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
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Vicki Peterson [left]  
and Susanna Hoffs  
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# Woodshed

VOL. 47 | NO. 3 | MARCH 2026

## More stark reminders that we're all just passing through

**WE'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING** a lot of losses — as in deaths — lately. Besides the more obvious ones like Ace Frehley, we've lost — just since our last issue — Steve Cropper, Phil Upchurch and Joe Ely, among others. A bit closer home, there's the sad loss of Joe Lalaina, a writer who was an important part of *Guitar World* in its early days. Joe, who had wound down his *GW* involvement by the time I showed up in 2011, was passionate about his heroes — including Yngwie Malmsteen, Ritchie Blackmore and Robin Trower — while remaining objective as a journalist. Longtime *GW* writer (and former editor) Joe Bosso, who knew Joe Lalaina much better than I did, described Joe L. as one of the most genuine people he's ever met, and I certainly can't argue with that. He'll definitely be missed.

One (incredibly tragic and senseless) loss I haven't even mentioned yet is Rob Reiner, the man who brought us *This Is Spinal Tap* in 1984. Who among us hasn't quoted from that movie at least 11 billion times during the past 42 years? It was one of the greatest films of the Eighties and a movie that every musician could (and still can) bond over — especially guitarists. And I know it's only a tiny bit of consolation, but I'm so happy Reiner was able to give us *Spinal Tap II: The End Continues* last year; it gave us a chance to see Marty DiBergi (Reiner's eternally bemused character) one last time.

Anyway, I seem to have conversationally painted myself into a mid-Eighties corner, so I might as well mention this issue's main attraction, a guide to some of the greatest and most interesting guitar albums of 1986. I say "some of" because, obviously, there are so many other albums we could've — and still could — cover. The year is young! That said, I hope you enjoy the sampling of albums we've chosen for this issue. If nothing else, whether you love or them or hate them (or have never even heard of them), they are mementos and reminders of an already-distant time that is slipping further and further away with every passing second.

**DAMIAN FANELLI**

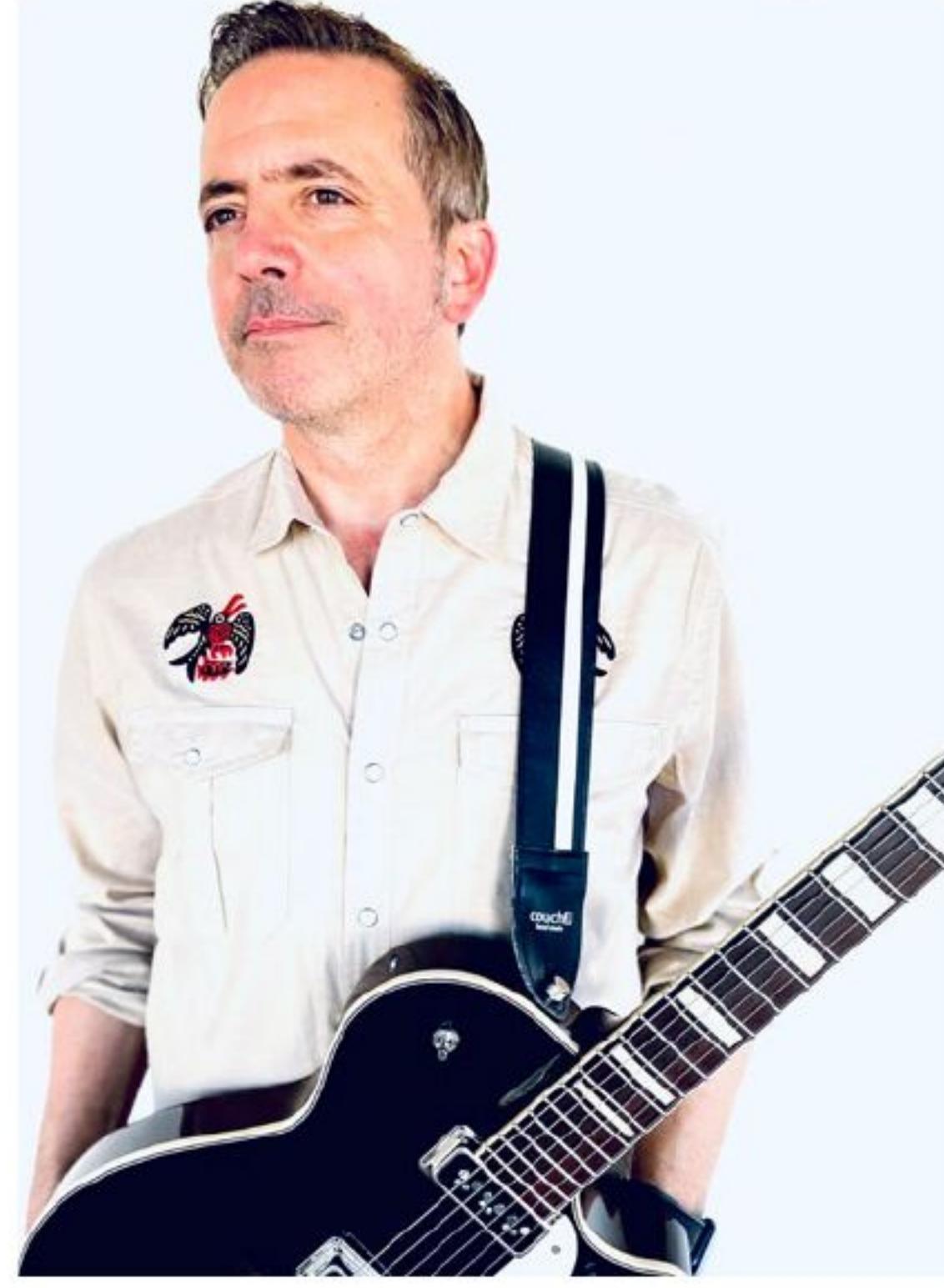
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## READER ART OF THE MONTH

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](mailto:GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com) with a .jpg or screenshot of the image. And (obviously...), please remember to include your name!



**Jimi Hendrix**

BY JACKIE MARCUS



**Slash**

BY SAMMY SEGRIST

## DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



**Ron Reyes**

AGE: 58

HOMETOWN: Rancho Cucamonga, CA

GUITARS: Warmoth "Lakeshow" Strat, Suhr Custom T, 1984 Fender Stratocaster Elite, Ibanez acoustic, Squier Strat  
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Originals, Nuno Bettencourt, Jimi Hendrix, Paul Gilbert, Richie Kotzen, NewJeans  
GEAR I WANT MOST: Fender Violinmaster, Suhr Custom S, James Tyler guitar



**Jeff Michaels**

AGE: 45

LOCATION: Lake County, California

GUITARS: My beautiful Dean Razorback 10K is all I need!

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Originals by my band Live the Day — "Come Undone," "Impending Doom" and "Compromised"

GEAR I WANT MOST: I have everything I need to rock, though I suppose a tuner might come in handy someday.



**Christian Gratz**

AGE: 54

HOMETOWN: Olyphant, PA

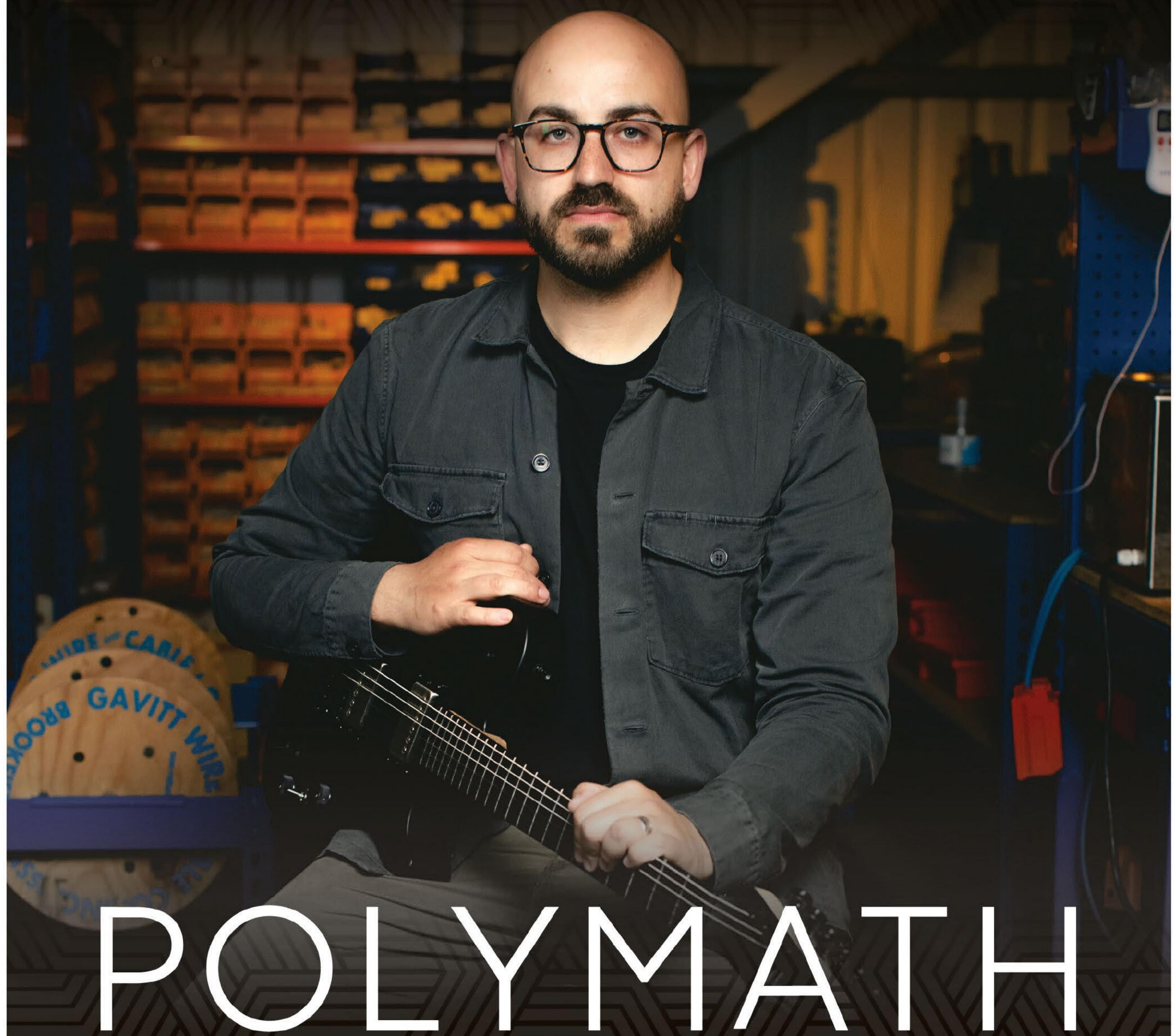
GUITARS: Assorted Fender Stratocasters, Rickenbacker 620, Fender Starcaster, Ibanez GB10

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Steve Kipner "The Ending," the Tony William Lifetime "Emergency" and various jazz/rock tunes  
GEAR I WANT MOST: Fender Telecaster Custom

### ARE YOU A DEFENDER OF THE FAITH?

Send a photo, along with your answers to the questions above, to [GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com](mailto:GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com). And pray!

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# TUNE-UPS

# NEWS + NOTES

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"I had to learn Van Halen's 'I'm the One,'" Jacob Deraps says. "I had to learn how to get the sound"

## Hit the Ground Runnin'

Jacob Deraps' passion for Eddie Van Halen has taken his YouTube channel halfway to 100,000 subs. Might as well jump... to hit Subscribe

BY ADAM KOVAC

**► IT'S BEEN MORE** than five years since Eddie Van Halen's death left a void in the guitar universe. Like Jimi Hendrix before him, EVH's influence will continue to be felt for decades, possibly centuries after the man himself left this world. For evidence, just head to YouTube and witness the uncountable number of guitarists emulating Eddie. While many are able to hit the notes, only a few can nail the nuances of his feel, not to mention his tone. At the top of that list, from St-Georges de Beuce, Quebec, is one Jacob Deraps.

For more than a decade, Deraps has been making content, much of it based around the music of Van Halen. Alongside the usual playthroughs of hits like "Runnin' with the Devil," there are reviews of various pieces of EVH branded gear and instructions on how to get Eddie's famed Brown Sound. The son of musicians — his mom studied jazz saxophone and classical piano, while his dad was a weekend warrior in a few bands — he was already playing guitar when he first heard "I'm the One" off Van Halen's debut album. The expo-

sure to Eddie's feel and tone at age 12 would prove to be a defining moment in his life.

"I had to learn that song," he says. "I had to learn how to get the sound. I was just hooked. There was so much groove and feel, and it sounds like the amp is about to blow up. I love that aggressiveness."

His love for Van Halen soon blossomed into a full-on obsession. He spent hours analyzing the playing on those albums and working out all the nooks and crannies on his own guitar. He'd spend all day, every day, playing the songs back to back. Much of that journey was documented on his YouTube channel, which he started when he was 13.

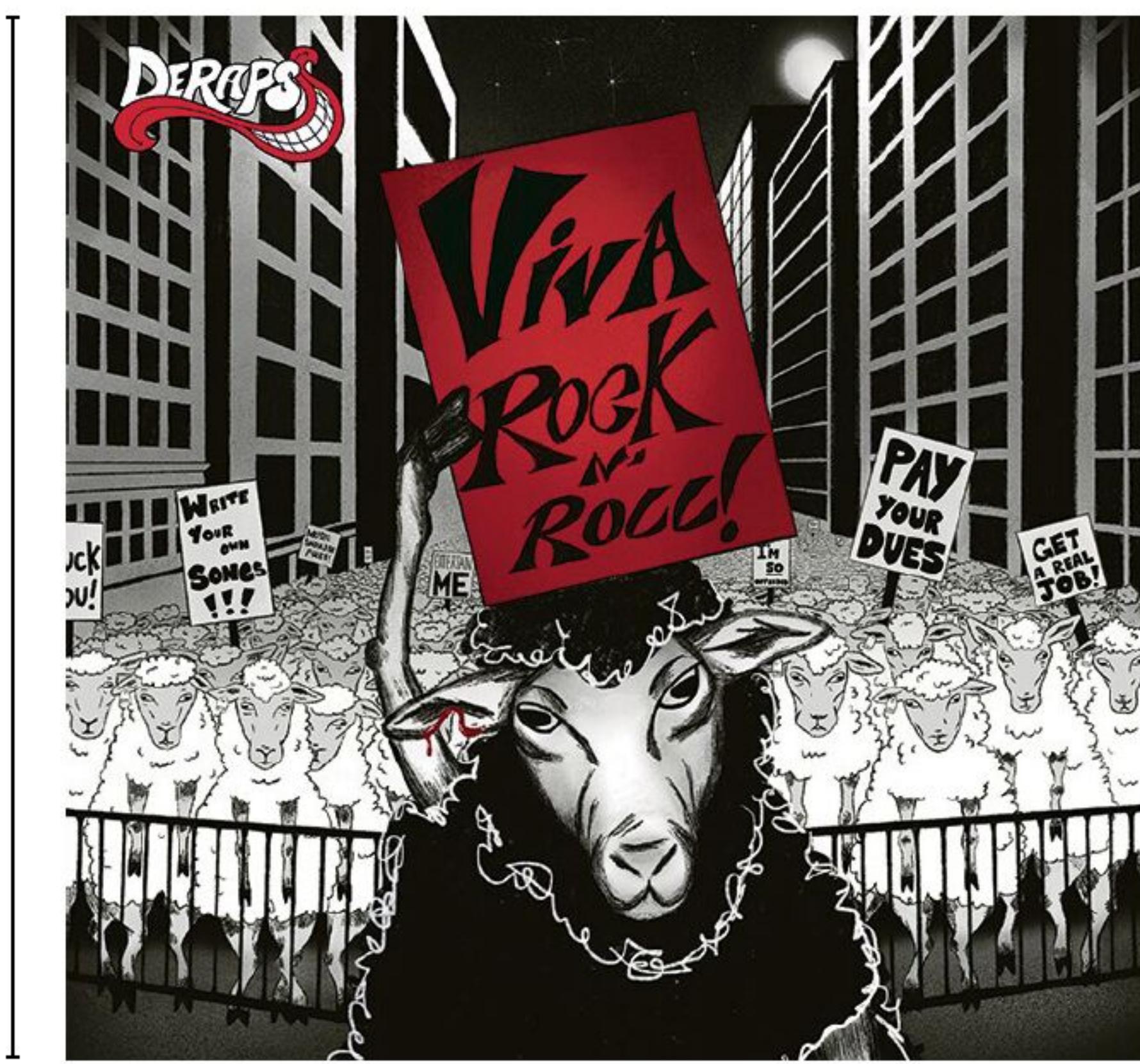
"I was kind of a tool to get my playing out there, to just show the world my passion for the instrument and what I could do," he says. "It wasn't more than that. It was just kind of giving a performance out to the world." □



Deraps in action with his Kramer The 84

In the 14 years since, the YouTube channel has taken off, garnering Deraps almost 50,000 subscribers and almost 13 million views. While those aren't Mr. Beast numbers, it's enabled the young Canadian to make connections, including with the EVH brand. As viewers can attest, Deraps has accumulated quite the collection of Eddie-related gear, including at last count, six replicas of some of his most iconic guitars, including three Wolfgang, a Frankenstrat, a Bumblebee and the oft-forgotten Circles guitar.

"It's really a dream come true to work with EVH," he says. "It couldn't get any better for me. It's surreal. It's amazing. The Wolfgang



**"I think [rock music] is just kind of forgotten. It's not about not liking it – I think young people are just not exposed to it anymore"**

are a little bit more modern and they have certain little things, like, where the neck meets the body is a little bit rounded, and it's more comfortable."

Along with the swag, YouTube has allowed him to make music his full-time job. Deraps is an example of the unorthodox ways to make it in music in the days where a record deal is no longer the be all and end all. Revenue from YouTube, along with a publishing deal and recording deal, combine with session work to make his life making art possible.

"I love doing videos, and I think it's a great way to make money and build a brand. So I'm trying to focus on that. I'm also doing gigs here and there; I play for other people, so there are many revenue sources."

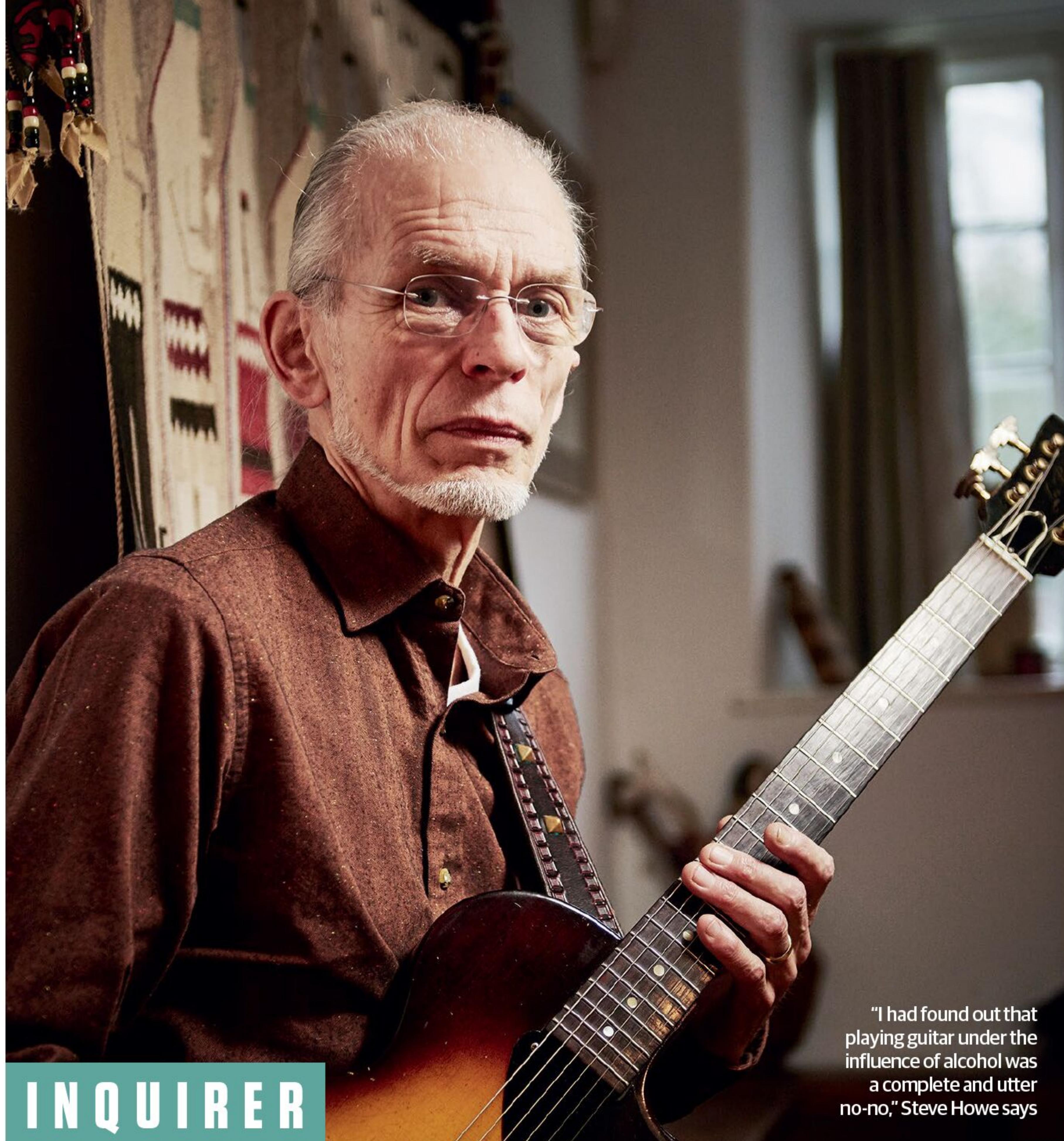
One of those sources is his own eponymous band, and it's here, too, that Deraps' Van Halen love shines through. Not necessarily in the playing, as the influence of Deraps' other hard rock heroes shines through just as much, but in the songs themselves. There's no denying Eddie's influence on the evolution of guitar, but some players took the wrong lessons, choosing to focus solely on technical mastery and ignoring what made VH so timeless. The band had hooks for days, and for every acrobatic solo, there was a riff so catchy it would get just as many butts shaking as it would fingers practicing.

Having studied the music of Van Halen and their contemporaries closely, Deraps wisely opted to fold that catchiness into his own eponymous project. Just as the core of Van Halen was Eddie and his drumming brother Alex (no disrespect to Michael Anthony intended), the band Deraps is centered around the guitarist and Australian drummer Josh Gallagher. The pair recorded their latest album, *Viva Rock N' Roll*, on their own, including a big helping of vocal harmonies (one other lesson Deraps may have gleaned from his idols: frontmen may be more trouble than they're worth). Not that the album is an attempt to ape Van Halen. It's just that at this point, their music is part of his DNA.

"It's not really something I think about prior to writing," he says. "I pick up a guitar and if the riff is good, and it sounds like certain things, that's what's going to be on the record. But it's not forced or anything."

Ever the hustler, he also sees a niche in the current music environment. There's simply not a lot of catchy rock 'n' roll in the mainstream. He's betting that there's a chunk of younger YouTube watchers who are simply ignorant and will fall in love with rock, the same way he did when he was 12.

"I think it's just kind of forgotten. People don't really know about that stuff anymore. It's not about not liking it – I think young people are just not exposed to it." **GW**



INQUIRER

# Steve Howe

The Yes, Asia and GTR legend explains why drinking and playing guitar are "stupidly incompatible"

BY JOE MATERA

**Q** **What was your first guitar?**

I wanted a guitar when I was 10, but it took until I was 12 before my parents gave in. We went to a shop in King's Cross in North London, and they had guitars hanging up, including a few electrics, but I was interested in an archtop with F-holes. For about £12, I got this foreign-made-six string archtop with F-holes that looked like a Framus but wasn't. I struggled on that guitar for a couple of years.

**Q** **What was the first song you learned to play?**

"Tea for Two," a simple tune with three notes. But I pretty much immediately progressed from that, because at the time it was all about instrumental bands like the Shadows with twangy guitars, which was just before the Beatles came out.

**Q** **What was your first gig?**

It was at school, when I was about 14. There was this kid who was a drummer, and one day he said, "Let's put a band together and do a show!" I don't think we rehearsed or tuned up; we just showed up and played the

gig by calling out Shadows tunes like "The Frightened City" and "Apache." Honestly, it was awful and we sounded terrible.

**Q** **Ever had an embarrassing moment on stage?**

I got my Gibson ES-175 in 1964. I cherished that guitar – it was totally gorgeous. One day, I had a beer and was playing the 175 and I suddenly dropped the guitar, which landed on the jack plug and broke the socket. I was horrified and heartbroken. I took the guitar to be repaired. The one thing that came out of that experience was that I never got drunk again. Playing guitar and drinking – those things are stupidly incompatible. I had found out that playing guitar under the influence of alcohol was a complete and utter no-no.

**Q** **What's your favorite piece of gear?**

The Line 6 Helix. While it's not perfect, it is incredible. It's as good as I found it gets, as there's a couple of tricks it can't do. It doesn't do a lot of great wahs or Leslie cabinets, but – other than that – it's the most compatible piece of equipment for me.

**Q** **The building is burning down; what one guitar from your collection would you save?**

The Gibson ES-175. That's the key guitar. I'd like to save my [Martin] 00-18s as well, but if it was just one guitar, it would have to be the ES-175.

**Q** **What was the last time you practiced and what did you play?**

Yesterday, and I played my solo pieces. The way I keep my guitar playing fluid is that I play my solo pieces like "Clap" and "Mood for a Day" and the 30 others I have. I can choose any of those and just tell myself to play it perfectly straight off, even if I haven't played it for two years. Basically, that's a pretty tall order. I'm telling myself, "Let's see if I can play that right." And while I have to still practice some of the fiddly bits of lead guitar, my stability really comes from playing those solo-performance pieces.

**Q** **What aspect of the guitar would you like to be better at?**

I've been playing guitar for 64 years or so, and there's going to be things I'm never going to be able to do. I've resigned myself at this happy age [78] where I say to myself, "I do this stuff, and I like doing this stuff and ain't too tricky and it doesn't drive me crazy," but there's a lot of things I just can't do. I've got the greatest respect for classical and jazz musicians in the way that their musicality is far greater than mine. But my imagination and inventiveness, most probably, is far greater than 90 percent of those classical and jazz musicians, because that's what I've developed as a guitarist.

**Q** **What advice would you give your younger self about the guitar if you could?**

"Don't drink and drop your best guitar" would be first! Besides that, it's to learn to be organized. I was quite lucky in that I got over the stage fears and worrying about that in a couple of different ways. Initially, I found a way of touring for years and years, where my personal preparation was completely secret and completely my own.

In 2001 that changed, where to get ready for a show now became a ritual. It takes about 45 minutes or an hour, minimum, for me to get prepared. During that time, basically, you need to get out of my face. I don't want to see you. I don't want to see anybody; I just want to get myself ready. I think the performance is not only about the moment, as you've got to be in the moment, but also about the preparation for that moment. I use techniques now that are very different from those that I used pre-2001. I enjoy that sense of organization. **GW**



# Taz

School's out for good ol' Brandon Niederauer, a guitarist nicknamed after a famously insane cartoon marsupial

BY JOE BOSSO

**► IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE** that there's something Brandon Niederauer – better known by his stage name, Taz – can't do, and we'll let you know when we find it. He's been singing and dancing on Broadway since he was 12. He's acted in movies (*Saturday Night*) and TV series (Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*). Just recently, he graduated from Yale with a degree in economics.

Oh yeah, he also plays guitar like a freakin' demon. "When I was a kid, somebody said, 'He plays like the Tasmanian Devil' [from *Looney Tunes* cartoons]. Ever since then, people have called me 'Taz,'" he says.

Only 22 years old, Taz is already something of a touring vet. He's shared stages with Lady Gaga, Stevie Nicks, Gary Clark Jr. and various members of the Allman Brothers Band. "The Allmans were my first musical heroes," he says. "My dad got me into Southern rock, folk and blues." Last year, he opened for the Rolling Stones at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. "I try not to

act star struck when I'm around these people," he says. "They don't want fanboys, particularly if it's in a work environment. They want a sense of normalcy." He smiles. "But it was hard to keep it together when I met John Mayer. I've been a fan of his forever."

Ahead of his upcoming album debut, Taz has released a hook-filled single, "Say Something," that seamlessly mixes pop, rock and R&B. "The guitar doesn't get in the way of my vocal melody," he says, "but I did try to make it super catchy." He plans to drop a few more singles in the coming months, during which time he'll be touring the U.S. as part of Jon Batiste's band.

"Now that I'm out of school, I can devote all my time to being a musician," Taz says. "Which isn't to say that I regret going to college, because I had the greatest time ever. I had to balance my schedule – when to work, when to have fun. It was a little hard bouncing between classes and playing gigs like Coachella, but it was all part of the journey." **GW**

## A X O L O G Y

### Guitars

D'Angelico Deluxe Brandon Niederauer Atlantic model

### Amps

Neural DSP Quad Cortex amp modeler (live), Vintage Marshall plexis, Vox AC30s and Fender black panel models (studio)

### Effects

Ibanez Tube Screamer, MXR Phase 90, Analog Man King of Tone, Dunlop Cry Baby

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# Getting Killed in Detroit

Geese's Emily Green talks vintage guitars, practice routines and selling out

BY JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

**► I'M NOT SURE** if it's the three-inch heels on her Doc Martens, but Emily Green dwarfs me as she strides across the stage. It's about an hour before her band, Geese, soundchecks for their sold-out show at Detroit's Majestic Theatre.

Officially, it's day two of the band's tour, save for a surprise hometown album release show at Bunker's Anchor in Brooklyn. That 100-yard stare that only a grueling tour can bestow has yet to set in for Green, and maybe that's why she's patient enough to let me put my grubby hands on her guitars. I pick up a short-scale Silvertone first. The aluminum edging is the most eye-catching, and the neck is massive.

"I got that guitar at a shop in Brooklyn called RetroFret Vintage Guitars. I went there

to buy this old Diastone from the Seventies, but I picked up the Silvertone just to see, and I walked out with that one. It's a '56 Silvertone Stratotone Newport Model H 42/2. Quite the mouthful."

"It's like a baseball bat," she continues. "It doesn't play like any modern guitar I've ever used. I suspect builders were building guitars for a different type of player back then. It's better for the warmer, scuzzy amp that you found in the corner of a garage that is sort of breaking up and sounds dusty. That's a bag I like to pull from. I'm using it on, like, half of the new record live."

The hype surrounding Geese's new record, *Getting Killed*, is palpable, and for good reason. It's a dynamic, relentless guitar-driven rock album with echoes of the Velvet

Underground, Television and Radiohead. Endorsements from Patti Smith, Nick Cave and Julian Casablancas have added fuel to hyperbolic press statements that Geese are here to reanimate rock's corpse.

"We make rock 'n' roll music," Green says with a shrug. "We have a classic rock setup. We fly in a V formation with a singer-songwriter at the head of the pack!"

But as Geese rips through their main set, ending with a 10-plus-minute version of album closer "Long Island City Here I Come," it's obvious Green is just shrugging off the hype. Her towering boots and howling guitar place her squarely in the driver's seat of one of rock's most exciting new bands.

"Here I come, motherfucker, here I come!" screams singer Cameron Winter. As he howls about the fall of Jericho, drummer Max Bassin locks in with Dominic Digesu's monster bass riff, steering the song into the breakdown. From my vantage point, Winter, Digesu and Bassin are obscured by Green, who's moving

**"Practicing is boring. Getting better at guitar by playing in a band with people is much more interesting"**

as if she were attached to the rafters by an invisible string. Arms and legs flail as a mosh pit erupts in the middle of the floor and the band pushes down further on the gas. Before the band can send us sailing off of a cliff into a pile of rubble, they bring the song screeching to a halt, and you can almost smell a hint of burning rubber.

At Green's feet lies a tattered setlist and a no-frills pedal board. A worn Blues Driver and a handpainted Zvex Fuzz Factory anchor the front of her chain, followed by a Pearl Parametric EQ.

"With this band, I can't turn the amp up too high," she says. "You get a power suck for it and it gets too loud on stage. I throw an EQ on to emphasize the highs and lows and I don't really touch the mids." For touring, though, Green reaches for her Boss DD-5 delay before anything else.

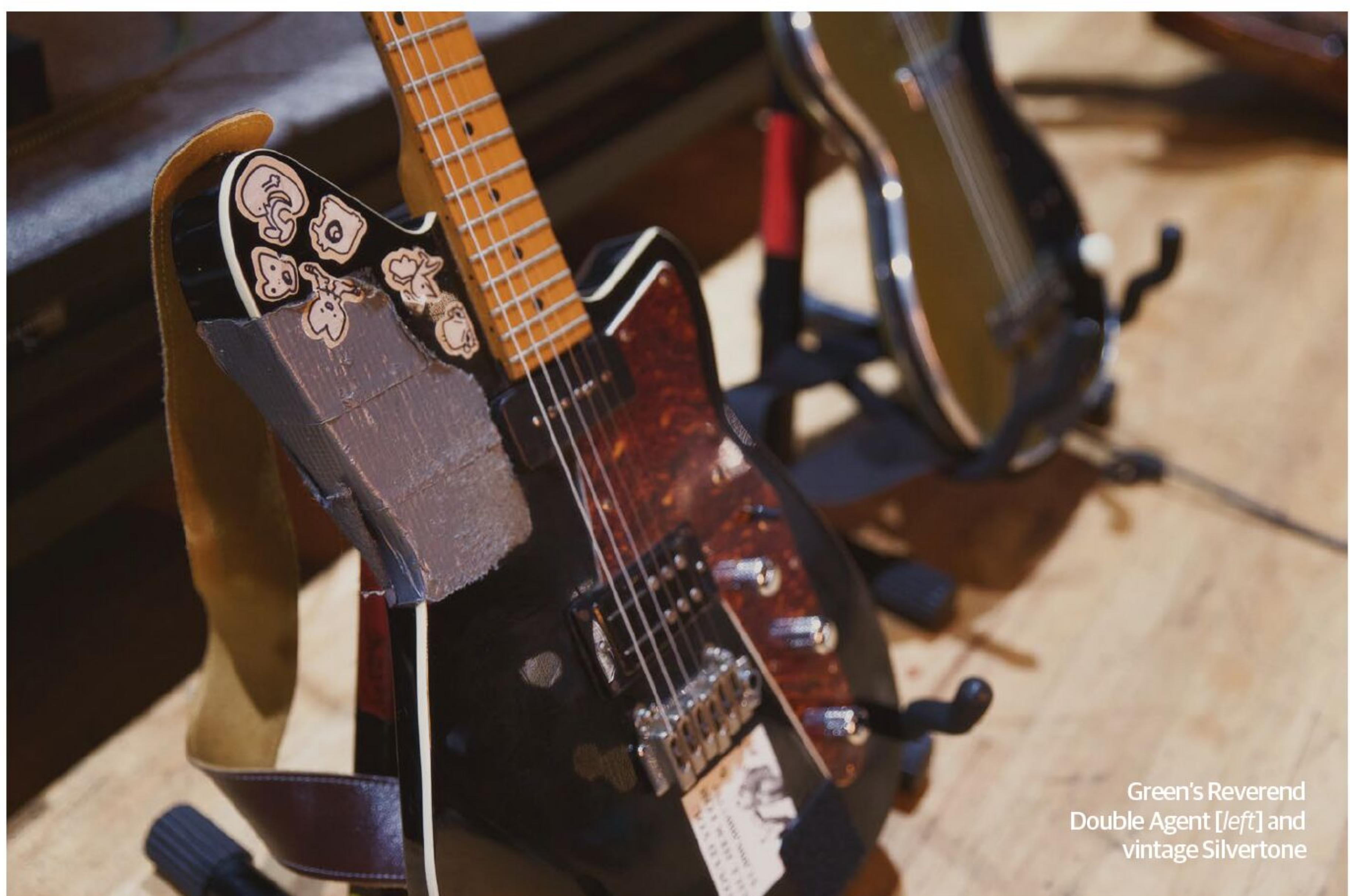
"That's definitely essential on the road. I don't use it in the studio quite as much, but I'll take that pedal anywhere. I think that's the best delay that exists. It does a lot of things I haven't seen in other delays. It's digital, so it doesn't get away from you. You can just set it to repeat forever, very fast, and it won't blow up on you. Also, when you change the time, it doesn't change the pitch of it. It just glitches it out in a weird way. You get some really cool 'cloudy' stuff."

"When Cameron works with me to make a guitar part, the metaphor I use is that it's like those little connect-the-dots coloring books for children. He's kind of like, 'It's this chord, and it's got to be cloudy. Don't play it totally in time. And can you bend this note here?'"

Green and Winter have been collaborating since they were kids, so when Winter comes to her with adjectives like cloudy to describe a musical moment, it's easy.

"That language is understood between us," she says. "Cloudy means something that is not played on the grid, not played on time."

The final song of the night is "Trinidad," a moody song with jazz undertones, born out of an idea that Winter brought to the band. "That idea was what started a jam and became



Green's Reverend Double Agent [left] and vintage Silvertone

## "We fly in a V formation, with a singer-songwriter at the head of the pack"

something different at the end," Green recalls. "It was like a 25-minute jam. Only five percent of a jam is usually good, in my experience. We try to find the five percent from that."

"I learned how to play music by playing with Max and Cameron," she says. "Practicing is boring. Getting better at guitar by playing in a band with people is much more interesting [and] the best way to learn how to play guitar. The scales and stuff just feel very dry to me."

"I don't really know practical theory. It's like I'm in a room with the lights off, and I know how to find my way around because I've been in that room my whole life. I know where everything is, but wouldn't it be so much easier if the lights were turned on?"

Back on stage, for "Trinidad," the lights are off. Smoke rolls out as Green furiously bangs a chaotic, Jonny Greenwood-inspired, tremolo-picked pattern out of her blue and silver Reverend Double Agent, dropped down to D.

"The Reverend is the first guitar I bought for myself," she says. "I worked a two-week internship at a headphone company. It was a desk job. I took all the money from that to buy the guitar. It's a precision machine. There's a lot of good note separation on that guitar, and clarity. Strats have clarity too, but they're a bit too thin for my taste."

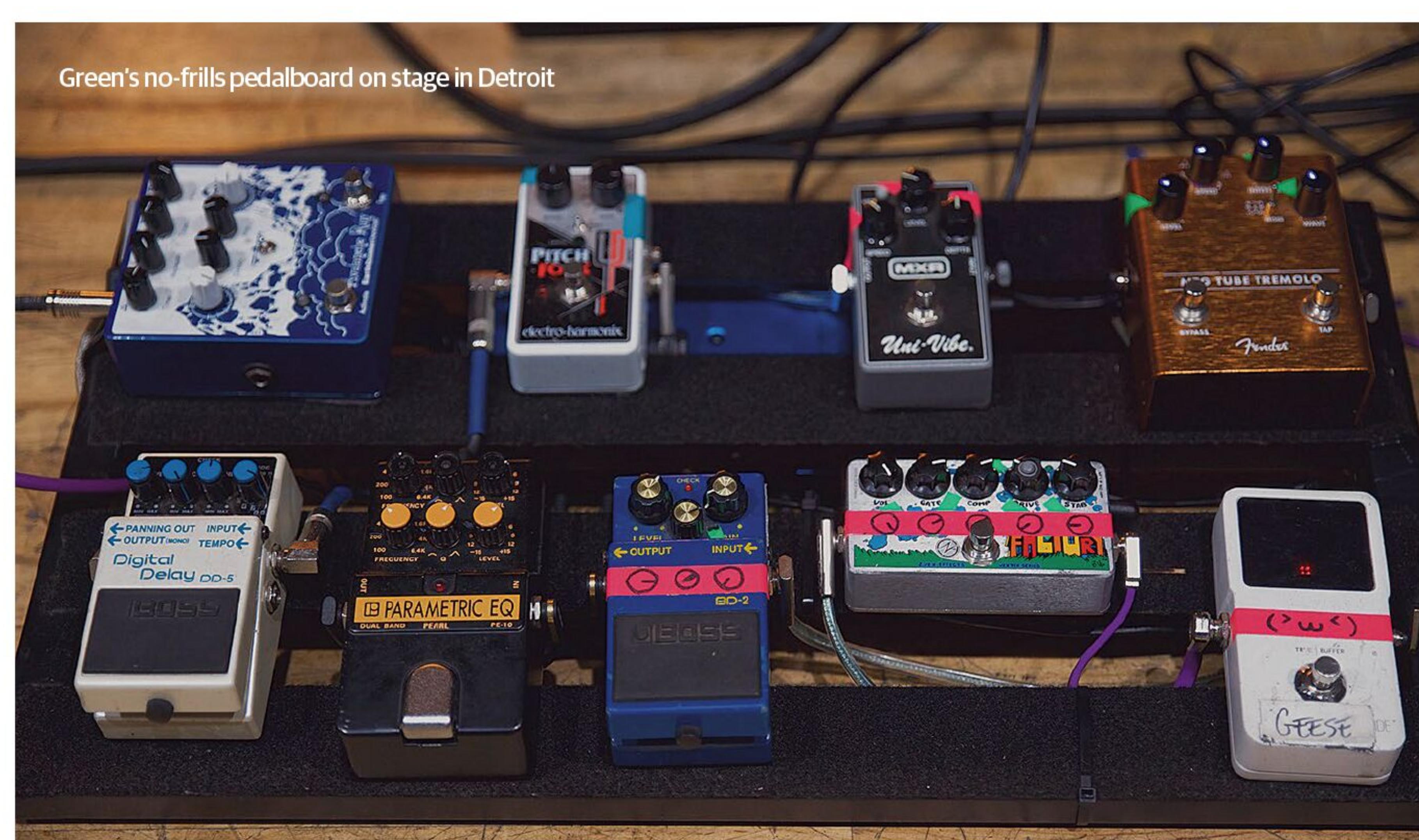
As Green wails on the Reverend, Winter's lyrics perfectly mirror her guitar's building urgency. "My son is in bed/My daughters are dead/My wife's in the shed/My husband's burning lead." That is, until the chorus. "There's a bomb in my car!" Winter bellows as the band seemingly detonates the explosive itself on stage.

It's Green's admiration for Tom Verlaine that keeps her reaching for guitars like the Double Agent. "[I love] the guitars on Television's *Marquee Moon*. They're not overdriven, per se, but they're not crystal clear. They break up when you play them harder, and they are defined when you play a bit softer, so you have to rely on how you play it for tone. The Reverend is really good at that."

So how is Green handling her band's newfound success?

"I'll see how much I can leverage it to get as many free guitars as I possibly can," she says with a laugh. "I'm glad a lot of people are receiving the record well. I think it's going to give us a lot more room to keep doing this for a long time in a way we'd like to. Going forward, it would be nice to do things less out of obligation and make more deliberate choices that we think will result in better art. Or, we'll sell out." [Laughs] **GW**

Green's no-frills pedalboard on stage in Detroit





Yamaha's new Chris Buck signature Revstar

# The Revstar Revolution

How Cardinal Black guitarist Chris Buck completely nailed his brand-new signature Yamaha Revstar

BY ADAM KOVAC

**► CHRIS BUCK KNOWS** he's caused a fuss among guitarists. There are certain things you don't do; you don't speak ill of Jimi or Eddie, you don't modify a vintage guitar and you don't talk shit about the Fender Stratocaster. But in a recent sitdown with *Guitar World*'s Paul Riario, the words just slipped out. Playing a Strat, the Welsh guitarist said, comes with "baggage."

As the video made its way through the Instagram algorithm, the blowback began. "My brother in Christ, you play blues music," wrote one commenter. "Maybe you should go play the flute," snarked another.

The Cardinal Black guitarist watched this all go down with some chagrin. "I'm getting a lot of love on socials at the moment," he says. He knows he didn't make his point as

eloquently as he would've liked. It's not like he even dislikes the instrument; his first guitar was a Squier Telecaster, but as a lover of players like Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Ritchie Blackmore, he had originally wanted a Strat. He was only talked out of it by his dad, who encouraged him to stand out from the other kids taking lessons and showed him pictures of Keith Richards and Bruce Springsteen to drive the point home.

He didn't say anything especially terrible, all things considered. Strats do have a particular sound, and that sound is associated with certain artists. Buck, however, wants to forge his own sonic path, and that's exactly what he's doing with the launch of his new signature Yamaha Revstar.

**"I fell in love with the Revstar for the fact that it was different from your T-type, S-type, Les Paul or whatever"**

While the guitar is getting its formal launch at the 2026 NAMM Show, its development began half a decade ago. In 2020, Buck was picking up his first Yamaha custom-shop guitar. Once again, there was a familial connection, as his father had an SG1000 "that was kind of heavier than my car," Buck says.

"There was kind of a little bit of an association already there with Yamaha, and I just fell in love with the Revstar for the fact that it was different and it wasn't obviously derived from your T-type, S-type, Les Paul or whatever. There were hints of other guitar models in it, but it was fundamentally fairly unique."

That uniqueness doesn't come with a bunch of fancy doohickeys and doodads. Rather, it was the guitar's simplicity that spoke to him — two pickups, a three-way toggle, a master tone and a master volume. In the course of designing his custom-shop guitar, Buck did a little futzing with the electronics, wiring it up to have two master

volumes, but he ultimately decided the original setup was used for a reason.

Using the basic Revstar setup as a launch pad, Yamaha let Buck run wild in their custom shop when it came time to get serious about his signature model. He started with one of the guitars already in his possession, a black RS502 that was among the first generation of the model. He asked Yamaha to make him the same thing, but in gold, and with the inlays of the later-generation RS720.

"I wasn't as crazy or as inventive as I could have been, which probably speaks to my personality," Buck says.

To that end, he also opted for a more traditional wrapover tail piece. While he does admit that using a tremolo bar has crept more into his playing in recent years, that love affair hasn't gotten to the point of wanting a Bigsby on the guitar that sports his name. A custom-shop model with a tremolo bridge isn't out of the question for the future, however.

"When I specced my custom-shop model, I was so much in love with RS502 at the time, I essentially wanted a more custom or bespoke version of that," he says. The infatuation led him to not mess with a good thing when it came to the woods. Once again, he figured it was better to trust the experts.

"I've always kind of been of the opinion that these people probably know more about guitar manufacturing than I do, so if I start trying to spec crazy, hard-to-obtain wood species from whatever part of the world, I'm probably going to make everyone's life a misery," he says. "I guess there was some sort of slightly scheming parts in me that thought, 'Well, if they're asking me for a custom-shop model, maybe there is a plan for this in the future to potentially be more widely available, so let's not try and totally disrupt everything and spec something absolutely ludicrous.'"

The feature that truly resonated with him, and the sound that sets him apart from the other blues rockers, is the Revstar's twin P90 pickups.

"I think they're just such criminally underrated pickups," Buck says. "I think there's an association that kind of dogs P90s a little bit, because they were superseded by humbuckers. People tend to think of them as a lesser pickup, because they hum, or they do this or they do that, but I think there's a versatility and a transparency that you get with P90s, which I feel is the truest reflection of the acoustic resonance or character of the guitar."

Rather than once again going stock, Buck did get more particular when it came to which P90s would go into his signature model. Yamaha sent over six or seven models, and, along with his more soldering-familiar pal, Huw Price, began to run sonic experiments. With the ideal pickups narrowed down, a minor tweak was made, with the magnets being



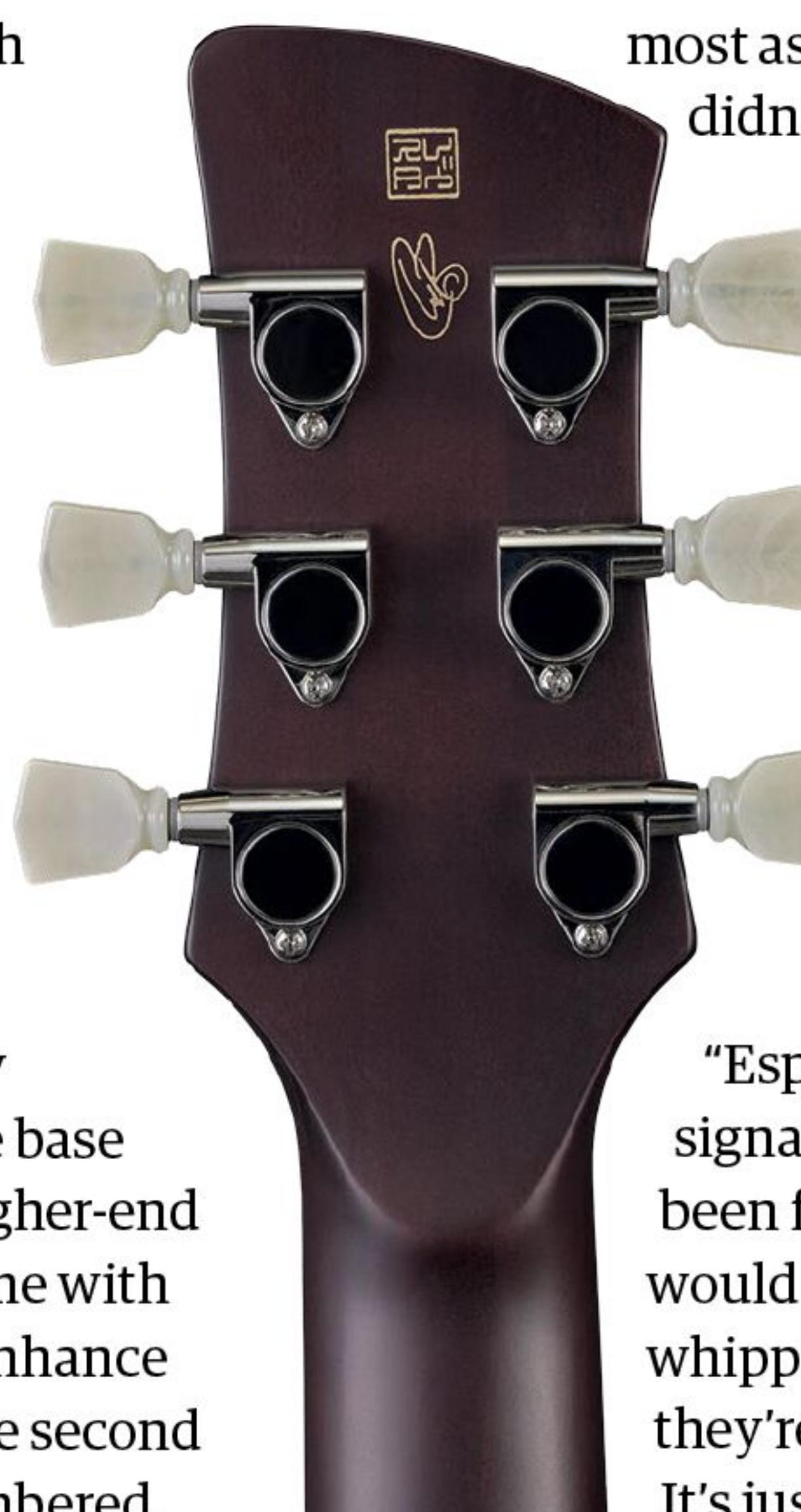
"It's honestly surreal," Buck says of his Yamaha signature model. "It's just an incredible honor."

swapped out in an effort to cancel out a bit of that typical hum. That's been a necessary evil as Cardinal Black has begun playing in larger venues, and Buck's volume has risen accordingly.

"They kind of feel like a little bit of a compromise, I guess, between that true vintage P90 thing, which I love, but also with one eye on 'Let's not be so vintage,' so as to invite all of the electronic interference in the world into your signal chain," Buck says. "If you're not needlessly fighting feedback at every point, P90s can feel more inclined to squeal. These feel like a very good halfway."

Some of the other tweaks Buck made to the Revstar have found their way into newer generations of the base models. He noted that the higher-end Professional models now come with carbon-reinforced necks to enhance stability, and all models of the second generation Revstars are chambered.

But all these features would be for nothing if not for the fact that the Revstar is a fundamentally beautiful instrument. After all, who wants to play an ugly hunk of junk? For now, that beauty will come in just a single variety, as all Chris Buck signatures will be in gold, the color he says he is "for better or for worse" most associated with, but the guitarist didn't rule out a run of reds if the current model sells well.



With his career just beginning and the future bright, it's hard to see a reality where the Chris Buck Revstar doesn't find its way into many hands. That's a reality that would have been hard to imagine just a few years ago, when his father was thrusting a Tele into his hands.

"It's honestly surreal," he says. "Especially with Yamaha's history of signature models that tended to have been for older musicians, or what you would consider legacy artists; not young whippersnappers who still look like they're struggling to grow facial hair. It's just an incredible honor."

# Music from “The Younger”

Bands formed by rock stars' kids rarely work out — but this one does. Say hello to Evan Stanley and Nick Simmons, whose dads you might just recognize, despite all that Kiss makeup

BY ANDREW DALY

**► EVAN STANLEY AND** Nick Simmons have known each other since they were babies. After all, their fathers — Kiss co-founders Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons — have been bandmates since the early Seventies. Considering all that, the thought of the younger Stanley and Simmons making music together seems like a foregone conclusion. But it didn't happen until a chance hangout in December 2024, which led to an Instagram cover of Simon & Garfunkel's “The Sound of Silence.”

“We listened to it, and we were like, ‘We blended pretty well. This sounds serious. We've got a thing,’” Stanley says. That “thing” became Stanley/Simmons, an unlikely modern-day folk project that quickly grew legs.

“After that, we said, ‘Let's try our hand at an original,’” Simmons adds. “There was no real expectation. We've known each other since we were babies, and would see each other at family functions and occasionally

Evan Stanley [with the 12-string Martin] and Nick Simmons. “The two of us had a similar upbringing,” Stanley says. “Our dads are like action heroes”



hang out. We're like cousins, because there were long stretches where we didn't see each other.”

Luckily, songs like “Body Down,” “Temporary Love,” “Hollywood Hearts” and about 30 others proved that things between Evan and Nick were, in fact, easy. “It happened quickly,” Simmons says. “We were like, ‘That took an hour — this is crazy.’”

It could be fate, genetics or chance. Whatever the reason, Stanley/Simmons is working. “Part of it is that it was never supposed to be a thing,” Stanley says. “We never said, ‘It should be this or that.’

It was, ‘Let's hang out, have fun and do what we love.’ People responded to that.”

“John Cleese from Monty Python once said, ‘The best creativity comes from a place of childlike play,’” Simmons adds. “This came from a session that wasn't supposed to be anything. We weren't being ambitious like we are now. It was a place of play and fun. We stumbled upon the fact that being relieved of pretension led to something. Hopefully, that comes out in the recordings.”

**Seeing as you've known each other your entire lives, was making music together something you always wanted to do?**

**STANLEY:** We were always homies but had our own things going. Then, since I moved back to L.A., we've hung out way more and were always kicking it. One day in December we were hanging out. I thought, “I saw what he was doing, and I liked it.” He saw what I was doing and said nice things, and we were like, “We should jam.”

**SIMMONS:** It wasn't a big idea. It was just, “We should film a reel or something... people do that, right?” [Laughs] We got together and figured, “Let's do something we both love.”

**Your music leans toward folk, which is different from the rock people**

**would probably expect.**

**STANLEY:** We grew up loving song-based bands, like Simon & Garfunkel and Crosby, Stills & Nash. Whatever we're listening to, it's always song-based. We thought, "Let's do 'The Sound of Silence'; that'd be fun." It went pretty well, and listening back, it was kind of one of those moments.

**What made it special?**

**STANLEY:** It's the kind of music that's close to our hearts and that we were both always writing, even though neither of our bands has anything to do with that kind of music.

**When did you begin writing music together?**

**STANLEY:** February 2025 was really the start. We hung out again and thought, "Let's try writing." We did, and it was an "a-ha" moment of, "Wait a second... this is what came out?"

**SIMMONS:** It happened really fast. Neither one of us was used to that. I find that writing sessions with others take a minute to get anything good, but he and I were like, "Let's try writing something original, because people seem to like the reel."

**How do you write songs?**

**STANLEY:** We both have our iPhones filled with lyrics, like a little line or stanza, but a song usually comes from a melody or riff. I've been playing guitar for so long, and I love it to death, but I'm also really comfortable with it, which can sometimes work against you.

**Meaning you go back to the same things?****How do you break out of that?**

**STANLEY:** Yeah! I like to do alternate tunings and just weird stuff to make the guitar novel again. Like, something that is a little foreign to me. So, for "Body Down," I tuned to drop C# and started playing that driving, plodding riff.

**Is that a new riff, or one that you had lying around?**

**STANLEY:** I always thought it was cool, but I sat on it for three or four weeks because I had no idea what to do with it. Then we had a session with a good buddy of mine, Jacob Bunton, when we were over at his place. I started playing that riff, and Nick walked out into the hallway, going, "The verse should do this..." He sang the verse, and I was like, "Wait, what?"

**SIMMONS:** Let's be clear – I was walking into the bathroom. [Laughs]

**STANLEY:** I was trying to be nice! [Laughs]

**SIMMONS:** I was peeing, heard them play the guitar, finished peeing too quickly, ran out and was like, "Hey, what about this?" They bounced off that, and within 10 minutes those

ideas became the first words. It's never that quick, but with that one, we vomited it up fully born.

**How about "Temporary Love"?****What's the story there?**

**STANLEY:** That was supposed to be a demo. The guitar was recorded in my kitchen using my laptop mic. The vocals were recorded in two passes, and I didn't comp, edit or tune anything. Nick did the same thing.

**SIMMONS:** I really wish my other musical endeavors were this... not easy, but fast. Because they sure have not been. I'll tell you that.

**STANLEY:** When you find the right partner, it changes things. It brings something out in you. It pushes you to your limits. On the other side, we all have our strengths and weaknesses. We balance each other out really well. Knowing you have that allows you to be comfortable pushing yourself further. I don't feel pressure to come up with something every day, because chances are Nick probably did – and we can run with it.

**Have you considered the fact that your dads have a similar musical partnership, and that maybe there's something to you two coming together so seamlessly? Is it in your DNA?**

**SIMMONS:** Oh, are they in a band? [Laughs]

**STANLEY:** [Laughs] Absolutely. There's this age-old question of nature versus nurture. The two of us had a similar upbringing. It's a unique position, given that our dads are like action heroes and the biggest rock stars around.

**SIMMONS:** It's very cathartic to bitch about our various grievances to each other because we can heavily relate.

**STANLEY:** There's a lot of common ground in the great aspects and the challenges. We're unbelievably lucky and grateful and super close with our families, but on the musical side, people forget that it works against you in a lot of ways.

**Meaning that people have unfair expectations of you, based on what your dads did?**

**SIMMONS:** It's a double-edged sword. ▶

"I like to do alternate tunings and just weird stuff to make the guitar novel again," Stanley says

**"It's very cathartic to bitch about our various grievances to each other"**



Doors are immediately opened for us because of our family relationships, like with any business. So, in entertainment and music, we get to meet these people. But once you're in the room, they don't necessarily give you the benefit of the doubt.

**Based on the strength of the songs and the following you're gathering, it seems like you're proving the doubters wrong.**

**SIMMONS:** What's working well for us is that at the end of the day, people will decide what works. It's not the executives. They're either



**"When you find the right partner, it changes things. It brings something out in you. It pushes you to your limits"**

gonna like the songs or not.

**STANLEY:** If they connect with it and it moves them, it's just a matter of time before people in the industry catch on. For us, the whole thing has been about having fun.

**SIMMONS:** We're making music that we love to make and hear. We're not thinking about all this political bullshit. There were people around us early on who went, "This is special." So the ones who don't give it the time of day, I'll say that we've been around long enough to detect that. My old man used to say you can die from enthusiasm. *[Laughs]*

**What did he mean by that?**

**SIMMONS:** In L.A., everyone will call you the next big thing since sliced bread, but when it's time to put a name on a dotted line, they'll be like, "Oh, I have something to do over here. Sorry, I was busy." Then, you won't hear from them, but they'll still say, "You're brilliant and amazing. Let's work together." We've gotten good at detecting fake enthusiasm versus real enthusiasm, but we've detected a shift in the mood, and things are ramping up.

**What's the long-term goal for Stanley/Simmons?**

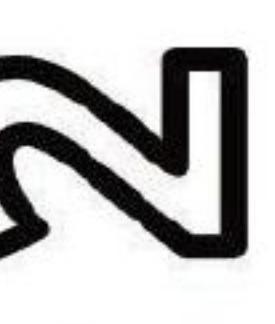
**STANLEY:** By the time the first record comes out, we'll be ready for the second! I've never been in this position before, because Nick and I write so much and so quickly. You never know when inspiration will run out, so we're trying to grab it when it comes out. We're definitely starting with a full-length album.

**SIMMONS:** We look at it like, "Does it fit with a body of work? Does it add depth? Does it take you to a new place?" A lot of modern artists, like Billie Eilish, are doing that again. They're writing concept albums with a lowercase "c" that are grabbing my attention.

**STANLEY:** We're writing so much all the time. We want people to hear it. We don't want to put out one song for every 10 we write; we want to put out nine or all 10 of them. Music is meant to be shared. We're not precious with songs. What we love might be what you love, too.

**SIMMONS:** We just want to sound human. I'd just like to sound like a real, flesh-and-blood human being. That's the main goal. **GW**

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# Steve Cropper

(1941-2025)

On December 3, we lost an M.G., a Blues Brother and a truly humble guitarist with one of the most impressive session-work resumes in history

BY ANDREW DALY

 **ALTHOUGH HE WAS** 84 and had been ill for several years, the passing of soul-funk-R&B legend and general jack-of-all-trades Steve Cropper still stings – a lot. Perhaps it's because Cropper, despite his sickness, was still cutting loose with a Telecaster in hand, as evidenced by his latest record, 2024's *Friendlytown*.

In fact, Cropper had fired off four albums in the last eight years. Not too shabby for a guy who was (unbeknownst to many) nearing the end. Of course, if you'd dialed in with Cropper, as this writer had a few times toward the end of his life, you might have experienced him doing interviews in a hospital or care center while getting blood drawn (and that's no lie).

And if you did, you'd have experienced a man who, despite the knowledge that life was slipping away through his capable fingers, was humble, kind and utterly accomplished. But that's just how it was for the man affectionately known as "The Colonel," who lived his life for the love of music above all else.

"Do not get into this business for money," Cropper told *Total Guitar* in 2024. "Do it for fun, and if you're good, somewhere along the way someone will pay you."

Sure, Cropper might have lent his Tele-fueled licks to the likes of Booker T. & the M.G.'s, Otis Redding, Albert King, John Lennon, John Prine and, of course, the Blues Brothers, but his beginnings were nothing short of humble. Born in Dora, Missouri, on October 21, 1941, Cropper was first exposed to music proper after his family moved to Memphis at age nine. The word is that Cropper got a hankering for soul music after being exposed to what he referred to as "Black church music." By the time he was 14, Cropper could be found with a guitar in hand, and, simply put, he never put it down.

Looking back on Cropper's career, it's easy to see how players like Chuck Berry, Chet

Atkins and Tal Farlow influenced him, but at the time, he was just doing what came naturally rather than trying to emulate his heroes.

"It's true about following the dots," Cropper told *Guitar World* in 2024. "I can't play without looking at them – not that I couldn't learn other stuff, but I just didn't learn. I just play what's needed. I use the guitar as a tool rather than as an instrument, if that makes sense."

By his early 20s, Cropper had sculpted an identifiable style that caught the ear of Stax Records President Jim Stewart. Stewart heard Cropper's playing with his band, the Royal Spades, who soon changed their name to the Mar-Keys and had a hit single with 1961's "Last Night." Stewart liked Cropper's chops and professionalism so much that he first brought him on as an A&R man before slotting him into Stax's house band, Booker T. & the M.G.'s. It was here that Cropper made a name for himself as a tidy player who kept it simple and always had a Tele or Esquire in hand.

"The Tele is a little more versatile," Cropper told *GW* in 2024. "The Esquire is one pickup, while the Tele is a two-pickup guitar. It's the same guitar, really, except for the differences in pickups."

Before long, Cropper's playing saw him become a low-key session star. Songs like "Knock on Wood" by Eddie Floyd, "In the Midnight Hour" by Wilson Pickett and "Green Onions" by Booker T. & the M.G.'s proved his mettle. But he wasn't just popular in the U.S., as even the Beatles loved his licks. In fact, after hearing Cropper's playing on

**Cropper's playing saw him become a low-key session star – even the Beatles loved his licks**

Otis Redding's material, John Lennon and Paul McCartney had a grand plan to travel to Memphis and record with Cropper. Legend has it that Beatles manager Brian Epstein canceled these sessions for "safety and security reasons."

This, along with his playing being featured on numerous hits, had Cropper feeling good. "I knew we had a hit with 'Knock on Wood'; I knew that Eddie Floyd and I had written a pretty good song," Cropper told *GW*. The same can be said of "Green Onions," which Cropper cited to *Total Guitar* in 2024 as the moment he shed his beginner status as a guitarist.

"We started writing that, and then we worked on it together," he said. "A singer was meant to come into the studio, but they never showed up – he'd been singing all night, and he couldn't even say his name in the morning, so he never came in. So we were just jamming around, waiting."

By the late Sixties, and after recording the watershed cut "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay" with Otis Redding, Cropper accumulated enough cachet to break out as a solo act, leading to his typically humbly-titled 1970 debut, *With a Little Help from My Friends*.

Around this time, Cropper left Stax Records, but his session career continued. Throughout the Seventies, he worked with everyone from Ringo Starr (check out "Step Lightly") to Rod Stewart to John Prine to Jeff Beck. He was sought after by the best, ironically, because he kept it simple.

"I basically just plug my Tele into an amp," Cropper told *GW*. He added, addressing his hallmark tone, "I used to use a Fender Quad Reverb amp as they were easy enough to rent until around 1990. Then Fender came up with the red-knob Twin. Usually, when I'd do a session, they'd have a Fender Super Reverb ready because they figure that's what I'd need. But I'd hit an E on it, and it would be totally

distorted. I'd say, 'If you get me a Twin, it won't be distorted!'"

But sessions weren't the only thing that kept Cropper busy, as he hooked up with the Blues Brothers band drummer, Willie Hall, leading to two albums and notable movie appearances in *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and *Blues Brothers 2000* (2000) along with a fellow M.G., Stax bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn. For drive-by fans, these appearances were the first time they could put a face to the licks, leading to further notoriety for the lovable yet unwilling guitar hero.

Things didn't slow down for Cropper in the Eighties. He released two solo records, 1981's *Playin' My Thang* and 1982's *Night After Night*. On the sessions side, he hooked up with Dolly Parton in 1982 and Billy Burnette in 1985 before things picked up in 1988, when Cropper contributed to records by Jimmy Buffett, Etta James and B.B. King, before closing out the decade by appearing on Roy Orbison's final album, 1989's *Mystery Girl*.

Speaking to *Total Guitar*, Cropper shrugged while pondering his steady workload. "My playing has always sucked," he says. "But it sells because I keep it simple, I guess. I'm not a guitar player — I never took the time. I use it as a tool. I couldn't afford to hire another guitarist on a lot of Stax records, so I learned



Cropper [center] performs with Blues Brothers John Belushi [left] and Dan Aykroyd in New York City, June 1, 1980

to play rhythm and lead at the same time so that when I was soloing, the rhythm wouldn't drop out."

By the Nineties, Cropper was past 50, but not past his prime. In 1991, he shared the stage with Keith Richards, B.B. King, Robert Cray, Bo Diddley, Brian May, Albert Collins, Bob Dylan, Joe Satriani and Steve Vai over the course of two nights for the legendary "Guitar Legends, Seville 1991" shows, cementing his status as a beloved hit-maker and a player's player. Also in 1991, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Booker T. & the M.G.'s. Looking back on these accolades, Cropper remained humble.

"I still play like I used to," he told *GW*. "I think it's because I didn't learn any more. I get accused of it all the time, not learning more — but I'm not one of those guys. I could learn anything if I wanted to, but I just don't. I just let it go as it is."

Of course, the universe looked past these supposed shortcomings, including *Mojo*, which named Cropper "the greatest living guitar player" in 1996. Keith Richards even referred to Cropper's playing as "perfect, man." If that's not a stamp of approval, what is?

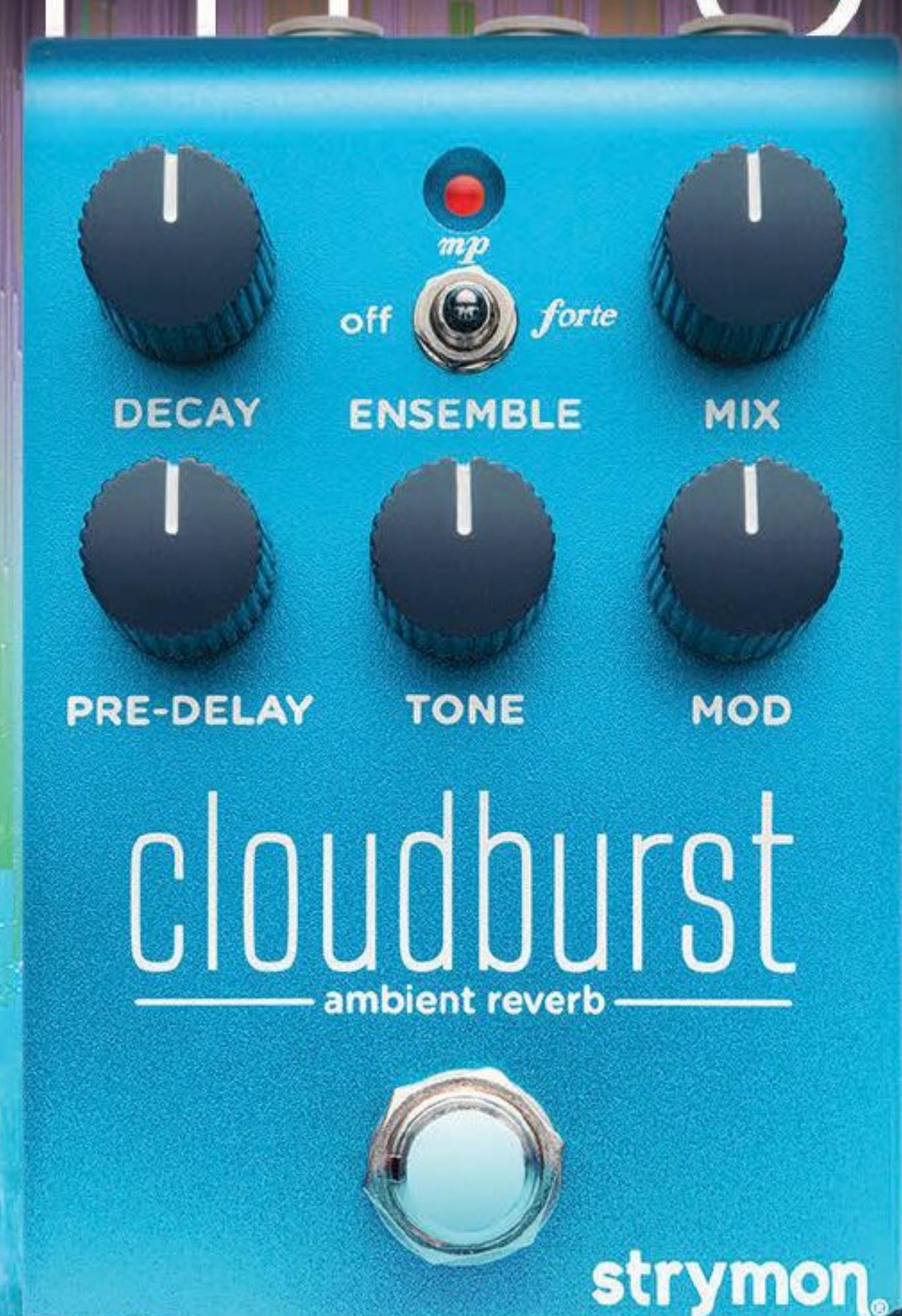
Toward the end of Cropper's life, the sessions died down and sickness set in, but he kept making music. This brings us back to *Friendlytown*, Cropper's final musical testament, which features guest appearances by Brian May and Billy Gibbons.

"[Steve Cropper] is legendarily low-keyed, with an upfront passion for tastefulness and tone," Gibbons told *Guitarist* in 2024. "When seeing what is possible with the straightforwardness of a bare-naked Fender slab-body straight into a Fender tweed amp, it is better to stand back for the attack."

As for Cropper, though the sand was running out in his proverbial hourglass, he wasn't sweating it. This, along with his knack for giving songs exactly what they need on the spot, was the magic of Steve Cropper. **GW**

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# THE GEAR HUNTER

# Taylor Guitars

**Andy Powers — dedicated luthier, Taylor CEO and self-declared “Geppetto” — talks Gold Label guitars, urban-harvested wood, Action Control necks and where the company is headed in 2026 and beyond**

BY ANDREW DALY



Andy Powers plays a Taylor Gold Label 814e

**► AS THE CEO** and president of Taylor Guitars, which has been in the upper echelon of acoustic guitar-making since 1974, Andy Powers has a lot on his plate. And while the business side of things is paramount, Powers' passion is forever centered around the making of the instruments.

“It stems around trying to create an instrument that feels inspiring to a player,” Powers says. “It could be inspiring in familiar, fresh and new ways. But I want somebody to feel joy when they pick up the instrument.”

Taylor’s lines range from high-quality, budget-friendly instruments to ornate guitars that’ll make your jaw drop — but the approach never changes.

“The trick is to try and take that one individual instrument and then scale that up in a way where you don’t lose the magic of the first one,” Powers says. “That’s difficult to do, so most of what we spend our time working on is eliminating the accidental customization that might happen on a shop floor. You’re trying to create a method where every single guitar you build comes out exactly the way you intended it to — even when your own hands weren’t the ones touching it.”

At over a half-century old, Taylor is still a new kid on the block, which means Taylor lives in a gray area, straddling the line between classic design and modern innovation. With this in mind, as far as Powers is concerned, the sky is the limit. To that end, he says, “One of the things that makes us unique is that our history is defined by changing what we see fit to change.”

**“I started building guitars from a young age. A lot of my focus was on actually building the instrument itself”**

**You come from a guitar-building background, so how would you describe your role at Taylor?**

I come from a guitar-making and playing background, not really so much of a business background. But I started building and playing guitars from a young age, so all I’d ever really done was build. A lot of my focus was on actually building the instrument itself. I still think about an instrument that might be interesting to a player — maybe an adaptation of a guitar we’re making now, maybe something totally new or something that might be an improvement to an existing guitar. I’ll go build those instruments by hand.

**So you’ve still got a hand in that aspect of the company?**

I maintain a shop here at our Taylor campus as well as a shop at my home. I’m working like Geppetto. [Laughs] It’s like a lot of old hand tools and a very traditional, craft-oriented kind of construction. That gives me a lot of flexibility to create what might be interesting for us to make next.

**Is it a challenge to match and raise the bar on Taylor’s well-known standards?**

It depends on which way we look at it. You’re right; Taylor, as a guitar manufacturer, is known for building a very consistent, high-quality guitar. Now, coming from the guitar-making world, that’s not really hard to achieve. It would be expected for a high-end instrument to be built at a very high level — the fit and finish, the way the parts work, the way it feels. I’d expect it to be working at a high level. And really, a lot of the credit I would give to Bob Taylor, a designer who’s trying to design something for a manufacturing scale.

**Of note with Taylor is that your budget models sometimes outpace other companies’ higher-end models.**

A lot of it comes down to the process you use, the way you’re gonna build the instrument. So if we’re gonna build a high-end instrument, we’re going to create a process to result in a really great guitar every time. We’re gonna go through that same process, even for a more modest instrument where it might not have lavish trimmings, the rarest woods or something like that. But that doesn’t simply mean we’re going to import loads of low-end guitars, slap our name on them and sell them. That’s not how we do it. We actually design a thing to go, “This guitar is for a musician of modest means, so we’re going to use more commonly available

materials – but I want the musical experience to be a great one."

**What's it been like trying to source materials these days, where tariffs have hampered companies and there are far more restrictions on the harvesting of certain woods?**

It is a challenge. But I would say that at no point was it ever not a challenge, right? Let's say I went back a couple of hundred years and worked in Stradivari's day; it'd be a real challenge to get great material. [Laughs] Not so much because the materials aren't there to be had, but just the logistics and transportation mean you're gonna be working really close to home to get that piece of ebony for a fretboard. Man, that is really gonna be hard. So there's a challenge there as you come into a more modern era where you face depleting resources. One of the challenges in procurement is actually sourcing the material and how it is harvested. So we're working a lot closer, a lot deeper into the forest, and oftentimes looking at alternate structures for the future.

**What do those alternate structures look like?**

Whether that's plantation-grown wood, whether that's deliberately planting trees for future generations of instrument use, or whether it's different forestry models altogether, like using reclaimed urban-harvested wood. There are all kinds of different ways we approach it, and they have their own unique challenges. One of them is a design challenge, which is to work with what options you have available. As an example, we started pursuing what I describe as urban forest harvested wood – city trees, street trees – trees that cities plant to control soil erosion, create shade, wind barriers, noise barriers, things like that. When those trees grow larger, because they're in a more densely populated area, they become a liability. A storm might knock that tree over, and it could fall on buildings, cars or people. Those trees have a managed lifespan. We look at it and go, "Why are you chipping that up for mulch? There's gotta be some end-of-life usage in that tree."

**With this, the age-old debate over tonewood arises, which is likely more critical when discussing acoustic guitars. Do you think a street tree versus**

A double dose of Taylor's Gold Label 817e Grand Pacific



**"What excites me as a builder and a player is having a wider variety of guitars"**

**a forest-harvest tree would produce a very different-sounding guitar?**

Oh, yeah – it's been super interesting. The most interesting part of it is that there are no direct comparisons. So what should I do with that to make an equally appealing sound musically on a guitar? It means you've gotta start changing the guitar a little bit. You change your design, maybe you voice the bracing a little differently, you use it in a different spot, you cut it to a different thickness. There are all kinds of different things you could do as an instrument designer to create a musically appealing instrument.

**It seems as if this particular challenge is an opportunity to unlock new tones and designs.**

It absolutely is. It's interesting to think about wood material over time and how the instrument world has constantly changed its appetite and developed new materials. It's become common practice for guitar makers to like what we call Honduran mahogany for a neck, right? That's pretty common. It's been used for a lot over the last century. Well, that was a substitute material for Spanish cedar. Spanish cedar was preferable for nylon-string or early classical guitars. A lot of classical makers still swear by it. But it was commonly used for necks well into the teens, Twenties and beyond. But Honduran mahogany was more obtainable. It was easier to get in big pieces, and it had a similar enough character to Spanish cedar that it became popular. Instrument making is a slow evolution, influenced by the maker's skill and the musician's taste.

**At NAMM 2024, Taylor launched the Action Control neck, which allows players to make micro-adjustments to string height without removing the neck.**

One of the things we like to do is make a genuine improvement to the instruments we're building when we can. I like to be able to work that idea into more places because what excites me as a builder and a player is having a wider variety of guitars. I like that we

"We have our Gold Label collection that's steeped in the tradition of instrument making," Powers says





get to choose our voice. We get to choose whether we wanna play a big-body strummer, powerhouse guitars, smaller finger-style instruments or more modern, heritage-based sounds. I like exploring different flavors. Now something like the Action Control neck is a feature or aspect I'd been working on for almost 10 years before those guitars came out – even before I was really happy with the design.

So we introduced that on the Gold Label guitars, and over the course of 2025, we introduced more iterations and variations of that into our Gold Label collection. We've added it to the Grand Pacific body shape guitars in that collection. We've done more Super Auditoriums and different wood combinations. That's something I'll start to spread into other models because of how well that serves the player.

#### What will you do to match that at NAMM 2026?

There's instrument development. It comes in kind of waves, but ideas come through different instruments so that all the different players can find what best suits their taste. There are going to be different voicings of the V-Class bracing architecture that we developed a number of years ago. That's a very adaptable kind of design that lets us manipulate the sound of the guitar in a lot of different ways. It brings out different nuances of the guitar's voice, so you'll see some different flavors there. And you'll see some different amplification developments from us.

#### What's on tap there?

As much as I love to play an acoustic guitar in front of a microphone, you're gonna see that most players

**"We're not afraid to change something. I like to think our best days are still ahead of us"**

still take a guitar on a stage, grab a cord and plug it in. We've used the Expression System, what we call the Expression System 2, for a number of years. That's worked really well for a lot of players on a lot of stages. But our development didn't stop there. So there are other developments coming into our amplification space that I think might serve players even better in an even wider variety of scenarios.

#### Taylor is as much about classic designs as it is innovation. How do you see the future shaking out?

We're not afraid to change something. I like to think our best days are still ahead of us as guitar makers. We're really not all that young anymore; five decades and counting is a pretty good run, and we've got a couple of miles on us. At the same time, amongst a lot of guitar makers, we're still relatively young, so we have a lot of permission to continue developing our instruments. I like to look ahead and go, "At this point, we have a history we can draw from as well as a still-unwritten future." You can see designs that are influenced by our past designs, and we've got a library of things we've built and a body of work we can draw from, kind of a "greatest hits." We have our modern benchmark guitars like the 814 Standard, the quintessential modern acoustic cutaway electric. Then we have these other collections, and we're still developing and pushing boundaries with our Builder's Edition collection. We're exploring ergonomics influenced by an electric guitar on an acoustic guitar. Then we have our Gold Label collection that's steeped in the tradition of instrument making. There are all these varieties that we get to continue developing and exploring. **GW**



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# The Everyman

Brazil's Mateus Asato – named one of *Guitar World's* 20 greatest guitarists of the decade back in 2019 – is finally releasing his debut album. As expected, it's a thing of beauty.

BY JOE BOSSO

**M**ATEUS ASATO IS the kind of guitarist we haven't heard much of lately – a true original. He doesn't do anything particularly outrageous or revolutionary – there's no crazy gimmick (yet) that he'll be known for – but in his own elegant and understated way, and it's so casual and subtle that it could go over people's heads at first, he's well on his way to becoming one of the greatest guitarists of his generation.

The 31-year-old Brazilian guitarist's debut album, simply titled *Asato*, is an unqualified thing of beauty, a thoroughly rewarding musical experience from start to finish. There are 15 cuts, none of which overstay the welcome (all but one are under four minutes), that emphasize moods and sensations over instrumental excess on exquisitely crafted songs that range from smooth pop ("Otsukare!") to neo-soul ("Cryin'") to aching ballads ("The Breakup Song") and kaleidoscopic rock ("Hendrix"). But even when Asato pours on the gas and shreds (spoiler alert: he insists he's no shredder), he's quick to offer a self-aware wink, like he does on the prog-style mini epic "Rush."

"It's funny because before I named the song 'Rush,' I called it 'The NAMM Song,'" he says. "It's pretty proggy, so it's like my extra dose of virtuoso. I wanted to add a lot of notes because, of course, it's guitar music and you need to do that. Obviously, I would love to reach the maximum number of listeners with my songs, but with 'Rush' I knew I would reach the shredders. They might think the other songs are okay, but 'Rush' will appeal to them."

Stylistically, he's all over the map, which might confuse some listeners – we tend to want our artists to specialize in one thing, because it's so much easier to process their music if we can put them in a box – but Asato can't stand still. He closes the album with a slinky spellbinder, "Too Nerdy for Pop, Too Pop for Nerds," that sums things up perfectly. "I do a little bit of everything, so people don't know what to think of me," he says. "I'm really okay with that."

Over the past decade, Asato has advanced his career at a steady clip; he became an Instagram sensation while embarking on a rapid-fire succession of world tours backing pop singers Tori Kelly, Jessie J and Bruno Mars. Before that, he studied at Musicians Institute in Los Angeles, graduating with the title "2014 Outstanding Guitar Player of Musicians Institute."

"Going to music school was such a multicultural and educational source for me," he says. "Five days a week I was exposed to so many different styles of music. I learned to love jazz, but I didn't become a jazz player. Same thing with blues; I didn't have the blues in me, but at least I could get the blues flavor."

He thinks, then continues, "I just never wanted to be just one type of a player. On the other hand, I never achieved the mastery of something. For example, back when I was

**"I could never replicate my heroes – it was just so hard. It upset me, but it forced me to go another way"**

completely in love with Dream Theater and shred stuff, I could never replicate my heroes – Eric Johnson, Joe Satriani and John Petrucci. It was just so hard. So many players could copy the whole formula. It upset me that I couldn't, and I was like, 'Oh, my gosh, is this a curse?' But it forced me to go another way. I decided to understand the essence of my heroes instead of copying them."

**You remind me of a great actor who isn't a singer or dancer, but he sings and dances just enough to get cast in a musical.**

Exactly.

**I hear that in your shredding. It sounds authentic, but I don't think of you as a typical shredder.**

I'm not a shredder. Perfect.

**Let me drill down on that. So much of shred feels rooted in masculinity – faster, harder, louder – but there's nothing macho about your shredding. What you do has more of a feminine mystique.**

You know what? I agree with you; it's definitely a more sentimental, feminine side. [Laughs] One of my first gigs out of music college was for Tori Kelly. She's very R&B, but she's so versatile. I understood that I had to serve her songs, her music, so I studied her vocal lines, and that made me take on a vocal flavor myself. Maybe that's why so many singer-songwriters can relate to my playing, because I relate to them.

**I understand you've been working on this solo record for a while.**

In a way. There's one song called "Change" ▶



that I wrote when I was 20 years old. It's been a decade-long process of collecting songs. The biggest obstacle for me was deciding on the concept of the record. When I started playing with various artists, I got a manager who said, "Mateus, you're great, but if you want to reach a lot of people with your music, you have to make a record with vocalists." I was young, so I was trying to figure things out. So that was an idea when I was 23 or 24, like, "Okay, I'll make something like Santana's *Supernatural*."

Working as a sideman got complicated because it all revolved around the artists' schedules. I had to find the time to work on my music between tours and shows. I started to use social media as a journal — I recorded music and posted it online. The manager was still telling me I needed to make something with vocalists, but at the same time I was creating this guitar music and posting it because I thought it was cool. I did that for a long time, until 2024. A lot of the songs and melodies on the album people will probably recognize.

The turning point came when I got married and left Bruno Mars. It was like the start of a new chapter. I was still dealing with the decision to record with vocalists, but then

I thought that because I had been working on these pieces of instrumental music for so long, it would be unfair for me to release my first album without them.

**You did work with a live drummer and bass player (Anthony Uriarte and Isaias Elpes, respectively) on the album. Were they recording with you through the years, or did you recut everything recently?**

I was surrounded by a lot of musicians, but I would say that after I got that realization of "Okay, I'm making an instrumental record," it was easy because I was able to just, "I need to find those people" — find a drummer and bass player who will understand me. The good part of that is both guys who recorded the album with me, they are also guitar players. So it was easier to speak with them because they were

**"Music is like a bird. Things can get too contained, and sometimes a bird just needs to fly"**

able to understand my guitar vocabulary. I had maybe 30 songs that were close to finished, so I had to decide which ones to cut with the drummer and bassist. At the same time, though, I kept going over the whole thing in my head, because that manager had been telling me, "You need to make a record with vocalists."

**Is he still your manager?**

[Laughs] No, we broke up. Things are good between us. He was one of the first people who heard the album. He still thought I could reach a larger audience with a vocalist, but that's all right. I'm older now and I understand my place. I feel like what I'm doing right now is the right thing. I'm so proud of this album, and I'm going to respect the process and show people the world that I'm in now. But I feel like I need to constantly challenge myself, like, "Okay, I already have my cards to throw on the table, but it's time to get new cards."

**On a purely guitar level, is there something about your technique that you'd like to improve, or is it a more philosophical element?**

I think it's both things. I would say my weakness is rhythm — counting. When I'm creating a melody, I don't see time. I don't see things being four or six, eight or whatever time signature. I'm just telling a story with a melody. One of the songs on the record, "Kawaii," has a weird 5/4 time signature. I was like, "Yeah, it's cool, but it's not grooving the way I want." I'd like to get more authority in terms of time.

**That's so funny you think you're not grooving — you're such a soulful player, so in the pocket. I feel like telling you that whatever you're doing, you're doing it right. Don't change.**

Thanks. I feel like music can be described in analogies and metaphors. To me, music is like a bird. Things can get too contained, like, "We've got to keep time in the right time." It's like putting a bird in a cage, and sometimes a bird just needs to fly.

**One of the best things about your playing is your unpredictability, but it's also part of your songwriting. So many guitar instrumentalists write songs that are riff, verse, chorus and then a long, long solo section. Your songs don't follow that formula.**

Thanks, I appreciate that. It's funny you say that because there's a couple of songs on the record where I thought, "Gosh, I'm soloing so much. Please be quiet. Let it breathe."

**The majority of your songs are three minutes long. You're not doing these**

**eight-minute epics that are basically showcases for solos.**

Here's another analogy: instrumental guitar music is like a dessert. A good dessert needs a decent amount of sugar, but sometimes you get a dessert that's too big or too sugary and you can't get through it.

**In other words, it's a dessert that's small enough and sweet enough so you can finish.**

Perfect. That's the best way to put it. I should say this: I know it's early to talk about the future, but I don't exclude the idea of making an album with vocalists. I really do want to do that in the future. But I wanted to get this album out there just in case it was my only instrumental record. I wanted it to be right – the right amount of songs, the structure, all that. But like we said, it couldn't be too long. I didn't want people saying, "Okay, I'm tired of this. It's all the same crap."

**We've talked about the business a bit. Something that's true about you and many younger guitarists is how they don't have a lot of club experience. They went from posting videos to playing big stages.**

That's true. I played in my local church, but then I joined Tori Kelly when I was 21. I was

the youngest guy in the band. I would say I've been blessed because I didn't have to go through that big struggle of carrying my own gear and paying to play clubs. I've been fortunate to jump from school straight to big stages, playing the Greek Theatre in L.A. and the Beacon Theatre in New York. I didn't have the experience that builds so much character in you, playing small gigs and facing that kind of struggle.

**Playing to a bunch of drunks who hate you does build character.**

Big time.



Mateus Asato

**Given the right offer, would you go back to playing with any pop acts?**

Right now, I'm in this phase of sharing my message with my own guitar. I've done tours by myself in 2019, and that was really amazing. I have so many expectations to continue that chapter. I don't close the door, but I feel like right now is a big standby moment. The main focus for me is to share my instrumental work. But I might get tired of playing my own music and be like, "Why not?" You learn a lot from playing [other] people's music.

**How about rock bands? If a big rock group asked you to join, would you consider it?**

I think it's definitely more doable for me to join a band, so yes, I would consider it. For example, in 2023 I did a project with Mike Shinoda from Linkin Park, and afterward I went to his studio to write songs for the band. I remember that kind put that sort of flame in my heart, like, "Wow, what if they invite me to play?" I would love to join a band like that. I know it's not my cup of tea – like, nu-metal – but it's cool. I've played so many styles, so yeah, to join a band like that would be cool.

**After this interview hits, you're going to be deluged with offers.**

[Laughs] The door is open! 

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**SERIES A**

# Solar, So Good... So Hot!

Ola Englund does it all, playing with Swedish thrashers the Haunted, running his Solar Guitars brand and starring in a successful YouTube channel. Behold the guitarist who never stops.

BY JON WIEDERHORN

**H**E MIGHT HAVE joined the Haunted a full 17 years after the group formed, yet to metal guitarists, Ola Englund's face is far more recognizable than those of his bandmates – even though bassist Jonas Björler and drummer Adrian Erlandsson were original members of Swedish death metal pioneers At the Gates.

How has Englund eclipsed the celebrity status of the rest of the Haunted? Simple. Since the early days of social media, Englund has been creating gear reviews, interview segments, on-the-scene reports and other nuggets of infotainment that've turned him into a YouTube influencer. Englund has posted more than 2,300 videos on his YouTube channel. His most popular one, "Boss Metalzone – Worst Distortion Pedal Ever?" has accrued more than 3.8 million views, and "Visiting Dimebag's Guitar Vault," has been watched more than 2.5 million times. Eleven of his other videos have more than a million views each.

"Doing the YouTube channel has definitely helped me get to where I am today," says

Englund, who had only played in underground bands before he started posting. "People recognized me from the channel and liked what I did. They liked my songs and riffs. A lot of them went, 'Hey man, what's this dude about?'"

In 2007, after failing to ignite label interest with his bands Subcycde and Facing Death, Englund started the death/thrash project Feared and played their songs in his amp-testing videos. By 2010, he had developed a following and soon musicians were lending Englund their gear. "These guys started saying, 'It would be cool if you could borrow my amplifier and do a demo,'" Englund says from his Stockholm home shortly before shuttling off to a music convention in China

**"My YouTube channel never blew up in a traditional sense. It's always been a steady grind"**

to promote his Solar Guitars brand. "I'd drive around Sweden picking up and dropping off rare amps I borrowed so I could review them. I was probably one of the first guitarists that did that."

Realizing the commercial potential of the channel, Englund quit his job as an accountant and focused exclusively on making music and videos. Then, in 2012, popular YouTuber Ben Eller recommended Englund to Six Feet Under frontman Chris Barnes. The death metal vocalist was looking for a guitarist to replace Rob Arnold; after watching Englund's videos, Barnes brought him into the fold. Englund toured with Six Feet Under for much of 2012 and co-wrote two songs for their 2013 album, *Unborn*. However, shortly after its release, he left to join the Haunted, replacing founding member Anders Björler.

"I had a great time playing with Six Feet Under, but it made more sense for me to be in the Haunted since they're based in Sweden, too," Englund says.

Englund's first album with the Haunted, 2014's *Exit Wounds*, marked a return to their melodic death metal sound following the

Ola Englund – YouTube star,  
the Haunted guitarist and  
founder of Solar Guitars





Englund [far right] with Swedish rockers the Haunted, a band he joined after leaving Six Feet Under in 2013

more mainstream alterna-metal vibe of 2011's *Unseen*. But after the record came out, the Haunted down-scaled their activities while bassist and songwriter Jonas Björler and drummer Adrian Erlandsson focused on the comeback of their pioneering Swedish metal group At the Gates. What could have been frustrating for Englund turned into a blessing in disguise. Not only did he wind up writing three-quarters of the music for the Haunted's thrash 2017 album, *Strength in Numbers*, but he had more time to work on his YouTube channel, and by 2019, his user base had grown to more than 380,000.

"My channel never blew up in a traditional sense," says Englund, whose site now boasts more than 900,000 subscribers. "It's always been a steady grind, and I've had steady growth. I didn't all of a sudden get that insane increase of views and then find no way to sustain that. I think that kind of crash is what makes subscribers leave. I just continue to do my thing and keep gaining viewers."

In addition to ramping up his channel, Englund spent much of the past couple of years working with guitarist Patrik Jensen and Björler on new songs for the Haunted's 10th album. The result, *Songs of Last Resort*, is a bracing slab of turbo-boosted death-thrash informed by cornerstones of metal, including

Entombed, Carcass, Slayer, Testament and Pantera. "My biggest inspiration is probably Pantera," Englund says. "I got into them and bands like Bolt Thrower and Testament right after I discovered metal. Dimebag was such a revelation. Soon after I fell in love with Pantera, I went out and got a black Dime Washburn. His guitar playing was like something to aspire to – not that I ever thought I could be that good. I just figured it was something great I could shoot for."

**As a guitarist, is it important to strive to play above your current pay grade?**

I think so. I've always liked working a lot and pushing myself. It keeps me on my toes and makes me not slack.

**Some people live to tour and don't enjoy being in the studio. You love recording.**

I've always liked coming up with riffs and

**"One of the first shows I did with Six Feet Under was at a festival in front of 45,000 people"**

songs, and that's why it has been fun for me to constantly write new material for my YouTube channel. I found out very early that all these YouTubers who played covers were getting shut down or demonetized. So I became adamant about only doing original stuff because then no one can tell me what to do or try to shut me down.

**In addition to your work with the Haunted, you've released two solo albums and two albums based on riffs you wrote for your show, "Sunday with Ola." Do you find it easy to write?**

Not always. For the Haunted, doing an album is like putting together a puzzle where all the pieces are scrambled. You work on it, and at some point you get the whole wide picture. When you get to that point it's very rewarding. But it's sometimes frustrating until you get to that point.

***Songs of Last Resort* is an apocryphal title. Will this be the band's last release?**

It's definitely not the last album. "Letters of Last Resort" is the last song, which is about letters that people in war would send back home. The album title is just a reference to that. Jensen took the lead on this album. He needed to write a bunch of heavy songs for



"In 2008, I went back to six-string since I'm a much better guitarist on six strings," Englund says

some reason, and he tuned down, which is something we don't do very often. The songs are so riff-based and evil-sounding. I did my part, but it wasn't until Jensen was done with his songs that we felt like the album was complete.

**You were born in Stockholm in 1981. Did you have a happy childhood or did adversity and conflict fuel your interest in aggressive music?**

I had a very good upbringing. I come from a musical family. My dad has always played guitar and is a big fan of Chet Atkins and that chicken pickin' style. He never pushed or pressured me to start playing, but he was very supportive. I picked up guitar when I was 13 and took lessons. The first riffs I learned were "Smoke on the Water" and "Proud Mary." That was cool, but I was more into rock, and I wanted to play Nirvana songs.

**That would explain why your first guitar was a Fender Mustang. What was your first amp?**

I worked my ass off during the summer when I was 15 and used the money to buy a '94 Mesa Boogie Rectifier with a cabinet. The thing is, I had no idea how to dial it. And no, I didn't use a boost because I didn't know how to do that. It sounded very loud when I played it, but it wasn't until I saw other people plug into it with guitars that had EMG pickups that I thought, "Wow, that sounds very different." That's when I started understanding that they were pushing the pre-amp. That's when I began reading about guitars, and I learned about how to use a Tube Screamer – you know, the Scott Ian trick – to get the guitar to really chug.

**Did you ever play a seven- or eight-string?**

Steve Vai played the Ibanez Universe and Meshuggah played seven-strings, so yeah, I went through that. I liked the fact that you didn't have to tune the guitar down. It was already in B. So in 1997, I got the first production Ibanez RG7620. I actually traded my Washburn Dimebag for it. Then, in 2008, I went back to six-string since I'm a much better guitarist on six strings. It's just one less string to worry about. And I almost always use standard D or drop-C tuning.

**Stockholm was the birthplace of some great death metal bands, including Entombed, Opeth and Dismember. Were you part of that scene?**

I was born about 10 years too late, but the

scene they created was so cool. They all had the Boss HM-2. They dimed it, and that was the chainsaw sound of Stockholm death metal. I understand that type of simplicity because it came from kids in their rehearsal space. They wanted to be insanely heavy, so they turned the knobs all the way up and created the sound of a whole new scene.

**Even though you were younger than the members of bands from the Gothenburg melodic death metal scene, did you feel a kinship with In Flames, At the Gates and the Haunted?**

I loved all that stuff. The name of my death metal band, Feared, was inspired by the Haunted; I always thought the Haunted was such a cool name, and I was a fan since the first time. I enjoy strong melodies in really heavy music, so when I joined them, it was a dream come true.

**You went from being a guitarist in Feared and a struggling YouTuber to making a name for yourself in the internet guitar video community and joining Six Feet Under. Can you point to the moment that your upward trajectory started?**

My big breakthrough came in 2012 when I went to NAMM for the first time. Before that, I was just doing videos, then sitting behind my desk seeing views on a screen, and I didn't know if they were real or not. At NAMM, people recognized me and thanked me for my videos. It was really an eye-opener. I thought, Wow, these are actual people, and a lot of them bought a certain amp because of me. That gave me confidence.

**Was there a slow build from there?**

Things happened right away. I was lucky I quit my job as an accountant because a month later, Chris Barnes called me about the Six Feet Under gig. I saw that as a fast ticket into the touring world. One of the first shows I did with them was at the Wacken Festival in Germany in front of 45,000 people. I was used to playing for 20 or 30 people at a pub. I went from zero to being on a tour bus.

**To succeed with a YouTube channel, you have to constantly reinvent yourself. How did you up your game?**

Up until 2015, I was just writing and playing music. There was no talking, just text on the screen. Then I started talking, which was insanely awkward – and it still is. But doing that definitely changed my whole channel. People got even more engaged because suddenly there's a voice behind this Swedish guy.

**One of your popular segments has been the amp- and pedal-review series called ▶**



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#### "Will It Chug?" What inspired that?

I saw that everyone was doing performance demos and amplifier demos like I did. And I thought, Man, if I'm going to survive this, I have to come up with some new ideas. I decided it would be fun to take a piece of gear and see if I can make it sound metal, and how long it would take. The first video was with an Orange amp, and they're not necessarily made for metal. But if you put in a Tube Screamer in there, it's going to be metal as hell.

#### You have a conversational, sarcastic and sometimes self-deprecating approach in your videos.

A lot of that comes from being Swedish. We definitely appreciate sarcasm. I try to be myself because on YouTube you create your audience and their expectations, so if you're pretending to be someone else, you're going to always have to be that person. Very early on, I decided, "Okay, now I'm just going to show you exactly who I am, and if you don't like it, don't watch." It makes everything simpler because I don't have to put on a persona.

#### What's a particular piece of gear you expected to love but sounded like crap?

Usually, when there's something really bad, I don't make the video because once I start doing a video I have to be honest, and if something breaks or sounds like ass, that will stay in the video. Also, sometimes a piece of gear is good, but it's not right for me. Take the

**"We launched Solar in late 2017 and had 300 guitars to sell and ship immediately. We've grown very fast"**

Synergy Marshall JMP, for instance, which is basically a JMP in a small, Synergy pre-amp module. I cannot play anything good on that thing. But I watch all the other YouTubers out there, and they make it sound incredible. So it's more like, "Okay, I think I'm the problem." I just cannot play these clean, super-plexi amplifiers, so I won't make the video. It makes me feel terrible about my playing.

#### You launched Solar guitars in 2017 after working with Washburn. Why did you decide to start your own company?

I had a successful model with Washburn. I brought them my designs, they released it and it did very well. But being a social media, YouTube guy, I know the world moves so fast now and people's attention spans are so short. I felt that Washburn's business model was too slow. There was a bureaucracy behind everything – the making of the guitars, selling to dealers and getting them to distributors. It's such a long process before an actual customer gets to see the guitar – like, about a year – and I was so frustrated because I knew people wanted the guitars but had to wait a long time before they could get them.

After my three-year contract ended, I figured I could stay there for another three years, but I knew I could do so much better if I could find some people to do a new company with me. The guy I worked with at Washburn had just left the company, so I gave him a call and we decided to create a model that went straight from us to the consumer because we know exactly what the audience wants. They tell me. I took my designs out of Washburn, and we formed Solar. We launched in late

2017 and had 300 guitars to sell and ship immediately. We've grown very fast.

#### Tragically, At the Gates vocalist Tomas Lindberg died from cancer in September 2025. This must have had a profound impact on you and your bandmates.

We were very close and I have lots of good memories. The band had known about his condition for a long time, and we knew he wouldn't be able to sing, but he was getting better. When we recorded our album, he came out to the studio and everyone thought he was fine. He had surgery and he had a little bit of a hollow voice, but otherwise he was just the same great spirit. He's always been happy, and we thought, well, even if he couldn't be in At the Gates, at least he's going to be alright. Then, in the spring, he suddenly got worse. Obviously, it was devastating to hear about him passing, but at the same time, it almost felt like we've been in mourning since the spring.

#### How will Tomas' passing affect the Haunted?

Obviously, when they were touring, the Haunted had to alternate schedules with At the Gates. We didn't play shows at the same time. So, from now on, maybe that will mean the Haunted will play more, and maybe we will spend more time as a band and it won't take eight years for the next album to drop. We're already talking about a new album because there's a hunger in this band. And there's such a good vibe. I've already started writing songs for the next album because I feel hungry to do that. I think we're going to have a new album sooner rather than later. **GW**

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# Look what the Cat Dragged In!

A very *Guitar World* guide to some of the most significant guitar albums of 1986

**O**N THE SURFACE, guitar trends in 1986 looked downright wild and perverse — a weird parade of shred-happy virtuosos, anthemic power pop heroes, dirtbag metalheads and eccentric alt-rock outsiders. But the truth is, the music provided a perfect soundtrack for any typical American high school in the mid-Eighties. Hot blonde cheerleaders and their varsity boyfriends — both with perfectly feathered hair — boogied to the glossy, arena-sized riffs of Bon Jovi's *Slippery When Wet* and Van Halen's *5150*. Meanwhile, the heshers in blue denim smoked cigarettes, slugged sloe gin behind the bleachers and skipped class with Metallica's *Master of Puppets* or Megadeth's *Peace Sells... but Who's Buying?* blasting through their Walkmans. And in the drama wing, the theater kids tried in vain to avoid being shoved into lockers while finding solace in the Smiths' *The Queen Is Dead* or R.E.M.'s *Lifes Rich Pageant*.

Beneath the Aqua Net and denim jackets, 1986 was a year of transition — a crossroads for the guitar. The instrument was everywhere, but what it meant was changing fast. Eddie Van Halen had redefined its possibilities, but his success with *5150* also symbolized the new mainstream, namely pop hooks and corporate sheen. Underground metal bands like Metallica and Slayer were weaponizing the guitar into something brutal, while alternative acts like the Smiths, the Cure and R.E.M. were rediscovering the beauty of jangle, texture and restraint.

It was a year when the guitar tried on every mask it could find — virtuoso flash, suburban rebellion, romantic angst and emo defiance — and somehow, all of it made sense. The same radio waves that carried "You Give Love a Bad Name" also hummed with "Master of Puppets" and "Fall on Me."

In hindsight, 1986 feels like the last great year before the guitar world split into tribes. Metal would get faster, pop slicker and indie more self-conscious. But for a brief, chaotic moment, it all coexisted in a glorious collision of energy and experimentation.

The albums of 1986 capture a turning point when the guitar was still king, but the kingdom was fracturing in fascinating ways. Whether you worship at the altar of tone, technique or attitude, the records represented in this issue of *GW* reveal how the instrument kept reinventing itself in the face of pop polish, metal fury and indie rebellion.

They're proof that in 1986, no matter your tribe or taste, the guitar still had something to say — and it was loud, proud and gloriously unhinged.

If *The Breakfast Club* summed up 1985 by locking five clashing archetypes in detention and showing they weren't so different after all, 1986 was the year their soundtracks collided. Metal, pop and alt-rock might have seemed like separate worlds, but they were all driven by the same instinct — the guitar as voice for identity, angst and escape.

Or, in the words of *The Breakfast Club*'s stereotypical athlete, Andrew Clark, "We're all pretty bizarre. Some of us are just better at hiding it, that's all." ▶

BY BRAD TOLINSKI



## RUN-D.M.C. FEAT. AEROSMITH “Walk This Way”

In '86, the ingenious blending of rock and hip-hop resulted in anything but a novelty hit. Joe Perry explains...

BY ANDREW DALY

**► LOOKING BACK AT** the then-improbable collaboration between Aerosmith and Run-D.M.C. on a rock/hip-hop reboot of “Walk This Way,” guitarist Joe Perry says, “It was a lot of fun and definitely a high point of our career.” His second point cannot be overstated. By 1985, Aerosmith were experiencing a commercial stasis, and their ballyhooed comeback album, *Done with Mirrors*, stalled on the charts. The revamped version of “Walk This Way” blasted them back into the mainstream while also introducing Run-D.M.C. to a wider audience.

Unbeknownst to Perry, Run-D.M.C. (Joseph “Run” Simmons, Darryl “DMC” McDaniels and DJ Jam Master Jay) were fans of the original track. At the same time, Perry was “just getting into hip-hop.” So it was kismet when Rick Rubin brought the guitarist and singer Steven Tyler together with the pioneering Queens-based hip-hoppers to create one of music’s most celebrated crossover hits. (In 1975, Aerosmith’s original “Walk This Way” reached Number 10 on *Billboard*’s Hot 100. Run-D.M.C.’s remake hit the top five, and its video was a smash.)

### What did you think of hip-hop when you first heard it?

My son, who was 11 or 12, was blasting it in his room. I dug the groove. It was really basic music; it’s all about rhythm and guys standing on a street corner with a boombox. The lyrics reflected how they were living.

**By the Eighties, a lot of people were calling “Walk This Way” proto-hip-hop.** The lyrics were a story, and there was a rhythm in hip-hop, so to me it was a natural progression from the blues. But to think that “Walk This Way” was proto-rap, that’s another story. I guess that’s a discussion — or an argument. And even if it’s an argument, which it shouldn’t be, it’s just a point of view; nobody’s right or wrong.

### Were you into the idea of collaborating with Run-D.M.C.?

Rick Rubin heard something. He had to convince those guys [because] and they were kind of tentative. But Aerosmith was up for anything. That’s why our music goes from hard rock to almost heavy metal to blues to ballads. We thought, “Let’s try it!”

### Aerosmith were touring at the time. What was the recording process like?

We were, I think, in North Carolina. They sent us plane tickets, and me and Steven went to Queens. I brought my guitar, and there was Rick, an engineer and the guys from Run-D.M.C., and one was late because they had towed his rental car. [Laughs] He was flipping out because he didn’t know what he was gonna do about it, but Rick kept saying, “Listen, you’ve got Aerosmith here. Focus. We’ll take care of the car later. Don’t worry about it.” After that, everybody settled down.

**What was the recording process like?** We got the drum beat down, which was the common ground for the song — from our version and theirs. I think Rick said, “You’re using the drums to rap to anyway; you might as well take it all the way. Let’s try it.”

### Is it true you also played bass on the updated track?

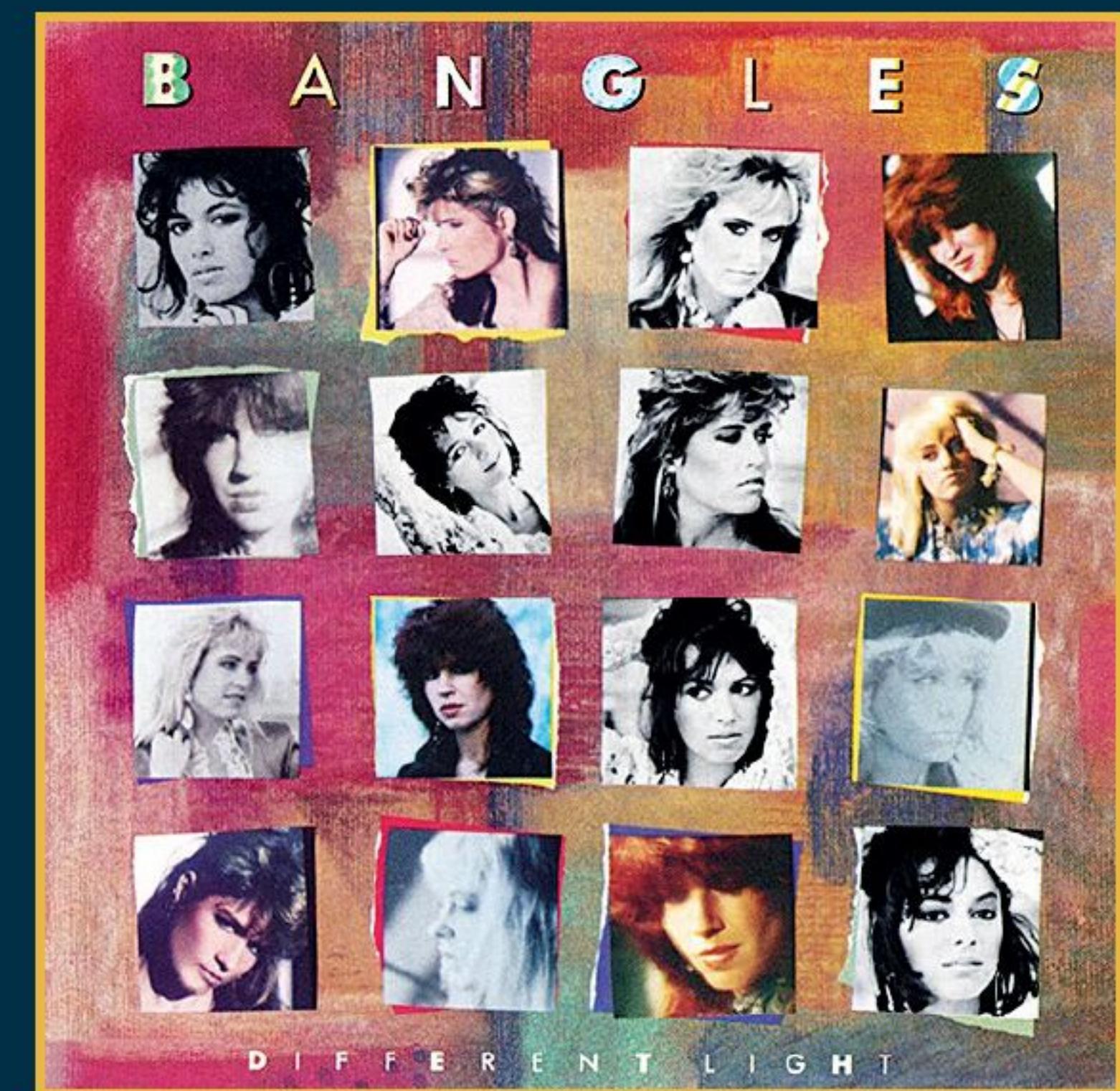
There were these three kids in the studio sitting on the couch. We were introduced to them, and I didn’t know who they were, but they were cool guys and a little younger. We were listening to the mixdown, and Rick said, “I think we need to put a bass on it.” We looked around the studio, and there were no basses, but one of the kids said, “My apartment ain’t too far, I got a bass there.”

### Who were the three kids?

The Beastie Boys! [Laughs] He went to his apartment and was back in 15 minutes with a P-Bass or a Jazz. Anyway, I played the bass.

### The track kicked off your second run to glory. How do you look back on its importance?

It was definitely a leg-up. We’re just proud to say it was a meeting of two styles of music. And the video speaks for itself. We got Black rappers on MTV. The only Black cat on MTV at that point was Michael Jackson; at least, that’s what we heard. I’m proud of that.



## THE BANGLES Different Light

Vicki Peterson on the California girls’ hit second album, an intoxicating blend of Sixties pop smarts and Eighties sheen

BY BILL DeMAIN

**► THERE WERE** A whole lot of pharaohs walking the earth in 1986. Even Princess Di and the Statue of Liberty were striking poses. The craze was all thanks to one of the year’s defining songs — the Bangles’ “Walk Like an Egyptian” — and its MTV video.

“Those moves still follow us,” says guitarist Vicki Peterson. “But fun as it is, I remember thinking the label would never have the balls to release it as a single, because it’s just too weird!”

But really, at a time when Madonna and Phil Collins ruled the charts, the Bangles were kind of weird themselves. Four friends who were “obsessed with the Beatles, jangly guitars and harmony singing,” their 1984 debut *All Over the Place* had landed as a charming throwback. “It had a glorified garage band sound,” Peterson says. “With *Different Light*, we embraced sonic techniques and production values that were more of the moment. Also, I think there was our own ambition plus pressure from the label to get more commercial success. So they were pleased when Prince offered us ‘Manic Monday’ because that was a stake they could put in the ground.”

The Purple One was a fan. “He would come to our shows and sit in,” Peterson says. “We’d get a note from the tour manager — ‘Prince is here and would love to play with you.’ It was like, ‘What? Here, my take my guitar, please!’”

That led to a demo of ‘Manic Monday’ arriving at the studio. “It was very well

mapped out," Peterson says, recalling that Prince suggested they just add their vocals over his tracks. "Normally, people were happy to take his tracks, because he's Prince. But we wanted to do the song our own way." It was the right move. Consider the organic push and pull of Debbi Peterson's drums and Michael Steele's bass, Peterson's layered fuzz guitars or that powdered-wig harpsichord hook... It provided a perfect bed for their lush harmonies. "Luckily, Prince liked what we did," Peterson says. "He came to a rehearsal, listened, gave us the thumbs up and walked out. All in his enigmatic style."

Working 12-hour days at Sunset Sound, with producer David Kahne, the band adopted an approach typical of the time. Peterson says, "Our normal modus operandi had been tracking live in the room, all four of us, sounding like a rock band. But here, we'd go back, then systematically replace sounds one by one — snare drum, bass, all my guitars. It was sort of ridiculous, really."

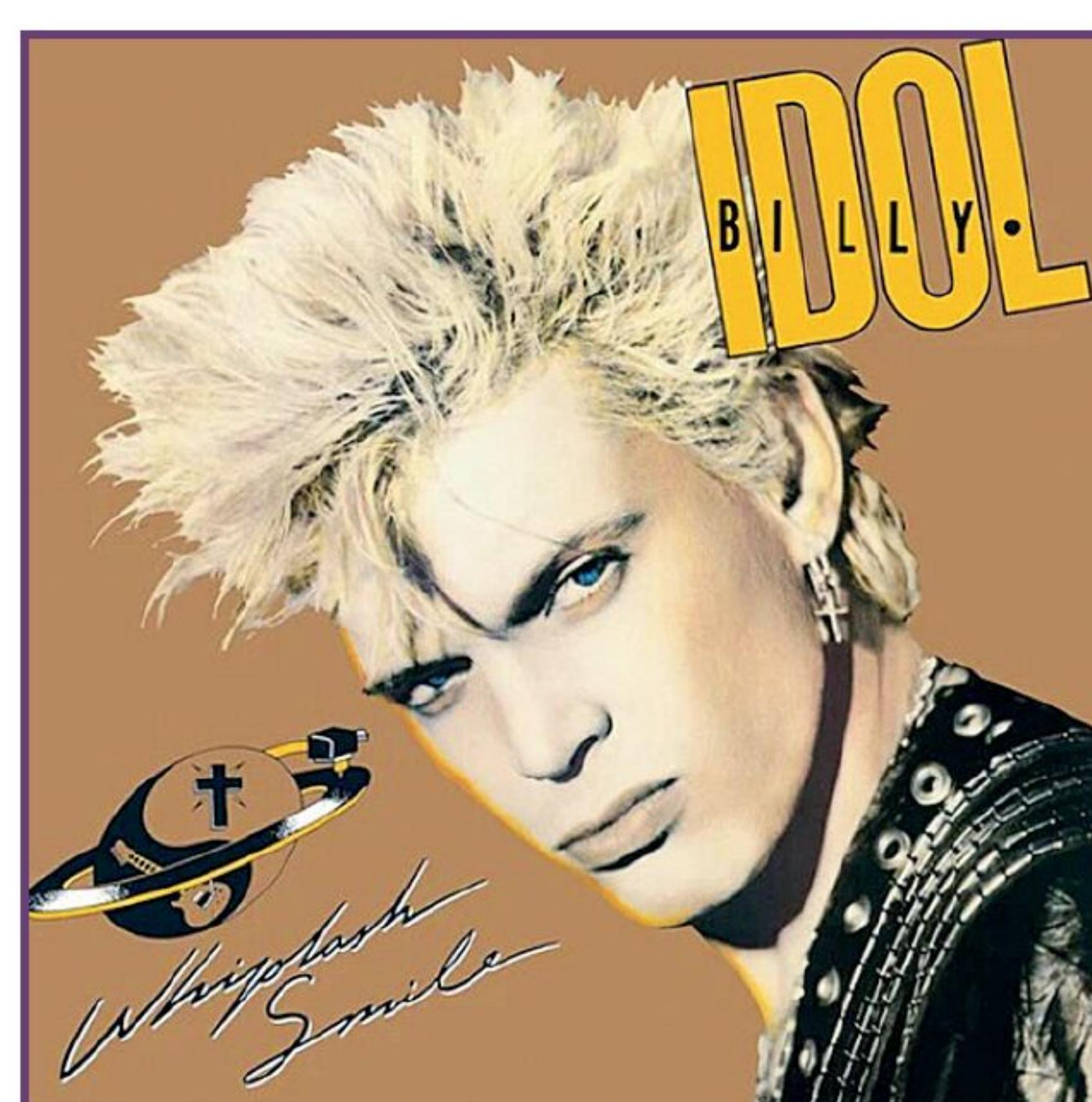
For guitars, Peterson kept it simple, using her "Frankenstein Strat, with a '65 neck on a '67 body," and a '73 Les Paul Custom, plugged into a Fender Deluxe or Fender Super. "My pedalboard would eventually evolve into insanity," she says, "but then, my favorite box was the Ibanez Tube Screamer. It still is."

Though Peterson says the sessions were mostly fun, she's still bugged by how Kahne pitted them against each other in "sing-offs." Especially on "Walk Like an Egyptian." She says, "For whatever reason, he didn't think Debbi's voice sounded good on it, and he kicked her out. That didn't go over well. And it became pretty obvious that David preferred Susanna's voice over the rest of us, so more songs got shifted to her."

The album's four singles ("If She Knew What She Wants" and "September Gurls" were also covers) grabbed so much airplay (Peterson says "constant touring hadn't left much time to write originals"), that listening now to the garage-meets-Motown blitz of "In a Different Light" and the beatnik bop of "Return Post" can almost sound like hearing a lost Bangles album.

Forty years on, Peterson has mixed feelings about *Different Light*. "It's like a middle child," she says. "Obviously, it's very important because of what it did for our career. But maybe I value it less because the singles were covers. As a songwriter, that always gets me a little bit. After the first record, I remember thinking, I don't know how anyone ever makes a second record, because it was incredibly draining. I'm proud of us for being tenacious and really going for it."

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS



## BILLY IDOL

### Whiplash Smile

After the Wedding: Steve Stevens remembers the early days of true international stardom

BY JOE BOSSO

**FOLLOWING THE 1981** breakup of his punk band Generation X, singer Billy Idol left the U.K. and began a solo career in New York City. There, he hooked up with Manhattan's best-kept guitar whiz secret, Steve Stevens, and the two got off to a fast start with the dance rock hit "White Wedding" off 1982's *Billy Idol*. A year later, things broke wide open with the multi-platinum *Rebel Yell*, which included a trio of radio and MTV smashes: "Flesh for Fantasy," "Eyes Without a Face" and the blitzing title cut.

"We were in an enviable position going into our next record," says

Stevens, speaking about *Whiplash Smile*, the 1986 album that marked his third collaboration with Idol. "We had success behind us, and with that came a fair amount of freedom. We had powerful management and a great relationship with our record company."

Stevens and Idol agreed they wouldn't try to replicate past hits. "The last thing we wanted to do was make *Rebel Yell Part 2*," Stevens says. He cites the 1985 remix

compilation set *Vital Idol* as the future-forward direction they wished to follow. "Gary Langdon from Art of Noise did an incredible remix of 'Flesh for Fantasy,' and we said, 'That's where we want to go,' the guitarist says. "We're going to employ more of the new gear and make a very modern record."

There would, however, be growing pains — a particular source of frustration was the matter of drums. Originally, the idea was to incorporate Thommy Price's live drums with Linn Drums, but as Stevens recalls, the technology required to marry the two just wasn't there yet. "Our producer, Keith Forsey, was a master at drum machines, but he could only do so much with what existed at the time," he says. "In the end, we went with the programmed drums."

The songwriting process for *Whiplash Smile* was a decidedly low-tech process. "Billy and I would just sit in a room with our guitars and go, 'What have you got?'" Stevens says. Among the album's songs the two wrote together were "World's Forgotten Boy," "Soul Standing By" and "Man for All Seasons." The guitarist singles out his solo in the latter track as a favorite. "That's where I slipped in a little Wes Montgomery inspiration," he says. "I always had to maintain a punk rock ethos, and punk wasn't about shred, so I thought, 'If I do a shred alternate picking solo but do it clean like Wes, I can get away with it.'"

At first, Stevens didn't know what he could do with "To Be a Lover," a cover of William Bell's 1968 soul ballad that had been reinterpreted by Al Kooper, Lee "Scratch" Perry and George Earl, whose reggae approach appealed to Idol. "That had a slow tempo, but Billy said, 'I hear it fast,'" Stevens says. "I was still saying, 'I don't get what you're hearing, guys, but I'm here to help.'"

It was only when Forsey ditched the Linn Drum in favor of a Roland TR-808 and the song took on a swinging, soulful rockabilly

feel that the guitarist had a change of heart. "It didn't sound like a big guitar song, so I wound up playing a lot of keyboards,"

Stevens says. "Eddie Van Halen had played keyboards on 'Jump,' so I figured I could do it, too."

In the end, Stevens did lay down a righteous guitar solo that he came up with right on the spot. "I think we only did a couple of takes," he says. "I always think I can do things better, but Billy usually goes for the first take. And he's usually right."



Hamer signature artist Steve Stevens in 1986



## THE CHAMELEONS

### Strange Times

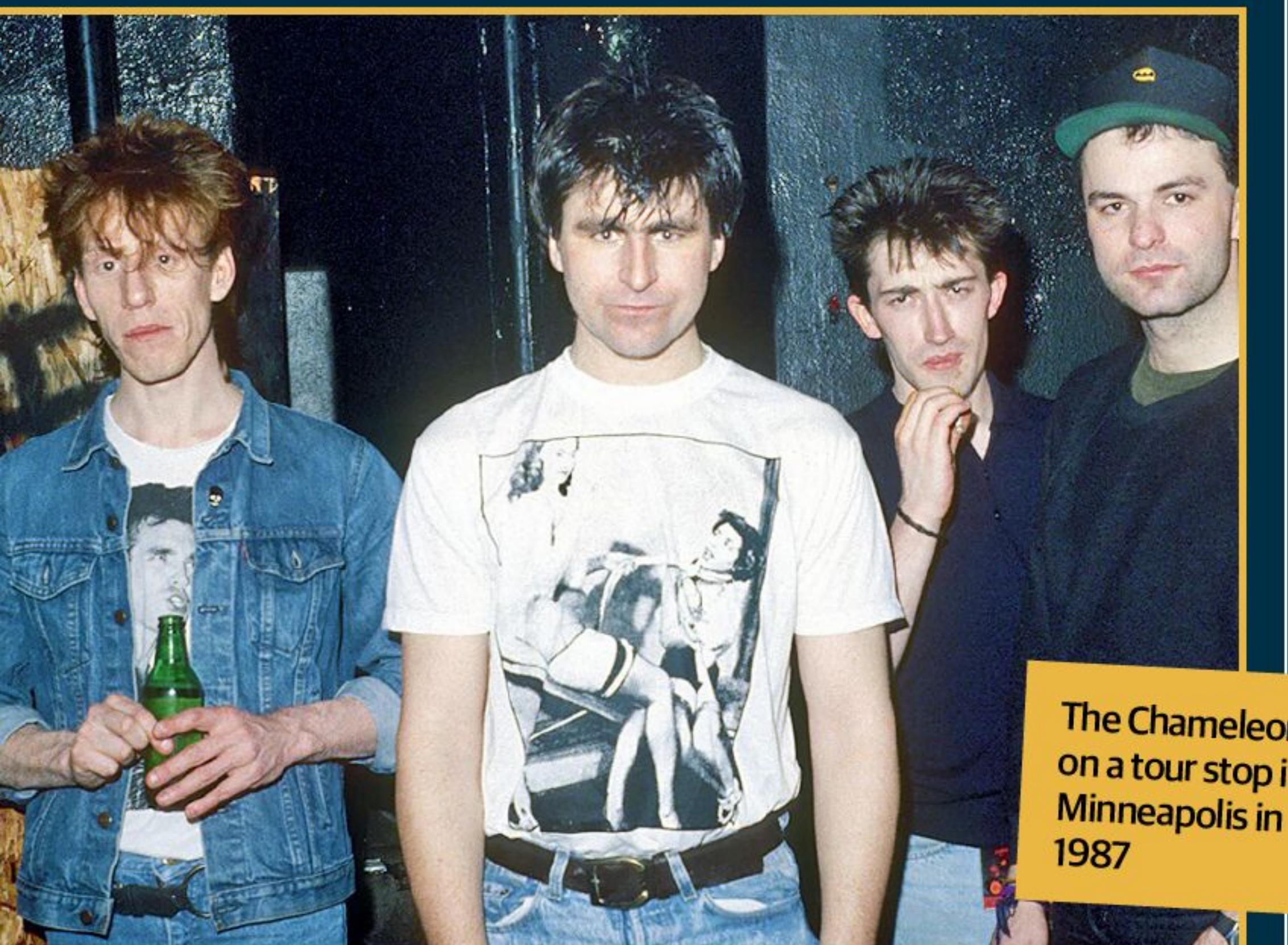
The Chameleons' third album might be the greatest British record you've never heard

BY HENRY YATES

**►** **SOME OF THE** most glorious British guitar music of the Eighties was born under the glowering skies of Manchester. And while the Chameleons never matched the commercial heights of city brethren the Smiths and New Order, those who did discover the band's third album, *Strange Times*, were forever marked by the experience.

"I'd forgotten how much this album meant to me," posted Oasis's Noel Gallagher on Instagram in 2018. "It came out in '86, when I was 19. I've been listening to it every day since and I have to say it's blown my mind — again. It must have influenced my early years as a songwriter because I can hear me in it everywhere."

Fronted by the shamanic vocals of Mark Burgess, with Reg Smithies and Dave Fielding handling guitars, the lineup only had a scattering of embryonic song ideas



The Chameleons on a tour stop in Minneapolis in 1987

when they loaded into Jacob's Studio in Surrey for a five-week session. But the bonhomie — and perhaps some leftover mojo from the studio's recent residents — fed into an album that is lusher, dreamier and more melodic than their post-punk debut, 1983's *Script of the Bridge*, or its obtusely titled follow-up, 1985's *What Does Anything Mean? Basically*.

"The Smiths had just been in doing *The Queen Is Dead*," Smithies says. "I've got a memory of doing backing vocals with Dave and we couldn't stop laughing. And I remember a bird getting in the control room — it took us ages to get it out!"

Somewhere amid the merriment, the band — with producer David M. Allen — captured an album that conjures its own unique headspace. While the nuts and bolts have faded in his memory, Smithies believes he used a Gibson SG and a Squier Strat into a rental Mesa Boogie, with vibes courtesy of Boss delay and chorus pedals, plus the otherworldly repeats of Fielding's Roland Space Echo.

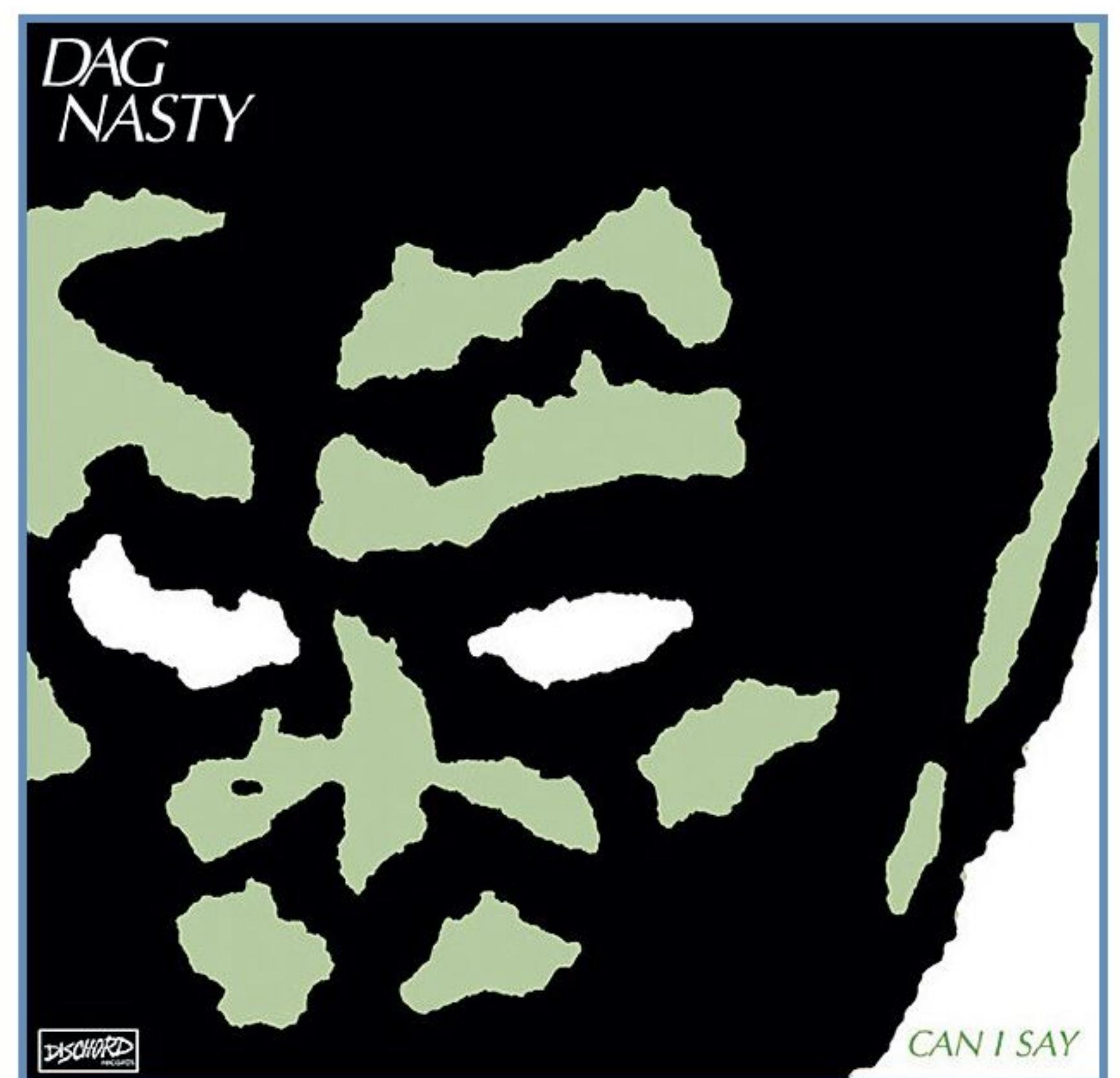
"We generally wanted the record to have a live feel," he says. "Dave and I didn't compete with each other, and it helped that we had different sounds... Dave was and is a much better guitar player than me, but my strength was riffs."

The synergy is obvious on "Mad Jack," "Caution" and "Swamp Thing," with the guitarists weaving hypnotic soundscapes decorated by chiming, delay-soaked arpeggios that at times bleed into feedback and foreboding. "The pop mainstream back then was just catchy love songs, but we related more to the alternative side," Smithies says. "We were lumped in with the goth thing, but we did what we wanted. My favorite guitar moment on *Strange Times*? I'll Remember. We split up not long after, so it's an apt song to end the record."

Thanks to that first parting of '87, the Chameleons missed the mid-Nineties Britrock boom they had helped inspire. But the band's second reunion since 2021 has stuck, and Smithies still enjoys the patronage of A-listers from Interpol to the Smashing Pumpkins, as well as namechecks from younger guns like Alcest frontman Neige ("The Chameleons were just as good as anyone else in the post-punk scene," he told *Louder*).

"I've never met Noel Gallagher, but I've heard he liked *Strange Times*," Smithies says. "I met Billy Corgan briefly when we supported the Mission on a recent U.S. tour. He was talking to Wayne Hussey.

I was about to go onstage and I got a selfie with him to send to my son, Joe, as he's a big fan. We also did a gig in Seattle not long ago; Krist Novoselic from Nirvana turned up and bought our 2025 record, *Arctic Moon*."



## DAG NASTY

### Can I Say

Brian Baker of cult hardcore practitioners Dag Nasty takes us back to the bad old D.C. days

BY GREGORY ADAMS

**►** **BRIAN BAKER WAS** too young to drive when he started playing the early Eighties punk circuit as the teenage bassist for Minor Threat. By 1986, he was in the driver's seat — both as the founding guitarist and creative force behind melodic D.C. hardcore quartet Dag Nasty, and as the guy who owned the van. With the latter in mind, Baker credits his dad — and misappropriated tuition funds — for getting him on the road.

"He gave me the check and, wouldn't you know, instead of registering for college I bought a van," Baker says now with a laugh. "I didn't let him know I'd stolen his money until I had made something of myself... By the time I told him, he was cool about it."

After Minor Threat broke up in 1983, Baker practiced with Glenn Danzig's then-developing Samhain project, but it wasn't a match. He also briefly performed with punk-provocateurs the Meatmen while attending college but abandoned both pursuits to start Dag Nasty. While often rooted in the furious pace of first-wave hardcore, 1986 debut album *Can I Say* also endures as a scope-expanding proto-emo classic — reflecting Baker's love of heart-pounding hooks and Captain Sensible's jangle-jolted guitar sound on the Damned's 1982 album, *Strawberries*.

"I'm not going to say I had a notepad of things to do, but I was consciously [thinking], 'We need a couple ragers that sound like Minor Threat,'" he says. "Also, the music that was not specifically trying to be fast was a reflection of what I liked to listen to."

Dag Nasty initially featured Baker, bassist Roger Marbury, drummer Colin Sears and gruff-but-energetic frontman Shawn Brown. After cutting a demo on Halloween '85, Baker

Dag Nasty's Brian Baker on stage in Sacramento with Bad Religion in 2014



brought Dave Smalley of Boston hardcore outfit DYS into the fold as a screamer who could match unbridled fury with melodic flair. They "slightly tarted up" eight early songs for the *Can I Say* sessions at Don Zientara's Inner Ear basement studio in Arlington, Virginia.

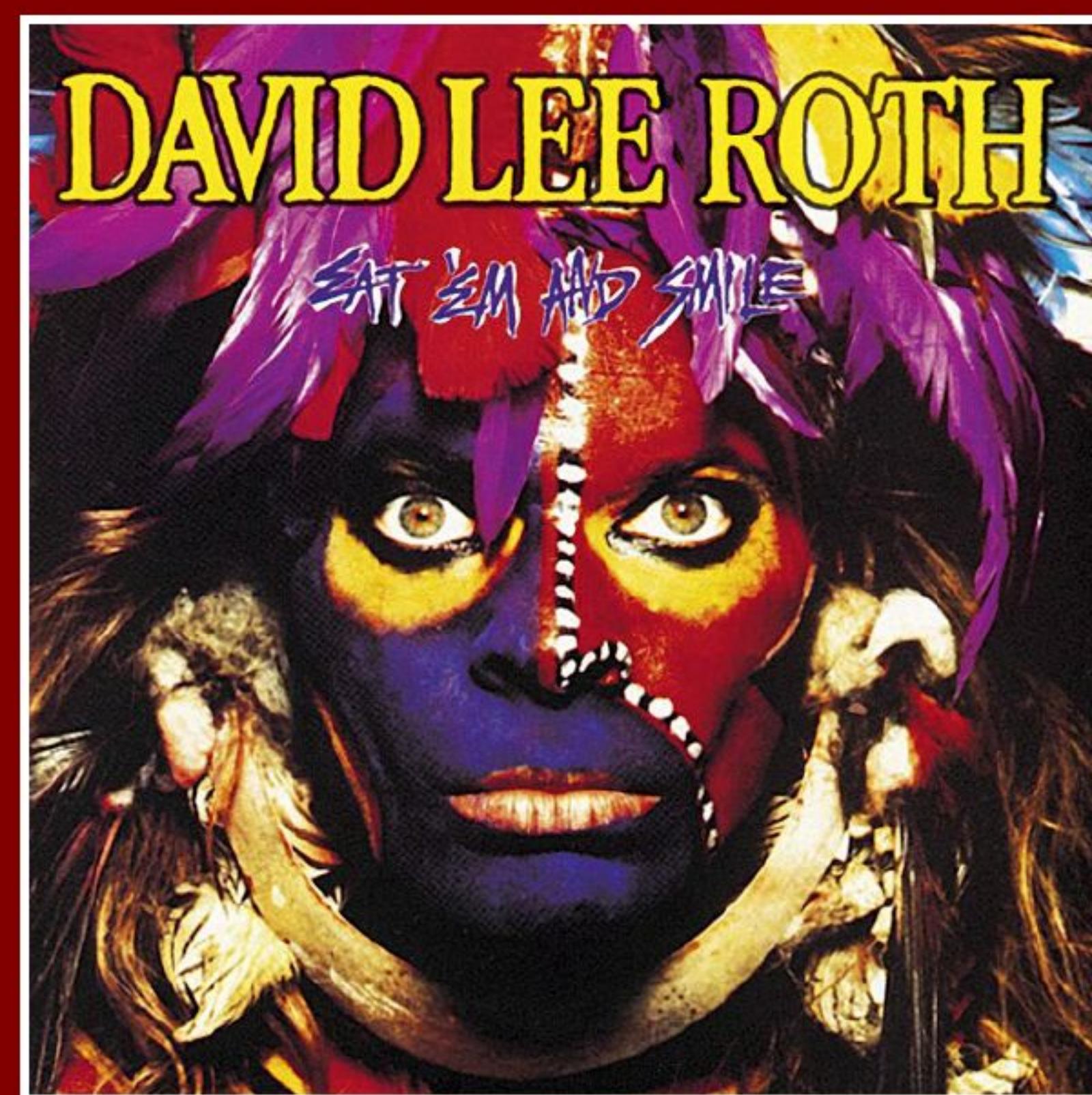
Baker's solo on the power-shuffled "Thin Line" is anything but wispy; the "Justification" demo's slender vibrato passage evolved into rock-scorched dynamism for the LP. Sometimes he hot-shotted things even more in concert: "As I got more comfortable playing guitar, and more familiar with the songs, I would probably cheese it up a little bit — but I wouldn't change the core of it."

His setup comprised a Seventies Les Paul goldtop, a 100-watt JMP 2203 Mk2 and a Marshall 1935B 4x12. The most crucial part of *Can I Say*'s tone ended up being an MXR chorus laying around Inner Ear. While omnipresent on the album, Baker felt the pedal design was "clumsy," so he opted to bring a roadworthy, rackmount Boss CE-3000 Super Chorus on tour instead.

Interestingly, Smalley wasn't road-ready either. Just as Dag were about to promote *Can I Say*, their frontman pulled out of the project. "We were going to open for the Descendents on a huge summer tour... and Dave decides he's going to go do graduate school, something that wasn't being in Dag Nasty." Vocalist Peter Cortner handled those dates. Shortly after the tour, Baker moved into Descendents bassist Doug Carrion's L.A. basement and started playing in Doggy Style, a party band making music with a "regrettable Chili Peppers flavor to it." That bottomed out for Baker quick — he and Carrion bounced to D.C. and restarted Dag Nasty with Cortner and Sears. They slowed the tempo for 1987's *Wig Out at Denko's*, "a weird-sounding record that sounds like people who went to California and smoked some pot."

Dag's demo-era lineup reunited in 2012 but have been relatively dormant since 2018. Baker's primarily focused on his 30-year run with Bad Religion, and he also plays with Fake Names and Beach Rats. Despite *Can I Say* ending with "Never Go Back," he says the door remains open for Dag Nasty's return.

MIKKI SKAFFARI/GETTY IMAGES



## DAVID LEE ROTH

### Eat 'Em and Smile

Steve Vai pays affectionate tribute to his first truly high-profile gig — and remembers the pressure of following in the footsteps of a certain guitar maestro

BY ANDREW DALY

**► DESPITE HAVING SERVED** under Frank Zappa, releasing one non-genre-conforming solo record (1984's *Flex-Able*) and scoring a key — and now legendary — role in *Crossroads*, which hit theaters in March 1986, Steve Vai was still relatively unknown in the land of regular humans. But after joining the solo band of former Van Halen frontman David Lee Roth, he'd become a household-ish name.

"At 26, I got to live the ultimate guitar rock-star fantasy," Vai says. "I wish every rock guitarist could experience a piece of that, but it would need to be the Eighties when that type of thing was flourishing."

The "thing" Vai is talking about is glammed-out shred, which was popularized by Eddie Van Halen (and a few others), who, in the eyes of Roth's fans, Vai was about to be directly compared to. Not that this bothered Vai.

"I believe I worked well in the band because I've had rock in my blood since I was a teenager," Vai says. "I was able to authentically express that, with my quirk, of course."

Also helpful was Vai's habit of coming in behind iconic shredders. "I've been lucky that way throughout my career," Vai says. "I replaced Warren Cuccurullo with Zappa, Yngwie with Alcatrazz and Edward with Dave. Somehow the fans kept welcoming me in. Maybe they just like watching a guy try to keep his head above water!"

In all fairness, judging by Roth's debut

solo record, 1986's *Eat 'Em and Smile*, Vai did more than keep his head above water. Tracks like "Yankee Rose," "Tobacco Road," "Shyboy" and Vai's favorite, "Big Trouble," tell the story of a match made in hair metal heaven.

Eventually, Vai would break out solo and turn the guitar world upside down, but he couldn't have done it without having served under Roth. "I always look for things I haven't done before, or I haven't really heard from any other guitar players," Vai says. As for how he looks back on working with Diamond Dave — one of music's most notorious characters — post-Van Halen, Vai smiles, saying, "He was a handful in the best possible way. Working with him was like being strapped to a rocket made of charisma and fueled by tequila."

#### How did you end up playing guitar for Dave?

I was living in a little apartment on Fairfax in Hollywood when I heard he was looking for a guitar player. For some strange reason, I just knew it was my gig. It wasn't an ego thing — I didn't think, "I deserve this" — it was more like a quiet voice inside saying, "This is yours." The next day, the phone rings; it's David Lee Roth. Turns out [bassist] Billy Sheehan had mentioned my name. Dave tells me he's putting together a band for an album, a tour and even a movie, and he asks if I want to come down and jam. I knew they'd been trying out other guitar players, but once we started playing together, it just clicked. Sparks were flying, musically speaking.

#### How did you handle being compared to Eddie Van Halen?

I knew all ears would be on me. It was probably the most coveted guitar chair in rock at the time. I adored Edward's playing, so from a fan's point of view, I understood that people would be skeptical. I would've been too. But competing with Eddie Van Halen? Forget it. You don't compete with Mount Everest — you just admire it. My mindset was simply to contribute something authentic, be myself and let that speak for itself. Once the album came out and we hit the road, the reception was fantastic. I didn't feel the backlash people warned me about. I think fans realize you can't replace Edward, you can only bring your own voice.

#### What did Dave expect from you?

Dave wanted a young hotshot who could play their ass off. He wanted a supergroup with players who could really throw down, and he nailed it: Billy Sheehan, Gregg Bissonette and me. It was wild chemistry. I knew I had to supply some riffs, and the ones I did resonated with Dave. He has a great ear for what works for him and

what doesn't. As a soloist, I was quite the "shredder," and that was popular at that time. I knew that was important to Dave, but he was also interested in solos being a musical statement and not just a flurry of notes.

**What gear did you use in the studio, and what was the vibe like?**

When I joined Dave, I was embarrassingly inexperienced with what people would call "big rock guitar tone." I didn't even own a Marshall! I was using Carvin X-100B amps, which I brought into the studio for *Eat 'Em and Smile*. I tracked a few songs with them using my yellow Jackson Soloists and also my pink one. I also used my Charvel "Green Meanie." But the Carvins weren't cutting through for the more aggressive tracks. Luckily, Steve Stevens was recording across the hall. I mentioned my tone troubles, and he lent me one of his favorite Marshall heads and cabs. Boom! Instant magic. I ended up using his rig for most of the album. Thanks, Steve. You saved my sonic bacon.

**Ted Templeman produced Van Halen and Roth. What was he like?**

He was brilliant. I learned a ton from him. He gave you total freedom, but his suggestions were so insightful that you wanted to follow them. I came from a background with Frank Zappa, where precision and complexity ruled the day. Ted taught me the opposite — how to capture raw energy. He knew how to bottle the chaos of young lunatics like us and make it sound big, tight and alive. We respected him as the Yoda that he is.

**What do you remember about working on "Yankee Rose," "That's Life" and "Tobacco Road"?**

I knew this record would be forensically examined, so I leaned into my quirks. I've always had this playful, slightly mischievous streak in my playing. One such example is my "guitar talking" technique. I thought it'd be fun to open the album with it, just to grab people by the ears.

"That's Life" was pure Dave — swagger, humor, and showbiz all rolled into one, and I was happy to support it. And "Tobacco Road"? That was a blast. Dave suggested it,

and I went home and cooked up a guitar arrangement filled with weird little twists and turns. I remember thinking, "There's no way they'll let me get away with all this nonsense." But they did. And that freedom made the whole session magic.

**You handled the horn arrangement on "I'm Easy." Did Zappa prepare you for that?**

I started writing horn charts in high school and really dove into it at Berklee. I've always loved big band arrangements. It's like sculpting sound with brass. Doing the horns for "I'm Easy" was... easy.

**What's your favorite guitar moment from *Eat 'Em and Smile*?**

Perhaps my solo on "Big Trouble." I had full creative freedom on that one, and it came out

exactly how I heard it in my head — melodic, daring and unapologetically "Vai." To me, it didn't sound like Edward or anyone else, and that's usually a sign that I was hitting the mark I set for myself for this record. And the riffing with Billy on "Shyboy"? Total mayhem. Imagine two electric eels wrestling inside a transformer. That's what it felt like.

**Were you satisfied with the album?**

It felt gloriously surreal to listen to that record from top to bottom and be embraced by its audio energy elixir. I still feel that when I listen to it now. A part of me ponders, "How the heck did we do that?" We were holed up in Dave's basement for about a year putting this thing together, completely under wraps. I couldn't tell anyone what we were doing, so I had no clue how it would land. But I loved it. It had energy, humor and attitude. It felt alive.

**Were you prepared for the wave of popularity that followed?**

One funny moment — I was at the gym, walking through the parking lot and nearly got hit by a car. The driver slams his brakes and yells, "Hey, you

dumb fuck — watch where you're going!" All the while, he was blasting "Bump and Grind" at full volume while headbanging. I just smiled and thought, "At least he bought the record!" [Laughs] Soon we were playing to 20,000 people a night.

**Would you do anything differently?**

That gig was a gift for many reasons. It launched me into a whole new world and taught me how to command an arena stage. I can't think of anything I would have done differently. It was financially rewarding, too, but after a 45-year career, I discovered that success is very nice — the money, fame, respect and so on. It's all quite fine and good, although it does come with certain challenges. But of vital importance is the people you meet along the way, the experiences you have with them and the bonds you create. This is the real payoff, and when I look back at *Eat 'Em and Smile*, those are the things I'm most appreciative of.

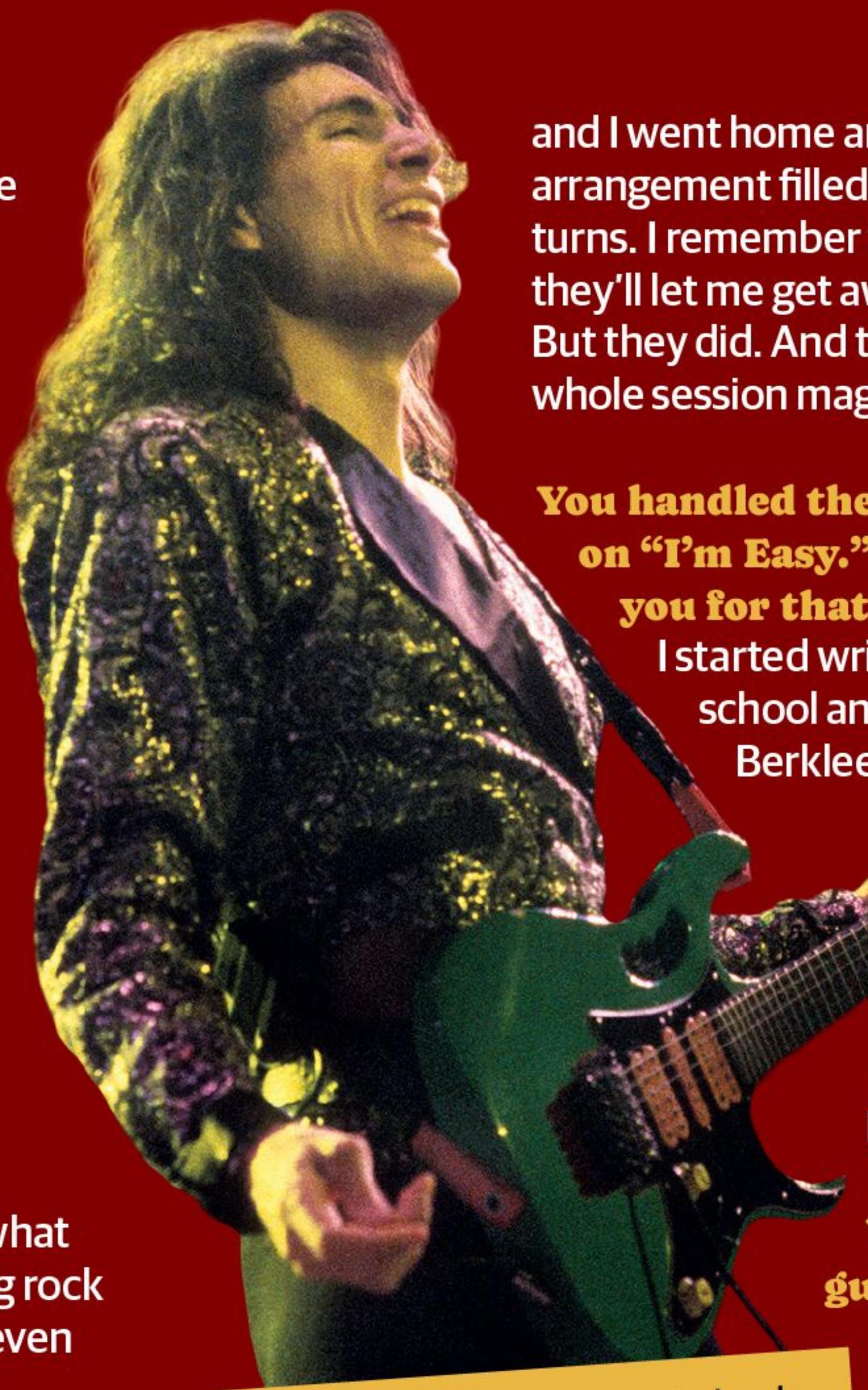
To this day, Billy, Gregg and I are unbelievably close. They're like brothers. There's no way to put a value on our friendship that could compete with worldly success. I could even pick up the phone and call Dave. We were actually good friends back then. He was like a mentor to me in many ways. When I look back, I thank my lucky stars. The whole thing feels extraordinary to me now. Touring, the videos, the huge stage, crazy clothes, girly hair, the backstage parties, the mayhem — it was outstanding.

**Beyond that, what does *Eat 'Em and Smile* mean to you?**

In all the bands I've been in, be it Frank Zappa, Alcatrazz, Roth, Whitesnake and the others, I knew there was a brand of music bubbling up in my imagination that I had to get out. Those eccentric ideas were there for as long as I can remember.

When I quit all those bands to make [1990's] *Passion and Warfare*, I thought it might be the end of my career, but it was an easy choice. If you don't allow your true creative impulses to manifest, it usually leads to depression.

I was fortunate in that *Passion and Warfare* and my brand of music and playing found an audience that has sustained me and my music. When I think of *Eat 'Em and Smile*, it's like a wild, beautiful chapter in a fairy tale. Somehow I got to be one of the characters.



Steve Vai on stage with David Lee Roth's band in Oakland in — you guessed it — 1986



David Lee Roth (wearing an *Eat 'Em and Smile* T-shirt) backstage in Detroit, September 26, 1986



Europe's John Norum [left] and John Levén stay hydrated in Minneapolis, May 7, 1987

## EUROPE

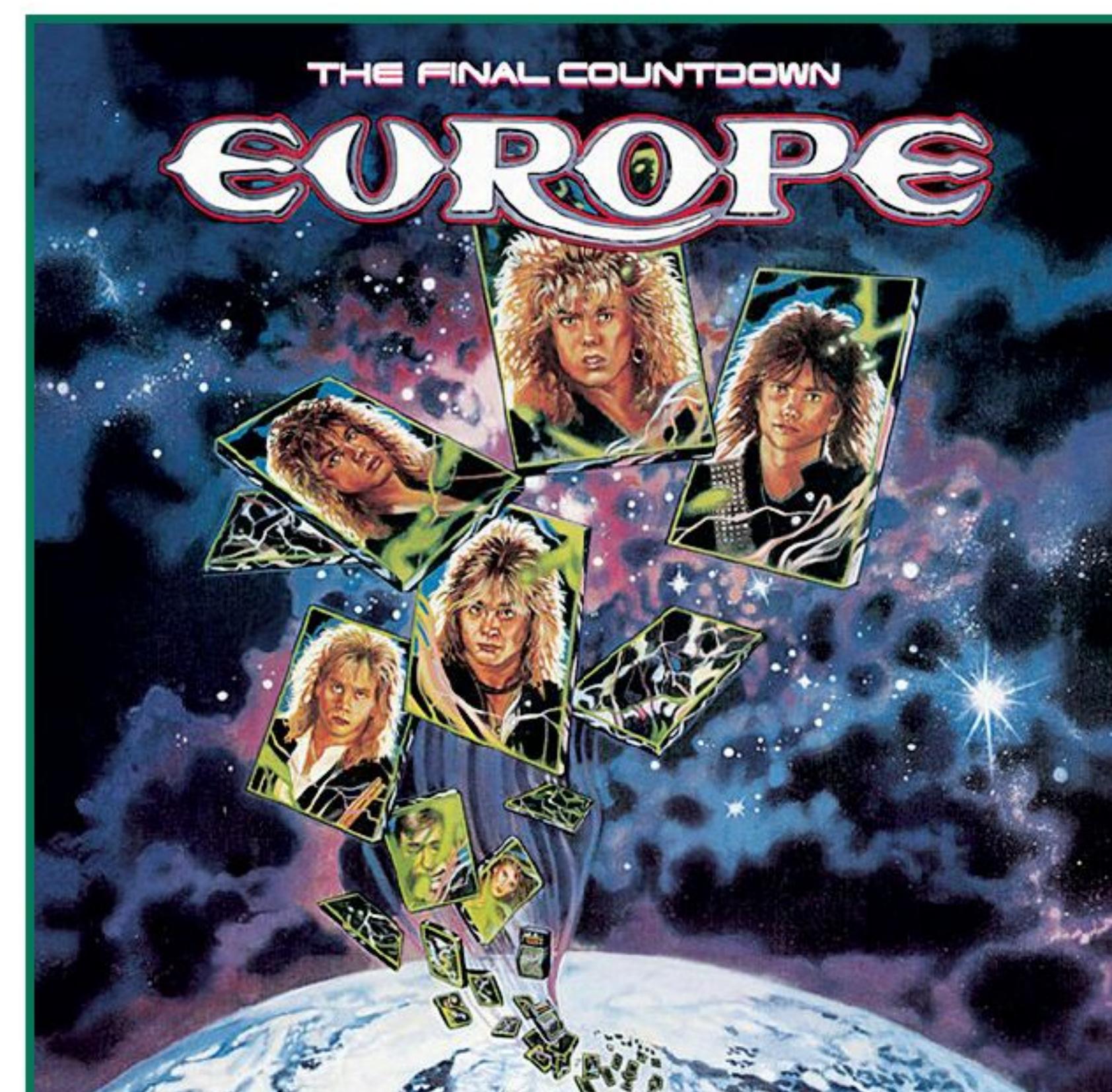
### The Final Countdown

John Norum on the album that put Sweden on the rock 'n' roll map

BY HENRY YATES

**► PRE-1986, SCANDINAVIAN ROCK** was a minor import for the U.S. — while the sluggish international sales of Europe's first two albums suggested the Swedes were doomed to their domestic market. But as guitarist John Norum remembers, everything clicked with *The Final Countdown*. First came a deal from Epic Records, then the hook-up with Journey producer Kevin Elson and, finally, the hot-streak of singles that beamed the parent album to Number 8 on the *Billboard* charts.

Among the highlights were the jawbreaker chorus of "Rock the Night" and the tear-streaked power-ballad "Carrie." But to discuss *The Final Countdown* without landing on the title track is futile. Forty years later, all roads lead to that deathless synth hook and space-exploration lyric (sketched by frontman Joey Tempest as early as 1984), while the dazzle of Norum's neo-classical solo still holds shivers. The song has been streamed 753 million times; factor in the ad-sync revenue and the money it must have made is unfathomable. But the guitarist didn't feel history in the making when



Tempest first presented him with the demo tape. Back then, Norum admits he thought the nascent track was "dreadful," already irritated by hearing that keys lick "over and over again," and fretting that the hard-rock band he co-founded in 1979 was "turning into Depeche Mode."

On the flipside, Norum "liked to try new things." As the guitarist beefed up the demo's weedy tone with Marshalls and a rhythm part like stampeding hooves, he slowly sensed the song's potential. "I'm a huge UFO fan," he says, "so that galloping feel came from Michael Schenker's playing on 'Lights Out.'"

As for the inspiration behind the solo, Norum cites two more giants. "The technique comes from Ritchie Blackmore, but at the same time, I was friends with

Yngwie Malmsteen and we were hanging out a lot. My guitar style was a lot more frantic back then, but that's the way it is when you're in your early twenties. I played that solo on a 1965 Strat. I bought it in 1984 and it's the only guitar I've kept from then. I paid, like, \$900 for it, and today it might be worth \$45,000."

With four decades' hindsight, Norum has no doubt *The Final Countdown* changed the band's trajectory. But today, he takes a beat to decide whether the runaway success of Europe's third album was worth the price they paid for it. With chart placings came pressure, and soon the guitarist cut an unhappy figure who hated the "teenybopper" image now dogging his band and numbed the circus with alcohol.

"Fame isn't really my thing," he says. "I've never been that kind of person: 'Look at me, everyone!' It's just not important to me to be in the spotlight and out on the ramp doing guitar solos. I'm quite introverted, so I ended up drinking and partying way too much, and I got stuck in that thing. It's never fun to wake up with a hangover when you have a gig that night and still 20 more shows on the tour."

Norum had split before 1988's *Out of This World*, but he returned in 2003 to find *The Final Countdown* had grown in his estimations. "The title track was originally in F# and it's now in F, so it's darker and doomier-sounding — not so square, like it was in the Eighties. Now, when we play it live, it sounds so much heavier. The reaction — you can see all these happy faces out there. I like it a lot more now than I did then."



## THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS

### Tuff Enuff

London was calling for Jimmie Vaughan in 1986, where album sessions alongside Dave Edmunds led to a classic LP

BY ANDREW DALY

**► BY THE MID-EIGHTIES,** Jimmie Vaughan had been hammering away with the Fabulous Thunderbirds for four under-the-radar albums, garnering a cult following. This, along with the fact that Robert Cray and Alligator Records artists Johnny Winter, Roy Buchanan and Albert Collins (not to mention Jimmie's little brother, Stevie Ray Vaughan) were enjoying success, meant that blues and blues-rock were on the rise in an otherwise sparkling metal- and synth-laden era.

This leads us to 1986's *Tuff Enuff*, the Fabulous Thunderbirds' fifth long-player, produced by Dave Edmunds, recorded in London. It's the album that took Vaughan and his cohorts in a decidedly more commercial direction. Proof of this comes by way of the title track, which was featured in two 1986 films, *Gung Ho* and *Tough Guys*, as was its follow-up single, a cover of Sam & Dave's

"Wrap It Up." But wait, there's more! "Tuff Enuff" even made a few appearances in *Married... with Children*. What could be better than the Al Bundy seal of approval?

Pop culture crossovers aside, "Tuff Enuff" remains the Thunderbirds' only Top 40 hit, cementing the album's mainstream status. For this reason, Vaughan dialed in with *Guitar World* to briefly discuss the record.

#### What was it like working with Dave Edmunds?

We had a good time! We rented an apartment in London, and we went to the studio every day. It was a lot of trial and error with Dave — a lot of just trying to find out what worked, fine-tune it and then do it again.

#### Dave is quite the guitar player himself. Did that impact your approach?

Dave is a fabulous guitar player. He plays more fingerstyle than I do, though. I just play with a pick and my fingers sometimes, but Dave is fabulous. He was also fabulous at mixing. But it's been 40 years, so it's really tough to remember all of it!

#### What gear did you use while recording *Tuff Enuff*?

Fender Bassmans and Super Reverbs. That's what I've always used — except for a Marshall every once in a while — because the Fenders sounded great. But back then I didn't use flatwound strings; I converted to those about 10 years ago.

#### How did the title track come together?

That was Dave Edmunds. He was into the six-string bass, which he used on a lot of his records. That's part of what the sound there is, and it's overdubbed three or four times.

#### When you look back on *Tuff Enuff*, which is a big favorite among T-Birds fans, how do you feel about it?

I think it sounds great — it still sounds good. Once we figured out the mix, and we liked it, I thought it was fabulous. It sounds silly, but if you mix something the way you like it, you'll always like it. I don't know what else to say other than that!

[from left] The Fabulous Thunderbirds' Jimmie Vaughan, Preston Hubbard, Fran Christina and Kim Wilson in 1986



## the Feelies



*the Good Earth*

## THE FEELIES

### The Good Earth

Feelies guitarist Glenn Mercer recalls the pressure of coming up with a killer sophomore album — and recording it with R.E.M.'s Peter Buck, no less

BY JOE BOSSO

**► "IT WAS A** pretty important record for us," says Glenn Mercer, singer and guitarist of New Jersey-based indie rock giants the Feelies, speaking of the band's 1986 album, *The Good Earth*. "Our first record, *Crazy Rhythms*, got a lot of favorable reviews, so it wasn't set in stone that a follow-up would do well. Plus, we took a lot of time between records. We pursued offshoot bands. I guess we didn't really have long-range goals at the time."

They might not have been career strategists (the band is legendary for its extended hiatuses), but the Feelies nonetheless made an impact on emerging post-punk and "college rock" bands like R.E.M. and Yo La Tengo, who were greatly influenced by the group's minimalist, edgy rhythms and the hypnotic guitar interplay between Mercer and co-six-stringer Bill Million. While Mercer often took on the role of lead guitarist, much of the time he and Million "wove" parts in a way that was reminiscent of both the Stones and the Velvet Underground. (Mercer's off-handed, almost whispered vocals, often buried in the mix, also bore an unmistakable Lou Reed influence.)

"I don't know if we ever really analyzed what we do," Mercer says. "A lot of it's just instinctual. I think the sound we got on *Crazy Rhythms* that people point to came about because the bass and drums are very tight, but Bill

and I are very loose. That creates a friction because things aren't precise."

By the time the Feelies felt ready to record their second album, they had a new rhythm section (drummer Anton Fier and bassist Keith DeNunzio were out, drummer Stan Demenski and Brenda Sauter were in). At the same time, their stature among indie rock fans had grown to mythic levels. One such admirer, Peter Buck, encountered Mercer at a party and offered his services. "He was very cool," Mercer says. "He said, 'I love *Crazy Rhythms*, and I hear you're going to make a record. If there's anything I can do to help you guys out, let me know.'"

As co-producer (along with Mercer and Million) of *The Good Earth*, Buck's approach was more along the lines of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." "Peter didn't come to rehearsals or do any kind of pro-production," Mercer says. "He wanted to make an honest-sounding record, so outside of a few suggestions here and there, he didn't really interfere. What he did was more encouragement than trying to steer us in any sort of way."

Although generally not known as a huge lead guitar fan, Buck was especially encouraging when it came to Mercer and Million's solos. On the meditative epic "Slipping (into Something)," the two guitarists engage in a blissed-out interlocking raga-like improv that recalls Robby Krieger's early work. Mercer takes the solo spotlight on a few cuts, most notably his dramatic, searing leads on "On the Roof" and "The High Road."

"Peter said he liked how the solos were like mini songs within the songs," Mercer says. "Typically, half of the solos were worked out, and the other half were improvised. The last thing I wanted to do was waste a lot of time in the studio and lose our momentum."

Prior to 1986, the Feelies had only played a handful of club gigs per year, but upon the release of *The Good Earth*, they logged their biggest number of dates to that time (31), which included an East Coast run of shows as openers for R.E.M., who themselves had just graduated to large-scale venues such as New York City's Felt Forum and Philly's the Spectrum.

"For me, there was always a certain degree of discomfort no matter what stage I played," Mercer says. "I wasn't even comfortable playing a club like Maxwell's in Hoboken, New Jersey. Playing those big places with R.E.M. was no different. I would look down at my pedals, maybe the monitors. A few times I'd look out and check out the first couple of rows of people, but I never looked out beyond that."

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

## HUEY LEWIS AND THE NEWS Fore!

Chris Hayes looks back on the making of a classic album — but one with none of the influences you'd expect

BY JOE MATERA

**BY THE TIME** Huey Lewis and the News began working on their fourth studio album, 1986's *Fore!*, the group had seen their third album, 1983's *Sports*, top the U.S. *Billboard* 200 chart and earn them four U.S. Top 10 singles with "Heart and Soul," "I Want a New Drug," "The Heart of Rock & Roll" and "If This is It." On top of that, their single "The Power of Love" — the theme to 1985 blockbuster *Back to the Future* — gave the group their first U.S. Number 1. In the wake of that success, they were now under enormous pressure to deliver more hits.

"Though we were busy touring after *Sports* came out, we were always writing a little bit here and there," says former News guitarist Chris Hayes. "We realized we were going to have to make another record, so we started writing in earnest. At one point we had around eight songs. Bob Brown, who was our manager, came to me and said, 'Hayes, I need you to write another hit!' And it's not like I could actually just do it whenever."

Hayes — co-writer of "The Power of Love," "I Want a New Drug" and many others — went home and continued writing. Inspiration soon hit after listening to jazz records and Donald Fagen's 1982 album, *Nightfly*.

"I loved that record, particularly 'I.G.Y.' and it inspired me to come up with "Stuck with You," Hayes says. "I wanted to write something with that sort of groove. 'Stuck with You' is pretty poppy — kind of a sappy song. I wrote the music, then Huey wrote the lyrics. Some of the guys made fun of it, but it ended up giving us our second Number 1."

*Fore!* would take six months to record, with session dates fitting around the group's hectic touring schedule. "We were in and out, because we'd do a batch of songs and then have to go and do some shows and then come back and

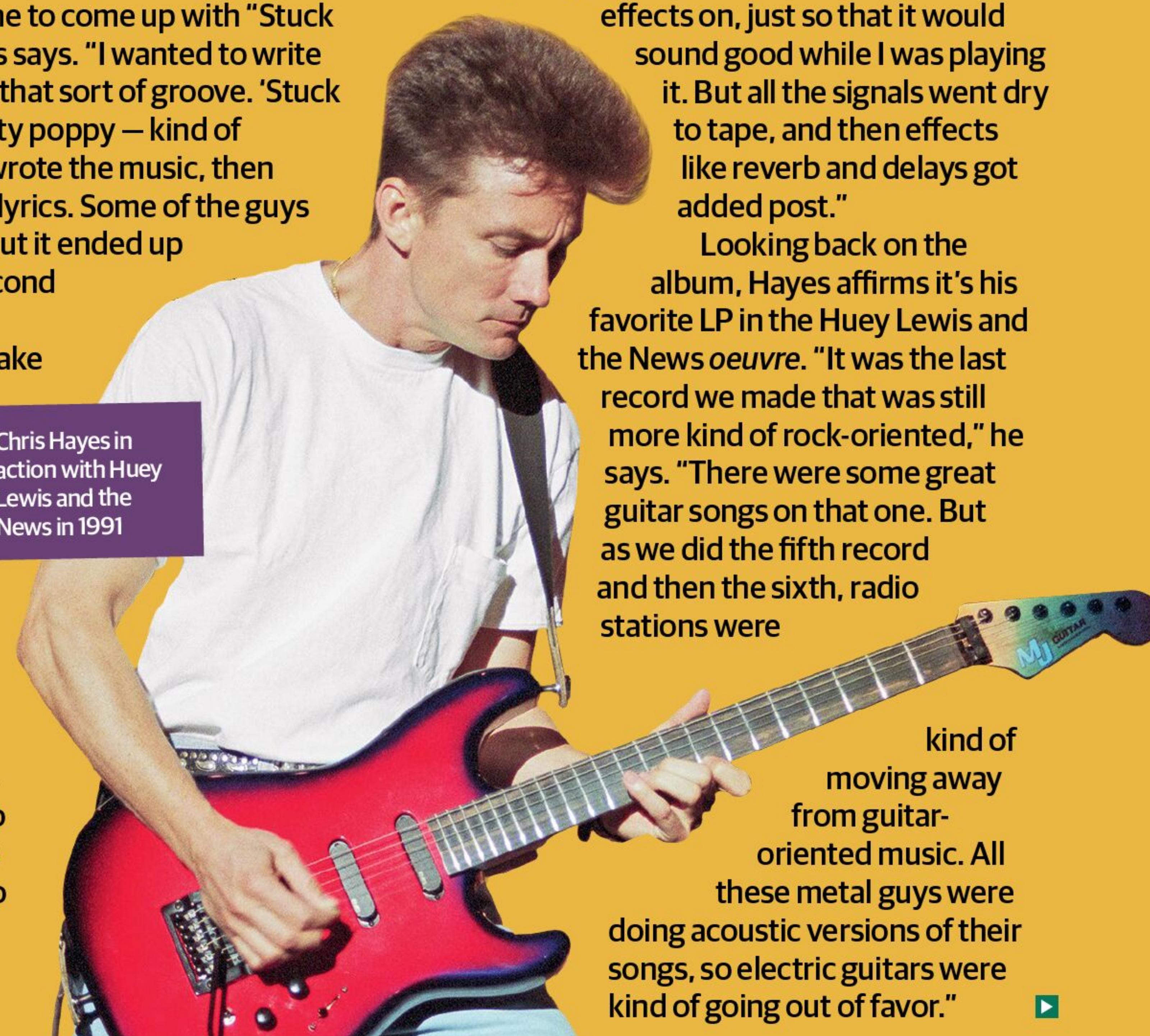
Chris Hayes in action with Huey Lewis and the News in 1991



get back into it," Hayes says. "It took us quite a while, but we got it done."

When it came to the guitar tones on the album, Hayes adhered to a streamlined setup. "I used a 1985 Gibson Spirit II prototype for the leads through a 50-watt Marshall combo with a 12-inch speaker, and I used that with a 4x12 cabinet," he says. "I just cranked that up all the way and it sounded pretty good. For the rhythm stuff, I used a Fender Strat through a Sixties Fender Black Panel Deluxe. I'd record all the stuff pretty dry and then monitor it with some effects on, just so that it would sound good while I was playing it. But all the signals went dry to tape, and then effects like reverb and delays got added post."

Looking back on the album, Hayes affirms it's his favorite LP in the Huey Lewis and the News oeuvre. "It was the last record we made that was still more kind of rock-oriented," he says. "There were some great guitar songs on that one. But as we did the fifth record and then the sixth, radio stations were



# METALLICA

## Master of Puppets

The making of the album that marked Metallica's epic leap from the underground to immortality

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

► "THE CALL OF Cthulhu," written by American author H.P. Lovecraft, was first published in *Weird Tales* in February 1928. The story describes an ancient, nightmarish being rising from the sludgy depths to wreak havoc on mankind. One Lovecraft scholar called it one of the writer's "bleakest fictional expressions of man's insignificant place in the universe."

Metallica bassist Cliff Burton – an aficionado of science fiction, horror and outsider art – was a huge fan of Lovecraft and passed his obsession on to his bandmates: singer-guitarist James Hetfield, lead guitarist Kirk Hammett and drummer Lars Ulrich. It's no surprise the group quickly embraced Lovecraft's work, particularly the Cthulhu Mythos, an interconnected universe of slimy, godlike entities.

But where most readers were repulsed by Cthulhu, Metallica found kinship. The creature, described as having "an octopus-like head... a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws and long narrow wings," mirrored the band's own shocking emergence from the San Francisco Bay Area scene in 1981. With their pimpled faces, denim vests and blistering speed, they were the monsters of their moment – reviled by a music industry obsessed with MTV-friendly darlings like the Police, Van Halen and Hall & Oates.

Lovecraft's vision of ancient gods slumbering beneath the sea struck a deep chord with Metallica. Beneath the band's speed and ferocity was a fascination with power, fear and the limits of human control – the same themes that haunted Lovecraft's fiction. That sensibility first surfaced on *Ride the Lightning*'s instrumental closer, "The Call of Ktulu," a wordless epic that proved heavy metal didn't need lyrics to conjure terror. Guided by Burton's classical instincts, the track unfolds like a symphony of dread, its shifting moods and minor-key melodies suggesting a vast creature stirring from its underwater tomb.

With *Master of Puppets*, Metallica expanded that universe, marrying brute force with a sense of grandeur and narrative precision few metal bands had attempted. "The Thing That Should Not Be" wasn't just a sequel to "Ktulu" – it was the sound of the monster fully awakened. Hetfield's preposterous down-tuned guitar growls like a leviathan rising from the depths, while Ulrich's drums land with the weight of



collapsing stone. Even Hammett's solo feels less like a burst of virtuosity and more like an unholy incantation, each note squiggling around like Cthulhu (or Ktulu) himself.

"The idea for that song was to create something even slower and heavier than 'For Whom the Bell Tolls,' from our previous album," Hammett said. "People often talk about how we brought a new level of speed and velocity to metal, but we were also exploring the opposite. 'The Thing That Should Not Be' helped usher in a slower, sludgier form of extreme metal."

Metallica discovered something even heavier: atmosphere. They transformed Lovecraft's sense of cosmic insignificance into sound – a grinding, inexorable reminder of how small we are in the face of forces we can't comprehend.

At its core, *Master of Puppets* was the sound of four musicians operating at full power. Burton gave Metallica its intellectual backbone – his love of classical harmony, prog, and horror fiction added an almost symphonic weight to the band's ideas. Hetfield gave those ideas muscle and

**Four decades later, its shadow still looms. Every modern metal band borrows something from *Master of Puppets*' DNA**

"Yeah, I was completely thinking of H.P. Lovecraft when I played my solos on 'Thing.' I did all of it in less than 45 minutes, which was quick for me, and I was so stoked afterwards. It was the last solo on the album."

If "The Call of Ktulu" suggested awe before the unknown, "The Thing That Should Not Be" plunged straight into it. The lyrics draw directly from Lovecraft's imagery – "Not dead which eternal lie/Stranger eons death may die" – while the music lumbers with deliberate menace, rejecting the speed-metal gallop of earlier tracks. In slowing down,

direction; by 1986 his songwriting had evolved beyond thrash templates into something closer to architecture – riffs built like fortresses, lyrics exploring control, manipulation and the loss of free will.

Ulrich's drumming, often dismissed as blunt force, was meticulously composed – every fill and accent placed for maximum impact. And Hammett, the band's conduit to melody, expanded his vocabulary to match the songs' ambition, blending modal leads, whammy-bar dives and harmonic twists that gave the record its emotional lift. Each song

pushed the chemistry to new extremes: the title track's epic construction, "Welcome Home (Sanitarium)"'s shifting moods, "Disposable Heroes'" relentless propulsion. And then, of course, "The Thing That Should Not Be" — slow, grinding and otherworldly, the sound of a band unafraid to explore the bottomless depths of the soul.

In hindsight, *Master of Puppets* captures the moment when Metallica's youthful aggression evolved into something profound. Lovecraft's monsters were metaphors for unseen power, and Metallica's music tapped into the same current.

Released on March 3, 1986, *Master of Puppets* — without a single music video or major radio hit — sold more than 500,000 copies in its first year, spending 72 weeks on the *Billboard* 200 and ultimately going gold. It was a staggering achievement for a band that played faster (and sometimes slower) and louder than almost anyone on Earth. Word of mouth, relentless touring and the sheer force of the music turned Metallica from cult heroes into the new standard-bearers of metal.

The record's power lay in its unity. *Master of Puppets* followed the sequencing the band had perfected on *Lightning*: a blistering opener ("Battery"), an ambitious title track, and a mid-album ballad that showcased unexpected vulnerability. Each member added a crucial piece to the puzzle. Hetfield's rhythm guitar was a weapon of precision — machine-tight down-picking that carried both aggression and groove. Ulrich's drumming, equal parts tactician and timekeeper, gave the music shape and drama. Hammett balanced brutality with melody, crafting solos that soared rather than shredded. And Burton, ever the architect, added color and depth, fusing Bach-inspired counterpoint with the visceral weight of thrash.

"I was using my black Gibson Flying V, my Charvel, my black Ednacaster, and I also had a red Fernandes Strat that they sent me out of the blue," recalled Hammett. "But perhaps most significantly, I bought a new black Jackson Randy Rhoads Flying V that I picked up straight from the factory. I was super-stoked because they gave me a discount on it. When the guitar was finished, they said, 'Just come down, it'll be done by the time you get here.' I drove down there from El Sobrante straight to the Jackson factory in the San Dimas area, and as I walked into the door they were literally just finishing screwing the tuners on."

"They put strings on it and handed it over, so no one else has ever had that guitar in their possession, which is unusual. I got it fresh off the workbench, and it's probably the guitar that I had on the road the longest. It's been consistently on the road since 1985."

The title track, "Master of Puppets," remains arguably their defining achievement — a sprawling eight-minute suite built on

Metallica backstage in Chicago, April 5, 1986; [from left] Cliff Burton, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield



shifting tempos and intricate time signatures. It moves from rapid-fire chromatic riffs at over 200 beats per minute into a haunting, clean interlude where Hetfield's melodic solo gives way to Hammett's searing virtuosity. The rhythmic trickery keeps the listener unsteady, mirroring the lyrical theme of addiction and control.

Even at its most punishing, the album carries an almost classical sense of balance. "Disposable Heroes" and "Damage, Inc." unleash pure velocity, while "Welcome Home (Sanitarium)" slows the pace to expose the band's melodic core. And then there's "Orion," Burton's magnum opus — an instrumental elegy that swells from serene arpeggios into a thunderous finale. When Burton died in a tragic bus accident later that year, the song took on an even deeper resonance, transforming *Master of Puppets*

into both a triumph and a requiem.

"By the end of the *Ride the Lightning* tour, we were almost becoming telepathic," Hammett said. "We were better players, and the new material we were writing for *Master of Puppets* was stronger. We were just really hungry to make something great — something that would stand the test of time."

Four decades later, its shadow still looms. Every modern metal band borrows something from its DNA — the precision of Hetfield's riffing, the narrative ambition of its structures, the balance between speed and sophistication. Like the Lovecraftian horrors that inspired it, *Master of Puppets* endures because it taps into something eternal: the fear and fascination of losing control. In the end, it's not just Metallica's masterpiece — it's the album where heavy metal looked into the abyss and found art staring back.



# OZZY OSBOURNE

## The Ultimate Sin

How Jake E. Lee found his voice and identity while making his second – and final – record with the Prince of Darkness

BY ANDREW DALY

**► WHEN JAKE E.** Lee was hired by Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne in 1982, he was a young gun with no experience and huge chops. The former led to a lack of songwriting and publishing on his first record with Ozzy, 1983's *Bark at the Moon*.

Lee wasn't happy, and he wasn't going to allow a sequel to unfold during Ozzy's next record, 1986's *The Ultimate Sin*.

"They realized they got away with something on *Bark at the Moon*," Lee says. "They knew it was something that would never happen again."

At the time, Ozzy was fresh out of rehab, and Lee, who had been waiting in the wings, was in possession of a rippin' demo that he and bassist Bob Daisley had put together. Ozzy wanted the songs. Lee wanted a fair contract.

"I told him, 'I'm not doing anything until I get a contract,' and so, that came pretty quickly," Lee says.

What didn't come quickly was a relationship with producer Ron Nevison, who demanded Lee be in the studio early, record in the cold and use monotone guitar sounds. But Lee had a vision and wasn't going to bend.

"I wanted to hear the guitar like an orchestra," he says. "Kind of like having violins on top, cellos on bottom and then having moving and melodic parts," he says. "It was about more than basic chords and one guitar sound. That wasn't my vision."

In the end – and with Ozzy and Sharon's blessing – Lee got to make a record he was proud of. *The Ultimate Sin* went on to be a hit, though its synth-heavy production did alienate diehards and pissed off heavy metal journalists.

And by 1987, after the tour for *The Ultimate Sin* ended, Lee, who had become increasingly independent, bored and free-thinking, was fired by Sharon and Ozzy, putting an end to a tumultuous five-year, two-album tenure. In short, Lee couldn't be tamed.

"I like that viewpoint," Lee says with a laugh. "Keep going! But I remember we had a big band dinner, and Ozzy raised his glass and said, 'This is a toast to Jake E. Lee, who practically produced this record and was a very important part of making it.' Maybe he



felt like my part was getting bigger than a band member should be. I don't know; a lot of things came with that. We were writing for the next record; I was pushing boundaries and getting rejected. I was bored with the restrictions. I'm sure Ozzy didn't like that. But as far as *The Ultimate Sin*, I stand by it."

**The story goes that while Ozzy was in rehab, you wrote a lot of music that would end up on *The Ultimate Sin*.**

Yeah. While he was in rehab, I had one of those four-track cassette recorders, which were high-tech at the time. [Laughs] I had a Simmons drum machine and a bass that Charvel gave me, and I'd sit there and make my own demos. That's when I came up with everything that's on *The Ultimate Sin*, except for "Shot in the Dark."

**And then Bob Daisley assisted the with lyrics, right?**

Yes. Bob and I got together, and he put his stamp on everything, which means he made everything a little better. [Laughs] He'd add parts or ask, "Why are you doing this part here? You don't need that," kind of like an editor – but he would also contribute stuff.

**Did Ozzy like what you'd put together?**

I gave him the tapes, which were probably 14 or 15 songs, and he liked most of them. There were a few rejects, where I'd tried to push things a little more prog at some points. I was trying to push the envelope and was honestly getting a little bored with having this hard rock, heavy metal limitation.

**You weren't appropriately credited for your songwriting on *Bark at the Moon*,**

**"It's the first record where I knew who I was and what I wanted to do as far as guitar"**

**Jake E. Lee**

**and it's known that you refused to move forward with *The Ultimate Sin* until you were presented with a fair contract. Was that something that lingered over the sessions?**

No. It was something that lingered over the *Bark at the Moon* sessions. When those were done, I became unhappy, so with *The Ultimate Sin*, before I gave him my demos, I said, "I want a contract that says exactly what I'm gonna get out of this record. I need songwriting credit. I want the publishing I deserve."

**How did Ozzy take that?**

Really, that was it. It's not like I wanted points off the record; I just wanted songwriting and publishing. I said, "Give me a contract that says that, and we can move forward." There weren't any problems.

**Another layer of confusion came by way of the bass. Bob Daisley assisted with songwriting and the bass parts. But then Greg Chaisson was hired and fired, giving way to Phil Soussan. The belief is that Bob wrote the bass parts and Phil played a version of those, but Greg has claimed otherwise.**

Bob and I had demoed the songs, and Bob's basslines were on there. Greg was only there for maybe two days, and to be honest, I don't think we auditioned anyone else. And he didn't hear any of the new material; it was all older Ozzy stuff. You're not gonna give someone you're auditioning a copy of a new album. And you're not gonna say, "You're not hired, give me the tape back..." [Laughs] So Greg didn't write any basslines for *The Ultimate Sin*. But then Phil got the job, and he basically took Bob's parts and simplified them. Bob does some really cool stuff on bass, and I would say Soussan simplified them. That would be the nicest way I could say it. He took the basic bass parts from Bob and kept them simple.

**For your part, a song like "Never" has some pretty inventive rhythm playing that was unique and less primitive for the time.**

Artistically, I felt more orchestral. I approached it by building things with moving parts for the rhythms, rather than just playing power chords. I looked at it more like jazz guitar, with weird shit where I'd play a progression of chords and then look for a melody within them to put on top, bottom, or maybe in the middle of the chord so that it was moving.

**The rhythms made your playing unique, but the leads soar, too.**

A lot of players didn't focus on rhythm guitar and would say, "Where's the lead? Okay, here it is," and then only shine on the lead. For me, rhythm was always the most important

part. But for the solos, I would try to take it somewhere else. You've established a verse, bridge and chorus, and I would then like to go somewhere else for the solos.

### What was the key to your tone on tracks like "Shot in the Dark," "The Ultimate Sin" and "Lightning Strikes"?

I did everything on the white Charvel, my main guitar. I'd play all the basic rhythms and solos on that, then I'd double it with the blue burst or the purple burst to give it a different sonic stamp. For amps, I had a '69 100-watt Marshall plexi and an early aluminum-faced one from '70 or '71, which was more aggressive than the plexi. Depending on the song, I'd use either/or. If I doubled something, I'd always use the amp I didn't use the first time.

### Ron Nevison, who had a reputation for being a guitar-forward producer, was behind the glass for *The Ultimate Sin*. What was it like working with him?

Terrible. [Laughs] It was butting heads from the beginning. Ozzy gave us a list of producers, and it wasn't my choice per se, but he asked me, and I thought Nevison was a guitar producer since he'd worked with UFO and Led Zeppelin, so he had my vote. I'm not saying that's why Ozzy picked him, but that's where my vote went.

### What made working with Ron so terrible?

I'm a nighttime guy, right? To me, rock is nighttime music you play in clubs until closing time. It didn't feel like a daytime thing to me. I recorded at night, and that's how we did *Bark at the Moon*. Max Norman, who produced that, was cool with that. Ron Nevison wasn't. He told Sharon [Osbourne] that he wanted to start no later than noon. Sharon told me that, and I said, "Noon? I'm not even thinking about waking up then. I won't start any earlier than 6 p.m." So right off the bat, we had problems, and Nevison told Sharon, "I know a lot of guitar players... we don't have to use him. We can use other people to come in and play the parts. I have all the demos."

### How did Sharon react?

It was

ridiculous. He obviously had no idea what Ozzy was. He's not somebody who brings in fucking guitar players. But Sharon told me that, and I said, "Really? And what did you say?" Sharon said, "I told him he was out of his fucking mind. You're playing the guitar. How about we start at 3?" That was a good compromise, so I said I'd come in at 3, but I never did. [Laughs] I'd get up, look at the clock and if I saw it was 3, I'd say, "Oh, shit, I better get ready..." But I never showed up earlier than maybe 4. I just hated the idea of forcing myself to wake up and play during the day. It felt wrong to me to make an album that would last forever that way. It irked me.

### Once you got that out of the way, were you able to find common ground?

No. [Laughs] When I came into the studio for the first time to record, I always played inside, where my amp was, because I like getting feedback. The headphones have to be really loud, but that's my problem; I like playing in the room. But I went into the room, and it was fucking freezing. I was like, "What the hell? Can you warm up the room?" Nevison said, "No. I like my musicians to be awake. The cold keeps them awake and alert." I said, "Fuck you. You know what it also does? It makes my fingers fucking slow because they're frozen. I can't play like that." So we argued about the temperature in the room, which I won.

### How did you win?

I said, "I'm just not fucking playing when my fingers are fucking cold. Fuck you." [Laughs] He acquiesced, but then, for every song, I liked to tune my amp depending on what I was doing. I might like it more aggressive for one song, and sweeter for another. So, I went into the room, and he goes, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm tuning my amp for the song..." He goes, "What was wrong with the last sound?" I said, "Nothing... for that song..."

He said, "I think all the guitars should sound the same," which was

another argument I wouldn't relent on. I said, "No, I'm not playing the same guitar sound." My vision for *The Ultimate Sin* was not a single sound done in one day.

### What were your thoughts the first time that you listened back to *The Ultimate Sin*?

When I heard the first mix, I hated it. [Laughs] It was keyboard-heavy, and I talked to Ozzy on the phone and said, "What do you think?" He said, "Too many fucking keyboards!" I said, "Exactly!" Sharon said, "We're remixing the whole album." She told Nevison, "I want Jake there, and I want Jake to approve of the mix as you're mixing it," which Nevison hated. But I made sure the guitars were actually there, though I still think it could have been more guitar-heavy. After that, I gotta admit, I liked it.

### The album sold well but was raked over the coals by old-school fans and the press.

It got shit on a lot. A lot of people said, "This is Ozzy's worst record ever." Ozzy even said in an interview that he didn't like it and that it was terrible. By the late Nineties, I thought, "I guess it was a shitty record. I just really sucked on it." I wouldn't listen to it.

### The general viewpoint on the album has changed over the years. Has yours?

I didn't listen to it for maybe a dozen years. Then a friend of mine said, "You don't listen to it? It's great. What are you talking about?" And then Chris Jericho told me, "*The Ultimate Sin* is the best" and started pointing out things I did on it, and I was like, "You really like it?" I went back and listened to it front-to-back, and I thought, "This is actually a pretty good record. Why was this shit on so much? Why did I think it sucked when I worked so hard on it?" Now I think it's a really good record. I don't care what anyone says. It's fantastic. I don't know why it got shit on. I don't care.

### What did *The Ultimate Sin* reveal to you about Jake E. Lee?

It's the first record where I knew who I was and what I wanted to do as far as guitar. *Bark at the Moon* was me as the new kid thrown in there, and the first time I'd recorded professionally. *The Ultimate Sin* is where I found my voice and my identity. And with all the guitar parts... I wouldn't change a thing. There's stuff on *Bark at the Moon* that I would change, but not on *The Ultimate Sin*. I found my identity, but now I'm thinking, I found my identity, and at the time people thought it sucked. [Laughs] But I stand by it. I played everything the way I felt I should, and I carried that over into *Badlands*. *The Ultimate Sin* established who I was as a guitar player. **GW**



Ozzy Osbourne [left] and Jake E. Lee do their thing in New York City in 1986

# PETER GABRIEL

## So

It was Hammer time – “Sledgehammer,” that is – for former Genesis man Peter Gabriel in 1986. Guitarist David Rhodes takes us back to the *So* sessions

BY ANDREW DALY

**PETER GABRIEL'S TIME** with Genesis in the Seventies – not to mention his early-Eighties musings as a solo artist – had granted him a reputation as a musical maverick who merged modern prog with all sorts of weird sounds, leading to such cult favorites as “Biko” and “Shock the Monkey.” The latter of those songs, which dropped in 1982, was the closest Gabriel had come to large-scale chart success as a solo artist. But that was about to change with 1986’s *So*, the record that gave us decade-defining hits in “Sledgehammer,” “In Your Eyes” and “Big Time.”

But Gabriel didn’t do it alone. He had a versatile band that included guitarist David Rhodes, a fellow free-thinker who had been with the frontman since 1980.

“When we’re all together, I think we do a quite idiosyncratic thing, obviously, under Peter’s guidance and leadership,” Rhodes says when looking back on the elements that had given *So* its magic. Gabriel’s leadership, along with the playing of Rhodes and a host of session aces and other pros (including Kate Bush, Stewart Copeland and Nile Rodgers) helped send *So* to the top of the charts worldwide, and many of its tracks are concert – and Spotify playlist – staples.

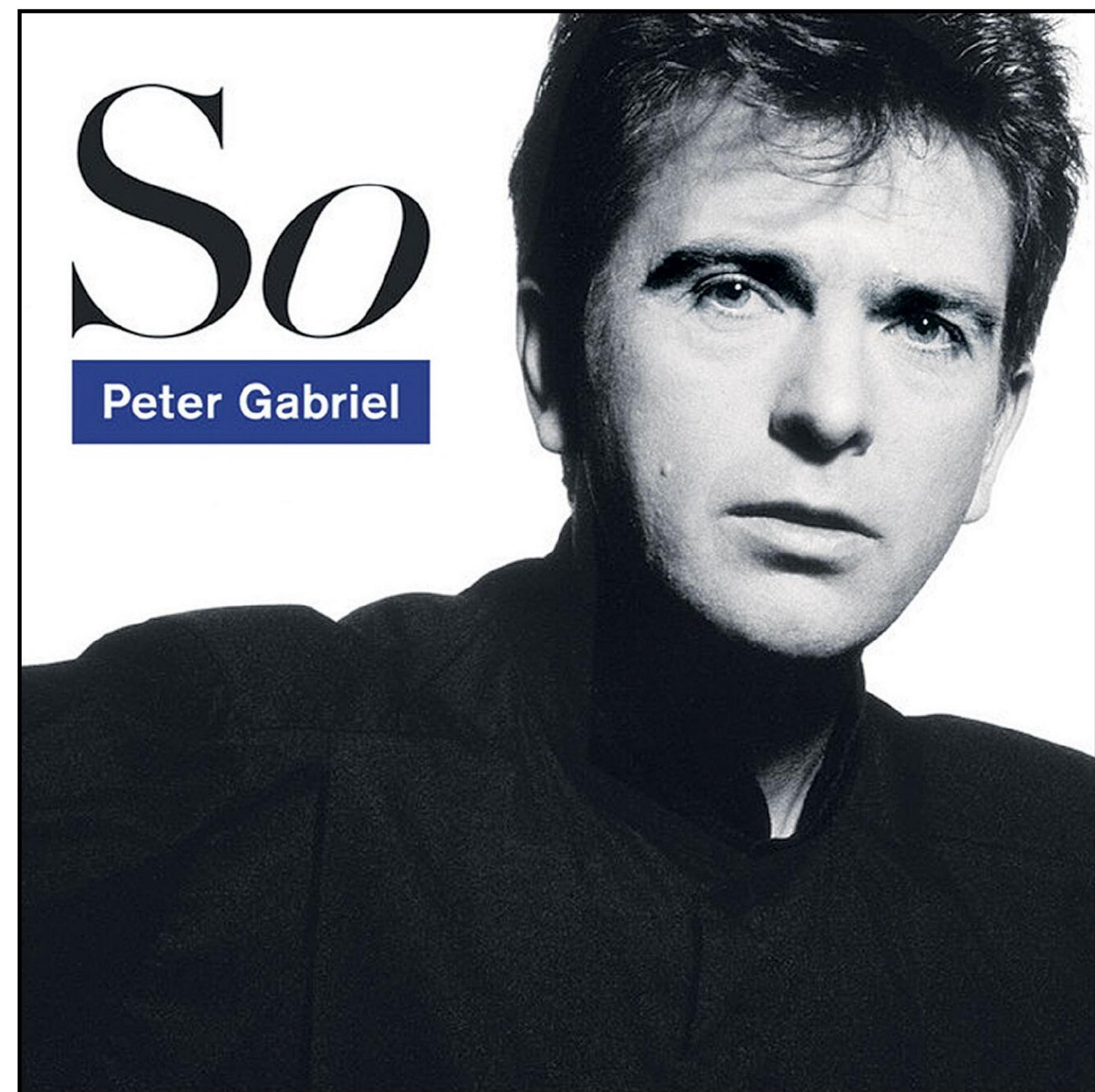
“It’s just a thing where the longer you’re with people, you almost do things without thinking or talking about them,” Rhodes says of *So*’s vibe. “You feel your way through. And I knew Peter has things he likes and things he doesn’t like.”

### Where were you at as a group going into the sessions for *So*?

Peter had decided to move away from the more experimental side of his third and fourth self-titled albums from 1980 and ’82. It was a very conscious decision on his part to come up with material that would make a very good and accessible record. So there was a lot that went into it, which paid off, thank goodness. [Laughs]

### At that point, you’d been with Peter for about six years. How had your technique evolved in that time?

I was never that interested in technique, but I think my groove playing improved. When



you’re playing with great people, you’ve got to keep up.

**How did “Sledgehammer” come about?**  
 When we were initially recording it, Peter just sat at the piano and played a few chords. Then he went to [fellow *So* guitarist] Daniel Lanois and me, and we started playing along with him. Whenever we were working on a demo or trying to build it up, we’d fill up a reel of tape of us just playing the groove and going through the changes. So it felt good – and then [bassist] Tony Levin came in and was playing a little rubber-band bass on quite a lot of things. I’m sure he didn’t play it on the finished thing, but it was great. Whenever he played it, everybody smiled. We had Chester Thompson come in to play on “Sledge” at one point, but that didn’t work out. Tony did his part, which was great, and then [drummer] Manu Katché was brought in. “Sledge,” I think, was a couple of passes for him because he had a plane to catch. It was all just instant, exciting and great.

### How about “In Your Eyes,” which became one of the Eighties’ biggest anthems?

Peter is very keen on those high, jangly sounds; he really likes those on his tunes, so we were doing that. I think I would play a 12-string that Peter had – an old Shergold

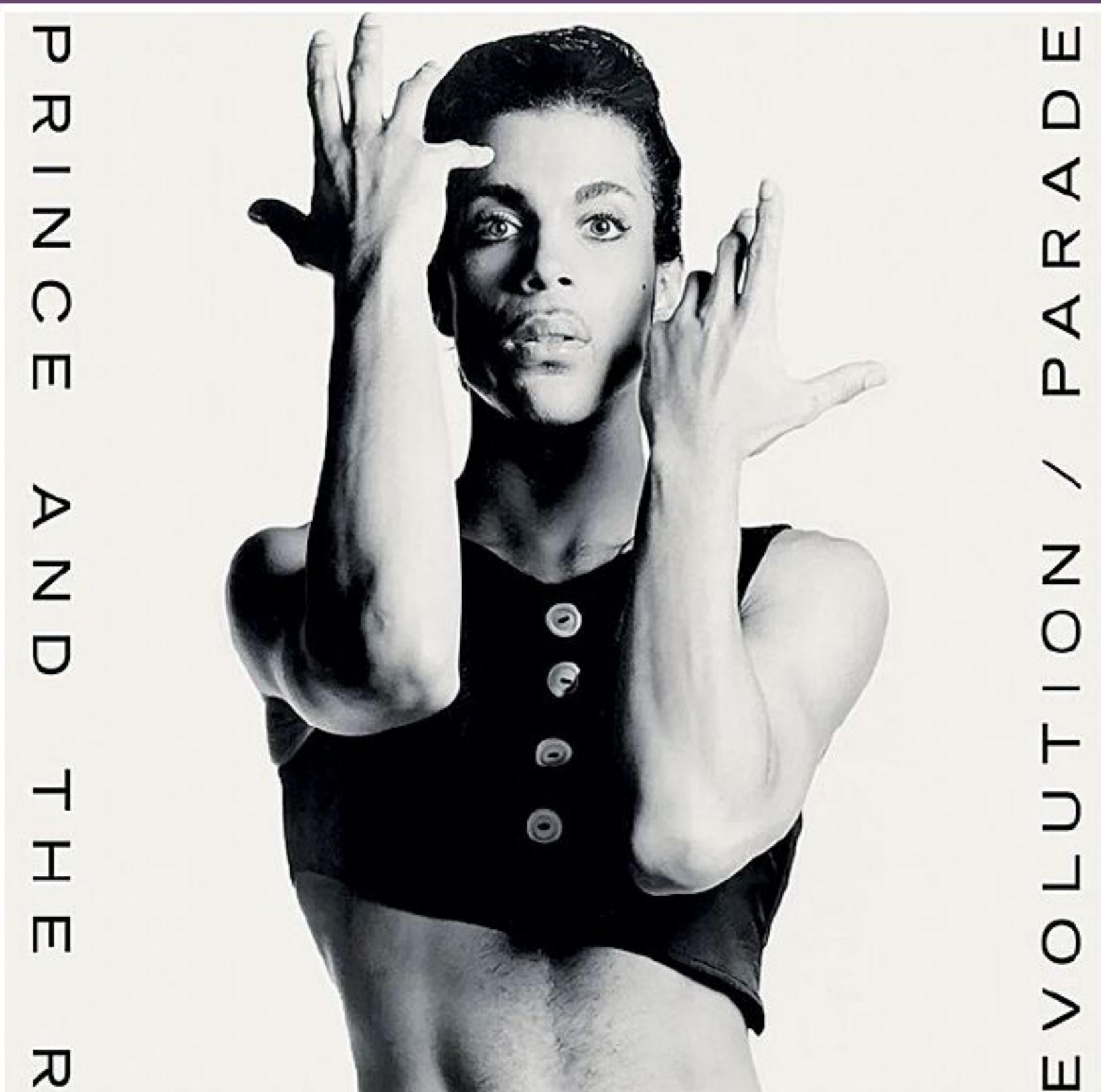
12-string that was a dog to play, but it had a nice sound. At the time, we didn’t have enough tracks because it was all on tape, so Dan Lanois and I would actually record to one track; we’d ask each other, “Were you good that time?” It was just playful. That was all a very good experience, but, of course, there were bits when things didn’t go so well.

### For example?

There were some bad tech issues, I seem to remember. We had the rhythm tracks done, and then the slaves made from them to try and keep the tracks pristine – you know, the master reels. You want to work with the secondary reel [*the slave*] because it doesn’t matter how much it degrades. You’re putting on good information, but you’re not screwing up the drums or the bass; those remain great. I think what happened was that one of the machines was running slightly slower than the other, and it led to all sorts of problems for a while.

### What does the enduring success of *So* mean to you?

It was surprising, but it was wonderful. We did the record, it did well, we toured a lot and people loved it! With that, you go, “Yeah... this is very cool.” [Laughs] I guess it meant a lot to a lot of people, which is a lovely, wonderful thing.



EVOLUTION / PARADE

## PRINCE

### Parade

Stung by the critics, March 1986 saw the Purple One come back swinging with this sporadically brilliant curio that — “Kiss” aside — you’ve probably forgotten

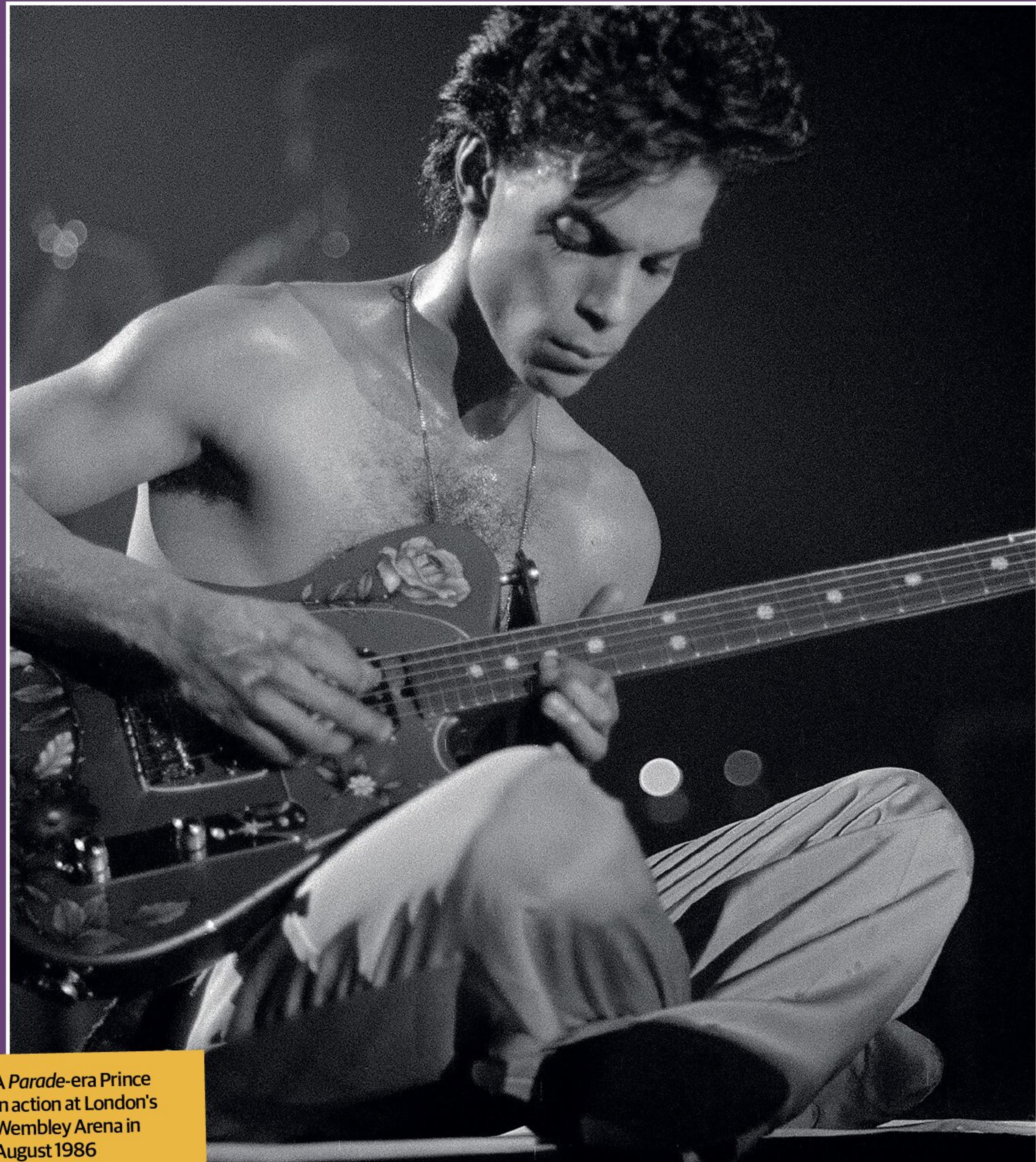
BY HENRY YATES

**► PARADE BEGAN WITH** a bruised ego. Two years earlier, in 1984, the 25-million-selling *Purple Rain* had set a sky-high bar. Now, the critical consensus was that Prince had fumbled the follow-up with *Around the World in a Day*. “A not very convincing approximation of McCartney-esque Beatles innocence,” sniffed John Rockwell of *The New York Times*, “clashing egregiously with his own image of defensive arrogance...”

While a lesser artist would retreat to lick their wounds, the Minneapolis peacock was so headspinningly prolific in that period — he fired out albums at one-year intervals all through the Eighties — that *Parade* arrived almost immediately to course-correct his career. In fact, flanked by his band of the era, the Revolution, Prince was spilling over with ideas to the extent that he reportedly sketched *Parade*’s four opening tracks — “Christopher Tracy’s Parade,” “New Position,” “I Wonder U” and “Under the Cherry Moon” — in a single session.

The received wisdom is that Prince stepped away from the guitars on *Parade*. True, there is no skyscraping outro solo to match “Purple Rain.” But there are myriad flashes of quirky brilliance, all smaller but still potent. Try the squelchy, highly processed lines in “Girls & Boys,” evoking something Robert Fripp might have played on Bowie’s “Fashion.” Try the indecently funky hits that underpin “Mountains.”

“I’m sorry,” Revolution guitarist Wendy Melvoin told *Rolling Stone* in 1986 of the telepathic jams between herself, Prince



A *Parade*-era Prince in action at London’s Wembley Arena in August 1986

and keys player Lisa Coleman, “but no one can come close to what the three of us have together when we’re playing in the studio. Nobody!”

Meanwhile, just as he had on *Purple Rain*’s “Computer Blue,” the bandleader invited his female protégés to co-write several *Parade* standouts, including “Sometimes It Snows in April,” decorated by Melvoin’s ringing acoustic fingerstyle. The guitarist was more prominent still in the video for flagship track “Kiss,” perched on a stool with a Gibson Byrdland as her boss cavorts shirtless.

In fact, during that period, Melvoin was more closely associated with a Rickenbacker 330, but as she told *Guitar.com* in 2022, spec was less important than spirit. “Prince was much more concerned with your performance rather than the actual sound of the guitar. He wasn’t really one of those guys that dictated the tone. I learned early on in a band situation that as a rhythm guitarist you shouldn’t make your distortion as loud as the lead guitarist because they’ll kill you! I had to kind of sit right underneath him, so he could be the main attraction.”

According to the *Parade* album credits, for the studio take of “Kiss,” Prince played all the

guitar parts. But it’s surprising to learn, through an interview with original producer David Z for *Sound On Sound*, that the global smash that went on to top the *Billboard* chart in February 1986 almost didn’t make the cut. “‘Kiss’ was so different to everything else out there that the Warner Brothers executives freaked out when they first heard it. When I talked to the Warner A&R guy he said, ‘Oh man, Prince really screwed up. It sucks.’ At that time, however, Prince had enough power to go, ‘That’s the single and you’re not getting another one until you put it out.’”

The less said about the movie that was soundtracked by these songs, the better (“*Under the Cherry Moon*,” wrote Kevin Lally in *The Courier-News* of Prince’s directorial debut, “is the kind of embarrassment that makes your mouth gape”). But while *Parade* went on to sell a speck of *Purple Rain*’s numbers, this underrated corner of the catalog saw the Purple One’s reputation restored among critics.

“It’s the sound of Prince at his most effortless and assured,” wrote *The Guardian’s* Simon Price. “Cohesive and ice cream-cool, nobody would guess it was a soundtrack for a (sub-par) film. And it has ‘Kiss’ on it...”

"The Eighties shredders were a joke," said Johnny Marr, seen here in with a Fender Strat early 1987



## THE SMITHS

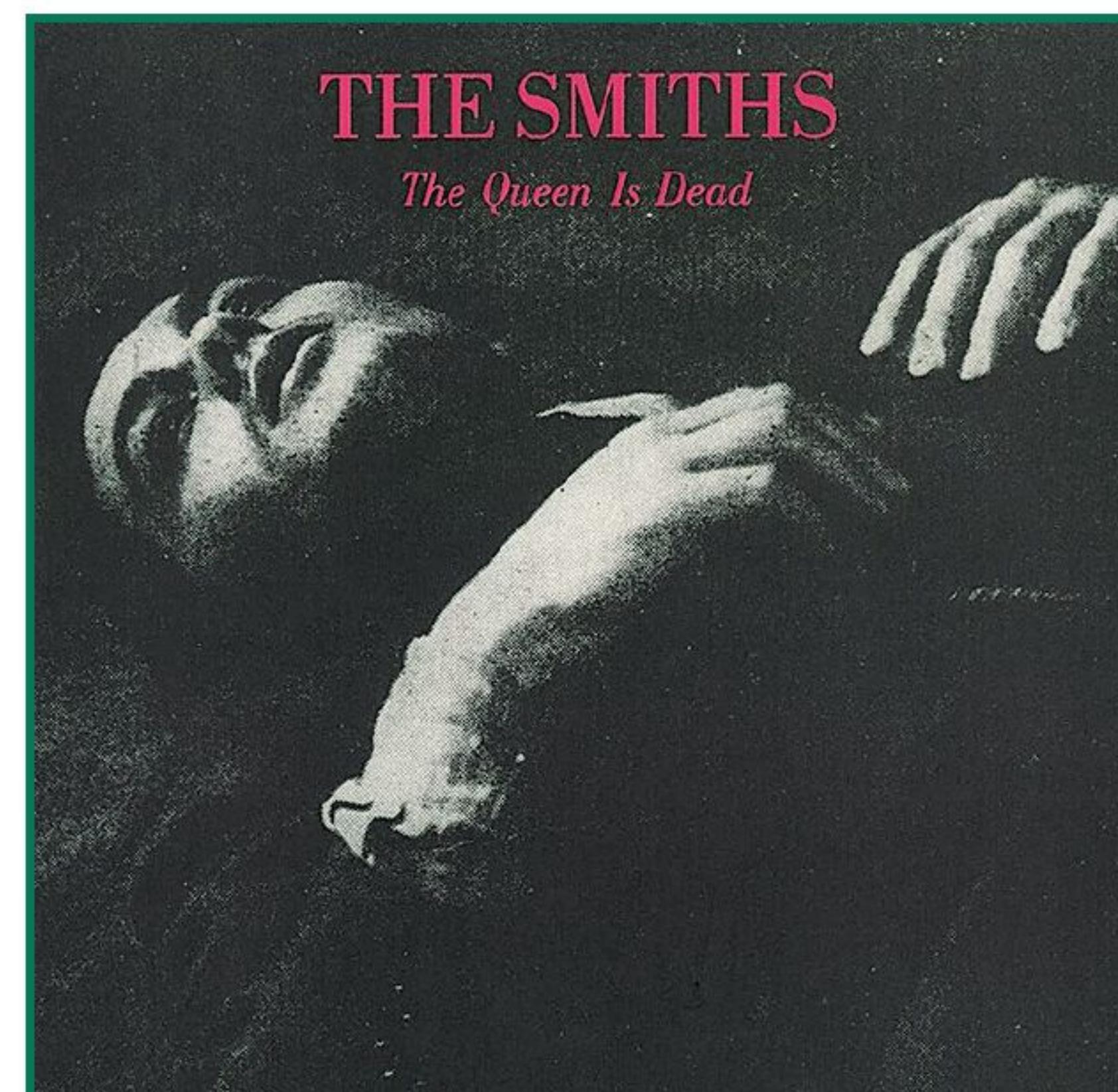
### The Queen Is Dead

It was a square peg amid the shred scene and almost sank Johnny Marr, but the Smiths' majestic third album ended up as the jewel in their crown

BY HENRY YATES

 **IT WAS THE** summer of 1985, and Johnny Marr was a man out of time. Three years earlier, while still a teenager, the guitarist had co-founded the Smiths in Manchester, England, with vocalist Morrissey (bassist Andy Rourke and drummer Mike Joyce completed the lineup). But the crystalline chime of his Rickenbacker 330 was still a lone voice in the era of sweep-picked flash. "The Eighties shredders were a joke," Marr told this writer in 2009. "That's guitar playing as an Olympic sport. If you're into decent music, it's just offensive."

What, then, did Marr deem 'decent music'? In their early career, the Smiths had covered more ground than their indie-jangle elevator pitch would suggest, roaming from the swampy tremolo judder of "How Soon Is Now?" to the airtight Chic-inspired funk of



"Barbarism Begins at Home" and the ringing doublestops of "This Charming Man" (a track Marr always denied was influenced by African highlife, but it sure sounds like it).

But the band's opening albums had been patchy, and now, as he sketched out the songs for third release *The Queen Is Dead*, the guitarist knew nothing less than a masterpiece would do. "It occurred to me one afternoon that the next Smiths album had to be a serious piece of work," wrote Marr in his 2016 autobiography, *Set the Boy Free*. "The stakes had got higher, and greatness was a possibility for the band if we were

prepared to go for it. I stood and thought about it, and then I said to myself, 'You're going to have to dig deep, whatever it takes.'

The material took shape fast. Marr remembers sitting nose-to-nose with Morrissey to present the new songs on his 1971 Martin D-28, and in a single evening, the pair had chased down the foundations of "Frankly, Mr Shankly," "I Know It's Over" and "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out."

"We didn't waste any time," he wrote of his ferocious work ethic in the period.

Likewise, as the band loaded into London's RAK Studios, the 21-year-old guitarist became the driving force. When he wasn't out on the floor with a rig that included a '78 black Les Paul Custom (later loaned to Noel Gallagher of Oasis) and a '63 L-series white Strat, Marr was to be found presiding over the mixing desk from morning until midnight, fueled by an endless stream of joints and strong coffee. "Smoking pot in the studio never hindered me — it helped me shut out the outside world just enough to do the job," he reflected. "I didn't need anything else in my life. My world was the studio, and I tried to ignore everything that might distract me."

That was easy: these were songs you could lose yourself in. *The Queen Is Dead*'s opening title track began with Joyce's tribal tom tattoo, but it's Marr's thrilling wah-soaked



The Smiths' Marr [left] and Morrissey on stage in Newcastle in January 1986

outro that defines it, the guitarist channeling the Velvet Underground's "I Can't Stand It" as he beats his Les Paul almost into matchwood. "Johnny did that pretty much live in one take," recalled engineer Stephen Street. "It was just one of those inspired performances. He just got this great harmonic feedback from his Les Paul and as he changed the angle on the wah pedal, it changed the note."

At the other extreme, there was the melancholy shimmer of "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out," Morrissey's ode to doomed romance and shared suicide ('To die by your side, well, the pleasure, the privilege is mine') driven by a stuttering chord sequence that held magic even in embryonic form. "I decided to record it using the Martin acoustic I'd written it on," explained Marr, "and it felt like the music was playing itself. We were high with it, and after just a few takes, we had one of our best ever songs — something that felt at the time like pop music and beyond."

With the possible exception of the turgid "Never Had No One Ever" and the demented rockabilly of "Vicar in a Tutu," *The Queen Is Dead* demanded front-to-back listening. There was the sardonic swipe at label boss Geoff Travis on the aforementioned "Frankly, Mr. Shankly" ("It was in total contrast to the others and sounded like an eccentric vaudevillian romp"). There was the grave-waltz of "I Know It's Over" (one of the few songs where the Smiths deserved their miserabilist reputation). "I'll never forget when Morrissey did that vocal," Marr told journalist Johnny Rogan. "It's one of the highlights of my life."

On the flipside, that desolate number was countered by the spring-heeled rhythm punch of "The Boy with the Thorn in His Side" and "Cemetery Gates." "I was on the train," reflected Marr of writing the latter song,

**For just a heartbeat in the summer of 1986, the Smiths were the greatest band in Britain**

a joyous Kinks-influenced sunbeam that belied Morrissey's lyric about an afternoon exploring the tombstones. "And I was thinking, 'Right, if you're so great, first thing in the morning, sit down and write a great song.' I started with the 'Cemetery Gates' B-minor-to-G change in open G."

At the album's midpoint, meanwhile, was "Bigmouth Strikes Again," its visceral minor-key assault establishing Marr among the most muscular players in British indie-rock. "I wanted something that was a rush all the way through," said the guitarist, who described the song as his take on the Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash." "I thought the guitar breaks should be percussive, not too pretty or chordal."

Finally, signing off the album was "Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others," a baffling ode to the differing dimensions of the female form that would have been a throwaway curio without the hypnotic glide of Marr's folk arpeggios. "Some things just drop out of the heavens, and 'Some Girls' was one of them," he reflected. "It's a beautiful piece of music."

So *The Queen Is Dead* was done, and Marr knew "no one could touch us — that was the peak of the Smiths' career." An unequivocal triumph, then? Not exactly. The laser focus of helming the album sessions had weighed heavy on the young guitarist, whose weight fell to about 98 lbs. as he ran on nervous energy, brandy and cocaine. "I rarely thought about food unless it was absolutely necessary," he recalled. "I'd just get on with recording and sometimes someone might make me a sandwich."

The music was just one of the burdens carried by Marr. Facing legal action over the Smiths' move from Rough Trade to EMI — and serving as the band's de facto manager, right down to the logistics of van hire — it's easy enough to join the dots between the overworked, rail-thin figure haunting the mixing desk and the borderline-alcoholic who would soon write off his BMW, then walk away from arguably the most important British guitar band of the decade at the peak of its powers. "The more bitter the split became," wrote Marr of that 1987 parting, "the better off I felt out of it, and soon I was just happy to be out of it altogether. I was in charge of my own life again."

But that was all to come. For just a heartbeat in the summer of 1986, the Smiths were the greatest band in Britain. With 40 years of hindsight, it might seem gloriously unlikely that *The Queen Is Dead* came into our lives the same year as Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, Van Halen's *5150* and Poison's *Look What the Cat Dragged In* — and stranger still that the album defied the zeitgeist to achieve gold sales in the U.S. But perhaps that just speaks to the magic of a charmed 12 months in music, when it seemed anything was possible.

## VAN HALEN

### 5150

How Van Halen defied the odds with a new singer and a new sound

BY CHRIS GILL

**VAN HALEN WAS** the world's biggest rock band at the beginning of 1985. Their 1984 album had sold more than five million copies in the U.S., reaching Number 2 on the *Billboard* 200 albums chart (their highest position to that date, held back only by the juggernaut that was Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album) and delivering their only Number 1 single, "Jump." The supporting tour was a massive success, selling out all 101 shows.

Eddie Van Halen hoped to propel the band to even greater success, starting work in early 1985 on new musical ideas at his 5150 studio with Donn Landee, who engineered all six of Van Halen's previous albums and had become the guitarist's studio sidekick. Meanwhile, singer David Lee Roth released the four-song *Crazy from the Heat* EP, recorded with Van Halen's producer Ted Templeman and released in late January 1985.

Eddie didn't mind the singer's extracurricular activity at first and spoke positively about Dave's solo record in interviews. The EP's music bore no resemblance to Van Halen material, and the general consensus among the band members was that Roth deserved the opportunity to release some creative steam as long as it didn't interfere with the band. However, when Roth showed up at a handful of sessions to write lyrics and work on melodies for the next Van Halen album, he seemed detached and disinterested. Eventually, he stopped showing up altogether, choosing to conduct interviews and promote his EP instead.

One evening in late March, Eddie invited Dave to his home to discuss Van Halen's future plans. The guitarist was shocked but not surprised to find out that Roth had received an offer from CBS Studios to star in a film with a \$20 million budget. While Ed wanted to release the next Van Halen album before the end of 1985, Dave wanted to take a full year off to make his movie. The singer suggested a short summer stadium tour as a compromise, but the guitarist refused to go out without any new material. Roth also invited the band to record music for the film's soundtrack, but Van Halen shot

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

that offer down as well. A stalemate was reached, with both parties refusing to budge.

Many sources cite that meeting as the end of Van Halen's classic era with David Lee Roth, but the singer's departure actually became official and final almost four months later. Dave assumed that his bandmates would wait for him to return to Van Halen after the film was finished, while Eddie was convinced that the singer would eventually come to his senses and join the band in the studio. The situation became more complicated when the band fired its manager, Noel Monk, after he demanded a new contract that would have paid him more than any individual band member. Without an authoritative mediator to guide and advise them, the friction grew.

Initially, Ed pitched the idea of making an album with several of his favorite singers. "We bounced around the idea of doing a record with me writing all the music and having everyone from Joe Cocker to Phil Collins to Mike Rutherford sing a different vocal on each track," Van Halen told Steven Rosen in May 1986. "But Alex talked me out of it. He said that would be just a one-shot project, and it made me realize that I wanted a family."

Ed also reached out to Pete Townshend around this time to pitch ideas for a collaboration, but that effort never went further than the exchange of a few telegrams. When the guitarist found out that Roth was putting together a band to record music for his movie and had reached out to Billy Sheehan (who accepted) and Yngwie Malmsteen (who declined), he realized Van Halen should probably start looking for a new singer as well. He made a genuine offer to Scandal vocalist Patti Smyth, but she turned it down because she was pregnant and concerned about the band's reputation as hardcore partiers.

News of Roth's and the Van Halen camp's extracurricular activities appeared in music publications like *Rolling Stone*, convincing many fans that the band was finished. Privately, Eddie Van Halen clung onto hope that Roth would return, but his attitude soon changed thanks to some matchmaking assistance from his friend, exotic car dealer Claudio Zampolli. One day in late June 1985, Sammy Hagar dropped by Zampolli's L.A. shop on Wilshire Boulevard to check out Ferraris. Ed had purchased several Lamborghinis from Zampolli, and during a recent friendly chat he mentioned that he was looking for someone to replace Roth. Zampolli told Hagar about Van Halen's predicament; Hagar gave Zampolli permission to pass along his phone number to Ed; Ed called to set up a meeting and audition.

Hagar was an enticing prospect to replace Roth. His solo career was on an upward trajectory at the time, with his three most recent albums (*Standing Hampton, Three*



*Lock Box* and *VOA*) achieving Gold certification and *VOA* ascending toward Platinum, thanks to the ongoing popularity of his need-for-speed anthem "I Can't Drive 55." In between he joined the supergroup Hagar Schon Aaronson Shrieve (HSAS), which showed that he could be a team player as well as a solo frontman. The Van Halen brothers were also big fans of the albums Hagar recorded as lead vocalist for Montrose in the mid-Seventies. An added bonus was that Hagar had recorded the *Montrose* and *Paper Money Montrose* albums as well as *VOA* with

Although the Van Halen brothers and Michael Anthony decided to hire Hagar on the spot that day in July, the public announcement followed a few months later, even though the news leaked almost immediately. In August, the band issued a statement confirming that David Lee Roth was no longer a member of Van Halen. However, Hagar's official induction waited until September 22, 1985, in the middle of Hagar's final concert performance with his former backing band at the Farm Aid concert in Champaign, Illinois. Actually, co-host Gary Beaty of The Nashville

## Van Halen 2.0 (aka Van Hagar) provided a perfect soundtrack for the rest of the dayglo/just say no Eighties

Van Halen's producer Ted Templeman.

Ed remained unwilling to give up on Roth until July 15, 1985, when Hagar dropped by 5150 to play and record a few new songs with the band. As Van Halen played the first song, "Summer Nights," Hagar came up with lyrics and a vocal melody on the spot. "In 20 minutes we had a complete song," Edward told Rosen. "We all freaked out."

"Believe it or not, I just started singing 'summer nights' for the chorus," Hagar told John Stix in 1986. "They all looked at each other and said, 'Wait a minute, the guy can sing!'"

Network prematurely spilled the beans during the live broadcast a few seconds before Eddie Van Halen joined Hagar on stage, confirming the rumors once and for all.

Before the duo played their first notes, Sammy fumbled with a banner and joked that it read, "My dick's too small." From that point onwards it became obvious that the Red Rocker was not going to be David Lee Roth 2.0, as the former Van Halen frontman would never speak of "Little Dave" in such self-deprecating terms. Hagar and Roth both were high-energy, dynamic performers who let expletives fly like a sailor with his dinghy □

caught in a zipper, but Hagar was more down-to-earth and less intimidating, with more working-class appeal.

Hagar's lyrics may not have been as clever as Roth's — Sammy's sexual innuendos were more single than double entendre — but they were direct, to the point and arguably more relatable, if perhaps also too obvious. While Roth was prone to unapologetic braggadocio, Hagar offered a less threatening approach and more modest personality — consider Roth's "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" compared to Hagar's "Why Can't This Be Love," or "guaranteed to satisfy" in "Ice Cream Man" to "you're never satisfied" in "5150."

After the Farm Aid appearance, the new line-up of Van Halen spent most of October 1985 writing and completing material for their first album. Recording started in November at Ed's 5150 studio with engineer Donn Landee behind the mixing console. The band wanted Ted Templeman to produce the album since he had already produced nine albums in total with Hagar and Van Halen, but much to their dismay they discovered that Templeman was unavailable due to his commitment to produce David Lee Roth's *Eat 'Em and Smile*. Instead, Ed and Donn presumed the producer roles until December, when they hired Foreigner guitarist Mick Jones, who previously co-produced all of his own band's albums.

"Sammy and [us] were all thinking we didn't want to do the whole thing on our own because we need an outside opinion," Van Halen said. "Mick was playing in town with

Foreigner and called Sammy to invite him to the show. Sammy

The photo shoot for our September 1986 cover took place in Rockford, Illinois, March 16, 1986. Van Halen brought along his custom "Red Cloud" Kramer Ripley

## 5150 ignited a David Lee Roth vs. Sammy Hagar debate that still rages, even as it becomes more and trivial with the passage of time

asked if Mick wanted to co-produce our album and he said yes. Actually we were almost done with it, but Mick helped us organize everything and polish it up. He changed a few things, especially on 'Dreams,' which is like a different song than it originally was. He got a hell of a vocal performance out of Sammy on that song, too."

Eddie Van Halen's guitar tone on 5150 went through a dramatic sonic shift compared to the albums he recorded with Roth. Although he previously used an Eventide H949 Harmonizer on various earlier Van Halen tracks, here he used it almost nonstop to create a stereo chorus-style effect by using one H949 panned right with a slight pitch detune, another H949 panned left with a different micropitch detune setting and his dry signal panned to the center. Landee occasionally patched in delay from a Roland SDE3000 or Lexicon PCM70 to add space and reverb-like resonance. The guitar's midrange was also more focused, providing more breathing room for Anthony's bass.

5150 was also the first album that Ed recorded without using his faithful original Frankenstein guitar, now replaced in the pecking order by the Kramer 5150 guitar he built himself, featuring a single Seymour Duncan JB humbucker and Floyd Rose vibrato. Previously he tuned his guitar down  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  step to accommodate Roth's vocals, but here he generally used standard pitch. For "5150," Ed used his 1958 Gibson Flying V tuned down a half step (to D#) with the low E string tuned further down a whole step drop D tuning-style (to C#) to record the main rhythm track and overdubbed the solos using the

Kramer 5150. "Good Enough" features Ed's Kramer "1984" guitar with the low E string replaced by a low A string from a bass (tuning low to high is AADGBE) to provide the vibe of a baritone guitar on the rhythm parts while allowing Ed to still play his regular lead parts.

Ned Steinberger gave Ed a Steinberger

GL2T headless guitar with a TransTrem system at the 1985 Summer NAMM convention in New Orleans. Ed immediately put this new toy to good use, writing the songs "Summer Nights" and "Get Up" only a few days after first receiving it and expertly employing the TransTrem system. "You can use the vibrato bar to take whole chords up or down and they'll stay in tune," he said. "You can also lock the bar in different positions to instantly transpose keys. It's kinda like a capo, but you can go up or down in pitch."

Other guitars featured on 5150 include a Fender Stratocaster with the bridge/middle pickup setting on "Best of Both Worlds" and a Kramer Ferrington acoustic-electric for the acoustic guitar tracks on "Dreams." Ed's number one 1968 Marshall model 1959 Super Lead plexi remained his amp of choice, plugged into a single 4x12 Marshall cabinet miked with either Shure SM57 or SM58 mics.

Ed's keyboard excursions continued to evolve on 5150, with several songs prominently featuring synths. An Oberheim OB-8 preset with a sweeping sawtooth oscillator patch provided the ersatz distorted "guitar" riff on "Why Can't This Be Love." Organic-sounding OB-8 string patches layered with an acoustic Steinway piano with MIDI controller capabilities provided lush textures on "Dreams" and "Love Walks In." Ed played Fairlight CMI and E-mu Emulator II sampling keyboards for the horn section hits and slappy bass on "Inside," which unfortunately instantly made it the most dated-sounding track Van Halen ever recorded.

When the newly revamped Van Halen released 5150 on March 24, 1986, the album proved that lightning can indeed strike twice. The album benefitted from the momentum of 1984's phenomenal success, and Sammy Hagar brought along a new group of followers to compensate for many of the David Lee Roth die-hards who broke ranks. It was also the first Van Halen album to reach Number 1 on the *Billboard* 200 chart, reaching that milestone only one month after its release date, although it took about eight years to reach the stunning 5x Platinum sales figure that 1984 achieved in just one year.

Of course, 5150 also ignited a David Lee Roth vs. Sammy Hagar debate that still rages today, even as it becomes more meaningless and trivial with the passage of time. Although Roth didn't match his previous band's success when he teamed up with the incredible line-up of Steve Vai, Billy Sheehan and Gregg Bissonette to record *Eat 'Em and Smile*, he delivered one hell of an album to satisfy the old-school fans. Meanwhile Van Halen 2.0 (a.k.a. Van Hagar) maintained a large dedicated following and found new fans as they provided a perfect soundtrack for the remainder of the dayglo/just say no Eighties. As Hagar sang on perhaps his most eloquent performance with Van Halen, it was the best of both worlds.





## XTC *Skylarking*

How Andy Partridge & Co. created a stripped-down masterpiece, despite butting heads with their big-name producer

BY ANDREW DALY

**XTC'S 1986 ALBUM, *Skylarking*,** is fairly beloved today, but for Andy Partridge, the British band's co-founder, chief songwriter and guitarist, it was difficult to make. The main issue? Partridge's disagreement with producer Todd Rundgren over the record's direction.

"Going in, there was weirdness in terms of having to shut up and obey," Partridge says. "I'm certainly not used to that."

*Skylarking* was recorded at Rundgren's Utopia Sound Studios in Woodstock, New York, where the atmosphere, combined with Rundgren's arguably unorthodox style, apparently proved somewhat oppressive.

"There was an almost macho climbing over you [in order] to break you," Partridge says. "And I know why he wanted to break you. He wanted to move on quickly to the next project. That's all there was to it. It was a money-making machine that wouldn't make so much money if you took more time to get things right."

Despite this, on the strength of the polarizing track "Dear God," *Skylarking* launched XTC into the mainstream musical orbit in the U.S.

"What can I say? It was a difficult birth, but the baby came out okay," Partridge says. "It's a miracle baby. It captured us and our musical interests pretty well at a time when our songwriting and the band were on a new career trajectory."

### ***Skylarking* took XTC in a bold new direction.**

I don't think it's a very guitar-y album. It seems to have been kidnapped by

keyboards – but it was written on guitar. We were in a difficult place. Virgin felt we weren't selling enough, and that's because most of the production was dealt with by "that weirdo, Andy."

### **Is that why Todd Rundgren was chosen to produce?**

It was a case of removing me and shutting me up. They insisted, "You have to sell records in America. To do that, you'd better have an American producer." They gave us a list of half a dozen producers who were selling well in America, and, to be frank, I didn't recognize any of them. We didn't pick one, so they said, "We'll give you a list of another six – but you've definitely got to have one of these. If not, you're going to be off the label." In hindsight, that might've been a great thing. But the only name on the list that anybody recognized was Todd Rundgren.

### **You said a lot of the songs from *Skylarking* were written on guitar. What guitars did you use?**

I had a Martin D-35. I still have it. It's not in great condition and really needs some TLC. Some things were falling out with that, so I treated myself to a Japanese-built Telecaster, a Squier. I walked into a shop, and they had about five or six Teles. I tried them all, but they didn't speak to my hands. They spoke to my ears, but not my hands – and that's very important. There's got to be that physical – and mental – marriage with my guitar.

The fella in the shop said, "There's one more. It's a Squier and it's made in Japan." That one felt great. It sounded the same, if not better, than the U.S. ones, and it really spoke to my hands. I brought that one to the States, along with my trusty Ibanez Artist,

which I'd had since '77. Those were my go-to guitars.

### ***Skylarking* is considered loosely conceptual, but you encountered issues with Todd regarding song selection and running order.**

It became obvious that it was going to be a light album. The whole concept of the summer day was nailed in place by Todd before we even got to Woodstock. He took the songs, spliced them in order and said, "This is how you're going to play it." This was very alien to us. He said, "You're going to be recording these songs in this order." Before we even stepped on a plane, I disagreed with him. I thought, "I don't know whether that song is so strong. Why hasn't he picked this tune?"

**It goes without saying that you and Todd didn't get along. But do you think that tension helped improve the album?** We butted heads terribly, but the album was made despite having our ankles bitten all the time by this rottweiler. It was a case of... how shall I describe it?

### **Perseverance?**

Yeah, I think it was a case of perseverance. He had some positive points, but there were a lot of negative points I could've done without. To be a producer, you have to have great bedside manner and pull out the best performances from the band.

### **Todd didn't do that?**

His arrangement skills were fantastic. But he didn't have the bedside manner, friendliness and enthusiasm to say, "Come on, lads! That was a great session yesterday. What have you got for me today?"

XTC's Andy Partridge in action – with his go-to Ibanez Artist – in Werchter, Belgium, in 1980



Partridge performs with XTC on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, April 6, 1982



### Some might say *Skylarking* had a few mixing and polarity issues.

Todd's skills as an arranger were immaculate, but his engineering was so slapdash as to be "demo" standard. When we got back to England, Dave [Gregory, XTC guitarist] did an interview and said, "Hmmm, maybe Todd should stick to producing himself." I thought, "Whoa, Dave, where's this coming from?" But his engineering is demo-quality because he's used to banging down stuff for himself, so he doesn't have a high personal standard. His engineering is certainly not on par with other engineers we've used, who I think have been immaculate. We weren't allowed to attend the mixes, which pissed us off. It's like, "Whose baby is this? Is it your baby? No, it's ours!" It was very difficult for us to take. [Editor's note: In a 2023 interview with Steve Jones of Jonesy's Jukebox (available on YouTube), Rundgren says that, early in the mixing process, XTC said, "We're going home to England; we're not going to stay for the mix."]

Nobody was happy with the mixes, but we couldn't spend any more money. I attended the mastering in England, and the engineer said, 'There's no bass on it. There's no top on it.' He did what he could to get it to a higher standard. We figured that Todd's studio was mis-wired, where it

sounded fine in one place and out of whack elsewhere. This is quite common.

### Despite all that, "Dear God" became a sensation.

Actually, there's something I'd like to put straight about "Dear God." There's a lot of talk on the Internet that I insisted on the track being taken off the album. That's not true. I'll tell you who wanted that track removed — the Geffen record label.

### Is that because of its polarizing subject matter?

I was invited into the Virgin offices in London, and they said, "Geffen is really worried by the nature of this track. They would really like it if you could take it off the album." They said, "They think it's going to damage you in some way." Fuck knows why that would be.

### How did you react to that?

I thought, "Well, this undermines some of the lack of confidence I had in certain things about that song..." I didn't know if I did the subject proud — and it's a massive subject, you know, human belief. I was also feeling a bit icky about the little-girl voice. It was too sugary sweet and sickly for me. I wasn't totally happy about that. So, with Geffen saying, "Can you take it off?", I thought,

"Okay. Alright..." But it was not me who took it off the album, though I seem to have gotten the blame for taking that off the album.

### Ironically, the label wanted XTC to break the U.S. market, and "Dear God" did exactly that.

That song was thrown away onto a B-side, and DJs started flipping it over. People would ring in, saying, "If you play that song again, I'm going to firebomb your station!" Or they'd say, "That's the best thing you've played in years. Play it again!" It accidentally became the tool that opened up our careers in the States. Weird, isn't it?

### While there were a lot of issues, *Skylarking* is considered one of the great albums of the Eighties.

It's the great missing Dukes of Stratosphere [a psychedelic pop group Partridge formed in 1984, basically an XTC spin-off] album. Apart from the problems in its creation, it chimes pretty decently with us for where we were at.

### Would you change anything about it?

It's pointless to have regrets. It came out fine. It didn't come out how any of us thought it would, but it came out fine. And it's not such an American album; it's more of a British psychedelic album. It's a good snapshot. **GW**

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# Line 6 Helix Stadium XL

A massive touchscreen, new Agoura amp modeling and a host of other features. Can Line 6 take the modeling crown with its sequel?

BY PETE EMERY

**► FOR THOSE WITH** even a passing interest in the amp-modeling world, the Line 6 Helix needs no introduction. Released in 2015, it is arguably one of the pieces of gear that made digital amplifier modeling technology a common sight within the rigs of professional guitarists. A decade later – and now with a lot more competition – Line 6 brings out the long-awaited sequel, the Helix Stadium XL.

The Helix Stadium XL improves on the original Helix with a touchscreen, wireless connectivity, new usability features and a host of other tweaks. The headline, however, is an all-new amp modelling technology that Line 6 has named Agoura.

First impressions of the Stadium XL are that it is cut from the same cloth as its supremely gig-worthy predecessor. It has a similar tank-like brushed aluminium chassis, a sturdy expression pedal and footswitches

that boast a reassuring clunk, as well as knobs and buttons that turn and click with a resistance that inspires confidence in their longevity.

The star of the show is the highly responsive 8-inch, high-resolution touchscreen with bright images that sport an impressive amount of detail.

At 19.4" x 10.1" x 3.6", it's smaller than its predecessor but bigger than the Fender Tone Master Pro and Neural DSP Quad Cortex. That's something to consider if space is important to you.

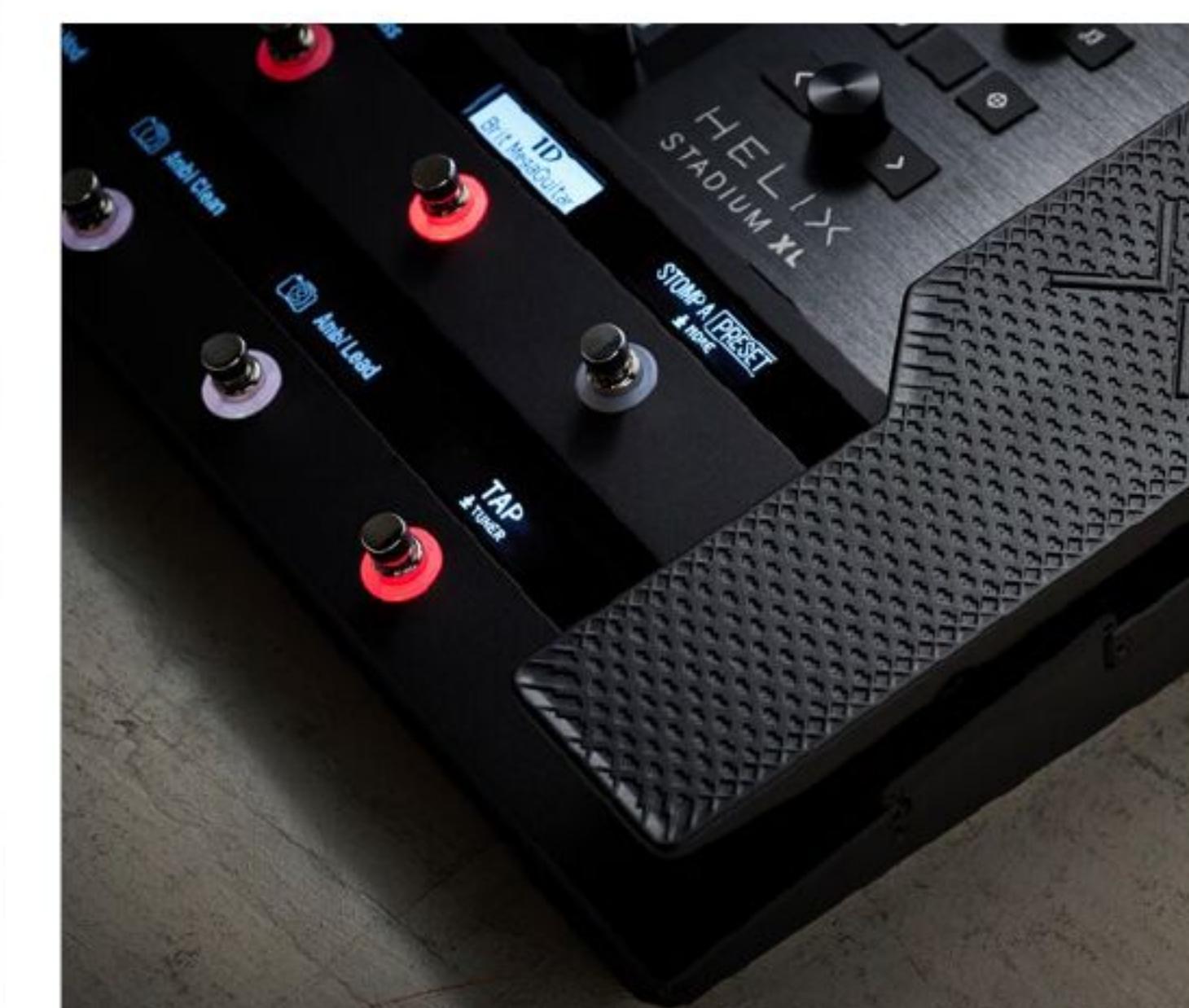
Anyone who has used a Helix will be immediately at home on the Stadium as it utilizes the same capacitance sensing footswitches, mini encoders (we have two extra on the Stadium XL), Snapshots and

a block-based signal chain, but with an expanded repertoire of icons that make it easier to quickly identify what is happening within a preset. Also carried over are the Scribble Strips, but with an OLED upgrade, making them easier to read.

The touchscreen makes editing presets so quick and easy that most will see no need for the accompanying Stadium app when it comes to preset creation. The app is still handy for loading in third-party presets and IRs, though. Utilizing this screen is the new focus view. This is an innovative way of adjusting multiple parameters on individual blocks by dragging a cursor through five zones on the screen. Again, quick and easy.

A new Search function makes scrolling through models and presets a breeze, and the Clips function allows you to test presets and models with a short burst of pre-recorded audio. Add the built-in WiFi and

**It modernizes the original without overwriting the parts that made it a success**



MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE





Bluetooth, and using the Stadium XL is an incredibly slick experience.

Having tested all of this at a real-world gig, it is our opinion that the Helix Stadium XL is the easiest flagship modeler to use live.

Plugging it in, the first thing to test is those new Agoura amps. Of which, we have 16 guitar and eight bass models. Also included are older

HX models from the original Helix. Agoura is Line 6's all-new approach to amp modeling. To paraphrase a few of the highlights, Power Stage and Tube emulation have been revamped, interactions between components within a modeled circuit are more accurately reflected, and Cab and Amp blocks communicate better. Also new to Agoura is the Hype

#### STREET PRICE: \$2,199.99

**MANUFACTURER:**  
Line 6, [line6.com](http://line6.com)

#### PROS

- New Agoura amps feel more alive
- Upgraded inputs mean increased dynamic response
- Built like a tank
- Excellent Delays, Reverbs, and Modulations
- Relatively easy to use

#### CONS

- Drive, Pitch, and Synth effects have some room for improvement
- Bigger than some of its closest competitors
- Fantastic sounds, but we found that it benefited from a little more tweaking than some other modelers out of the box

**VERDICT:** Line 6 was always going to have a tough job following up on the Helix, but with new amp models that feel lively under the fingers and a host of other modern features, the Line 6 Helix Stadium XL is a great, user-friendly choice for working guitarists.

control, which dials in an idealised version of the amp model.

Using the Stadium XL to compare the Agoura models to their HX equivalent, we find that the differences depend on the model, as the more recently released HX models sound closer to the Agoura versions when it comes to their core tone. But across the board, the Agoura models better reflect picking dynamics and volume roll off and, as a result, feel a little more real.

All of which is furthered by the improved inputs. Testing the Legacy (HX) models on the Stadium against the exact same models on a Helix Floor, they sound slightly clearer and more dynamic on the Stadium XL.

The Helix excelled when it came to Delay, Reverb and Modulation, so most will be glad to see their favorites being carried over. But some improvements could be made in other areas; for example, the Polycapo introduces a bit of a warble when used with chords, even in unison, and the TS808 model is great for pushing driven amp models into tight saturation but lacks the compressed feel of the real thing in a clean amp model.

All things considered, the Helix Stadium XL modernizes and builds on the original Helix without overwriting the parts that made it a success. It's a worthy successor. **GW**



# Bare Knuckle Halcyon humbucker pickups

Could the Halcyon humbucker be the forceful sonic voice you've been seeking?

BY PAUL RIARIO

## THE HALCYON HUMBUCKER

**HUMBUCKER** is the result of a three-way collaboration between the U.K.'s Bare Knuckle Pickups founder Tim Mills, frequent collaborator and musical polymath Adam "Nolly" Getgood and Spiritbox guitarist Mike Stringer. Their aim? A signature pickup for Stringer that can precisely enhance the low-end density of a seven-string guitar that's being pummeled with gain, while also clearly detailing ambient and clean tones when both pickups are combined.

We opted to hear how these pickups fare with a six-string guitar, which we believe most players and readers will want to know about, and the dual-bladed Halcyons look absolutely killer in our Charvel with its five-way switch and coil-tap, allowing us to really dig into these pickups' tonal range.

Speaking of "killer," my guitar tech – the guy who installed these Halcyons – informed us, "I'm just gonna warn you – these are the loudest pickups I've ever heard in a guitar. Make sure you put the dogs and kids in another room before plugging it in." Noted!

Just like the Ragnarok humbucker, the Halcyon is among the highest-output passive pickups Bare Knuckle produces; the bridge measures at a gargantuan 17.9k ohms, but the neck reveals a more moderate 7.9k ohms. Having a twin-blade pole design (versus individual pole pieces) allows both pickups to maintain even string balance across various gauges and tunings – making these pickups



particularly effective for drop tunings and in use on multi- or extended-scale instruments.

The Halcyon bridge is stacked with a trio of custom ceramic magnets to deliver a biting midrange, muscular output and razor-sharp attack without being flabby in the lows. The neck pickup's leaner wind around an Alnico V magnet provides ample headroom for a refined hybrid of cleaner and ambient textures. Surprisingly, despite that intentional contrast between the Halcyon's individual builds, there is no discernible output drop as you switch between the neck and bridge, or engaging coil-tapping, which allows you to summon an array of dynamic tonal colors without sacrificing balance.

Heeding our tech's advice, we started on a clean channel of a Blackstar St. James head to catch the initial breath of these Halcyons. And yes, he's right; the bridge pickup has a massive output unlike anything we've ever heard. You can hear a colossal wall of rounded lows and weighted mids, but thankfully, no excessive "boom" on its bottom end.

After dropping our strings down to F# and pumping full-throttle gain from my EVH 5150 III head, it's apparent that the Halcyon doesn't possess a feral nature; instead, it captures pure brutality through

## The bridge pickup has a massive output unlike anything we've ever heard

**STREET PRICE:** Starting at £195.60 per pickup (approx. \$247) or £376.80 for a set (approx. \$476)

**MANUFACTURER:**  
Bare Knuckle Pickups,  
[bareknucklepickups.co.uk](http://bareknucklepickups.co.uk)

### PROS

- A powerful, high-output bridge humbucker that capably handles drop tunings with clarity and evenness
- Twin-blade pole design balances string-to-string response

### CONS

- Some may not prefer the look of a twin-blade pole design "dual-rail" humbucker
- Powerful response from the bridge humbucker may be too much output for some

### VERDICT

Bare Knuckle's Halcyon humbuckers provide a pugnacious foundation of intensity that demands your attention.

controlled aggression. By chugging away on the wound strings, you can sense how well the Halcyon bridge handles low-end with clarity and manages to preserve chordal articulation under the strain of increased gain from modelers and pedals, or in this case, a high-gain amp driven to its limits.

Sticking with the bridge pickup, we found it was great for injecting elements of Stringer's style. As we unleashed a barrage of rhythmic pick scrapes and thickly layered, low-end riffage, the Halcyon responded with surgical precision and presence.

Switching over to the neck, what's immediately clear is which pickup the Alpha is and which is the Beta – and that's not throwing shade at the neck. The Halcyon neck wastes no time pulling punches; it still hits hard, but it's all about firmly detailing its crystalline voice that doesn't clash with the bridge.

What's cool is that no matter the pickup configuration or coil-tapping we used between the neck and bridge, both consistently proved the Halcyons fuse precision with authority, allowing each riff and note to land with weight and vitality. **GW**



# Fender Limited Edition Johnny Marr Special Jaguar

Thirteen years after Johnny Marr's upgraded signature Jaguar launched, this new Special version piles on the sonic options with its trio of Lipstick single-coil pickups and some natty switching

BY DAVE BURLUCK

## ▶ JOHNNY MARR'S FIRST

signature took the vintage vision of the Jaguar and upgraded it, very much from a player's perspective. This new addition sticks close to that original, aside from the major difference – its trio of Lipstick single-coils, a pickup design that was, of course, introduced in the Fifties by Danelectro.

Marr's recipe also does away with the original's rhythm and lead circuits, and here the new single coils are selected by a four-way lever switch (which adds both pickups in series) along with a specific switch to bypass, add or solo the additional middle pickup. And, like the original JM Jaguar, the two "strangle" or "bright" switches – one universal and one specific to that series pickup link – are retained.

Those changes aside, the new guitar follows the previous one pretty much spec-for-spec. The body is alder (only offered in this gloss-black nitro finish) with quite deep vintage-style body contours. The vintage-tinted maple neck is also vintage-informed with its profile cloned from one of Marr's favorite Jaguars, a model from 1965. Also, here the fingerboard radius swaps from the original JM's small 7.25" vintage radius to Fender's more modern 9.5".

Previous tweaks like the bridge's solid brass Mustang saddles and the push-in vibrato arm with its nylon

collar and the "locks" on the bridge's posts, which prevent the adjustment screws from moving during use, are all retained. It's a very smart build.

Like the original JM Jaguar, the new guitar retains the key elements of the vintage design, not least its short 24" scale length. In combination with the offset vibrato and the separate bridge, with that long "dead" string length between the two, the Jaguar has quite a unique feel, even for an offset. But there's nothing to criticize about the setup and smart fret work from what is best described as narrow/tall gauge wire. The bigger fingerboard radius certainly doesn't hinder anything, and actually here the string spacing at the bridge, 52.5mm, is narrower than the original JM model, which followed vintage protocol at just over 55 mm.

With quite a full-shouldered deep-C profile that feels slim-depthed in lower positions but really fills out by the 12th fret, it's a very playable piece. It's not particularly light in weight – 8.56 lbs. for our test model – but strapped on it all feels very fit-for-purpose and, unlike the longer-scaled Jazzmaster, the neck doesn't stick out as far.

The vibrato works really well, too; the arm stays put, that bridge rocks back and forth, and once the strings had settled in, tuning stability for those classic light shimmers didn't bother the tuning stability at all.

## STREET PRICE: \$2,999

MANUFACTURER:  
Fender, fender.com

### PROS

- + Superb build with nitro gloss finish and a raft of player-led mods to the original design
- + Big range of jangle-tastic sounds
- + Vintage informed neck profile and body contours

### CONS

- Convoluted pickup height adjustment
- You need to brush up on what all those switches do!
- Pro-level price

### VERDICT

A stunning upgrade of the short-scale Fender Jaguar, this Johnny Marr signature model is full of player-led improvements and more sounds. A pro-level piece in every regard.

There is no shortage of sounds here and rather like the original-spec Jaguar you need to work out what does what before you hit the stage. There are no markings for those slide switches either, although you do get a control description flyer to get you started. With the bright slide switches off and the three-position middle pickup slide switch also in its off position, it acts like a two-pickup Telecaster with the four-way series mod switch – bridge, both, neck and bridge and neck in series.

Lipstick pickups are known for their snappy, bright but smooth-edged voice, and that's just what we get here. There's a fast attack to the note, with a typical offset "plunk" to the decay. Set up a clean amp tone, with a little chorus, and this is the definition of jangle – almost summoning Gretsch and Rickenbacker at the same time.

Adding in the middle pickup to those selections, things get a bit more Strat-y (although the previous fourth series position now just voices the middle pickup) and the bright switches certainly clean up the low-end, seeming to push the punchy mids forward.

There's nothing to criticize except here the fact that you can't adjust the height of the pickups without removing the central plastic scratchplate and the bridge. But it's the range of sounds here that impresses – it's a real studio-style overdub guitar – while those strangle switches help to sit the sound in a mix, not least when you're using some heavier fuzzed-out and gained tones.

The problem is the price. At the top of Fender's USA production, before you move into Custom Shop pricing, we're into near boutique-level cost here with zero chance of any customization, not to mention its "any color, as long as it's black" color choice. That said, it plays like a dream and sounds superb. If only there were a Mexican-made version... **GW**



MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE

# TWA Source Code

A collaboration with the architect of the Tube Screamer to create an overdrive masterpiece

BY PAUL RIARIO

**WE CAN HEAR** many of you cry out, "Please, God – not another Tube Screamer!" And yes, while we understand these pleas, the Source Code by TWA (Totally Wycked Audio) is one of the finest TS808-style overdrives we've heard for many notable reasons.

You could say that the Tube Screamer – or any other similar overdrive iterations – is essentially a "hammer" in a guitarist's toolbox, to pound the front end of your amp for an enriching boosted tone. So, for the sake of argument, "How many times do we need to improve a hammer?" Well, that's where Susumu Tamura enters the chat. No, he didn't invent the hammer, but Tamura is the creator and designer of the original Japanese Tube Screamer, and now, after an unrelenting examination into, yet again, overhauling his classic TS808 soft-clip circuit, Tamura, along with TWA, has introduced the Source Code overdrive. Simply put, the Source Code is a reimagined Screamer with a host of optimized improvements like a newly developed "Magic IC" OpAmp, an added "Bite" control for more articulated sizzle, a multi-transistor input buffer circuit to preserve tone, and a few other enhancements that expand its sonic capabilities. So is this Tamura's masterpiece?

The Source Code incorporates a new multi-transistor input buffer circuit, a noticeable improvement over the original TS808. Whereas the original used a single-transistor input buffer that significantly narrowed the audio's dynamic range, Source Code's multi-transistor buffer reproduces the input signal more accurately and with less signal distortion.

The three main controls for Drive, Level, and Tone behave as expected when tailoring overdriven or boosted

**It's hard to beat a classic, but the TWA Source Code has done just that...**

tones. What's improved is that the Volume control includes a +6 dB boost circuit (placed after the gain and tone-shaping circuit sections), which increases the pedal's output level without altering its fundamental tone. For reference, setting the Source Code's Level control to 1 o'clock matches the maximum output level of a stock TS808, giving you an additional 1/3 of output level or "clean boost" by turning the knob further, which puts this pedal, for us, a 1/3 of an inch closer to making it onto our pedalboard.

The "ace in the hole" is the inclusion of a "Bite" control, which acts as a pre-gain input attenuator, regulating how hard the input signal hits the circuit's amplification and clipping stages. In essence, Bite serves as a handy secondary tone filter or gain control, providing dynamic changes throughout the entire drive spectrum by adjusting the amount of even-order harmonics within the output signal. For example, depending on where the Drive control is set, Bite noticeably restores clarity and note articulation (clockwise) or delivers texture, chime and articulate chunk (counter-clockwise).

Finally, for a wider dynamic range and increased headroom, the pedal features an inverting charge pump IC

**STREET PRICE:** \$299

**MANUFACTURER:** Totally Wicked Audio via Godlyke Inc, godlyke.com

**PROS**

- + One of the finest sounding and newly evolved TS808-style overdrives
- + 18V operation via internal voltage inverter for increased headroom
- + Multi-transistor input buffer circuit preserves guitar signal integrity
- + "Bite" control adjusts the balance of even-order harmonics present in the output signal
- + 6 dB boost circuit for increased output level without altering tone

**CONS**

- Pricey

**VERDICT**

With the addition of a Bite control delivering clear articulation and texture, among other noticeable improvements, this might become the most go-to Tube Screamer overdrive for guitarists who care about refining their tone.

that allows it to operate at 18VDC, providing a voltage swing of +/- 9VDC and a zero-volt reference, all derived from a standard 9VDC input.

The genesis of the Source Code came from Tamura's analysis of a friend's vintage Tube Screamer that produced an exceptional tone due to a rare Malaysian-made TI RC4558P OpAmp. Inspired by this remarkable IC, Tamura developed a custom op-amp that replicated its performance and unique asymmetrical clipping properties, resulting in the "Magic IC" incorporated within the Source Code overdrive.

Now that you know, how does it sound? With the Bite control completely rolled off, the pedal shares a similar tonal foundation to the TS808 but departs from it with the combined effort of its Bite control and "Magic IC" OpAmp, delivering a breathtaking, amp-like overdrive. Once you start introducing the Bite control, it becomes clear that the "Bite" knob is the "silver bullet" that makes this pedal a secret weapon.

Once you start adding or subtracting the amount of rich harmonic content generated from the Bite control, you begin to wonder how you lived without it. Think of it as "bringing in the muscle" to a fight. At lower settings, it adds a chewy texture to the drive or boost, and past the halfway mark, it starts to sparkle with clarity and sinewy articulation. In other words, if you're pushing a cranked amp, Bite becomes this muscular voice that fluently accentuates your pick attack, making each note pop with prominence.

We find the Source Code essential when paired with single coils in delivering that robust and stinging SRV tone with snap. With humbuckers, it acts just the same, albeit with more brawn. What's neat is the Source Code's slight compression manages to let the pedal breathe, resulting in a wide-open response.

It's hard to beat a classic, but the TWA Source Code overdrive, a leveled-up TS808-style pedal refined by the creator of the original Tube Screamer, has done just that. **GW**





# Strymon Olivera Vintage Oil Can Echo pedal

Strymon proves it's a well-oiled pedal-making machine with yet another knockout delay unit

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

## LATE-FIFTIES OIL CAN

echoes are fascinating pieces of gear. Imagine a rotating disk submerged in oil and built-in pickups that work in tandem to recreate the delay. Sounds a little wacky, right? But somehow, this quirky setup produces a dark, murky echo that's surprisingly musical. Now Strymon is dragging this retro tech kicking and screaming into the 21st century with its signature modern twists.

With just a handful of controls with its sleek, quality build, you'd be correct in the assumption that this is an easy pedal to use. First up, we have the Time dial, which adjusts the delay time. For this oil can delay, you're changing the rotation speed of the virtual can. Of course, this goes hand-in-hand with the play heads. Right in the center of the pedal, there's a three-way toggle that lets you choose between three modes, which bracket the delay time ranges.

Switch to Long mode to mimic the furthest play head and stretch that delay time to anywhere from 155ms to 620ms. If you want something snappier, flip it to Short mode for the closer head and a shorter delay, this time only 72ms to 290ms. Now, if



you're in the mood to mix it up, select Both and unleash a wild multi-tap echo pattern that is infectiously fun to mess with.

The Rate and Intensity control are your ticket to that delightful modulation, or warble, you hear on the repeats of vintage delays. As with regular delay pedals, Rate controls the speed of the modulation and Intensity governs how deeply the pitch variation fluctuates.

Lastly, we have Regeneration. Often dubbed "reverb" on the original units this pedal is based on, this dial controls how much echo gets fed back into the can for reprocessing. Crank it up, and you're in for a space-age shimmer that will sit beautifully in the background of your licks.

If you hold the footswitch while adjusting the Regeneration knob, you can tweak the tone of your repeats. We found this perfectly handy when trying to balance the tone with my already pretty bright-sounding amp.

We hooked the new Gretsch Synchromatic Falcon to our Fender '68 Twin Reverb reissue for testing and found a dark and almost lo-fi

## STREET PRICE: \$259

**MANUFACTURER:**  
Strymon, strymon.net

### PROS

- Unique delay tone
- Super easy to dial in
- Sleek and stylish aesthetic with quality build
- True and buffered bypass with mono and stereo options

### CONS

- Like the original units, be aware these are relatively short delay times
- Uneven repeats aren't for those seeking a precise delay

**VERDICT:** In true Strymon fashion, the Olivera is expertly put together, intuitive to use and sounds fantastic. Be warned: This pedal has relatively short delay times, so those seeking longer echoes will want to look elsewhere.

quality to the repeats of this pedal. Strymon says the oil can design creates an "uneven cadence to the echoes," and you can feel it push and pull when you play. It's pretty inspiring, and it made us approach the parts we were playing differently.

Using the Short play head and with the time set pretty quickly, it's easy to dial in a brilliant slapback. The repeats happily sit in the background to let your lead parts shine, all while giving our tone buckets of vintage charm. Cranking up the two modulation controls, and things start to mutate and get a little sea-sick if you're not careful. Keep the Intensity and Rate low, though, and you are rewarded with just the right amount of movement on the repeats.

Playing with the Regen is where things get really interesting. With the dial set relatively high, you can start to create atmospheric beds under your playing. Of course, it follows the same uneven nature as the main repeats, but it still manages to feel organic and very musical. We could almost see ourselves using this pedal as an instrument in its own right. **GW**

**We could almost see ourselves using this pedal as an instrument in its own right**



# Cort G200SE

It might be built for beginners, but the G200SE's quality and playability show that budget guitars are getting seriously good

BY MATT McCACKEN

**► COMBINING MODERN BUILD** quality and design practices with classic colors, the Cort G200SE is a budget beginner electric guitar aiming to provide new guitarists with a versatile tonal palette. Made in the Cor-Tek factory in Indonesia, which has also crafted guitars for PRS, Ibanez, Fender, Jackson and many more, it's a potentially exciting entrant into a very busy beginner-guitar market.

The headline spec is that it features a roasted maple neck and fretboard combo, a feature that was once the reserve of boutique guitars but is rapidly becoming more accessible to the rest of us at lower and lower prices.

Roasting necks has some advantages in that it purges the wood of moisture, resulting in more

stability, as well as preventing any excess oils or moisture from entering once the torrefaction (the technical term for roasting) has taken place. They resist changes in humidity better than traditional maple necks, so to see this start appearing on budget guitars is great news.

The G200SE is packing an HSS pickup configuration with a covered humbucker for extra style points, plus the two typical Strat-style single coils. These are Cort's own "Powersound" pickups to help keep the cost down, combined with a single tone knob and five-way pickup selector to give you plenty of spanky Stratocaster-style tones alongside the heft of the humbucker. A six-point tremolo with die-cast tuning machines rounds out the hardware offering.

Since Cor-Tek is well-versed in building guitars for different brands, it's not a surprise to find that the G200SE is immaculately put together, with excellent fretwork out of the box and the bonus for playability of a sculpted neck heel for better upper-fret access with the modern-C-feeling neck and 9.45" radius, with

**STREET PRICE:** \$249

**MANUFACTURER:** Cort, [cortguitars.com](http://cortguitars.com)

**PROS**

- + Barely anything out of place in terms of build quality
- + HSS configuration gives you plenty of tonal versatility
- + The roasted maple neck is fantastically playable
- + Bridge humbucker is a highlight

**CONS**

- Tuning went out with any medium-heavy use of the six-point tremolo
- The single-coil sounds are a little lackluster

**VERDICT:** The Cort G200SE is a lot of guitar for the money. The roasted maple neck is a delight to play on, and although some of the single-coil sounds are lacking, the bridge humbucker pretty much makes up for it.

a belly cut for additional comfort when playing. We did find the tremolo on our example quite hard going, though; there's initially more resistance than we'd like, but while it's stable for subtle bends, the tuning goes out for anything heavier. It will need some tech attention.

Starting with the humbucker on the drive channel of our Orange Rocker 32 tube amp, the G200SE delivers a surprisingly fat and full tone, much more satisfying than we anticipated, given its price. There's plenty of midrange heft when playing partial barre chords near the headstock, too.

The single-coil sounds aren't quite as inspiring. The neck position is a little thin, without that thick warmth you typically expect to hear. The in-betweens have some of that Strat-type quack or honk, but it's only really noticeable when playing clean, with the qualities of the pickup disappearing when we add my Tube Screamer clone into the equation. Strat-style sounds are especially honky in position 4, but position 2's bridge humbucker and middle pickup sound duller rather than twangier.

For beginner guitar players, these tones should be more than good, with scope to upgrade a pickup or two later. With its impressive build quality, excellent playability and a very usable humbucker, we think the Cort G200SE is worth the investment. **GW**

**It's immaculately put together, with excellent fretwork out of the box**



## FOLLOW THE GROOVE

BY CORY WONG

# Two-Bass Hit

The power of doubling a bass line

**ONE OF THE** coolest and most badass-sounding things a guitarist can do is double a long, complex bass line an octave higher. This was my approach for the song "Dean Town," which I recorded with Vulfpeck for our 2016 album, *The Beautiful Game*.

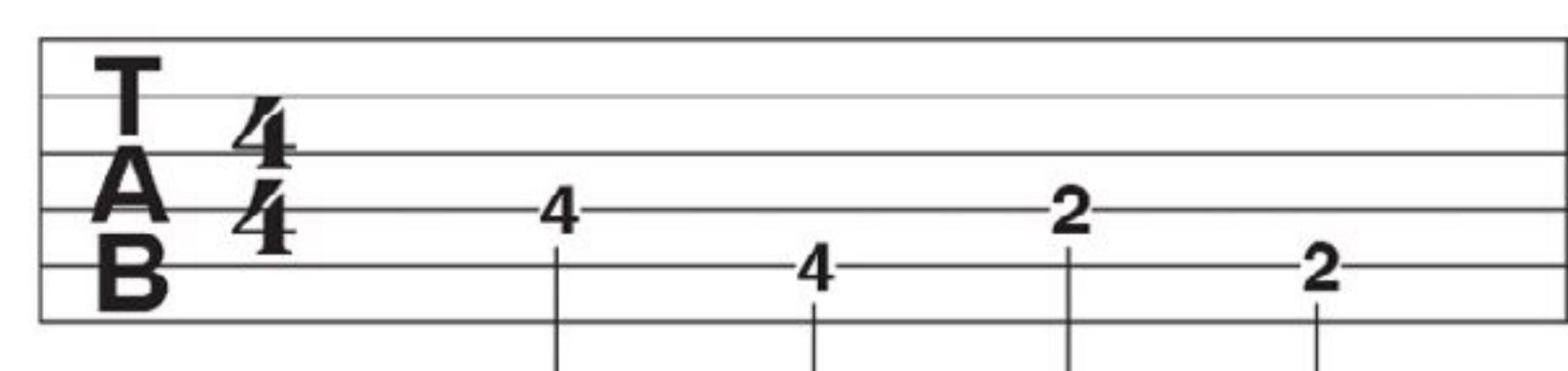
The tune was inspired by legendary bassist Jaco Pastorius' "Teen Town," which he recorded with Weather Report on the 1975 album *Heavy Weather*. Like "Teen Town," the bass line in "Dean Town" is a through-composed melody, which means it's a continuous and non-repetitive piece of music. The melody was written by our keyboard player Woody Goss and "made famous" by bassist Joe Dart. I decided to octave-double Joe's intricate bass line through the long initial section of the tune, which was challenging!

Before launching into the melodic line, let's take a look at the basic underlying chord changes, outlined in **FIGURE 1**. In the song, each of these notes – F#, C#, E and B – is played for two full bars, as steady 16th notes. So it's an eight-bar loop. The tune's melody is 16 bars long and is played over the eight-bar progression two times.

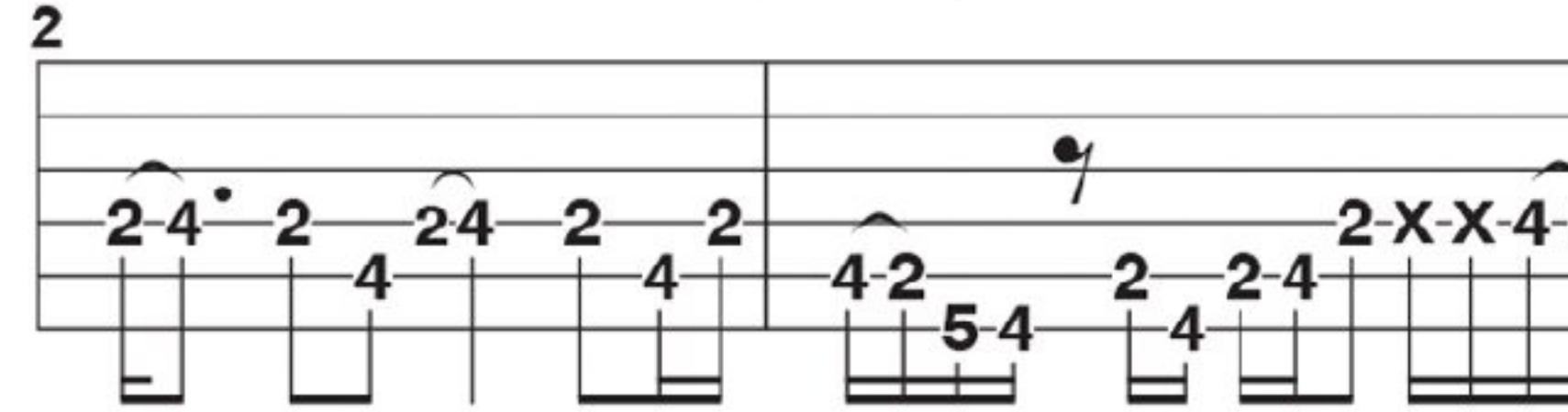
The first time the 16-bar melody, or "head," is played, it's performed by the bass alone. The second time through, I octave-double it on guitar. This 16-bar melody is shown in **FIGURE 2**. Using palm-muting throughout, I begin with a one-beat pickup, and bar 1 starts with the 16th notes E-D#-C#-A, followed by the root note, F#, which falls on beat 2. Right from the start, this is a little deceptive, as the low F# root note hits you like it's on "1," but it is in fact on beat 2.

As you play through the line, you'll see that it includes some complex, syncopated rhythms driven by eighth and 16th notes and rests, with many "holes" dropped into

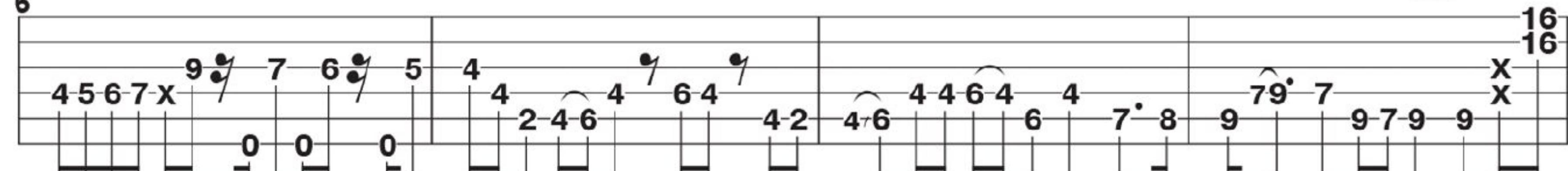
**FIG. 1** N.C.(F#) (C#) (E) (B)



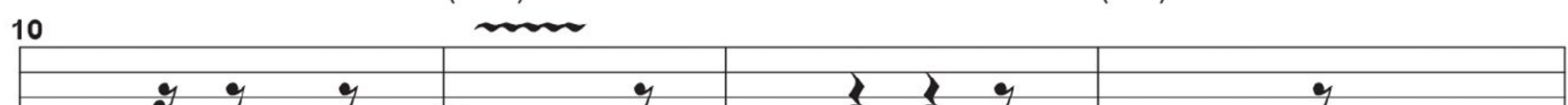
(Bsus4)



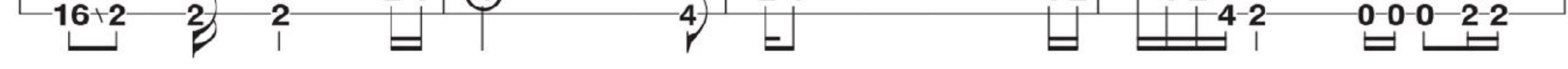
(B7)



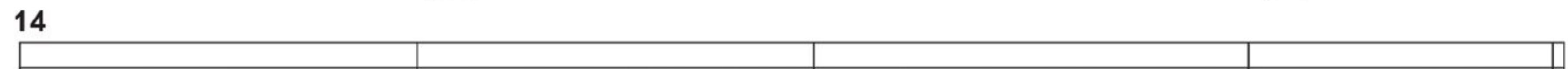
(F#m7)



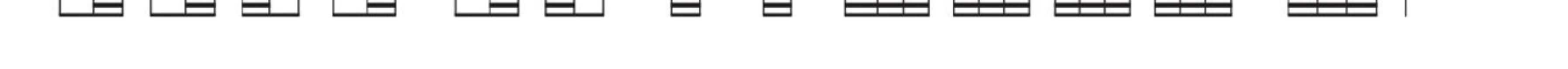
(B/C#)



(D/E)



(B7)



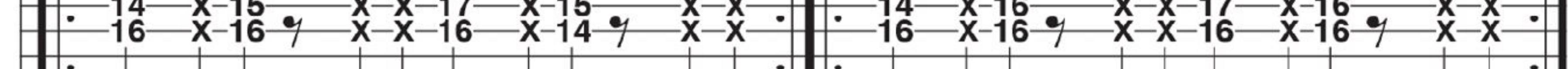
(F#)



(F#m)



(E7sus4)



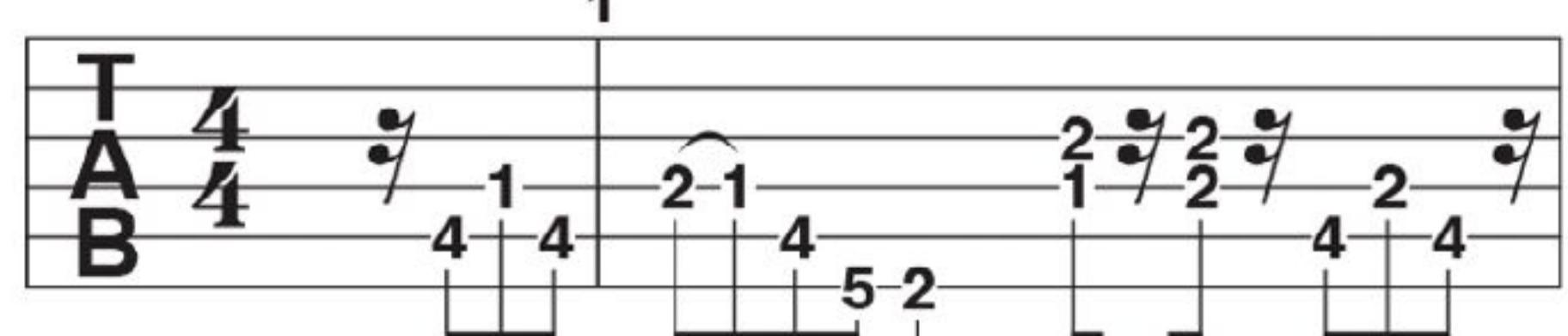
unexpected places. Bar 6 begins with a four-note chromatic row, from F# up to A, followed by high melodic notes that bounce off open low-E 16th note syncopations. Bars 7 and 8 circle around B7 with the notes of B major pentatonic (B, C#, D#, F#, G#), which resolves in bar 9 to F#m, with the bar ending with dead-string hits and a high chordal accent on the final 16th note of the bar.

Bars 10-12 offer a break from the barrage of 16th notes with repeated eighth-note accents on the F# root note, only to return to very syncopated lines in bars 13-16.

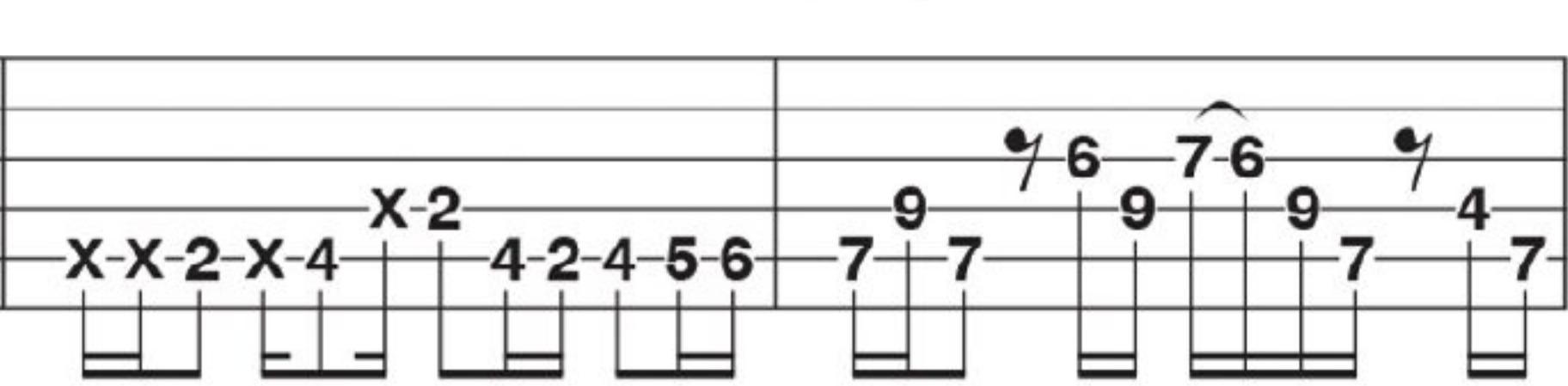
The biggest challenge when doubling a complex, rhythmically dense base line like this is precision. It simply will not work and

**FIG. 2** (C#m9)

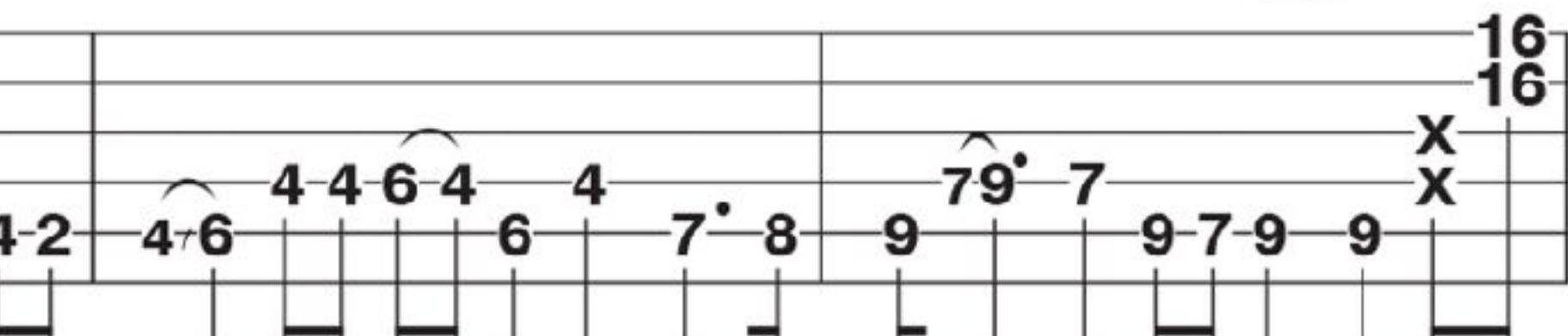
P.M. throughout



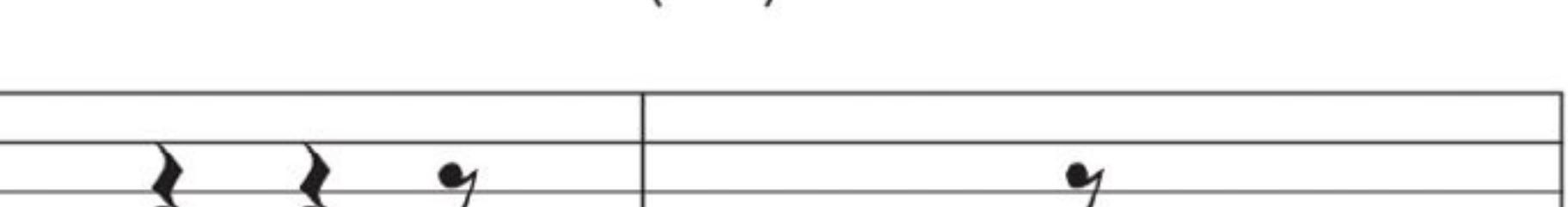
(D/E)



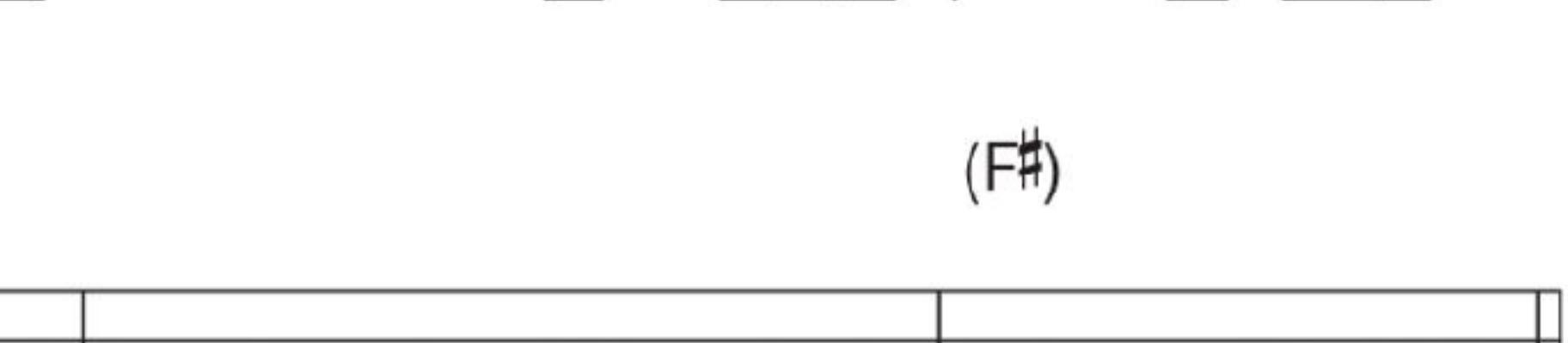
(F#m7)



(B/C#)



(D/E)



(B7)



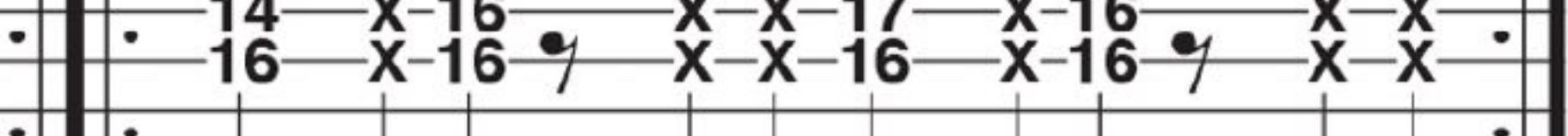
(F#)



(F#m)



(C#m9)



will sound sloppy if I don't nail every phrase and mirror the articulations of the bass.

Later in the tune, I play a funky rhythm part high up on the fretboard that consists of syncopated double-stops on the G and B strings, shown in **FIGURE 3**. Notice that each bar repeats and how the notes work with the underlying chord changes. Utilizing two-note chords like this is a great way to outline the harmony with just a minimal amount of information and textural density.

This is the last installment of Follow the Groove for now, so I hope you've enjoyed reading these columns and the ideas presented have been useful to you. See you on the road! **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to [guitarworld.com/march2026](http://guitarworld.com/march2026)

Cory Wong has made a nice-sized dent in the guitar scene since emerging in 2010. He's released a slew of strong albums – solo or with the Fearless Flyers – the latest of which are 2025's *Wong Air (Live in America)* and *The Fearless Flyers V*. His new album, *Lost in the Wonder*, is coming soon.



## TALES FROM NERDVILLE

BY JOE BONAMASSA

# Thrill of a Lifetime

B.B. King's immortal "The Thrill Is Gone"

**WHEN PUTTING THE** tracks together for *B.B. King's Blues Summit 100* – my band's two-disc, 32-track tribute to B.B. King in celebration of what would have been his 100th birthday, on September 16, 2025 – we knew that the most essential track would be "The Thrill Is Gone." B.B. originally recorded this song back in 1969 for the *Completely Well* album, and it immediately became his signature tune and the most successful record of his career.

"The Thrill Is Gone" is so iconic, in fact, that no one wanted to cover it! I felt that I had two choices: one would have been to approach a young, budding blues artist with no fear about tackling the beast! Luckily enough, we were able to get Chaka Kahn for vocals and Eric Clapton for guitar. They are the crown jewels, two of music's greatest icons, paying tribute to an icon.

When I listen to B.B.'s original version of "The Thrill Is Gone," one of the most striking things is that every lick he plays sounds perfect, like it's etched in stone. But I'm sure that he simply improvised everything you hear on the track right off the top of his head.

The eternal question is always, "How do I get into the tune?" For B.B., the answer is as simple as the riff shown **FIGURE 1**, which is along the lines of what's heard on the record. The phrase is based on B minor pentatonic (B, D, E, F#, A), with the 2nd, or 9th, C#, added here and there, as well as the major 7th, A#, when playing over the F#7 chord in bar 9. And the stabs on the high B note in bar 6 are elemental to B.B.'s signature style.

This figure is indicative of B.B.'s purely melodic and effortless approach, which is almost like jazz. His lines are so strong that

**FIG.1** (Bm7)

**FIG.2** (Bm7)

**FIG.3** (Em7)

**FIG.4** (Bm7)

**FIG.5** (Bm7)

they're melodies unto themselves. Along with his distinctive touch, tone and phrasing, his solo lines are as integral to the tune as the chords and lyrics. This is borne out by the fact that any time "The Thrill Is Gone" is covered, the guitar player will "quote" B.B. with a phrase like **FIGURE 2**. What you hear are long, sustained notes with heavy vibrato, followed by elegant melodic phrases.

When you listen to the great masters of this craft – B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, Albert King – you realize that these phrases just flow naturally. There's no thought involved. I very much doubt B.B. sat there and worked out a phrase like **FIGURE 3**.

On the recording, B.B. used a very clean

tone, like a Fender Twin that's barely turned up. **FIGURE 4** is meant to be played in a subtle and delicate way. There's no sustain coming from the amp, but there's so much feel. You can hear the tactility of his fingers, and you should aim for that feeling and mindset when playing a phrase like **FIGURE 5**. Notice the use of pull-offs, slides and quarter- and half-step bends, all of which make the lines that much more vocal-like.

"The Thrill Is Gone" is not just a beautiful piece of music, it's a track that features some of B.B.'s most iconic playing on that particular take. He never played the song the same way twice, but every version illustrates his brilliance as a true blues master. **GW**



## WORKIN' MAN

BY CHARLIE STARR

# On a Bender

Mimicking B-bender licks

**A STAPLE OF** many great country and country rock songs – and, in the hands of Jimmy Page and Albert Lee, rock songs – is the sound of the B-bender. For those unfamiliar, a B-bender is a string-pulling device built into a guitar, most often a Fender Telecaster, that allows the player to raise the pitch of the B string by simply pulling down on the guitar strap. This enables one to emulate the pitch-bending sound of a pedal steel guitar, which works in a similar way, with pedals used to raise the pitches of individual strings or groups of strings.

The B-bender was originally known as the “Parsons/White Pull-String,” because it was the brainchild of guitarist Clarence White and drummer Gene Parsons of the Byrds and Nashville West. Legend has it that, while recording, Clarence said, “Hey, I need another finger to play this chord! Gene, come over here and push down on my B string behind the nut to raise the pitch.” Gene reportedly said, “You know, I can build a device that will do that for you.” And thus the Parsons/White B-bender was born.

Part of the guitar’s body is hollowed out for a pulley system: a rod is attached to the strap button above the neck, and when this rod is pulled downward (by pulling on the strap), the pulley system raises the pitch of the B string inside the bridge up to one whole step.

As a young guitarist, I was completely under the spell of all of the fantastic B-bender players, including White, Marty Stuart, Lee and Page, who used a B-bender guitar brilliantly on the 1979 Led Zeppelin album *In Through the Out Door*.

Like most players, I was forced to learn how to attain the B-bender sounds on a standard guitar long before I attained one equipped with a B-bender. As shown in **FIGURE 1**, while holding down the notes B

**FIG. 1** (E) D5 E E7 G7 D5

**FIG. 2** (D) (E7) (G) (D)

**FIG. 3** (G) (D)

**FIG. 4** (D) (E7)

**FIG. 5**

**FIG. 6** (D) (C) (G) G5

**FIG. 7** (E) (D) (G)

**FIG. 8** (E)

**FIG. 9** (E)

and F# at the 7th fret on the top two strings, I can bend the F# up to G#. This technique, where one note rises while another remains stationary, is known as an oblique bend.

We have a Blackberry Smoke song called “Sleeping Dogs,” in which I play B-bender-type licks on a standard guitar. As shown in **FIGURE 2**, there’s a turnaround in the song that goes D5 - E (or E7) - G7 - D. **FIGURES 3** and **4** illustrate the licks I play over these chords, for which I bend my G string downward to raise an E note up to F#.

Years ago I’d go see Rick Richards from the Georgia Satellites, who played a Les Paul

Junior through a dimed Hiwatt amp. He was the king of Chuck Berry-style licks, like the one shown in **FIGURE 5**, and he’d play beautiful licks like **FIGURES 6** and **7** that emulated the B-bender sound by bending his G string while holding two-note forms on the top two strings.

In **FIGURE 8**, I begin by bending into an E major triad (E, G#, B) and then play a lick based on E major pentatonic (E, F#, G#, B, C#) combined with the E blues scale (E, G, A, B, D). In **FIGURE 9**, the oblique bend technique is applied to the top two strings with the bends on the B and G strings. **GW**



# **HARDWIRED**

**BY JARED JAMES NICHOLS**

# Runnin' with the Pack

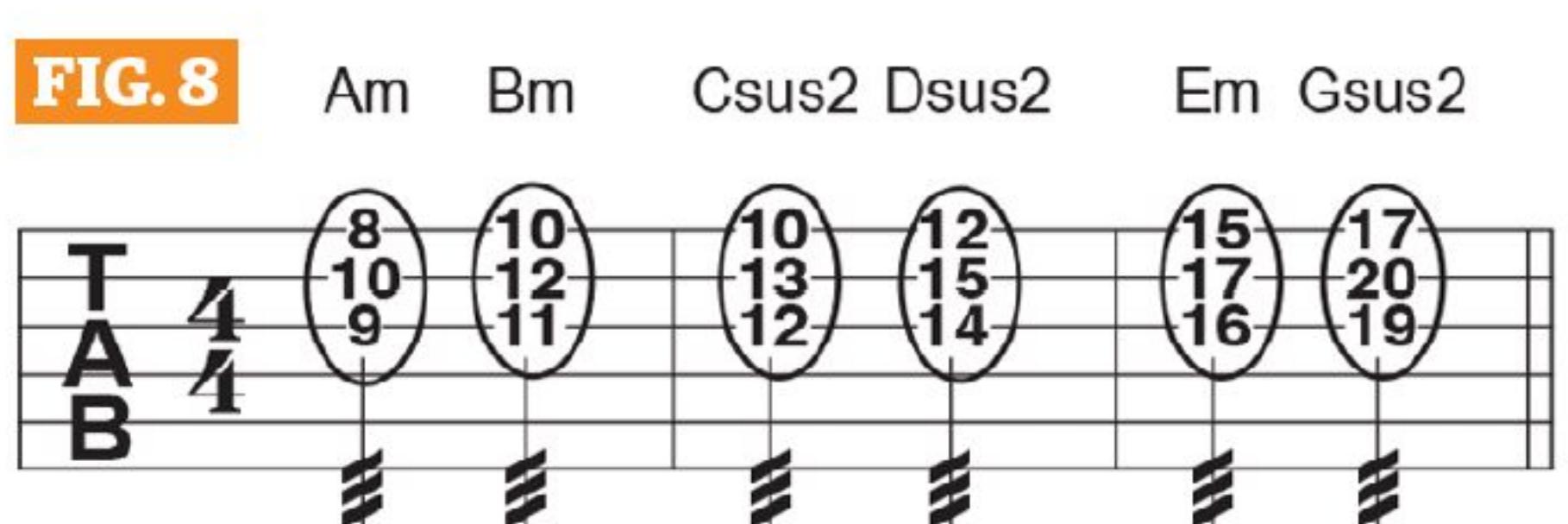
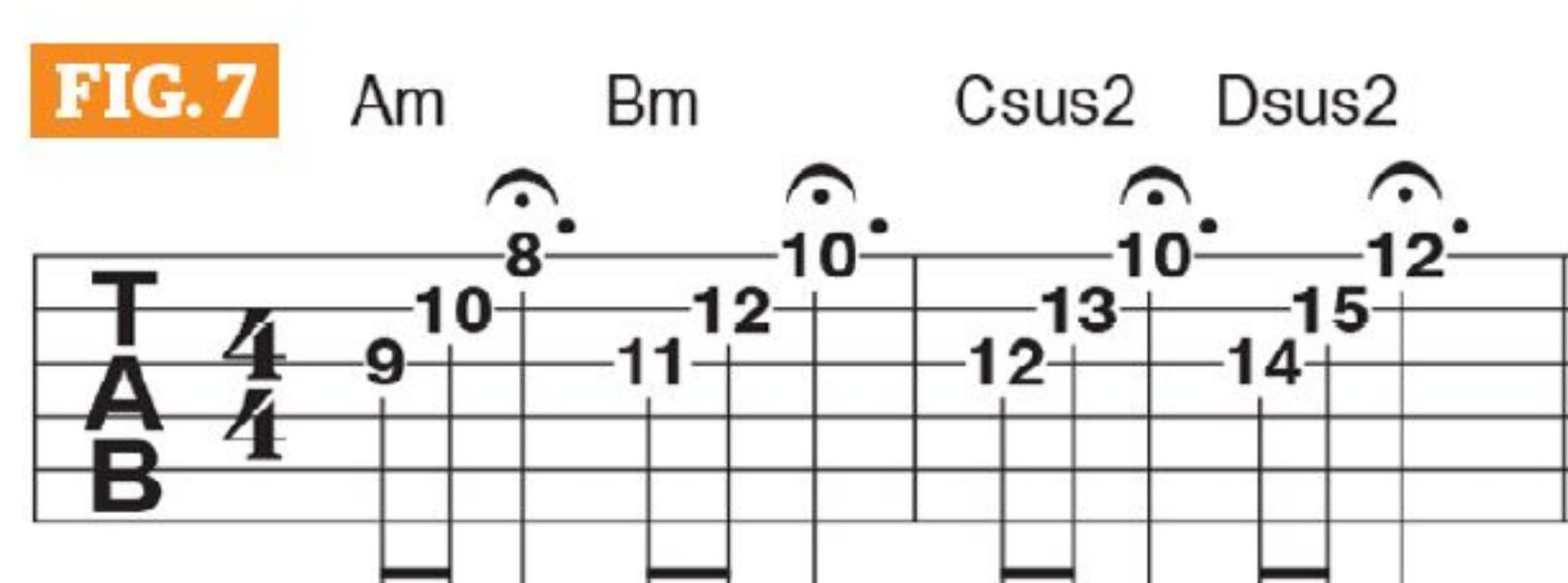
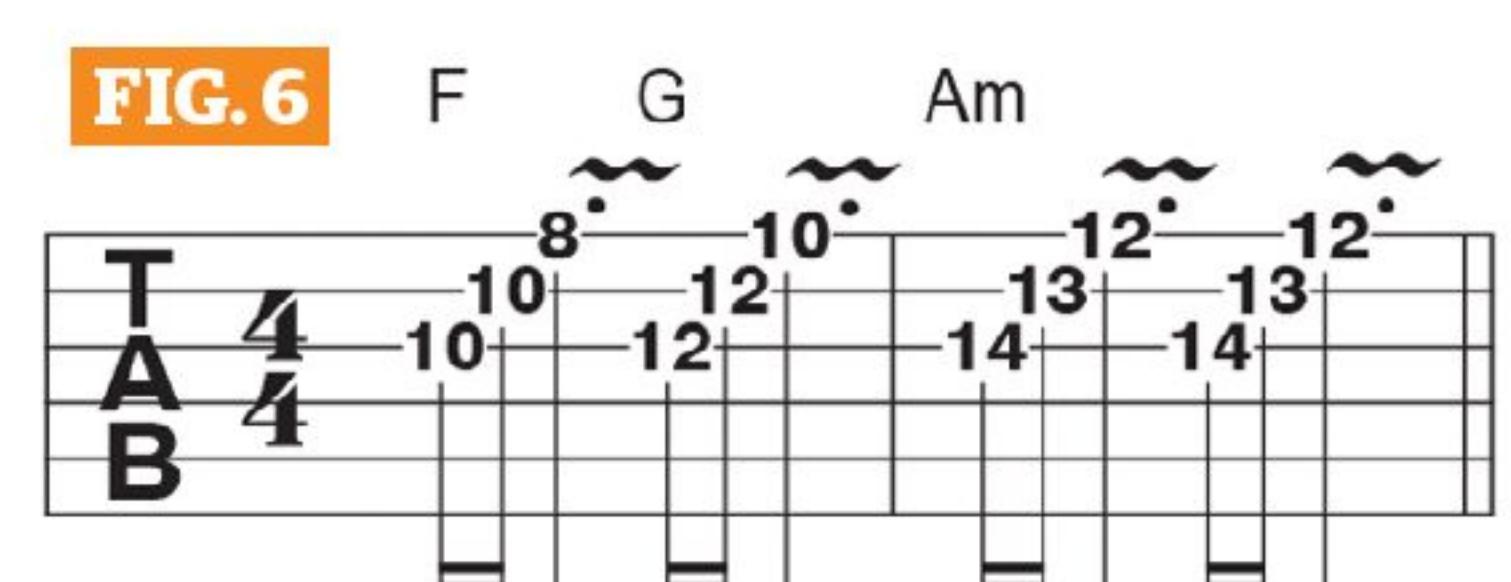
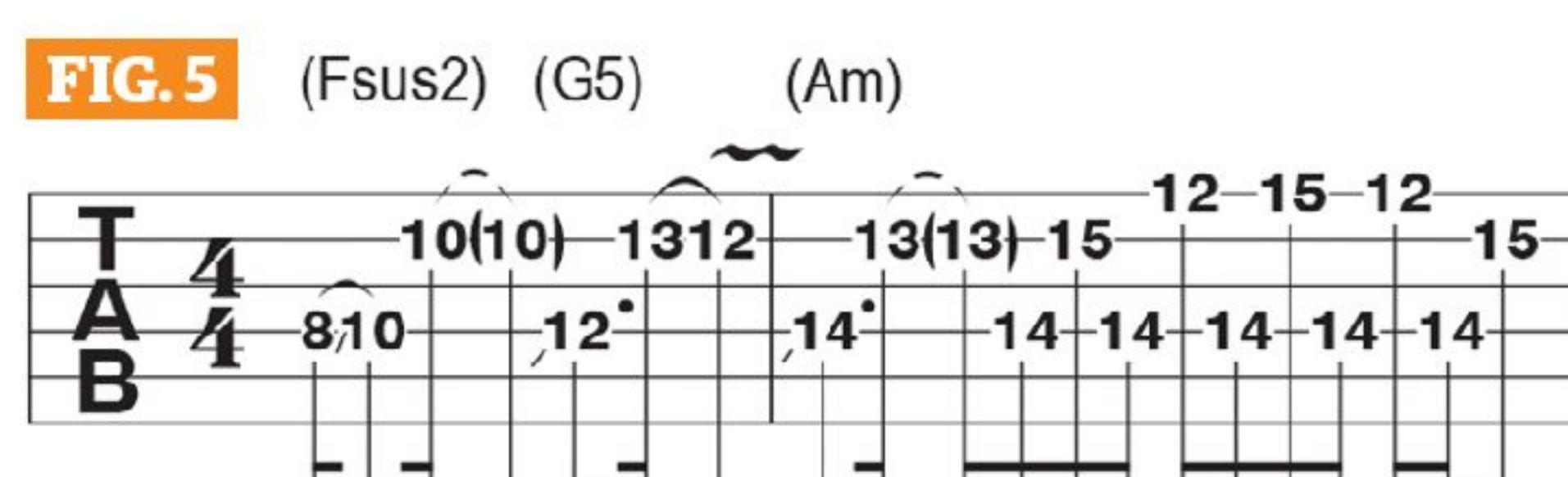
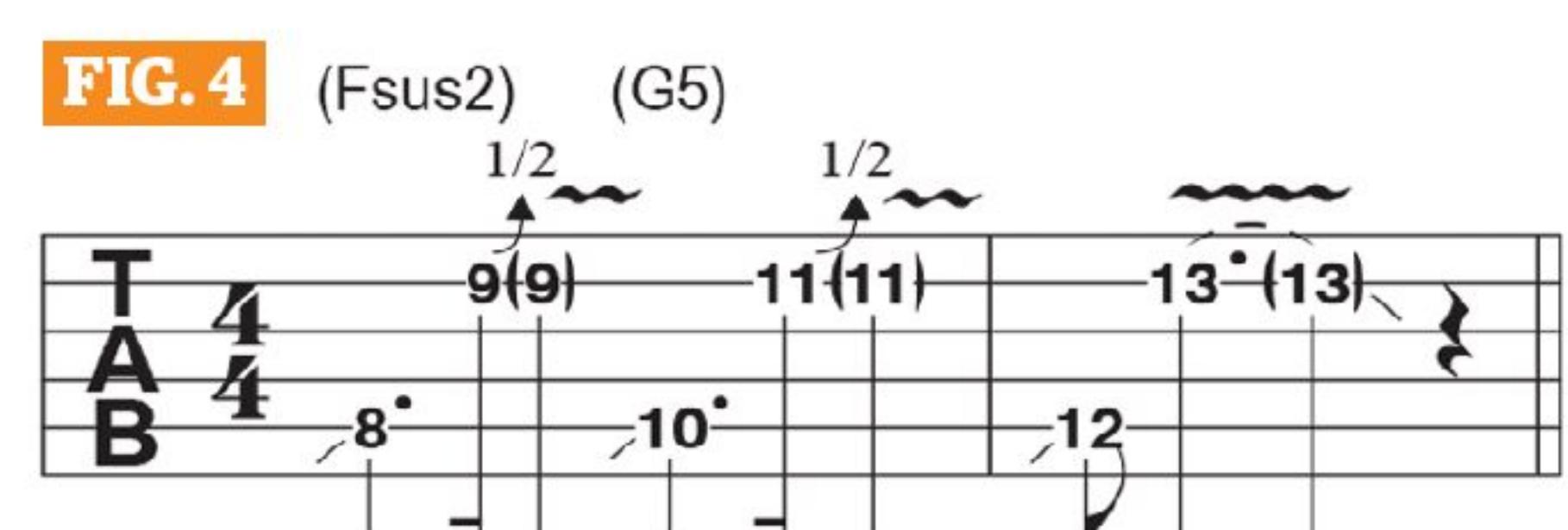
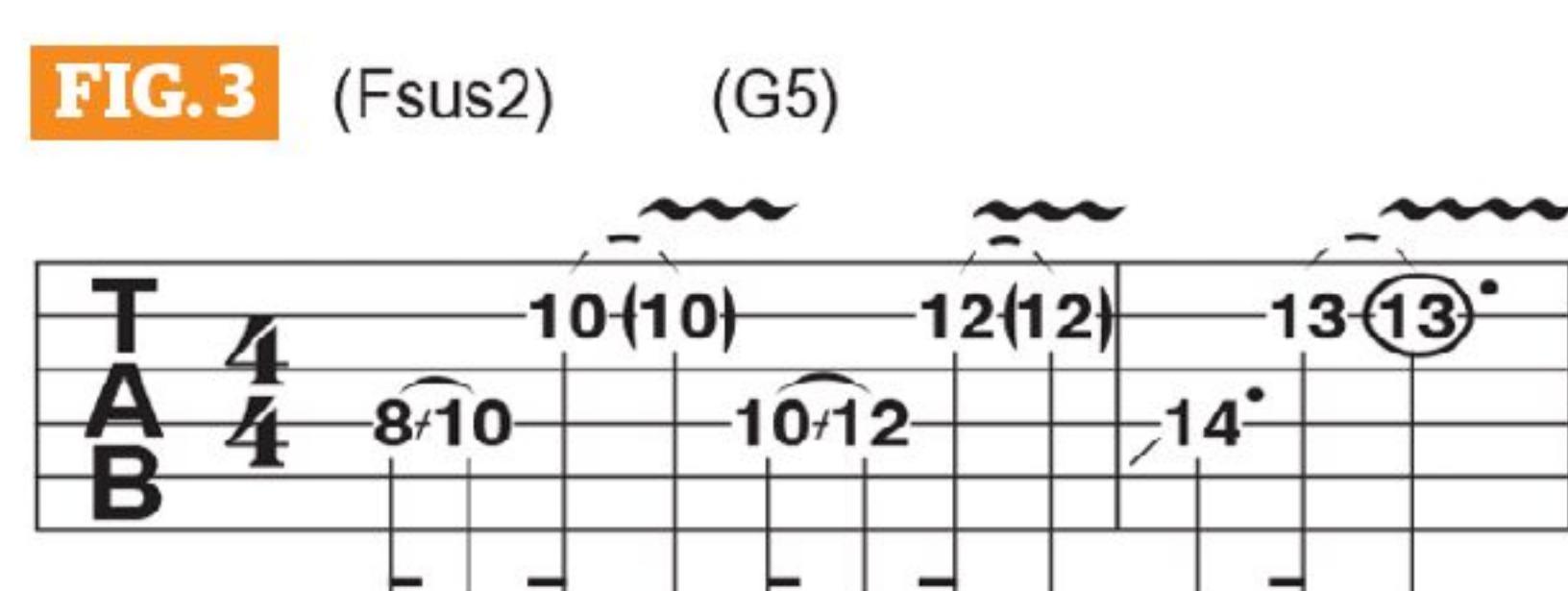
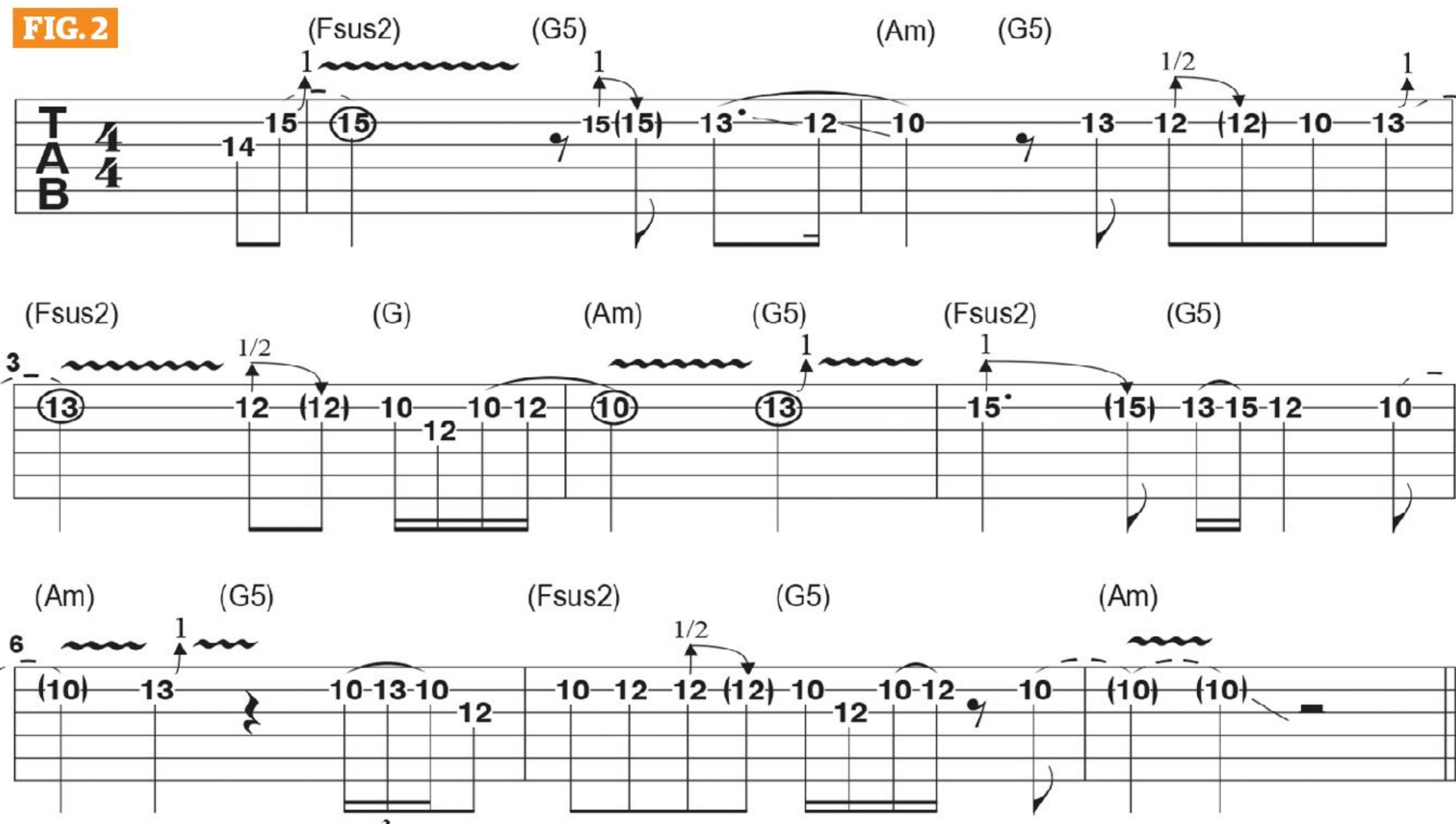
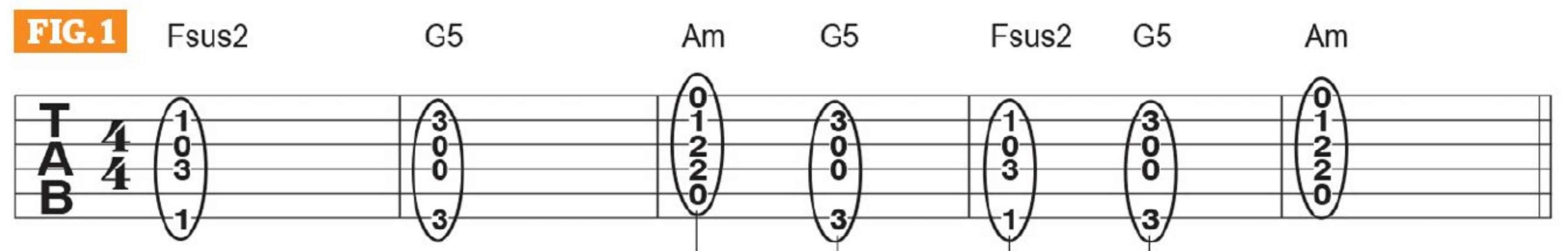
## Melodic "storytelling"

**LAST MONTH,** I discussed some of the advantages of playing in a power trio, such as the open harmonic canvas that it affords me as a guitar player. "Threw Me to the Wolves" is a song of mine that presents many opportunities to explore and exploit the creative freedom that the three-piece ensemble allows. When we come to the song's solo section, my mindset is that we're at the start of a musical journey, and it's my mission to "tell a story" that will take the audience from one place to another. In this lesson, I'd like to share how I go about doing that.

Let's first look at the solo section's chord progression. As shown in **FIGURE 1**, we're in the key of A minor, and the progression begins with the  $\flat$ VI (flat six) chord, F(sus2), which moves to the  $\flat$ VII (flat seven) chord, G5, then resolves to the tonic, or root, chord, Am. Each chord lasts for two beats, so the first bar is Fsus2 to G5, and the second bar is Am to G5. This two-bar pattern then repeats throughout the solo.

For the F and G chords, no 3rd is played, which gives me more melodic freedom when soloing. This sense of “open harmony” allows me to hold long, sustaining notes over all three chords, and then travel through the progression with melodic freedom, in my quest for memorable, singable solos.

**FIGURE 2** illustrates how I get into the solo. Taking an Eric Clapton/Albert King-inspired approach, I begin with a whole-step bend from D, the 4th, up to E, the 5th, which I hold and shake, after which I slowly move back down to the A root note via the notes D and C, as well as the 2nd, B. The overall scale I rely on here is A minor heptatonic (A, B, C, D, E, G), which is A minor pentatonic (A, C, D, E, G) with the note B, the 2nd, or 9th, added.



Another thing I love to do here is reference the chord progression with double-stops, specifically 6th intervals, or 6ths. **FIGURE 3** has me sliding into a C-A double-stop over Fsus2, a D-B double-stop over G5 and an E-C double-stop over Am.

**FIGURE 4** demonstrates a neat little trick I picked up from Joe Bonamassa: when playing a 6th or 10th interval as a double-stop, instead of fretting the higher note normally, play it one fret lower then bend it up a half step and add some vibrato, to make it really sing.

Another cool way to elaborate on 6ths is to create a “pedal tone”-type melody. In **FIGURE 5**, I begin with straight 6ths over Fsus2 and G5 then use the lower note as a rearticulated pedal tone against a melodic

line played on higher strings.

I also like to reference each chord with simple triad arpeggios. In **FIGURE 6**, I play F, G and Am triads on the top three strings while adding vibrato in an Otis Rush-type manner.

**FIGURES 7** and **8** illustrate a tremolo strumming technique I picked up from Stevie Ray Vaughan: **FIGURE 7** shows Am, Bm, Csus2 and Dsus2 triads played on the top three strings. In **FIGURE 8**, I create a tremolo effect by lightly strumming the strings with the tip of my pick-hand index finger as quickly as possible.

This is the last installment of Hardwired for now. I hope you've been able to incorporate some of my ideas into your own playing and hope to see you at a show soon! **GW**

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**B6AMAG**



# TRANSCRIPTIONS

Ah

yeah

PH PH

w/bar - - - -

Ow

R.1

**B** 1st Verse (0:34)

On the stage I'm in a rage but  
F5 B.M. (repeat previous measure)

Bass guitar tablature for measure 29. The tab shows a 6-string bass guitar with the following notes and markings:

- String 6: (5) 0 5 0 3 0 3 0
- String 5: 3 3 1
- String 4: (1) 2 2 0
- String 3: 3 3 5 5 4 3 1
- String 2: 3 X 1 X
- String 1: (1) 2 2 0

Measure 29 ends with a repeat sign and a bass drum symbol.

you I never fool Well I can rock with anyone but not alone with you

G5 F5 D5 F5 G5 F5 D5

34

Chord chart:

- Chord 1: G5 (Fret 3 on 6th string, 5 on 5th string, 3 on 4th string, 1 on 3rd string)
- Chord 2: F5 (Fret 3 on 6th string, 5 on 5th string, 3 on 4th string, 1 on 3rd string)
- Chord 3: D5 (Fret 2 on 6th string, 3 on 5th string, 2 on 4th string, 0 on 3rd string)
- Chord 4: F5 (Fret 3 on 6th string, 5 on 5th string, 3 on 4th string, 1 on 3rd string)
- Chord 5: G5 (Fret 3 on 6th string, 5 on 5th string, 3 on 4th string, 1 on 3rd string)
- Chord 6: F5 (Fret 3 on 6th string, 5 on 5th string, 3 on 4th string, 1 on 3rd string)
- Chord 7: D5 (Fret 2 on 6th string, 3 on 5th string, 2 on 4th string, 0 on 3rd string)

Lyrics:

you I never fool Well I can rock with anyone but not alone with you

Chord progression: G5 - F5 - D5 - F5 - G5 - F5 - D5

Time signature: 3/4

P.M. - - - - -

N.H. - - - - -

N.H. - - - - -

pitch: D



## TRANSCRIPTIONS

Shy  
N.C.(Dm)

boy  
shy

boy

Shy

boy

shy

boy

*Elec. Gtr. substitutes Fill 5 third time  
(see below)*

*Elec. Gtr. substitutes Fill 2 second time  
(see below)*

56

**GTR. 1**

Shy  
boy  
shy

boy  
give it

one

more  
try

boy  
2. Ooh you make me

*Elec. Gtr. substitutes Fill 3 second time  
(see below)*

(2nd time) skip ahead to **E**  
(3rd time) skip ahead to **I**

Bb5

A5

60

**GTR. 1**

*Bass plays Bass Fill 1 (see previous page)*

**D** 2nd Verse (1:04)

nervous

N.C.

Elec. Gtr.

more than I

G5 F5

had

D5

planned Would you wanna know

me

N.C.(G)

64

**GTR. 1**

if I  
wasn't in the band

G5 F5 D5

Crazy

feelings

N.C.(D5)

69

**GTR. 1**

**GTR. 1**

Fill 2 (1:28)

Elec. Gtr.

**GTR. 1**

Fill 3 (1:31)

Elec. Gtr.

**GTR. 1**

Fill 5 (2:48)

Elec. Gtr.

deep inside of me I need a wild woman to

G5 F5 D5 N.C.(D5)

P.M. - - - - .

**GTR. 1**

73 T T 10 8 6 5 6 8 10 3 3 1 5 3 1 0 0 3 2 0 3 2 0 10 12 14 12 14 12 10 9 10 9 7 5 7 5 2 12 14 12 14 12 10 9 10 9 7 5 7 5 2

T T 19 17 15 14 15 17 19 7 5 3 3 5 (5) 5 3 (5) 5 3 5 3 5 7 14 12 14 12 10 9 10 9 7 5 7 5 2

*go back to chorus* **C** **E** (1:33)

knock me off my feet boy  
G5 F5 G5 F5 D5 A5  
78 P.M. - - -> F5  
**GTR. 1**

The image shows two sets of guitar tabs. The top set, labeled 'GTR. 1', consists of two staves. The first staff starts with a G5 chord (3, 5) and a F5 chord (1, 3). The second staff starts with a G5 chord (3, 5) and a F5 chord (1, 3). The bottom set shows a bass line with a D5 chord (0, 2, 4, 5) and an E5 chord (0, 2, 4, 5). The tabs include various markings like 'x', '3', '5', '7', '1', '2', '0', and '3', as well as slurs and grace notes. A circled '14' is placed under the 14th fret of the bass staff, and a circled '15' is placed under the 15th fret of the bass staff.

**F** Guitar Solo (1:37)

starts improving

G5 A5<sup>V</sup>

84

**GTR. 1**

*let ring throughout*

*w/bar*

*full*

*1 1/2*

*\*\**

*+1 1/2*

*\*\* Pull bar up (one and one half steps). See performance notes.*

*\*Chord symbols reflect harmony implied by bass gtr.*

# TRANSCRIPTIONS

## “SHYBOY”

**GTR.1**

110 (F5) (D5) w/bar

**GTR.1**

113 (G5) (F5) (G5) (F5) (D5)

## G 3rd Chorus (2:07)

Shy boy shy boy Shy boy shy boy Shy boy shy boy give it  
N.C.(Dm)

## Elec. Gtr.

**Elec. Gtr.**

**GTR. 1**

117

P.M. - - - - -

slight P.H.

N.H.

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice simile (see meas. 24)

pitch: G

*Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice simile (see meas. 24)*

pitch: G

pitch: E B

**GTR. 1**

128

boy

Shy boy

shy

boy give it

one more

try

boy

The tablature shows a six-string guitar neck with a pink box labeled 'GTR. 1'. The tempo is 128 BPM. The lyrics 'boy' are repeated with a wavy line above the first one. The chords shown are G (15, 15, 13), D (15, 15, 13), C (12, 12, 10), F (10, 7, 7), B (13, 10, 10), E (13, 10, 10), A (10, 7, 7), and D (10, 7, 7). The first two chords are circled in pink. The lyrics 'Shy boy' are followed by 'shy' and 'boy give it'. The chords shown are G (10, 10, 10), D (13, 13, 13), C (10, 10, 10), F (13, 13, 13), B (10, 10, 10), E (13, 13, 13), A (10, 10, 10), and D (10, 10, 10). The last two chords are circled in pink. The lyrics 'one more' and 'try' are followed by 'boy'.

Gotta keep things movin' 'til my personality starts improving

### Elec. Gtr.

133

GTR. 1

Bass

## TRANSCRIPTIONS

### H Interlude (2:26)

N.C.

137 T

GTR.1

T

19 17 15 14 15 17 19 17 15 14 15 14 15 17

142 T

GTR.1

T

14 - 12 - 10 - 9 - 10 - 9 - 10 - 12 - 14 - 12 - 10 - 9 - 10 - 9 - 10 - 12

go back to chorus C

N.H.

145 T

GTR.1

\* Tap harmonic node points along open 5th string.  
pitch: A C# E A

\* Tap harmonic node points along open 5th string.

T

12 - 10 - 12 - 10 - 7 - 12 - 10 - 12 - 10 - 7 - 12 - 10 - 12 - 10 - 8 - 5

† N.H.

I (2:53)

boy

J Outro (2:54)

Ah

148

N.C.(E5)

GTR.1



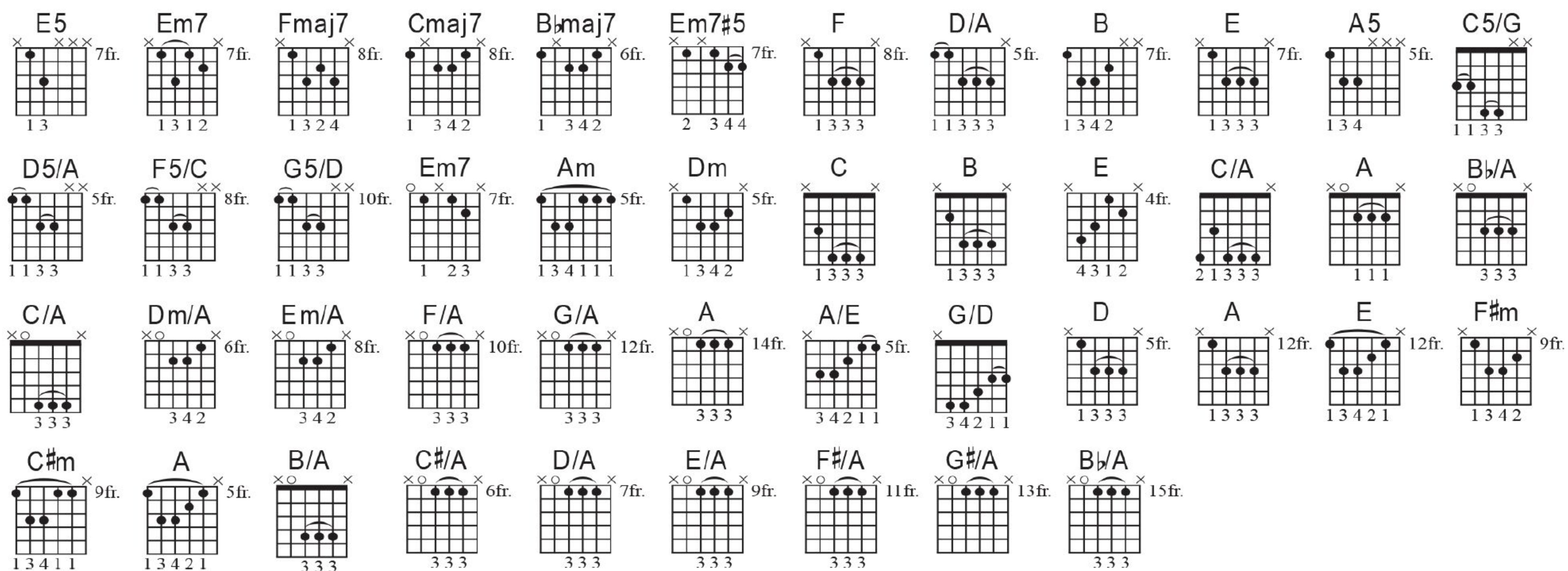
# FOCUS

## "Hocus Pocus"

AS HEARD ON MOVING WAVES

WORDS AND MUSIC BY THIJS VAN LEER AND AND JAN AKKERMANN

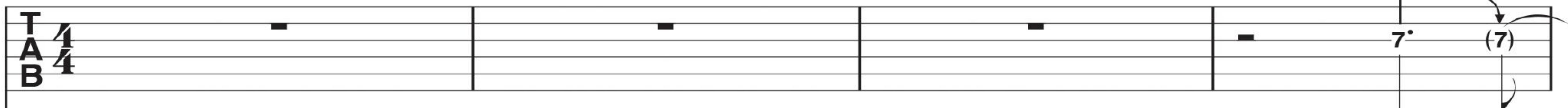
TRANSCRIBED BY JEFF PERRIN

**A** Intro (0:00)Fast  $\text{♩} = 182$ 

N.C. (A5)

1 Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

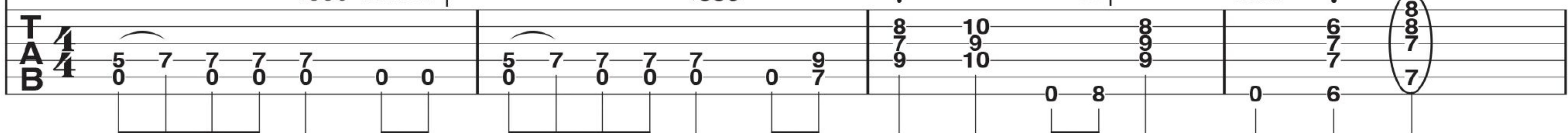
GTR. 3



Gtr. 2 (elec. w/dist.)

Rhy. Fig. 1

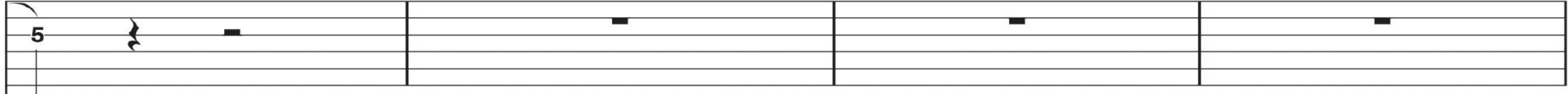
GTR. 2



N.C. (A5)

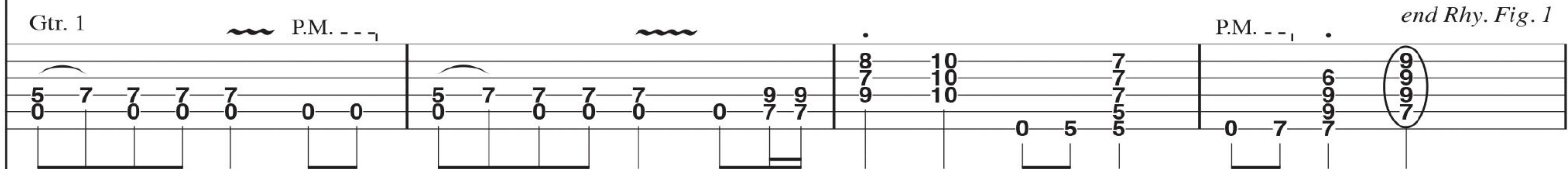
5 Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

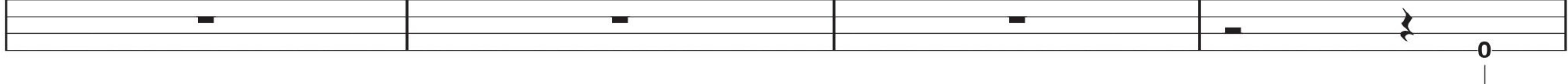


Gtr. 1

GTR. 1



Bass



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N.C. (A5)

GTR.1

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

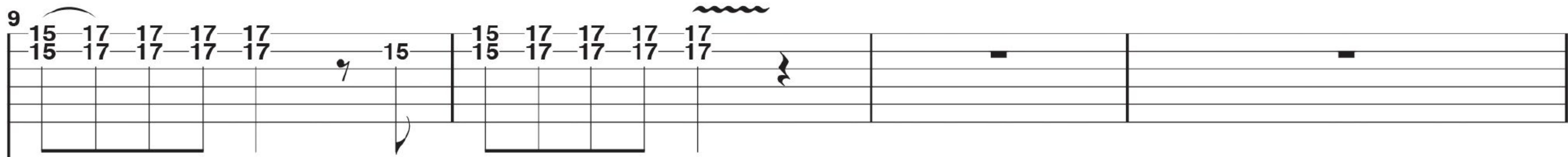
Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

Fill 1

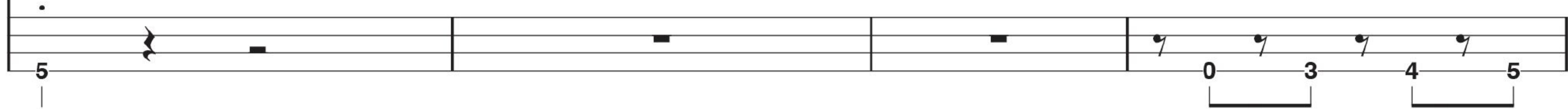
E5 Em7 Fmaj7 Cmaj7

Bmaj7 Em7#5

GTR.3



Bass



N.C. (A5)

E5 Em7 F

D/A

B E

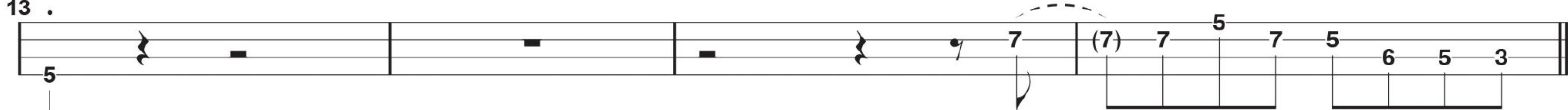
GTR.3

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 (see bar 33)

GTR.2

Gtr. 2 doubles Gtr. 1 simile

Bass



**B** Verse Theme (0:21, 1:14, 2:53, 4:31, 6:05)

(♩ = 184)

(5th time: with maniacal laughter)

N.C. (A5)

E5 Em7 Fmaj7 Cmaj7

Bmaj7 Em7#5

GTR.3

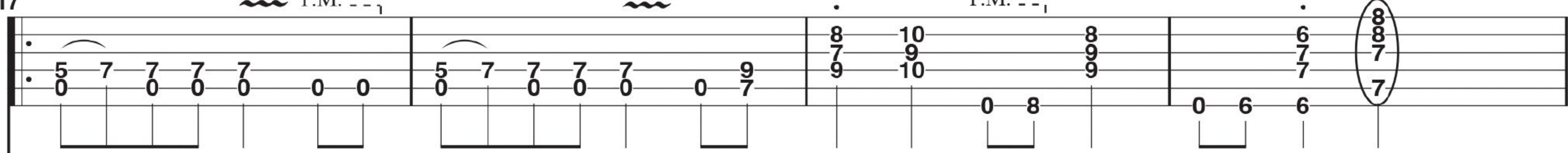
Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 (see bar 33)

GTR.2

Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 2 third verse (see below bar 21)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

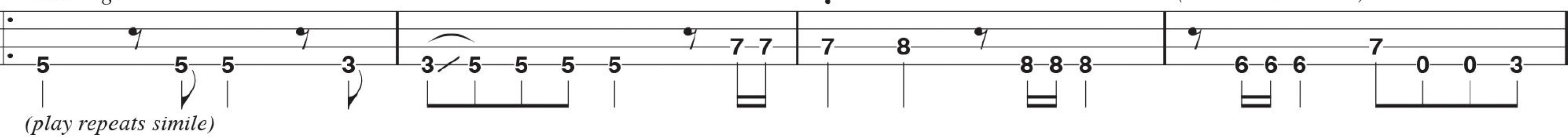
Rhy. Fig. 2



Bass

Bass Fig. 1

Substitute Bass Fill 1 on repeat  
(see below bar 23)



N.C. (A5)

E5 Em7 F

D/A

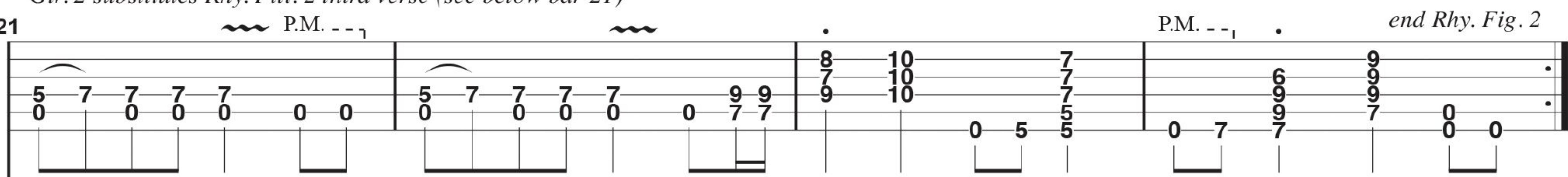
B E

GTR.3

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 (see bar 33)

GTR.2

Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 2 third verse (see below bar 21)



P.M. . . . . end Rhy. Fig. 2



Substitute Bass Fill 2 on repeat  
(see below bar 47)

end Bass Fig. 1

Rhy. Fill 2 (2:06)

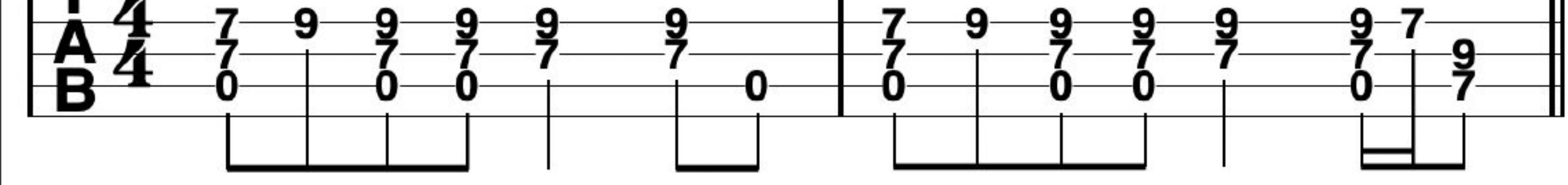
GTR.2

A5

Gtr. 2

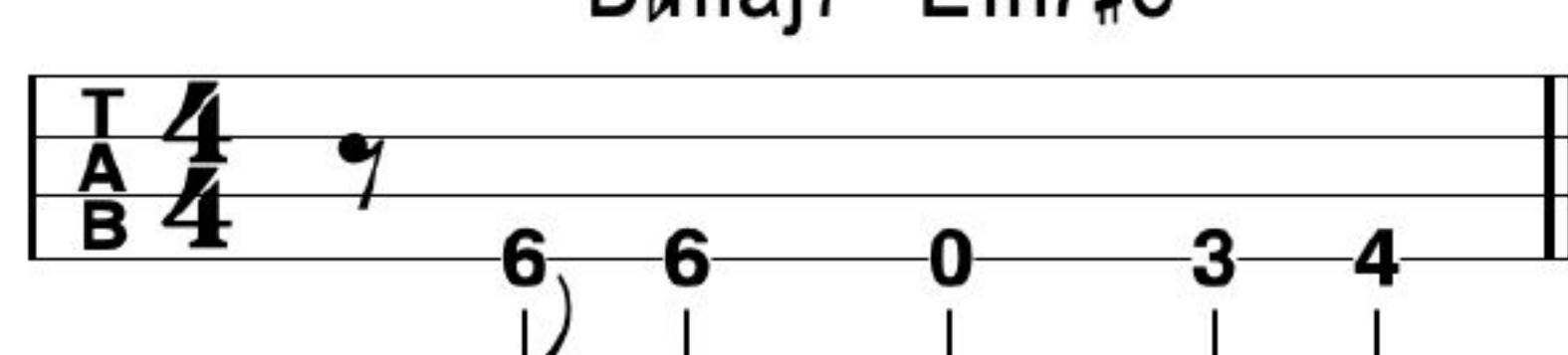
~ ~ ~ ~ ~

E5



Bass Fill 1 (0:36)

Bmaj7 Em7#5



## TRANSCRIPTIONS

### C Chorus Theme (0:42, 1:35, 2:27, 3:14, 4:06, 4:52, 5:33, 6:25)

(♩ = 176)

8th time, skip ahead to **K** Outro  
(bar 125)

A5 C5/G D5/A

F5/C G5/D

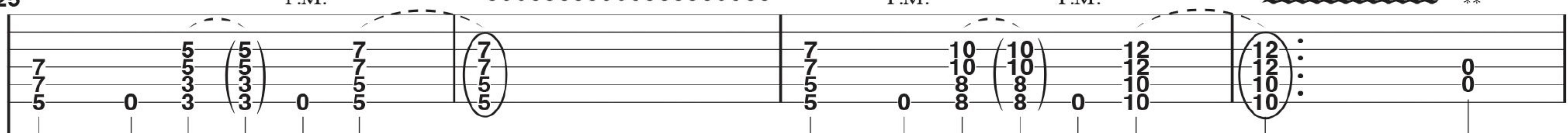
**GTR. 3**

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 2 on 4th, 6th, and 8th Chorus  
(see below bar 33)

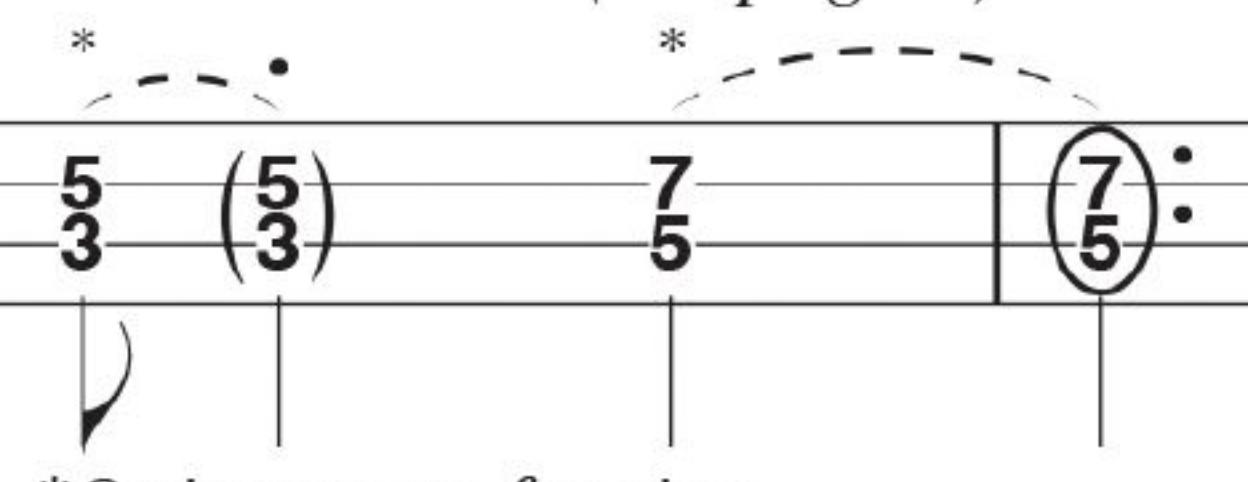
25 P.M. P.M. \*\*

**GTR. 1**

**GTR. 2**



Substitute Bass Fill 8 7th time (see page 8)



\*Omit top note, first time.

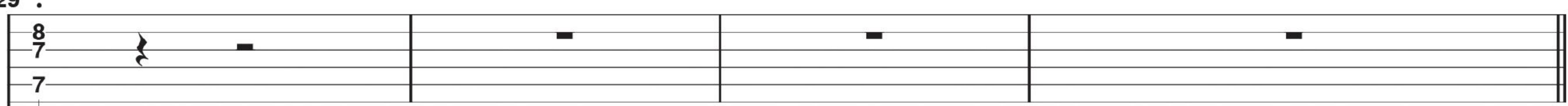
\*\*Notes played by Gtr. 2 only.

Em7

29 .

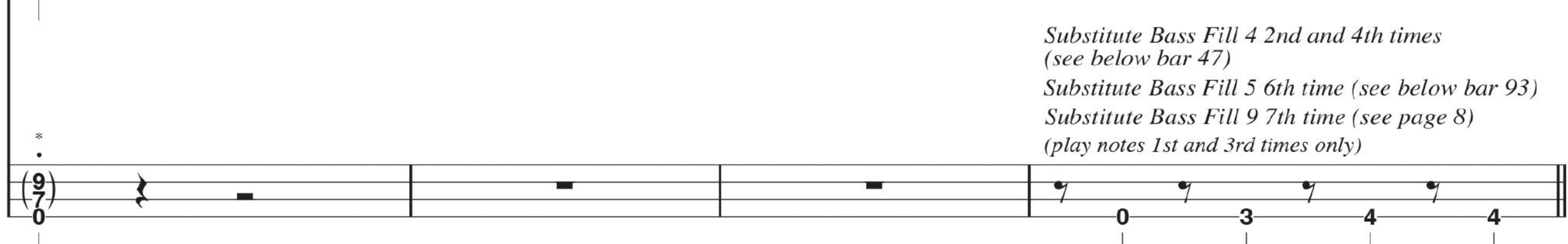
**GTR. 1**

**GTR. 2**



3rd time, skip ahead to **F** Organ Interlude (bar 65)  
5th time, skip ahead to **H** Flute Interlude (bar 91)

6th time, skip ahead to **I** Accordion Interlude (bar 101)



\*Substitute notes in parentheses 2nd and 6th times.

### D Bridge Theme (0:53, 1:45, 3:24, 5:43)

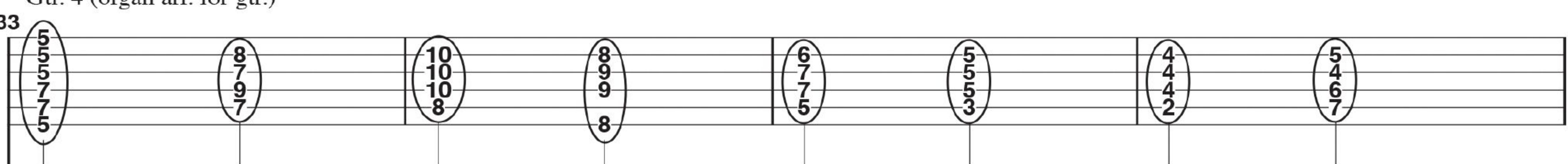
(Yodeling throughout)

Am Em7 F Cmaj7 Dm C B E

Gtr. 4 (organ arr. for gtr.)

33

**GTR. 4**

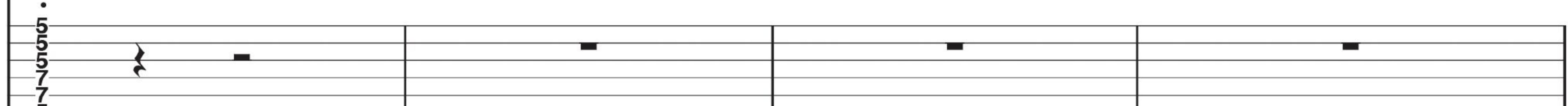


Gtrs. 1 and 2

Rhy. Fill 1 -----,

**GTR. 1**

**GTR. 2**

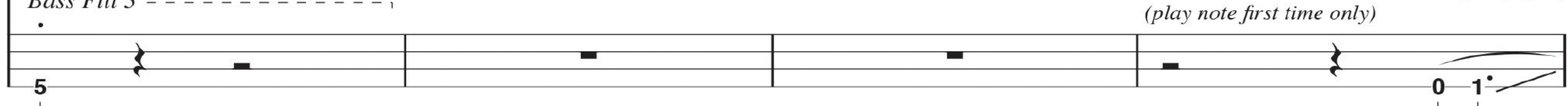


Bass

Bass Fill 3 -----,

Substitute Bass Fill 5 3rd time  
(see below bar 93)

Substitute Bass Fill 10 4th time (see pg. 8)  
(play note first time only)

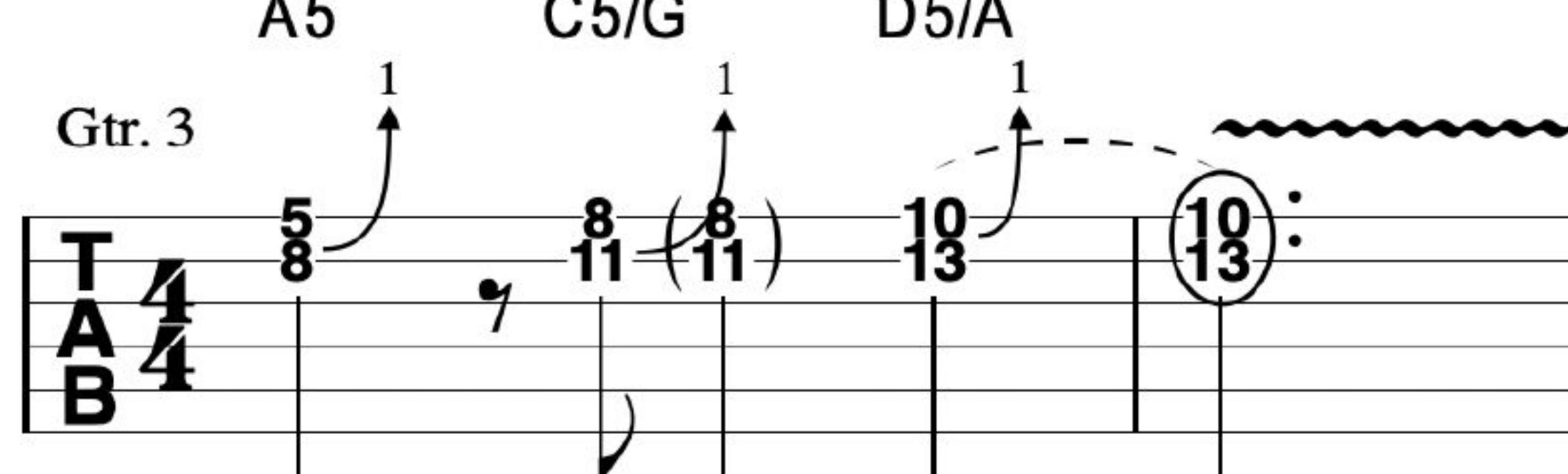


Fill 2 (3:14)

**GTR. 3**

A5 C5/G D5/A

Gtr. 3



F5/C G5/D

Am Em7 F Cmaj7 Dm C/A B E

Gtr. 4 37

**GTR. 4**

Bass . (play note 1st, 3rd, and 4th times only)

5 0 1

(1:03, 1:56, 3:35, 5:54)

Ah

A Bb/A C/A Dm/A

Gtr. 4 41

**GTR. 4**

Substitute Bass Fill 6 2nd time (see pg. 8)

Substitute Bass Fill 7 3rd time (see pg. 8)

Substitute Bass Fill 11 4th time (see pg. 8)

5 5 5 5

1st and 4th times, go back to **B** Verse Theme (bar 17)  
3rd time, skip ahead to **C** 2nd Guitar Solo (bar 75)

Oh

Em/A F/A G/A A

Gtr. 3 45

**GTR. 3**

Gtr. 4 plays Fill 3 3rd time (see below)

(2nd time)

14 2

Gtr. 4

**GTR. 4**

Bass

Fill 3 (3:42)

**GTR. 3**

A

Gtr. 3

**Bass Fill 2 (0:41)**

B E

T 4 A 4 B 4

7 7 7 7

**Bass Fill 4 (1:44, 3:23)**

N.C.

T 4 A 4 B 4

1



**G** 2nd Guitar Solo (3:45) ( $\text{♩} = 186$ )

N.C. (A5)

**GTR.1**

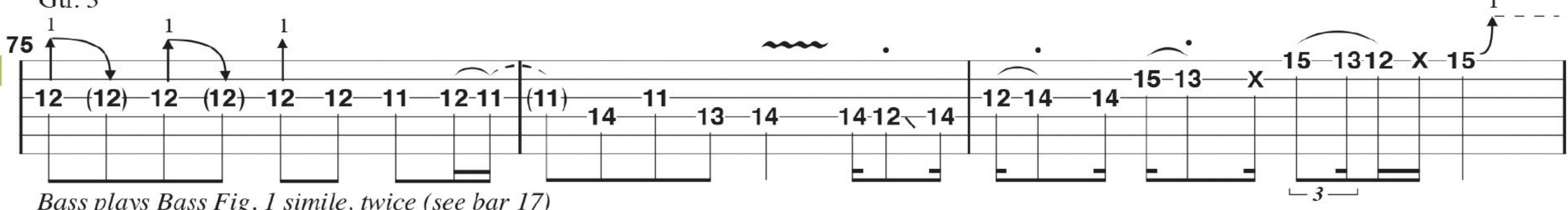
Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 twice (see bar 17)

**GTR.2**

Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 3 (see below bar 91)

Gtr. 3

**GTR.3**



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile, twice (see bar 17)

E5

Em7

Fmaj7

Cmaj7

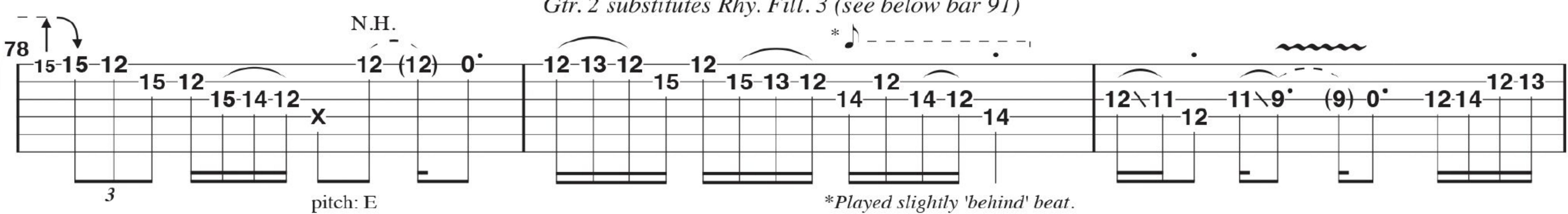
B♭maj7

N.C. (A5)

E5

Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 3 (see below bar 91)

**GTR.3**



D/A

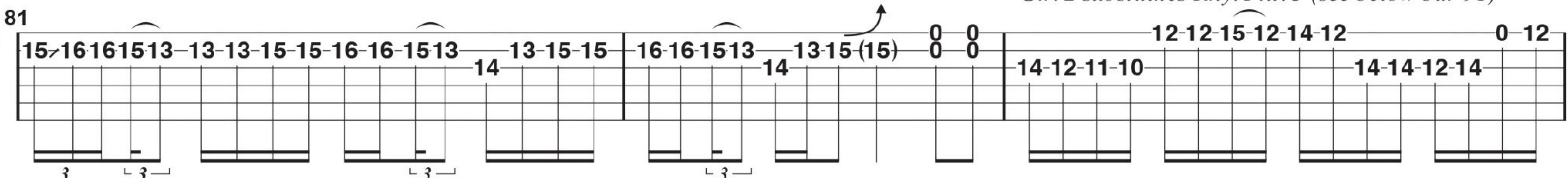
B

E

N.C. (A5)

Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 3 (see below bar 91)

**GTR.3**



E5

Em7

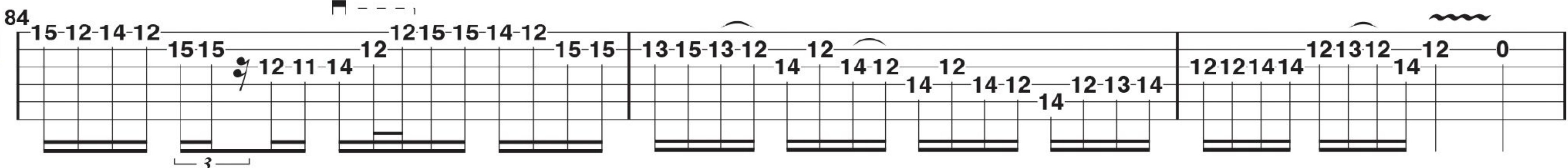
Fmaj7

Cmaj7

B♭maj7

Em7♯5

**GTR.3**



Go back to **C** Chorus Theme (bar 25)

N.C. (A5)

**GTR.2**

Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 3 (see below bar 91)

E5

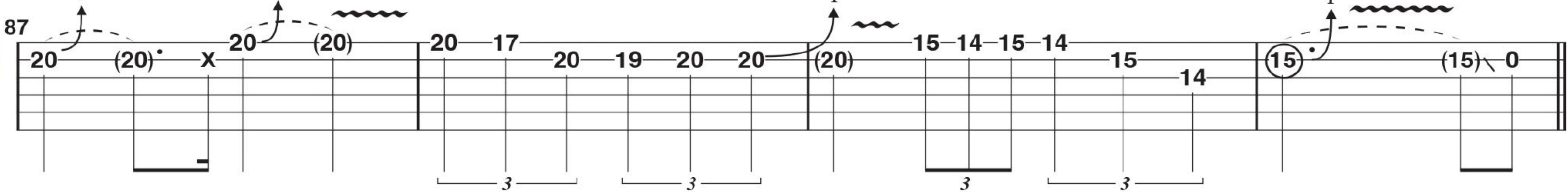
Em7

F

D/A

B E

**GTR.3**



**H** Flute Interlude (4:16) ( $\text{♩} = 180$ )

**GTR.1**

Am

**GTR.2**

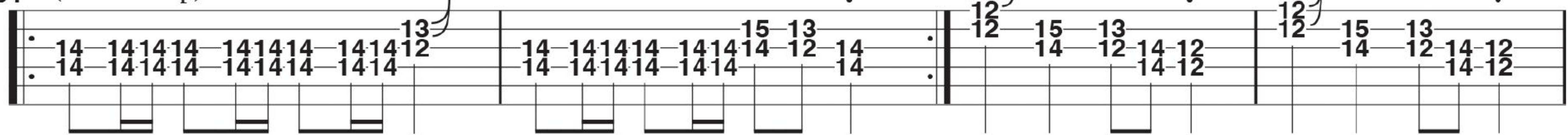
Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fill 1 (see bar 33)

Gtr. 4 (flute arr. for gtr.)

(notes on top)

N.C.

**GTR.4**



Gtr. 5 (flute arr. for gtr.) (notes on bottom)

Bass plays Bass Fill 3 (see bar 33)

**GTR.2**

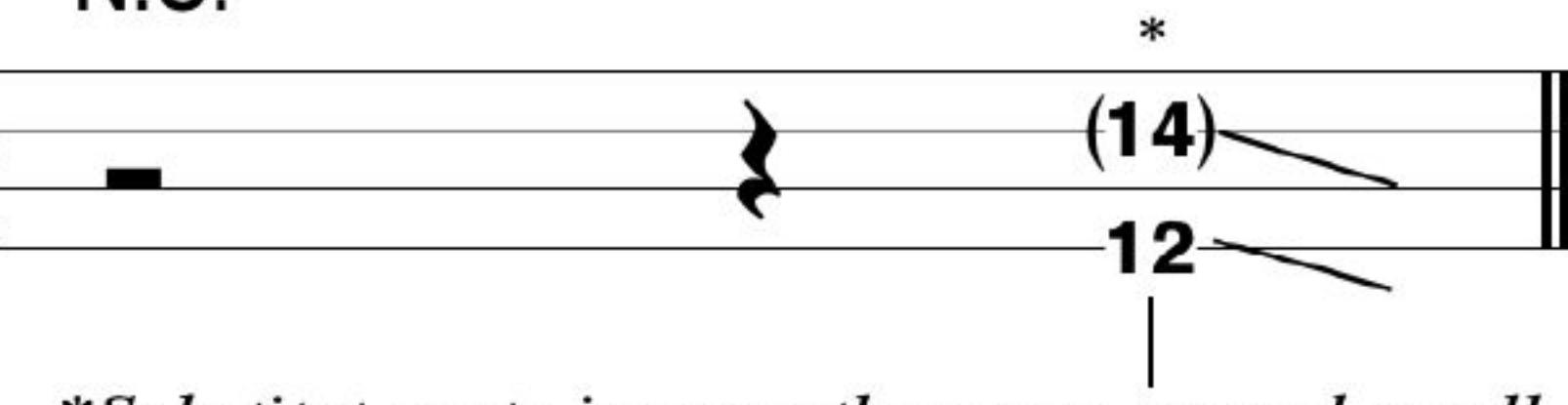
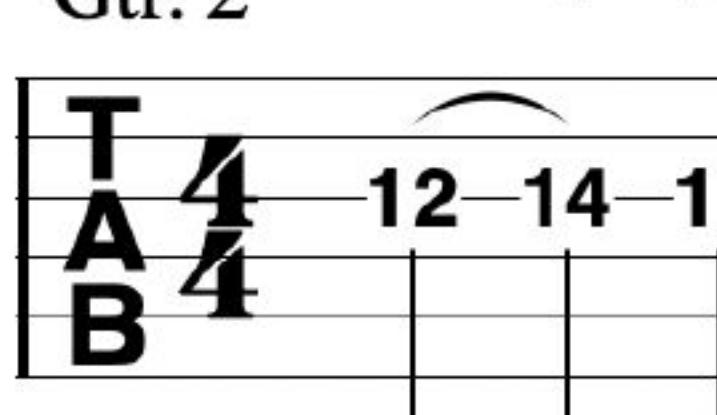
Rhy. Fill 3 (3:45)

N.C. (A5)

E5

Bass Fill 5 (3:28. 5:01)

N.C.



\*Substitute note in parentheses on second recall.

# TRANSCRIPTIONS

*Go back to **B** Verse Theme (bar 17)*

99 Gtr. 1

**GTR. 1**

Bass plays Bass Fig. 12 (see pg. 8)

## I Accordion Interlude (5:02) ( $\downarrow = 180$ )

*(Improvised whistling throughout)*

**GTR.1** A E E $\sharp$ m C $\sharp$ m D A B E A E E $\sharp$ m C $\sharp$ m D A B E

**GTR. 2** *Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fill 1 (see bar 33)*

**101** Gtr. 4 (accordian arr. for gtr.)

*Bass plays Bass Fill 3 (see bar 33)*

105

**GTR. 4**

A      B/A      C#7/A      D/A      E/A      F#7/A      G#7/A      B7/A

2 2 0      4 4 0      6 6 0      7 7 0      11 13 13 13 0      9 9 9 0      15 15 15 0

## J 3rd Guitar Solo (5:13) (♩ = 186)

<b>GTR.1</b>	N.C. (A5)	E5	Em7	Fmaj7	Bbmaj7	Em7#5
<b>GTR.2</b>	<i>Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 twice (see bar 17)</i>					

109 Gtr. 3

**GTR. 3**

9 7 9 | 9 x 9 7 9 | (9)

7 8 10 8 10 3 7 | 10 8 10 7 7 |

*Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile, twice (see bar 17)*

**N.C. (A5)**

**GTR. 2** *Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 2 (see below bar 21)*

**GTR. 3**

113 113 113

7 8 10 8 10 8 7 9.

8 7 5

0 8 16 14 11 12 11 12

0 X 15

15 12 15 12 15 14

15 14

**E5**

**Em7**

**F**

**D/A**

pitch: D

Em7      Fmaj7      Cmaj7      Bbmaj7      Em7 $\sharp$ 5      N.C.(A5)

**119**

**GTR. 3**

**GTR. 2** *Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 2 (see below bar 21)*

Go back to **C** Chorus Theme (bar 25)

122

GTR. 3

E5 Em7 F D/A B E

**K** Outro (6.31)

Em7

Gtrs. 1 and 2

125

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass

Bass Fill 6 (1:56)

(A)

(play 6 times)

Bass Fill 12 (4:30)

N.C.

Bass Fill 7 (3:38)

(A)

Em/A

F/A

G/A

A

Bass Fill 8 (5:33)

A5

C5/G

D5/A

F5/C

G5/D

Bass Fill 9 (5:42)

N.C.

Bass Fill 10 (5:47)

A

Bass Fill 11 (5:57)

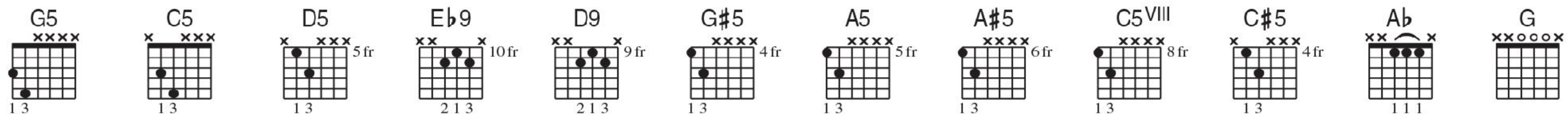
(A)

A

# ZZ TOP

## "Tush"

AS HEARD ON FANDANGO!

WORDS AND MUSIC BY **BILLY F. GIBBONS, DUSTY HILL AND FRANK LEE BEARD**  
TRANSCRIBED BY **ANDY ALEDORT****A** Intro (0:00)Moderately Fast Shuffle  $\text{♩} = 144$  ( $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ )N.C.(G5)  
Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

P.M. - - -

P.M.

~~~~~

P.M.

P.M.

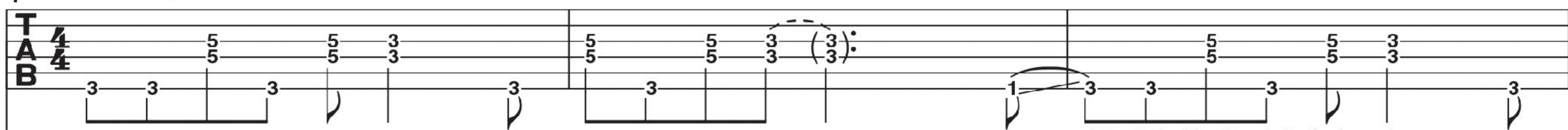
~~~~~

Yeah

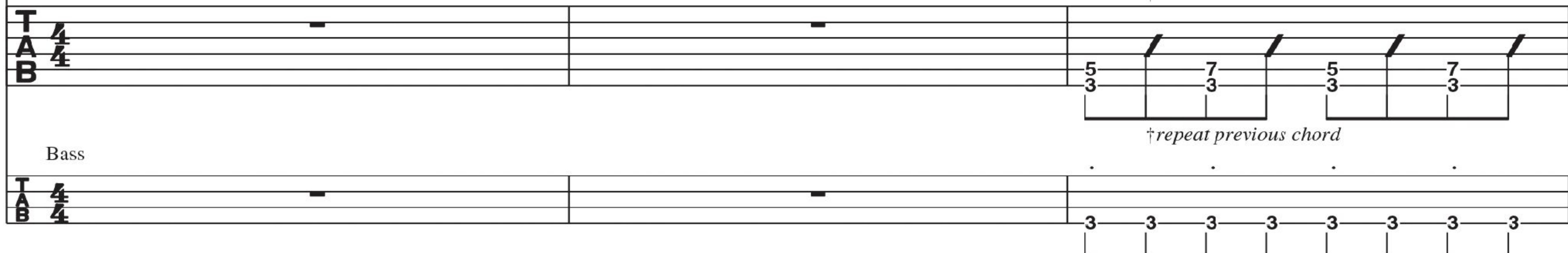
**GTR.1**  
**GTR.2**\*\*G5  
\*Gtrs. 1 and 2 (elec. w/dist.)

P.M. P.M.

~~~~~ P.M.

**GTR.1**\*Gtr. 2 doubles Gtr. 1 simile throughout.  
\*\*Chord symbols refer to overall harmony.

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

**GTR.3**

1. I've been up

**GTR.3** Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fill 1 three times (see meas. 3)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

P.M.

~~~~~

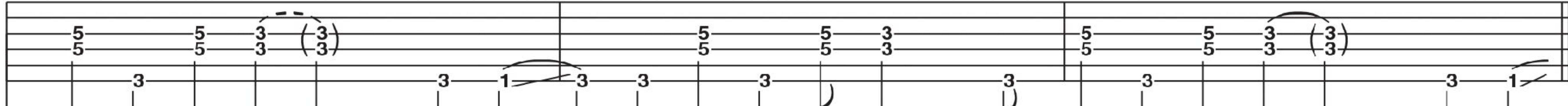
P.M.

P.M.

~~~~~

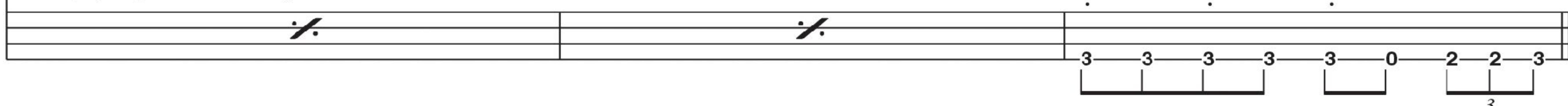
P.M.

~~~~~

**GTR.1****GTR.2**

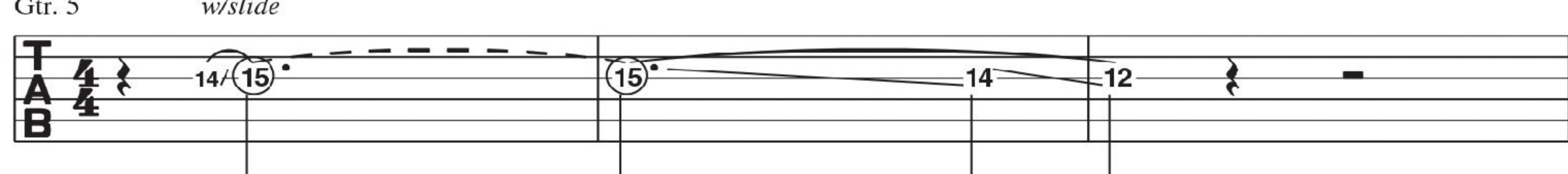
Bass

(repeat previous measure)

**GTR.5**

Fill 2 (1:34)

Gtr. 5 w/slide



"TUSH" WORDS AND MUSIC BY BILLY F. GIBBONS, DUSTY HILL AND FRANK LEE BEARD.  
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**B** Verses (0:10, 0:30, 1:29)

(1.) I've been down  
 (2.) I've been good  
 (3.) way back home

Take my word  
 Dallas Texas  
 Not by myself

my way 'round  
 Hollywood  
 not alone

Gtr. 1 G5 **GTR.3**  
 and 2 Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fill 1 four times (see meas. 3)

**GTR.5** Gtr. 5 plays Fill 2 third time  
 (see previous page)

7 P.M. P.M. ~~~~ P.M. P.M.

~~~~~ P.M. P.M. ~~~~ P.M.

P.M.

**GTR.1**  
**GTR.2**

Bass Fig. 1

I ain't askin' for much  
 11 C5 Gtr. 1 P.M. light P.M. Hmm I said Lord

**GTR.1**

fret-hand fing: 1 3 3 4 1 3 3 1

Gtr. 3

**GTR.2**  
**GTR.3**

Bass

(3rd time) skip ahead to **D**

take me downtown  
 D5

I'm just lookin' for some tush  
 C5

2. I've been bad  
 D9(no3)

**GTR.1** Gtr. 1 substitutes Rhy. Fill 3 third time  
 (see below)

**GTR.5** Gtr. 5 plays Fill 1 second time  
 (see below)

**GTR.4**  
**GTR.4** Gtr. 4 plays Rhy. Fill 2 (see below)

15 P.M. ~~~~

G5 P.M. ~~~~

~~~~~ \*

**GTR.1**

\*Note in parenthesis played first time only.

**GTR.2**  
**GTR.3**

end Bass Fig. 1

Rhy. Fill 2 (0:28, 0:48, 1:28)

**GTR.4**  
 Gtr. 4 (elec. w/light dist.) E9 D9

Fill 1 (0:46)

Gtr. 5 (elec. w/dist.)

**GTR.5** w/slide

Rhy. Fill 3 (1:46)

**GTR.1**  
 Gtr. 1 P.M. ~~~~



go back to **B** Verse

3. Take me back

D5

C5

G5

C5 C#5 D5

**GTR.4** Gtr. 4 plays Rhy. Fill 2

**GTR.5**

39

**D** (1:48)

G5 **GTR.2** **GTR.3**

Gtrs. 2 and 3 play Rhy. Fill 4  
(see below)

**E** Outro (1:49)

G5

**GTR.1** **GTR.2** **GTR.3**

Gtrs. 1, 2 and 3 play Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see meas. 19)

43 Gtr. 5

**GTR.5**

16 14 X 8 8

Bass plays Bass Fill 2 (see below)

\*Slide past the highest point of the fingerboard.

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see meas. 7)

Gtr. 5

G#5 A5 A#5 C5VIII

G5

47

**GTR.5**

12 10 10 12 10 12

Bass substitutes Bass Fill 1 (see previous page)

51

D5

C5

**GTR.5**

G5

54 Gtr. 5

A♭ G

**GTR.5**

Gtrs. 1, 2 and 3

**GTR.1**

**GTR.2**

**GTR.3**

Bass

Rhy. Fill 4 (1:48)

Gtrs. 2 and 3

**GTR.2**

**GTR.3**

Bass Fill 2 (1:48)

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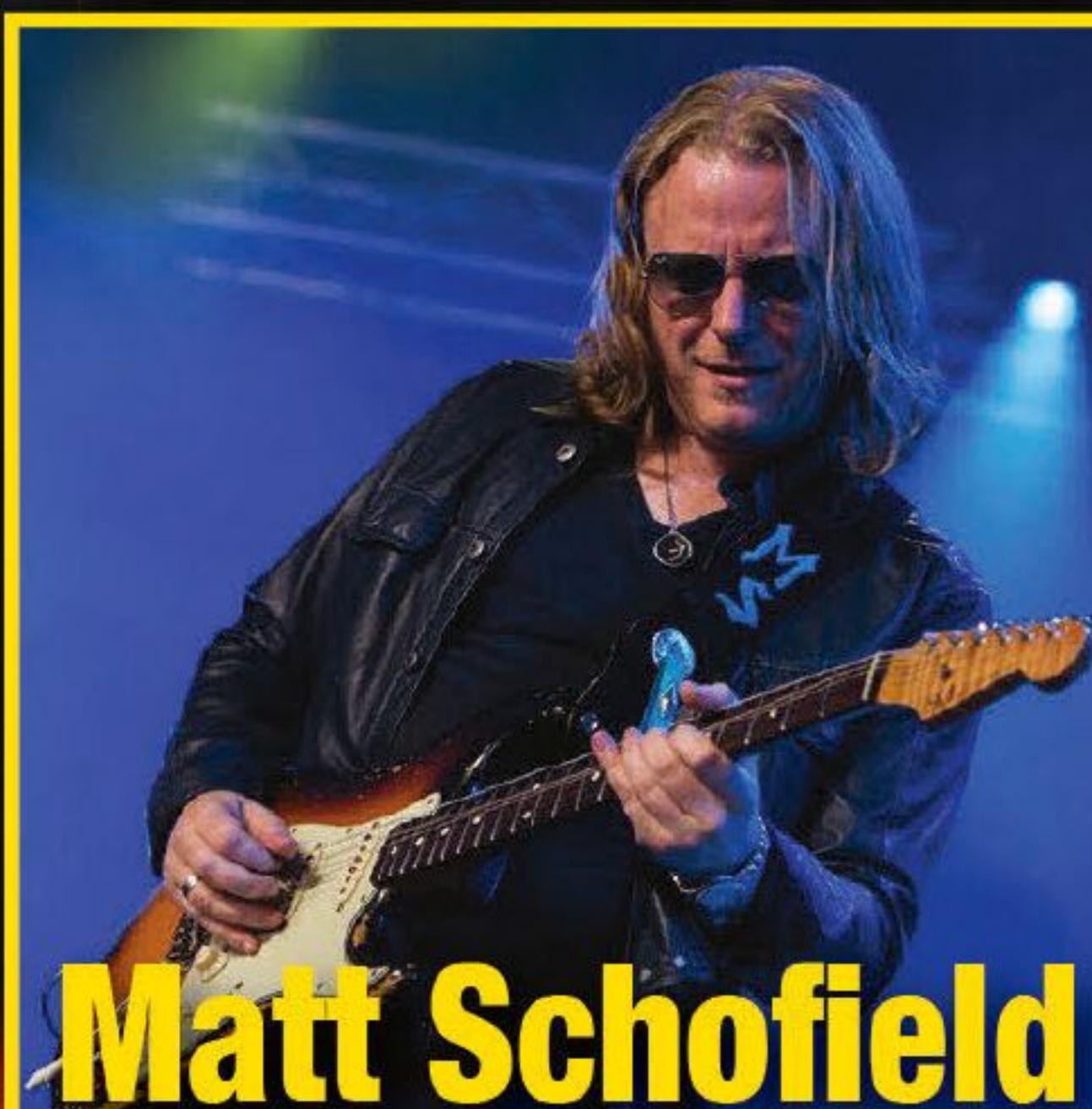
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**June 21-26, 2026**

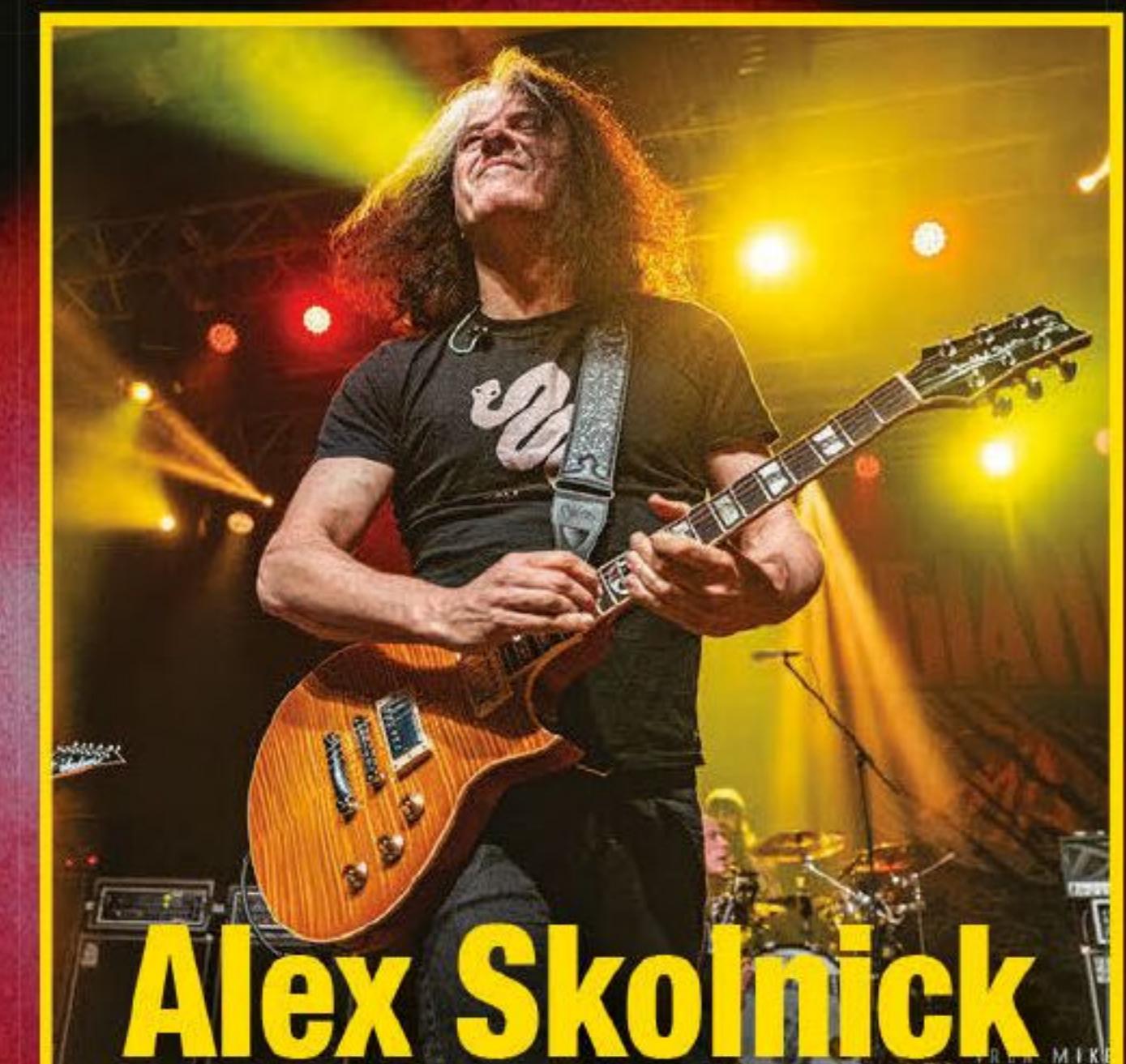
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**July 12-17, 2026**

**Nashville Session:**  
**July 19-24, 2026**

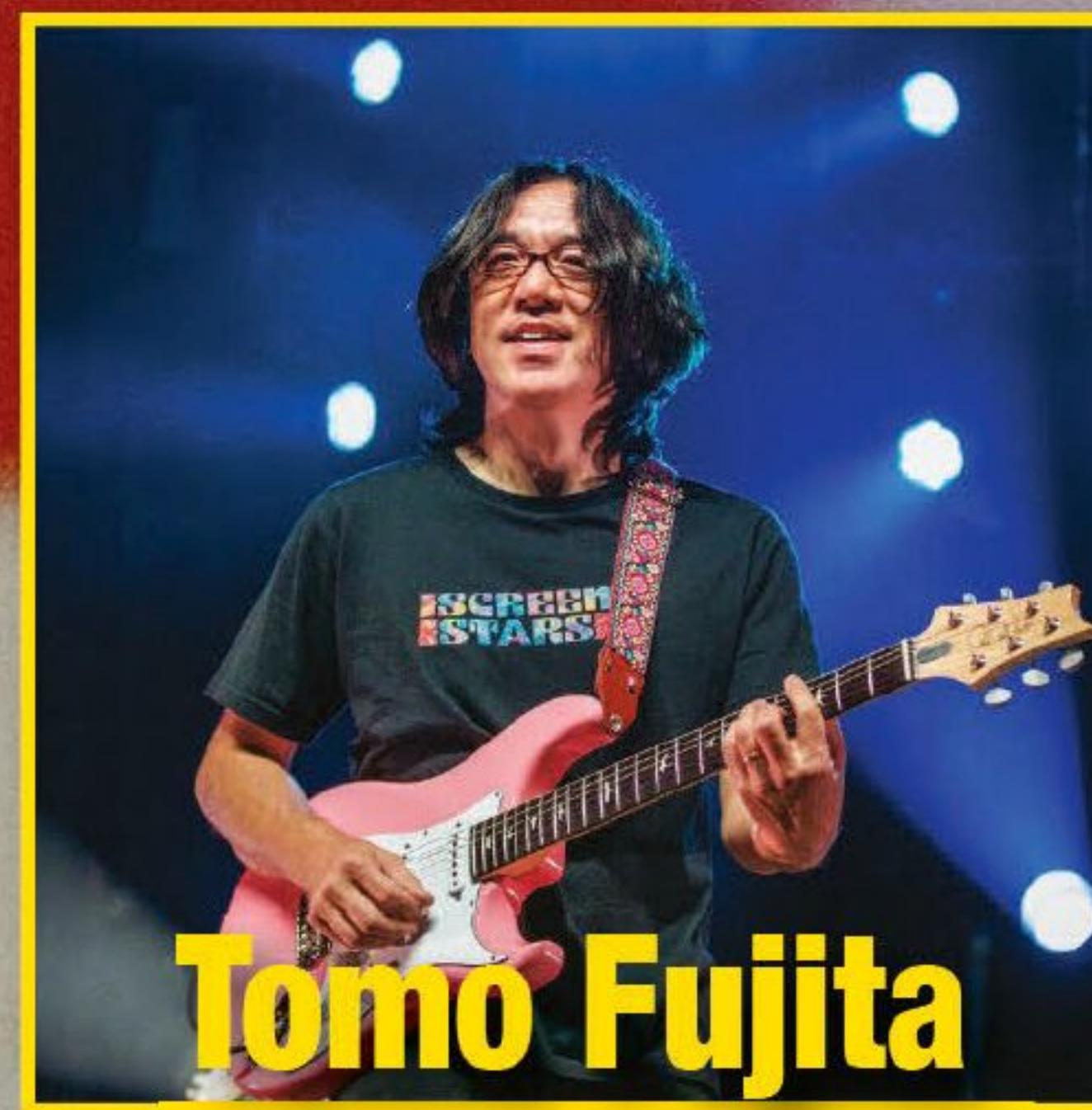
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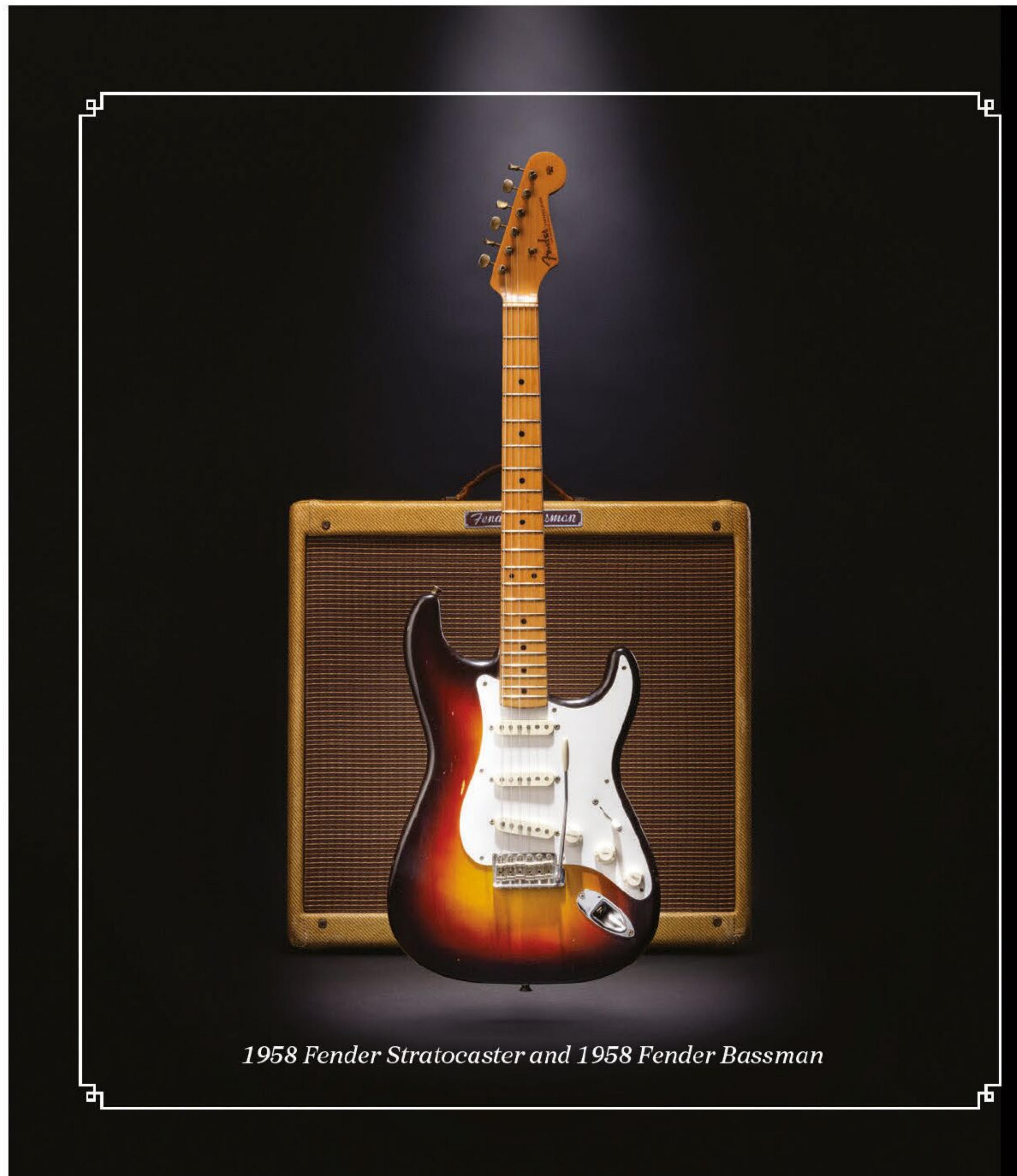
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## POWER TOOLS

# Rickenbacker 360/12

## 1964-PRESENT

CATEGORY SEMI-HOLLOW ELECTRIC GUITAR

BY CHRIS GILL

**T**HE RICKENBACKER 360/12 might not have been the very first 12-string electric guitar to appear on the market – it was preceded by the 12-string necks found on the double-neck Gibson EDS-1275 and Stratosphere Twin in the Fifties and the single 12-string neck Danelectro Bellzouki in 1961 – but it instantly elevated the electric 12-string from novelty item to essential tool upon its public debut in 1964.

A 360/12 prototype given to George Harrison was prominently featured in the Beatles' film *A Hard Day's Night* and its accompanying soundtrack, inspiring insatiable lust for the lush sounds of the electric 12 among aspiring and pro guitarists alike. The Byrds, Beach Boys and other popular Sixties bands that didn't begin with "B" (like the Jefferson Airplane, the Rolling Stones and the Who) further increased the popularity of the 360/12's distinctive jingle-jangle sounds.

Although the 360/12 was essentially a Rickenbacker 360 model (introduced in 1958) with a 12-string neck, the innovative headstock design still was a noteworthy engineering achievement. Rickenbacker president F.C. Hall thought the standard 12-string headstock looked awkwardly elongated thanks to its 6x6 tuner configuration, so he asked the head of Rickenbacker's woodshop Dick Burke to figure out a way to fit 12 tuners onto a standard six-string size headstock. Burke quickly came up with an ingenious and elegant solution that combined normal electric guitar tuning pegs with classic-style pegs inset in headstock slots.

Early Ric 360/12 models were equipped with low-output "toaster" single-coil pickups that deliver a very bright and metallic tone. Later versions come with Hi-Gain single-coil pickups that produce a richer, fuller sound. While the toaster pickups play a major role in the sound of songs like "Ticket to Ride" and "Mr. Tambourine Man," a good studio or pedal compressor is also essential for dialing in warmer tone and the perfect treble shimmer without strident overtones. Generally, a crystal-clean amp setting works best, and the amp can even be pushed to the edge of overdrive with good results, but too much gain and distortion usually results in an indecipherable mess.

The original six-saddle bridge makes it difficult to intonate all of the strings properly, which is particularly noticeable when playing above the 12th fret. Fortunately, replacement 12-saddle bridges are available from Rickenbacker and other manufacturers. Traditionally, the 360/12 features a 21-fret neck, but since 1969 Rickenbacker have offered 360/12 models that expanded the total number of frets to 24. Currently, the traditional 21-fret neck is standard.



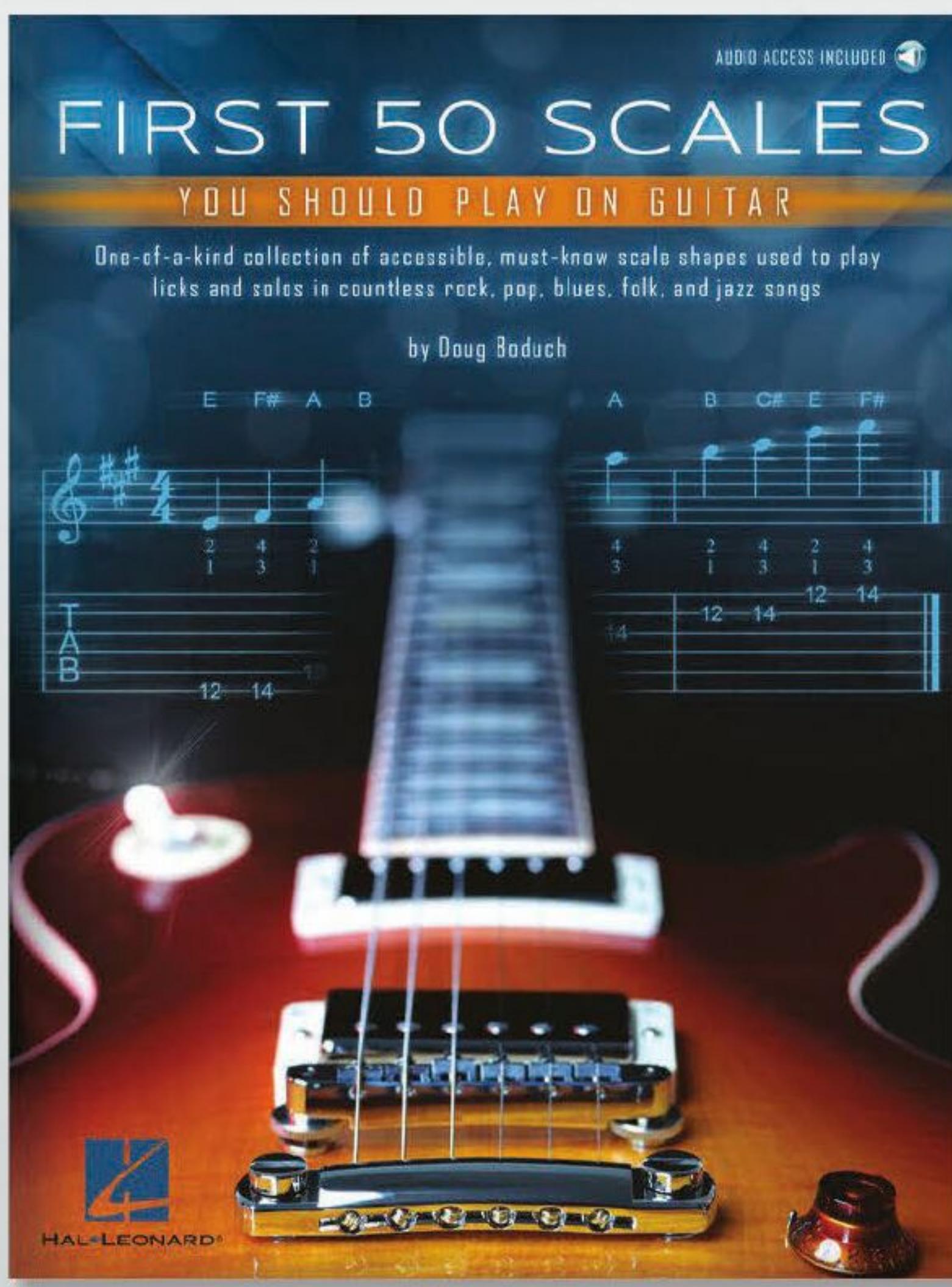
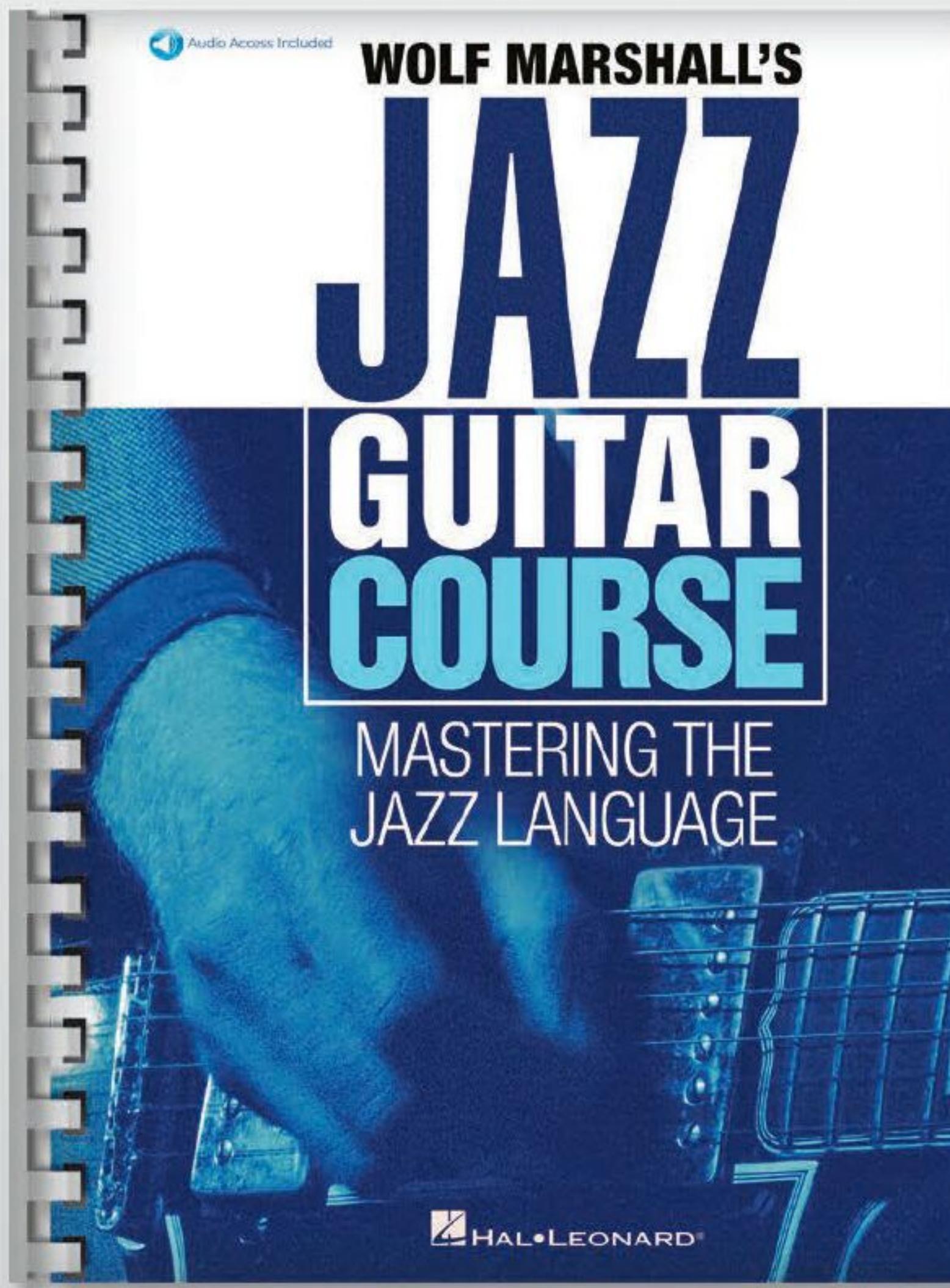
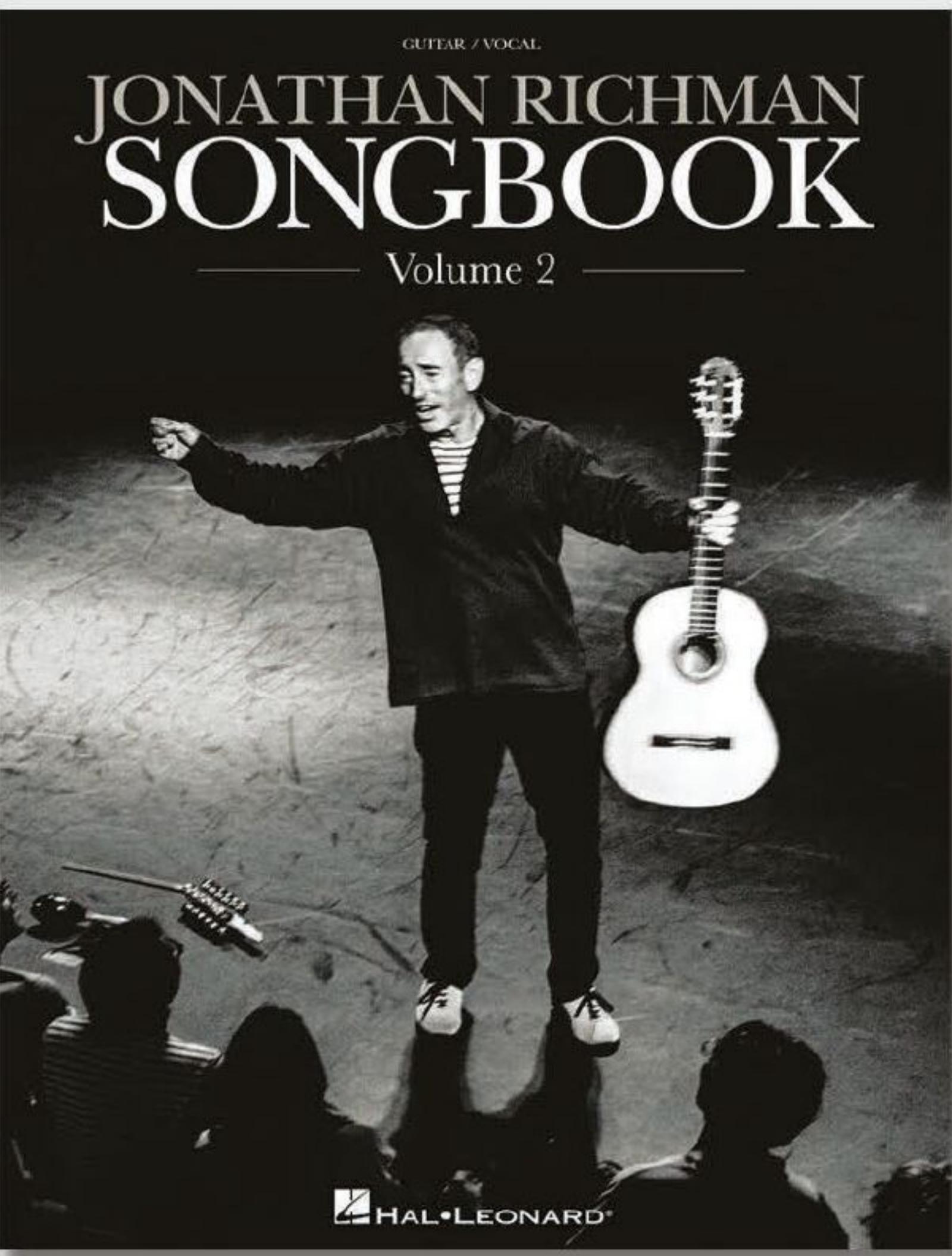
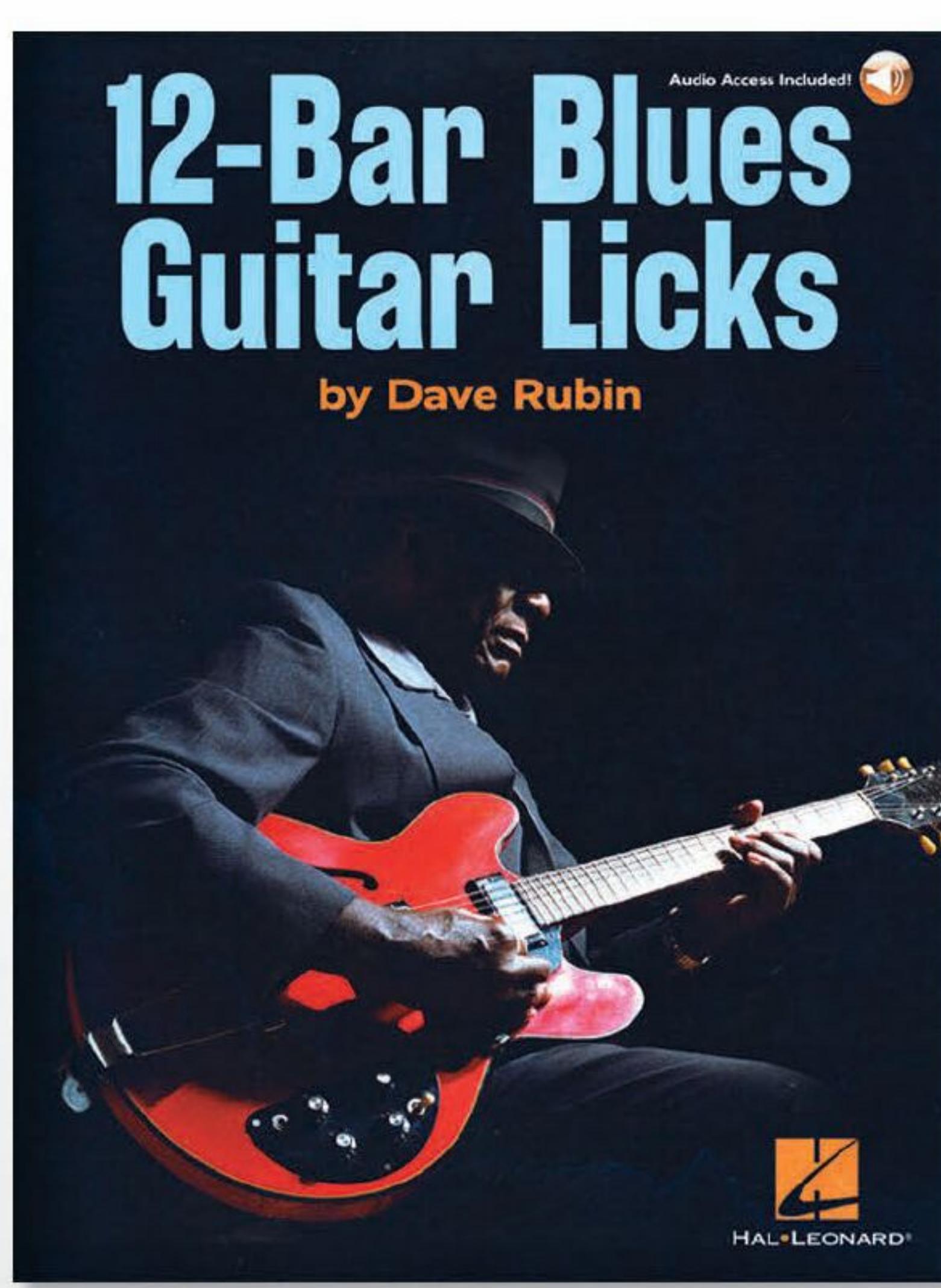
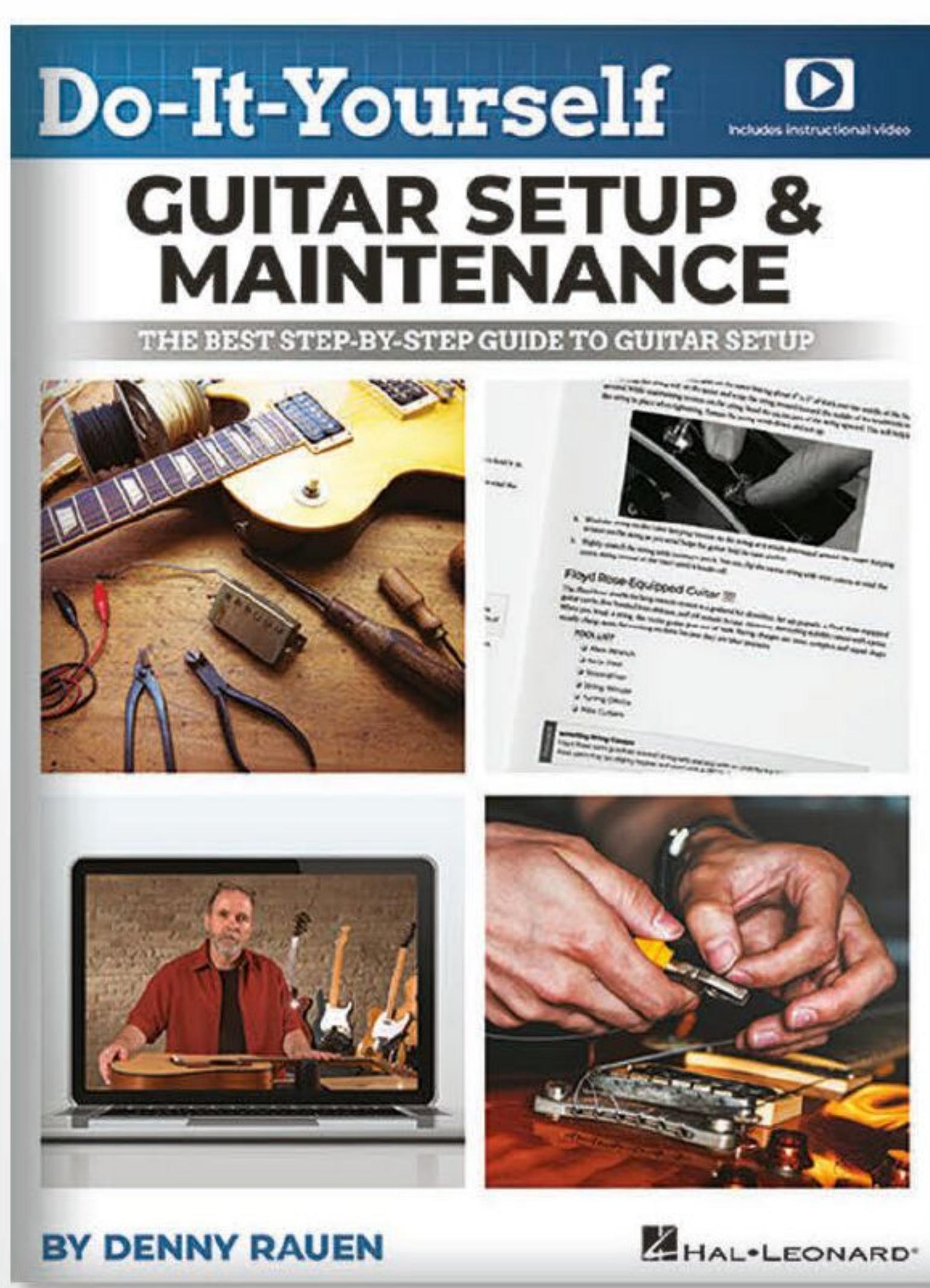
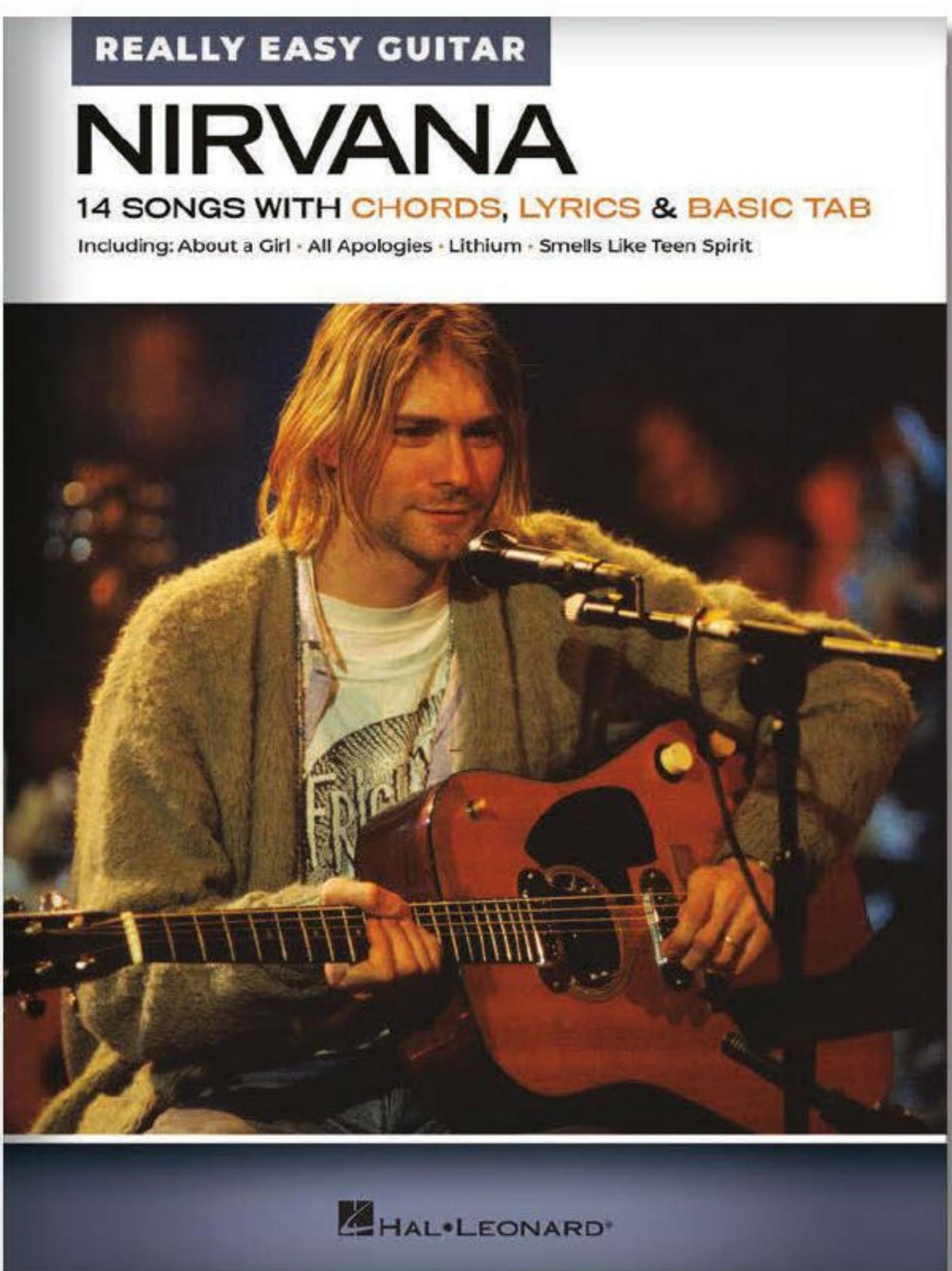
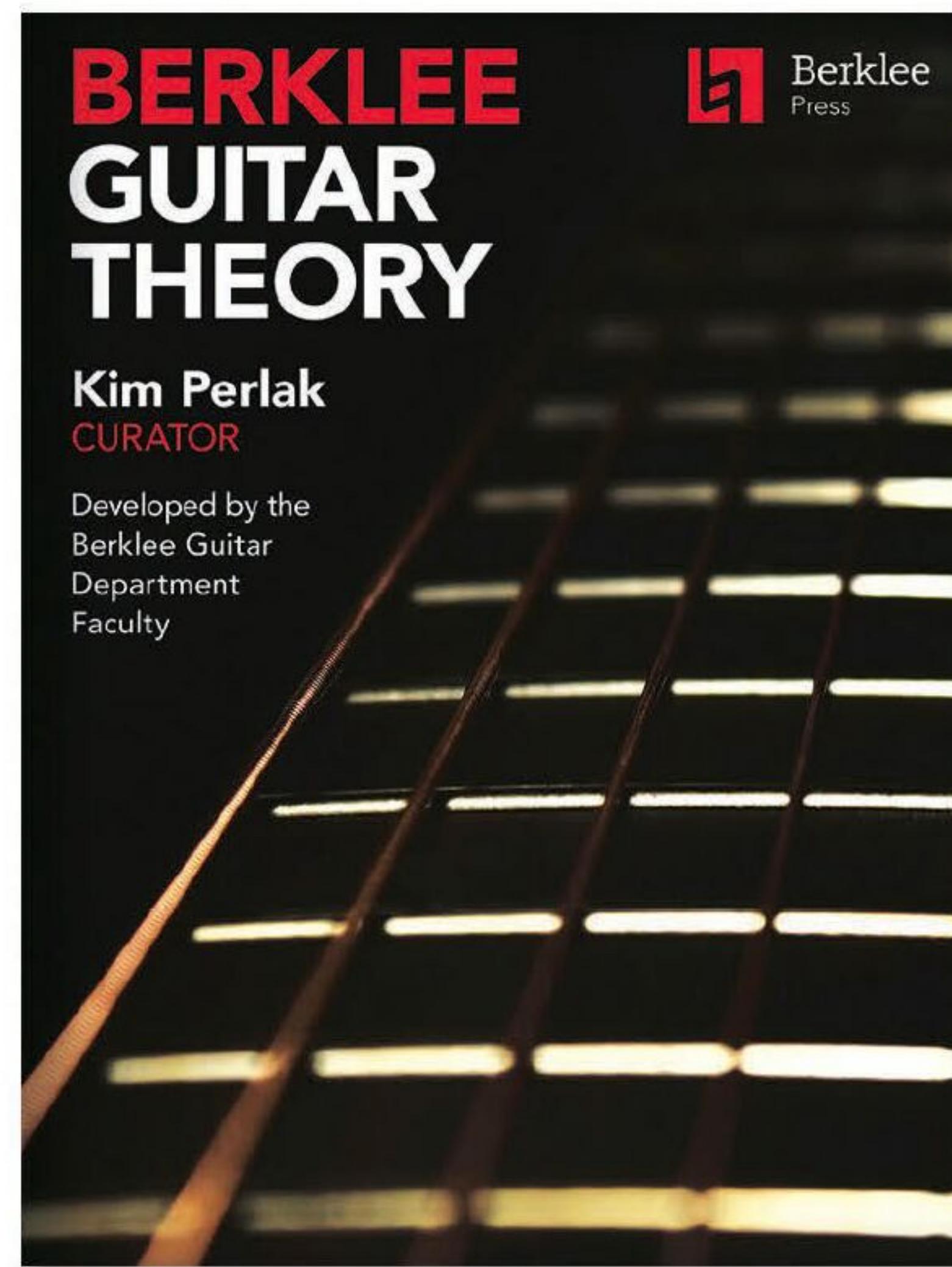
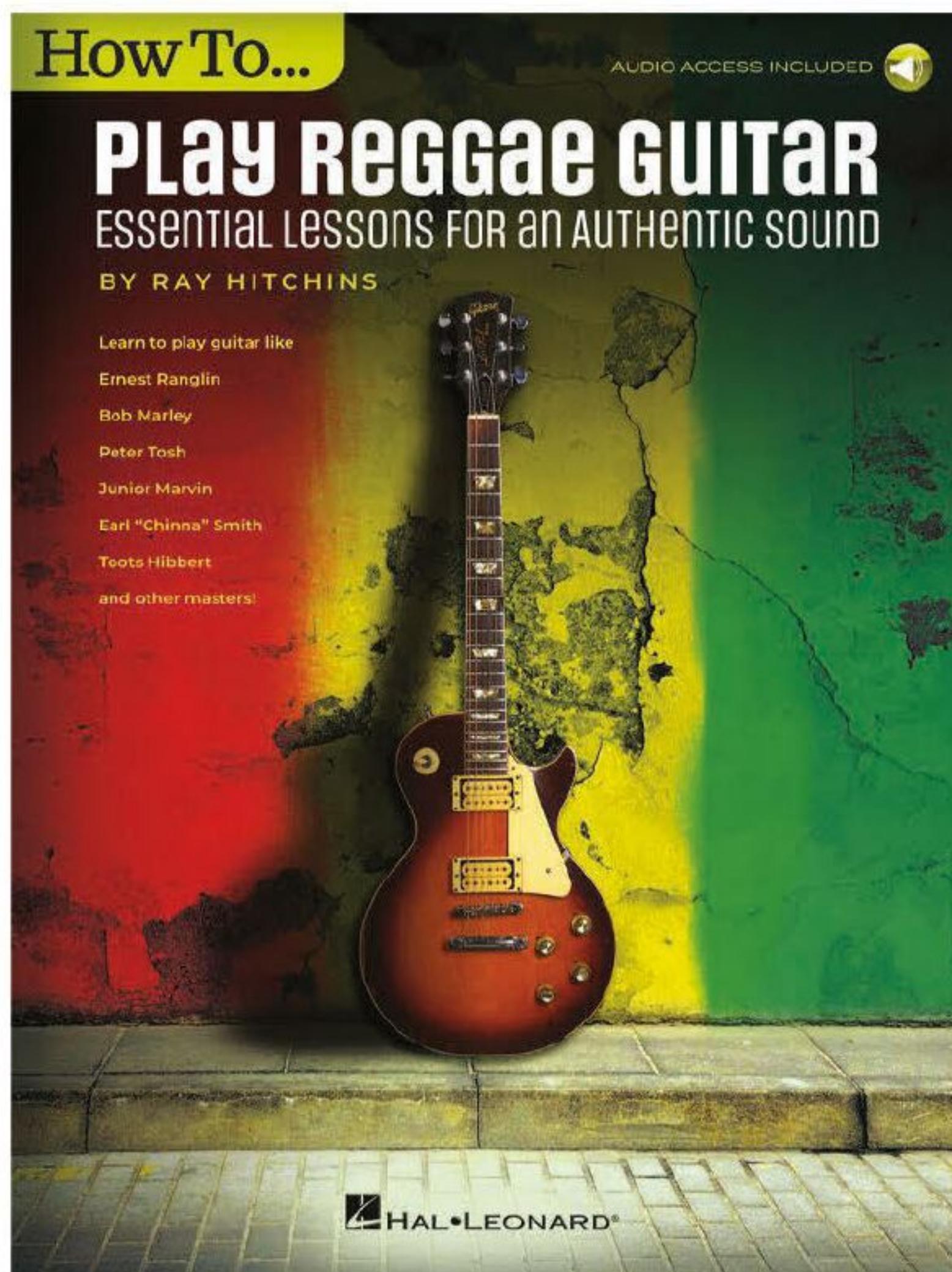
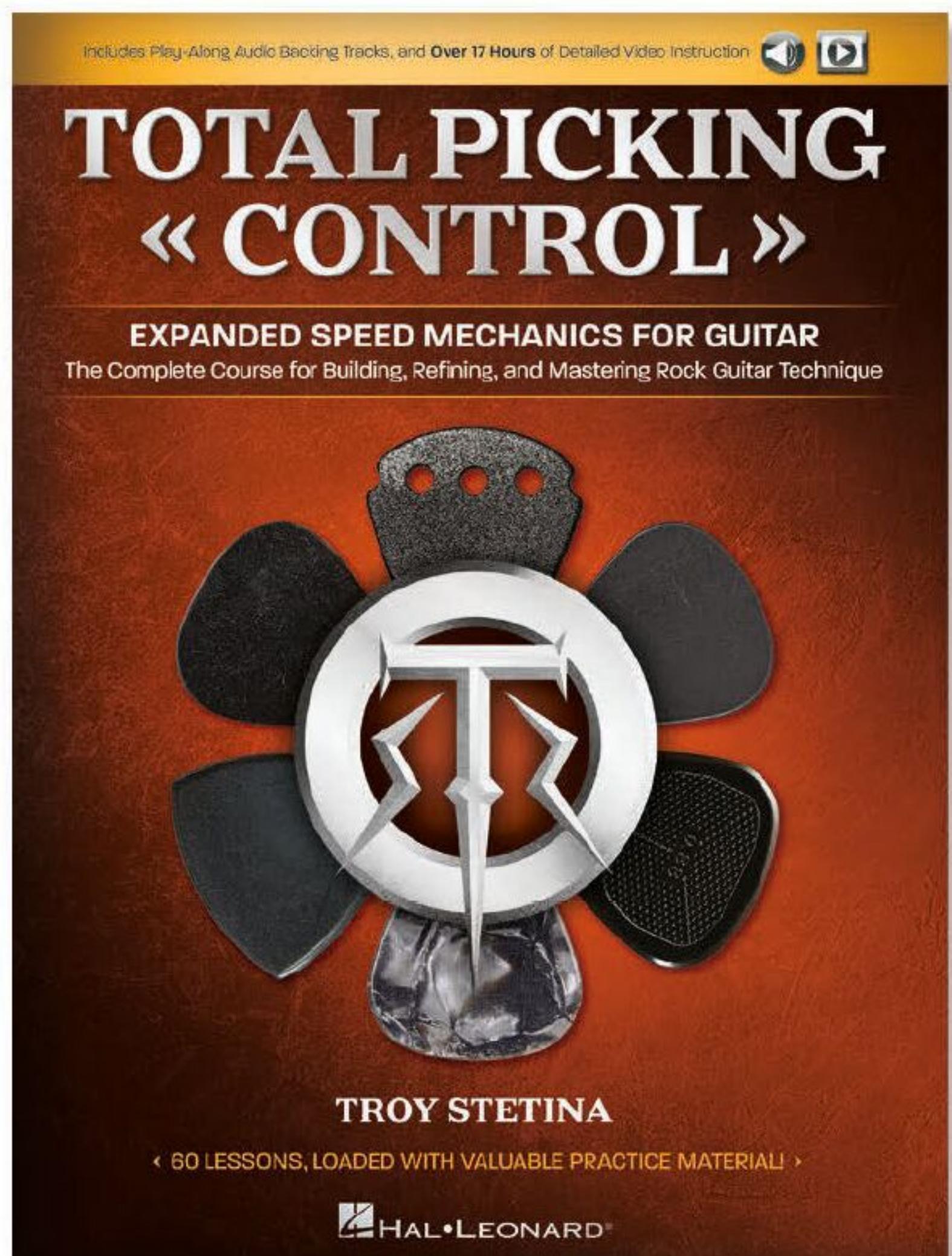
A late-Nineties Rickenbacker 360/12 V64 photographed in 2015

**A crystal-clean amp setting works best, and the amp can even be pushed to the edge of overdrive**

The jangly sound of the Rickenbacker 360/12 instantly evokes images of the mid-Sixties, and most players who have picked one up since then have used it for music heavily inspired by that era. Tom Petty and Mike Campbell, James Honeyman-Scott (the Pretenders), Johnny Marr, Marty Wilson-Piper (the Church), and Dave Gregory (XTC) helped revive the Ric 360/12 sound during the Seventies and Eighties, and Steve Howe proved that it could even work in a progressive rock context with Yes.

More recent 360/12 fans include Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien of Radiohead, Coldplay's Chris Martin, Jeff Buckley and Andy Bell of Ride and Oasis. **GW**

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