abbey Road* classic, "The End." Ringo hosted in 1984.

3 Jack White, "Taking Me Back" / "Fear of the Dawn"

SEASON 48, EPISODE 13; FEBRUARY 25, 2023

Ever since the White Stripes bashed through a radically raw "Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground" on 8H in 2002, Jack White has been an *SNL* fixture. On top of being a five-time musical guest, he once ripped a solo as a six-stringing wedding

The Blues Brothers' Dan Aykroyd [left] and John Belushi in 1978

2



crasher in a 2018 sketch and also covered "Rockin' in the Free World" during this year's *SNL50* concert. While he cut a memorable double-handed tapping tribute to EVH in 2020, his mic stand-toppling, pedalboard-maximalist "Taking Me Back"/"Fear of the Dawn" medley in 2023 was a fiendishly feral display of fuzz-blown sonics and wah expressionism.

2 The Blues Brothers, "Soul Man"

SEASON 4, EPISODE 6; NOVEMBER 18, 1978

John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd prototyped their musical-brothers band in the first season with a buzzy, bee-costumed performance of Slim Harpo's "I'm a King Bee." They eventually bought some fedoras and rechristened themselves as Jake and Elwood Blues. Flanked by members of the *SNL* band (blues vet Matt "Guitar" Murphy and Stax session all-stars Steve Cropper and Donald "Duck" Dunn), this Season 4 cold open is the Brothers' defining moment — and it led them toward a hit

record and a blockbuster film. After smashing into a sweat-box vamp of Otis Redding's "I Can't Turn You Loose," they choogle through a cool-as-ice cover of Sam & Dave's "Soul Man." Cropper steps into the spotlight with sleek vibrato waggling while Elwood honks his harmonica.

1 Frank Ocean with John Mayer, "Pyramids"

SEASON 38, EPISODE 1; SEPTEMBER 12, 2012

Pop-bluesmith John Mayer's earnest-but-animated performance style was roasted on the show several times, via squinty-eyed, fat-tongued and *faux*-ripping impersonations from Bill Hader, Jimmy Fallon and host Ashton Kutcher. Mayer got the last laugh with his staggering 2012 guest solo for Frank Ocean. The R&B singer walks over to a vintage arcade cabinet and starts gaming once Mayer unearths deep, atmospheric bends on a finish-obliterated Strat. A fighting game plays on in the background, but Mayer delivers the knockout blow. **GW**

1



Frank Ocean [left] and John Mayer in 2012



Rising Son

With their third album (and a bit of his dad's Frankenstein), Wolfgang Van Halen and Mammoth are taking the world of rock guitar by storm once again — critics, anxiety and wildfires be damned

STORY BY GREGORY ADAMS PHOTO BY TRAVIS SHINN

DON'T LET THE finality of *The End* fool you. Despite the connotations of the title of Wolfgang Van Halen's third and latest album as Mammoth, the hard rocker's thrilling new era has only just begun.

When *Guitar World* catches up with him over Zoom, the musician — progeny of Eddie Van Halen, and a dynamic master-tapper in his own right — is riding high from leading his live band through a series of opening dates on Creed's Summer of '99 tour. It's put the ever-rising act in front of huge arena crowds and had Van Halen sharing laughs backstage with his old Tremonti bandmate and Creed guitarist, Mark Tremonti.

Each night so far, Mammoth has electrified the masses with "The End," the tapped-and-slapped ripper that roared to the top of the *Billboard* Mainstream Rock charts over the summer, and which is likewise affixed to one of the most memorably goofy-and-gory music videos of 2025 — featuring vampiric maulings aplenty and a scene where Wolf's mom, Valerie Bertinelli, punches out a ghoul during a mid-concert bar brawl.

It's been a fun few months, to say the least, but Van Halen also explains that *The End* arose out of a long period of tension and turmoil — its songs reflecting an existential dread informed by terrifying natural disasters and general anxiety.

"During the last show we played with Metallica in Mexico in 2024, I had a really traumatizing panic attack on the airplane," he says. "I'd never had that before, and that was the impetus of my lyric writing when it came to the subject material on *The End*."

As such, *The End* marks a highly personal exploration of identity, the weight of expectation, human connection and more. But despite that heady thematic whirl, *The End* — recorded at his late father's 5150 Studios with longtime collaborator and producer Michael "Elvis" Baskette — remains a jubilantly rocking offering full of energized anthems, phase-glazed soloing, grungy melodicism and daringly funkified struts.

It feels like you're poking at some interconnected ideas on songs like "The End," "Same Old Song" and

TRAVIS SHINN



Wolfgang Van Halen performs at SiriusXM Studios in New York City on July 14

“Something New.”

With the way I write, it's very much a therapeutic release. Working those thoughts out is a way of calming the voices in my head and subduing my anxiety. I was working through a lot this time around. The vocals were recorded in January while we had everything in 5150 packed up and ready to go at any moment, because of the Los Angeles fires. So there's a lot of nerves, stress and anxiety there. I was thinking about all of my dad's instruments and all of his belongings before I could even think about mine. We had a U-Haul truck filled with everything. It was tough to be creative in that environment, and I'm already a really anxious person, you know?

How close had the wildfires gotten?

At one point there were four separate fires within two miles of us – you're just kind of sitting there watching the news and watching the LAFD be the incredible heroes they are. It was the winds that were the scariest, just how it would carry over miles. We were incredibly lucky. I know a lot of people who weren't. It was a terrible time to be in the area.

“This is going to be our craziest tour yet”

How long did it take to get back into the recording sessions?

There were about two weeks where we couldn't work more than an hour without getting some sort of alert – I didn't have the brainpower to focus on it, because I was just like, “I need to make sure Frankenstein [ed. *Eddie Van Halen's iconic parts guitar*] is safe.” Once stuff started to calm down, that's when we really started slamming. There were two ideas I wanted to finish, but we didn't have the time. They might show up on something else in the future.

Getting into some of the urgency that is on the record, there's a really dramatic tempo pivot that kicks off the record, in the intro to “One of a Kind.”

I thought it'd be fun to really start this off with something different, almost like a jump-scare. You're kind of lulled into this one thing, and then it explodes. But it was also fun to play with something that we hadn't before, which was a dramatic time change. It's almost

Sabbath – not the arrangement itself, but with how Sabbath get halfway through a song, and then they start chugging on something else and it's badass. I also thought it was fun to tie that to the lyrical motifs of the song.

What's the song about?

A lot of stuff on the album is about somebody losing themselves to some sort of negative influence. By the end of the song, that negative influence wins. That's why I thought about ending on that really gross note – how it hits that last note and just feeds back for a little bit.

Something else that jumped out at listeners is the tapping intro to “The End.”

There's a little callback in the intro to “Source of Infection” off of Van Halen's *OU812*, where I think maybe Donn Landee says “Take one,” and then Dad does all this tapping stuff. I actually yelled that into the pickup of the guitar on “The End,” which was pretty funny. But yeah... I had that idea for a bit, but it seemed a little over the top. I almost used it as a challenge of, like, “How can I make a song out of this?” It was one of the last ideas I pulled out for pre-pro. It was very inspiring and we had a lot of fun doing it.

People have been trying to sleuth out the slapping technique of your verse riff, too.

I really need to post a how-to video, but I haven't had the time. But it's literally just a slap bass part. And you're plucking harmonics. Originally, the idea was to use it on the bass – like that one moment right before the first chorus, where it drops and the bass is playing it. But when I was showing my producer, Elvis Baskette, I was like, “I have this idea – imagine this on a bass,” and I did it on the guitar. Then he's like, “Dude, you should do that on the guitar.”

Was it easier to throw that down on bass or to transpose it onto Frankenstein?

On the guitar you almost have to lay back and be real soft with it, whereas with the bass you can dig in more, because obviously they're bigger strings. But I found that the more I relaxed while doing it on guitar, the easier it was to get the sound I wanted.

An Instagram video you posted reveals you've got some electrical tape covering the D string, near the pickups.

That's just a studio trick to make sure there's no buzz. It was just to deaden any possible extraneous noise. Obviously, I don't really have a problem doing the riff live now, but when you're recording, you just want it to be as quiet as possible.

You've used Frankenstein on earlier Mammoth records. Have you learned

anything in particular about how to harness the sound of that guitar over the years?

Not really. But any moment I have it in my hands... just being able to hold something that my dad had such a history with is nice, since my dad's not around anymore. It's a little bittersweet, but it's a nice thing to have on the record with me. I think that's why I try to bring it out on every record.

Do you have that same kind of connection with other pieces of gear at 5150?

Pretty much everything, yeah. I mean, just the fact I'm recording in 5150 is enough. But because *Frankenstein* is arguably one of the most famous instruments in music history, let alone guitars... the emotional and historical weight of it all is a lot to handle. You almost have to push it to the side and just enjoy the moment.

How defining a factor is your own signature EVH SA-126 on this record?

I have a burst – I believe it was the second prototype of the 126 – and that was the backbone of *Mammoth II*. Pretty much everything recorded on *The End* was the goldtop 126 I have now, other than the *Frankenstein* guitar parts. It's just been so fun to have this instrument that Matt Bruck, Chip Ellis and I put together become the defining sound of what *Mammoth* has become.

How about the amps?

Amp-wise, it's pretty straightforward, and it's what we've been using on tour, which is the 50 watts. I have the EVH 5150 III 6L6, and the specific one I have in the studio is the one I used for the Taylor Hawkins tribute shows [*in 2022*]. The cabinet, too.

"I Really Wanna" has some great phases running through it. Can I assume that's a classic MXR in there?

Yeah! The other effects I used were just fuzzy sorts of vibes. We have this Foxx Tone pedal we used a lot. We always had a layer of Uni-Vibe... or maybe it was a Univox? Elvis is the guy for all the effects. I'm never really relying on an effect unless it's something extremely specific – like on "Happy," we used the MXR Rockman [*X100 Analog Tone Processor*] for this clean lead over the chorus, so it really cuts through. And during "The Spell" there's a lead thing starting in the second chorus where we're doing wah, just to sweeten it up.

"The Spell" is driven by those funky sharp-ninths. Where did that song come up in the process?

I was thinking of Lenny Kravitz when I was writing that song, paired with a Seventies rock vibe. It felt vintage, because I'm doing

Van Halen with his EVH SA-126. "It's been so fun to have this instrument that Matt Bruck, Chip Ellis and I put together become the defining sound of *Mammoth*," he says



what I guess people call the "Hendrix chord." But I also think of the last note Dad hits on "You Really Got Me" – a lot of Van Halen songs end with that big note. But that's definitely one of my favorite choruses on the record. I'm happy with that one.

You mentioned "Happy" earlier – that song feels like one of the larger vocal showcases on *The End*.

With that initial vocal melody in the verse, I was basically thinking of Failure and Nirvana. And in that headspace, I was like, "We should straight-up do a 'Smells Like Teen

"Being able to hold a guitar that my dad had such a history with is nice, since he's not around anymore"

Spirit" sort of thing and have the guitar solo be that vocal melody."

That song starts off with the lyric "I need control – it shows." How could that line speak to the broader experience of making music on your own as *Mammoth*?

You could certainly make that comparison, but with the overarching theme of the record and anxiety, I think it's more about trying to find your comfort zone amid chaos. That's a criticism I never saw coming, honestly. Like, "He's really selfish because he plays everything." I always thought it was just a fun thing for me to do. I've been in bands before where it's been a collaborative effort, and it's very much still a thing with me and my producer, Elvis. He helps me to avoid second-guessing myself, and he tells me when I should keep digging on something. But a lot of people say things like, "Why don't you just have other people on the record? It'll deepen the sound," or some real ethereal bullshit like, "You'll give it more *zhuzh* if



"Pretty much everything recorded on *The End* was the goldtop EVH SA-126," Van Halen says

you have more people on it." [Laughs] I don't know... this is exactly how I want it, and I'm very happy with it.

The music world faced a great loss this summer with the death of Ozzy Osbourne. The day he passed, you performed his song "Mama, I'm Coming Home" in Hartford, Connecticut. How did Ozzy's death impact you at that moment?

I think it was around three o'clock that day when we all looked at our phones and everybody went silent. It was really tough. We felt like we needed to do something, because how could you not? He affected everything we do, forever. It would've felt weird to go out there and try to play "Crazy Train" or "Paranoid." "Mama, I'm Coming Home" felt like the right thing to do. I was very nervous because I didn't have all the lyrics memorized, and I didn't even know how to play it. But we

sat in the dressing room and listened to it over and over again. We played through it two-and-a-half times in soundcheck, and then we kept doing it acoustically backstage. I don't even remember the rest of the show because I was



"At the Hall of Fame in 2024, I got to see Ozzy, give him a hug and talk to him a little bit"

so focused on "Mama." I didn't want to mess it up.

You didn't play "Crazy Train" that night, but was that a formative song for you to work your hands around, as a developing guitarist?

Absolutely, which is why it was such an insane thing to be asked by Ozzy and Sharon to play it at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction he had last year. And knowing my dad's connection with Sabbath... he would tell me all the time about that tour in 1978 where Van Halen opened for them. One of my dad's favorite riffs of all time was "Into the Void."

You had to pull out of Black Sabbath and Ozzy's Back to the Beginning farewell concert in Birmingham. What would you have played? Was there a plan in place?

Not really. It was all very down-to-the-wire. The rehearsal schedule kept moving, because obviously it was an incredibly monumental thing to put together. I don't put missing the show on anyone – it was a crazy thing to organize. But the rehearsal dates for this tour kept looming over everything, and the rehearsal dates for Back to the Beginning kept changing. We just weren't able to do both, and that really sucked, but I'm happy I was able to do the Hall of Fame thing, so at least I got to see Ozzy, give him a hug and talk to him a little bit.

Are you excited to transition from doing these six-song shows with Creed into playing the fuller, hour-and-a-half sets on your own headlining tour this fall?

This is going to be our craziest tour yet. Up until now, all the headline shows we've done have been mainly performance focused. We didn't have much of a show built around it other than lights and a backdrop. This time we're bringing stuff we've never brought out before. And now that we have three albums of material to pick from, I'm excited to really cater the set wherever we go. It's going to be a good time.

We don't necessarily want to ruin a surprise, but are you going to be killing any vampires on stage during "The End"?

[Laughs] No, there's not going to be much acting. Our show is just going to be a bit more souped up in comparison to what it's been before. **GW**

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SLASH AND BURN

Saul "Slash" Hudson is the luckiest man in rock. Quitting Guns N' Roses in '96 when they were on top of the world, he returned in '16 for the ultimate victory lap, making peace with Axl Rose, playing guitar at the peak of his powers — and even learning to love a certain, harmonics-heavy ballad

BY ANDREW DALY

SLASH WAS THERE when, in the aftermath of Guns N' Roses' 1987 debut album, *Appetite for Destruction*, the band suddenly exploded onto a chaotic arc from Sunset Strip hopefuls to one of the biggest, most debauched rock acts on the planet — so it's hard to imagine anything phasing him. But when the guitar maestro considers how far GN'R has come since his and bassist Duff McKagan's return in 2016, his mind is clearly

blown. As he tells *Guitar World*, "It really trips me out that all of this has happened."

From the outside looking in, of course, Slash's return to the GN'R fold seemed inevitable. Behind the scenes, though, he and GN'R vocalist and leader Axl Rose barely spoke after the guitarist left the band in 1996, let alone thought about teaming up to take on the world again. And even when he did agree to cozy up alongside Rose again, he didn't exactly have the long haul in mind.

"It sounds crazy, but when I first got involved again, it was just to do a couple of shows, one of which was Coachella," Slash says. "We'd been getting these offers to do that event for years, so Axl and I got together, sat down and hashed out a lot of stuff that had built up over the years. That's when he said, 'We get these offers to do Coachella. Do you want to do it?' I said,

'Yeah, that would be fun.'"

So much fun, in fact, that Slash is still here, nine years later. But this isn't your father's Guns N' Roses. There are no more hardcore drugs, no more binge-drinking benders and no more infighting — the factors that tore the band apart in the first place.

"That's the best way to put it," Slash says. "But other than changes in the way things were

handled back in the day, it's just maturing... and maybe the lack of massive substance abuse on my part. [Laughs] I can't speak on everybody else's behalf, but all those things play into it. It's a perfect storm of a lot of things."

That perfect storm has seen Guns N' Roses go from a legacy act — who went through lead guitar players like it was going out of style in the early 2000s — to regrouping and picking up where they left off after the *Use Your Illusion* tour in the early Nineties.



Slash — with yet another tasty Les Paul — in action with Guns N' Roses in Incheon, South Korea, on May 1



"We did Coachella, and then we just kept going," Slash says. "It never really stopped. The only thing that [temporarily] stopped it was Covid, because we were just going from tour to tour and having a great time."

Having a cache of iconic songs to revisit surely made having a great time much easier. But for Slash, these aren't just any songs. For the most part, these are songs defined by his riffs and his solos, which the guys who kept his spot warm for 20 years could never quite replicate.

Yeah, you could say Slash is Guns N' Roses' proverbial X factor. But it has nothing to do with top hats (though he makes those look damn cool), nor does it have to do with Les

Pauls slung low (because those are always cool), but the vibe he elicits from the stadium-sized audiences GN'R perform to every night.

"I don't want to sound *cliché*," Slash says, "but every show is so contingent on the audience. That sort of reciprocal energy is what drives it, and that has been solid for this whole run since I've been back in it. That's how it was from our inception back in the day, up until I left in 1996."

The last part of that statement, specifically about leaving in 1996, is particularly critical when it comes to Guns N' Roses. Despite their issues, Axl Rose and Slash epitomize that classic lead singer/lead guitarist dynamic. It's magic — but in 1996, that magic died.

Yes, the post-Slash lineup of GN'R gave us 2008's *Chinese Democracy*, and yes, it was kind of fun to see Buckethead shred with Guns N' Roses. The same goes for Robin Finck and Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal — but we wanted to see the band that gave us *Appetite for Destruction* and *Use Your Illusion I and II*. We wanted Slash. We wanted him to welcome us back to the jungle, and we wanted him to dance with Mr. Brownstone (figuratively). And now that he has, Guns N' Roses are stronger than ever.

"We're fortunate to be a band whose material has stood the test of time like that," Slash says. "And we're fortunate to be appreciated this far out. To be able to

Slash does his thing in Bangkok, Thailand, on May 13 and [facing] Yokohama, Japan, on May 5



maintain that much interest, you have to consider yourself really fucking lucky, and that's the way I see it. It's been quite a ride."

That ride isn't over yet. GN'R has shows planned around the world in 2025, aiming to circle back to America for yet another stadium-sized victory lap. After that, their long-awaited reunion album just might be in the works... but not until the time is right. More on that later.

For the time being, Slash is vibing and enjoying the ride in a way his younger self maybe couldn't. "I constantly have to stop and

be thankful that we're able to do something that I love so much," he says. "There's really nothing like it. To be able to go out there and play for three hours is really a blessing."

The chemistry within Guns seems stronger than ever. How come?

I have no idea. [Laughs] I think a lot of the stuff that was an issue for Guns in the early days — especially in the Nineties — had to do with management issues and stuff that pitted me and Axl against each other. And it worked; it definitely worked. But without that

element, he and I get along great. Duff and I have always gotten along great, and I love working with Richard Fortus. He and I make a really great guitar team, and he's just a good guy. We all get along really well, and we have a good time doing what we do.

What's it been like playing beside Richard compared to Izzy Stradlin and Gilby Clarke?

Richard is a great all-around guitar player. He can do it all. And the cool thing about him is that of all the guys who were in the band



when I wasn't — like Buckethead, Bumblefoot and DJ [Ashba] — he was the only one I'd worked with prior. He was there for a minute, and with all those guys in there, I don't know how that would have worked when I came back. And there was a lot of expectation that Izzy was going to do this, but Richard was there that first day we started rehearsals, and I was given the opportunity to see if I liked working with him or not. Although we did toy with the idea of Izzy coming back, Richard was always there. I felt really at ease and comfortable with Richard staying in when Izzy didn't work out.

Izzy is such a recluse; it's difficult to imagine him playing so many big shows on such a grand scale.

Well, it was weird coming back into it for me. So we had just started to rehearse, and the depth of the material at this point, and the level of playmanship and all that kind of stuff, since the Nineties, was where everybody had been growing as players. We were all really eager to get better and just keep evolving. But I don't know where Izzy would have fallen in

“We're fortunate to be appreciated this far out... you just have to consider yourself really lucky!”

at that time. I have no idea, because we never really got a chance to jam at any of those initial rehearsals for the Not In This Lifetime tour. So I don't know what it would have been like. Everybody has been constantly working this whole time and growing as musicians, but I don't know what he's been up to on a musical level.

Looking back, how did you write the riff for Appetite for Destruction's first track, “Welcome to the Jungle”?

“Welcome to the Jungle” is funny because when that riff came to me, Axl had come over, and I played him that riff, right? And then, we had our first rehearsals at this guy Nickey Beat's studio in Silver Lake in L.A., and on that first day, we were like, “What are we going to play?” This is when the band first got together, like the classic lineup with Steven [Adler] and Izzy. Axl goes, “Why don't you play that thing

you were playing to me earlier?” And that's where “Jungle” started. We all fell into where I had the riff — and Izzy and everybody just had different input. That's how all our songs worked. No matter who came up with the initial idea, everybody was hands-on.

Did the solo come just as spontaneously?

I remember doing the solo, but I can't remember how we ended up in C#. [Laughs] I remember changing a couple of notes around the chord changes, and the solo just came together. But all of that material on *Appetite*, musically, almost wrote itself. I can't remember too much time being spent on any one particular song where we were trying to get the arrangement right. Everything had to be done in the studio at Nickey Beat's, and entire songs came out of it. And “Jungle” was one of those, where it really came together in the time it took to have a session. ■



Slash during Guns N' Roses' first-ever appearance in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on May 25

Is it true that you didn't initially like "Sweet Child O' Mine"?

Yeah, I have to admit I did have a thing with it. *[Laughs]* It was a riff I came up with, and I didn't know what I was going to do with it. I wasn't really thinking about it at the time, but it inspired the whole song. I always say this, but to me, we were like a Motörhead-type hard rock band, so any kind of ballads were sort of uncongressed. *[Laughs]* But it really became part of our set. We played it one time opening for Ted Nugent, and when it was time to play that song, I was like, "Oh, fuck..." *[Laughs]* And, of course, I had to remember how to play the riff accurately by myself in front of everybody every time we played, which, at the time, I was a little drunk, and you never knew what was going to happen. *[Laughs]*

How do you feel about the song now?

As luck would have it, it was the single that actually broke the band. It's a great song, and I don't have any issues with it. I had issues with it back in the early days when I'd go out and play it, but it's become one of the big tentpole songs in the set. So it is what it is. *[Laughs]*

When people talk about your guitar solos, "November Rain" always comes up.

Yeah. But all the solos, that one included, were very spontaneous and at-the-moment when the song was written. You figure out what the chord changes are going to be and then just

do whatever you feel. The "November Rain" solo, which sounds so structured to me now, was just what happened in the moment.

Can you visualize how you came up with it?

The first version of "November Rain" we did was on acoustic. Even though Axl wrote it on piano, we didn't always have a piano, so we used to play it on acoustic, and that solo was there. That was just the spontaneous way it went. I think what happens is you come up with a basic melody that comes to mind when you play the song, and the more you play the song, the more it starts to have a vocal life of its own. That's what a solo should be. It's an extension of whatever the song is. It's another melody, a counter-melody or an extension of the vocal, but it should be lyrical and melodic.

How do you feel about those solos when you play them now?

I have to admit, it feels weird. Like, if I get hung up one night and don't feel like playing the solo for "Sweet Child O' Mine" and I play something else — and that does happen, especially if I break a string — it feels weird if I don't play the solo the way it's supposed to go. I know people get really disappointed if I don't play it the way they're used to hearing

"We toyed with the idea of Izzy Stradlin coming back"

it. That's the double-edged sword. It's cool because it means something in the context of the song; it's not just a ripping solo that comes, goes and is forgettable. It means it has some tenacity. But then again, you can't just go off on a tangent like I would like to do sometimes in songs like that. *[Laughs]* Because it just doesn't feel right. You feel like you're missing something if you don't play it the way that you hear it, or heard it originally, you know?

Those solos sound so well-planned, like mini-compositions. It's hard to believe they were just off the cuff.

Yeah, they really all were. I don't remember ever sitting down and figuring any of them out. Especially "Jungle." I remember going into that, and it sounds very structured to a point, but that's just what the chord changes were. It's interesting to think back on sometimes. When you're onstage, your mind wanders, and I'll go back and think about stuff like that. *[Laughs]*

When you play "Rocket Queen" live, it features an open-ended jam.

That whole jam section has been there since the Nineties. When Guns was doing the stadium tours back then, we started to extend parts of certain songs to make jams out of them and really just made them up on the spot. You really didn't know what the structure was.

How has that evolved since you've been playing with Richard?

[Initially] he was doing a solo section, I was doing a solo section, and then it would get back to the arrangement of the solo section of the song, which is a slide solo thing, and it's evolved a bunch of different times in different ways. And now we've added a piano part and some more chord changes, and Richard does this fucking ripping solo, and I go into a voice-box solo afterward. We've been doing it that way on this tour, and it seems to hold its own that way, so it feels a bit more structured now. But whenever we do any kind of jams, very little time is spent working shit out. You just go for it by the seat of your pants and see what happens. *[Laughs]* And since you're playing however many nights a week, you can remember what was fucked up from the night before and work on it in the moment.

On the gear side of things, you're forever associated with the Gibson Les Paul, but you've been using everything from B.C. Rich Biches to Gibson ES-335s.

It's just one extended evolution, right? It started out with gear that wasn't mine back in the day, and then in the Nineties we had a touring apparatus where we needed to

have reliable shit. I was using three Marshall Jubilees back then, which were a new thing at the time. I happened to get them because, if I remember correctly, they came from Guitar Center, and I got them for cheap, or if not, for free... somehow. I can't remember exactly how I got them, but I had them. [Laughs] So those were in my touring rig. Then I had two Les Pauls I got from Gibson, which are affectionately named Jessica and Stephanie. I still use Jessica, and I still have Stephanie. And then, during the Nineties, because there was so much material on the *Use Your Illusion* records, I started picking up different guitars for different sounds.

You had a B.C. Rich Mockingbird back in the day, too.

The Mockingbird was actually the first professional, brand-name guitar I ever got. I was always a big fan of B.C. Riches, and I worked in a guitar store in Hollywood that was a B.C. Rich authorized dealer. I had a lot of interaction with B.C. Rich as a kid, and when we were doing *Use Your Illusion*, I actually had enough money to buy a new guitar, so I picked up a used Mockingbird, an early-Eighties one, which I still use on the road. I also picked up an Eighties Les Paul goldtop that was really amazing, and some other odds and ends

while we were making the *Use Your Illusion* records. When we went out on the tour, I took all that gear with me, and I still use some of it.

You've incorporated a lot of other instruments since then, right?

Yeah, I picked up a lot of stuff over the 20 years when I wasn't in Guns N' Roses, like different types of Les Pauls. I started working with Gibson on a lot of signature models, the double-necks and so on. And with Guild, I designed a [*Crossroads*] double-neck acoustic-electric that I predominantly used for "Civil War" in the early Nineties. That's still around and I still use it. But lately, the mainstays are a killer B.C. Rich Bich and the guitar that's a replica of the guitar I recorded *Appetite* on... which was a replica of a Gibson Les Paul.

A replica of a replica!

Yeah. [Laughs] That's on the road with me. And I've been really into Gibson ES-335s lately. I have one of those on the road, and some really amazing handmade [*Leo*] Scala guitars, but I don't take vintage guitars on the road as a rule. I'm too hard on them, so I pick up new stuff. I've gotten different things for different songs, basically. For amps, I switched from Marshall to Magnatone in

the last couple of years. And on the What You Want and What You Get Are Two Completely Different Things tour, I've been using newly co-designed 100-watt Magnatone heads and matching 4x12 cabs.

When you returned to Guns nine years ago, did you imagine you'd be packing stadiums with the world at the band's fingertips again?

No, I didn't! It'll be 10 years in March 2026, and I'm tripping that so much time has gone by. Like I was saying before, I'm blown away that we've managed to have such a great following this whole time.

Is there a new album in GN'R's future?

There's so much material at this point — it's a matter of having the discipline to sit down and fucking get into it. But the thing with Guns is, in my experience, you can never plan ahead. You can never sit down and go, "We're going to take this time, and we're going to do this." Every time we've done that, it falls apart. It just spontaneously happens through some sort of inspiration that triggers it. And the next thing you know, it's off and running. So it's coming. I know it's coming because everybody is thinking about it. It'll just happen when it happens. **GW**



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HOLDING **DOWN** THE **FORT**

What does it take to be in Guns N' Roses for 23 years and counting? Let's just say that for Richard Fortus, it requires tone mastery, the ability to mesh with his legendary gunslinger partner and a highly desirable signature Gretsch

BY ANDREW DALY

A**FTER SLASH AND** Duff McKagan exited Guns N' Roses in the mid-Nineties, things went kinda sideways for a bit. The band kept rolling, but it was host to a cavalcade of guitar players, from Buckethead to Paul Tobias to Robin Finck to DJ Ashba to Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal.

As you can imagine, all that change did not give rise to new music. It's not that Axl Rose wasn't writing tunes; it's just that honing them proved... difficult. But things shifted for the better — on the guitar side, at least — when Richard Fortus, who at the time was touring with Enrique Iglesias, was drafted into Guns in 2002. Fortus brought immediate stability to a situation that was anything but stable.

Twenty-three years later, GN'R is still wreaking havoc on a stadium stage near you, but things are very different. "It seems to me that we're much more unified," Fortus says today — but that shift only came after Slash and McKagan re-entered Guns' orbit in 2016.

"When I first came into the band, it was split into factions," Fortus says. "There was Buckethead, Brain [*Bryan Mantia, drums*] and Chris Pitman [*keyboards/bass*] as one little faction. And then there was myself, Tommy Stinson [*bass*], Robin [*Finck*] and Dizzy [*Reed, keyboards*]. That was another faction. And there was Axl, a faction unto himself. [*Laughs*] It was a different feeling to the band, but now

everything feels solidified."

It hasn't always been this way for Guns N' Roses, who first welcomed us to the proverbial jungle in 1987 with *Appetite for Destruction* and then soaked us with an enduring November rain in the early Nineties. Back then, lineup volatility and infighting were pretty much standard, but not anymore. Maybe it's age, maybe it's the fact that drugs and alcohol are no longer part of the equation — or perhaps it's the simple fact that the world doesn't usually offer second chances, but it has done so for Rose, Slash and Duff. Whatever the reason, Fortus, who — for those

Richard Fortus with his signature Gretsch G6136TRF. "We came up with something that is not like anything else in the Gretsch line," he says



keeping score — is Guns N'

Roses' longest-tenured six-stringer, is having the time of his life.

"Sometimes Slash and I will play the same thing in harmony or an octave part that we've never played before or not worked out at all," Fortus says.

"It's freakish to me how similar our approach is. It sounds a little metaphysical, but it's really strange how in-sync we are."

He goes on to say that the main reason for Guns' modern-day harmonious functionality comes down to the fact that the band is "very united."

"That's the biggest difference," he says. "It's night and day."

And there's no denying that Slash is at the core of it all.

"Tommy Stinson led the charge when I was first brought into the band," Fortus says.

"He came from a punk-rock ethos of not wanting to over-rehearse, because it was pointless. You know, you do your

TOMAS TREŠTİK



"There's never been a time when Slash has said to me, 'I think you should copy what Izzy did here,'" Fortus says

rehearsing onstage, because no matter what you do, it's not going to translate onstage, which is true in a way. But Slash comes from a completely different perspective. He loves to rehearse, so that when we walk onstage we never have to think about playing. I love that. I understand both sides, but I really enjoy having the music become muscle memory."

Rehearsing is one thing, and it's undoubtedly made Guns a tighter unit, but Fortus came into the picture during an era when being a GN'R guitarist meant you weren't long for this world. That, along with the fact that he's now occupying a role once held by Izzy Stradlin and Gilby Clarke, means he's needed to remain on his toes as Slash's sidekick.

"It's always fun," he says. "But when Slash came in, I had to rethink everything because I needed to be able to support his tone, the way he plays and the way he creates. It's been me thinking, 'Okay, how can I do that?' For example, I love P90 pickups, but they don't work with Slash's tone. So it's been about me going back to the chalkboard."

Guns N' Roses has plenty of huge shows planned. Beyond that, there have been whispers of the band's first new record since 2008's *Chinese Democracy*, which is significant because GN'R hasn't dropped a proper full-length featuring Slash and McKagan since 1993's covers album, *"The Spaghetti Incident?"* But to date, we've only seen a few singles, like 2023's "The General" and an EP from 2022 called *Hard Skool*. But that might change.

"I think we probably will [*put out a new record*]," Fortus says. "I can't see us not doing that in the future, although it seems people don't really care about albums anymore. It's hard to say. I'm sure there are quite a few people that would. It's a great honor [*to be in Guns*], and I'm really glad to have been a part of it, and I think the band is on top form right now."

You've been in Guns for 23 years now. Has the response the band is getting – compared to what it was when you started – been surprising?

When we started with Slash and Duff back in the band, the reaction was overwhelming, but that was expected. It wasn't a shock to be playing stadiums and doing multiple nights, because it was a big event. What's shocking is that every time we go out, it continues. We're still playing stadiums. I expected it to die down once the initial reaction wore off, but it's continued. It's incredible.

GN'R was at a crossroads when you joined in 2002. How do you view your role now compared to then?

It's been a pretty massive change. Robin Finck was my favorite guitarist I played with, besides Slash, and was the one I felt most unified with. With Slash, it's a whole different level. I've never played with another guitar player I feel so in-sync with.

What's an example of how things work between you two?

There's a section in "Rocket Queen" where it's completely open. I'll play a solo and then Slash plays a solo, and it's a completely different solo every time. The other night, I played a melody at the beginning, and when Slash played his solo, he quoted that melody. I thought, that's what I've always dreamed a band to be, you know? And he didn't even realize he did it! It's almost

"It sounds a little metaphysical, but it's really strange how in-sync Slash and I are"

jazz – when someone plays a theme and someone else picks up on that theme. That's as good as it gets. He's such a natural musician. It's such a joy to play with somebody like that.

You're occupying a role once filled by Izzy Stradlin and Gilby Clarke. Do you play their parts straight, or do you have freedom to improvise?

I can't really speak to the Gilby thing as much, but with Izzy, there are certain things I view as integral. There's never been a time when Slash has said to me, "I think you should copy what Izzy did here." He's very much in the moment. He's come back to me and said, "I listened to this live recording we did, and I didn't realize you were doing that. That's really cool." But he's never said, "I think you should do this..." He is very trusting with how I approach things. But there are things that – out of respect to the genius of Izzy and what makes this band legendary – I play what I think is integral to the song. There are moments with a lot of the stuff that I interpret in my own way, but I feel very akin to Izzy's approach and where he was coming from with the songs. I think about that spirit when I approach a song.

The recording of *Chinese Democracy* took place over many years. What was that like?

My parts on those songs came about very quickly, because they were already written when I came into the band. The only thing I wrote on that record was the chorus to "Better." Everything else was done. I was just putting on parts, which was challenging because everything had to be structured with three guitar players. We were working out parts that had come before, as well as for the new songs, so everything was very structured because everything has to have its place when you have three guitar players. You have to keep out of each other's way. That was something Buckethead did a really good job at. He understood how to make that work. He would lay out on the verses, come in on the choruses and then come in with a solo or play things that would augment what Robin and I were doing.

It must have been interesting to watch Buckethead work within the Guns paradigm, since he's not traditionally been associated with that style of music.

True, but ultimately, he's very musical. He understood the big picture of what was going on and always came at it from that perspective. He's incredibly prolific, right? He's put out, like, 137 albums or something. [*Laughs*] But he's very much the type of guy that does his own thing.

That's the aspect about the Buckethead — and Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal — era of Guns that sticks out, and perhaps why it was a little musically volatile.

It's difficult for somebody that's used to doing that. Ron was used to doing his own music. Being in a band is a very different thing than sitting in your studio or your bedroom and creating your own music. When you're out playing bars and clubs as a band, it's a very different thing, a very different dynamic.

When you look at what Duff and Slash have brought to the table over the last nine years, does any of what we're talking about from the *Chinese Democracy* era remain?

I really don't think so. *[Laughs]* There's an organic quality that Slash and Duff bring that is inherent to who they are as musicians. It speaks to where they've come from and what they've brought back into this.

When you look at where you started when you joined GN'R and compare it to today, can you track the changes in your rig?

My journey has been very long and arduous when it comes to gear and the things I have to cover. *[Laughs]* A lot of the stuff I'm playing now isn't the stuff I played on *Chinese Democracy*; I'm covering a lot of what Buckethead did. I went through periods where I was using multiple amps and channels, but now it's simplified. When we play live, we run a mono mix, and it's an analog desk. It's very old-school.

Does that help bring the classic GN'R guitar sound to the forefront?

I think it brings a lot more dimension and danger into the sound. Slash and I run mono rigs because it's a mono PA, so it'd be silly for us to have stereo rigs. But I've simplified things; I have two amplifiers that I run and that I hit all the time. I'm just running two single-channel amps, a 100-watt head, a Magnatone combo and a Magnatone Twilighter mono combo. I'm hitting them together throughout the night. I'm constantly on my volume knob, as is Slash. My clean sound is just dropping down the volume.

Where did that approach come from?

It's very old-school. I simplified it and approached it in a Malcolm Young type of way. For the older stuff, my job is to support what Slash is doing, and for there to be a natural juxtaposition between two guitars. So I wanted to go with a cleaner type of tone, similar to Malcolm, and how he spits around Angus Young's tone. It's the same type of dynamic. It's also like Joe Perry and Brad Whitford; you can tell the district guitar tones apart and hear how one supports the other.



"Slash is a legend, so he has a sonic fingerprint that is very much him," Fortus says

Has Slash been a big influence on how you look at gear since he rejoined?

Slash is a legend, so he has a sonic fingerprint that is very much him, although his tone has changed a lot since he first got in the band. I think he plays with a lot less gain, and his tone has gotten bigger, which makes my job harder. *[Laughs]* But obviously, my signature Gretsch has been the biggest piece in the puzzle for me — and lower-gain amps.

There's an argument to be made that your signature Gretsch Falcon G6636TRF is as synonymous with GN'R as Slash's Les Paul at this point.

That's pretty cool. I hate to keep going back to it, but Malcolm Young had the perfect rock rhythm tone. I've got to cover more ground than Malcolm, but I loved how huge-sounding the Gretsch is. I love how there's a lot of low end and a lot of top end, but I need to be able to do more than just that, so we've spent a lot of time working with Gretsch on those pickups. They were fantastic to work with.

What's the secret sauce to those pickups that separates them from standard Gretsch Filter'Trons?

The key to my signature model is the pickups and electronics. We came up with something that is unique and not like anything else in the Gretsch line. Those pickups are a hybrid of vintage Filter'Trons and vintage PAFs in tone and construction. John Gaudesi, who's no longer with Gretsch, brought his pickup winder to rehearsal, and he had our front-of-house engineer in the control room, listening on reference monitors while we were in rehearsals. My tech had four prototypes, and we'd swap the pickups in and out quickly, so we had a rotation of four guitars, and John would wind pickups based on our comments.

We'd make comments, the control room would make comments, and he'd go, "I know what I need to do. Let me try this magnet or this wind," and we narrowed it down until we came up with the right formula.

Some of the more fun guitar moments in Guns' current show are the classics, like "Paradise City" and "November Rain." How do you approach those?

I make subtle changes to things based on what Slash is doing, or on the way things are going in rehearsal or live. Things change all the time, and it's been a process to where things just develop. I'm sure it's the same way if you watch a Rolling Stones video from 1981; it's fascinating for me to watch how their guitar parts have changed so much since then and how different they were in '81 from the original recordings. Songs just develop over time when you play them live every night.

When you came into GN'R 23 years ago, given all the early volatility, did you have a vision of how things would play out?

No. *[Laughs]* I just took each year as it came. I never had a big vision as far as how I saw things going. Nor did I anticipate still being here with Axl after a quarter of a century. I never really thought about it. I think about the next six months. What I'm consistently focused on is what's coming up next, whether it be with Guns, another artist or whatever.

How do you see GN'R's future unfolding?

I see us continuing to put out new music, but like I said, I don't think about things more than a year out. That's my focus. It's always on the next rung in the ladder. I'm not looking at where I've come from or where I'm going, long term. I'm just constantly trying to move up. **GW**

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THE GEAR HUNTER

Suhr Guitars

John Suhr knows a thing or two about tone. Hey, the guy oversaw repairs at Rudy's Music in NYC, modded amps with Bob Bradshaw, became a Senior Master Builder and launched his own admired brand

BY AMIT SHARMA



John Suhr checks out a Suhr Modern Plus

▶ VERY FEW NAMES in our industry command as much respect as John Suhr's. His creations are widely considered to be world-beating manifestations of design and craft colliding at the highest possible level, sitting at the ultra-boutique end of guitar manufacturing. As a result, he's recruited some of the most respected names in the business as signature artists, from Guthrie Govan and Scott Henderson to Reb Beach and Mateus Asato. He's even managed to infiltrate the world of pop; earlier this year at Coachella, Lady Gaga was seen playing one of his Classic T models.

Suhr was making a living as a cook in Manhattan when he got the opportunity to handle repairs at legendary NYC guitar shop Rudy's Music. Eventually he started building his own instruments, which led to a stint at the Fender Custom Shop in the mid-Nineties as a Senior Master Builder. Two years later, he launched his own company, and the rest is history.

Perhaps one of the most impressive things about Suhr's wealth of knowledge is that it's not limited to guitars; he's also designed and produced pickups, pedals and amps, making him one of the most encyclopedic minds in the game, not to mention well-versed in all things tone. Almost three decades on from launching Suhr Guitars, he's rightly proud of how far he's come as an independent builder. He's also very excited about the road ahead.

Take us back to the beginning of your journey with guitars.

"I'm a bit 'cradle to the grave' when it comes to tone"

I used to race dirt bikes and then started playing guitar around 1973. I wasn't satisfied with the way some of them played, especially Strats where the neck felt too narrow. I loved how those guitars sounded, but I didn't like how the strings would fall off the fingerboard or the round radius meant certain notes would choke out. When I was racing, I'd be the guy who took his engine apart. If my parents had a hi-fi in the house, I'd take it apart. Nothing was safe. I just love seeing how things work. I was totally into Brian May because of how the first Queen album shocked me. I loved all the phasey tones. That inspired me to learn more about how to create them. But my heart at that time was really just in playing.

How did you get into building and repairs?

I found this jazz-box maker called Bob Benedetto. I was just this 18-year-old kid who wanted a new neck – I wasn't aware how famous he was. I wanted to apprentice for him. He said no, explaining that it's a terrible business with a lot of work for little reward. He did, however, let me watch him make a guitar. In the end, he moved away, so I made a body and glued it together. I took the guitar to someone for the inlays and when I got it back, I almost cried. The guy had butchered my guitar. It looked like a child had done it with a screwdriver. That was the day I decided, "Fuck this – nobody is touching my stuff again." Later down the line, Rudy Pensa [*of Rudy's Music*] gave me a chance,



The Suhr Andy Wood 10th Anniversary Modern T in two different finishes

SUHR GUITARS

and I started off doing repairs in a little boiler room. That quickly expanded onto the other floors.

You worked at the Fender Custom Shop for a while. What did you learn there?

By this point, I'd started modifying Marshalls and building racks. I made one for Bob Bradshaw and did some Custom Audio stuff with him, like the OD-100. Eddie Van Halen used the CA3+ on *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*. After two years of working with Bob, doing mods for people like Steve Lukather, Reb Beach, Doug Aldrich and Mike Landau, I was missing guitars. My wife got pregnant and I needed job security, so I moved over to Fender for a couple of years, learning a lot of history there — but also how I *didn't* want to make a guitar. My ideas were a bit different. I broke away from Fender and started this company in 1997.

What are your best-selling models?

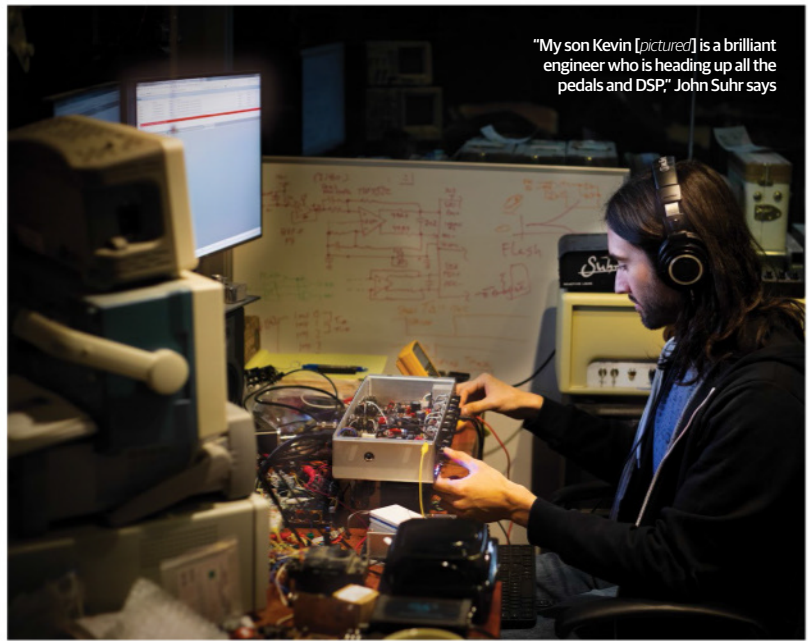
I really don't know. The old Fender shapes are still popular. The Mateus Asato models do well, but all of my guitars have the same kind of flavor and do pretty well. I'm at a point in my life where I'm not going to talk anybody into anything. I let people choose what they want. That's the beauty of a custom build. Sometimes the artist sells the guitar, but I like a guitar to sell itself. The exact model doesn't matter as much as people think. Some of us, including myself, can get a little neurotic in our passion and chase. I'm not trying to shoot myself in the foot here, but you don't need the same instrument as someone else to achieve the same response and tone. I'd actually argue the speakers in your amp are more important than your pickups.

What do you think makes you different from other builders?

I'm a bit "cradle to the grave" when it comes to tone. Maybe it comes from being a cook. I love making pizza, and sometimes people ask me for the recipe. I could tell you the exact amounts of flour, water and yeast, but you won't make the same pizza. It takes 10,000 hours, just like anything else. You might want garlic oil on your pizza; it might not be strictly Neapolitan, but it could taste great. I approach tone from the wood right through to the speaker. How long is the cable? What's in front of the amp? Are there buffers? What kind of effects loop does the amp have? There are different parameters. Building racks taught me all this. If you don't understand the complete signal path, you're not going to be successful in making one part of it. Steve Stevens paid me a nice compliment once. He said he'd order a guitar and record with it right away, knowing it would be correct right out of the box. That made me happy.

Where do you see your company heading?

My son Kevin is a brilliant engineer who is heading up all the pedals and DSP [digital signal processing]. I'm teaching him about guitars because I want a successor, obviously. It's exciting that Pete Thorn is playing my guitars and amps on stage with Steve Vai and Joe Satriani. We're working on a flagship 50-watt amp that should be in his hands by the next NAMM Show. We've been doing some work with Lady Gaga and her



"My son Kevin [pictured] is a brilliant engineer who is heading up all the pedals and DSP," John Suhr says

guitar player, Tim Stewart. There's something on the electronics side coming out for Andy Timmons and Big Wreck's Ian Thornley, both phenomenal players. We're always seeking the next guy or girl, but we're not trying to make the artist side huge.

But you're still a custom shop, right?

We don't make as many guitars as Fender. What they do in a day is what we do in a month. We're still small — bigger than we used to be but still small. We never changed the quality. I will not grow at the expense of quality. If anything, I want the quality to increase. That's very important to us. **GW**

"I'd actually argue the speakers in your amp are more important than your pickups"



A few Suhr Classic S models mingle with SL Series amps

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Fender Ultra Luxe Vintage '60s Telecaster Custom

Does this high-end mix of the classic and the contemporary succeed?

BY ROB LAING

THE ULTRA AND Ultra II succeeded Fender's Elite range as the manufacturer's highest-end California-made production six-strings, with its most contemporary specs, including neck heel and rear body contours. Fender's Vintage Ultra Luxe instruments now combine that with some aged class.

The new Ultra Luxe Vintage '50s and '60s models debut Fender's new Heirloom aging to the lacquer. From a distance, you'd be forgiven for not even noticing that these guitars are relic'd at all – beyond the duller sheen, that is; instead there's hairline checking to be found in the nitro finishes across the body and neck to simulate the effect of decades of environmental temperature changes on the finish. It's like an old guitar that's been played and loved but not fully "road worn." It's not everyone's cup of tea, but it's a more subtle alternative to heavier-relic guitars.

That worn nitro gloss of the Heirloom-aged nitrocellulose combines with the Ultra satin finish and rolled edges of the neck to feel like a played-in guitar that begs to be cradled. The checking has been tastefully applied and works well with the darker hues of the Sunburst. But the thinner nature of the nitro lacquer exposes some rather unsightly streaks in the alder grain on the lower left side of the body of this test model that we'd be unhappy with as buyers of a \$3,000 guitar. There's also a small bubble in the finish on the upper bout.

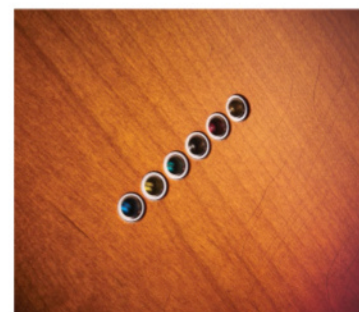
The action on our test guitar is slap bang in the low territory (1.25mm clearance from the low E, 1mm from the high), which makes it a very friendly guitar to get to know.

Like an old guitar that's been played and loved but not fully "road worn"

There is also evidently truth in Fender calling these "Ultra" rolled fingerboard edges, because they do feel notably more rounded than a Player II model.

The 10-14" compound radius could be another little game-changer for a Fender fan – especially if you're coming from short-scale Mustangs, Jags and Duo-Sonics. The flatter real estate further up the neck is a treat compared to those models. It's a feature – alongside the locking tuners and rear contours – you simply obviously don't find on Tele reissues, and the proposition with the finish here is unique.

The departure from the Ultra norm here is the pickups; rather than a set of Ultra II Vintage Noiseless, Fender has gone with a truer vintage choice of the Custom with the '63 Pure Vintage single-coils (6.1k on the bridge pickup and 7.3k at the neck) found on the American Vintage II



PHIL BARKER/FUTURE





1963 Telecaster. It's aiming for that "best of both worlds" theme.

Plugging into our Supro Delta King 12 tube amp and kicking in the overdrive circuit, there's less hum than we expected. As we test through it, before stacking with overdrives, we experienced a real showcase of Tele versatility. The Pure Vintage '63s are great Tele pickups.

Yes, there's the twang and cut we'd hope for – it's certainly more

percussively spanky on the bridge with a boost than some Tele examples we're used to – but driven it roars. There's a breadth to chords and a clear, bell-like character to notes that sounds like a high-definition Telecaster.

The neck pickup balances round warmth with brightness to offer an incredible range in conjunction with the tone control. Being able to round off with the tone and clean up so well

STREET PRICE: \$2,999

MANUFACTURER:
Fender, fender.com

PROS

- ✦ Super playability from a great neck
- ✦ A versatile, great-sounding Tele for working players
- ✦ This specific mix of Fender vintage and modern is a fresh take

CONS

- The knurled controls are a bit too meatgrinder in feel and look
- Our test model had some cosmetic issues
- A big investment for a production Fender model

VERDICT: The Tele blueprint moves into another distinct chapter with an Heirloom finish that pushes this model further into premium-price territory. The blend of vintage and contemporary specs will be a turn-off for some, but it is compelling in use. This could easily become a workhorse for a gigging guitarist.

with the responsive volume pot when stacking with two overdrive pedals impresses. The quality of the pots really encourages deeper exploration of this guitar's range, and the way this Tele retains its treble frequencies when cleaning up with the volume means we're far less reliant on gain-staging with pedals.

The series wiring mode really is a fantastic option for Teles; it's an easily accessible key to added sustain and low-end muscle available in all positions via the volume control's S-1 switch. It's an extremely useful live tool for solos, riffs and anything else you want to throw at it. A kind-of-humbucker button? We'll take that.

Heartland Americana, post-rock, country twang, British blues-rock, punk and beyond, this is a timely reminder that the Tele's tones weave into the very fabric of the music we've grown up with.

It's a workhorse for many needs – and we'd argue more of an open canvas than the Strat. We feel that the Ultra Luxe Vintage '60s Telecaster Custom is a thoroughbred version of that. For the right stage and studio player, its combination of strengths would make an appealing investment. **GW**



Boss VG-800

A guitar chameleon with the ability to dramatically transform your instrument

BY MATT McCRACKEN

▶ WHEN IT COMES to tech, the Boss VG-800 sits at the cutting edge, not just in terms of modeling amps and effects, but transforming your guitar into an entirely different instrument. It can make your Strat sound like a Les Paul, turn a Tele into a 12-string acoustic and even imitate an analog synthesizer.

Getting your paws on this guitar juju won't come cheap, though. As well as the outlay for the VG-800 itself, you'll need the GK-5 Divided Pickup (around \$270) and the Serial GK Cable (\$65-ish) to unlock the myriad alternate tunings and modeled instruments contained within.

As with any Boss stompbox we've encountered, the quality of the build inspires confidence. It's an all-metal, wedge-shaped, Azure blue chassis with three sturdy footswitches angled toward you to help keep wayward stomps away from the decent-sized 256-by-80 backlit LCD screen. Five endless encoders in conjunction with the master select knob take care of the pedal's navigation, while some small buttons handle any additional functionality.

Installing the GK-5 pickup turns out to be a lot more approachable than we initially thought. Boss provides a multitude of spacers, rubber pads



and adhesive strips in order to stick the pickup in your desired location, and the process takes us around an hour. We need to be careful with the placement; too close or far from the strings will cause tracking issues, and it's advised to be at least 15mm away from the bridge.

The VG-800 has a detailed calibration process. You can change pickup orientation, dial in each string's sensitivity and input how far from the bridge it is. Once this initial setup is done, it's surprisingly easy to navigate the pedal and start creating sounds. Presets are banked up and down with the footswitches, and you access the onboard tuner by pressing the two simultaneously.

The tracking is simply superb. It handles chords, bends, pinch harmonics and every other technique

Able to jump from massive basslines to open-tuned acoustic guitar in an instant

STREET PRICE: \$714.99

MANUFACTURER:
Boss, boss.info

PROS

- Sensational pitch tracking with GK-5
- Huge array of tones
- Intuitive app for deep editing
- Pedalboard-friendly format

CONS

- Price adds up with additional pickup and cable
- You'll spend a lot of time changing settings

VERDICT: If you can get over the steep price point and are willing to spend time delving into the nitty-gritty, the VG-800 will deliver radical sound-shifting power to your pedalboard.

we throw at it without the faintest hint of a glitch. Suddenly, our Telecaster is a bass, then it's a 12-string acoustic, now it's a Les Paul, before transforming into an analog synthesizer. The acoustic guitar simulations are inspiring, and you can instantly change to open tunings like DADGAD or open-G at the push of a button.

While there are nice presets, we soon run out of sounds to try, and the emphasis is on modeled guitars rather than out-there experimental sounds. This is where the Tone Studio app comes into play, allowing you to craft sounds with heaps of modeled amp and effects tones. Boss's effects are as fantastic as they ever have been, but the amp models do lag behind those from Neural DSP and Line 6.

The VG-800 is a niche tool, but it does its job brilliantly. The initial outlay is steep once you factor in the additional pickup and cable, and you'll need patience to tweak it to your particular instrument and playing style. But once it's dialed in, it's a chameleon like nothing else we've tried, able to jump from synth leads to massive basslines or open-tuned acoustic guitar in an instant. **GW**





Martin GPE Inception Maple

Progressive, powerful lutherie with piano-like clarity

BY JAMIE DICKSON

TRADITION CAN BE a gilded cage for guitar companies with a long and famous history such as Martin. On the one hand, Martin's original D-28 is, to this day, most people's mental template for what an acoustic guitar should sound and look like. But historic brands like Martin can't just keep on selling the past to players who are already deeply invested in the heritage. They have to innovate, attract new players and persuade people that they are still a growing, evolving force in guitar-making.

To Martin's credit, the company has made careful but persistent efforts to do just that over the years

— notably with the offset-bodied, exceptionally playable SC Series. But the more recent Inception series of guitars has a poise, polish and maturity that challenges high-end modern makers at their own game.

This GPE model is the first non-cutaway guitar to appear in the Inception series, which debuted at NAMM in 2024, and the choice of maple as the main material for the guitar's body is central to the whole design mission behind the range.

It yields a harmonically rich sound great for modern country or rock

With tropical hardwoods such as mahogany and rosewood in dwindling supply, Martin wanted to take a second look at maple — a sustainable northern species — but design a guitar from scratch to get around some of its traditional limitations as a tonewood.

Martin's Fred Greene described the challenge like so: "Maple can sound a bit stiff. You get a strong, quick fundamental note... and then it decays quickly and you just don't get a lot of nuanced overtones over the top of that." Martin's solution to those issues was to introduce a beautiful curved, wedge-shaped panel of black walnut (another sustainable tonewood) to the back of its Inception guitars, to lend a softening effect to the overall sound. However, the real innovation takes place beneath the European spruce top.

MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE



meeting the body at the 14th fret with a 25.4-inch scale and a fairly shallow, slender profile Martin calls a GE Modified Low Oval.

The fingerboard itself is FSC-certified ebony, as is the Sloped Modern Belly bridge, which features bone bridge pins, in keeping with the guitar's sustainability theme. The maple body itself is attractively flamed, the rich, rippling patterns of the wood just visible beneath the smoky Amber Fade Sunburst finish – a typically understated Martin touch, similar in intent (I assume) to Taylor's maple-bodied 600 Series guitars, which also featured warm cognac-toned finishes to trick the mind into not thinking "bright sounding" when you see maple.

Combined with the satin finish on the neck, it's an immediately engaging tactile experience and the 1¾-inch (44.45mm) nut width invites easy fingerstyle playing without feeling a stretch for strummers. And that's just as well, because the GPE Inception Maple has a really potent voice when strummed; it doesn't collapse when hit hard but instead yields a focused, harmonically rich sound that could be a great for modern country or rock tracks.

To voice the maple body to deliver more subtlety and richness, Martin used what it calls "skeletonized X-bracing" to support the soundboard. Essentially, instead of the solid, scalloped bars of wood we might normally expect under the top of an acoustic guitar, this skeletonized bracing has a honeycomb structure that offers huge strength while reducing deadening weight. Additionally, Martin has cut "tone channels" into key areas of the underside of the soundboard. These shallow grooves allow the most resonant areas of the top to vibrate more freely, further reducing the "stiffening" influence of that maple body on the guitar's voice. That's the broad idea, anyway.

On the new GPE Inception Maple model, these core features have been combined with a black walnut neck,

STREET PRICE: \$4,199

MANUFACTURER:
Martin Guitar,
martinguitar.com

PROS

- ✦ Silky sustain and warm clarity
- ✦ Powerful, detailed voice
- ✦ Classic non-cutaway styling
- ✦ Rewards confident playing

CONS

- A serious investment for a new design
- Modern voice won't suit everyone
- Might not hold value like a classic model

VERDICT: Anyone buying a high-end guitar knows it's often a game of diminishing returns. But with the Maple GPE Inception Martin offers something new, compelling and powerful – and if it speaks to you, you'll find yourself in possession of a real thoroughbred.

Switching to fingerstyle, you have to admire how Martin has extended the strong initial attack of maple into a silk-smooth sustain with crisp harmonic detail. The overall impression is of elegant strength – this is not a warm, woody Sixties folk-club kind of guitar. It's a guitar to play bold, beautiful Celtic or Appalachian melodies on, with a carrying, harp-like quality that would really suit eloquent but spirited players from the school of Martin Simpson or Tommy Emmanuel.

The guitar also features an LR Baggs Anthem acoustic guitar pickup system – combining an internal mic with an undersaddle pickup – and we like how Martin has kept the input separate from the endpin, avoiding an oversized button to cram a strap eyelet over and allowing easy battery access in the same end-plate.

Plugging in to my trusty Trace Elliott acoustic amp, the value of this guitar's punch, composure and drive really shines through. Amplified, this guitar is thrilling to play, and the combination of playability, poise and articulate power means you can really immerse yourself in plugged-in performance. **GW**



EVH 5150 Iconic Series 15-watt 1x10 Combo

This might be the smallest amp in the Iconic series, but it sure packs plenty of firepower

BY ARMIT SHARMA

▶ NOW, LET'S BE clear — although this 15-watt combo is technically advertised as a practice amp, it can churn out some serious sonic damage and is capable of keeping up with metal drummers at rehearsal. For medium to larger gigs, you'll need to mic up the amp, but in smaller spaces, it'll certainly be loud enough to hold its own with the rest of the band.

Robust in build and minimalist in aesthetics, thanks to a black-and-silver color scheme, it's the kind of amp that looks like it's been built to last, though naturally a single 6L6

power tube will need more frequent replacing than two. On closer inspection, this is a very feature-rich amp. There are two channels, and each has an additional mode — you can choose a straight clean or an overdriven one, and similarly the second channel has a "Burn" mode with extra heat and low-end.

Though there's a shared three-band EQ, every channel has its own gain and volume control, and you also can fine-tune your sound using the resonance and presence chicken-head dials, which are right next to the reverb control.

"Burn" mode takes things way beyond Eddie Van Halen's tones and into the modern metal universe

STREET PRICE: \$679

MANUFACTURER:
EVH, evhgear.com

PROS

- More gain than you'll ever need
- Extra modes for each channel

CONS

- Fewer features than the 40W version
- Reverb could be better

VERDICT: If you're a metal player looking for an amp that can handle everything from bedroom practice and rehearsal to smaller gigs and recording, this Iconic combo will tick a lot of boxes.

On the back, there's an effects loop, an aux input, an emulated speaker output and a quarter-power switch that's perfect for bringing things down to bedroom levels. So while it doesn't look particularly forward-thinking, there's a lot going on inside.

For this test, we used a 2006 Gibson Les Paul 1958 V.O.S. reissue going into a Crazy Tube Circuits Gus G Speed Demon overdrive and MXR EVH Phase 90, with even more Van Halen flavors coming from the Boss SDE-3 Dual Digital Delay in the effects loop.

Given the metal lineage behind this design, many of us wouldn't expect a particularly great clean tone, but this Iconic combo performs better than most in this area. Click on the overdrive button and the Green



channel turns into a classic-rock workhorse, perfect for everyone's favorite AC/DC and Led Zeppelin riffs.

Shifting onto the Red channel, there's seemingly no end to the amount of gain on tap – especially with the "Burn" mode activated, which takes things way beyond Eddie Van Halen's tones and into the modern metal universe, covering all bases from Machine Head and Slipknot to Cattle Decapitation and Spiritbox.

Given the speaker size, this amp sounds best with the bass near full and treble kept low, but it's quite astonishing how loud and multi-dimensional it sounds, even if you're only running it at a quarter of its 15W

power. There are, however, just a couple of areas where the EVH Icon falls short. The reverb isn't particularly inspiring, and you might very well prefer to run your own pedal in the effects loop. No biggie. And there are some useful features from its 40W bigger brother that the manufacturers chose to remove here, notably the noise gate and the switchable boost.

However, in the grand scheme of things, these are minor points, and it's worth remembering that at this price point, you're already getting a lot for your money, from the low-power mode and extra channel voicings to the aux-in and speaker emulated out. **GW**



Blackstar ID:X 50

In the fierce modelling
combo amp market,
can Blackstar deliver?

BY MATT OWEN

IT TAKES A brave soul to take on Boss in the modeling-amp arms race, and an even braver one to do so explicitly. After all, the Japanese firm's Katana range – now on its third iteration, following a mass overhaul last year – is undoubtedly the market's biggest player and has comfortably cemented itself as the amp to beat in the near-decade since its release.

Dubbed “a bold step forward in modern amp design,” the ID:X – available in 50- and 100-watt iterations – is Blackstar's stake for conquering the modeling-amp space, building on the beloved Blackstar ID range and elevating it to all-new heights, thanks to newly engineered tech and some proprietary features. These include Blackstar's CabRig functionality, a companion Architect app, the firm's Infinite Shape Feature (ISF) control, tube response options, wattage-scaling, loads of presets, expansive connectivity and its new “In the Room” tech.

On the control side, the Voice knob makes it easy to switch between any of the six amp types (Clean Warm, Clean Bright, Crunch, Super Crunch, OD 1, OD 2), which can be dialed-in using Gain, Volume, Bass, Middle and Treble controls. There's also Blackstar's ISF control, which purportedly moves between British and American amp tones, and a Master output.

The way the effects are laid out is especially clever, with simple buttons to trigger Pre FX, Mods, Delays and Reverbs, and two smaller knobs to alter parameters and move between

The competition is fierce, but Blackstar has muscled its way to the table



STREET PRICE: \$349.99
(\$449.99 for ID:X 100)

MANUFACTURER:
Blackstar Amplification,
blackstaramps.com

PROS

- ✦ Ace control layout
- ✦ Solid tones, six great amp models
- ✦ Exceptional clean sounds
- ✦ Architect desktop software is great
- ✦ Competitively priced

CONS

- ✦ No smartphone app for tone tweaking
- ✦ Footswitch not included
- ✦ No stereo

VERDICT: This is a really solid modeling amp with some great tones and even better extended features. The competition is fierce, but Blackstar has done enough to muscle its way to the table alongside the Boss Katana, Line 6 Catalyst and Fender Mustang lineups.

specific effects. This is so much better than the “one size fits all” approach of the previous ID amps, not to mention a huge step up in terms of usability.

Ultimately, it's a really nice use of space, and – when paired with a small screen – something we found to be immensely usable. It's also nice to see the Power and Response buttons – which change between 1W, 10W and 50W, and EL84, EL34 and 6L6 tube voices – on the top of the panel, rather than on the rear of the amp, making them inherently more accessible and thus practical. Presets can also be accessed, thanks to the three Channel buttons and the Bank button, which work together to help bring to life up to 12 separate onboard presets.

There's no stereo functionality with the amp, despite the implementation of the CabRig tech. It seems to be a strange oversight, especially since older ID models offered stereo effects loops. Heck, even the ID:Core V4 offered “Super Wide Stereo.” A missed opportunity, it seems.

That's not the case with the sounds, which include a bunch of practical presets, six solid amp models and a load of top-rate effects. We have no qualms with any of the reverbs, delays or modulations – of which there is a healthy variety – and were particularly impressed with the Pre-FX.

Thankfully, some sought-after, classic overdrive pedal gems are included in the list – the Klon-inspired K Drive, Marshall Bluesbreaker-based Blue Drive and the TS Drive, which is inspired by the Ibanez Tube Screamer circuit – as well as some more out-there additions. We were less convinced by the more high-gain effects on tap – the fuzzes in particular – but this is usually a sticking point for most modeling amps around this price range. With all that said, the cleans were pretty flawless, as were the edge-of-breakup tones, and we found the ID:X to be a great pedal-board platform in testing. **GW**

EarthQuaker Devices Easy Listening

A guitar headphone amplifier that aims to make things easy breezy for players with pedalboards

BY MATT McCRACKEN

DEFINED AS AN analog amp simulator, the EarthQuaker Devices Easy Listening is a mini pedal designed to go at the end of your pedalboard. Featuring just a single knob, single input and a headphone out, it's the antithesis of the complex pedalboard-based amp simulators we're used to in the modern age of guitar, so there's no menu diving, no latency, no updates and no smartphone app.

The idea behind the all-analog circuitry is to give a response and immediacy that's more like a real amplifier, and its circuitry is based on a Fender 65 Deluxe with both tone controls at 12 o'clock. With a built-in cab simulation, it's the ideal pedal platform in theory – and potentially a great pick for those who don't love the knobs and sub menus of your usual pedal amps. It feels very rugged for a mini pedal, and with so few adornments, there's going to be precious little to go wrong. The single-volume control's travel also has some resistance to it, which feels nice for making fine adjustments.

Our sound test begins with our Gretsch semi-hollow plugged straight into the pedal, with the output being a pair of Beyerdynamic DT 990 Pro studio headphones. Wanting to get an idea of the base tone it offers, we play a few post-punk-style licks we're working on. Right off the bat, we can hear that Black Panel amp tone through the humbuckers on our guitar – those resonant lows, smooth yet cutting highs and that slight low mid-range cut that makes the Fender



STREET PRICE: \$99

MANUFACTURER:
EarthQuaker Devices,
earthquakerdevices.com

PROS

- ✦ Great base tone for pedals
- ✦ Easy to use
- ✦ Compact for your pedalboard

CONS

- ✦ A one-trick pony
- ✦ If you're not a fan of Fender Black Panel amp character, look elsewhere

VERDICT: The perfect antidote to players who don't want an amp simulator jam-packed full of tech. With no smartphone app, no IR loader and a single knob, it does away with distractions and lets you focus on the good stuff, i.e. actually playing guitar.

65 Deluxe Reverb one of the most popular amps in the world.

It's super responsive, too, with none of that slight fudginess you can sometimes get from playing a digital amp. For us, this is the most impressive thing about Easy Listening; it makes you forget you're playing with a modeller and just lets you enjoy your guitar without having to think too much about it.

There's a surprising amount of headroom available. Even when we swapped to a humbucker-equipped baritone guitar, it still stayed clean the majority of the way through the turn of the volume knob. There was some clipping once we got near to max volume, which wasn't exactly pleasant, but that was at considerable volume.

Clean tones tested, we grab our pedalboard with its wildly overzealous choice of gain stages, synth

effects and octave pedals to see how Easy Listening holds up under heavy load. When we start front-loading it with drives, we realize just how loud this pedal can get. With the knob barely at 11 o'clock, it's positively deafening through our headphones, and we immediately reach down to change it to the 9 o'clock position for some respite.

It handles us putting various stages of gain on it really well, so even with a boost, fuzz, octave, overdrive and distortion in the signal path, it holds itself up as admirably as our regular Orange tube amp does. We do need to tweak the settings of our pedals to handle the different voices of the Easy Listening, but these are small changes that don't require a drastic change from our typical sound. Overall, it's a case of just plug in, turn on and play – exactly how a good guitar amp should work. **GW**

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WITHOUT ADAPTERS

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PAIRS

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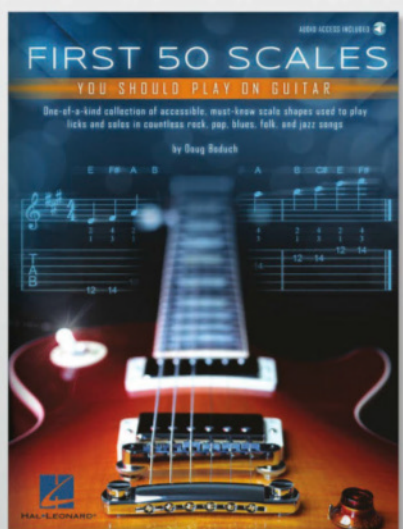
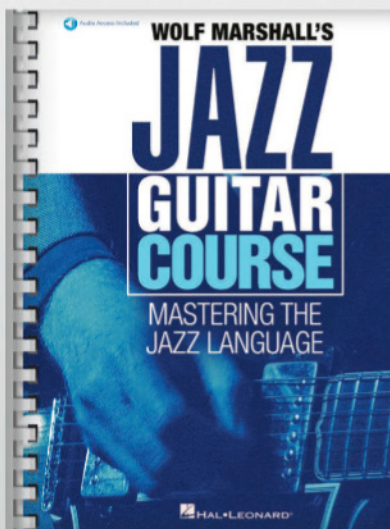
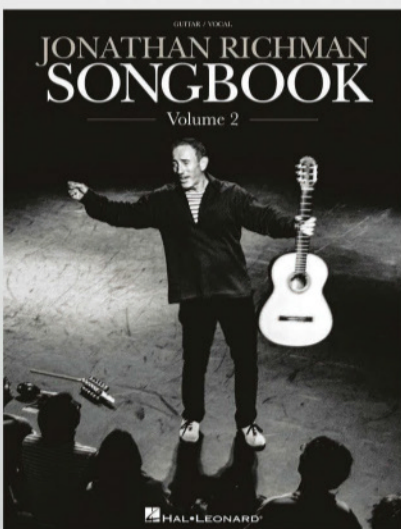
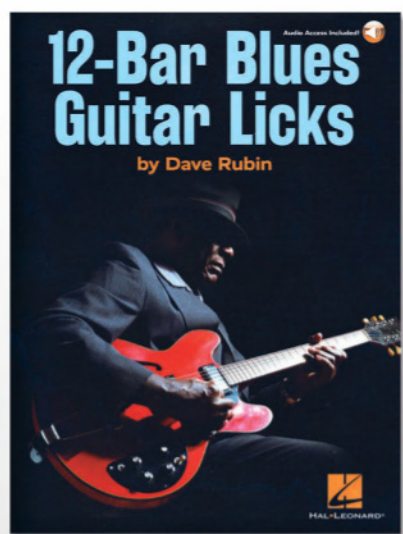
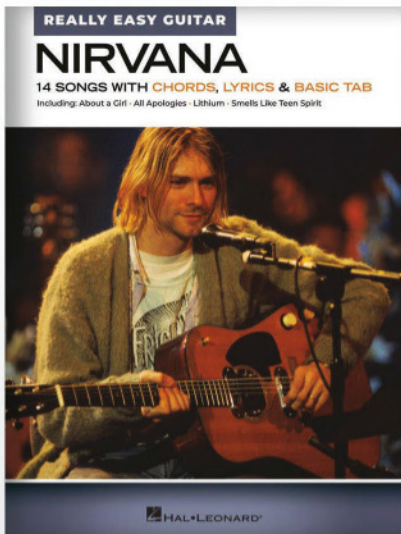
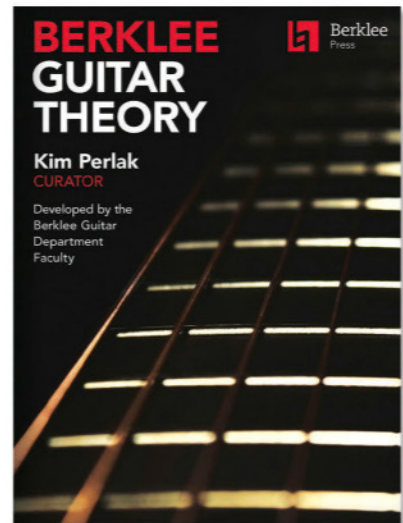
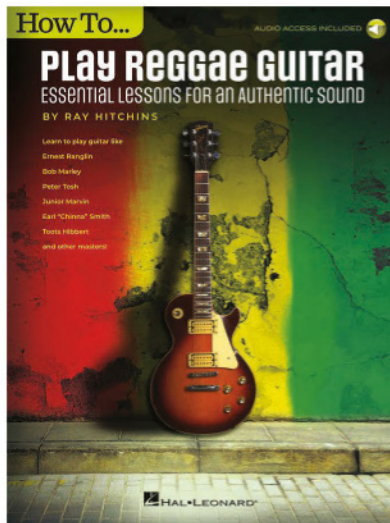
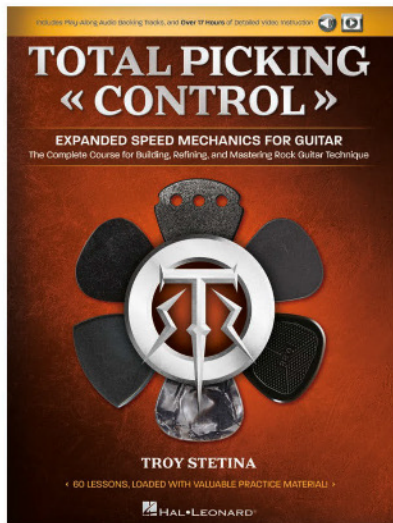
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FOLLOW THE GROOVE

BY CORY WONG

Puzzle Jumping

Effective ways to arrange regular and baritone guitar parts

"ACE OF ACES" is the debut track from the 2018 self-titled EP by the Fearless Flyers, which is a side project from the band Vulfpeck that consists of me, guitarist Mark Lettieri, bassist Joe Dart and drummer Nate Smith.

This track all started from a melodic line I had written. Jack Stratton, our producer, had compiled a handful of live performance clips of each of us in the band playing and said, "Let's work on these musical concepts as different things. We'll use Cory's line as the anchor then try to come up with four different sections of playing over one chord."

I've seen people cover the tune, and one thing most get wrong about it is they're not intentional about the sections in the way they should be. The best way to explain this is to demonstrate how Mark's and my guitar parts work together in the arrangement, which I think is interesting and informative.

The tune starts with a primary bass-line-like riff, shown here in **FIGURE 1**, which is based on the E major pentatonic scale (E, F#, G#, B, C#) with some syncopated chromaticism happening on the low E string. Compositionally, that's actually the most important part of the tune.

FIGURE 2 illustrates Mark's rhythm guitar part for the tune's first "verse." It's based on a 7th-position E9 chord shape, and the top three strings are strummed and move down from a 9th-fret barre, sounding E6, to a passing-chord at the 8th fret then to E9 at the 7th fret. The strum rhythm is 16th notes, with pitchless, fret-hand-muted percussive scratches between the accented chord hits.

I play baritone guitar on this track, tuned to A standard (low to high: A, D, G, C, E, A). But for this column I've adapted my baritone parts

FIG.1 (E)



FIG. 2 (E9)

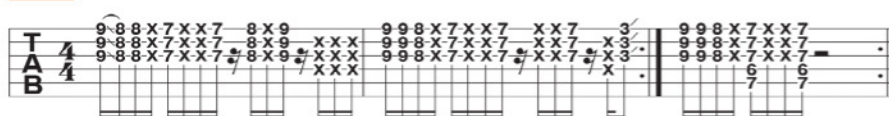


FIG. 3 (E9)

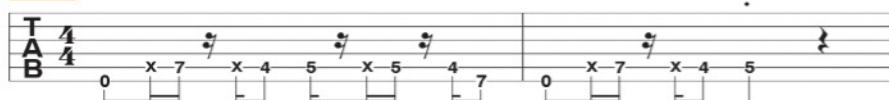


FIG. 4



FIG. 5



FIG. 6 (E9)



FIG. 7 (E)

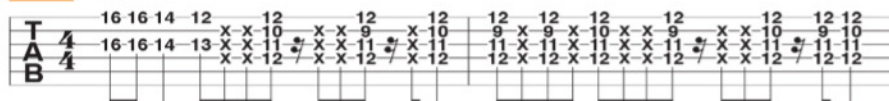
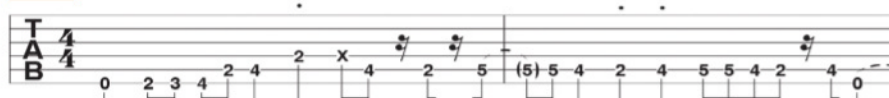


FIG. 8 (E)



for a conventional guitar in regular E standard tuning (low to high: E, A, D, G, B, E).

My approach with the baritone in this tune is like that of a second bassist, as Joe is playing a relatively simple part. As shown in **FIGURE 3**, I play a repeating line that's based on the E Mixolydian mode (E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D) and pick a lot of fret-hand-muted, percussive notes between the pitched notes.

The ways in which Mark's and my parts weave together is a key element of the arrangement. There are some spots where we play a harmonized line together; my baritone guitar part is shown in **FIGURE 4**. This line is recalled at the end of the tune.

After repeating the initial riff, we move to the second "verse," for which Mark switches to a rhythm part based around an E7#9 chord, not unlike "Shining Star" by Earth, Wind & Fire. Then, midway through the verse, we

play a different line in unison, which is based on the E minor pentatonic scale (E, G, A, B, D), shown in **FIGURE 5**.

While Mark is sitting on that E7#9 chord, I change my baritone guitar part to **FIGURE 6**, which accentuates the minor 3rd, or #9, G.

For the third verse, Mark and I switch to a “gospel-y,” downstrokes approach. As shown in **FIGURE 7**, his part consists of descending 6ths on the top two strings followed by E9sus4 and E9 chord accents.

Over that, I add, on the baritone, a “gospel quartet” line based on E Mixolydian (see **FIGURE 8**). The song then moves to a bass feature then a drum feature and ends with a reprise of the line from **FIGURE 1**.

As you can see, Mark and I have very specific parts that we devised to fit together, all while working with the other instruments to create a bigger, wider sound. **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/december2025

Funk, rock and jazz pro Cory Wong has made a massive dent in the guitar scene since emerging in 2010. Along the way, he's released a slew of high-quality albums, either solo or with the Fearless Flyers, the latest of which are 2025's *Wong Air (Live in America)* and *The Fearless Flyers V*.

TAICHI NISHIMAKI



TALES FROM NERDVILLE

BY JOE BONAMASSA

Tools of the Trade #16, Part 2

Using a Gibson ES-350 for rock rhythm guitar

THOUGH NOT OBVIOUSLY thought of in this way, the Gibson ES-350 is a great instrument to use for rock rhythm guitar playing. With its hollow body and two-pickup design, it's similar to the Gretsch 6120, which Pete Townshend used nearly exclusively for the guitar parts on the Who's seminal *Who's Next* album. Those gigantic rhythm guitars you hear on "Won't Get Fooled Again" and "Baba O'Riley" were, surprisingly, recorded by Pete on a 1959 Gretsch 6120.

I will often use the ES-350 in the same manner. The necks on these guitars are skinny and narrow, so the strings are actually a little closer together, as compared to other Gibsons, and it features "narrow-spaced" PAF pickups, wherein the screws are closer together.

These guitars may not be for everyone, but they're great "power chord" guitars, and I will often use them in the studio for that purpose. As shown in **FIGURE 1**, I put the guitar in the bridge pickup position and play through a series of single-note licks based on the E blues scale (E, G, A, B $\flat$, B, D) before moving into three- and four-note chords played in a syncopated rhythm against the open low E string.

These guitars are great for rock rhythms because they have a great sparkle to them, and the larger hollow body allows a little bit more bass to come out, as compared to an ES-335. In **FIGURE 2**, I embellish E5 power chord accents with single-note phrases, switching to sliding 6ths in bar 2, and then move between A5 and D/A chords in bars 4 and 5.

FIG. 1 E D5 E5

D5 D A G D A (E) E

FIG. 2 E5 G6 A6 (E) E5 A5 D/A

FIG. 3 E5 A5 D/A Gsus2/A

Asus4 A Esus4 E D A G D/A N.C.

If you turn up the amp and use distortion, these guitars will howl with feedback due to the hollowbody design, so you have to mute the strings as necessary.

FIGURE 3 offers a long, 13-bar example that begins with power chords in bars 1-7. The single-note riff in bar 1 gives way to syncopated chords played against the open A string in bars 2-6, as I move freely between various voicings of A5, D/A, Gsus2/A, G/A, Dsus2 and Esus4 up and down the neck, pounding out the open-A pedal tone in steady eighth notes.

Pete Townshend was a master of devising rhythm parts played with this kind of "pedal tone against shifting chords" approach.

In bars 7-9, I switch to single-note lines based on the E blues scale, and then in bars 10-13, I move into fast, solo-type phrases based on E minor pentatonic (E, G, A, B, D), and the E blues scale, with the inclusion of the 2nd/9th, F $\sharp$, in bar 10.

These guitars are so lively and have a lot of "pop" to the sound, but they also have a lot of body and low end that fattens up the single notes in a great way. These guitars are not just for blues lawyers — you can rock with one of these! They may not be thought about that much anymore, and this is why I wanted to bring your attention to the rock 'n' roll magic of an ES-350. **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/December2025

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. His new album, *Breakthrough*, will be available July 18. For more information, head to jbonamassa.com.



ONE GUITAR WOMAN

BY SUE FOLEY

Back to the Top

Essential blues turnarounds, part 2

LAST MONTH, I discussed the role of the turnaround in a 12-bar blues. To review, the turnaround occurs in the last two bars of the progression. Its function is to set up the return to the beginning of the form by providing a “wrap up” to the musical ideas of the previous 12-bar section. Every blues guitar great uses turnarounds masterfully, and many have their own signature turnaround phrases.

Turnarounds can also be used to add tension between the I (one) chord and the IV (four), or when moving from any one of the three chords in a I - IV - V (one-four-five) progression to the next. It's very useful to learn as many of the “tried and true” turnarounds that exist in blues music, but you should also feel free to invent your own.

Let's stick with the key of E, which we used for last month's examples. In the key of E, a I - IV - V progression is made up of the I chord, E, the IV, A and the V, B. **FIGURES 1** and **2** illustrate two of my favorite turnarounds in E. In **FIGURE 1**, bar 1, starting on beat 2, I play a simple melody based on E minor pentatonic (E, G, A, B, D) that ascends and then descends, setting up the change to B7. In **FIGURE 2**, the only difference is that I include a trill, a quickly repeating hammer-on/pull-off, between D and E. These licks are based around things I've heard Eddie Taylor play in his recordings with Jimmy Reed.

The coolest thing about these turnarounds is, once you learn them, you can expand on them and put your own inflections into them. In **FIGURE 3**, I take the basics of **FIGURES 1** and **2** and, in bar 1, change the placement of the trill, and in bar 2, reference the B7 chord with notes on the 5th and 1st strings only, followed by a slide down the low E string.

Single-note “lead”-type turnarounds are also very important; Freddie King and T-Bone

FIG. 1 (E7)

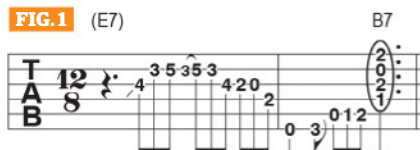


FIG. 2 (E7)

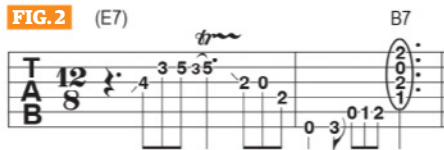


FIG. 3 (E7)



FIG. 4

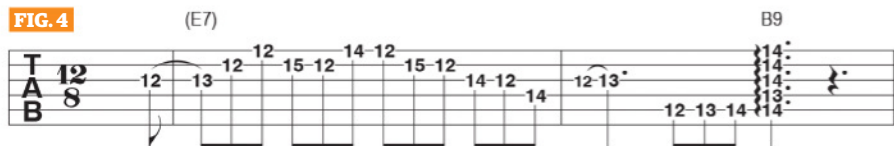


FIG. 5 (G7)



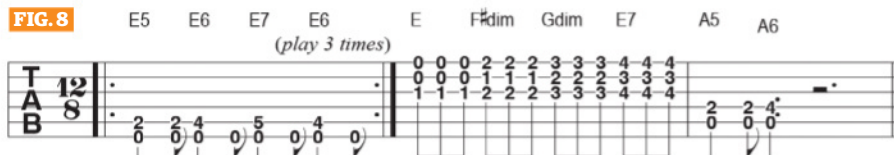
FIG. 6 (G7)



FIG. 7 (E7)



FIG. 8



Walker both developed exceptional vocabularies of single-note turnarounds that can be heard in many different tunes. **FIGURE 4** offers a single-note turnaround in E played in Freddie's style.

T-Bone loved the key of G, so it's important to work out a bunch of turnarounds in this key too. **FIGURES 5** and **6** are played in T-Bone's style and are based on G Mixolydian (G, A, B, C, D, E, F). You can also look at these licks as being based on G minor pentatonic (G, B $\flat$, C, D, F) with the inclusion of the major 3rd, B, and the 9th, A.

One of Freddie's most enduringly popular songs is “Hideaway,” and he plays fantastic turnarounds throughout it. **FIGURE 7** is

based on the “Hideaway” approach. Notice, at the beginning, the “threes on twos” phrasing, which is three quarter notes played within the space of two quarter notes.

FIGURE 8 represents the first five bars of a 12-bar blues in E. After three bars of E5 to E6 to E7, I play ascending chords on the top three strings as a means to set up the change to A7.

Listen to and learn as many turnarounds as you can, and use them as elements in your solos. The whole fun of playing blues is finding your own voice inflections.

This is the last installment of One Guitar Woman for now. Thank you for reading! You can check out suefoley.com for the latest on my tour dates and album releases. **gw**



HARDWIRED

BY JAMES JARED NICHOLS

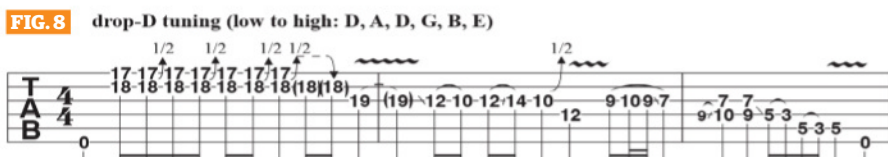
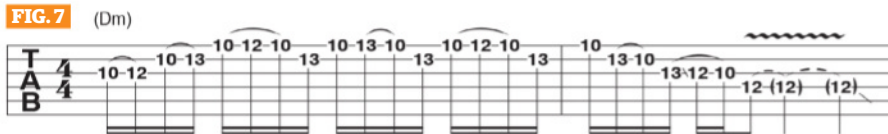
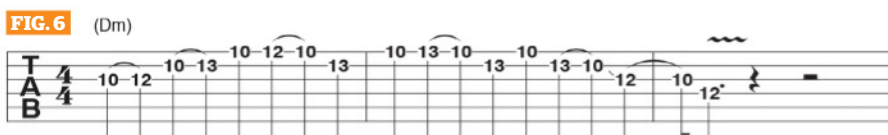
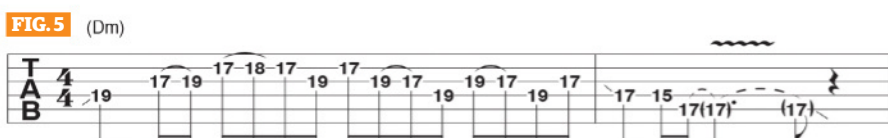
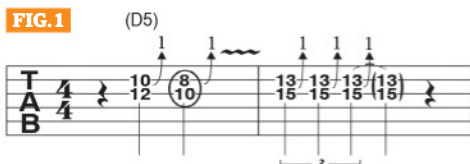
The Big Picture, Part 2

How to build a guitar solo to a powerful climax

LAST MONTH, I demonstrated my approach to soloing over the song "Hard Wired," originally released on my 2023 self-titled album. We began with the breakdown section, over which I play simple lines over the D - F - G chord progression before moving into the heavy D minor pentatonic-based (D, F, G, A, C) "theme riff," over which the main solo is played. Once that riff is established, I begin the proper solo with some Jimi Hendrix-inspired dominant 7 triads that are tremolo-picked and slid up and down the neck, *à la* "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)." In this lesson, I'd like to discuss what I play next and why.

After that, I love to utilize unison bends, which are inspired by players like Ted Nugent, Pat Travers and Johnny Winter. As shown in **FIGURE 1**, I play a series of unison bends on the B and G strings by fretting the primary note on the B string and bending up to that same pitch from a whole step below on the G string, two frets higher. The initial unison bend is performed by fretting an A note on the B string's 10th fret while bending a G note up a whole step to A at the 12th fret on the G string. I then move the unison bend shape down a whole step – two frets – to sound a G unison bend, followed by a move up two and a half steps to a C unison bend at the 13th and 15th frets. Be sure to add some hearty vibrato on the G string to any unison bend that's allowed to sustain.

After this series of unison bends, I like to move into sequences, which are phrases that ascend or descend in a specific manner, that I will move to different areas of the fretboard. As shown in **FIGURES 2 and 3**, over a Dm chord, I like to move up and down the D minor pentatonic scale (D, F, G, A, C) with the



inclusion of the 2nd, or 9th, E, articulating the line with an abundance of hammer ons, pull offs and finger slides.

The solo section is played at a slow tempo with a heavy feel, so it sounds great to ramp up the intensity by playing these sequences in a rhythm of 16th notes, as shown in **FIGURE 4**. With a fast phrase like this, a little bit of palm muting is very helpful in cleaning up the articulation and making each note sound more distinct. I'll often jump up an octave to play the same phrase, as shown in **FIGURE 5**.

I think of these phrases as being "efficient" because the contour of the melody is so specific, which is something I learned from listening to Johnny Winter. In **FIGURE 6**,

I play a similar phrase, also based on D minor pentatonic with the inclusion of the 2nd/9th, E, but played here in a slower rhythm of eighth notes and in 10th position. In **FIGURE 7**, I double it up by playing the phrase in 16th notes.

Phrases like these, which are so specific melodically, work very well against more aggressive, off-the-cuff playing. It's like a game of "cat and mouse," where each approach compliments the other very well.

Any "country-style" sounds will work great here, too. Since we're tuned to drop D, I'll strike the open low D string and play two-note figures, 3rds apart, adding subtle bends, as in **FIGURE 8**. Licks like these add a raunchy flavor with a great bluesy undertone. **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/december2025

Jared James Nichols is a true blues-rock titan with two signature Epiphone Les Paul models (and a Blackstar amp) to his name. His latest album is 2023's *Jared James Nichols*. For more information, head to jaredjamesnichols.com.



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B5DMAG

VOLBEAT

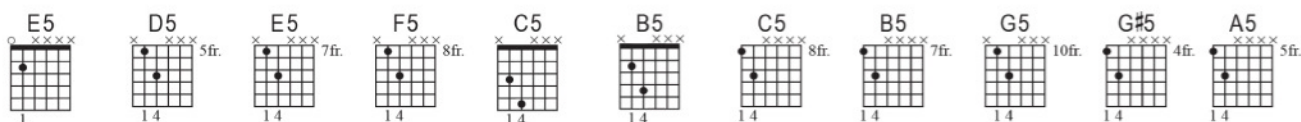
"By a Monster's Hand"

AS HEARD ON **GOD OF ANGELS TRUST**WORDS AND MUSIC BY **MICHAEL POULSEN** • TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**

All guitars are tuned down one whole step (low to high: D, G, C, F, A, D).

Bass tuning (low to high: D, G, C, F).

All music sounds in the key of D minor; one whole step lower than written.

**A** Intro (0:00)

Moderately Fast ♩ = 122

N.C.(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5)

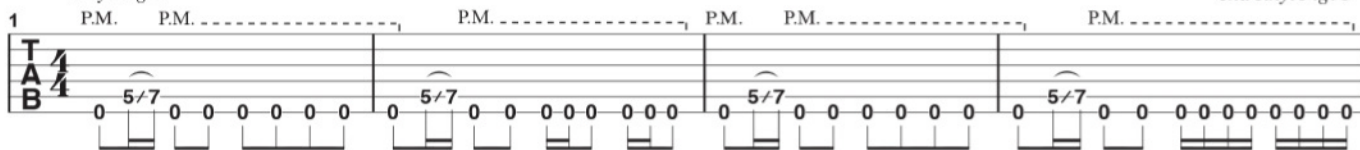
(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5)

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

Rhy. Fig. 1

end Rhy. Fig. 1

GTR.1

(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5)

GTR.1

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

GTR.2

Bass (w/dist.)



(D5)(E5)

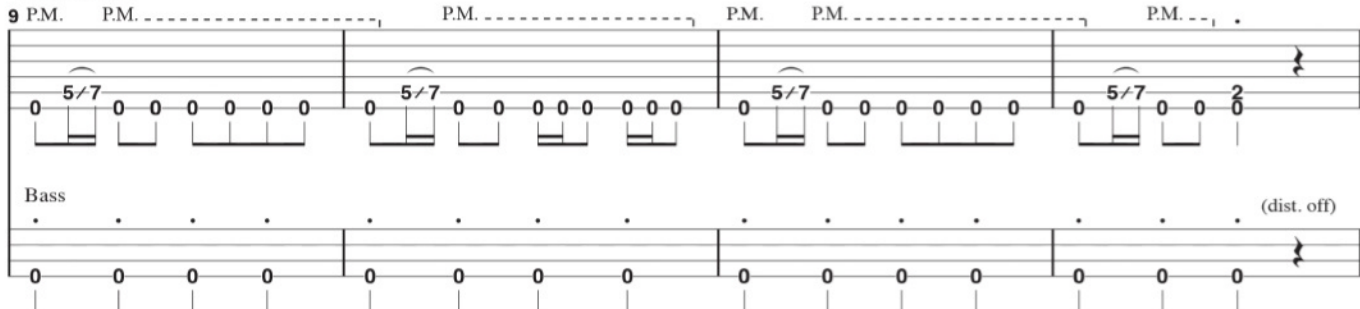
(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5)

(D5)(E5) E5

GTR.1

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.2

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B (0:24)

(D5)(E5) (D5)(E5) (D5)(E5)

GTR.1

GTR.2

13 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

Bass Fig. 1 end Bass Fig. 1

C 1st and 2nd Verses (0:39, 1:19)

1. Counting the masses beyond him that's been cut by the blade
2. The stench of rotting flesh has now been caught by a storm

(D5)(E5) (D5)(E5) (D5)(E5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

17 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 13)

Decapitation inflicted by a monster's hand
Moving his cellar trophies to another home

(D5)(E5) (D5)(E5) (D5)(E5)

D5 E5 F5

Gtr. 3

GTR.1

GTR.2

21 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

Bass

Gtrs. 1 and 2

D Chorus (0:55, 1:34, 3:08)

And in the night he's dancing with the dead Wearing the body parts on a string

F5 C5 D5 E5 F5 C5 D5 E5 F5

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

GTR.3

25

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass

41

F5 E5 F5 E5 G5 F5 E5

Gtr. 3 (pick scrape)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass

Bass Fig. 3

end Bass Fig. 3

F Guitar Solo (2:10)

45

G#5 A5 G#5 A5 G#5 A5 G#5 A5 G#5 A5

Gtr. 3

Rhy. Fig. 2

end Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass Fig. 4

end Bass Fig. 4

49

F5 E5 F5 E5 G5 F5 E5

Gtr. 3 (played on repeat only)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 (see bar 41)

G (2:25)

A5 G#5

53

GTR. 3

Gtr. 3

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR. 2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 (see bar 45)

A5 G

A5

G#5

A5

55 Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

Gtr. 3

GTR.3

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

N.C. (E5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

57 P.M.

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 37)

F5 E5 F5 E5

G5 F5

E5

59

P.M.

P.M.

P.M.

P.M.

GTR.1

GTR. 2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 (see bar 41)

H (2:43)

GTR.1 G#5 A5 G#5 A5 G#5

GTR.2 Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 45)

GTR.3 63

Gtr. 3

17-19-21 17-20-21-20-17 21-19-17-19-21-21 17-20 21-20-17-16 20-17-16-14-16 17-16-14-12 16-14-12 16-13

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 (see bar 45)

5

GTR.3 65

Gtr. 3 slight P.H.

14 (14) (14) 9 13 14 16 (16) 17 14 16 (16) 14

GTR.4

Gtr. 4

9 10 (10) 13 11 13 (13) 11

A5 G#5 A5 G#5 A5 G#5 A5

Original tempo ♩ = 122

E5

GTR.3 67

Gtr. 3

17 (17) (17) (17)

GTR.4

Gtr. 4

14 (14) (14) (14)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

2 2

Bass

0 0

TRANSCRIPTIONS

I 3rd Verse (2:52)

3. Counting the masses beyond him that's been cut by the blade

E5 N.C. (D5) (E5) (D5) (E5) (D5) (E5)

69

GTR. 3

GTR. 4

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Go back to **D** Chorus (bar 25)

Decapitation inflicted by a monster's hand

N.C. (D5) (E5) (D5) (E5) (D5) (E5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 3 F5 Gtr. 3

73

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

GTR. 3

Bass

J Outro (3:28)

E5

77

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

ALICE IN CHAINS

"Dam That River"

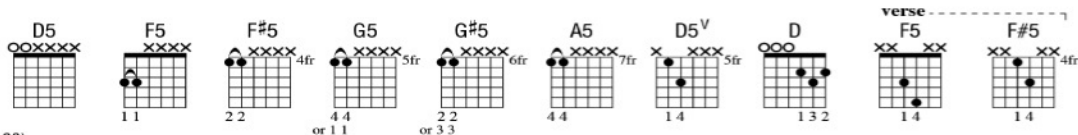
AS HEARD ON **DIRT**

WORDS AND MUSIC BY **JERRY CANTRELL** • TRANSCRIBED BY **JIMMY BROWN**

All guitars are in drop-D tuning down one half step (low to high: D $\flat$ A $\flat$ D $\flat$ G $\flat$ B $\flat$ E $\flat$).

Bass tuning (low to high): D $\flat$ A $\flat$ D $\flat$ G $\flat$.

All notes and chords sound one half step lower than written (key of D $\flat$ minor).



A Intro (0:00)

Moderately $\text{♩} = 126$

F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5

Gtrs. 1 and 2 (w/dist.)

GTR.1

GTR.2



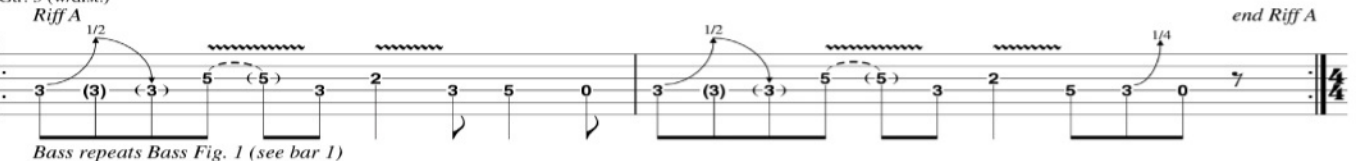
GTR.1

GTR.2

F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5

Gtrs. 1 and 2 repeat Rhy. Fig. 1 twice w/palm muting (see bar 1)
Gtr. 3 (w/dist.)

GTR.3



Bass repeats Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

B Verse (0:23, 1:09, 2:21)

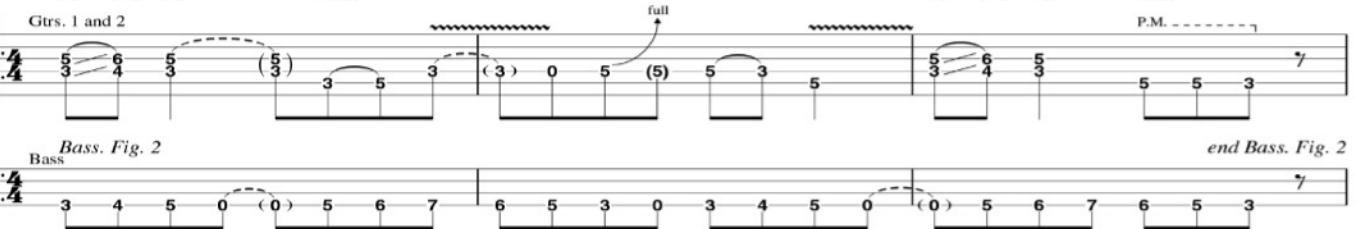
1. I
2. I
3. I

broke pushed you in the canyon
burned and the place you stumbled
around you

F5 F#5 F5 N.C. F5 F#5 F5 N.C.

GTR.1

GTR.2



Bass Fig. 2

end Bass Fig. 2

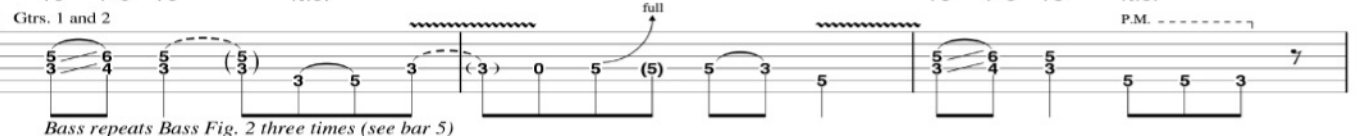
1. I
2. I
3. I

drowned kicked you in the lake
hit you you in in the lake
a rake

F5 F#5 F5 N.C. F5 F#5 F5 N.C.

GTR.1

GTR.2



Bass repeats Bass Fig. 2 three times (see bar 5)

TRANSCRIPTIONS

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

11 F5 F#5 F5 N.C. You You You a snake stare piss that at upon I me would so my trample hollow candle F5 F#5 F5 N.C. P.M.

14 F5 F#5 F5 N.C. Only Got So to thing keep proving I'd that not killin' you're embrace a pace fake F5 F#5 F5 N.C. P.M.

C Chorus (0:46, 1:33, 2:44)

17 Oh you couldn't dam that river F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 (Gtr. 1 w/light P.M.)

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 four times (see bar 1)

19 And maybe I don't give a damn anyway F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

21 So you couldn't dam that river F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 (both gtrs. w/light P.M.)

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

23 And it washed me so far away F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

(3rd time) skip ahead to **E**

(1st time) go back to **B** Verse

D Guitar Solo (1:57)

25 A5 A#5 G5 F5 D5 A#5 F5 A#5 F5 D5 D A5 A#5 G5 F5 Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

Rhy. Fig. 1 P.M. end Rhy. Fig. 1

Gtrs. 1 and 2

Bass Bass Fig. 3 end Bass Fig. 3

GTR. 2

Gtrs. 1 and 2 repeat Rhy. Fig. 1

GTR.3

29 *Gtrs. 1 and 2 repeat Rhy. Fig. 1*

Bass repeats Bass Fig. 3

D5 A^b5 F5 A^b5 F5 D5 D

grad. bend 1/2 full

A5 A^b5 G5 F5

Gtr. 3

GTR.3

32

Gr. 3

D5 A^b5 F5 A^b5 F5 D5 D

12 14 12 10 10 8 10 8 10 12 12 14 12 10 7 5 (7) 5

4 5 7 7 5 7 7 5 4 6 4

4 3 5 5 3 5 5 3 2

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR. 2

[illegible]

Bass

Bass

The first system of the bass staff for 'The Sound of Silence' consists of 16 measures. The first 12 measures are in 4/4 time and feature a steady eighth-note bass line: 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3. The 13th measure is a double bar line. The 14th measure is a 4/4 time signature. The 15th measure contains the notes 3, 6, 3, 6. The 16th measure contains the notes 3, 0, 0, 0 and is followed by a double bar line. The second system begins with a 6/4 time signature.

go back to **B** Verse

GTR.3[illegible]

GTR.1

GTR. 2

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Wind" by The Beatles. It consists of two staves: a guitar staff (top) and a bass staff (bottom). Both staves are in 6/4 time and have a key signature of one sharp (F#). The guitar staff includes a "P.M." marking and a "4/4" time signature change. The bass staff includes a "4/4" time signature change.

E (2:56)

So you couldn't dam that river

F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5

Gtr. 3 plays Riff A twice (see bar 3)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

C



36

TR. 1

TR. 2

3 4 5 0 (0) 5 6 7 6 5 3 0 3 4 5 0 (0) 5 6 7 6 5 3

And it washed me so far away

F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5 D5 F5 F#5 G5 D5 G5 G#5 A5 G#5 G5 F5

38

GTR.1

GTR. 2

The second system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' consists of two staves. The upper staff is a treble clef and the lower staff is a bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody in the upper staff begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with a quarter note F#3, a quarter note G3, and a quarter note A3. The system concludes with a double bar line.

EAGLES

"Life in the Fast Lane"

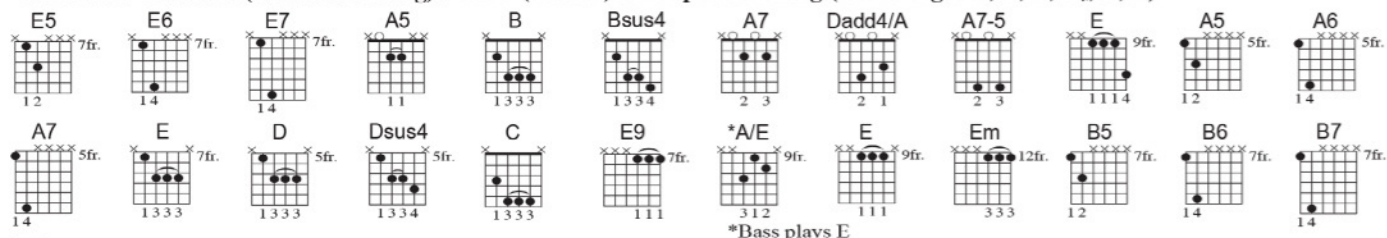
AS HEARD ON HOTEL CALIFORNIA

WORDS AND MUSIC BY DON HENLEY, GLENN FREY AND JOE WALSH

TRANSCRIBED BY ANDY ALEDORT

Chords for Gtrs. 1-4 (standard tuning). Gtr. 5 (w/slide) is in open E tuning (low to high: E, B, E, G $\sharp$, B, E).

Chords for Gtrs. 1-4 (standard tuning). Gtr. 5 (w/slide) is in open E tuning (low to high: E, B, E, G $\sharp$, B, E).


A Intro (0:00)

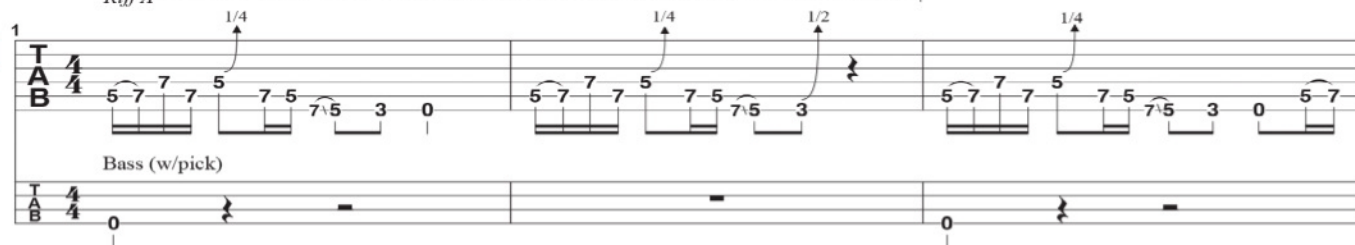
Moderate Rock ♩ = 112

N.C.(E)

Gtr.1 (elec.w/dist.)

Riff A

GTR.1

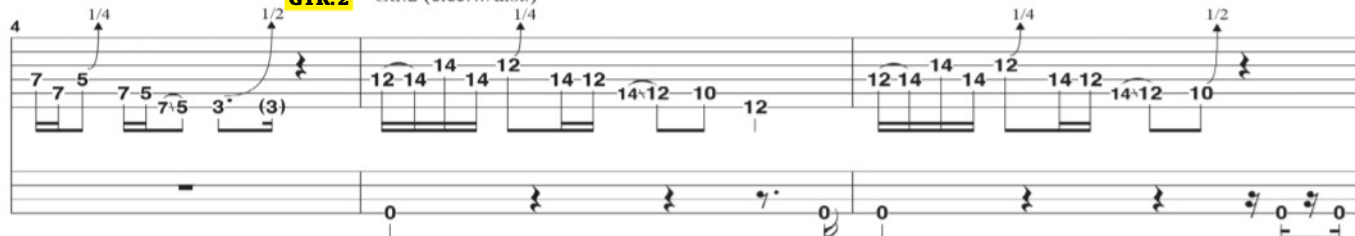


GTR.1 Gtr. 1 plays Riff A (see bar 1)

Riff B

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

GTR.1



(0:18)

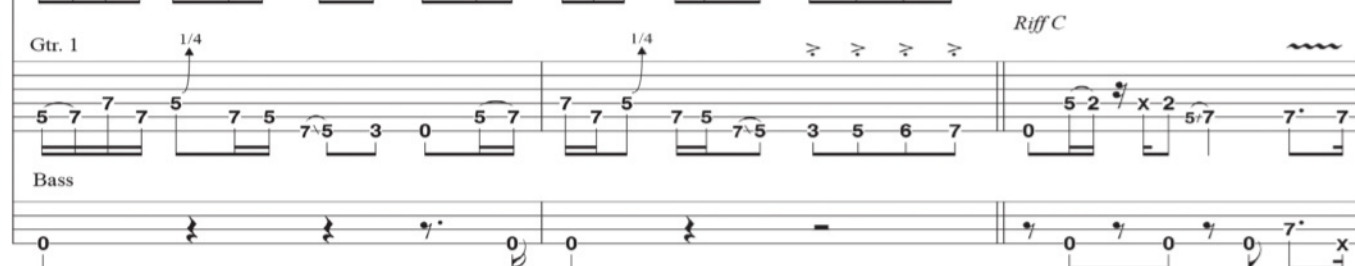
(E)

end Riff B

GTR.2



GTR.1



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GTR.2 Gtr. 2 plays Fill 1 (see below)

He was a
end Riff C

GTR.1

B 1st Verse (0:27)

hard-headed man He was brutally handsome And she was terminally pretty
E9 A/E E E9 Em E9 A/E E

Rhy. Fig. 1

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

GTR.3

Gtr. 1

GTR.1

Bass Fig. 1
Bass

E9 She held him up and he held her for ransom in the heart
A/E E E9 Em

GTR.2 Gtr. 2 plays Fill 2 (see below)

GTR.3

GTR.1

(repeat previous bar)

Fill 1 (0:20)

N.C.(E)

GTR.2 Gtr. 2 (w/dist.)

Fill 2 (0:33)

N.C.(E)

GTR.2 Gtr. 2 (w/dist.)

TRANSCRIPTIONS

of the cold cold city He had a nasty reputation as a

E9 Gtr. 3 A/E E E9 end Rhy. Fig. 1

GTR. 3

E5 Gtr. 1 A5 Rhy. Fig. 2 A6 A5

Bass

cruel dude They said he was ruthless They said he was crude They had

(E) Riff D

GTR. 3

A7 A6 A5 end Rhy. Fig. 2 E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E7 E6 E5

GTR. 1

one thing in common they were good in bed She'd say faster faster The lights are turning red

B Gtrs. 1 and 3 A7

GTR. 1

GTR. 3

Bass end Bass Fig. 1

C 1st Chorus (1:02)

(Life in the fast lane) Will surely make you lose your mind (Life in the fast lane)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass

Uh

Are you with me so far?

Gtr. 1 plays Riff C (see bar 9)

Gtr. 2

32 $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$

GTR.1 **GTR.2**

D 2nd Verse (1:19)

Eager for action and hot for the game

The coming attraction

The drop of a name

They knew

(E)

Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 13)

Gtr. 2

GTR.1

Gtr. 1

GTR.2

Gtr. 2

37 $\frac{1}{2}$

GTR.2

Bass plays first 12 bars of Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 13)

all the right people They took all the right pills

They threw outrageous

parties

They paid heavenly bills

There were

Gtr. 1

41

GTR.2

lines on the mirror

Lines on her face She pretended

not to notice

she was caught up in the race

A

(E)

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 21)

Gtr. 3

45

GTR.1 **GTR.3**

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Out every evening

until it was light

He was too tired

to make it

She was too tired

to fight about it

B

A7

Dadd4/A

A7-5

Gtrs. 1 and 3

49

GTR.1 **GTR.3**

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Bass

E 2nd Chorus (1:54)

(Life in the fast lane)

Gtrs. 1 and 3

53

Bass Fig. 2
Bass

Everything all the time

GTR. 2 *Gtr. 2 plays Riff B (see bar 5)*

[illegible]

(Life in the fast lane) Uh huh

Gtr.5 (elec. w/dist., in open E tuning)

Grtr.5 (elec. w/dist., in open E tuning)

59

w/slide

B

Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.)

Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.)

The notation for Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.) consists of a single staff with a treble clef. It begins with a double bar line, followed by a measure with a whole note chord of G4 and D5. This is followed by another double bar line, then a measure with a whole note chord of G4 and D5. The piece concludes with a final double bar line.

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 1

1/4

1/4

B5 B6 B7 B6

5 7 7 7 5 7 5 7 5 3 0 5 7 7 7 5 7 5 7 5 3 5 6 7 9 9 11 11 12 12 11

Gtrs. 2 and 3

Bass

end Bass Fig. 2

[illegible]

"LIFE IN THE FAST LANE"

GTR.5**GTR.5**

listen baby You can hear the engine ring We've been up and down this highway Haven't seen a goddamn thing He said

Gtr. 2 1/2 GTR.1 Gtr. 1

81

GTR.2

call the doctor I think I'm gonna crash And doctor say he's coming but you gotta pay him cash They went

A7 Dadd4/A E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E7 E6 E5

GTR.3 Gtr. 3 plays Riff D (see bar 23)

85

GTR.1

Gtr. 1

GTR.2

P.M. -----

rushin' down that freeway Messed around and got lost They didn't care They were just dying to get off And it was

B A7 Dadd4/A A7-5

Gtrs. 1 and 3

89

GTR.1

GTR.3

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

1/2

I 3rd Chorus (3:21)

(Life in the fast lane) Will surely make you lose your mind (Life in the fast lane)

(Life in the fast lane) Everything all the time (Life in the fast lane)

N.C.(E)

GTR.2 Gtr. 2 plays first three bars of Riff B (see bar 5)

Gtrs. 1 and 3

93

GTR.1

GTR.3

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

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 53)

TRANSCRIPTIONS

J Breakdown (3:39)

Uh huh

Life in the fast lane

E5
Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist. and phaser)

Gtr. 2

GTR. 4

Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist. and phaser)

GTR. 2

GTR.1

GTR.3

Gtrs. 1 and 3

Bass

Bass Fig. 3

D5

Gtr. 4

C5

Life in the

GTR. 4

GTR.1

GTR.3

Gtrs. 1 and 3

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 three times (see bar 97)

fast lane

A5

GTR. 4

GTR.1

GTR.3

K **Outro** (3:56)

N.C.(E)

GTR.1 *Gtr. 1 plays Riff C until fade (see bar 9)*

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Bass

Bass Fig. 4 -

"LIFE IN THE FAST LANE"

(E)
Gtr. 2

GTR. 2

109

Bass repeats Bass Fig. 4 until fade (see bar 108)

GTR. 2

113

Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

116

Gtr. 2

GTR. 2

Gtr. 4

GTR. 2

(4:30)
Begin fade

119

GTR. 2

122

GTR. 2

125

Fade out



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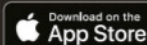


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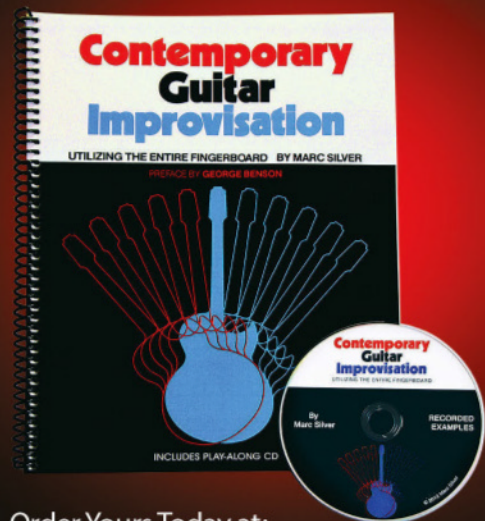
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POWER TOOLS**Ibanez RG550**

1987–1994, 1997–2002, 2013, 2017–PRESENT

CATEGORY: SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR

BY CHRIS GILL

DURING THE MID-EIGHTIES, Ibanez became stuck in a rut. Although the company's guitars sold pretty well, they were rapidly losing market share to up-and-coming competitors like Charvel/Jackson, Hamer, B.C. Rich and particularly Kramer. Ibanez's super Strat (Blazer and Roadstar) and pointy DT, Rocket Roll and X series models failed to generate more than moderate excitement, even with endorsements from heavy hitters like Phil Collen, Allan Holdsworth and Steve Lukather. Some of the problems were external, like a weakening dollar that made Japanese import guitars less of a bargain, but Ibanez also failed to keep up with guitar design trends that were changing rapidly.

Hoping to avert disaster, Ibanez's Japanese leadership looked to their U.S.-based distributors to develop new model designs, engaging the West Coast subsidiary Chesbro in a friendly competition against their East Coast counterpart Hoshino USA. Led by Mark Wittenberg, Chesbro devised the Radius guitar, while Hoshino USA (which included Rich Lasner, Bill Cummiskey and Bill Reim) offered the Maxxas, Power and Saber models.

At the same time, the Americans aggressively pursued new up-and-coming talent, mostly culled from Mike Varney's Spotlight column in *Guitar Player*. Their biggest success was landing Steve Vai's endorsement and collaborating with him on his signature JEM model. The completely revamped Ibanez electric guitar lineup made its debut at the 1987 Winter NAMM Convention in Anaheim and instantly generated a huge buzz of excitement in the guitar community.

The most successful model to come from this new era was the RG550. In essence, it was a more affordable variation of Vai's JEM model with more conventional features that included a super-slim Wizard neck with maple or rosewood fretboard, flat 16.9-inch radius and 24 jumbo frets, lightweight basswood body and humbucker/single/humbucker pickup configuration. Controls were stripped down to a master volume, master tone and 5-position blade pickup switch that provided a useful variety of humbucking and single-coil tones. The V1 (neck) and V2 (bridge) high-output humbuckers were designed in the U.S. and featured Alnico 5 magnets.

Perhaps the most important feature was the newly designed Edge double-locking tremolo. Ibanez's earlier tremolo systems were considered inferior to the Floyd Rose and Kahler units used by their competitors, but the Edge tremolo quickly gained acclaim as one of the best available alternatives to the Floyd Rose. With hot-rod features like its Edge tremolo, high-output pickups and aggressive styling highlighted by deep cutaways



An Ibanez RG550 in Desert Sun Yellow, photographed in 2018. It's basically a more affordable variation of Steve Vai's signature JEM

"The completely revamped 1987 Ibanez lineup instantly generated a huge buzz in the guitar community"

with sharp horns and updated six-on-a-side headstock design based on that of the Iceman model, the RG550 boldly established Ibanez as a new contender in the highly competitive super Strat market.

Although the RG550 initially only lasted for a seven-year run into the mid-Nineties, it has been reissued frequently over the years and morphed into a number of variations. The spirit of the late-Eighties original version lives on with the recent RG550 Genesis Collection, but players can also choose from a variety of upscale RG Axe Design Lab, RG j.custom and RG Prestige models.

Notable guitarists who have played RG550 models include Nili Brosh, Larry Mitchell, Blues Saraceno and Dave Urich. Paul Gilbert was one the first major shredders to play an RG550, and several of his signature Ibanez PGM models over the years were based on the RG550. **GW**

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